

Prospects for Regime Change in North Korea

Soyoung Kwon, Ph.D.
George Mason University, Korea

Abstract

The view of convergence in terms of how former socialist countries change invites questions about cases of non-transition and their typological regime features. This paper examines the North Korean regime to assess its unique path of post-communist transition and analyzes behavioral explanations for the divergent outcome. A combination of institutional and behavioral features point to a country-specific development, which may have taken a distinctive path due to different historical experiences, leadership features, legitimation, and political culture. This also invites a new comparative perspective on the remaining socialist countries in Asia in order to discuss the prospects and challenges of political change within the framework of transition from the authoritarian rule.

Keywords: North Korea, regime, transition theories, Kim Il-song, Kim Jong-il, Kim Jong-un, authoritarianism, post-communist transitions

Introduction

North Korea is unique in the sense that it is an express case of deviation from the global trend of post-communist transition, surviving as one of a few remaining countries in the world that still keeps the communist institutional setting. The presence of the dominant and fundamental features of the old system in North Korea, however, is largely a consequence of absence rather than failure of transformation. The view of convergence in terms of how former communist countries change has been largely challenged by the divergent outcomes of failed transition, retarded transition, partial transition, and non-transition. China and Vietnam have shown a distinctive evolutionary development via a reform path without undermining the existing polity, in which significant changes in the economy have not yet caused instability or a major shift in the political order. None of the typical post-communist developments towards political pluralism, democracy, the free market, or Chinese style reform appears to be the path that North Korea has chosen to follow even

under the current leadership of Kim Jong-un. North Korea has continued the main features of the old system without major political and social progress towards democratization or liberalization, and is still surviving. These Asian cases rekindle scholarly debates on the ‘convergence of system’ theory that explains post-communist development and review of the theoretical approach to post-communist transition that can accommodate cases of both transition and non-transition.

One may question whether North Korea represents a typical communist state. Some argue that all real-world “communist” regimes have revolved around a form of authoritarian and often totalitarian state, and advise not to consider North Korea communist, but rather a specific type of authoritarian regime.¹ The typological classification often places communist countries in either one-party or personalist types of authoritarianism, in which the current North Korean regime is classified as a hybrid authoritarian type in which personalist and single-party features coexist.² The implication of such claims suggests that the post-communist transition paradigm with its emphasis on the institutional features has little relevance in discussing regime change of North Korea. Instead, revisiting behavioral features and regime characteristics may be more pertinent in explaining regime continuity in North Korea and, conversely the prospect of regime change.

Discussing the prospect of regime change in North Korea invites questions as to what is meant by regime change and who the likely agents of change would be. Depending on these key conceptualizations, policy analysis and recommendations may differ. According to Barbara Geddes, a regime transition refers to a change in the basic institutions that determine who will rule, how rulers will be chosen, and how basic distributive decisions will be made. Such a regime change entails power struggles and the development of organizational strength and popular support for an opposition force, as well as bargaining and negotiating, if not revolting, to bring about new institutions that reflect the interest of the winners.³ In the case of North Korea, such a regime change threatens the very existence of the Kim Jong-un regime, which features a centralized power in the leader and the ruling coalition. This will be further explained in the following section on regime typology and vulnerability.

Assuming that the breakdown of communist regimes is regarded as the same variant of the third wave of transition and common process of diffusion and causal interaction,⁴ the study of regime breakdown and the

process of transformation can be approached with two simplified versions of transition: a bottom-up transition in which the people rise up to overthrow an authoritarian regime in a popular revolution, and a top-down transition in which the dictatorial ruling elite introduces liberalizing reforms that ultimately lead to a democratic transition. This paper attempts to place North Korea in a regime typology of comparative authoritarianism, and take the breakdown of the authoritarian rule as a frame of reference as to see under what conditions regime transition is likely to occur in North Korea. Taking that regime change refers to internally induced political change rather than externally imposed change or regime collapse, this paper first examines major approaches to transition with which the agent and process of change can be analyzed. Then, it examines the features of the North Korea regime to speculate the likely agent and process of change through a looking glass of regime typology and vulnerability of different regime types. In the final section, the paper discusses the prospect of political change in North Korea and some policy recommendations on how to encourage North Korea to change.

Theoretical Approaches to Transition

There are four major theoretical approaches to the study of transition based on social science theories of social change.⁵ Two distinctions that are central to the study of regime breakdown and the process of transformation: (1) behavioral versus structural approaches; (2) state-centered versus society-centered approaches, with the former stressing the autonomy of politics from society and the latter the dependence of the political realm on society. Reisinger (1998) developed a scheme that captures commonly noticed differences in emphasis and goals among those who study social change processes. The different bodies of literature that illustrate particular theoretical approach to the study of democratization in general and post-communist transition are categorized in each cell:

