NORTH KOREA: THE DEMISE OF A STALINIST TOTALITARIAN STATE

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A Thesis
Presented
to the Faculty of
California State University, Chico

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In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Political Science

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by
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Spring 2012
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Spring 2012

APPROVED BY THE DEAN OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
AND VICE PROVOST FOR RESEARCH:

_________________________________
Eun K. Park, Ph.D.

APPROVED BY THE GRADUATE ADVISORY COMMITTEE:

_________________________________
Matthew O. Thomas, Ph.D.
Graduate Coordinator

_________________________________
James Jacob, Ph.D., Chair

_________________________________
Paul Viotti, Ph.D.
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ABSTRACT

NORTH KOREA: THE DEMISE OF A STALINIST TOTALITARIAN STATE

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Bradley W. Bourdon

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In this thesis, an attempt will be made to anticipate the future of North Korea in the 21st century. North Korea faces staggering difficulties that may result in the continuing weakening of the country and even the collapse of the Kim regime. North Korea is a unique country like no other. Its government system is based on a cult of personality and a military-first mindset. It is an impoverished nation that relies on foreign aid, primarily from China and the United States, to sustain itself. It has a nuclear program and has one of the largest standing armies in the world. However, North Korea faces many problems and it has inherent weaknesses that will be ever more so pronounced in the 21st century. This thesis will start with a literature review aimed at surveying the contemporary issues facing North Korea. Next, the three most significant elements threatening North Korea’s viability will be examined. First, the leadership of North Korea is inherently defective and the cult of personality is unsustainable. The government
system is becoming more fragmented. Second, reunification of the Korean Peninsula is extremely unlikely. South Korea has too much at stake, the two political and cultural identities of the countries are divergent, and North Korea’s vision of reunification is vastly different from that of South Korea, China, and the United States vision. And last, North Korea relies on China for political and material support. However, China’s political and cultural ideology is changing and China is adopting elements of postmodernism. Throughout the 1990’s and 2000’s, China has shown an increasing reluctance to support North Korea, and this trend will continue in the 21st century. All of these factors will hobble North Korea’s development and hasten the demise of the Kim regime.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the heart of North Korea’s capital Pyongyang stands a commanding, enormous, and undeniably impressive pyramid. Standing at over 1,000 feet and with over 100 floors, the Ryugyong Hotel sternly dominates the city’s skyline. Bold and ambitious, Kim Il-sung imagined the Ryugyong Hotel to be a definitive statement on the resolve of North Korea, and an architectural marvel for the rest of the world. Its aggressive architectural design and unavoidable size visually imposes itself onto all the citizens of Pyongyang.

However, behind its glass façade lays a dormant shell of a building that is structurally unsound. Moreover, “even by Communist standards, the 3,000-room hotel is hideously ugly” and it “isn’t just the worst designed building in the world – it’s the worst built building, too” (Hagberg 2008). Built with inferior concrete and with major construction flaws such as crooked (and therefore unusable) elevator shafts, the Ryugyong hotel is fundamentally damaged. Although construction started in 1987, once the Soviet Union collapsed, North Korea was unable to continue construction and therefore for over two decades the hotel stood as an empty concrete shell. Recently, a foreign investor accepted the task to finish the hotel’s exterior so it could fully masquerade as a successful construction project and therefore hide the truth of its existence. The Ryugyong hotel stands as a metaphor for North Korea itself.
This thesis will examine all the difficulties North Korea faces and it will suggest that North Korea is indeed on a path towards its own assured demise, primarily because of the Kim regime’s inability to maintain power. Internal, rather than external, forces will most likely weaken the North Korean government to the point where the Kim regime will be rendered ineffective. Its current government system is arguably inherently flawed and unsustainable. Additionally, North Korea is becoming more and more isolated. By reviewing the intricacies of the Kim regime, the impossibilities of reunification, and China’s apparent abandonment of North Korea, this thesis will cover the main reasons why the Kim regime will face potentially insurmountable challenges in the 21st century, and how the future of North Korea’s success lies in the balance.

The North Korean government is one of the most oppressive in the world and it invades every facet of life for its citizens. Under the guise of a cult of personality, North Korea’s propaganda machine paints a very unrealistic picture of the Kim regime. Almost solely relying on false appearances and postures, North Korea is far weaker than it suggests to both its own citizens as well as to the rest of the world. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, North Korea has been unable to move forward and progress in any noteworthy capacity.

North Korea is on a trajectory that suggests it is headed towards failure. The cult of personality and political philosophy of juche, invented by North Korea’s first leader Kim Il-sung, are not sustainable practices that will ensure longevity. Juche philosophy asserts political independence, economic self-reliance, and isolationist defense and foreign policies. They instead ensure that the Kim regime will most likely
eventually fail. Aside from the obvious problems regarding dynastic succession, the Kim regime is extremely vulnerable to pressures from the country’s military.

Kim Il-sung’s cult of personality and juche philosophy cemented his status and allowed him to rule with little to no opposition, but his political vision was shortsighted. Kim Jong-un, thrust into power in the wake of his father’s death, does not apparently possess the wherewithal or political savvy his father and grandfather had. Furthermore, Kim Jong-il’s erratic ruling style and personal life have weakened the foundation on which Kim Jong-un stands.

The Kim regime will most likely collapse or at least rendered ineffective and instead government may be usurped by military officials. If anything, it will eventually become little more than a figurehead to keep the citizens of North Korea brainwashed, rather than actual leadership. At the same time, however, North Korea’s government will grow weak because it historically relies upon and needs strong central leadership to guide the policies of the country. As the Kim regime and its friends struggle for control over the government with the military elites, effective governance of the country will most likely decline and, at best, the government may end up with a tenuous hold on Pyongyang and military outposts only.

Aside from the impending leadership disaster, there are several other factors that can potentially lead North Korea to ruins. Since the end of the Korean War, both North and South Korea have publicly longed for reunification of the Korean Peninsula even though they are still technically at war. While both countries pay lip service to the idea of reunification, it is not a realistic solution. Although the two Korea’s are still
technically at war with one another, if a realistic and successful reunification could have occurred, that time has come and gone. Reunification is an optimistically favorable way of solving the North Korea problem, but it will not happen for various reasons.

The foreign policy of South Korea toward North Korea from 2000 to 2010, called the Sunshine Policy, was arguably the most generous proposition ever offered to North Korea by any state. Yet, North Korea subverted South Korea’s generous offer and instead pursued nuclear weapons. That is but one example that illustrates North Korea’s desire to antagonize and aggravate its neighbor in the South instead of conducting meaningful diplomacy that would reduce tension in the region.

The rift between South Korea is massive and growing wider as each day goes by. South Korea has culturally moved on from the Korean War and has accepted a divided Korean peninsula. New generations of South Koreans are more interested in the economic and political development of their country. Modern South Koreans tolerate, rather than placate, North Korea. As South Korea’s economy continues to burgeon and expand, its economic interests affect its culture as well into one that values education and consumerism.

On a practical and logistical level, South Korea would face economic ruin if it adopted North Korea. There plainly is no appetite for South Korea to adopt its Northern neighbor; the costs would be far too high. South Korea is too far advanced economically to realistically assume the burden of the impoverished economy of North Korea. Additionally, most of North Korea’s population lives in poverty and starvation, the costs
to subsidize the North Korean people would be enormous both in money and infrastructure.

Moreover, North Korea’s vision of reunification is vastly different from that of South Korea’s. Because of North Korea’s political and cultural identity, no option but its own is entertained when it comes to the discussion of reunification. North Korea would rather create a confederation and use it to exploit South Korea, or require that South Korea adopt juche philosophy and recognize the Kim regime as the only legitimate source of leadership. Both of these scenarios are far-fetched and unrealistic, and it is entirely plausible that North Korean leadership knows this and uses its fanciful approach to reunification as a permanent wedge to keep the two Koreas separate.

Finally, the last major problem that North Korea will face is China’s waning support for the isolated country. At the end of the Korean War, China wrongfully thought North Korea would have a similar government structure and be a useful and collaborating ally that would form an enduring bond that would offset the balance of power away from South Korea and the United States. Instead, China became the reluctant headmaster tasked with the sole responsibility of being the caretaker major ally for troublesome North Korea.

As if that unwanted avocation was not enough of a problem, the collapse of the Soviet Union pressed China into making various reforms that would damage the positive aspects of its relationship with North Korea. The demise of the Soviet Union pressed China onto a path that welcomes elements of postmodernism, and it has left behind many of its Cold War policies and grudges in exchange for economic growth and relaxed
oppression. This has obviously created a cultural, political, and philosophical rift between North Korea and China. China’s reforms and growths allow it to be a more legitimate player on the world stage; it no longer needs an alliance or strong relationship with North Korea.

North Korea is also poisoning the well with China by pursuing nuclear weapons. North Korea has proven itself to be belligerent when it comes to sacrificing long term stability for what are in reality short term self-serving goals such as nuclear weapons. North Korea’s erratic behavior, especially under the rule of Kim Jong-il increased tension between China and itself, to the point where Chinese officials under their breath have expressed pure exasperation and contempt for North Korea.

This thesis will cover and explore all of the aforementioned topics: the weakness of the Kim regime and its government system, the impossibility of reunification with South Korea, and China’s distancing itself from North Korea. Each topic exists as a major factor in North Korea’s potential demise. Alone, each element can be survived by North Korea. But collectively, North Korea does not appear to have the strength to resist buckling under the weight of difficulties it is burdening. Each chapter will hopefully explain why each element acts as a contributor to North Korea’s and the Kim dynasty’s inaccuracies to persist as they historically have.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The hermit nation of North Korea, simply by virtue of its isolation and aura of mystery, surely invokes much interest and speculation. Singular, unpredictable, and enigmatic, it compels people around the world, not just Northeast Asia, to ponder what type of end-game North Korea is playing. For over 20 years, many have predicted the country is on the perpetual edge of instant collapse, yet others have noted how the country manages to persist. Much has been written about North Korea and relevant literature insomuch as the topic of this thesis will be observed in this section.

Many notable authors and academics have contributed to a range of topics dealing with North Korea. Reunification is a constant issue always looming in the background, China's relationship with North Korea is another, and many find the cult of personality and the Kim regime and endless source of interest and areas in which a basis to speculate on what is happening behind North Korea's borders are important areas of literature in international relations. North Korea stands alone and behaves like no other state in the world; it is by default a country about which much has been written. And now, with the recent death of Kim Jong-il, the international media's love/hate affair with North Korea is again at full steam. Nonetheless, a literature on what has already been discussed is essential.
Although many articles seem to be outdated simply because Kim Jong-il is no longer the leader of North Korea, this is far from the truth. Rather, some authors who wrote in the early 1990's when Kim Jong-il assumed power over North Korea produce striking similarities and parallels with how scholars and people interested or involved with international relations are viewing the current transfer of power, now, to Kim Jong-il's son Kim Jong-un.

The history and contemporary politics of North Korea are inherently interesting to people interested in world politics. North Korea, so strange and so bewildering, has prompted a mountain of literature. Because North Korea is such an enigmatic place with an esoteric history, almost any literature written about it contains some value or worth. This literature review will focus on a select number of specific works that attempt to paint the clearest picture on where North Korea is headed, and the possibilities and difficulties that could contribute to a possible regime change or collapse.

In the 21st century, North Korea's trajectory can go in any number of directions. However, as the world, China most notably in the case of North Korean politics, lurches more and more towards embracement of postmodern values such as democracy, economic equality and growth, and political efficacy among citizens, North Korea is by far a nation very much rooted in its own inadequate status quo and instead appears to be slowly disintegrating from the inside out. The best place to start, when attempting to gain a comprehensive view on the issues that will influence North Korea's eventual and certain demise is Robert Kaplan and Abraham Denmark's recent work such as 2011’s: “The Long Goodbye: The Future North Korea”.
The article touches upon many different aspects of a North Korean collapse and the authors speculate how the international community would react to a collapse. However, the real strength in the article lies in the author's discussion of the figure of Kim Jong-un. The article was written only months before Kim Jong-il's sudden death, yet it discusses the conditions, ramifications, and possibilities of the country being run by Kim Jong-un. This is very useful information, especially now, since Kim Jong-un is the incumbent supreme leader of a country that is surely going to be challenging to govern, not just with internal politics, but with North Korea's place in world affairs.

Seemingly everything about Kim Jong-un is strange and the authors make note of this at the beginning of their article: “Kim Jong-un, in his mid- or late twenties, was made a four star general, though he has no military experience...he is rumored to have undergone plastic surgery, in order to more closely resemble his grandfather, Kim Il-sung” (Kaplan and Denmark 2011, 8). It is worth noting here, as will be expanded upon in a later chapter, that Kim Il-sung is still, in death, the president of the country.

One of the most important statements the authors argue in the article has to do with Kim Jong-un. Whereas Kim Jong-il appeared to have some degree of consolidation of power, Kim Jong-un's ascent to supreme leader appears to be less persuasive than his father's, and the power he has inherited is apparently not as comprehensive. This is a very important aspect when speculating on the future of North Korea and the authors explain it clearly: “Kim Jong-un is obviously inexperienced and lacks a military and party network to support his claims of power...generational cohorts in the military have been promoted, in order to keep the armed forces content with the regime” (Kaplan and Denmark 2011,
When this paper discusses Kim Jong-un in a later chapter, the role of the military in governing the country and the assured balance of power with the regime will be essential.

In the context of new leadership in the country, the authors explore and contemplate different scenarios that may unfold for North Korea. The article, as a whole, creates points for future debate. If North Korea collapsed, what roles would China, Japan, South Korea, and the United States make? The only shortcoming in the article is that although it is a great starting point for engaging in dialog about what might happen in North Korea, it is entirely speculative and even the authors concede this point: “we emphasize that all of this is speculative. But as we interviewed one expert after another in the course of our research, it became apparent that each had little more than speculations about a future crisis” (Kaplan and Denmark 2011, 16). While this may be true, and speculation is inherently part of studying North Korea, some bold predictions have been made, as this literature review will show.

Without exploring specific scenarios or venturing beyond the distant bounds of speculation and consideration, the world will surely be unprepared if North Korea indeed collapsed. It would have been welcome if the authors would have taken a more specific stance; they obviously feel that North Korea is on a path towards doom, but do not take any specific stance. With all that being said, the article is foundational for one trying to see the broad picture of how North Korea might collapse, and is an especially important resource because the authors satisfyingly include analysis of Kim Jong-un in their arguments. They contemplate the future of the country within the context of Kim Jong-
un, the youngest head of state in the world, jockeying for power with established military elites.

Additionally, with a dearth of journal articles that discuss Kim Jong-un, this article is valuable in that it provides information on the young leader. Finding even generalized information on Kim Jong-un is difficult but, this article does an effective job of explaining the big picture regarding Kim Jong-un's current and unique position.

In regards to the difficulties the next leader of North Korea will face is Scott Snyder in his article “Kim Jong-il's Successor Dilemma”. Snyder’s work serves as a suitable companion to the work of Kaplan and Denmark. Although Snyder wrote the article before the world knew that Kim Jong-un was going to be Kim Jong-il's successor, it offers brilliant insight into what Kim Jong-un is most likely facing now. As previously mentioned, information on Kim Jong-un is not so easy to obtain, and although this article was written over a year before Kim Jong-un succeeded his father, Snyder adequately describes the nature and troubles with ruling North Korea at this juncture in the country's history.

