

# Understanding North Korea's Resilience through Economy, Laws and Governance: a review of introductory sources and essential monographs

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## Abstract

*This study reviews contributions that may help researchers re-evaluate the question of the North Korea's remarkable resilience in spite of its undeniable economic failure, a seemingly obscure legal system, and flawed governance. The review focuses therefore on three pillars of the North Korean regime and their historical evolution: the economy, the legal-judicial landscape (inclusive of state bureaucracy and legislative processes) and institutional profile anchored to the conventional understanding of the DPRK as a failed state. The purpose of this review is to introduce studies – particularly those produced over the last two decades - that can specifically guide researchers who have recently approached North Korea in their inquiries.*

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**JEL classification codes:** F5, F50, F53, G18, H7, N45

## 1. Introduction

More than three decades after the end of the cold war, the DPRK continues to defy predictions of its imminent demise, and this may well be its most impressive feature. Those approaching the country for the first time however, may be justified in believing that Pyongyang is living on borrowed time: media reports on North Korea continue to depict it as isolated, irrational and bankrupt. Academia and think tanks make similar assessments. North Korea is traditionally framed as a military-security issue, a geopolitical floating landmine, and it is seldom considered a viable subject of inquiry within the vast literature on global institutions and their engagement with states that are considered fragile, failed, or otherwise problematic.

Important exceptions to this trend include Lim (2021), Habib (2015), Park (2016), and Jonsson(2018) who expand the study of North Korea out of the restricted purview of security studies and realist approaches in IR. These studies show that scholarly work on the DPRK under the conventional methods of social science inquiry is indeed possible, and in doing so they build on pioneering works by Smith (1999, 2000, 2005) on the impact of international organizations (IOs), particularly the UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, WFP and WHO on the reconstitution of North Korean institutions during and after the 1990s crisis. Jonsson, Habib, Rim, and Lim are particularly useful in considering the influence of cooperation between multilateral institutions and the DPRK government in the architecture of global governance.<sup>1</sup>

Building on these studies, this review presents works that may contribute to a better understanding of the country. Each section of this paper asks questions intended to guide researchers towards a more nuanced analysis of North Korea, by looking at how scholars analyze three important domains: the economy, the law and the governance. The aim here is not much to answer these questions in detail, but *to present materials that can be used to elaborate answers.*<sup>2</sup> As no single review can possibly be exhaustive of an entire field, the works listed here are meant by necessity to be a succinct “starting package” for those venturing away from traditional,

binary considerations of the DPRK as either a strategic and humanitarian liability or a dangerous new member of the nuclear club. For clarity purpose, all bibliographical entries are arranged following a simplified APA style.<sup>3</sup>

## **2. Money talks: the evolution of economic outlooks and the analysis of North Korea's marketization.**

The consensus around North Korea, whenever talking about its economy, seems to be that it is non-existent. The country is bankrupt beyond repair, and has been so for decades. So, why has it not collapsed? Economic performance represents a decisive benchmark for the viability of most political regimes, but North Korea's survival seems to eschew traditional measurements. If any other state faced the same economic conditions of the DPRK - and for as long - we would assume the whole country to have long plunged into chaos. Instead, the Pyongyang regime shows remarkable political durability and social stability, decades after a major socioeconomic crisis in the mid-1990s. The question of how the North Korean government remains firmly in power despite widespread poverty and underdevelopment is equally popular among academics and journalists; however, this line of inquiry seems guided by two misleading assumptions.

