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Educational Exchanges with the DPRK

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
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by

Tammy Kim

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Educational Exchange with the DPRK

by

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Master of Arts in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2015

Professor John N. Hawkins, Chair

There have been numerous reasons for concerns regarding the current state of North Korea and its future outlook. Dealing with these problems as a global community requires strategic diplomacy and engagement. Opinions regarding the proper approach to engagement with the DPRK are many and affect the various types of negotiations, interactions, and exchanges that occur between the country and other nations. This thesis will explore the complex web of issues related to the pursuit of diplomatic engagement with North Korea and apply this understanding to developing a perspective on present and future educational exchanges with the country.

The thesis of Tammy Kim is approved.

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1. Introduction

The current state of the DPRK (Democratic People's Republic of Korea, or North Korea) has been attracting worldwide concern for various reasons. These reasons include nuclear tensions, international conflicts, political and economic instability, and accumulating accounts of human rights abuses. Although it is impossible to ascertain the facts surrounding such issues because the country has, since becoming its own nation, been mostly closed off to the rest of the world, it is clear that the Kim family regime has constructed a systematically oppressive totalitarian state that exerts inconceivable measures of control over its citizens, which warrants global concern and action.

However, it has become evident in recent years that North Korea has been significantly affected by stirrings of change. For example, North Korean citizens, by acquirement of media from other countries through DVDs, USBs, radio, etc., are getting a clearer picture of the outside world and realizing the discrepancies between this picture and the one that the Kim regime has painted and repeatedly reinforced. In addition to being affected by external influences, the country has also experienced significant changes due to internal erosion and growing discontentment of its citizens, though stifled in expression for fear of repercussions. Such noticeable shifts have provided reason for many to speculate that the current structure of the regime cannot be sustained and that it is a matter of time before an era of reformation begins. Others would argue, however, that there is much evidence to believe that the current system is very much intact and sustainable, and that most North Koreans have a considerable measure of loyalty to its leader Kim Jong Un.

Whether the current regime is headed towards a breakdown or will be sustained indefinitely, it is indisputable that changes need to take place for the well being of North Korean citizens. There is abundant evidence indicating that positive changes are already in motion, and it is necessary to consider the elements that can accelerate transformation and broaden its scope. Since a major cause of recent changes has been a partial breakdown in the blockade of communication with the outside world, increased interaction and exchange is perhaps what will be the most powerful agent of further change. This can occur through exposure to the world outside the walls of the DPRK, whether through the subversive inflow of media through various technologies, or through intentional intercommunication through diplomatic engagement.

Discussions regarding engagement and/or aid, however, tend to stir up much debate because of the deeply complex web of issues related to the DPRK and its relations with other nations. For example, proposals for aid are often met with the argument that the leaders of the regime will most likely employ tactics of manipulation and deceit in order to use the aid for its other agendas instead of for its people. It is for this reason that engagement with the nation on any level is subject to scrutiny and reluctance, and most of the conversations surrounding North Korea have been highly politicized and are rarely limited to the core issue at hand.

While most of the public discourse about the DPRK has been quite sensational, focusing mostly on the latest news of nuclear threats, a volatile Kim Jong Un, or more information about human rights violations, engagement in the form of educational exchanges has rather quietly been taking place behind the scenes. The purpose of this thesis is to analyze relevant topics surrounding the issue of engagement with North Korea through educational exchange. By reviewing available literature on such exchanges, the research seeks to: one, identify the types of

educational exchanges with the DPRK that have been and are taking place and two, analyze the various concerns related to educational exchange with North Korea.

The paper will include first a discussion of concepts and classifications relevant to the topic, focusing mostly on defining education and educational exchange. This will be followed by an examination of the relevant background knowledge that is necessary to understand the complexities that affect the challenge of engagement with North Korea in general, as well as educational exchange with the nation. Background information will consist of the nation's general and educational history, the indoctrination that prominently underlies and characterizes much of the on-goings of the country, and human rights abuses in the DPRK. This overview of background information will be followed by a study of the recent changes that have been taking place in North Korea, which will play a crucial role in analyzing the benefits, drawbacks, and risks of engagement through educational exchange. Ultimately, this thesis will survey the educational exchanges that have taken place and explore the pros and cons of educational exchange for the parties involved- both perceived and potential.