Snyder highlights the fact that Kim Jong-un will indeed have not only less political influence, but will rely more on others to secure power than Kim Jong-il or Kim Il-sung ever did. This will have wide effects on the political system in North Korea, to be sure. How a struggle for power may end up is unknown, but the fact there will be a struggle is telling enough, as Snyder observes “the next North Korean leader will have to manage weakening internal cohesion and influence among North Korean institutions, the relatively rapid penetration of external information into North Korea, and a greater
reliance on external parties for economic support,” (Snyder 2010, 36). Snyder's claims appear to be true, now that Kim Jong-un is the supreme leader of North Korea.

One of the main conclusions one can deduce from Snyder's arguments (as well as Kaplan and Denmark's) is that it appears that the Kim regime's grasp on power has weakened from generation to generation, and Kim Jong-un has the most watered down version of control. According to Snyder, this is partly due to the fact that Kim Jong-il's “sungun (military first) policies prioritized military institutions over those of the party and the government” (Snyder 2010, 37). The military’s increased power and influence was established after a severe famine devastated the country in the mid 1990's. Kim Jong-il had no choice but to prop up the military not only to support famine relief, but to absolve himself from personal responsibility. Because of this, Kim Jong-un will probably endure the ramifications of strong military politicization.

The strength of Snyder's argument is that it is entirely reasonable, but also it was nearly prophetic, in a way. Elsewhere in the article, Snyder outlines three different ways a transfer of power could occur: a managed succession, a contested succession, and a failed succession. At this time, a managed succession with no clear or obvious political turbulence has occurred in the same fashion that Snyder imagined: “if North Korea successfully manages a succession to either one of Kim Jong-il’s sons or a collective leadership bound by fear, there is a greater likelihood of continuity” and “such a leadership would continue to focus on consolidating internal political control and on utilizing nuclear weapons pursuits to extract economic benefits from the international community” (Snyder 2010, 42). As of the time of writing this thesis, there have been no
significant changes to North Korea's policies regarding nuclear weapons, and the internal battle for consolidation of political control continues.

However, this is the one weakness of Snyder's article. He briefly references then discusses an article that attempts to diagnose the behavior of leaders of countries that possess nuclear weapons. Snyder then concludes that the next leader of North Korea, now Kim Jong-un, would inevitably keep pursuing nuclear weapons and will have no wish to disarm the country. While this may be true, Snyder is suggesting that the supreme leader of North Korea possesses that kind of power, where Kim Jong-un could simply turn off their nuclear program like turning off a switch. The situation is surely more complicated seeing that the military has a large stake in the decision-making process -- more than ever before.

Nonetheless, Snyder provides terrific insight into the political struggles that Kim Jong-un will face. The point for further debate in regards to Snyder’s argument is how the United States and South Korea react to a change in leadership. Since North Korea has attained, it seems, a managed succession, will the United States continue international policy against North Korea as is, or is the succession a new opportunity for the United States to alter its strategies in containment of North Korea? Snyder boldly concludes that “the most likely current path will not change U.S.-- DPRK relations” (Snyder 2010, 45). At the time of this thesis, that appears precisely the case.

One of the most important elements regarding the future of North Korea as well as the Korean peninsula itself is the topic of possible reunification between the two Koreas. Much has been written about this topic and theories vary greatly. Some see
reunification as not only possible, but inevitable. Others view reunification as unworkable as it is unlikely. The spectrum of published studies and articles on this subject is broad, but there are several academics and writers that stand out as reliable and provide the best possible insights and information into the topic of reunification.

Standing at the forefront of reunification analysis is Mario Arturo Ruiz Estrada and Donghyn Park. Their 2007 journal article “Korean Unification: How Painful and How Costly?” is an essential piece. The authors of this article did an in-depth quantitative analysis on the ramifications of a possible reunification, as well as the plausibility of one. The authors employ the global dimension of regional integration model (GDRI Model) and apply it as a comparative analysis of the two Koreas. The results of these analyses is “to provide policymakers and researchers a new analytical tool” (Estrada and Park 2007, 89) and provide a comprehensive examination of all the important factors that contribute to the viability of an undoubtedly complex process of reunification.

Although North Korea is a relatively shadowy nation that resists providing the rest of the world much insight into how the country operates both politically and culturally, the authors of this article use the best appropriate datasets that provide the most principled insight. The four indexes the authors use are the Global Political Index, Global Social Development Index, Global Economic Development Index, and the Global Technological Index. Using these indexes, the authors provide a comparative observation between the development of South Korea, and North Korea. The scope of their study spans the course of three decades, from the 1970’s through the 1990’s.
The result of their quantitative work provides very clear data on the nature of these two very different countries insomuch as development. Their conclusions are very reasonable and persuasive and are definitely the strongest element of the article. As this thesis will later argue, reunification is unlikely. Nor is reunification within any realm of reasonable plausibility; the authors of the article in question provide strong conclusions that support this notion. To list all the individual results of their study here would be exhaustive, instead a generalized explanation of their findings will be observed.

As speculated, the two Koreas have greatly diverged in all aspects of development, according to the article. Almost anyone can see that South Korea presently has a robust economy whereas the North Korean economy is anemic if not clinging onto life-support, and the authors observed that “the South Korean economy has achieved rapid development, in sharp contrast to the North Korean economy which has deteriorated sharply over time” (Estrada and Park 2007, 93). This has an important effect on reunification, as South Korea alone would have to shoulder nearly the entire economic burden of incorporating the poor North Korea.

The wildly different economies of the two countries is but one hindrance and the authors also discuss other elements that dampen the hopes of those who wish for reunification and state that “the fact that the Koreas are becoming less similar in all aspects rather than more similar does not bode well for their unification” (Estrada and Park 2007, 95). Furthermore, the most compelling result of the article is that the numbers simply do not allow for a reunification if current trends continue or stay the same, and “according to results...a viable and sustainable union between South Korea and North
Korea became impossible” (Estrada and Park 2007, 95). The article definitely paints a dire picture and succinctly articulates the difficulties that reunification faces.

There are, however, a few methodological weaknesses to this article. As previously mentioned, the data may not be blindly followed as the development indexes must be relatively speculative at times because North Korea is so isolated from the rest of the world. Nonetheless, they provide the best possible speculative data and one can only hope that as times goes on more concrete data will be available to political scientists and those who study international relations. Additionally, the article offers little qualitative information and the bulk of the article wallows in the authors describing the quantitative methods in which they reached their conclusions. Some explanation is welcome, to be sure, and perhaps to embolden their argument against future scrutiny the authors comprehensively explained their methodology. However it definitely bogs their overall argument down, as the point of their article lies in the results of their methodology, not the methodology itself.

Much remains to be discovered about this topic, however, and Estrada and Park do speculate what the future may hold in regards to reunification. Although they do not spend much space discussing the ramifications of their study as well as what must occur for a reunification to be plausible, they end their article by stating that South Korea's former political stance with North Korea, that of a Sunshine Policy, is not sufficient for the Koreas to even entertain the notion of reunification. And ultimately, if a reunification is indeed something that may occur at some point in the future, South Korea will need to “sacrifice a lot of its political, social, economic, and technological
development” (Estrada and Park 2007, 99) and North Korea will need to catch the balance point in the same categories. Both these events, currently, seem entirely unlikely if not politically impossible, according to Estrada and Park’s conclusion.

Whereas Estrada and Park made predictions that reunification is not likely, based on results of their qualitative study, it is also important to observe the topic of reunification in a historical context as well. Presently, many around the world pensively wait, watch, and speculate on what North Korea will do in the wake of Kim Jong-il's recent death and the subsequent announcement that his son Kim Jong-un has assumed the title of supreme leader and becomes, possibly, the reigning autocrat of North Korea. Can this changing of the guard result in renewed hope for stability in the region and perhaps even a renewed look at reunification? History has shown otherwise, and in his article “Can the Two Koreas Be One”, scholar and expert on North Korea Nicholas Eberstadt entertained these notions the last time North Korea had a change in leadership.

The main strength of Eberstadt's article, in regard to reunification, is that Eberstadt provides an exquisite insight into reunification from a much different perspective compared to Estrada and Park. When researching reunification, one may find it agreeable to compare a possible Korean reunification with the German reunification in 1990. Eberstadt successfully summarized and persuasively articulates how vastly different the conditions are when comparing formerly divided Germany with the divided Korean peninsula.

Germany's reunification has been a long and sometimes spasmodic process. Nonetheless, it has been relatively successful. However, Eberstadt argued that by no
means should anyone suggest that a Korean reunification will be anything like Germany's, and it is foolhardy to use Germany's reunification as a sufficient example of what a Korean reunification would look like. Rather, “even under the best of circumstances the challenges to a successful Korean unification will be great, and will run deep—far deeper and greater than those Germany faced” (Eberstadt 1992, 161). This notion, combined with the qualitative work done by Estrada and Park, offers a stark view.

The problems that face the Koreas in comparison to divided Germany are different and much more severe; Korean reunification seems improbable. For example, Eberstadt points out several aspects that support that claim, such as the fact that the two Koreas have had “virtually no contact with one another” (Eberstadt 1992, 162), North Korea is simply geographically larger than East Germany, North Korea's degree of military mobilization, and the fact that North Korea's economy is in much worse condition than East Germany's ever was (Eberstadt 1992, 162). Additionally, there is a larger sense of the unknown -- East Germany was a relatively known quantity and both sides of Germany were eager to reunify; the same cannot be said for Korea.

While Eberstadt's argument against comparing Germany's reunification with a Korean unification is excellent and still relevant and accurate 20 years after it was written, Eberstadt's article does have several weaknesses, regardless of its age. Eberstadt's article is strictly qualitative and seems to be mostly his own (although sensible and seemingly well-informed) speculation. No data is presented and the statistics that Eberstadt *does* offer are not cited; facts and statistics are only worth their face value in the article. To take any author or scholar on his or her word alone is a tall order, to be
sure. Nonetheless, there is some solace in the fact that Eberstadt bears the qualifications and professional pedigree that lend to his trustworthiness.

With Kim Jong-il gone and his son now presumed to be the head of the country's political and military establishment, there is great value in revisiting Eberstadt's article. Eberstadt speculated that “no matter how carefully or forcefully a hereditary transition is orchestrated, there is little reason at present to expect a reign by Kim [Jong-il] to be either stable or long” (Eberstadt 1992, 155). North Korea and Kim Jong-il proved otherwise. However, although history does offer some insight, it is by no means a guarantee on North Korea's new leader Kim Jong-un being a success like his father. Although little is known about Kim Jong-un and much of the writing on him and his succession are from news media sources, there are authors that discuss the possibilities and ramifications of Kim Jong-un being the new leader of North Korea.

In regards to reunification, one would be remiss without discussing South Korea's foreign policy with North Korea that ran from 2000 to 2010. The primary goal of the Sunshine Policy was to get North Korea to assuage its diplomacy with South Korea in exchange for enhanced communication between the two countries, and economic incentives. The policy has been deemed a failure and serves as not only a cautionary tale about how to not work with North Korea, but it acts as a general commentary on North Korea's simple lack of cooperation.

One of the best articles that chronicle the history and highlights many of the difficulties of the Sunshine Policy is Jim Hoare's article “Does the Sun Still Shine? The Republic of Korea's Policy of Engagement with the Democratic People's Republic of
Korea”. Hoare wrote the article in 2008, two years before the Sunshine Policy was officially declared a policy misadventure and right before Lee Myung-bak became the president of South Korea. This was a pivotal time in South Korean politics as there was general malaise about the Sunshine Policy and many questioned its continuation with a new president; especially in the wake of North Korea's declaration it had nuclear weapons.

Hoare's article is substantive and he accurately describes the political history of the two countries since the end of the Korean War. His summary of South Korean policies towards the North since the 1950's is succinct and appropriate. Furthermore, the political history of these two countries allows the reader to better understand why South Korea decided to adopt the Sunshine Policy. For anyone interested in learning about the Sunshine Policy, Hoare's article is arguably the best place to start.

It is relatively easy for one to criticize the Sunshine Policy, but Hoare's methodology and style appears unbiased and more clinical rather than theoretical. Hoare attempts to highlight some of the possible benefits the Sunshine Policy provided; even though there admittedly are relatively few examples. Hoare is careful not to get mired in criticism, and instead aims to provide an impartial analysis of the political maneuvering of the two countries.

However, there are some elements of his article that could be expanded upon. Hoare seems very careful not to take a hard stance on either side of the Sunshine Policy. Although it is helpful that he provides a mostly unbiased report, the article at times reads more like a news article or periodical that tries too hard to hold the middle ground. The
Sunshine Policy was a colossal diplomacy bungle and by 2008 most people in South Korea knew it. Although it is not suggested that Hoare take a hard posture on the topic, the ineffectiveness of the Sunshine Policy cannot be ignored or understated. Hoare, at times, shows unrealistic optimism for the Sunshine Policy and cherry picks elements of the Sunshine Policy that were arguably effective – no easy task.

Hoare hints at having an opinion or a critical view of the topic towards the end of the article, but stops just short of articulating it. The article is superb in the way Hoare outlines the entire political history of the two Koreas; he undoubtedly has a wealth of knowledge on the subject, to be sure. With such a firm grasp on the topic of the Sunshine Policy, it would behoove Hoare to perhaps inject his own insights about the policy. Although he subtly champions some of the positive aspects of the Sunshine Policy, one ponders why Hoare did not take a more firm stance on the topic.

At face value, Hoare's article provides the best comprehensive examination of how South Korea and North Korea have interacted with each other over the years and why. North and South Korea have been jockeying for the upper hand for decades with North Korea always being relatively uncooperative and at times exploitive of policies that are intended to improve relationships. Hoare's article serves as a background guide for the Sunshine Policy. The one caveat is Hoare's reluctance to discuss the major problems with the Sunshine Policy. By glossing over its deficiencies, Hoare's optimism seeps through and the reader need approach these elements of the article with concern and suspicion.
Overall, Hoare's article is an essential piece. The article concretely achieves its goal, and also includes the actions and relationships of third parties such as China and the United States. Well-written, expansive, and well researched, it is a trustworthy source for an interested person to understand the complex historical relationship between North and South Korea.

Additionally, when one considers reunification, it is usually within the context of how it would affect South Korea and how it would probably be in the immediate wake of North Korea's collapse. While this view makes the most pragmatic sense and is the preferred way of observing reunification, other views exist as well; those that are not so viewed through the lens of the West or South Korea. North Korea, or its military and political body at least, are very proud and often times overstate their own abilities and powers.

When looking at reunification from a different angle, Chan Yul Yoo's article “North Korea's Resurgence and China's Rise: Implication for the Future of Northeast Asian Security” is as essential as it is theoretically interesting. Despite the article's glaring weaknesses that will be discussed, Chan's article provides a thought provoking idea: what if reunification, or any degree of heavily increased cooperation between the two Koreas, was done on North Korea's terms?

The article hinges on Chan’s belief that North Korea is a burgeoning empire that has recovered from the maladies it experienced in the 1990's and is not likely to collapse anytime soon. Rather, with the suggested ever present help of China, North Korea is growing and becoming more successful. Under this guise, Chan suggests that
North Korea will engage in diplomacy with South Korea that will bind the two countries together and bring them closer to unification, but that North Korea will ultimately prosper from its feints on the arrangements.

The ideas posed by Chan are fascinating, but controversial. According to Chan, instead of a complete reunification, “Pyongyang would also argue that the only way to unify Korea without war is to establish a N-S Confederation as it had previously introduced...this would be a ploy” (Chan 2008, 303). Chan continues: “Pyongyang could also insist that the DMZ be opened up and the two Koreas be engaged in arms reduction to ease tensions...this is an old North Korean ploy: the North has twice the weaponry of the South, and can mobilize troops much more easily than the South (Chan 2008, 303). And in regards to the starkly different economic abilities of the two countries and North Korea's assured inability to reach the economic balance point with the South, Chan again predicts North Korea will continue with its nefarious brand of diplomacy: “the North would vie to win over the South through political and military means as it has always done, barring economic complications where it is inferior” (Chan 2008, 304). These are all interesting propositions that aid the discussion on the viability of reunification.