First, there is the idea that good economic performance is key to the longevity of any state *regardless of their political nature*. This may be true for economy-first states (i.e: where the social contract rests on the renewed provision of a successful economic model), but such notion doesn't stand to scrutiny with states that derive their legitimacy from sources other than economic output and redistribution of resources. The fact that the DPRK has repeatedly declared itself a *military-first state* since the mid-1990s (and the fact that it boldly behaves as one), should have redirected some of the assumptions on the correlation-causation between economic growth and political stability in Pyongyang. Second, there is no definitive consensus on what state power actually means in the context of DPRK - beyond the basic monopoly of coercion - and how exactly it is nourished in the face of chronic economic stagnation.<sup>4</sup>

These assumptions permeate numerous publications about North Korea, so that it is not uncommon to read reports where the DPRK is at the same time portrayed on the brink of catastrophe and forecast to remain an unsolved geopolitical issue indeterminately. The issue is, it is not possible to make sense of North Korea's post-1990s existence without revising the assumption that every state needs steady economic growth to survive. In addressing the North Korean reaction to the 1990s crisis and the attempts at economic reforms, Frank (2005: 279) offers a perfect introduction to the decoupling of politics and economy: "the North Korean leadership is ready to sacrifice economic success for the sake of regime stability. Economic reforms therefore have to be analyzed in connection with their political and ideological surroundings". This view is widely accepted today, but it took time to gain traction.

Analyses of economic matters and political economy in North Korea have evolved slowly since the 1990s along three different stages:

(A) *The DPRK is doomed and will ultimately collapse because of its moribund economy*. This view was near-consensual during the early 1990s, but has increasingly been discarded due to both (i) the fact the DPRK has routinely disproved any prediction of its imminent demise for three decades now, and (ii) the lack of any reliable sign of actual loss of power or social control by the regime. This understanding of the DPRK has been dubbed the "collapsist view" and is exemplified among others in Eberstadt (1999, 2007). The core of this argument

is that as the DPRK was originally a byproduct of the Soviet camp, it was destined to fail as all the other satellites of Moscow did.

- (B) *North Korea is doing poorly, though nowhere near the levels of the 1990s, and could do better given certain changes and conditions.* H. Feron (2014), among others, synthesizes this interpretation, which is basically a rebuttal of the collapsist theory with a more pragmatic outlook based on the study of data on trade and food production that was not available during the late 1990s and early 2000s. The country is seen as being in a prolonged (often indefinite) stage of transition; a recent, extensive study by Koen and Beom (2020) published by the OECD exemplifies this view; some South Korean economists (Kim 2017) offer a middle ground perspective between the transition and the collapse views. Works that document the supposed transition of the DPRK often rely on a paradigm popularized by J. Kornai in his studies of command economies.<sup>5</sup> These studies understand the DPRK to have fallen out of a developmental paradigm that was relatively successful until the early 1970s.
- (C) *The DPRK is not doing badly - given its circumstances - and shows surprising improvements, particularly in certain niches, though the future remains uncertain.* Green and Denney (2016) present the most viable synthesis of this argument: “North Korea is not only a low-income state with a moribund national economy: it also has a well-run, sector-specific economy” [...] these “pockets of efficiency” however, are constrained into a sector-specific “Royal Court Economy”, that is, an economy geared first and foremost towards the maintenance of the ruling elite. Green and Denney theorize that these niches could, one day, catalyze a steady development of the people’s economy; but while the authors hypothesize that “this would not require the government to yield its monopoly on power”, they also admit that the system of governance “acts as a roadblock to the realisation of this idea”.<sup>6</sup>

A common thread among all the different views of North Korea’s economic trajectory is the analysis of the unofficial market economy (known as *Jangmadang*), its ramification through state apparatuses, and its effect on the daily lives of North Koreans. The marketization of North Korea is not exactly new; the government began experimenting with private markets in the mid-1980s, quietly and with a very limited scope. Minus a few exceptions, however, it has taken a few years for most scholars (western and South Korean alike) to properly account for the magnitude and implications of the *Jangmadang*.