Table 1: Theoretical Approaches to the Study of Transition

	State-centered	Society-centered
Structural (Objectivists)	<p>1. Institutions</p> <p>a. Constitutional Engineering</p> <p><i>General</i> Aristotle (1995) Rae (1967) Lijphart (1984) Taagapera and Shugart(1989) Lijphart (1990) Shugart and Carey (1992) Satori(1994)</p> <p><u>Communist/Post-communist countries</u> Elster (1992) Linz and Stepan (1992) Clark (1996) Lane et al (2001)</p>	<p>2. Modernisation</p> <p><i>General</i> Lerner (1958) Lipset (1959) Apter (1965) Moore (1967) Pye (1990)</p> <p><u>Communist/Post-communist countries</u> Lewin (1991) Hosking (1991)</p>
	<p>b. Neo-institutionalism</p> <p><i>General</i> March and Olsen (1989) Moe (1984) North (1990)</p> <p><u>Communist/Post-communist countries</u> Roeder (1993)</p>	
Behavioral (Subjectivist)	<p>3. Elite Political Culture, Ideology, or Interest</p> <p><i>General</i> Michels(1949) Mosca (1958) Pareto (1935) Rustow (1970) Putnam(1973) Przeworski (1986) O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986) Hagopian (1990) Di Palma (1990) Burton et al. (1992)</p> <p><u>Communist/Post-communist countries</u> Beck et al. (1973) Welsh (1976) Willerton (1992) Higley et al. (1996) Kullberg (1994) Lane (1996)</p>	<p>4. Mass Political Culture</p> <p><i>General</i> DeTocqueville (1835) Weber (1930) Almond and Verba (1963)</p> <p><u>Communist/Post-communist countries</u> White (1979) Barghoorn (1965) Brown and Gray (1979) Tucker (1973) Wegren (1996)</p>

Source: William Reisinger, "Transitions from Communism: Putting Society in its Place"

While the *state-centered approach* stresses institutions and elites as the major determinant of the transitional process and outcomes, the *society-centered approach* regards modernization and mass political culture as important socio-economic and cultural preconditions of transformation. The elite-centered approach considers interests, behavior and actions of the leadership connected to legitimacy problems. This has been explained with the process of bargaining and negotiation among the individuals or political factions near the center of power, followed by the splits within the authoritarian government based on the experience of transformation from authoritarianism in Latin American and East Asia.⁶ The society-centered approach considers the influence of political culture on polity and the growth of civic culture that articulates political demand and interests of the societal forces. Modernization theory, in particular, was popular among social scientists in explaining the third wave of democratization. It pinpoints the economic structure of a country as an impetus of social change, in large part because it alters the balance of power among social classes. Identifying the impact of changing institutions and economic development on the mass public's beliefs and behaviors, modernization theorists argue that society is likely to be influenced by industrialization, urbanization, and other socioeconomic transformations in a direction of greater complexity of thought, self-efficacy, and political demands. Accordingly, the modernization process brings about citizens' receptivity to a more democratic political culture. Thus, economic development inevitably accompanies democratization.⁷

These four approaches have been employed by transitologists primarily to identify the pattern of establishment and consolidation of different types of liberal and partial democratic systems following the transition from authoritarianism. However, it also provides a useful framework in understanding the circumstances under which democratic systems may be encouraged to emerge and flourish, thus, identifying agents and conditions needed for a change to take place in the existing regime. The study of transition also suggests the importance of behavioral change either in the elite or the society in initiating change in an authoritarian regime.

The theoretical implications on transition also indicate that behavioral approaches rather than structural/institutional approaches may be more appropriate in explaining the determinants of transition and non-transition from communism. In other words, the behavior of primary actors and societal conditions within the given institutional setting have a

better explanatory power in addressing the surviving communist states in Asia. Focusing on the absence of identity crisis or loss of legitimacy, one could investigate regime features of these surviving communist states in terms of a formation and preservation of the identity. The following section will consider the regime features of North Korea and the distinctiveness that has formed North Korea's behavioral characteristics.

The Case of the North Korean Regime

Addressing the case of North Korea in the post-communist transition, institutional setting may have little significance. North Korea features a variety of typological categories of modern non-democratic regimes in accordance to the framing of institutional features and variables. Based on the universal features within a comparative framework, the North Korean regime is often classified as Totalitarianism, Authoritarianism, Sultanism or Personalistic Dictatorship.⁸ Focusing on regime peculiarity, others described North Korea as socialist corporatist state, *Suryong* [Supreme leader] system, monolithic leadership system, military state and theocratic state.⁹ North Korea has never been typologically static, implying an evolutionary regime change within the institutional setting of the state socialist system. Accordingly, the forms of integration, legitimation, and political management have never been typical under the state socialist formation.

Deviation from the general path of socialist development occurred in North Korea at an early stage of its regime consolidation process, and continued on a trajectory that differs from other state socialist states or departs from the convergent path of post-socialist transition. The behavioral approach to North Korea's lack of transition may point to the importance of history, values, philosophy, elite unity, and political culture that shape the regime type and peculiarities, which might have contributed to the collapse-proof North Korean regime.

