

# Berlin Wall in My Mind...

*Kim Gi-Eun*

## THE BERLIN WALL IN MY MEMORY

The first meeting for a Korean student with the Berlin wall began in the airplane on a cold Sunday in February. It was cloudy and dark. The city was limited with a borderline, it looked interesting from upside and to come into such a circle made her suspicious. Flying was the only possible way to come into the totally closed city without control. After a strict passport-control, an outsider was permitted to drive by the highway or by the railroad to visit the city. On the highway you had to give attention to the strict traffic regulations. You could be stopped every time and everywhere by the soldiers from the east side. In this case it was useless to discuss or explain. Only in some western parts money could help you. It was frightening enough for a South Korean at that time during Cold War to be in such a communist city. There was a special lecture about many kinds of dangers with North Korea abroad, before leaving Seoul. At first it was a little bit frustrating to come into such a city, but an attractive and beautiful city like this can make you forget all the things

For me the West Berlin looked like a very well protected city from the inhumane and the dangerous place on the other side of the wall. Living there would benefit with various privileges in your daily life, like your citizenship, tax, pay, rent and possibilities to visit the other side of the wall. The culture in this city was unique enough with such possibilities. Even with such a special right and atmosphere you could feel isolated from the outside world and controlled, especially if you go across the border by subway or travel to the other German cities. For the privileges enjoyed during living there you had to pay extra-patience and tolerance.

Such an atmosphere after the world-war gave birth to the cultural characteristics. The classicism was the base of the whole

historical city and at the same time all the new tendency in the culture were tolerated and melted. The city was globalized with people from all over the world. Every kind of music, paintings, movie, drama and performance could be dealt with sympathy and tolerance.

For a South Korean who lived in West Berlin, everyday life was the same as others. You got used to the wall and the wall did not play any kind of a role in everyday life. You could hear every day about East Berlin, watch about them in the television and could feel a sense of familiarity with East Berliner. Visitors from the east would take some consumption goods for home from the west, so called 'east packet', which used to sound strange to me. But I felt envy of it, because it was very different from North Korea. Even the existence of the wall in the west side of the city was opened to the outside and humane enough to accept. In the east there were scarce of cars and imported goods and going abroad was not always permitted. But unemployment was not a problem and they always had enough food to eat. Everybody had the same or similar lifestyle. The citizen's life was maintained as usual, but politically the situation was different.

### **THE WALL IN KOREA...**

Korea and Germany had many similarities like border-wall and at the same time many differences. Economically and culturally the west was much richer than the east side and had an important political meaning in the world in comparison with South Korea. After Korean War, this country had fewer possibilities as a nation to rebuild themselves from poverty and Japanese exploitation. After a long political whirl all the energy was concentrated to build a rich nation with much trouble in and out of the country. The patriotism to protect the country from communism was one of the most important things for us to learn and to keep in mind since schooldays. There were fewer tolerances for a human right or private life. Every generation had to work hard only with a future perspectives, of a better and richer fatherland. There was not much choice for Korea at that time. Maintaining dictatorship was rationalized in the name of the patriotism. Politically North Korea was the best choice as a common enemy to fight together. The severe time passed and one day South Korea was estimated as an

Asian Dragon. Koreans were very much proud of themselves. After a long and severe citizen movement the political power could be changed peacefully.

There were variable strong walls in the South Korean society between generations, regions, political parties and groups. After the peaceful political change the people felt like as if these walls could have to be also disappeared and it did happened somewhere. It was one of the other engines of growth for social development.

### **THE WALL WAS BROKEN...**

The Berlin Wall was broken, suddenly and dramatically. It happened in a time in history when nobody was expecting it. Especially for Koreans it was the biggest surprise and they thought about themselves. There was a hope for unification like Germany! Everybody began to talk about reunification and North Koreans were being considered as same people and not enemies to fight against. Without huge conflict, packets were sent to the North, filled with food and dollars. The Korean president visited North Korea and there were dramatic meetings. Families and relatives could meet only for a little while in the south, who had not met or heard from each other after the war at all. The head of a Korean company brought 2,000 cows to the north by himself on the road through the border. At that time there was only a peace and euphoria, as if the Korean reunification were in front of the door. The North Korean only required to say, what they needed and they got from the South. The Korean president got the Nobel Price for Peace. For the opposite site the German case has been always an important argument. The fallen Berlin Wall has always been very special for the Korean .

### **WITH THEODORE FONTANE...**

I could visit the east side of city over the wall with curiosity, not as a South Korean, but West Berliner. Theodore Fontane was one of my favorite writer, who wrote many essays about Brandenburg and described well his birth place, home, downtown, forest, bank, streets and woods etc. I would like to visit there and anticipated changed views. It was amazing, after more than 100 year everything stays as the same, as it was! The streets with the same stones,

house, bank, woods and forest like before 100 years! It was beautiful, sometimes windy, and silent like music. As if you heard the symphonies of Beethoven, it was peaceful, blue, green and sometimes red. After the first visit I was eager to go there once more, because I could not forget the beautiful scenes everywhere in Brandenburg. It was important for me to find out that not all the things on the other side of the city were gray and sad. Since this experience, I thought differently and started accepting the existence of diverse form as a fact.