When early accounts of increasing market activities surfaced in the early 1990s from Sino-Korean borderlands, some analysts saw them as a silver bullet that would have put an end to North Korea’s misery. Time taught us that North Korea absorbed the impact of marketization and shrugged it off just as it did with the famine, the collapse of the PDS, the sanctions, several natural calamities, and the death of its first two leaders. Initially understood as vital anomaly in an otherwise doomed system, the shadow economy turned out to be *a feature in the system, not a bug*: markets, as it turns out, are one of the ways by which the state managed to survive without relinquishing actual power. Joo (2010:134) makes for a very good introduction to this line of reasoning: “Born out of the economy of shortage decades ago, it is as old as the official planning system. Indeed, it is not the shadow economy but our attention to it that is new, as the shadow economy has grown exponentially for the last ten years or so”. Joo’s study is also important to understand that while the *Jangmadang* may have started as a border phenomenon, it soon expanded thanks to geographical relocation “in dispersed forms with its main constituents temporarily withdrawing from dangerous fronts to the anonymous rear of the shadow market” (ibid: 135).

Hazel Smith has been among those western observers of the DPRK who looked at the shadow economy early on, not simply as an economic matter, but rather as a new way for the government to maintain old power structures while allowing at the same time ordinary people to trade for survival *and* elite members to trade for prosperity. Through three different publications on the topic (2009, 2012, 2015) Smith noted how the DPRK has progressively incorporated incentive-based market practices in a process of “marketization without liberalization” that was forced onto the regime and the society by the near-collapse of the mid-1990s. In this view, the transformation of the North Korean political economy from state-driven to market-driven is a bottom-up process not accompanied by political liberalization from the government downward. Smith analyzes provincial disparities to illustrate how marketization became embedded in North Korean society, as well as the consequences of post-famine marketization.

Insofar as marketization can account for the survival of the North Korean people it doesn't alone explain the longevity of the polity; to this end, a volume by J. Hastings (2016) redesigns North Korea as an “enterprising state”, one that does much more than muddling along through humanitarian aid. Hastings makes an excellent point in explaining that the markets have not only revealed how people survive, but more importantly, why the state lets them do so, and how the regime turned a challenge into an opportunity, defeating once again the stereotypes that paint the DPRK leadership as solely intent on frolicking among starving masses: “The desire to engage in elite indulgences and irresponsible weapons sales are perhaps necessary corollaries of what it means to be a rogue state. The continued ability to engage in what is fairly sophisticated international commerce, particularly in the face of one of the more comprehensive sanctions regimes ever created, is not.” (2016: 2)

To gather a better understanding of how actually the economy works, newcomers to the field can read Benjamin Habib's study (2011) in which he identifies five parallel economies in the post-1990s North Korea. The first is what remains of the formal command economy. Next, a military economics that procures and sells what is needed to keep the DPRK ready for battle – not limited to weapons, but also to maintain the loyalty of the military. The third is the illegal economy, a largely state-led effort to obtain foreign currency through the manufacture and sale of drugs, counterfeit cigarettes, counterfeit banknotes, etc. The fourth is the “court economy”, which supplies the central government elite with imported luxuries. Finally, there is an informal market economy through which ordinary people survive independently of the state. Habib (2011: 157) however falls at times into the same fallacy of many other scholars, when he argues that the North Korean economy “would function more efficiently [...] if the regime undertook system-wide economic reforms. However, such reforms are likely to unleash a political transformation that could ultimately bring down the regime.” This is a common adagio: North Korea could get in much better economic shape *if only it agreed to undertake reforms ...that will likely cause the disintegration of the state*. Why a regime so invested in its own survival would ever choose such path is a question still left unanswered.

### **3. Legislation, Public Administration and Bureaucracy in North Korea.**

In comparison with the economic studies, the subject of North Korean laws and bureaucracy represents uncharted waters.<sup>7</sup> Researchers looking to explore the legal and bureaucratic architecture of North Korea will find that, as it is often the case for the DPRK, important materials sometimes can go overlooked because of the polarized views that Pyongyang exerts

among its observers. The conventional argument against the DPRK *as a polity* (so, a judgment on the state, not on the people) holds that there is no resemblance of democratic institutions nor of any people's participation in the *res publica*; this notion does not seem to be up for debate. From the viewpoint of western liberal democracies the DPRK sits at the opposite end of the spectrum; however, this should not imply that it doesn't possess any legislative or judicial institutions are devoid of meaning. The issue is rather about their nature and role: is the law running independent from, parallel or subordinate to the political will of the regime?