The thesis will draw on various scholarly journal articles and reports, as well as both academic books and literature containing first-hand accounts, in order to address the research questions regarding educational exchange with the DPRK. Availability of sources on the topic of North Korea is limited, and sources containing specifically information about educational exchange with the country are extremely scarce. Much of the information specifically about educational exchanges with North Korea in this thesis are extracted from a book titled U.S.-DPRK Educational Exchanges: Assessment and Future Strategy, which contains a collection of essays written by various experts in the field. This thesis will therefore contribute to existing research on the topic of educational exchange by adding to the little that does exist about

educational exchange with North Korea and expanding the traditional scope of “educational exchange” to include forms of education that is beyond formal education.

2. Relevant Concepts and Classifications

2.1 Defining Education: Lifelong Learning through Informal, Non-formal, and Formal Contexts

The concept of lifelong learning is based on the interpretation of learning as a process that is weaved throughout one’s life and includes educational opportunities outside of the formal and traditional pathways. According to the Belem Framework for Action of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, lifelong learning encompasses a “cradle to grave” philosophy, and its role is crucial in addressing global educational concerns. Lifelong learning is a “conceptual framework and an organizing principle of all forms of education, based on inclusive, emancipator, humanistic and democratic values” (Confintea VI., 2010). Upheld by the Belem Framework for Action, the four pillars of learning as stated by the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century are: learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together (Confintea VI., 2010).

Incorporating into a framework of learning types of education that do not fall under the category of formal education allows for an inclusion of educational opportunities that can be valid contributors to the enhancement of a person’s well being. The additional categories of informal and non-formal learning incorporate forms of education that takes place through one’s everyday experiences and environmental influences (informal) as well as the more organized

opportunities and activities with learning objectives but take place outside of the formal education system (non-formal). There are various constraints that impede the people from a process of lifelong learning. Nonparticipation in lifelong learning opportunities can result from a range of barriers which can be classified into three different categories: *situational*, which is dependent on a person's situation at a given point in his life, *institutional*, which is related to the procedures and institutions that provide learning, and *dispositional*, which is pertinent to a person's attitudes and self perceptions (Desjardins & Rubenson, 2013).

And although the DPRK is not a UNESCO member country that holds itself accountable to such a framework, the concepts themselves are highly applicable to the country's citizens. Kawachi (2010) suggests that the people of North Korea hold deep intrinsic motivations towards lifelong learning, which can be inferred from "the emphasis on early childhood education, the Confucian work ethos, and the pervasive on-the-job training and studying that continue throughout life" (p. 40). The author also refers to the literacy rate of 99% being the result of state provision of education. Furthermore, the functions of non-formal education have been interwoven into the history of North Korea ever since it became its own nation. Examples of non-formal programs include literacy campaigns after the Japanese occupation, study groups during the war, and vocational training programs. Kawachi (2010) states that there are also many current opportunities beyond the eleven years of free compulsory education, such as training programs in government schools, vocational learning in institutions known as "attached universities," or programs at "air and correspondence" universities like the Kim Il Sung University. The DPRK's continuing education system is comprised of three types: 1) institutions for training political elites, 2) technical training institutes for the development of manpower, and

3) air and correspondence universities that aim to provide opportunities in the higher education sector (“North Korea- Nonformal..,” n.d.).

The degree of importance placed on the values and framework of lifelong learning has a significant impact on the implementation and evaluation of educational programs in all sectors. In addressing the subject of educational exchange with North Korean participants, this thesis will uphold the principles of lifelong learning and use it as a foundation for interpreting and analyzing research and regard “education” as consisting of all its various forms- informal, non-formal, and formal.

2.2 Defining Educational Exchange

A field of education that encompasses the formal, non-formal, and informal aspects of education is educational exchange. Exchange programs, broadly defined, can take on many forms, such as travel tours aimed at educating tourists about North Korea, cultural and sports exchanges with North Korean teams, and study abroad programs in the higher education sector for both university students and professors. Of the different types of exchange, an *academic* exchange can be more narrowly defined as “the transfer of people or information from one university or college to another with the explicit intent of furthering the sharing of information in a fairly open fashion; an academic exchange involves academics on both sides” (Lee & Shin, 2011, p. 12). And although other forms of exchange are valuable and possess comparable characteristics that aid purposes of engagement, this thesis will employ a definition of “educational exchange” as being academic in nature but not limited to strictly exchanges

between two universities. In other words, the exchange programs that are reviewed in this thesis will be ones that can be classified into either the non-formal or formal categories of education.