Origin of Communist Regimes

The communist movement in Korea was intertwined with nationalism and anti-Japanese resistance during the Japanese colonial period. The communist parties and revolutionary leaders were perceived to be strong, indigenous nationalists. The communist movement was viewed as the movement for national liberation from colonial oppression and an anti-imperial movement. Kim Il-sung, the founder of North Korean regime, was a symbol of anti-Japanese nationalist movements.¹⁰

Communism was a heritage of nationalism and liberation as well as a significant part of the history that legitimizes the foundation to North Korea.

The collapse of the Soviet Union had no direct impact on the homegrown communist regimes of North Korea. They were much less responsive to political change in the Soviet Union or the legitimacy problems of the communist system than the countries in which communism was implanted by the Soviet Union.¹¹ In response to the collapse of communism and disintegration of the Soviet Union, the North Korean regime introduced a unique brand of socialism, proclaiming the supremacy of *Urisik Sahuijuyi* [socialism in our style] to differentiate itself from the socialism of other countries.¹² Confronting its changing environment, the North Korean regime managed to survive not by adaptation to these changes, but through an emphasis on the superiority and particularity of the North Korean regime.

Guiding Ideology

The political origin of communist regimes helped North Korea depart from communist orthodoxy and the Soviet ideology at an early stage, and create own flexible model in the practice of socialist development. The legacy of semi-colonialism, imperial invasions, and internal wars certainly made the leadership more reluctant to embrace the values and practices that were perceived as belonging to “other system.” Since the idea of socialism was considered as a doctrine of European philosophers that had little in common with Asian philosophies, the North Korean regime, adapted socialism to specific Asian conditions blended with nationalism. National legitimacy did not come from ideological adherence to Marxism or Leninism, but rather from the victory in a struggle for national independence and nationalism embedded in the communist configuration.

Building a theoretical rationale and device for legitimating Kim Il-sung’s power consolidation, the term *Juche* was introduced. *Juche* is commonly known as ‘self-reliance’, but depending on the context in which it is used, it can mean national identity, self-reliance, independence, national pride, or national assertiveness. The ideology is claimed to be the most correct application of the Marxism and Leninism to Korea’s own situation, which reflects the specific characteristics of the Korean revolution and unique features in the development of socialism in the country. *Juche* thought evolved through various phases, ranging from

a mere political slogan to a system of values and the central guideline for policies in the fields of politics, economics, society, military, and foreign affairs. The status of the Juche ideal escalated and finally superseded Marxism-Leninism when it was enshrined as Article 3 of the 1972 DPRK Constitution. This meant disconnecting the North Korean communist revolution from the Soviet or Chinese revolutions.

Since the 1970s, North Korea departed from the mainstream of socialism based on the ideology of Marxism-Leninism, the official guiding ideology that swore commitment to the utopian form of communism. Instead, North Korean leaders and elite groups derive most of their sense of mission, legitimation, by elaborating a new guiding ideology—Kim Il-sung thought—that articulates a North Korean uniqueness. With little binding power of the original socialist doctrine, loss of ideological legitimacy did not happen in North Korea despite the collapse of the belief system in other communist states.

Leadership

In the formative stage of North Korean communist politics, there were several competing political factions and power struggles among the communist leaders. The collective leadership, however, turned into a monolithic power structure centered on Kim Il-sung through purges and eliminations of other factions. By removing the opposition, Kim Il-sung established himself as the absolute ruler supported by a loyal cohesive elite. The concentration of power and formation of an integrated elite forged North Korea into an absolute monolithic totalitarian socialist state from the 1960s. This cult of personality intensified to consolidate Kim's power. Although personality cults existed in other socialist countries under Stalin or Mao, the personality cult in North Korea was peculiar in its scope, intensity, and duration. The cult was not confined to the individual, but extended to Kim's family and relatives, which paved the way for a dynastic succession.

A leadership succession scheme, the father-son hereditary succession, markedly differentiates North Korea from other state socialist states regimes. The leadership succession in the Soviet Union and China often accompanied an intense power struggle within the elite.¹³ Kim Il-sung sought a way to guarantee the continuation of the rule and his authority by designating his son, Kim Jong-il, as his successor. In the process, he removed those who opposed the succession plan from key positions in the Party, state, and military to ensure he had

loyal supporters. Not only did Kim Il-sung prevent the possibility of challenge to his political power and eliminate possible conflict, this long-term preparation for his son's rule seems to have had a stabilizing effect on the North Korean regime during the transition of leadership. There was no apparent internal conflict or power struggle within the North Korean power elite during the period of leadership change, which was often the case in other communist regimes.

Nepotism has minimized the possibility of political instability after the death of Kim Il-sung. However, a succession of leadership throughout the three generations accentuating the 'blood line' from Kim Jong-il to his son Kim Jong-un is rare for any non-democratic regime, let alone a state socialist regime. Legitimacy of leadership succession has not been openly questioned, though the relatively short period of time for Kim Jong-un's succession preparation has left the procurement of loyal support base for the young leader in question.