Researchers tackling these questions may want to familiarize themselves with older studies first. One of the earliest, an article by I. Kim (1963), introduces both the judicial and administrative institutions of the DPRK. Around the same period, P. C. Hahm (1969) examined the relationship between ideology and the penal codes of North Korea, while Cho (1971), expanded on the functions and role of the judicial system. These three studies clarify that the law in North Korea *serves the all-important role of buttressing the politics* rather than existing on a separate and independent plane. These findings are confirmed in recent studies that, interestingly, have been developed within departments of law (Zook 2012) and public administration (Jordan and Ip 2013), rather than area studies or traditional IR.

To be sure, the DPRK's human rights violations are widespread, and its critics argue that these violations are in fact a pillar of regime stability (*i.e.*: a feature, not a bug). North Korean foreign policy is aggressive when not isolationist, and their observance of international covenants is - at best - sporadic and selective.<sup>8</sup> The legal infrastructure of the DPRK appears to be just as complex as that of many developed states and familiarizing with the major legal texts of the DPRK enables researchers to follow government priorities, their ideological evolution, and the degree of influence that international contacts may have on domestic policy changes.

Where can one access North Korean legal texts? The English translation of the North Korean constitution is available through its several editions (some of them featuring essential changes) at the *Globalex Database* curated by P. Goedde and M. Weiser (2014). This essential online repository also includes analysis of the legislative evolution in North Korea, the DPRK's own framework of human rights and a list of direct links to both original (Korean) and legal collections in the English language. An ideal complement to this compendium of civil and penal codes comes from the Singapore-based NGO *Choson Exchange* which produced a list of all existing laws in the DPRK that regulate investments, commercial activities, and foreign partnerships; these documents can be cross-referenced and compared with those in a collection on economic legislation released online in 2013 by North Korea Economy Watch (Government of the DPRK, 2003).

#### **4. North Korean institutions and governance: is the DPRK a 'failed' state?**

While most studies in the field of global governance and multilateralism eschew North Korea as subject of analysis, the DPRK is routinely described through the labels that IR scholars adopt to examine polities with questionable governance records. North Korea is largely considered a *failed state*, or a *fragile country* when addressing its socioeconomic issues; it is classified as a *repressive state*, an *authoritarian* or *totalitarian regime* when explaining both its domestic politics and foreign policy. Do these definitions help analysts, and are they warranted, in the case of North Korea? What do these labels say about the resilience and durability of the

### North Korean regime?

The repressive and authoritarian features of North Korean governance are self-evident, much as its stagnant economy (minus the exceptions noted above); however, the DPRK's state of fragility or institutional failure are debated in the literature. Observers of Korean affairs across the political spectrum, from Bruce Cumings to Victor Cha and Nicholas Eberstadt have long referred to the DPRK as a "communist state"; usually therefore as a "failed communist state", a demotivated country that is muddling along by dint of sheer repression. The "failed" characteristic is predicated on the assumption that North Korean politics are communist (or Stalinist) in nature. This notion however doesn't stand up to scrutiny. The "Stalinist" connotation is more evident in the titles of popular books on North Korea than in their contents; for instance, Lankov (2014) in spite of the title makes for a good introduction to the politics and society of the DPRK.

The understanding of North Korea as a failed polity is far from consensual – partially due to different interpretations of what constitutes a failed state. Scholars as diverse as B. R. Myers (2011) Patrick McEachern (2010), Alex Dukalskis (2017), Hazel Smith (2005b), and Heonik Kwon (2012) have all convincingly argued - through different (often conflicting) analytical frameworks - that the DPRK cannot be considered a "failed state" in any political or ideological sense, in spite of undeniable economic sluggishness. These authors come to similar conclusions regarding the stability of the regime: separately - and for different reasons – they agree that North Korea is here to stay, that the regime acts quite rationally – more than many of its critics would admit - and that the state has never really lost the confidence of its people. However, all these studies disagree in their methodology and in the benchmarks used to assess and explain the longevity of North Korea.