3. Background

3.1 History of Education

Before 1910, education in Korea was mostly privatized and maintained significant elements of classical Chinese education. All primary schools were private and secondary schools were initially public but were followed by private ones. However, during the period of Japanese occupation of the Korean peninsula from 1910 to 1945, Japan made many changes to the Korean education system in order to achieve its goals. Vocational and technical education programs were utilized to meet the demands for Korea to be a market for Japanese goods and also a provider of raw materials for Japanese industries (Hunter, 2008). The number of public schools greatly increased, although actual enrolment of Koreans in these schools was low and did not significantly increase until after the end of Japanese rule. By the time the period of occupation ended, fewer than 20% of the Korean people had received schooling beyond elementary school and there was widespread illiteracy (Kang, 2008).

Schools were modeled after Japanese schools, and elementary schools were referred to as *citizen schools* because they aimed to make “imperial citizens” out of Koreans. Although at first the curriculum took on a hybrid form and maintained the teaching of Korean while introducing Japanese history, culture, and language, the teaching of the Korean language was eventually completely banned. Implementation of changes to the education system occurred in phases and

the degree of imperialistic measures of change intensified with time. The Japanese government implemented policies aimed at assimilation and tried to force Koreans to speak Japanese, take Japanese names, and consider themselves Japanese. Students were not allowed to speak Korean in or out of schools and all instruction in schools was given in Japanese. However, Koreans did not recognize the new educational policy as the Japanese did and the imperialists did not achieve their intended goals (Kim & Oh, n.d.). And while it can be said that Korea experienced much development and modernization in education during the period of annexation, educational opportunities were, for the most part, not accessible or available only with the condition of compromise of national identity, culture, and/or ideology.

Lankov (2000) asserts that according to data obtained from the Japanese colonial administration, 86.2% of the Korean population had no formal education whatsoever in 1944, and of the remaining, about half (7.4%) had primary education. After the occupation ended in 1945, the Korean peninsula was divided into two parts: the South, which was occupied by the U.S. and the North, which was occupied by the Soviets. The Soviet Union, having its own agenda and interests in the country, was able to successfully influence much of the North's ideology and education system. This impact can be seen in the various campaigns, policies, reforms, and constructions within the education system that were present after liberation from Japanese colonialism. "The creation of a developed system of primary education in post-1945 North Korea was indeed a towering achievement, perhaps, one of the few genuine achievements the new Communist regime could really boast about" (Lankov, 2000, p. 61). In 1946, the DPRK launched a program to combat illiteracy, which was modeled after a similar Soviet campaign, which was very effective and the North Korea government claimed that it had achieved full literacy in 1949, for adults between 15 and 50 years of age (Lankov, 2000). And while such a

declaration may not be completely credible, other reports validate that the campaign made significant progress. Some other educational similarities between North Korea and the Soviet Union are: the structuring of the school year (beginning in September as opposed to March, like in South Korea), the curriculum, political indoctrination, militarized boarding schools, and the system of higher education (Lankov, 2000).

The years following the occupation were filled with educational reform. During the 1944-1945 school year, North Korea had 2,192 primary schools with 917,727 students taught by 8,596 teachers, but by 1949 there were 3,882 primary schools with close to 1.5 million students taught by 27,380 teachers (Kim & Kim, 2005). An even greater rate of educational expansion was seen in secondary schools, and there was also much growth in higher education as well (Kim & Kim, 2005). Starting from 1947, North Korea adopted a 5-3-3-4 education system, which included five years of primary school, three years of middle school, three years of secondary school, and four years of college/university. In addition to these schools, technical junior high schools and specialized high schools were also built for the purposes of vocational/technical education. Because the government also deemed it greatly important to develop higher education, a law was passed to establish the Kim Il Sung University in Pyongyang, as well as a teacher's college, a four to five-year college/university, and a three-year graduate school (Kim & Kim 2005). It is evident that North Korea went to great lengths to make progressive reforms in the years following the Japanese occupation for the aims of national development, and focused heavily on "anti-feudal" or "anti-imperialist" measures.