However, this article's foundation is on an assumption that North Korea is stable enough and strong enough politically in the region to assert power over its neighbors. This is the primary weakness of the article, and Chan at times seems to revel in his enthusiasm for China and North Korea, while also never skipping an opportunity to criticize some of the United States foreign policy mistakes. With assertions that the United States “can no longer wield power to control the state of affairs in Northeast Asia,
and it is difficult to forecast when the U.S. can bail out of the [Middle East] dilemma” (Chan 2008, 294), it is clear that Chan has definite opinions of American foreign policy. They surface again and again throughout his article. Additionally, many of the things that Chan mentions in regards to failures of American foreign policy are no longer issues in international relations. Even though he wrote his article fairly recently in 2008, he has simply been proven wrong by recent history.

Yet, despite Chan's favoritism of China and North Korea at the expense of the United States, he manages to appear relatively unbiased at times; just enough for his arguments to be considered worthwhile. And while his main argument of a strong and resurgent North Korea teaming up with China to become a large regional power hinges upon an assumption that North Korea is on solid footing and in fact becoming more organized and powerful, the ideas he poses are at least worth consideration, and provide a strong reminder that there are many views of reunification and different degrees of the two Koreas unifying. Therefore, despite its blemishes, Chan provides unique ideas that promote further debate.

When observing the literature in regards to North Korea's subsistence and persistence, it is important to include a discussion on China's unique relationship with North Korea. In the affairs of world politics, China remains North Korea's closest ally and historically has supported the Kim regime in maintaining power over its people. However, China's relationship with North Korea is changing as China itself changes. As China becomes more cooperative with other countries and more assertive in forging its own path in the 21st century, its policies on North Korea have changed.
According to Anne Wu in her article “What China Whispers to North Korea”, China and North Korea indeed have a strong bond rooted in the bloodshed of the Korean War, but China's dedication to its smaller neighbor is slowly changing and unraveling. In short, Wu observes that “especially in comparison to relations 50 years ago, China no longer feels obligated to be Pyongyang’s patron and no longer provides unqualified support to North Korea” (Wu 2005, 41). This is an exceptionally important aspect to the future of the Korean peninsula and the fate of North Korea.

Wu states the various factors that explain China's change in policy and support for North Korea and her article is exceptional in its clear and sufficient canvassing of the topic. Her arguments are persuasive and realistic. Essentially, Wu argues that China has many reasons to limit and restrict its future support for North Korea. Among these: a nuclear North Korea would be undesirable for China; a country surrounded by other nuclear states. Additionally, China aims to improve its relationship not only with the United States, but with the United Nations and other more democratic governments in Asia. Coupled with China's strong economic growth, it behooves China to take a more stern approach in its diplomatic dealings with North Korea.

Wu's arguments are articulate and sensible. Of chief concern for the Chinese is the issue of nuclear weapons. China is resolutely against a nuclear North Korea because “a North Korean bomb could jeopardize long-term stability in the region by triggering the nuclear ambitions of Japan, South Korea, or even Taiwan” (Wu 2005, 38). Wu's description of China's uneasiness about a nuclear North Korea is the strongest argument she makes in her article and the focus on which she places most of her emphasis and
reasoning. Her observations are well grounded and backed up by a relevant and appropriate bibliography, but other areas regarding China's diplomacy with North Korea are seemingly excluded from her argument.

The only weakness in Wu's article is that she focuses almost exclusively on the diplomatic posturing of China, North Korea, and the United States in regards to North Korea acquiring nuclear weapons. While this is important discourse, to be sure, more emphasis on China's economy would have been welcomed. The only time China's economic incentives for distancing itself from North Korea is mentioned is when Wu puts it within the philosophical framework of an extremely unlikely war between the United States and North Korea: “a U.S.-DPRK war threatens China's well-maintained economic growth, with one estimate predicting a reduction in growth of 10-20 percent” (Wu 2005, 37). Although the presence of nuclear weapons is surely an essential aspect to how China cooperates with North Korea, there are definitely economic variables as well that are not mentioned in the article.

Nonetheless, the article is an excellent study into how North Korea's nuclear ambitions are straining its relationship with China and conversely why China is slowly distancing itself from North Korea and replacing soft and paternal diplomacy with more stern and direct diplomacy that reflects China's realization that it is indeed a strong player in the arena of regional and world politics. The article was written in 2005, and since then it is generally believed that North Korea has nuclear weapons of some degree. Since 2005 and moving forward into the future of this decade, it is wholly appropriate to deduce from Wu's article that China will take an even more robust stance on the issue, which it has.
The main point for future debate on the topic of China's reluctance to continuously support North Korea, Wu concludes by observing China's unique role and growing diplomatic clout: “China can triangulate its desire for a nuclear-free Korean peninsula, a peaceful solution, and a reciprocal agreement encompassing the international community's desire for nonproliferation” (Wu 2005, 47) and an enhanced diplomatic roll for China in the region.

As previously stated, China's relationship is an integral part of studying North Korea and making speculations on its uncertain future. If China is indeed slowly repositioning itself to be a better friend to the West and less of a friend to North Korea, one may offer several possible reasons. One prism to use when observing China's relationship with North Korea is one of theory. Ronald Inglehart's landmark exploration of cultural change *Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic, and Political Change in 43 Societies* provides some theoretical answers regarding China's behavior.

According to Inglehart, as countries become more industrialized, they transition into modernism, and then postmodernism. But what is postmodernism? Inglehart states that “in postmodern society, emphasis on economic security and economic growth is giving way to an increasing emphasis on quality of life” (Inglehart 1997, 325). Inglehart asserts that as countries become more open to capitalism and enjoy more success economically, the citizens of these countries enjoy more freedoms and luxuries and there is a larger emphasis on general happiness.
That is not an outlandish claim in the slightest and Inglehart defends his argument by interpreting data from the World Values survey and the Euro-Barometer survey. The amount of data that Inglehart sifted through is astounding, and the fruits of his labor are the many comparisons he makes between 43 different societies that represent 70 percent of the world's population. Inglehart observes how societies have changed over the century and offers a credible exhibition of intergenerational value change.

The main strength of Inglehart's work is simply the immense depth of analysis Inglehart provides. Inglehart observes the change in economies, political culture, and values (to name only a few) of societies around the world. And at the conclusion of his book, Inglehart offers reasonable and supposable arguments for the postmodern trajectories of these societies. Inglehart's book is an indispensable text for anyone wishing to gain insight on comparative international politics and the future of international relations as societies become more and more postmodern.

There are some weaknesses to the book, however. First, Inglehart's own politics are sometimes hard to ignore. Although he aims to maintain an unbiased voice, he often provides great favor to more leftist or socialist countries; most notably countries in the Nordic and Baltic regions. Another weakness, though not the fault of Inglehart, is that the data he uses is outdated; the most recent data he has only goes up to 1990. Much has changed around the world since then, to be sure, including but not limited to Kim Il-sung's and Kim Jong-il's deaths, in respect to the topic of this paper. And finally, one can
never truly trust the results of opinion polls for they offer a myriad of problems, chief among these: people may simply not tell the truth.

Nonetheless, even with its weaknesses, Inglehart interprets the data in such a way that provides clear and general conclusions and it would be incredibly interesting to see how data from today would look. One can surmise that Inglehart's predictions regarding postmodernism would be vindicated, especially as the world has embraced globalization and technology has increased the speed in which economic activity takes place.

In respect to the topic of this paper, Inglehart's book is a very worthwhile book to reference. North Korea is a country void of any postmodern values and has maintained almost entirely economically static. Meanwhile, China has not, and instead has increased its economic capacity greatly and the world has seen an explosion of Chinese consumerism and openness toward Western economic policies, as Inglehart has noted: “in recent decades, East Asia (including China, since the pragmatists took power in 1976) has shown the most rapid economic growth rates in the world” (Inglehart 1997, 144).

Inglehart will be invoked later in this thesis. Inglehart is able to articulate China's drift toward some postmodern values, especially that of economic growth. At the same time, China will drift away from North Korea, a country that lacks virtually any element of postmodernism whatsoever. Although China has a shared history with North Korea and has historically held a strong commitment to North Korea, postmodernism is greatly influencing the way in which China behaves and changes in the 21st century, not
just on the world stage, but directly in how it will grapple with a North Korean society that is choosing to be left behind.

In closing, North Korea, because of its unpredictable nature, inspires curiosity. There are many angles one can examine and study North Korea and there is an abundance of analysis and writing that has been done on North Korea. Its nuclear program, unusual cult of personality, oppressive government system, idiosyncratic foreign policies, and its need to peacock & posture to the rest of the world, all contribute to why North Korea is an inherently fascinating country to study. This thesis will hopefully build upon what has already been written and make suggestions on the trajectory North Korea is headed in the 21st century.
CHAPTER III

THE WEAKNESSES OF THE KIM REGIME

For any government to achieve long-term stability and success, it must prove to its people that it is valid and legitimate. The leaders of governments must employ strategies, both politically and culturally, to ensure its citizens will respect their authority. Many different methods have been attempted; some with more success than others. Despotism, monarchy, democracy, dictatorship, communism, totalitarianism -- the list goes on. Many have fallen out of favor or are just simply unworkable in the modern era. Totalitarian dynasties are one such example, and the requirements for a totalitarian government to effectively rule over its citizens are very different.

Much inspired by the divine right of kings, the Kim dynasty in North Korea is a singular and unique experiment in leadership succession in the 20th century. Although North Korea could be categorized as a totalitarian Stalinist dictatorship, the element of dynastic succession possibly makes North Korea sui generis in the post-communist world. In most communist states, the success of the government resided in the people's belief and devotion to a political and social cause and national loyalty. However, in North Korea, the stability of the government lies with the people's personal loyalty to the leader. This will be the demise of the Kim regime and will result in the power of North Korea's government to be increasingly divided and inefficient.
Kim Il-sung

North Korea's first Supreme Leader was Kim Il-sung. By implementing a unique twist on communism, Kim Il-sung invented a personality cult based entirely on propaganda. Seizing the moment, Kim Il-sung was able to successfully consolidate complete control of the country by emphasizing his revolutionary role and devotion to his country in the Korean War. Kim Il-sung elevated himself and his son Kim Jong-il into mythic status through the state media and propaganda indoctrination. No other government on earth depends so heavily on the cult of personality and propaganda to retain power than North Korea’s. The Kim regime has utilized every tool of propaganda and repression of free thought to present the people an altered version of cultural and political reality; or as George Orwell famously put it: “who controls the past...controls the future: who controls the present controls the past” (Orwell 1950, 35).

However, succession has many weaknesses and the Kim regime is experiencing difficulty in maintaining the type of blind allegiance that Kim Il-sung enjoyed during his reign. In short: succession is an exercise of diminishing returns. When Kim Jong-il replaced his father, his power was diluted and Kim Jong-il had to resort to pandering to military elites to maintain power. His son and current Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un has had to do the same, but on an even much wider scale. The outlook for the longevity of the Kim regime is grim, and its fragility signals a weakening government with a tenuous grasp on the totalitarian rule over the people.

With a history of such political domination over its people and the uncanny ability to completely oppress the people with no opposition, how did the Kim regime get
to the place it is now, where the source of power is no longer squarely in the hands of the Supreme Leader? The search for the answer to these questions begins in a look back at the origins of the Kim dynasty.

In 1951, the Eternal President of North Korea, Kim Il-sung, declared on a Chinese radio broadcast that the Korean War was headed in the direction of North Korean victory and that communism would drive capitalism from the Korean peninsula. While history would disprove this statement, Kim Il-sung's rule over North Korea at the time appeared to be rooted in undeniable self-sufficiency and resistance. His authority emerged during the bloody Korean War, after which Kim Il-sung as a gifted military leader was able to manipulate the people of North Korea into his invented cult of personality. To understand the power of the Kim regime and its importance to the ability of maintaining control over the population is to understand the power of its three leaders, starting with Kim Il-sung.

The genesis of the historical and modern political practice in North Korea is found in the practices established after the end of the Korean War. During his rule, Kim Il-sung developed a blueprint for a leader's behavior for his successors and set a precedent for the extreme degree to which the business of the state could be at the whim of the leader's wishes. His dynasty built, in his own image (figuratively and literally, at times), would unflinchingly rule the country. To put it in more official words, a report produced by Congress illustrated Kim Il-sung's importance by stating that “more than can be said of any other country, North Korea is a creation of one man – Kim Il sung – one of
the most intriguing figures of the twentieth century, dominating his country during his lifetime and afterwards as few individuals in history have done” (Worden 2008, 70).

**Juche Philosophy**

North Korea emerged as an independent state in the wake of the Korean War and during the spring of communism. In the 1950’s, Russia was developing more power and influence around the world and communism found its fruition in places like Cuba. Additionally, North Korea's neighbor China had also undergone its own revolution to become a communist state. It was Kim Il-sung's perfect moment to establish his country's new identity allowing his persona to permeate nearly every aspect of the country's political and cultural character. Kim Il-sung accomplished the transformation by developing *juche* philosophy, a term that roughly translates to “self-reliance”. This political invention of Kim Il-sung would be the cornerstone on which the Kim regime would rest.

Kim Il-sung's life prior to his rule of North Korea was punctuated by war, imprisonment, revolution, and adherence to the promises of communism. When he emerged as the sole leader after the Korean War, he cemented his own leadership by promoting *juche* philosophy as a means for the country to break with its recent chaotic past. In his own words, Kim Il-sung explained the general principles of North Korea's new government:

Establishing *juche* means, in a nutshell, being the master of revolution and reconstruction in one's own country. This means holding fast to an independent position, rejecting dependence on others, using one's own brains, believing in
one's own strength, displaying the revolutionary spirit of self-reliance, and thus solving one's own problems for oneself on one's own responsibility under all circumstances. (Yuk-sa 1972, 157)

Aside from giving Kim Il-sung supreme rule of his country, juche philosophy assured the North Koreans that their existence and prosperity was established in revolution, and that the deaths of so many North Koreans in the Korean War would not be in vain. The tenets of juche were ingrained into the minds of all North Koreans: “implementing and executing policies based on juche effectively consolidated Kim [Il-sung]'s absolute political power and indirectly provided ideological justification for his dictatorship” (Sunny 2003, 108).

Under this premise, Kim Il-sung would preside over North Korea through much of the second half of the twentieth century. The success of juche, insomuch as Kim Il-sung maintaining his absolute rule of North Korea, is validated by Kim Il-sung's extensive tenure that lasted through six South Korean presidents, ten United States presidents, and 21 Japanese prime ministers. Moreover, Kim Il-sung outlived Joseph Stalin by 41 years and Mao Zedong by 18 years.

Kim Il-sung's ruling style was dependent on the people of North Korea submitting themselves to it and therefore supporting it. Although Kim Il-sung could have ruled by sheer force, indoctrination was his preferred method of control. The same was true for Kim Jong-il and, and if we learn from history, will likely be true under Kim Jong-un as well. The Kim regime and the loyalty of the people is a symbiotic political relationship: “the leader is the errorless brain of the living body, the masses are the living body that is able to maintain its life only through loyalty to the leader, and the party is the
nervous system that organizationally links the masses to the leader” (Sung Chull 2006, 125). Kim Il-sung's cult of personality exists to this very day and is an important element of indoctrination of the North Korean people.