Smith uses the Weberian model, and the absence of any component of a classic Weberian state, to explain that equating North Korea to Somalia, or Afghanistan, would be a mistake. The state *never vanished* in North Korea, because "the state, in the classical, Weberian sense, did not fail in the DPRK. Indeed it could not, because it did not exist as a set of interlinked but separate semi-autonomous institutions." (2005:173). The leadership was never substituted by something else, and it never lost the ability to reclaim legitimacy or the monopoly of coercion, mostly because legitimacy was not (and still is not) necessarily associated with economic performance: "one consequence of the absence of a modern state bureaucracy was that blame for the crisis could not be shifted in its direction." (174). What happened instead, Smith argues, is that the North Korean state took very early on the shape of a "permanent campaigning movement" based on "mass mobilization, based on guerrilla-type military organization, underpinned by institutions that had no existence except through their constitution as instruments of the party" (Ibid. 171).

B. Myers (2011) makes a very similar point: North Korea is not a failed state, nor is it particularly communist in its ideology, by its own admission. North Korea has long deleted any reference to communism from its constitution, and purged every single piece of literature or media of any reference to the Soviet Union decades ago. North Korea's official discourse has a distinct focus on ethno-nationalism. The government stresses the cultural and ethnic homogeneity of its people on every occasion, be it through propaganda or in its dialogue with international institutions (Myers 2010, 2011). The actions of the DPRK government (with, until very recently, priority given to military strength over economic improvement) are in contrast to the basic tenets of Marxism-Leninism; and yet the label lingers on. Myers argues that, in fact, North Korea

should be regarded as a very successful state from an ideological and political standpoint, though a state positioned on the far right end of the political spectrum.

Perhaps one of the most important lessons one can learn from economic studies on North Korea is that the regime North Korea appears to have modified the tools, and - to a lesser extent - the *modus operandi* of its governance; however the underlying principles, drivers, and the aims of the state are virtually unchanged since the times of Kim Il Sung. Ahrens (2027) is a useful starting point for those wishing to deepen the idea that a model of “strong state-weak economy” can (as it has, thus far) work well for the DPRK.

One may say that - looking at daily realities of the marketization and the socioeconomic changes – Pyongyang did somehow *renegotiate the scope* of its governance: street markets have been largely tolerated for three decades and are now partially regulated by the state, while vendors strive to evade state control (taxes on food stalls). In major cities, women of the elite class are allowed to display privately purchased luxury items, and so do the men in the upper echelons of the military and the party. North Korea has proven as resilient to external shocks as to possible internal turmoil; it has avoided compromise with international norms and rules where these do not coincide (or are in open conflict) with the safeguard of what the government considers to be the national interest. The question lingers on: can (or should we) call it a *failed* state or a *fragile* one, or use another framework entirely?

Technically, the DPRK has been in and out of the major failed state indexes for years. In 2009, reporting for UNESCO, Brannelly et Al. argued that definitions of fragility vary according to the donor and organization, and this affects the countries they therefore classify as fragile.<sup>9</sup> In their report, out of four major classification indexes used by donors - conflict affected fragile states (CAFS) the OECD-DAC fragile states index, the World Bank index of fragile states (formerly LICUS) and the Failed States Index by the Fund for Peace - the DPRK only figured in the latter, and did so only from the mid-2000s, that is, *after* it showcased nuclear tests, rather than when the state was at its weakest and could not avoid a catastrophic famine in the 1990s. Similarly, for the year 2011, when it took the country into consideration for its yearly report on Multilateral Aid, the OECD considered North Korea as a ‘fragile’ state (yet not ‘failed’, nor one torn by conflict) and it did so using a combination of four databases: the Harmonized List of Fragile Situations from the World Bank, the African Development Bank and the Asian Development Bank, and the 2011 Failed States Index by the Fund for Peace.<sup>10</sup>