On the other side of the wall there were also happiness, pleasure, suffering and sadness. There exist also life and death. To the outside, they looked shoddier and more difficult. And it was important to accept their existence as they are. Only the strong border was disturbing, not the wall by itself. Both the Germany's recognized and accepted each other, as they were. Historically the political situation with and in the neighborhood was one of the most important factor for reunification. But for me philosophy and esthetic was the worthiest thing between two Germans and they could also conquest all the difficulties in the last 20 year after reunification.

### **POST-WALL-DISAPPEARANCE...**

The small pieces from the broken Berlin Wall were distributed in the world as a souvenir and gift. Every Korean at that time, who visits Berlin and Germany, brought a piece of the wall with a hope for unification. Politicians from North and South talked about unification, when they met and there was always euphoria. For the sunshine policy in the last 10 years the politicians liked to talk about German case. It has always been considered as the best sample for Korean unification, along with all its problems. However some Korean politicians and researchers have only emphasized its positive sides.

Since the new government in Korea, the policy to North Korea has been changed. Then political propaganda against South, South Korean and president began again. No more visit or tourism to the North has been permitted at once without announcement. It was a shock for businessmen, who have factories in the North. Everything stopped. It happened exactly as some people had warned about the North in the last 10 years. In the South there has always been

much discussions and rumors. We speak the same language, but with different meaning and thought. There is a harder wall than the border itself. Reunification is an astounding incident in the history and is indisputable, but a real unification needs more time, endurance, efforts and power to conquest disappointment.

In our life only pleasure and euphoria cannot be continued, sometimes the reality becomes more important. You could get used to the wall-less Berlin and growing desires in everybody's mind. In the beginning you would tolerate all the difficulties and abnormalities. The reality began and many people could be familiar with changing world. For our own happiness we try to establish a political system with election and control. But any policy or doctrine cannot fill all the intentions.

Even while using the same language or having the similar feature there can exist an abstract wall, which was not expected before. Differences in thought and form exist everywhere. Economical discrepancy can be only a part of it. It takes time and needs efforts to conquest and recognize. Even with a wall people could communicate and see each other, but without the wall not always.

For social economy after unification people would have to pay more tax, but other people would feel unconcerned from the society and unsatisfied. Dissatisfaction and disaffection would drive out hope and pleasure. Especially the younger generation needs more time and education to adapt in the changing society. They need time for preparations. Even though time goes fast and the change happens with all the efforts very slowly. But after 10 years it will be surprising to find out all the changes and developments. The development will be accelerated and stimulated.

## **PERSPECTIVE WITH DOMINO EFFECT...**

20 years later after the historical event we can get hope and brevity from the wall-less Germany. People are proud of changes and development in policy, economy, society and culture. Maybe after 10 years in the future you can be more proud and we can organize an incorporate seminar as reunified countries together.

Changes can be positive and negative. With all the difficulties there has been changed with development enormously after reunification. In the world policy and economy the unified country has much more influences. The German experience can be a good

example for Korea, especially with its difficulties in the last 20 years. Koreans want to learn from Germany and prepare earlier and fully enough for the reunification. The educational and economical part has been a big issue.

The sunshine policy has been compared very often with Germany before unification. In the last 10 years with sunshine policy Korean government has tried to persuade people for peace and tolerance. With the financial and many kinds of help Korea has been sending to the North, talks about reunification have emerged.. The Korean president visited Pyongyang and during his era he got the Nobel Prize for peace. It was only an image or one side intension. With new government in South everything has been changed dramatically, as we have seen in the last year. There are so many problems in North, as we know. The hunger, scarce nutrition, North Korean defectors, who are escaping through every Asian country in misery have become actual problems, which we can neither solve, nor help. In this case the German experience could not help. Only some positive experiences have been explained as examples. The minister for unification looked like a minister of the North Korea, as he visited Pyongyang during the last government era. Such a picture brought many troubles between people with different political thoughts. Even many supporters of North Korea want more and more without changing themselves. South Korean has been skeptical about reactions from North Korea. And all these factors caused the governmental exchange last year. Especially if the North Korean defectors have suffered in China like a fugitive from justice and have been sent back to North Korea. In home only inhuman treatment, punishment and pain is waiting for them and nobody knows what will happen after the compulsory return. This wall can be fallen at first, and then we can expect to remove other walls like dominoes. In this regard, in Germany the wall has been falling like dominoes and it will continue. 20 years after the fall of the wall, we are still learning.

There are many events for the disappeared Berlin Wall in this year. One of them is 'Domino of the Berlin Wall', which is planned and organized by Goethe Institute. Three Korean Artists joined this event, they drew pictures with some sentences about unification, sadness, sufferings and hope. Domino effect may be realized also for Koreans...

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