With the outbreak of the Korean War (1950-1953), however, the country experienced many changes that naturally resulted from the realities and brutalities of war. During the first year, schools were shut down and more than 850,000 students (about 50% of the entire student

population) were mobilized to support the cause either as soldiers in battle frontlines or some other capacity, in addition to educators being drafted to serve as agitators and propagandists (Kim & Kim, 2005). According to Kim & Kim (2005), there were two shifts in the communist propaganda that impacted North Korean education. One was an increased focus on patriotism and nationalism, which was expressed by the dramatization of war heroes. Another change was in the largely numbers of “Chinese volunteers” who were sent to war under the slogan “Resist America, Aid Korea.” The authors also explain that as the conflict failed to cease, the North Korean government began to consider the educational needs of its people and started preparing to reopen schools for the 1952-1953 school year, repairing school buildings and using air-raid shelters as classrooms. By the end of 1951 a total of 13,088 classrooms (including 1,935 air-raid shelters) were made available, and by the end of 1952, 54 different types of textbooks were published and many teacher training programs were carried out (Kim & Kim, 2005).

With the ending of the Korean War and the official division of the peninsula into two separate nations, North Korea faced the task of rebuilding a war-torn country and developing its own national identity. The political and economic agendas of the time naturally shaped the DPRK’s education system and the *Juche* ideology was introduced. *Juche* can be translated as a belief in “self-reliance,” which is infused with a strong nationalistic spirit. With its history of having been greatly influenced by the educational systems and goals of other nations such as China, Japan, and the Soviet Union, the first leader of North Korea, Kim Il Sung, placed a priority in instilling in the citizens a sense of pride of their own nation. Thus the 1950s in North Korea were characterized by many reforms aimed at this agenda. Kim Il Sung, in a speech “On Communist Indoctrination,” delivered six major goals: to indoctrinate in 1) the superiority of socialism and communism over capitalism, 2) the truth that new things are destined to conquer

old things, 3) eliminating individualism, harboring collectivism, 4) socialist patriotism and proletarian internationalism, 5) socialist labor, and 6) incessant revolutionary ideology (Kim & Kim, 2005).

The following decades were aimed at further refining and solidifying the *Juche* ideology. Kim Il Sung intended to model socialist values in the education system and strongly desired a free and compulsory education system, specifically a ten-year universal and compulsory education. In 1973, this system was put into effect through a law that articulated the establishment of a one-year of pre-school, four years of the people's school, and six years in the senior middle school. Revisions were also made in the higher education sector and of the 140 colleges in North Korea as of 1972, most require a four-year study but there have been some that offer five to six-year programs, depending on the major. This overall structure has been maintained to the present, although there have been some very recent reports that the North Korean education system may be considerably revised in the near future.

According to some reports, the department director of North Korea's Ministry of General Education has stated that a 12-year education system (1 year Kindergarten, 5 years Primary, 3 years Junior Secondary, 3 years Senior Secondary), which aims to equip all students with "ample knowledge, sound moral character and good health," was set to begin in April of this year and be implemented through a transition phase of three years ("Changes made to North Korean...", 2014). The article also cites other proposed reforms include: new subjects, teacher training, improvement of contents/methods/environment, and changes in tertiary education such as the inclusion of double major systems and reduction of undergraduate liberal arts programs to four years.

3.2 Indoctrination- the Unique Case of North Korea

An understanding of the DPRK requires knowledge of the principles that pilot the thoughts and motivations of the leaders and the people they govern. These principles critically shape the behaviors of the country's key decision makers and the population that supports them. Furthermore, the comprehension of such a significant factor, i.e., indoctrination, must then inform policies, strategies, and attitudes towards collaboration or any other type of engagement with the DPRK.

One of the greatest impediments to diplomatic relations with North Korea is the state's difficult-to-understand governing ideology that shapes the cultural, political, economic, and social climates of the country. The country's political temperament no longer convincingly conforms to any classification commonly named, such as "Communist" or "Stalinist." North Korea's culture has been largely shielded from the influences of the world beyond its barriers, and even the arts are controlled by the ruling political party, and this yields artificial and manufactured forms of the arts that have little to do with creativity and individual expression and much to do with the agendas of the nation's leader. Furthermore, the society operates under a caste system (*songbun*), in which careers, food consumption, marriage, geographical residence, etc. are mostly under tight control of the party.

However, it is not the citizens' volitional adherence to an ideology that has enabled the Kim family to exert such strict control over an entire nation and garner support and allegiance from them. Despite the more recent changes in the attitudes and beliefs about the regime in the minds and hearts of North Koreans, there is yet a large degree of homogeneity in their loyalty

towards the leader. External measures of force combined with an intricately designed method of indoctrination form the web of control that the North Korean rulers have rather successfully maintained for nearly 70 years. Because of such methods, it can even be argued that the country resembles and operates more like a “cult” than any defined form of political system.