Political Culture: Asian Values

Asian societies tend to share a similar set of values that are distinct from the Western ones. These values stress social harmony, respect for authority, and a belief in the family. These detailed features appear to have an explanatory power as to why the communist rule has survived so well in the Asian countries. First, there is a general disposition to respect leaders and the state because of the Confucian emphasis on loyalty, discipline, and duty. Second, there is broad support for "strong" government and a general acceptance of state as a "father figure: that guides the decisions and draw up strategies for national development. Third, there is great emphasis on community and social cohesion. Lastly, the overriding priority in Asian culture is on growth and prosperity rather than individual freedom in the Western sense of civil liberty.¹⁴

The overall feature of Asian values makes the regime more susceptible to authoritarian/patrimonial types of ruling, and hence makes the regime more tolerant of powerful ruling parties. Civilians with Asian values tend to be more fearful of the confusion and anarchy caused by the change of systems, thus preferring stability with the existing system rather than opting for a new social order. The Asian values emphasizing hierarchy, respect for authority, strong government, and harmony tend to have a strong impact on the political culture that glues the elite together in many Asian countries. North Korea is no exception. Elite unity and cohesion has been relatively strong in North Korea. Thereby, the ruling

elite performed better in preventing, and in some cases, managing legitimation crisis.¹⁵ The study of elite cohesion and division under the Gorbachev leadership revealed a fragmented elite group with internal divisions in terms of ideology, institutional allegiance, and political culture in the configuration of the national elite in the Soviet Union.¹⁶ In contrast, the North Korea political elites remain strongly united ideologically, showing their personal commitment to the ideology and institutions of state socialism.¹⁷ Such features in the political elite might have contributed to preventing legitimation crisis and accepting the status-quo in North Korea.

The Regime Features

North Korea has clearly developed a very strong and durable political system that is based a single, deeply entrenched political party under an absolute ruler and cohesive political elite as the center of power. In such a configuration, the possibility of society-driven change is low. Firstly, the basic characteristics of its institutional system is a concentration of power in a single party (the communist party), a centralized and largely nationalized economy, a highly centralized and relatively closed polity, and a society largely devoid of the bourgeoisie.¹⁸ Secondly, the North Korean regime features the political domination of society through the Communist Party and a weak civil society where there is a relative absence of civic culture and distinct large social strata with individualized social interests or established political-ideological views. Such a weak society is less able to exert constraints on elites or the state. Thirdly, the state's monopolization of economic and public life leaves organizations outside the state with few resources by which they can increase the costs of oppression to political leaders.¹⁹ Such a weak society is thus less able to organize a strong society-based opposition. Furthermore, a lack of democratic experience in North Korea, where the communist regime was installed following decolonization and foreign interference, left the regime relatively unfamiliar with Western democratic values or with different conceptualizations of Western-type of democracy. Unlike Eastern European countries, North Korea lacks true democratic experience and has a limited vision and strategy of reforming the existing system in the post-socialist era. Therefore, the prospects for overthrowing or even meaningfully destabilizing the regime through a popular uprising would be practically unlikely under normal circumstances.

The state-centered approach emphasizes elite political culture, ideology, and interest as an analytical factor in the process of transition and democratization. The structure and process of elite politics have been considered crucial to the understanding of the process of change in a number of studies.²⁰ One of the principal criteria of the elitist approach considers the behavior and actions of the political elite²¹ groups and the political culture imposed upon the polity. Considering that the breakdown of the communist system was essentially the process of abandoning state socialism as a system of power, in which political elite was a primary actor, this state-centered behavioral approach may have some bearings to the prospect of top-down change in North Korea.

Due to the nature of top-down legitimation in a communist system, the ruling elite's loss of confidence in the legitimacy of its own domination or will to rule is fatal. When the leaders are exposed to an identity crisis associated with legitimacy failure, they are deprived of willingness to continue ruling the existing system, and some may look to an alternative system.²² The system may collapse when the leaders fail to manage legitimation crisis successfully because they lose faith in the very system it is supposed to maintain. North Korea has shown relatively strong elite unity and cohesion, thereby, the ruling elite performed better in preventing, and in some cases, managing legitimation crisis. A long-term consolidation of a monolithic leadership and the winning coalition, eradication of factional division or opposition, and formation of the established ruling coalition that supports a father-to-son leadership succession scheme²³ altogether have created a consistent ideocratically unified elite group in North Korea. The political elite has every interest in maintaining the regime rather than opting for change.

A succession of leadership throughout the three generations accentuating the 'blood line' from Kim Jong-il to his son Kim Jong-un is rare for any non-democratic regime, let alone communist regime. Nevertheless, legitimacy of leadership succession has not been openly questioned or contested by any group in North Korea. A relative short period of time for succession preparation for Kim Jong-un left the procurement of loyal support base for the young leader in question. Recent studies of the structure and nature of the ruling coalition under Kim Jong-un suggest a stable power structure in addition to sparse differentiation and strong cohesiveness.²⁴ After purges and removals of opposition, Kim Jong-un's ruling coalition has now been restructured to comprise of a support group made up by the elder generation, young

technocrats, and descendants of the revolutionary generation that legitimized the succession of the young Kim. Following Kim Jong-il's efforts to ensure the loyalty of military by giving special privileges to military officers and by promoting military leaders based on political allegiance, Kim Jong-un has strengthened the solidarity between the military and party and taken control of the military. As long as the structure and nature of the power elite remains in its current form, the prospect for meaningful political change in North Korea propelled from the top seems very slim.

