

Cooper: Obviously, today, there is a concern over there about this war, and why are we spending so much effort on that, when we really don't need to.

Korean Rail Expert

'For the Era of The Iron Silk Road'

Dr. Choi Yeon-hye, professor in the Department of Transportation Management at the Korea National Railroad College in South Korea, spoke at the Nov. 25-29 conference at the Siberian State Transport University in Novosibirsk, on a panel with Dr. Hal Cooper. Dr. Choi contributed a paper, "For the Era of the Iron Silk Road: A Report on Inter-Korean Railway Link Projects and Perspectives for the TKR-TSR" (Trans-Korean Railway and Trans-Siberian Railway).

In the 30-page document, Dr. Choi starts with a chronology of the Korean National Railway, from 1899 to the present, and then reviews the status of the current North and South Korean rail systems. Finally she gives the latest update on the "Inter-Korean Railway Link Projects," and her perspective on "Alternatives for Continental Railway Link"—through both China and Russia.

Her paper provides charts and tables of the "Planned Inter-Korean Infrastructure Re-Link Projects," ranging from a mere 8 km of the Jangdan-Bongdong connection on the west coast Kyongui Line (opened in 1906, to connect Seoul with Pyongyang and Shinuiju), to a re-link of 127 km on the Kangnung-Demilitarized Zone segment of the east coast Donghae-Bukbu Line. She writes that with the reconnections, "the two Koreas are expecting positive impacts, first of all, in the economic field. Transportation costs between the two Koreas will

be reduced to about one-quarter of the current cost of sending goods by ships, namely to \$150-200 per TEU [20-foot equivalent unit] from the current \$700." And there will be time savings, too.

Choi wrote: "These merits will contribute to increasing inter-Korean economic cooperation. According to estimations from the Korean Ministry of Construction and Transportation, the volume of inter-Korean trade can be increased up to tenfold of this year."

In giving her view of the "Comparative Advantages for the Trans-Siberian Railway," Choi stressed that, in respect to future progress in North Korea, "Russia can plan an important role, because it is one of a few countries which still remain in a diplomatic relationship with North Korea. Furthermore, the two countries have been cultivating a close friendship traditionally. Hence, Russia is situated in a position to inspire North Korea for re-linking railway networks and also for keeping up smooth operations later on."

Dr. Choi drew out other comparative advantages of the Trans-Siberian link—not as opposed to the link-up with China, but rather, for certain inherent merits. She provided a chart (**Table 1**) comparing three land-routes from Korea to Germany, and the marine transport trip, in terms of length of time, distance, and estimated fare. She then summarized:

"First, in the case of the TSR, the number of transit countries is much less than the TCR [Trans-China Railroad]-TMGR [Trans-Mongolia Railroad]-TSR corridor. It is generally acknowledged that the customs formalities at the cross-border are always accompanied by some risks in terms of time.

"Second, TSR still offers available capacity, whereas the TCR suffers in some areas from partly serious bottleneck phenomena.

"Third, the transportation means more than transit. The connection to TSR indicates access to Siberia, which is known as the treasure house of various resources. Therefore, taking a chance to participate in the economic development process of this area represents another merit of TSR."

TABLE 1

From Korea to Germany: Comparison of Three 'Iron Silk Road' Routes, and Marine Transport

Route	Length (km)	Time (Days)	Fares (\$)
1. Trans-Korea/Trans-Siberia Rail Seoul-Tumen River-Bostochini-Brest-Berlin	11,569	24-26	1,869-2,019
2. Trans-Korea/ Trans-China/Trans-Mongolia/Trans-Siberia Seoul-Shinuiju-Dandong-Beijing-Ulanbaator-Brest-Berlin	10,625	25-27	1,919-2,069
3. Pusan, Trans-Korea/Trans-Siberia Pusan-Bostochini-Brest Berlin	12,080	26-28	2,024-2,174
4. Marine Transportation*	21,749	33	2,101-2,501

* Different marine routes from Pusan to Europe (Rotterdam). By sea, through the Suez Canal (27,000 km); through the Panama Canal (23,000 km); via Cape Town, South Africa, (27,000); or land-bridge across North America (20,000 km).

Source: Dr. Choi Yeon-hye, "For the Era of the Iron Silk Road: A Report on Inter-Korean Railway Link Projects and Perspectives for THR-TSR," November, 2002.