In tackling the topic *thought reform*, another term for “ideological remolding” or “ideological reform”, Lifton advises against a perception of such a phenomenon as a type of “brainwashing” that is all-powerful way of achieving complete control over the human psyche (2014, p.4). And although the author investigates thought reform as it applied to the Chinese Communists, the process and techniques are relevant to other contexts as well. He states that regardless of the setting, there are two basic elements of thought reform: “*confession*, the exposure and renunciation of past and present ‘evil’; and *re-education*, the remaking of a man...” and that these elements are aimed to achieve social control and individual change (Lifton, 2014, p.5).

An institution that plays a substantial role in the DPRK’s indoctrination process and maintenance is *chochik saenghwal*, which means “organizational life”. (Lankov, 2012). Although the term is also commonly used in South Korea to refer to community life usually in the context of an organization or a workplace, *chochik saenghwal* in the DPRK embodies traits that are distinctly North Korean. It refers to “a highly formalized array of surveillance and indoctrination practices that are conducted within a set of networks, each run by a particular government-controlled ‘organization’ (*chochik*).” (Lankov, 2012, p. 194) Lankov further explains that the most significant of all functions of *chochik saenghwal* are the “mutual criticism sessions,” during which every member is required to confess, publicly, mistakes committed since

the previous session and then be criticized by another member, forming a ritual of extreme policing of the self and others (p.205).

Indoctrination is also achieved through curriculum and textual representations. It is a common practice of totalitarian states to employ tactics in the formal education system to achieve the subordination of the population, and the North Korean education system is thoroughly saturated with the agendas of its leaders. And because there is an increased intensity of the methods of inoculating people with a ruling ideology when a country perceives itself as being at war with another, Kim Jong Il created a perpetual atmosphere of international crisis and tension, encouraging citizens to be loyal to him by warning them to be vigilant against the threat of other nations (Lee, 2010). Shaping the perceptions of other nations as threatening and evil is achieved by intentionally portraying them in a particular manner through various channels. For example, school textbooks depict nations, especially the United States, as inherently evil worthy of hostility.

Indoctrination through educational material is not only accomplished by portrayals of other nations as enemies, but also by infusing subject matter content with more direct agendas, such as devotion to the state through military service and labor. A former North Korean teacher, in an interview, stated “How can you homogenize individuals with different backgrounds and personalities? It seems impossible and incorrect from an American perspective, but it would be right and acceptable from the point of view of North Korean education” (Karp, 2010, p.5). A North Korean student, also in an interview, recalled that every subject included content about Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Il, and the Workers’ Party, and even Mathematics textbooks were filled with problems with political content such as “problems about collective farms whose output

exceeds their government-stipulated plans due to the beneficial influence of the teaching of the Great Leader” (Karp, 2010, p.6).

3.3 Human Rights Issues

Since the Korean War ended in 1953 and the Korean peninsula was split into two separate nations, North Korea has been under the rule of a dictatorship in one of the most, if not the most, systematically oppressive regime(s) in the world. In the Heritage Foundation’s 2013 Index of Economic Freedom (“Index of Economic,” n.d.), which measures the degree to which individuals are able to work, produce, consume, and invest with freedom that is protected and constrained by the state, North Korea was scored the lowest at 1.5. This score is a 87.8 point difference from Hong Kong’s leading score of 89.3 and a 27 point difference from the score of the next to last country on the list (Cuba at 28.5), which is by far the widest point margin between any two countries.

A significant component of the complex issues affecting discourse on North Korea is the rampant human rights violations that are still ongoing. While the spike in numbers of visitors to Pyongyang have increased conversations and literature about the normalcy with which the daily lives of North Koreans are conducted, accounts of grievous human rights abuses continue to accumulate. One cannot turn a blind eye to either reality. It is true that there is much evidence of change, particularly in the geographic areas that foreigners are allowed access to, and many North Koreans are evidently enjoying satisfying lives and are far from resembling the perpetuated stereotypes and caricatures of the people commonly portrayed in the media. It is also true that the nation is systematically oppressive and denies many basic rights to its citizens, and

understanding that the very basic rights and freedoms of an entire population are at stake is important when considering engagement aimed at reform. In this chapter, the United Nation's "Report of the commission of inquiry on human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea" is used as a framework for categorizing the human rights violations and draws from other sources to expand on the categories.