In the absence of potential agents of change, any significant political change in the personalist type of authoritarianism of North Korea seems unlikely. It is also unlikely for the regime to risk its own survival by taking the convergent path towards post-communist development. The nature of development in North Korea brings out some important features that might have effectively prevented implosion within the ruling elite or unprompted regime collapse. Firstly, differentiation of the North Korean state socialist system based on its nationalist identity and independent ideology minimized the impact of the breakdown of the Soviet Union on its own continuation. Secondly, building a closed but controlled society curtailed any possibility of a societal force challenging the existing leadership. Thirdly, monolithic leadership prevented the formation of an alternative to Kim's political power or possible conflicts within the leadership. The father-to-son leadership succession, in particular, helped eradicate a possible power struggle surrounding the succession issue.

Regime Typology and Vulnerability

Within the simplified classification scheme of regime type²⁵, the North Korean regime has shown a single-party authoritarian regime type by its institutional features and a personalist regime type by its behavioral features.²⁶ It has built an institution founded upon a single dominant political party with cohesive political elite as the center of power, which characterizes the one-party authoritarian regime type. From the 1960s, however, the regime's behavior changed to become a personalist dictatorship type, where Kim Il-sung rose as an absolute ruler and his *Kapsan* faction became the only winning coalition.

In general, the personalist regime has the leader, often supported by parties and militaries, maintaining a near monopoly over policy and personnel decision. It is often the case that the leader seizes power before

any particular organizations become sufficiently developed or autonomous to prevent the leader from taking personal control of policy decisions and the selection of regime personnel.²⁷ A personalistic dictator often deliberately undermines these institutions so that they cannot act as a power base for potential rivals, and prevents them from building independent bases of support through purges or elimination of factions. The uniqueness of North Korea tends to highlight a personalistic form of rule with monolithic leadership, personality cults, and hereditary succession from Kim Il-sung to Kim Jong-il, then to his son Kim Jong-un. The personalist regime features persist in North Korea through Kim Jong-un, who has ruled North Korea since 2012 and inherited a similar personality cult from his grandfather, Kim Il-sung, the “Eternal Leader,” and his father, Kim Jong-il, the “Dear Leader.” Young Kim also inherited the art of managing potential rivals and power bases. Since he came to power, a number of high-level officials, including his uncle Jang Sung-taek, were executed and purged in the process of remolding his loyal support base.

The personalist regime, however, has its weakness. Compared to the military or single-party type, it tends to be most vulnerable to potential dissenters, split in the ruling coalition, armed insurgents, or popular uprising. Some scholars of comparative authoritarianism argue that nominal authoritarian types are often associated with regime duration, regime change types, preferred means to control dissenters, and the effectiveness of exogenous factors.²⁸ With these claims, they demonstrate why some forms of authoritarianism are more vulnerable than other to exogenous shocks, opposition from outside the ruling coalition, or reforms.

The study finds that military regimes tend to be less durable since the professionalized military officers cling less tightly to power and opt to return to the military institutions once their unity seems to be threatened by internal splits.²⁹ Military regimes are more likely to end in negotiation, followed by competitive forms of government. Single-party regimes, on the other hand, tend to be most durable and less threatened by exogenous shocks, since multiple factions existing within the dominant party have incentives to cooperate in order to remain in office. A strong dominant party may provide a means for incorporated groups to present their political and policy preference to the regime, so it would generate a cohesive leadership.³⁰ The party-based type tends to have a large size of winning coalition and multiple factions may exist within the

ruling party and try to sustain patronage-client links. Co-optation of potential dissenters via political rents may be possible by authoritarian leaders in general, but not in personalist regimes. The personalist type is durable as long as the leader's faction can increase benefits to itself by excluding the rival faction from participation, or if rival factions remain loyal to the ruler due to greater payoffs for supporting him.

In terms of regime change types, military and single-party types go through transition when the leaders are willing to transfer political power to another government in the negotiation process for democratization. Personalist regimes, however, tend to exit in irregular ways through either coup or revolution, which forcefully removes the ruler and his faction from the monopoly of power and wealth. In order to prevent this from happening, the leadership in personalist regime would exclude those who are not perceived to be sufficiently loyal or who withdrew support from the winning coalition through purges, even among family members. The leadership would not intensify military individuals who could be potential subverts, and would place the military under its direct control, rewarding loyal military officers and repressing the officers who are not loyal. Such a regime is more likely to depend on suppressive means. The personalist rule is highly vulnerable to the death or removal of leader, but it may end in a renewed authoritarianism by the consolidation of power of those who overthrew the old regime.