The variety of these indices can be puzzling. A 2010 review of the 10 major indices of fragile states found “considerable differences in how all the major indices classify certain countries”, with disagreement being consistent on cases such as Cuba and North Korea, both recognized as authoritarian on the political spectrum, but reasonably capable states, at least in the provision of welfare and basic social services, for a considerable portion of their history and in spite of stringent international sanctions. The authors of the study emphasize how these global indices, being calibrated on the Western model of liberal democracy and market economy, disagree especially with regard to two groups of countries: ‘autocratic and socialist regimes’ (North Korea, Cuba, and China) and ‘Islamic states with an autocratic or authoritarian governance’ (Saudi Arabia, Syria and Libya).<sup>11</sup> These findings cast a few doubts on whether the “failed” or “fragile” labels can be used at all - constantly, periodically, or just *una tantum* - for the DPRK. The standard OECD definition of ‘fragile state’ refers to a polity that is “unable to meet its population’s expectations or manage changes in expectations and capacity through the political process”.<sup>12</sup> The World Bank instead relies on quantitative paradigms based on economic

performance by state institutions, structural policies, social inclusion and equity, and public sector management.<sup>13</sup> Both definitions - the OECD's one more so - imply some degree of political responsibility; under the standards used by the World Bank or the OECD, North Korea may be considered both 'fragile' and 'failed'.

The view of North Korea expressed by United Nations agencies however, is different. To begin with, during the Cold War, North Korea enjoyed much better consideration from international institutions and media than it does today. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) opened its office in Pyongyang in 1980. UNESCO reported positively for years on many aspects of socioeconomic life in North Korea – particularly education – while UNICEF compared DPRK social indicators favorably to those of South Korea as late as 1987.<sup>14</sup> Within the UN as well as in the European parliament, North Korea was not seen as the “last bastion of dictatorship” it later became known as. Until the late 1980s, troubles on the peninsula were largely regarded as an affair between two authoritarian regimes. The presence of a military dictatorship in Seoul, with its negative record on human rights, somehow balanced things out with the DPRK, as this was conventionally understood as a state akin to those within the Eastern Bloc.<sup>15</sup>

In the pre-1995 documentation on North Korea, the UN foresaw grounds for capacity-building and development cooperation with the DPRK government. A UNICEF (1994: 4) program review for East Asia-Pacific stated that the DPRK was expected with other countries to “lead the East Asia region in achieving most of the mid-decade goals”, with water supply and sanitation estimated at more than 90 percent of the target goals, and with near-universal rates of vaccinations. The same document suggests that polio, measles and neonatal tetanus - at that time - were either absent or virtually disappearing countrywide. The review made no specific mention of the DPRK in reporting on either child or adult malnutrition, as of the summer of 1993 – that is, 24 months before North Korea openly admitted to a widespread humanitarian crisis that had likely begun long before the 1995 announcement.

This judgment stemmed as much from limited direct knowledge on part of UN agencies as it did from what the DPRK government reported to UN bodies during the 1980s on its own progress in the realms of development, nutrition and education. Nevertheless, even on the offset of the humanitarian crisis, the UN would not consider the DPRK a fragile state. When the UN began its North Korean operations in 1995, the DPRK was not involved in open conflicts; the North Korean government – firmly in control of every aspect of social, economic and political life since 1948 - maintained a *de jure* commitment to the core values of the UN development agenda from the mid-1980s and presented notable achievements in childcare, maternal health, and literacy.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, two decades after the outbreak of the crisis, according to a 2014 UN-CERF (Central Emergency Response Fund) review the situation in North Korea could - *still* - not be considered to be an emergency in the traditional sense of the word, as the country has not been either historically ‘poor’ for most of its existence, and the government remained firmly in control of each and every aspect of all aid operations, social life and economic choices.<sup>17</sup>

Not a failed state, not a fragile one; rather, a state that for all its problems seems able to wield some kind of power in the region. What type of state can do this? Korhonen and Mori (2019) may have the answer. The authors define the DPRK as a “small great power”: more powerful than its size or material resources would have anyone guess, and most importantly, one that behaves according to its self-perception as a powerful country. According to the authors,