North Korean citizens are restricted from political, social, and religious freedoms and become subject to extreme forms of punishment enforced by the state if they fail to follow its orders. The UN's Commission of Inquiry (COI) report identified nine areas in which grave violations of human rights are taking place. It lists them as:

- Violations of the right to food
 - The full range of violations associated with prison camps
 - Torture and inhuman treatment
 - Arbitrary arrest and detention
 - Discrimination, in particular in the systemic denial and violation of basic human rights and fundamental freedoms
 - Violations of the freedom of expression
 - Violations of the freedom of movement
 - Enforced disappearances, including in the form of abductions of nationals of other States
- (United Nations, 2014, p.3)

The North Korean people are denied the freedoms of expression, thought, and religion. The state maintains totally control in these areas through indoctrination, monopoly over all media, strict surveillance over the social and private lives of the citizens, and prohibition from practicing

religions. “The State considers the spread of Christianity a particularly serious threat, since it challenges ideologically the official personality cult and provides a platform for social and political organization and interaction outside the realm of the State” (United Nations, 2014, p.7). Violations of the right to food and life have resulted not simply because of famines and food shortages, but because the regime has used access to food as a means of exercising control over its citizens. Not only has distribution been discriminatory, placing priority based on the *songbun* system and those that the leaders believe are more important to the survival of the regime, but food has also been confiscated based on the same standards. There is still widespread hunger and malnutrition and reports of deaths due to starvation continue to accumulate.

The COI states the following regarding political prison camps

(kwan-li-so):

Although the authorities in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea deny the existence of the camps, this claim was shown to be false by the testimonies of former guards, inmates, and neighbours. Satellite imagery proves that the camp system continues to be in operation. While the number of political prison camps and inmates has decreased owing to deaths and some releases, it is estimated that between 80,000 and 120,000 political prisoners are currently detained in four large political prison camps (United Nations, 2014).

The Committee for Human Rights in North Korea reported, in 2012, that the total number of detainees being in the range of 150,000 to 200,000 (Hawk, 2012). Those that are exiled to such camps include those suspected of “wrong-doing, wrong-thinking, wrong-knowledge, wrong-association, or wrong-class-background” (Hawk p. 25). The inmates are those who either can be

classified under one of such categories, or those who have been perceived or suspected to be, and up to three generations of their extended families can be imprisoned as well.

In the camps, those incarcerated have been subject to “deliberate starvation, forced labour, executions, torture, rape, and the denial of reproductive rights enforced through punishment, forced abortion and infanticide” (United Nations, 2014, p. 12). The conditions of such camps are heinous and punishments include difficult labor in mining, timber-cutting, farming, etc. and prisoners must endure semi-starvation (Hawk, 2012, p.27).

North Koreans are not granted freedom of movement and each citizen’s place of residence depends on the state’s designation based mostly on *songbun*. Travel is also completely banned for ordinary citizens. However, some risk severe consequences by leaving the country. Motivated by the need to escape dire conditions or the desire to pursue better life opportunities, tens of thousands of North Koreans flee the country by crossing the border every year (“Q&A: North Korea’s,” 2013), despite the possible repercussions which include torture, starvation, incarceration, and/or execution. It has been reported, however, that Kim Jong Un has implemented tighter controls of the country’s borders since taking office, leading to a significant reduction in defection. For North Korean refugees, defection and resettlement often mark the beginning of a host of adversities which include, but are not limited to, harsh discrimination, psychological/health problems, and exploitation. Once crossing the border into China, many refugees seek to flee without detection into a country in Southeast Asia, where they can hence be deported to a country of resettlement instead of being forcibly repatriated back to North Korea. Most North Koreans that make it this far hope to resettle in South Korea, where they hope to be welcomed by South Koreans and start an entirely new life with freedoms they were previously denied. Once resettling in South Korea, North Korean defectors experience both the benefits of

resettling in South Korea and also the unexpected challenges that significantly damage the quality of life. They often face incredibly harsh circumstances as a result of various factors such as the refugees' backgrounds, South Korean culture and societal structure, exploitation, etc.