Right from the start of his rule, Kim Il-sung's chief concern was to proselytize the people of the country and justify his rule. From the country's seal, to the insisted blind allegiance to the Kim regime and idol worship of Kim Il-sung, Kim Il-sung crafted a cultural climate that ensured the people would always revere him and he would eternally be a thread that holds the people together, like a modern cult religion based in political ideology but given its real power through mystical belief of its followers. His legacy is a constant in the life of every North Korean: “a photo of Kim Il-sung is on every North Korean identification card, worn by every citizen” (Orenstien 2009, 11). Where once was a revolutionary leader who usurped power in the aftermath of the Korean War, is now a transcendent figure whom the people revere. Kim Il-sung became a myth and a legend in his own lifetime, comparable to a demigod drenched in his own dogma that is adhered to by the people of the country.

As an extension of his own personal cult of personality, the North Korean Constitution in all its forms is an outgrowth of Kim Il-sung's philosophies. The North Korean Constitution, drafted by Kim Il-sung in 1948, was borne out of and reaffirms juche philosophy. Whereas most constitutions are rulebooks on how a government operates, the North Korean Constitution is heavy on rhetoric that re-emphasizes Kim Il-sung's desire for totalitarian rule. For example, with seemingly no relation to the
pragmatic goals of the constitution, the preface is, reads like propaganda aimed at
reasserting and over-stating the achievements of Kim Il-sung:

Comrade Kim Il-sung was a genius ideological theoretician and a genius art
leader, an ever-victorious, iron-willed brilliant commander, a great revolutionary
and politician and a great human being. Comrade Kim Il-sung's great idea and
achievements in leadership are the eternal treasures of the nation and a
fundamental guarantee for the prosperity and efflorescence of the DPRK.
(novexcn.com)

On the surface the constitution ascribes laws and guarantees rights to the
citizens, but in reality “the North Korean Constitution exists essentially as a political
manifesto with a bulk of programmatic provisions rather than as a document written to
ensure justice for the people” (Dae-Kyu 2003, 1291). Although it was revised in 1972
and again in 1998, the general underlying principles of the 1948 North Korean
Constitution remain the same. In North Korea, to question Kim Il-sung is to question the
country itself. Additionally, for the people to question authority is akin to the citizens
throwing their own lives and cultural identities into question as well.

Consolidation of Government

In addition to Kim Il-sung's cult of personality and the propaganda of the
country's constitution, Kim Il-sung established additional bastions of government that
would ensure his and his successors' continuous control of the country. One such
institution is The Korea Workers' Party (KWP). According to the U.S. Department of
State, several other political parties exist in North Korea, but in name only. It is
presumable that these phantom parties serve only to showcase political diversity when in
fact the KWP is the only political group in the country and its preeminence is established and supported by in the North Korean Constitution.

The KWP is made up of important military leaders, party elites, and chief governmental figures. The KWP's sole purpose is to facilitate the totalitarian dictatorship and “its supremacy over official government organizations and unlimited authority has allowed this one-man reign to thrive” (Dae-Kyu 2003, 1290). Moreover, to give the illusion of democratic representation to both the citizens of North Korea and the rest of the world, the North Korean Constitution established the Supreme People's Assembly (SPA) to be the legislative arm of the government. The KWP is intertwined closely with the SPA and to this very day is “purely a quasi-independent agency, a facade erected to give the appearance of democratic representation, and a puppet whose strings are pulled to legitimize State action” (Dae-Kyu 2003, 1293). As it was undoubtedly intended, the SPA, instead of balancing power of the autocrat through giving the people a voice, instead serves as yet another strategic support to the bastion of the Kim dynasty's power.

With the mechanisms in place and a personality cult firmly established, Kim Il-sung had laid down the foundation for which his son and successor Kim Jong-il would build upon. Under more unclear circumstances a succession might have been full of uncertainty or perhaps even a power struggle from an outside person or party. However, since the government of North Korea was so securely in the grasp of Kim Il-sung and the country blindly followed juche, Kim Jong-il's success was much more likely if he could smoothly perform the transition and do everything necessary things to consolidate his own power.
Kim Jong-il

While the personality cult was strong for Kim Il-sung, can the same be said for Kim Jong-il? Kim Jong-il was groomed to be the next leader of North Korea under orders from his father. Throughout the 1980’s Kim Jong-il already had considerable power in different areas of the government and political system. By the time Kim Il-sung died in 1994, Kim Jong-il already held considerable control over the affairs of the state and was already deeply involved in the duties of the military and the SPA. Nonetheless, Kim Il-sung had so much myth built around him, he was presumably a hard act to follow in terms of perpetuating the sort of unchallenged devotion that a personality cult ensures. Whereas Kim II-sung's reign was forged in war and revolution and the people felt a strong personal connection to him and his vision -- the only vision -- Kim Jong-il was simply a son replacing a father. This was a potentially dangerous position for the new leader.

The propaganda machine persisted and shifted its focus to Kim Jong-il. According to the Korean Central News Agency (virtually nothing more than propaganda artisans tasked with maintaining the cult of personality), Kim Jong-il was “born in a log cabin in Mount Paektu while his father was fighting the Japanese” and “lore has it soldiers spread the news of his birth by inscribing the announcement on trees across the country, a practice that North Koreans continue today by carving the leaders' messages into rocks and mountainsides” (Lee 2011). However, it is widely known outside of North Korea that Kim Jong-il was born in Siberia under much less glamorous circumstances.
Nonetheless, despite the barrage of propaganda that was intended to shore up allegiance for Kim Jong-il and place him in the realm of myth, like his father, it was not a clean and easy thing to do. Uncontested acceptance did not happen:

Even the Great Leader Kim [Il-sung]'s propaganda campaign on behalf of his son met resistance and required purges of senior party officials who got in the way in the 1970's and '80s. Kim Jong-il...is less healthy, less revered and less powerful than his father was when succession loomed on the horizon (Green 2009, 38).

It came as no surprise that when Kim Jong-il first took control of the country following his father's death, observers around the world were convinced that Kim Jong-il's government would collapse and that the citizenry of North Korea would have much less affection for him than they did for Kim Il-sung.

However, Kim Jong-il managed to not only persist, but he was able to cement his cult status as the valid heir to his father's philosophy and policies. Knowing he could never achieve the same sort of devotion and unmitigated idol worship his father enjoyed, Kim Jong-il cleverly abolished the position of his father's official post: the presidency. This in turn established that Kim Il-sung would eternally be the president of his people. But who would wield the powers reserved for the deceased president? While still respecting his father's legacy and immortalizing him, the “rhetorical and structural change was, of course, a reflection of Kim Jong-il's character and motivations. The powers that seemingly went to the grave with the senior Kim were instead creatively transferred to the son” (Dae-Kyu, 1301). Over the years of his reign, Kim Jong-il proved to be a relatively crafty and capable politician. Nevertheless, this move would not placate everyone in North Korea, especially the older military elites who fought alongside Kim
Il-sung and were unsure about a younger Kim with surely different motivations that could threaten their own power.

Kim Jong-il faced a host of challenges when he took control of North Korea, challenges that were drastically different from those faced by his father, all of which had to do with the transfer of established power rather than legitimizing a new regime. Kim Jong-il had to appease many different groups of people within the party. He was also forced to prop up the military and then had to rely on it. As one can see, although Kim Jong-il enjoyed enormous power, it was of a different quality from his father's. From one generation to the next, the position of supreme leader of North Korea was altered and therefore also essentially diluted and the public increasingly disapproved of Kim regime.

Mounting evidence pointed to the North Korean public becoming less enthusiastic about the Kim regime during Kim Jong-il’s reign. Some commentators speculated that the North Korean people were exasperated with the way their country was being run. Instead of drawing strength as a nation from the image of their supreme leader, the North Koreans could have been simply going through the motions and artificially paying homage to the personality cult of Kim Il-sung. They did this not because they wanted to maintain the status quo, but rather under threat of becoming one of the 220,000 political prisoners living in work camps in the countryside.

As North Korea went through a famine in 1998 where an estimated 3 million people perished, many thought that the famine would be the final straw that would break the Kim regime. According to a defector and now author Kang Chol-Hwan: “the North Korean people finally had some hope that the time had come for regime change, or at
least for the start of Chinese-style economic reforms” (Kang 2005, A14). Instead of inspiring self-reliance and pride at the country's independence from the rest of the world, the repressive state is instead inciting a political death-wish among its citizens. According to defectors like Kang, the latent desire among North Koreans is for the country to collapse so they can consequently have more freedom.

During Kim Jong-il's reign, the people's support for him grew more artificial and Kang asserted that “North Korea's people [longed] to see the end of Kim Jong-il's misrule” (Kang 2005, A14). Although the North Korean people acted as though they approved of Kim Jong-il, there was a strong undercurrent of dissatisfaction and hope that he would somehow lose his power over the country. Therefore the real question is whether or not Kim Jong-il himself recognized this and knew that the people may not be as loyal as he would like.

Perhaps one of the most telling events that suggests that Kim Jong-il was indeed aware of the tenuous nature of his rule comes from South Korean filmmaker Shin Sang-ok. Kim Jong-il was a well-known lover of cinema and had Shin kidnapped in 1978 for the purpose of making movies strictly for North Korea. Nonetheless, Shin became a confidant to Kim Jong-il and was treated comparatively well. Shin attended many events with Kim Jong-il. In a noteworthy exchange, “Shin claimed that Kim 'is aware of his unpopularity. Once, when I was walking next to him during a public event the crowds cheered wildly. He whispered to me: “this is a lie’”” (Behnke 2008, 91). The fact that even the secretive Kim Jong-il was aware that his people only acted like they support him illustrates the difficulty of maintaining an effective cult of personality from generation to
generation and highlights the fundamental flaw inherent in the foundations of the Kim regime.

The propaganda that was produced for the purpose of mesmerizing the public with Kim Jong-il was flamboyant and unbelievable when viewed from the West. The fact that North Korea's propaganda machine had to resort to seemingly gross exaggerations in order to impress the citizens of North Korea highlights how desperate the Kim regime might be. From the time of Kim Il-sung to Kim Jong-il, propaganda had to become increasingly more dramatic and extravagant. Although Kim Jong-il was widely ridiculed in the West because of his questionable fashion sense, pluming pompadour, and his undistinguished stature, the propaganda in North Korea paints a very different and flattering image:

Myths suggest that Kim [Jong-il] shot a 38-under-par round at the inauguration of Pyongyang's first golf course in 1994, including eleven holes in one. He also invented the hamburger...and he was able to skip going to the bathroom; one government website briefly claimed that he had no need to urinate or defecate. (Moore 2012)

Enhanced propaganda to capture the adoration of the public was not the only thing Kim Jong-il needed to do to consolidate his power. Once he was squarely the head of government, he had to perform a political balancing act and incorporate different people and institutions in order to prevent factions from arising. Kim Il-sung never had to face these issues and instead could rule and guide the country with ease; Kim Jong-il would have to expend consider energy, time, and will simply maintaining his own power.
While ultimately successful in gaining control of the government, it was not without concessions.

For example, Kim Jong-il had to incorporate the military into government at a very high degree. As soon as Kim Il-sung died, there was potential for a strong military push to gain more control over the government. Kim Jong-il beat them to the pass and instead “strongly pursued a military-first policy...[that] was embodied in exclusive favoritism to the army” (Jei Guk 2000,768). While the military under Kim Il-sung provided strict allegiance to their leader, the military in the Kim Jong-il regime would be catered to, caressed, and given considerable influence on the business of the country. It is now a political reality in North Korea that if one wishes to gain influence or have a stronger say in what the direction the country takes, being a military elite is a default prerequisite. The military enjoys benefits that they never knew, before Kim Jong-il.

However, this is not to say that Kim Jong-il's life was dominated by the military and that he was single minded in his dedication to his position as leader. If anything, the military controlling many aspects of the government allowed Kim Jong-il to focus on other endeavors. Kim Jong-il's decadence has been widely reported. While the average citizen of North Korea suffered from starvation and lack of personal rights, Kim Jong-il led the life of a hedonist, philanderer, and playboy. The dissonance between Kim Jong-il and his subjects was immense. Kim Il-sung, although by no means a man of the people, did not engage in the level of lasciviousness as his son did. According to confirmed reports from the cognac maker Hennessey, “Kim [was] their biggest buyer...with an estimated annual account of between $650,000 and $800,000 since 1992.
The Dear Leader annually spends 770 times the income of the average North Korean citizen on cognac alone” (Herrold and George 2004, 249).

At the same time, indulging in luxury western goods was not the only thing Kim Jong-il pursued for his own pleasures. In addition, he was also known for his sexual habits and threw lavish and salacious parties at his house on the weekends. According to defectors, diplomats, and visitors, “the routine at the parties included eating, drinking and dancing, but usually ended with erotic games” (Lee 2011). Evoking the spirit of Caligula, Kim Jong-il certainly enjoyed the spoils of power to great excess. His devotion to his own hedonism seems irresponsible for a leader of a country, but the behavior of Kim Jong-il is perhaps that of an antisocial sociopath or a narcissist. A psychological analysis of Kim Jong-il found that the degree of his behavior “may indeed be related to psychotic disorders such as schizophrenia” (Coolidge and Segal 2009, 199).

Because of Kim Jong-il's peculiar personality traits, he was unpredictable when it came to diplomacy with other nations. Lack of consistency was a hallmark of his negotiations and one can argue that his unpredictability and often time irrational behavior adversely affected the North Korean people. Kim Jong-il was all that stood between the lifting of sanctions and the wellbeing of his people. For leaders around the world, Kim Jong-il was enigmatic and at very least difficult to work with -- particularly for the United States and South Korea.

One of the major problems with dynastic succession is that when it is time for power to transition to a new leader, the pool from which this leader is drawn is extremely small. In the case of Kim Il-sung, there was only possible person to replace him. There
surely existed talented persons in government that could have successfully carried on North Korea in Kim Il-sung's image and done it capably. But therein is the rub: the regime, as previously mentioned, was dependent on personality cult and idol worship. The next person in line had to be related to Kim Il-sung, no matter how qualified or dutiful another person may have been. With Kim Jong-il, the leader of North Korea was psychologically unhinged and seemed to value his own habits as much as he valued the business of government. But Kim Jong-il's reign did not last forever and North Korea would again be introduced to a new leader.

Kim Jong-un

It is plausible that Kim Jong-il's wild life style contributed to his relatively early death at age 69 on December 17, 2011. Seemingly the moment Kim Jong-il died, the North Korean propaganda organ went into overdrive and scrambled to both memorialize Kim Jong-il's death as well as transition the cult of personality of the Kim family to Kim Jong-un. As previously mentioned, the Kim regime has long relied on propaganda to secure its power; this was inherent in how Kim Il-sung established the government and dually made himself a deity. Even in death, Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il were protected by propaganda in such a way that attempted to make transition to the next son more acceptable to the North Korean people.

While Kim Jong-il died from a heart attack, state news reported to the citizens of North Korea that he actually died from exhaustion, a by-product of his ever-lasting devotion to working for his people. His funeral 11 days later was a massive event that
was most likely preplanned ahead of time by the government. It lasted several hours and was elaborate. Citizens along the path of the hearse were seemingly overwhelmed with sadness. Kim Jong-il's son Kim Jong-un was there every step of the way and the funeral procession gave the world its glimpse of the new leader. One curious and ironic element that poetically symbolized Kim Jong-il's reign was the fact that his hearse was a mid-1970's American-made Lincoln Continental.