The overall implications of the study derive a speculative insight into regime features and prospect of change in North Korea. The behavioral features of personalist regime type in North Korea dominated throughout the three generations of power transition through a hereditary succession. Due to its vulnerability to the rise of opposition, the regime has left little room for different factions to co-exist and continually strengthened its suppressive means. In such a setting, regime change is only possible by elimination of the ruler and his coalition, which may not be a viable option for the Kim Jong-un leadership. China has shown the features of a single-party authoritarian regime rather than a personalist regime in the post-Mao period, which seemed to have contributed to the construction of a more stable and durable regime that is less vulnerable to exogenous shocks or reforms. If the North Korea regime features can change to more of a single-party type with a well-institutionalized party and differentiated political elite, it would be more likely to see a wider range of policy options and alternatives without risking imminent regime breakdown. The regime would also induce more stable and favorable

condition in which new potential agents of change may rise and negotiate for a peaceful and regular exit, and perhaps for regime transition as described by Geddes.³¹

Prospect of Political Change and Policy Recommendation

The primary actor in the process of regime breakdown is generally an organized group or a new ascendant class that is capable of challenging the existing leadership's confidence in its own ruling and the system it advocates. In the case of North Korea, this element is certainly missing. There was little change or differentiation in the ruling elite as well as an absence of civic culture or established political-ideological views. These features are very much due to the unique development of the North Korean regime, in which the nature of the North Korean polity evolved towards monolithic and dynastic configuration, and the society was strongly controlled and repressed from the early stage of development. In the absence of alternatives, survival of the existing leadership and its system of rule was easily guaranteed. The main features of the old system persisted in North Korea. However, continuation of the North Korean state socialist system was not a consequence of the superior functioning of its system to other disintegrated systems or rigid adherence to the Utopian goal of communism, but of a lack of an alternative vision as how to restructure the existing system without risking regime collapse. Removal of reform-oriented Jang Sung-taek and his supporters put an end to a glimpse of hope for change towards an alternative system under the Kim Jong-un regime.

The question is no longer about finding the prototype of transition recommendable for North Korea, but about accepting the country-specific development process which may take a distinctive path and process, and offering acceptable alternatives that can induce a gradual change in the North Korean regime. For this, typological classification of North Korea in comparative authoritarianism and the study of the breakdown of the Authoritarian rule may offer a better framework in search of key factors, processes, and relationships that indicate when change is likely and when it is not. Exploring how other authoritarian regimes resisted the forces of political change can also help identify appropriate ways to bring change in the North Korean regime, whether it is top-down or bottom-up.

In her research, Barbara Geddes finds that any authoritarian regime, including a single-party authoritarian one, can be in a vulnerable situation if a crisis caused by exogenous shock severely damages the economy, impedes the distribution of benefits to supporters and allies, or destroys coercive capacity. She further argues that when this crisis, in some situations, creates splits within the party leadership and the state, popular pressure can lead to the collapse of the regime.³² We have observed that exogenous shocks have little effect in the case of North Korea, as the regime not only survived despite decades of economic difficulties, but also avoided the debilitation of factional infighting. The North Korean regime seems to be largely immune from international pressures and sanctions. We still need to see if recently intensified international sanctions will act as an effective exogenous pressure to force behavioral change in North Korea.

If the goal is regime change and not regime collapse, sanctions or exogenous shock may not be the ideal approach towards reforming North Korea. Encouraging market-based reforms and opening up may offer a better solution for political change in the long-term. The North Korean regime largely remains insulated from outside influences, resulting in little information being available to leaders who could challenge the ideology of the regime. Market-based reform and opening up may not only offer North Korea an alternative vision and goals, but may generate structural change that would allow for a more balanced state-society relationship and a rise of an ascendant class, which are the necessary conditions for political change. Finding and collaborating with this potential agent of change may help the emergence of “instrumental democrats” or political reformers. Authoritarian regimes usually construct sophisticated and pervasive systems for monitoring potential and actual dissidents and dealing with them in a manner that not only prevents them from achieving their goals, but also dissuades others from joining their causes. However, the impetus for political change has to come from the inside, not from the outside, for which the role of the outsiders should be limited to providing favorable conditions for the agents of change to grow and rise. Thus, the answer to the North Korean question is engagement, not containment.

Appendix:

Questionnaire for assessing the Regime Typology by Geddes (2003)