There are also many challenges that particularly affect defector youth largely because of their past experiences in the impoverished and oppressive regime they fled. In South Korea, there are “alternative schools” for defector youth and most who attend these schools have had very little education from their homeland because they were forced into labor or had to give up schooling in order to search for food and energy resources. Some were barely even able to eat a meal a day by scrounging for plant roots in the woods. According to the principal of a school for defector youth in South Korea, about 60% develop anemia and/or diabetes even after they begin to eat three meals a day, because their bodies are used to consuming only one meal per day (Chun, 2013). In North Korea, they were taught not to ask questions or make decisions for themselves, and some cannot read, although they are in their late teens. Even after settling in South Korea, it is common for children to not attend school because of problems at home, such as needing to care for a physically or psychologically ill parent. Many have experienced or witnessed traumatic events, such as seeing fellow countrymen be openly shot to death for attempting to flee the country, and their trauma is relived when hearing news of someone they know being detained in China after trying to escape the DPRK. These adolescents have undergone immense trauma and continue to experience unimaginable psychological distress.

The resettlement challenges that North Korean defectors experience are not limited to those who resettle in South Korea. Their trek out of North Korea involves crossing the border into China. There, they must remain anonymous because they risk repatriation if caught and are often subject to exploitation in China. The tens of thousands of defectors who reside in China do

so without official government-recognized status. This means that the children of North Korean refugees, as well as the children born from relationships between a North Korean mother and a Chinese father, become what are known as “stateless children.” These children do not have any legal access to education. According to the North Korean Refugees Foundation, about 68.7% of defectors have been women (“Why are the Majority,” 2013) and of the women who defect into China, 70-80% are trafficked into forced marriages, commercial sex exploitation, and exploitative labor (“Those Who Flee...,” n.d.). These women do not have access to social services because they are not legally recognized as refugees by the Chinese government. And because of this, the UNHCR cannot provide refugee aid to them. After defecting to China, North Koreans either resettle there or in another country. Approximately 30,000-50,000 have resettled in China, 24,000 in South Korea (“Liberty in North Korea,” n.d.). The U.S. admitted 122 refugees between 2004 and 2011 (“North Korean Defectors,” n.d.).

Once resettling in their new host countries, defectors experience vastly different processes of resettlement, depending on the location. Most of the documented literature about North Korean defectors is related to the experiences of refugees in China or South Korea. The U.S. is also another nation that has received North Korean refugees, but has taken in one of the fewest numbers of refugees, as compared with other nations. Resettlement in the U.S. also inevitably results in certain hardships that are specific to the locale and its political, societal, cultural structures. Educational opportunities, or the lack thereof, also play an important role in the process of adaptation in a new society vastly different from that of the defectors’ former homes. The combination of these aforementioned factors produces rather specific and unique adversities that deserve attention and assistance, in any place of resettlement.

According to “North Korea defectors...” (2013), overcoming discrimination is often the biggest obstacle for the refugees and “discrimination at the hands of South Koreans goes deeper than just different accents,” because “North Koreans are looked down upon and distrusted because of their association with the regime in Pyongyang.” (“North Korea defectors,” 2013). In a 1997 survey of North Korean defectors, 60% stated that the attitudes of South Koreans towards North Korean defectors were unfriendly and/or hostile, according to the National Institute for Reunification (“South Koreans,” 1997). It seems that a combination of this apathy (and at times hostility), discrimination, and structural characteristics present in South Korea may produce circumstances and a quality of life that prove to be extremely challenging for defectors. The issue of defection is an important one in considering North Korea’s human rights issues not only because of the conditions inside the country that are causing people to flee, but also because although defectors have left the country of oppression they desperately wanted to escape, many face grave challenges to their well-being in their new host countries.

With the establishment and findings of the UN Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in North Korea, more attention has been placed on human rights issues in North Korea. The commission has recommended that the situation be referred to the International Criminal Court, to which the North Korean leadership has not responded favorably and continues to deny that there is truth in the findings. The defense of human rights for North Koreans needs to be a main objective in developing policies and in establishing relationships with the DPRK.

4. Evidence of Change

There is no denying that the many concerns related to the current situation in North Korea contribute to a rather dark picture of despicable abuses of fundamental rights and liberties that all people should possess. The leaders of the country have been successful in maintaining a high degree of control over virtually all main aspects of life that dictate a person's well-being. However, it would be mistaken to turn our eyes away from the transformative elements that do in fact exist, and are in the works. It is not only dehumanizing for a regime to fail to recognize the basic civil liberties of its citizens, but also dehumanizing for the global community to perceive them as merely indoctrinated automatons or victims of abuse without agency and capacity for positive change. This chapter will investigate the changes that have apparently been taking effect within the country.