The new supreme leader, young Kim Jong-un, was ushered onto the scene in grandiose fashion by North Korean propagandists in typical North Korean fashion. Kim Jong-un, more so than his father and grandfather, will rely on the illusion of propaganda in order to stay in power and further the cult of personality in which the Kim regime is steeped. Kim Jong-un will face many more challenges and his power will most likely be even more limited, if not already less potent than his father's. From each successive regime, the power of the supreme leader is potentially diluted.

Reliance on propaganda, as a stalwart of Kim Jong-un's success, was illustrated recently when the North Korea press released two documentary films about the new leader. The documentaries depict Kim Jong-un riding a galloping stallion, having discussions with a troupe of military leaders, driving a tank, and going to an amusement park. The documentary was strategically filmed to create an image for the North Koreans of a leader who is continuing the mantle of the Kim Jong-il and the eternal Kim Il-sung. Kim Jong-un's regime cannot survive if he is a singular entity untethered to the Kim dynasty, and the documentary “particularly emphasizes things marking the continuity
between the grandfather Kim Il-sung, the father Kim Jong-il and the son Kim Jong-un” (Coppola 2012).

Although little is known about Kim Jong-un, one can glean much insight from the documentaries. The documentaries are heavy on showing Kim Jong-un with military leaders and participating in military events. Just as Kim Jong-il was forced to enhance the status of military leaders to safeguard his own power, Kim Jong-un already seems awash and surrounded by the military elite. According to Antoine Coppola, a French film scholar and expert on Korean filmmaking: “in propaganda movies, the emphasis of certain images and themes denote the given regime's real problems: here it is Kim's relationship with the army and the regime's elders who have to accept him, or not” (Coppola 2012.). Although this is conjecture based on two documentaries, it highlights a possible inherent problem with the government structure of North Korea and the power of the supreme leader.

Perhaps the most obvious problem for Kim Jong-un is his age. Kim Il-sung was in his mid-30’s and a revolutionary figure that represented the genesis of North Korea's existence. Kim Jong-il was in his early 50’s when he became the supreme leader of North Korea and had been groomed for the position almost his whole life, and as previously mentioned, was entrenched in the regime well before he took control of the country. By contrast, Kim Jong-un only has his name and pedigree with which to cling and present to not just the North Korean citizens, but the North Korean military and political elites.
Right away, it appears that some share of the power has been seized by others and various promotions and reshuffling of the deck suggests that Kim Jong-un will not enjoy complete autocracy like his grandfather, and to a lesser extent, his father enjoyed. Whereas Kim Jong-il was quick to solidify his power and had the tools to do so, his sudden and seemingly surprise death has created a power vacuum which the political elites and military filled even before Kim Jong-il was gone:

Regents have been appointed. Kim Jong-il's sister, Kim Kyonghui, has also been named a four-star general, raising her to the status of Imperial Aunt. Her husband, Jang Song-taek has been promoted to vice chairman of the National Defense Commission which controls the military and other domestic security forces. Generational cohorts in the military have been promoted, in order to keep the armed forces content with the regime. (Kaplan and Denmark 2011, 8)

The retooling of the Kim regime has many implications. More than the previous two supreme leaders, Kim Jong-un's rule will be inherently more symbolic and probably less practical. Kim Jong-un's role will be more to maintain the cult of personality and keep the illusion of Kim Il-sung’s myth alive. By doing so, he will ensure that those who hold power in the government will retain their control and influence. Unfortunately for military leaders, they need Kim Jong-un to be involved with politics in one capacity or another just retain the legitimacy of juche philosophy and the Kim personality cult. As long as the public buys (whether genuinely or not) the Kim regime’s propaganda and continues to hold Kim Il-sung in godlike esteem, behind closed doors the military can increase their position in government.

That will be a difficult task, to be sure. Perpetuating a myth and continuing the pageantry of the Kim regime is a very short-sighted strategy, but it is the only strategy
that can be employed within the confines of the governmental structure of North Korea as well as its unique culture: “North Korea...appears to have little grasp for thinking in terms of the longue durée. North Korea's leadership is focused exclusively on the tactical challenges of short-term regime survival” (Kaplan and Denmark 2011, 7). With Kim Jong-un as the acting leader of the country, this battle for survival will most likely intensify.

Additionally, the fact that the Kim regime's exclusive power has probably been greatly reduced by the military out of fear that Kim Jong-un is quite possibly unqualified for the post he quickly received, illustrates the amount of distrust that presumably exists between the military and Kim Jong-un. It is worth pondering: exactly who is in control of North Korea and its future? Instead of a top down Stalinist totalitarian autocracy with the supreme leader funneling policy down, there appears to be a division of power and a dispersal of allegiances and duties. A government so fragmented is sure to be rife with internal jockeying and redefinitions of who controls what, with the military elites presumably garnering more and more power to subsidize their own posts.

This sentiment was echoed by a true North Korean insider: Kim Jong-il's eldest son Kim Jong-nam. In a recent book, Kim Jong-nam boldly questioned the Kim regime and predicted the growth of the military: “my father governed the country with the backing of the military but the power of the military has become too strong' he says in the book 'if the succession ends in failure, the military will wield the real power” (Haddadi 2012). North Korean officials, however, dismiss the claims of Kim Jong-nam, and for good reason. Kim Jong-nam greatly embarrassed North Korea when he was
famously apprehended in Japan with a fake passport and Tokyo Disneyland as his travel goal. Nonetheless, his testimony does bear some weight because of his unique insight.

Outlook for the Future

Kim Jong-un's diminished power will most likely greatly affect the destiny of North Korea. With power being shared it will be harder for the Kim regime to portray the illusion that Kim Jong-un is the natural continuation of Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il's legacy. With power being shared, checked, and balanced, the decision making process will be more convoluted, to be sure. Kim Jong-un's sheer inexperience will create a roadblock for effective rule and the military will take advantage of his age as well. The outlook for the effectiveness of the North Korean government is not good.

Furthermore, the people of North Korea will most likely feel less of a connection with the supreme leader as time goes on. Kim Il-sung died almost 20 years ago; there is an entire generation of North Koreans who only lived through the Kim Jong-il regime and have no memories of Kim Il-sung or any personal connection with him. Kim Jong-il's legitimacy was rooted in the fact that he was the son of Kim Il-sung. Kim Jong-un's personality cult is presumably watered-down even more, and even if he manages to maintain the allegiance of the people through propaganda and the ever looming presence of the ghost of Kim Il-sung, the people will potentially not respect him as much. And if Kim Jong-un manages to stay in power long enough to be succeeded by someone else in the Kim lineage, their power will obviously be even more inconsequential.
As the supreme leader becomes more of a figurehead and more power is dispersed amongst political and military elites, North Korea's trajectory will face new challenges that will presumably lead to the government being unable to sustain itself from generation to generation. The propaganda needed to perpetuate the lore and myth of the Kim regime will most likely become more desperate, elaborate, and pervasive. The blueprint for government invented by Kim Il-sung almost ensures that the Kim regime will not be able to maintain power. *Juche* itself is outdated and with increased globalization and the rapid development of technology over the past 20 years, there will be more and more ways for the Kim regime to be undermined. North Korea and the Kim regime, as we know it today and as we have known it throughout its history, will probably not persist and survive in its current form.
CHAPTER IV

VISIONARY REUNIFICATION

People are linked with one another through shared history. The United States has a close relationship with the United Kingdom, most countries in South America have similar historical foundations, countries in the middle-East have citizens that see themselves as Muslims first and members of their country second. The point being: experiences, languages, history, and destiny sometimes bleed through the artificial borders humans place on the globe.

This is especially true for the Korean Peninsula. Throughout most of history, the people of Korea have forged a cultural identity. The Three Kingdoms of Korea, the Joseon dynasty, and the rise of Confucianism all hallmarks of Korea's culture and history. However, the peninsula was sharply divided into two very different countries after the Korean War in 1953: North Korea and South Korea. Ever since then, the hope of many is that the two countries will reunify and become one Korea again. The reunion of the Korean people and the reestablishment of the distinct Korean culture is the quixotic ideal for those who sincerely wish for the two Korea to reconcile and reunify.

Although in the grand pantheon of civilization North Korea is a very new country, its culture has grown more and more divergent of South Korea's. While North Korea is a hermit kingdom with a totalitarian government and little economic activity, South Korea has become a free market democratic developed country. Although the two
share the same history, their government systems and contemporary cultures could not be any more different. The idea of reunification will almost assuredly not happen because of a myriad of variables that will be surveyed in this chapter.

South Korea's Economy Versus North Korea's Economy

The first step towards a reunification would be increased fair and meaningful dialogue between the North and South. This has not occurred, even when Seoul offers the best diplomatic terms possible. But even if the two countries did engage in some enhanced diplomacy and began to explore the logistics behind reunification, they would quickly see that the proposition would be extremely undesirable for both sides, mostly the South. The sheer numbers show that reunification would be a quagmire on the issue of money alone.

North Korea's economy, to put bluntly, is a shipwreck. Juche philosophy itself has hobbled the North Korean economy in every way. By insisting on relying on itself and refusal of cooperating with other countries, North Korea has become an economic island. Furthermore, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the general decline of communism across the world further negatively impacted North Korea's economy. It clings to life by extorting its neighbors and the United States for aid and money, and heavily relies on China to subsidize the country. Hardly a model that shows signs that North Korea can grow economically and come closer to South Korea in that regard.

On the surface, the numbers are not good. According to the Central Intelligence Agency, North Korea's gross domestic product (official exchange rate) was a
paltry $28 billion in 2009 (Central Intelligence Agency 2012). For a country with a population around 24 million people, North Korea's economic power is pathetic. To put things in perspective, the size of North Korea's economy is very close to that of Panama, but Panama only has a population of 3.5 million people (Central Intelligence Agency 2012). Add on to that the fact that North Korea has outstanding external debts that exceed $12 billion (Central Intelligence Agency 2012), one can easily see that if reunification were to happen, it would have to be under the provision and understanding that economic interests would have to play no role; an unlikely proposition.

Furthermore, most countries with monetary aspirations try to diversify their economies and promote economic growth through innovation and investment – North Korea does not. Once again, because of juche philosophy and the previously discussed power structure of North Korea and its military doing everything it can to keep power, the military has become the biggest benefactor of most of North Korea's income much to the detriment of the general population: “large-scale military spending draws off resources needed for investment and civilian consumption” (Central Intelligence Agency 2012). The blatant disregard for its own population’s wellbeing is evident in the fact that North Korea is tied with Burma for providing the smallest percentage of its gross domestic product on health expenditures.

South Korea, on the other hand has a vastly more successful and robust economy that continues to grow. South Korea has emerged from the Korean War as a major economic player in Asia: “in 1960, Korea was characterized as 'poor'...incomes were at 11.1% of those in the USA. Since then, however, Korea has been growing more
rapidly than the USA” (Byung Woo 2008, 408). South Korea's burgeoning economy makes North Korea's listless economy look like loose change:

The South Korean economy has achieved rapid growth and development, in sharp contrast to the North Korean economy, which has deteriorated sharply over time. South Korea’s Global Economic Development Index (X3) has more than doubled, from 40% in the 1970s to 75% in the 1980s and 84% in the 1990s. This is consistent with the country’s radical transformation from a poor developing country to a highly successful newly industrialized economy...On the other hand, for North Korea, the same index has plummeted from 14% in the 1970s to 5% in the 1980’s and 1990’s. (Estrada and Donghyun 2008, 93).

For the two countries to merge, the playing field would have to be leveled first and until that happens, there is little to no economic incentive for South Korea to unify with North Korea.

While North Korea's economy has stubbornly stagnated and even deteriorated in some aspects, South Korea's has ballooned. In order for there to be a smooth reunification regarding economies, either South Korea's economy will have to suddenly collapse, or North Korea's economy would have to suddenly adopt capitalism and expand to an unfathomable degree relative to where it is now. Each is a highly unlikely scenario, to put it lightly. As South Korea continues to enjoy the fruits of capitalism and its own political and economic development and growth, the prospect of reuniting with their neighbor to the north looks more and more like a system of diminishing returns.

There are some who have accurately observed some reforms North Korea has made in regards to its economy. North Korea has opened itself up somewhat to foreign investments and has allowed some of its citizens the ability to have private businesses. While it is true that “North Korean reforms constitute a departure from the command
economy towards a model of market socialism,” (Guo and Stradiotto 2007, 755) in comparison to the general North Korean economy the changes are relatively modest and do not represent an embrace of capitalism by any means.

South Korea also could not absorb the amount of North Koreans that would obviously relocate to South Korea in search of opportunities. In North Korea employment opportunities are scarce because there is very little private industry and many citizens are forced to resort to joining the military in order to gain income. While North Korea has a labor force of 12 million people whose per capita income is $1,800, South Korea has a low unemployment rate and per capita income is $31,700 (Central Intelligence Agency 2012). It is entirely conceivable that South Korea would be flooded with North Koreans simply because the standard of living in South Korea is so enormously greater and there would be no barrier preventing them from doing so. South Korea would be reluctant to provide services for this influx of workers, and it is entirely possible that North Koreans would be exploited insomuch as wages.

Additionally, the military is the largest single employer in North Korea. If Korea would reunify, there would be no need for North Korea to maintain such a large armed force and hundreds of thousands of North Koreans would simply be out of work. As previously mentioned, North Korea's military receives a large percentage of North Korea's gross domestic product at the expense of its citizens. Perhaps more in North Korea than any other country, the military is the foundation on which the country rests. The prospect of North Korea strapping large chunks of its military because of reunification runs counter to the military culture of the country.
Political, Social, and Technological Differences

Although the different economies of the two countries provide a major hindrance to the possibility of reunification, there are also other differences that would need to be addressed if the two Koreas reunified. There are also major social, political, and technological considerations as well. North Korea would have to make a myriad of concessions to South Korea that run contrary to the political and social nature of the country. The Kim regime and the North Korean military rely on oppression and totalitarianism, it is simply the nature of their government system. And since the Kim regime is linked with the overall juche philosophy of the country, the social culture of North Korea is inherently tied with the North Korean leadership.

If the two countries were to reunite, there is much that would be expected of North Korea, aside from the economy. For example, human rights violations are rampant in North Korea and there are “more than 150,000 North Koreans” (Wrenn 2012) banished to labor camps that are scattered throughout the hinterland of the country; North Korea would have to atone for this. North Korea would most likely resist most of the social changes demanded of it.

Politically, the countries have little in common. As previously illustrated in this chapter, North Korea shows a penchant for deliberately disregarding and rejecting formal diplomacy with South Korea. In order for the two Koreas to merge, they would have somewhat similar political development. As it stands now North Korea has not progressed politically at all, while South Korea has progressed enormously and has become more democratic, especially throughout the 1980's and 1990's.
There must be political or economic common ground for two or more countries to cooperate closely with one another. The European Union, although comprised of many countries with distinct cultures and languages, generally enjoy the same political systems and governments and that expedites cooperation. The same cannot be said for North and South Korea, whose political ideology are worlds apart and even growing more distant still: “the large and growing gap between the two Koreas in political development does not bode well for the prospects of Korean unification since common political values facilitate regional integration, as most clearly evident in the [European Union]” (Estrada and Donghyun 2008, 93). In order for these two countries to effectively collaborate they would need to have some common ground politically and as North Korea has confidently shown, it is consistent in maintaining the type of government Kim Il-sung instituted in the 1950's.