“despite its small size, North Korea systematically behaves like a great power, and its actions can meaningfully be interpreted from that angle”. The authors list a number of reasons for their classification. The DPRK has a decades-long policy of resolutely maintaining independence and preparing for military conflict. It disregards international law whenever it deems it necessary. It is a unified state, at least in the sense that there are no known serious political conflicts or major ethnic or religious divisions. The only aspect of international politics where North Korea behaves as a small state, according to Korhonen and Mori is in its relations with major international organizations. North Korea does not hold significant positions in any major United Nations fund, agency or institution. Nevertheless, the DPRK managed to establish and maintain memberships in many organizations, with all the benefits that this may entail - first and foremost access to foreign aid, defying once more the stereotype of the “hermit kingdom”.

## 5. Conclusion

The “hermit kingdom” is no more. Stereotypes referring to a presumably inscrutable North Korea are increasingly disregarded today as researchers engage in interdisciplinary work, contributing to advance a proper research program on North Korea - not just as a part of area studies but in view of a better integration with the realm of economic studies, international relations and social sciences. This review sought to introduce the findings of important introductory works related to the economy, the laws and the governance of North Korea. At the same time this paper sought to expand on previous contributions to the construction of an interdisciplinary program of North Korean studies as a viable subject of inquiry in all social sciences.

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- 1 Lim examines the application of UN-SDGs goals and framework to the DPRK context, Johnson sheds light on the long history of cooperation with the UNDP, Rim explored the legal issues related to North Korea's compliance (or lack thereof) with the CEDAW, on women's rights; finally, Habib examines the patterns of North Korean compliance with international environmental legislation. Note: an earlier version of this paragraph appears in: Spezza, Gianluca. (2022), UNICEF and Epistemic Authority in North Korea, *Journal of Peace and Unification* 12(3): 87-122.
- 2 This review is inspired by Clemens, W. C. (2008) *North Korea and the World: A Bibliography of Books and URLs in English, 1997–2007*. *Journal of East Asian Studies*, 8(2): 293–325, on which my article seeks to build. In my opinion, Clemens' review article stands the test of time as a thorough introduction to the scholars and books regarded as “classic” in North Korean studies (i.e: the works of R. Scalapino and C. S. Lee, B.C. Koh, Young Whan Khil, B. Cumings, M. Bradley, among others) although most of them are now outdated; here, as to provide a continuum to the work of Clemens, I prioritize works published over the last 20 years.
- 3 To make the bibliography easier to read, I simplified the citation style: regardless of the source type (book, chapter, article, or else), the title goes in italics and everything else in regular font, with no geographic location attached to the publisher - because the combination of author, title, date and journal/publisher name is enough to deliver correct search results whenever looking for these entries. I use endnotes to expand on selected concepts and facts, or to cite materials that are not directly *about* the DPRK, but nonetheless contribute context to this bibliographical survey. Romanization follows South Korean convention for ROK names and terminology, and North Korean convention for the DPRK. The article also