One-Party Regime	Personalist Regime
<i>Did the party exist prior to the leader's election campaign or accession to power?</i>	<i>Does the leader lack the support of a party?</i>
<i>Was the party organized in order to fight for independence or lead some other mass social movement?</i>	<i>If there is a support party, was it created after the leader's accession to power?</i>
<i>Did the first leader's successor hold, or does the leader's heir apparent hold a high party position?</i>	<i>If there is a support party, does the leader choose most of the members of the politburo-equivalent?</i>
<i>Was the first leader's successor, or is the current heir apparent, from a different family, clan, or tribe than the leader?</i>	<i>Does the country specialist literature describe the politburo-equivalent as a rubber stamp for the leader?</i>
<i>Does the party have functioning local-level organizations that do something reasonably important, such as distribute seeds or credit or organize local government?</i>	<i>If there is a support party, is it limited to a few urban areas?</i>
<i>Does the party either face some competition from other parties or hold competitive intraparty elections?</i>	<i>Was the successor to the first leader, or is the heir apparent, a member of the same family, clan, tribe, or minority ethnic group as the first leader?</i>
<i>Is party membership required for most government employment?</i>	<i>Does the leader govern without routine elections?</i>
<i>Does the Party control access to high government office?</i>	<i>If there are elections, are the essentially plebiscites, that is, without either internal or external competition?</i>
<i>Are members of the politburo chosen by routine party procedures?</i>	<i>Does access to high office depend on the personal favor of the leader?</i>
<i>Does the party encompass members from more than one region, religion, ethnic group, clan, or tribe?</i>	<i>Has normal military hierarchy been seriously disorganized or overturned?</i>
<i>Do none of the leader's relatives occupy very high government office?</i>	<i>Have dissenting officers or officers from different regions, tribes, religions, or ethnic groups been murdered, imprisoned, or forced into exile?</i>
<i>Was the leader a civilian before his accession?</i>	<i>Has the officer corps been marginalized from most decision-making?</i>
<i>Was the successor to the first leader, or is the heir apparent, a civilian?</i>	<i>Does the leader personally control the security apparatus?</i>
<i>Is the military high command consulted primarily about security matters?</i>	
<i>Are most members of the cabinet or politburo equivalent civilians?</i>	

Notes:

¹ Timothy Lim, *Politics in East Asia: Explaining Change & Continuity*, (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2014), p. 265.

² Barbara Geddes, J. Wright and E. Frantz, "Autocratic Breakdown and Regime Transition: A New Data Set," *Perspectives on Politics*, Volume 12, Number 2 (2014) and Bon-sang Koo, Jun-young Choi, Jun-seok Kim, "Analyzing Kim Jong-un's Survival Strategy from the Comparative Authoritarian Perspective," *Pacific Focus*, Volume 31, Number. 2 (2016).

³ Barbara Geddes, *Paradigms and Sand Castles*, (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2003).

⁴ P.C. Schmitter and T.L. Karl, "The Conceptual Travels of Transitologists and Consolidologists: How far to the East should they attempt to go?" *Slavic Review*, Volume 53, Number 1 (1994).

⁵ Philip G. Roeder, "Transitions from Communism: State-Centered Approaches," *Can Democracy Take Root in Post-Soviet Russia? Explorations in State-Society Relations*, Harry Eckstein, Frederic J. Fleron, Jr., Erik P. Hoffman and William M. Reisinger (Editors), (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1998), pp. 201-228, and William M. Reisinger, "Transitions from Communism: Putting Society in its Place," *Can Democracy Take Root in Post-Soviet Russia? Explorations in State-Society Relations*, Eckstein, et. al., pp. 229-248.

⁶ Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe C. Schmitter and Laurence Whitehead (editors), *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Prospects for Democracy*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

⁷ S.M. Lipset and S. Rokkan, *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives*, (New York: The Free Press, 1967), Fredric J. Fleron, "Post-Soviet Political Culture in Russia: An Assessment of Recent Empirical Investigations," *Europe-Asia Studies*, Volume 48, Number 2 (1996), pp. 225-60, and Barrington Moore Jr. *Soviet Politics – The Dilemma of Power*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1965).

⁸ Gavan McCormack, "Kim Country: Hard Times in North Korea." *New Left Review*, Number 198 (1993),

Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-communist Europe*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), Seong-chang Cheong, "A comparative analysis of Stalin and Kim Il-Song Regimes: the ruling ideology and power system," *Korean Journal of International Studies*, Volume 37, Number 2 (1998), [in Korean] and Dal-joong Chang, "The Kim Jong-il Regime and Juche Vision: Ideology, Party and Mass line." *Asia Studies* (1999) [in Korean].

⁹ Bruce Cumings, "Corporatism in North Korea." *Journal of Korean Studies*, Volume 4 (1982), Haruki Wada, *Kita Chosen* Translated by T. Seo and K. Nam as [North Korea: from Guerrilla State to Regular Military State], (Seoul: Tolbegae, 2002), Dae-suk Suh, *Kim Il-sung: the North Korean Leader*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), and Masayuki Suzuki, *Kim Jong-il and Suryong System Socialism*, translated by Young-ku Yu, (Seoul: Joongang Daily, 1994).

¹⁰ Akihiko Tanaka, "Socialism in East Asia: Vietnam, Mongolia, and North Korea." Gilbert Rozman (Editor) *Dismantling Communism: Common Causes and Regional Variations*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991).