The history of North Korea refusing to cooperate with South Korea, their increasingly divergent cultures and economies, the terms of reunification (the North has a very different idea of what reunification looks like compared with the South, to be sure), the heavy burden reunification would place on South Korea, and North Korea's need for a divided Korean peninsula in order to propagate its own existence, are all barriers to reunification. North Korea truly is alone on the world stage and those who see reunification as a way to prevent the collapse of North Korea are foolhardy in believing that reunification can or will actually occur.
The Sunshine Policy

North Korea has a well-earned reputation of being extremely difficult with which to work. Even North Korea's best ally, China, has had various frustrations with the troublesome country. For reunification to occur there would have to be an extensive array of cooperation between North Korea and South Korea. However, North Korea's continual belligerent and selfish behavior ensures that this will never happen. One can look at South Korea's failed Sunshine Policy from 2000 to 2010 with North Korea as an example of how uncooperative North Korea is even when South Korea has acted favorably and generously with North Korea.

Former South Korean president Kim Dae-jung was the champion of the Sunshine Policy and was the chief proponent of it (Prusher 2000). The Sunshine Policy attempted to change South Korea's political posture with North Korea. Instead of defiance, the Sunshine Policy instead attempted to foster a more positive relationship with North Korea. Incentives and aid was offered to North Korea as well as an insistence that both Korea's would be equals and respect one another's sovereignty. In exchange it would behoove North Korea to, in return, behave properly and be less aggressive – in theory.

Kim Dae-jung instituted the Sunshine Theory with great optimism and “the world summoned a round of applause for [him]...in the form of the Nobel Peace Prize, a bow to his efforts in human rights and in reconciliation with Seoul's onetime enemy – North Korea” (Prusher 2000). A new age of diplomacy would begin and the very positive
and forward thinking Kim Dae-jung would lead the way. However, Kim Dae-jung's boundless optimism was relatively excessive:

He subsequently surprised many people by referring to Kim Jong-il, the North Korea's communist dictator, as “a quite sensible man to deal with.” His big hearted approach to the North Korean leader and concerted effort to promote economic and humanitarian aid programs as well as sports and cultural exchange culminated in the historic summit in June 2002 between the two Kims. Undoubtedly, he proved himself a forgiving and magnanimous leader in his peace initiative. (Chi Ho 2005).

Unfortunately for Kim Dae-jung, Kim Jong-il would do much to not only deflate optimism for the Sunshine Policy, but also completely undermine it.

The policy seemed to generally be one directional. Kim Dae-jung lavished Kim Jong-il with praise and North Korea's borders were slightly opened up to South Koreans. South Koreans did business in North Korea and aid was continuously offered to North Korea, all in exchange for a plea to Kim Jong-il and his government to be more cooperative, give the aid to the people, and not pursue nuclear weapons. Whereas North Korea was receiving direct and tangible benefits, South Korea was pinning its hopes on North Korea joining the themes of good will and reciprocity. However, “South Korean officials have admitted that the arrangements and the behavior of the North Koreans in private could be heavy-handed and unaccommodating” (Hoare 2008, 78).

To suggest that the Sunshine Policy was equitable for both sides would be erroneous, instead “economically, the North may have made gains at the expense of the South ” (Hoare 2008, 80). Moreover, it was more than just simply material gains from which North Korea benefited. North Korea's brazen behavior continued and at times it
would place South Korea in an even subservient position. In 2003, then South Korean president Roh Moo Hyun was forced to apologize for an independent event elsewhere in South Korea where students burned a North Korean flag (Demick 2003). At the time, North Korea even “put out a statement demanding an apology and complaining that South Korea is a 'dangerous place where compatriots do harm to their brothers’ safety and dignity’” (Demick 2003).

As one can easily see, North Korea acted with virtual impunity during the years of the Sunshine Policy and South Korea never disciplined North Korea for its actions that ran contrary to the Sunshine Policy's gestures of goodwill. In short, the Sunshine Policy did nothing to bring reforms of any kind to North Korea. Instead, the Sunshine Policy may have inadvertently helped North Korea grow many of its military programs including its development of nuclear weapons. By receiving aid and money but not having to pay it back or explain where it was going, North Korea's internal economy was subsidized and North Korea's military did as it wished:

South Korea sent hundreds of thousands of tons of fertilizer and food to North Korea every year. Neither Kim nor Roh asked anything in return other than expressions of goodwill and signs of cooperation in the form of trade and visits. Neither of them had a clue that North Korea all the while was forging ahead with a program for developing nuclear weapons with highly enriched uranium (Kirk 2009).

It seemed that there was virtually nothing short of North Korea invading South Korea that would anger South Korea into cutting aid. Critics of the Sunshine Policy at the time felt that “North Korea's continuing delinquent behavior, such as its nuclear program, provocation of naval skirmishes, and submarine intrusion only confirmed their view that
it was simply inappropriate to continue with [the Sunshine Policy]” (Jong Kun 2010, 128). The fact that North Korea could essentially do whatever it wanted without fear of retribution instead encouraged North Korea to act as it always had.

It is worth mentioning that North Korea's nuclear program flourished during the years of the Sunshine. The fear of a nuclear North Korea was tantamount and a major motivation behind the Sunshine Policy; yet, North Korea developed nuclear technology regardless of South Korea's insistences. Even towards the beginning of the Sunshine Policy when there was elements of hope for South Korea, North Korea was not only toiling away at obtaining nuclear weapons, but was even somewhat taunting the rest of the world with its nuclear program:

As early as 2003, North Korea began to intimidate the world by entertaining the idea of declaring North Korea a nuclear-weapon state. Such a notion became quite clear by 2004, when North Korea's vice-foreign minister stated that North Korea had weaponized 8,000 fuel rods and already possessed a nuclear deterrent against the United States (Yong Chool, and Chaesung 2010, 92).

It is clear that North Korea never intended to follow any of the conditions of the Sunshine Policy. Possession of nuclear weapons by unpredictable governments is something people around the world fear. North Korea and South Korea, technically, are still at war with one another. If something as powerful and distasteful as North Korea having weapons of mass destruction did not draw the intense ire of South Korea in regards to the Sunshine Policy, nothing could.

The Sunshine Policy officially ended in November of 2010. South Korea rightly considered it a failure. Aside from North Korea's cantankerous attitude and
development of nuclear weapons, the Sunshine Policy was also wrought with internal corruption. Many of Kim Dae-jung's top aides and presidential staff were arrested for corruption and a prominent South Korean businessman that eventually committed suicide “had made a secret payment to North Korea amounting to at least a half-billion dollars and that it was used for the development of nuclear weapons” (Chi Ho 2005). It seems that no facet of the policy provided any substantial benefits to South Korea.

Although it was a hopeful and optimistic goal, it relied on North Korea acting amicably. Instead, North Korea reaped the benefits but continued to antagonize South Korea, and the rest of the world for that matter. As of now, “reconciliation on the Korean peninsula...returned to ground zero as of 2010. Those 'Sunshiners' of past-administrations are now lethargically watching inter-Korean relations deteriorate” (Jong Kun 2010, 136). If anything, the Sunshine Policy proved that North Korea is incredibly untrustworthy and unwilling to compromise.

Furthermore, antagonizing South Korea is essentially part of North Korea's diplomatic strategy. North Korea must consistently paint South Korea as an imperialist aggressor in order to placate its citizens and keep them in fear of war. No matter what kind of generous policies South Korea, or any country for that matter, put in place that aid North Korea, it will continue to defy the rest of the world and aggranvate its neighbors. It is just part of North Korea's modus operandi. The North Korean submarine attack on South Korea's navy ship Cheonan is a perfect example. Another noteworthy example was when “two North Korean agents were arrested...for allegedly plotting to assassinate the 87-year-old Hwang [Jang-yop], who has openly condemned Kim's regime
as totalitarian;” (Hyung-Jin 2010). Hwang is a defector of North Korea and was once Kim Jong-il's mentor (Hyung-Jin 2010).

In regard to reunification, the failure of the Sunshine Policy illustrates that even when South Korea extended an olive leaf to North Korea, North Korea still rejected it. The leadership and political machine of North Korea has no interest in becoming diplomatically friendly with South Korea. The two countries are on such different levels politically, meaningful policy agreements between the two are impossible. The Sunshine Policy was an extremely generous proposition, but North Korea still would not respect it. The political rift between the North and the South is so deep that it is unknown what it would take for the countries to even begin entertaining the notion of reunification.

**North Korea's Vision for Reunification**

Reunification cannot only be viewed through the lens of the west or South Korea. The common conception is that the South would adopt the North once North Korea politically progressed and adopted elements of capitalism; there would have to be a certain degree of harmony between the two countries achieved before reunification could occur. While this may seem obvious (South Korea has a much larger population and more international diplomatic support), there are two sides to the story of reunification.

Although the Korean Peninsula, and therefore the people of Korea, has been separated for decades, the wish for reunification does not only emanate from South Korea. There are families on both sides of the demilitarized zone that have been broken
up by the Korean War that want reunification. The Kim regime voices its wishes for reunification as well, and reunification is part of North Korea's continuous dialog. Despite the fact that North Korea's public wish to be reunified with South Korea seems insincere at best, the voice of the North still superficially appears to long for joining the Korean peninsula as one.

Certainly the North Korean leadership has a different take on what reunification would look like, and it would not incorporate the typical notion that South Korea would play the role of the paternalist. As farfetched as it may seem, North Korea has its own designs on reunification. Currently, part of North Korea's propagandized dogma revolves around reunification – albeit one that is very different from the conventional view most scholars and politicians imagine. This is but another hurdle worth considering when discussing the insurmountable difficulties of reunification.

As recently as February 2012, the official North Korean newspaper Rodong Sinmun ran an article that explicitly stated the North Korean angle on reunification: “we should dynamically advance along the road of independent reunification on the basis of the three principles clarified by Kim Il-sung” (Kim Hyon 2012). Surely this would be disagreeable to many, if not most, South Koreans. It is clear that North Korea has no intention of being enveloped by South Korea and would rather dictate the terms of reunification itself. North Korea is surely aware of the logistical and cultural nightmare that reunification would bring if it was done on their terms, and how unrealistic their terms are. This conveniently prevents them from ever having to truly entertain the reality of reunification.
What North Korea says and what it does are two different things. While on the surface North Korea desires to reunify the Korean peninsula, it purposefully sabotages the concept. In the same breath as claiming to want reunification, the closely controlled North Korean press denounces South Korea for supposedly impeding the process and paints the South Korean president as an enemy of reunification: “the Lee Myung Bak group...continued to seek fratricidal confrontation and war. During the mourning over the great loss to the nation last year in particular, they committed unethical and traitorous acts. Their reckless acts should never be pardoned” and that Lee's cabinet is a “group of traitors” (Kim Hyon 2012). This sort of double-talk is rampant in the North Korean press.

North Korea’s propaganda machine continues to insist that North Korea and the Kim regime desperately want reunification, but it is South Korea that is preventing it from happening. Additionally, North Korea consistently asserts that the reunification of Korea can only happen if the United States is removed from the peninsula: “it is necessary to heighten the vigilance against the military nexus of the U.S., Japan, and south Korea and drive the U.S. imperialist aggressor forces, a main obstacle in ensuring peace on the Korean Peninsula, out of south Korea as soon as possible” (Choe Chol 2012). As one can see, North Korea has little real interest in reunification and instead uses it as a propaganda ploy to instill in its citizens resentment towards South Korea.

In addition, North Korea could use reunification against South Korea. North Korea knows no bounds in its repeated attempts to undermine South Korea for its own selfish benefits. If anything, North Korea has an undeniable knack for exploiting the treaties and policies of South Korea (as well as the international community, at times) in
order to get what it wants. The desire for reunification is a tool that North Korea could use to weaken South Korea and bolster its own position in the region.

For example, North Korea has argued for a North-South Korea confederation in the past. While on the surface this concept seems like a relatively agreeable and benign form of reunification. However, one must always critically analyze North Korea's motivations; their shifty policy behavior is well known. A confederation of the North and South would be a thinly veiled ruse for the North:

This would be a ploy. Pyongyang would calculate that it would win in any civil war once the Confederation was established...Pyongyang's arms control schemes are likely to repeat the old ones, that the two Koreas reduce their forces by equal numbers...this is an old North Korean ploy: the North has twice the weaponry of the South, and can mobilize troops much more easily than the South. (Chan 2008, 303)

North Korea's continual brinkmanship and insidious motives threaten any form of reunification. At best, North Korea is a difficult dance partner with the South -- it purposefully moves to its own rhythm. North Korea only adopts policies when they benefit North Korea exclusively. This is a hallmark of North Korea's diplomacy, and especially its relationship with South Korea.

It is obvious to see that North Korea chooses to be on a completely different page than South Korea on the topic of reunification. Not only did North Korea subvert the Sunshine Policy, but the rhetoric of its official news agency constantly blames South Korea for blocking reunification. One final poignant example of North Korea's stubborn behavior and foolhardy approach to reunification is North Korea's fantasy plan after the peninsula had been reunified:
A group of cadres suggested to Kim Jong-il that Pyongyang would be renamed 'Kim Il-sung City'... a defector from Pyongyang claims the plan was put on hold in favor of renaming Seoul 'Kim Il-sung City' and Pyongyang 'Kim Jong-il City' once unification was achieved. (Mok Yong 2012)

These suggestions alone highlight and succinctly epitomize how very different North Korea views reunification and what its motivations are.

Germany's Reunification Not Comparable to Korean Reunification

As hopefully been demonstrated thus far, the odds of a successful reunification are very poor or even non-existent, and there is too much that stands in the way of a merger of North and South Korea. Nonetheless, optimists persist and cling to the hope that North Korea will suddenly change its ways and decide to completely cooperate with South Korea and the rest of the world. Additionally, many look to the 1990 reunification of East and West Germany as an example of a successful reunification. Some argue that by using Germany as an example, the two Koreas can learn from Germany's mistakes and pursue reunification. This is a flawed and unrealistic argument. Albeit it is very tempting to draw parallels between Germany and Korea, the situations are very different and Korea faces many more obstacles than Germany did. Additionally, there is a strong argument that challenges how truly successful the reunification of Germany was.

At first glance, the divided Korean peninsula has a couple things in common with the divided Germany, to be sure. Both were borne in the aftermath of World War Two and illustrated a clear divide between democracy and communism. In general, however, this is where the similarities end. There are many differences between the two
scenarios that are substantial enough to undermine the argument that Korea could follow in the path of Germany.

One important distinction is the motivations of the countries involved. West Germany actively worked towards destabilizing East Germany and was purposeful in its attempts to hasten East Germany’s collapse. West Germany actually wanted to absorb East Germany and was “aggressively pursuing the collapse and absorption of the East…it was a deliberate destruction of any of East Germany’s potential social or ideological threat to the existing West German political economy” (Hong 2008, 70). As previously argued, South Korea has grown weary of North Korea and has little interest in absorbing its neighbor to the North and has in fact instituted schemes such as the Sunshine Policy that helped bolster the North Korean government’s stability instead of weakening it.

At the same time, North Korea has violently rejected South Korea’s overtures and has shown no interest in a South Korean adoption of the North. However, in Germany, “East Germany’s ruling elite, chafing under the Soviet yoke, was not averse to the idea of uniting with West Germany and even accepting its capitalist system” (Klug 2012). North Korea is not part of a bigger union like East Germany was and remains a politically isolated country that ultimately is guided by its own policies. As previously stated, the only way North Korea is interested in reunification is if it is done on its own unrealistic terms. The political aspirations and motives of the two Koreas are vastly different from East and West Germany’s.

Another key difference between German and a possible Korean reunification is a logistical one: population. The more people involved in a major political change, such
as a reunification, the more difficult and costly it will be. At 24 million, “North Korea's population, however, is about half the size of the South's, while East Germany's population was only a quarter of the West's” (Klug 2012); a smaller population is a more manageable population in terms of reunification. Not only was East Germany’s population of approximately 16 million people much smaller compared with West Germany in 1990, but it was significantly smaller North Korea’s current population. On this basis alone, it is inappropriate for one to surmise that Korea can follow Germany’s example.