- lists online sources, with links updated as of December 2022. Longer links are shortened using *Bitly.com*
- 4 More on this in the section of the paper dedicated to the North Korean governance and the degrees of its institutional failure, whether actual or perceived.
  - 5 See among others: Kornai, Janus. (1980) *Economics of Shortage*, Oxford University Press; Ibid. (1988), *The Socialist System*, Princeton University Press, and Ibid. (1995); *Highways and Byways*, MIT Press.
  - 6 See Green, Chris., Denney, Steven. (2016: 102): “In North Korea, the economic sectors chosen to receive the guiding hand of state protection are not selected according to principles of comparative advantage, nor do they power the wider national economy. Rather, they are selected according to an alternate hierarchy of need, predicated on maintenance of the elite coalition that keeps the Kim family in power.”
  - 7 A quick example: both editions of the *Historical Dictionary of the DPRK* (2003 and 2016 respectively) do not contain any voice related to: *Bureaucracy* or *Public Administration*.
  - 8 Researchers can consult the online resource *North Korea in the World* to grasp the ramification of the DPRK into various international treaties and covenants.
  - 9 Brannelly, Laura, Ndaruhutse, Susy, Rigaud, Carol. (2009) *Donors’ engagement in supporting education in fragile and conflict-affected states*. UNESCO.
  - 10 OECD, (2012) *DAC Multilateral Aid Report*: 117-118; Noteworthy, according to OECD, DAC previously used the Brookings Index of State Weakness in the Developing World and the Carleton University Country Indicators for Foreign Policy Index; however, those two sources no longer exist.
  - 11 Ziaja, Sebastian; Fabra, Javier, (2010) *State fragility indices. Potentials, messages and limitations*, Briefing Paper 10, Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE) Bonn: DIE. The authors argue that “the indices’ discrepancies bring forward a fundamental question regarding the nature of authoritarian states: “must repressive but stable regimes be considered fragile, just because it is assumed that, in the long run, they will not be able to accommodate social demands as democracies can? [...] such a classification obscures more than it clarifies and ‘fragile’ should refer only to countries with incapable governments that are likely to break down soon”; the authors also note how countries from both groups (at the time of writing) were not among the world’s top aid recipients. As for the OECD definition of fragile states: “States are fragile when state structures lack political will and/or capacity to provide the basic functions needed for poverty reduction, development and to safeguard the security and human rights of their populations.”, see: OECD, (2007) *Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States and Situations*; at: <https://www.oecd.org/dac/conflict-fragility-resilience/docs/38368714.pdf>
  - 12 Jones, Bruce. Chandran, Rahul. (2008) *Concepts and Dilemmas of State Building in Fragile Situations: From Fragility to Resilience*, OECD/DAC Discussion Paper, OECD:16.
  - 13 Piffaretti, Nadia, Ralston, Laura, Shaikh Khadija, (2014) *Information Note: The World Bank’s Harmonized List of Fragile Situations*. Online at: <https://bit.ly/3geWgb7>
  - 14 See: UNICEF (1987) *Draft Board Submission, UNICEF-ROK Programme of Cooperation (1988–1992)*, Seoul. While many UNESCO and UNDP publications had reported near-universal enrollment and literacy rates at all school levels for both genders in North Korea during the 1980s, this UNICEF report stated that only 1.7 percent of children in the ROK (South Korea) attended kindergarten until 1970; this figure rose to 57 percent in 1986, yet still lower than DPRK figures for the same period. Similarly, breastfeeding, infant and maternal mortality, and immunization rates for the ROK were worse than those of the DPRK, even though South Korea was projected to join the group of advanced countries in the 1990s, and no longer be a recipient of development aid.
  - 15 See: European Parliament. (1985) “Committee on External Economic Relations Draft Report on the Community’s Relations with North Korea. PE 99.748.” (Rapporteur: M. Hindley), July 17; Ibid (1986). “Debates of the European Parliament, 16-1-1986. Subject: Rapport by M. Hindley (Doc A.2.169-85).” Official Journal of the European Communities, No 2-334, pp. 250–252; Ibid (1997) “Debates of the European Parliament, 23.10.1997.” Official Journal of the European Communities, No 4-507, pp. 231–233. This page utilizes passages, edited for this publication. from: Spezza, Gianluca (2020), “The Unwillingness to Take North Korea Seriously”, in: Helgesen Geir, Harrison Rachel. (Eds), *East–West Reflections on Demonization. North Korea Now, China Next?*, Copenhagen: NIAS Press: 120-122.
  - 16 This view is mirrored in discussions about trade and engagement with North Korea that took place within the European commission and the European parliament in the 1980s. At the time, EU institutions and single state representatives considered the DPRK as a country capable of absolving its governance functions.
  - 17 Willitts-King, Bradley. (2014) *Independent Review of the Value Added of CERF in the DPRK. Final*

*Report*, UNICEF: 9. The same document clarified that although the work of various UN agencies was considered lifesaving, “the CERF criteria are generally intended to apply to situations where facilities have been damaged by natural disaster or conflict, and rehabilitation is required to return them to a usable state – not to situations caused by under-investment and neglect [referring to the DPRK government – author’s note]” (2014: 28)

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