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- ¹¹ Jan Adams, *Why Did the Socialist System Collapse in Central and Eastern Europe?* (London: Macmillan Press, 1995).
- ¹² So-young Kwon and Young-chul Cho, "Legitimacy and Regime Security in North Korea," *East and West Studies*, Volume 26, Number 4 (2014), pp.138-139.
- ¹³ Raymond Taras, *Leadership Change in Communist States*, (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989).
- ¹⁴ Andrew Heywood, *Politics*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 278-9.
- ¹⁵ So-young Kwon, *An Elite Analysis of the Disintegration and Survival of State Socialism: The North Korean Political Elite in Comparative Perspective*, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Cambridge. 2003.
- ¹⁶ Lane, 1998, p. 90. David S. Lane, *The Rise and Fall of State Socialism*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), p. 90.
- ¹⁷ Kwon, *An Elite Analysis of the Disintegration and Survival of State Socialism: The North Korean Political Elite in Comparative Perspective* and Steven Saxongberg *Transitions and Non-transitions from communism: Regime Survival in China, Cuba, North Korea, and Vietnam*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 99-103.
- ¹⁸ Leslie Holmes, *Post-Communism: An Introduction*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997) and Thomas Henry Rigby (1990) *Political Elites in the USSR: Central Leaders and Local Cadres from Lenin to Gorbachev*, (Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1990).
- ¹⁹ Robert A. Dahl, *Poliarchy: Participation and Opposition*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), pp. 14-16.
- ²⁰ Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe C. Schmitter and Laurance Whitehead (Editors), *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Prospects for Democracy*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), John Higley and Michael G. Burton, "Types of Political Elites in Postcommunist Eastern Europe," *International Politics*, Volume. 34 (1997), John Higley and Jen Pakulski, "Elite Transformation in Central and Eastern Europe," *Australian Journal of Political Science*, Volume 30 (1995), John Higley, Jen Pakulski, and Włodzimierz Wesolowski (ed)(1998) *Postcommunist Elites and Democracy in Eastern Europe*, (London: Macmillan Press, 1998), David S. Lane, *The Rise and Fall of State Socialism*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), and David S. Lane and Cameron Ross, *The Transition from Communism to Capitalism: Ruling Elites from Gorbachev to Yeltsin*, (London: Macmillan, 1999).
- ²¹ If political elite is generally defined as a politically influential person who is capable of making substantial political decision, the political elite in a state socialist regime narrows down to party-state bureaucracy: a limited network of individuals who play a key role in decision-making and a positional power elite based on Nomenklatura posts (Higley and Burton 1989: 1997).
- ²² Giuseppe Di Palma, "Legitimation from the Top to Civil Society: Political-Cultural Change in Eastern Europe," *World Politics*, Volume 43, Number 1 (1991).
- ²³ Kim Il-sung sought a way to guarantee the continuation of the rule and his authority by designating his son, Kim Jong-il, as successor. In the process, he removed those who opposed the succession plan from key positions in the Party, state, and military to ensure his loyal supporters. Not only Kim Il-sung prevented the possibility of challenge to his political power and eliminated possible conflict, a long-term preparation for succession to his son seems to have had a stabilizing effect on the North Korean regime during the transition of leadership. There was no apparent internal conflict or power struggle within

the North Korean power elite during the period of change of leader, which was often the case in other communist regimes.

²⁴ Y. Park, “The Structure of Power in Kim Jong-Un Regime based on Dictatorship Theory,” [in Korean] *Defense Policy Analysis*. Volume 28, Number 4 (2012) and J. Kim, “Analysis and Implications of Elite Change in the Kim Jong-Un Regime,” [in Korean], *Defense Analysis Monthly*, (Seoul: Korea Institute for Defense Analysis, 2015).

²⁵ The most common classification of authoritarianism has three distinct institutional forms: single-party or dominant-party regimes, military regimes, and personalist regimes (Geddes 2003; Wright 2008; Clark, Golder and Golder 2013; Orvis and Drogus 2014). In single-party regime, a party organization exercises some power over the leader at least part of the time, dominates access to political office and control over policy, and organizes the distribution of benefits to supporters. Military regime is a system of government in which military officers control power. Military leaders would take over the government often via coup d’état in time of crisis, and start down the road to development before returning it to civilian and democratic rule. The personalist regimes has a central leader that dominate a state through eliminating all apposition and by weakening the state’s institutions to centralize power in his own hands.

²⁶ See the appendix for the survey questions provided by Geddes (2003) with which regime typology could be assessed.

²⁷ Geddes, *Paradigms and Sand Castles*, p. 53.

²⁸ Geddes, *Paradigms and Sand Castles*, Barbara Geddes, Joseph Wright and Erica Frantz, “Autocratic Breakdown and Regime Transition: A New Data Set”. *Perspectives on Politics*. Volume 12, Number 2 (2014), and Abel Escriba-Forch and Joseph Wright *Foreign Pressure and the Politics of Autocratic Survival*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015)

²⁹ Geddes, *Paradigms and Sand Castles*, pp. 53-88.

³⁰ Benjamin Smith, “Oil Wealth and Regime survival in the Developing World 1960-1999,” *American Journal of Political Science*, Volume 48 (2004), p. 431.

³¹ Geddes, *Paradigms and Sand Castles*, pp. 53-88.

³² Barbara Geddes “What do we know about democratization after twenty years?” *Annual Review of Political Science*, Volume 2 (1999).