The spotty history of Germany’s reunification also serves as an incentive for North Korea to not follow the German example. In Germany, the toll on East Germany after reunification was immense and many East Germans now long for the days of being separate from West Germany. In short, “the eastern population has shrunk by about 2 million, unemployment soared, young people are moving away in droves and what was one of the Eastern Bloc’s leading industrial nations is now largely devoid of industry” (Kirschbaum 2010). These are hardly encouraging figures for people in North Korea. Reunification of Korea under the German model would not guarantee their quality of life would improve. For East Germany, the immediate costs of reunification were great and can serve as a cautionary tale for North Koreans:

The…GDP of East Germany fell by 14% in 1990 and 22% in 1991. East Germany, which used to be the central industrial bloc of the Soviet Union, was on the verge of economic collapse after 70% of its productive capacity was shut down. Also, between 1989 and 1991, East Germany’s economy plunged 50% in terms of growth rate. (Hong 2008, 70).
Lastly, in regards to the danger of drawing German-Korean parallels, the economies of North Korea and East Germany were much different. It has already been established in this paper that South Korea’s economic output is massive when compared with North Korea. The same cannot be said for East and West Germany. While North Koreans continue to languish in poverty; East Germany “was one of the wealthiest of the Soviet affiliated states” (Klug 2012) and therefore facilitated a smoother reunification than what would occur in Korea. Importantly, many in the West think German reunification was a mistake.

It is tempting to look towards German reunification as a model, or even a beacon of hope and possibility for Korean reunification. When thinking about Korean reunification, it can be standard for one to immediately summon the successful (albeit costly) example of the reunification of Germany. However, as has been shown here, it is dangerous to use German reunification as something comparable to a Korean reunification; there are simply too many insurmountable differences. If anything, comparing the German reunification to a Korean reunification actually highlights and illustrates how difficult and improbable a Korean reunification of any kind would be.

In conclusion, reunification cannot be relied upon as a possible exit strategy for North Korea. Although in theory reunification looks like a desirable outcome for the Korea, in application it is not. North Korea’s government will collapse internally; reunification is not a worthwhile scenario to consider. South Korea’s Sunshine Policy illustrates exactly how rebellious North Korea is and how the Kim regime used it to exploit South Korea for resources in order to build nuclear weapons. North Korea is one
of the most uncooperative countries in the world but unbridled cooperation would be essential for reunification.

South Korea’s economy is growing at an impressive rate and therefore putting great distance between itself and North Korea. There is absolutely no economic incentive for South Korea to reunify with the North. The pure economic burden of adopting North Korea is a deterrent for South Korea – the monetary costs are too great. Additionally, South Korea would be unable to take on the millions of North Koreans searching for social welfare and employment.

Politically and socially, the two countries not only have little in common, but their cultures have become so divergent that the perception of reality in North Korea is skewed so much so that if reunification would occur, North Korea’s people would be jettisoned into a world they do not understand and could not work within. Moreover, South Korea’s population is growing increasingly enervated with North Korea. As each generation goes by, South Korea looks towards the future, and the legacy of the Korean War slowly fades.

When scholars, academics, diplomats, and those interested in international relations think of reunification, it is almost always in the vein that South Korea would absorb North Korea. North Korea, however, has its own distinct and wildly different vision of reunification and is uncompromising in its view that the North should absorb the South under Kim Il-sung’s vision. Although this vision of reunification is even more unrealistic than the traditional South Korean and western vision, it remains a strong part of North Korea’s political ideology.
For these various and significant reasons, reunification will not be a factor in North Korea’s eventual demise. Reunification is unrealistic and improbable. Reunification is nothing more than a theoretical situation that appeals to optimists. The reality is much different and North Korea will not be absorbed by the South nor will it absorb the South. Reunification cannot be relied upon as a viable exit strategy for ending tensions on the Korean Peninsula and eliminating the Kim regime. Reunification will most likely not occur, and North Korea will succumb to internal rather than external (such as reunification) pressures.
CHAPTER V

CHINA'S ERODING RELATIONSHIP WITH NORTH KOREA

In the arena of international diplomacy and relations, most countries enter into relationships with other countries on the basis of shared history, culture, and economic interests. Northeast Asia is no exception, and there perhaps exists no relationship quite like the curious one between China and North Korea. Generally speaking, the international community frowns upon North Korea and prefers sanctions over aid. China, however, is far and away North Korea’s biggest supporter and benefactor: “China is North Korea’s only treaty ally and supplies the impoverished state with close to half of its food, three-quarters of its trade, and nearly all of its oil” (Fitzpatrick 2009, 9).

Historically, North Korea would not even exist without China’s support during the Korean War, and from that point on, China has provided North Korea with a large majority of its resources and maintained the political status quo on the Korean Peninsula.

This is starting to change, and in the 21st century China will move away from North Korea both politically and materially. China’s economy is growing at an enormous rate and the country is on the trajectory of postmodernism. China’s postmodern development runs in stark comparison to North Korea’s lack of development of virtually any kind. North Korea, under its juche philosophy, is locked in a stagnant state. As China becomes more financially and politically independent, it will no longer need to prop up the North Korean government and use it as a buffer against the west.
Moreover, China understands that North Korea is the only country that is threatening the status quo of the region. It appears that China supports North Korea as minimally as it can and in only to an extent to not cause uncertainty or tension in the region. Additionally, a sudden collapse of North Korea would flood China with North Korean refugees, a situation China would prefer to avoid. On a philosophical and theoretical level, China openly supports the idea of Korean reunification. However, one can see that perhaps the sole reason China wishes for reunification is so it can validate its own desired absorption of Taiwan back into the People’s Republic of China. China’s political motivations, especially with North Korea, are rarely altruistic. The benefits of being in solidarity with North Korea are rapidly becoming a game of diminishing returns and China is both internally and externally becoming less of a friend to the Kim regime and its practices.

Postmodernism is also an element to consider when viewing China’s relationship with North Korea. According to Ronald Inglehart: “postmodernism is the rise in new values and lifestyles, with greater toleration for ethnic, cultural, and sexual diversity and individual choice concerning the kind of life one wants to lead” (Inglehart 1997, 23). While North Korea holds virtually none of these values, and China is adopting some, their cultural trajectories are going in opposing directions. With the growth of postmodernism in China in the wake of growing capitalism, China’s culture will change because “economic development is linked with a syndrome of changes that includes not only industrialization, but also urbanization, mass education, occupational specialization, bureaucratization, and communications development, which in turn are linked with still
broader cultural, social, and political changes” (Inglehart 1997, 8). North Korea’s population is impoverished and the only real social safety-net is the military. However, China is engaging in some forms of social programs and it is becoming more postmodern.

As China becomes more postmodern, it will seek to enhance its reputation and standing amongst all the other countries of the world and establish itself as an emerging leader. Blatant support for a hermit kingdom that has nuclear weapons and one of the most oppressive totalitarian regimes in the world can only hurt China’s international reputation. China will most likely slowly abandon North Korea, and therefore North Korea will presumably therefore lose a majority of its most important lifeline. Historical connections can only last for so long, and if China wishes to become a more important player in international diplomacy, it knows it must leave Cold War inspired policies behind.

China and North Korea's Historical Relationship

At the end of the Korean War, it appeared that China would always support North Korea. In fact, North Korea would presumably not even be a sovereign country had it not been for China’s military support. China joined the war under the banner of anti-imperialism and hoped North Korea would conquer the entire Korean Peninsula and make it a communist state, therefore bolstering communism in that region. China, fearful and weary of the United States & Japan and angry about Taiwan, hoped that a powerful North Korea would increase its regional power.
China also assumed that North Korea would share a similar political system as China with the same types of ideologies. And if they had similar political and cultural ideology, North Korea could be a dependable ally to China, or so China thought. Although the relationship between the two countries started off well, “China and North Korea were 'as close as lips and teeth,' said Mao Tse-tung” (Moore 2010), China did not anticipate that North Korea would forge its own path into the political and international wilderness and defy China. But at the time of the Korean War, China was short-sighted and aimed at using North Korea as a proxy in the war to stunt what it saw as imperialism on the Korean Peninsula.

This was an imperceptive strategy that effectively saddled China with the diplomatic responsibility of keeping North Korea constrained. Since the end of the Korean War, China has been the chief mediator between North Korea and the west, and has been reluctantly tasked with the responsibility of keeping North Korea from collapsing or lashing out at its neighbors. At the end of the Korean War, had China known that the Kim regimes would be so erratic and foolhardy, its handling post-Korean War politics surely would have been different, but “neither the Soviets nor the Chinese ever developed a satisfactory strategy for reining in Kim [Il-sung], who soon became known as Asia’s Talleyrand” (Chang 2011, 45). China sacrificed short term gains for long term regional stability and erroneously placed faith in the assumption that North Korea would behave properly and more reasonably.

There was a strong possibility that South Korea and the United States would win the Korean War, thus diminishing the presence of communism in the region. That
spurred China into action: “although Stalin’s support for North Korea’s invasion was necessary for Kim to launch the war, Mao’s decision to send Chinese ‘volunteers’ to North Korea in October rescued Kim Il-sung’s government from certain defeat in 1950” (Brune 1998). As one can see, North Korea owes its very initial existence to Chinese involvement in the Korean War.

China did more than just help North Korea’s military. As a member of the United Nations, China cited the Korean War as an example of imperialism. In 1950, China sent its chief delegate Wu Xiuquan to the United Nations Security Council to make a statement regarding China’s firm stance on the United States’ presence in northeast Asia: “Wu demanded that the United States be subjected to sanctions, that the US withdraw from Taiwan, and it also withdraw from the Korean Peninsula leaving the Korean people in charge of their internal affairs” (Yasuda 1998, 79). Although China had ideological ties with North Korea insomuch as xenophobia and disdain for Japan, China’s chief motivation in initially assisting North Korea had more to do with being rigidly against the United States rather than brotherly gestures rooted in what China and North Korea had in common.

Nonetheless, the support that China gave to North Korea allowed Kim Il-sung to take complete control of North Korea’s government. At the time, both countries were heavily influenced by Marxism and Stalinism; it made logistical sense within the context of the Cold War that China would obviously support North Korea. Furthermore, North Korea’s guiding light, juche philosophy, was rooted in independence and being able to take care of one’s self without foreign intervention. China flirted with something similar
in their legendary “Great Leap Forward”. Although it ended up being a major tumble backwards, China’s “Great Leap Forward” shared similar core themes with *juche* philosophy. The two countries, on paper, seemed to have a lot in common in the 1950’s. But North Korea's reluctance to change, and China's desire to become more relevant on the world stage economically and diplomatically, strained the relationship between the two countries as the 20th century came to a close.

Despite the promising beginnings of the relationship between China and North Korea, North Korea proved to be an unreliable ally in the region and has caused many problems for China. This is in part due to the fact that North Korea's government was based more around a cult of personality and propaganda, whereas the Chinese government was less drastic and more open to political and economic growth. As the decades went by, the two countries became distanced with one another. Nonetheless, China was and remains North Korea's lifeline when it comes to aid.

**Postmodernism and China**

When the Soviet Union collapsed, China began to reform its economy and redefine the direction it wanted to take. Throughout the 1990s and the 2000s, China's economy grew at an exceptionally rapid pace. China's embrace of state capitalism cannot be denied: “China’s economic growth is an object of worldwide curiosity” (Chan 2008, 307). While North Korea continued to wither away under its *juche* philosophy, China's economy was blossoming. Primarily starting in the 1990s, China's relationship with
North Korea became decidedly more tenuous and China found North Korea to be extremely difficult to work with in its new era of economic activity.

China has taken many steps that are leading it on a trajectory of postmodernism. Although the Chinese economy is still relatively oppressive and state controlled, “the pragmatists who came to power after the death of Mao, though still nominally communists, have been allowing more and more scope for individual enterprise and an increased role for market forces” (Inglehart 1997, 239). With more emphasis on the individual and more rights being granted to Chinese citizens, Chinese culture is slowly, but undoubtedly fostering postmodernist ideals:

“in many of the former state-socialist societies and in China, respondents [of the 1990-1991 World Values Survey] who gave high priority to economic growth were the same people who emphasized 'giving the people more say in government,' 'more say on the job,' 'freedom of speech,' and a less impersonal, more humane society’”. (Inglehart 1997, 127).

In regard to postmodernism, China is doing much to take better care of its citizens. Long left behind is the blood of Tiananmen Square, and the Chinese government is taking more proactive approaches to improve the lives of its citizens. Expansive social safety nets and welfare programs are hallmarks of most postmodern societies, and “since the mid-1990s, the Chinese government has attempted to set up step by step a nationally unified social security system for the urban population” (Chow 2007, 229). China’s investment in the welfare of its citizens is growing rapidly, and even “in 1999, an unemployment insurance system was introduced” (Chow 2007, 230). While millions of North Koreans live on the brink of starvation, China’s path towards postmodernism is
Aiding its population greatly, and therefore the public has more political efficacy and autonomy and “the regime in power in China is thus called on to accelerate its own subversion today in the service of China's national greatness tomorrow – all in the name of yet another of the West's theories about the way to wealth and power” (Horner 2009, 165).

China is also becoming more open to western culture and shedding away its xenophobia that North Korea continues to maintain. With economic expansion and rising postmodernism, China has embraced elements of Western culture. While North Korea continually wages its propaganda war against the alleged imperialists (synonymous with the United States), China’s cooperation and relationship with the United States and Europe has improved greatly. One can find examples all over China, provided are a couple of noteworthy examples: “the new headquarters of the country’s largest government-owned bank is a project of Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill of New York. A Dutch firm won the competition for two new buildings for CCTV (China Central Television)” (Horner 2009, 140). China is slowly embracing aspects of Western culture and economic activity with the United States.

Meanwhile, North Korea still paints the United States as the ultimate imperialist aggressor bent on destroying North Korea and is the one major barrier preventing North Korea from reunifying with South Korea. The ideological divide between North Korea and China is widening and China’s patience with North Korea’s antics is fading. The Cold War is long over and the Soviet Union has collapsed; China
has decided to adapt to the new world order and is realizing its own unique power now that it has adopted state capitalism.

China and South Korea

China, in hopes of strengthening its own economy, reached out to a former enemy: South Korea. As previously discussed, South Korea has become an economic powerhouse as well. For China, South Korea would be a major source of trade and commerce and a valuable capitalist partner in northeast Asia. North Korea, predictably, found this new partnership galling and “bilateral ties deteriorated considerably when China established relations with South Korea in 1992” (Jae Cheol, 899). North Korea no doubt viewed that as an act of treachery because “while China pursues its legitimate long-term strategic interest with the South, every such move is interpreted as adding salt to injury by the North, which regarded the normalization as an act of betrayal from the very beginning” (You 2001, 397). Nonetheless, China disregarded North Korea’s frustrations in exchange for normalizing its relationship with South Korea.

Aside from economic development, there are opportunities for cultural exchanges between China and South Korea as well. For most of the 20th century, the two countries were estranged and had very little contact. However, once they opened up communication and began to cooperate with trade, they became more connected and more open to one another. For example, “in 2001, 444,113 Chinese visited South Korea” and “in the same year, South Korea invested US $830 million in China, for the first time exceeding the investment flow from the United States” (Yu-shek Cheng 2003, 54). It is
safe to conclude that China and South Korea’s relationship is growing in both economic and cultural terms. This serves to not only make North Korea jealous and angry, but it also enhances China’s slow progression towards postmodernism and favor of democracy.

**Chinese Attitudes Towards Democracy**

Democracy, political equality, and political efficacy are important elements in postmodern societies. Although China’s government remains nominally a Marxist-Leftist single party state, modest reforms have taken place within the country that suggest it is much more open to the application and theories of democracy. According to the World Values Survey:

> The idea of democracy is gaining hold there. Even in the survey carried out between late 1992 and early 1993, in the aftermath of the governmental suppression of the Tiananmen pro-democracy movement of 1989, 86% of the people agreed, and another 8% strongly agreed that ‘It is now necessary to expand democracy in our country’. Only about 5% disagreed with this statement. (Wang 2007, 566).

This is a very telling result from the survey for it cements the idea that, even in the wake of government crackdowns, the appetite for democracy in China boldly exists. The same cannot be said for North Korea and one can easily come to this theoretical conclusion without the findings of a survey such as this. One can also deduce that the results of the same survey would be much different from the China of 40 to 50 years ago. This supports the notion that China is wading into postmodernism and moving away from its revolutionary Cold War values.
Paradoxically, the anti-democracy crackdown at Tiananmen Square may have actually ending up pressuring Chinese leadership into relaxing regulation and oppression; it was a wakeup call to the leadership regarding the desires and wishes of the people. The government of China responded throughout the 1990’s and 2000’s, and “such efforts, although limited, tend to reassure the public that political changes are being considered or undertaken. All these together seem sufficient to make citizens satisfied with ‘how democracy is developing in this country’” (Wang 2007, 572). The people of North Korea are oppressed on such a grand scale, that a Tiananmen Square situation is highly unlikely, and if it did, North Korean leadership would probably not react in the larger scheme with reforms and increased liberty for its citizens. Partly because of China’s reforms and changes, its political and ideological relationship with North Korea has worsened.

China’s Distaste for North Korea's Nuclear Goals

The 1990s and the 2000s were two decades of souring relations between the China and North Korea. While China’s growing economy and participation in globalization pulled it away from North Korea's stubborn reliance on its Cold War mentality, North Korea itself did things that pushed China away. The prime example is North Korea's penchant for obtaining nuclear weapons: “after North Korea admitted to the U.S. In October 2002 that it had restarted its nuclear program, triggering a crisis on the Korean Peninsula, some Chinese observers began to argue that North Korea was a strategic liability” (Jae Cheol, 899). Although China continued to provide aid and
investment into North Korea, rifts have formed and China's attitudes with North Korea are becoming more critical:

China's view on North Korea is not always benign. Criticizing the North's nuclear development and extreme poverty, many progressives, liberal analysts, and young, urban, middle-class Chinese including Wang Zhongwen of the Foreign Economics Research Institute, Tianjin Academy of Social Sciences, openly argue that China should cooperate with the U.S.. (Chan 2008, 302).

Aside from China’s own ideological shifts and adoption of postmodernist values, North Korea’s ambition to develop and possess nuclear weapons has been a source of much strain between China and North Korea. North Korea’s ambition to obtain nuclear weapons adds more gravitas to its diplomacy and effectively forces the United States and the world to listen to its demands. North Korea has also used its nuclear program as a way of extorting aid from other countries. However, it also has drawn the ire of China.

Recently, North Korea pledged to the United States that it would, “along with halting weapons activities…permit nuclear inspectors from the U.N.'s International Atomic Energy Agency to visit its Yongbyon nuclear complex to verify the moratorium on uranium enrichment has been enforced” (Quinn 2012). While this may sound encouraging to the optimist, there is little to suggest that this is not another North Korean short term ploy. If history is any indicator, North Korea will not simply roll over on this issue and abandon its biggest negotiation tool. Although China and the United States have applauded this recent move by North Korea, “there are, as yet, few concrete reasons to believe that negotiations will be any different this time around” (Foster 2012). Much to
China’s chagrin, it is almost certain that North Korea will “seek to manipulate [the talks] into a creeping, de facto acceptance of North Korea as a nuclear state, a position the US has promised to avoid” (Foster 2012). North Korea’s nuclear ambitions will presumably never diminish, and this will further strain its relationship with China.

This will be problematic for China, and China will likely assert more pressure on North Korea. Long gone are the days when China either blindly supported North Korea, or used it as a buffer to distract the United States with its erratic diplomacy. As if taking a cue from South Korea and its substitution of its failed Sunshine Policy in exchange for a more hard-line approach, China is now doing the same:

A Chinese Foreign Ministry official privately admitted that relying solely on persuasion and positive inducements to secure North Korea’s cooperation had proven to be a failed policy. In the new situation after the [2006 nuclear] test, the official suggested that efforts to promote dialogue must be combined with pressure. (Glaser and Wang 2008, 175).

One can clearly see that North Korea’s nuclear situation is yet another major source of aggravation and discord with its relationship with China. Not only will this problem persist, but it will almost certainly add fuel to the fire insomuch as the breakdown of relations between the two countries.

The Future of the Increasingly Strained Relationship

In conclusion, there are many aspects that are poisoning the relationship between China and North Korea. Without China’s support, North Korea would be most likely doomed. Even with that being a universal truth, North Korea’s own actions are
negatively affecting its relationship with China. It refuses to adopt economic practices that China suggests. Although the two countries are major trade partners (usually with North Korea being the benefactor of the arrangement), North Korea and the Kim regime stubbornly stick to the outdated and ironically unsustainable *juche* philosophy.

Market reforms and increased economic growth would allow North Korea to be less reliant on China, but it refuses to take these steps probably because of the government’s fear of its people becoming more enlightened and therefore rebellious in the future. Therefore, its economy continues to stagnate and North Korea is by default required to rely on China. This goes against the philosophy of self-reliance, to be sure, and “paradoxically, Pyongyang’s growing dependence on Beijing for economic and political survival generated considerable distrust and resentment” (Yu-shek Cheng 2003, 65).

North Korea is between a rock and a hard place regarding its strategy with China. It postures that it is self-reliant and sovereign, but must sheepishly rely on China. In the meantime, China has become fatigued and frustrated with North Korea’s continual disobedience and unhinged diplomacy. Although China and North Korea had a strong historical bond after the Korean War, and North Korea was a useful antagonist to counteract South Korea’s alliance with the United States, recently, Chinese “officials reportedly told South Korean counterparts that Beijing places little value on the North as a buffer state” and that “Pyongyang was behaving like a ‘spoiled child’” (Hogg 2010). China simply does not need North Korea for strategic purposes any longer. China’s international interests have moved well beyond the region of northeast Asia.
China’s recent shift in ideology and motivations also do not bode well for its relationship with North Korea. As China trends towards postmodernism, it no longer behaves like the hardcore Marxist-Leninist state it once was. Capitalism and personal freedoms are expanding, albeit slowly and with a measured pace. Even the concept of democracy is desirable to most Chinese citizens.

In addition, North Korea’s nuclear ambitions are exasperating China and pushing China to be more aggressive with its policies towards North Korea. Not only does Japan, South Korea, and the United States strongly oppose North Korea possessing nuclear weapons, much of the world is wary of such a proposition. China also is very apprehensive about a nuclear North Korea, and is fearful that it would instigate a nuclear arms race in the region. Yet, North Korea continues to defy its most supportive ally. This has had disastrous consequences for the diplomacy between the two countries.

For these reasons, North Korea may find itself adrift and alone far away from the world stage in the 21st century. China’s subtle withdrawal of support for North Korea may cause it to slowly wither away. China is North Korea’s lifeline and only regional ally. The Kim regime will have surviving without China’s support. When China distances itself from North Korea, the Kim regime will most likely lose power and therefore will not be able to control the government and the people as effectively and absolutely as it has done up until now. It is possible that North Korea can slowly stagger toward being a failed-state with nuclear weapons but without China’s unbridled support. The Chinese/North Korean dynamic is essential to the future health of North Korea but the prognosis does not look good.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Ever since the fall of the Soviet Union, observers around the world at various junctures throughout the last twenty years have predicted North Korea would rapidly collapse. When Kim Il-sung died and power was handed over to his son Kim Jong-il, many thought that he was incapable of successful leadership and that the people of North Korea would rise up. Furthermore, when North Korea suffered a massive famine in the 1990s, some saw it as an opportunity for regime change. Yet, North Korea persisted and Kim Jong-il stayed in power until he died in 2011. The future for North Korea, however, looks grim and the Kim regime may be in its last throes.

North Korea has proven itself to be relatively resilient and has proved many of its critics wrong. A continuously starving population and energy shortages are just some of the scourges that plague North Korea. Yet, it endures and defies the odds time and time again. It seems that North Korea has a knack for barely escaping ruin. However, the 21st century is presenting North Korea with a host of new problems and challenges that it will have difficulty dodging. Although North Korea thus far has displayed an uncanny ability to duck disaster, “aircraft—even helicopters—cannot hover or remain stationary airborne indefinitely but with skillful pilots and favorable air currents they can prolong their flight by gliding” (Scobell 2007, 321). It is possibly only a matter of time before North Korea finally buckles and feels the effects of a slow internal collapse – it could
already be happening.

As discussed in this thesis, a primary source of trouble lies in the leadership structure of North Korea. Of the three Kim’s, only Kim Il-sung was able to completely enjoy pure autocratic rule with no one for whom to answer. Kim Il-sung’s *juche* philosophy and its unbridled influence on North Korean political culture have hampered the ability of the government to effectively rule over its subjects from generation to generation. The Kim regime is markedly flawed and Kim Jong-un is most likely not properly trained nor up to the task of ruling the country. He is the recipient of a marred government structure that he will surely have difficulty controlling. Already, the military elites in North Korea are feverishly clamoring for control and power, often times at the expense of the Kim regime. There are obvious fractures in the upper echelons of government and Kim Jong-un does not enjoy the same unrestrained absolute control that Kim Il-sung or Kim Jong-il (on a lesser scale) did. Additionally, at the time of this writing, it is unclear who has control over the country and military.

Furthermore, the cult of personality is not a sustainable long term strategy of governance. While military elites and countries like China and South Korea prefer the status quo, drastic leadership change is very likely to occur at some point in the 21st century. In other words: the Kim regime will probably not last because it is simply not built to. Power may shift towards a new dynamic, to be sure, and “while the days of totalitarianism in Pyongyang are numbered, one should not conflate a crash landing with the end of North Korea or Korean unification” (Scobell 2007, 321).
Reunification of the Korean Peninsula is always a factor when discussing North Korea. Reunification is usually a built-in ideal or hope in regards to the end of North Korea. The most common view of reunification is that of a Western perspective: that capitalism and democracy are right, and it is only natural the reunification would be done with South Korea being the more patriarchal figure that would guide the process. However, as discussed, South Korea does not have an appetite for reunification at this point nor could it logistically adopt the North. Reunification would be a logistical nightmare that would destroy the South Korean economy.

Aside from the implicit difficulties that South Korea would face in attempting to absorb the impoverished people of North Korea, simply starting a dialog about reunification is problematic as well. North Korea has a starkly different vision of reunification and does not view South Korea as its own sovereign nation that can be reasoned with, rather the North views the South as being subservient to the United States: “the United States has occupied the southern half of Korea for over half a century, has kept nearly 40,000 of its troops there…in an attempt to make the south of Korea its permanent colony” (Chol U 2002, 46-47). It is clear to see the ideological dissonance between North Korea’s perception of reality and the rest of the world’s view of reality.

Moreover, the two countries have been separated long enough to where they have developed unique and different cultures that would be extremely difficult to reconcile if reunification occurred. The two Koreas have diverged greatly and their attitudes towards one another have become divisive: “south Korea takes on the role of metaphorical colonizer to north Korea as metaphorical Other” (Grinker 1995, 193). There
are too many cultural, political, and ideological differences that ensure reunification is unrealistic.

Additionally, a large part of North Korea’s ethos is that of a war mongering country that antagonizes its neighbors. North Korea relies on posturing and threats of violence to legitimize its large army and military presence near the demilitarized zone. Although many commentators observe that North Korea’s posturing is nothing more than a smokescreen to keep South Korea and the United States guessing, North Korea still pursues foreign policy that is disruptive and actively threatens South Korea in its state run news agency as part of its typical dialog.

As much as the propaganda machine props up the Kim regime, it also vilifies the United States and South Korea and makes unsubstantiated claims about its strength and power in the region, even boldly declaring that if war broke out on the Korean Peninsula “the result [is] that the United States would have to spend 5.7-7.1 billion dollars a day and that the winner would be North Korea” (Chol U 2002, 127). As long as North Korea maintains its saber-rattling postures, it remains impossible for the two Koreas to begin substantive dialogue, reunification cannot even be considered as a plausible outcome at this juncture.

And finally, the ever changing relationship between China and North Korea threatens the long-term stability of the Kim regime. North Korea relies on China for life support, but China is becoming more reluctant in supporting the Kim regime. China is surging towards modernization; its economy has ballooned throughout the 1990s and 2000s. With more economic success, China has begun to assert its legitimacy in
international trade and economics. Moreover, China has a modern relationship with South Korea much to North Korea's dismay. Ultimately, “China needs a stable regional environment to carry out its modernization goals. North Korea might disrupt this environment because of its hostility towards South Korea” (Ong 2006, 127).

Aside from China's participation with capitalism, there are other reasons that will stunt its relationship with North Korea. China's own cultural and political values are shifting and becoming ever so slightly more postmodern. Pro-Western postmodern ideals are not harmonious with North Korea's juche philosophy and xenophobia. As time goes on, the ideologies of these two countries is becoming more divergent and less compatible.

While North Korea's nuclear program is distasteful for most countries in the world, China has the unenviable task of being the principle figure trying to corral its mercurial neighbor. Perhaps more so than the United States, the dubious idea of North Korea possessing nuclear weapons is a more serious problem for China, this is because “a nuclear North Korea would not only undermine its own nuclear monopoly in East Asia but also give regional states such as Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan further justification to achieve and develop their own nuclear weapons” (Ong 2006, 128). More recently, China has amped up pressure on North Korea and taken a more aggressive and insistent stance.

China simply does not need North Korea as a buffer to the West like it once did. In fact, having North Korea as an ally is perhaps undermining the legitimacy of China’s standing on the world stage. China is slowly distancing itself from North Korea. While China will assuredly do the bare minimum to prevent a sudden North Korean
collapse, it is assuring that North Korea is becoming both more isolated and more in need of foreign help, and therefore more inclined to suffer slow internal decay.

These obstacles will most likely prove to be impossible for North Korea to avoid. With a weakening government that has a fractured leadership and a less-than-willing dance partner in China, North Korea’s future is as uncertain as it has ever been. Rather than a sudden crash landing, North Korea will more likely endure a slow and painful internal government collapse. The Kim regime will wallow away and is sure to not survive the 21st century.

The implications are significant for international relations and world stability. When the North Korean government finally collapses or its government structure significantly changes, how will that affect not only its nuclear program but will it continue to use its nuclear program as a hostage-style bargaining tool? If the North Korean cannot effectively control its people’s mobility, how will a refugee spillover affect China and South Korea? Although reunification is an unlikely wish, will North Korea ever be motivated to have meaningful and genuine diplomacy with South Korea? When the Kim regime finally loses most of its control, what type of government will take its place?

These are all meaningful questions that are concerned with the ramifications of North Korea’s internal governmental and institutional erosion. Because of North Korea itself, northeast Asia is a relatively unstable region. As North Korea becomes more unstable and it begins to falter under the weight of its flawed government system and pestilential foreign policy, it will most likely slowly destabilize. Countries in the region
and with strong material and political interests in the region will have to develop strategies and contingency plans for a world without the Kim regime.
REFERENCES
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