4.1 Political

When Kim Jong Il died in December of 2011, his youngest son Kim Jong Un became his successor, suddenly spawning a new and unpredictable era for North Korea. With what seemed to be a deliberate political strategy to quickly gain the trust and allegiance of a nation in grief over the passing of their "Supreme Leader", Kim Jong Un was presented to the public as a figure reminiscent of the late Kim Il Sung in appearance and personality. He was dressed and styled much like his grandfather and characterized in the media as a wise and compassionate leader.

However, this impression of the new Supreme Leader did not last long, as he deposed most of the nation's top officials that had served under his father's command in a seemingly erratic manner. Circulations of rumors regarding the dismissals added to speculations of Kim Jong Un as a much more merciless ruler than his father and/or grandfather, and he sent global

ripples of shock when it was openly reported that Chang Song-taek, his uncle by marriage to Kim Jong Il's sister, was executed for reasons that remain unclear. Prior to Kim Jong Un's ascension to power, Chang had been considered to be the most powerful official in the DPRK and it is believed that he had played a key role in the 2012 purge of the military command (Lankov, 2015). What is particularly striking about this incident is that this revealed ruthlessness of Kim Jong Un's character departs greatly from those of his predecessors. "This large family has had its share of issues... nonetheless, until the death of Chang it was thought that a Kim does not kill another Kim" (Lankov, 2015, p. 155).

4.2 Cultural and Ideological Shifts Resulting from a Changing Economy and Communications Pathways

The effects of the cult of personality, that the North Korean leadership has depended largely upon to exert its control over the people, has been dwindling with time and as the dictatorship has been passed onto a second, and now third, successor after the passing of the "Great Leader" and "Eternal President" in 1994. To the younger generation, this first great leader is not someone they have seen and remember, but have been taught to be loyal to. And while some claim admiration for him, many do so because they do not want to lose their standing in the state-imposed *songbun* caste system (Park, 2014). The *Jangmadang* (market) generation is the younger generation in North Korea that will inevitably replace a significant portion of the nation's adult population. It is a generation that has been significantly affected by marketization and has internalized much less of a degree of allegiance to the lineage of the Kim family rulers than previous ones.

“‘Communist,’ and ‘collectivized’ are utterly outdated labels for a North Korean economy that now heavily relies on thriving, person-to-person market exchanges in which individuals buy and sell private property for the purpose of generating profit” (Tudor & Pearson, 2015, p.15), and private market activity comprises of up to 80% of family income (Park, 2014). This kind of participation in markets has led to shifts in the dominant ideologies and it is evident that many North Koreans now value individualism and capitalism to a greater degree than in the past.

Through the information obtained from surveys of defectors in both China and South Korea, Haggard and Noland have found that the marketization of the North Korean economy can be understood as “a by-product of state failure rather than of conscious reform” and that those who participate in private markets “not only harbor more negative attitudes toward the regime than the general populace but also are more willing to communicate their dissenting views to others.” (Haggard & Noland, 2011b, p. xii) The regime has not been able to provide for its citizens or maintain strict control over the markets, and perceptions are changing through the products that North Koreans are coming into contact with through these markets.

Modern communications technology has become another channel for correspondence with the outside world, and the use of mobile telephones, internet, and radio has become much more commonplace in recent years. By the year 2003, there were about 20,000 subscribers of a mobile service network, but cell phones were banned by the government in 2004 (Tudor & Pearson, 2015). However, with the establishment of a new cellular network, Koryolink, in 2008, the use of mobile phones began to skyrocket and by 2013, there were a reported two million subscribers of the network (Tudor & Pearson, 2015). Although the legal sales of radios and televisions in the DPRK consist of those with only access to preset North Korean channels,

foreign radios have made their way into the black markets. And although radios aren't as preferred as TVs as sources of entertainment, radio content is considered the medium that is most reliable and informative (Tudor & Pearson, 2015). There are major radio stations, both AM and FM, that receive broadcasts from outside the country and televisions can often be adjusted to receive major South Korean station programming (Kawachi, 2010) and millions of North Korean citizens listen to them.

North Koreans have also been exposed to the cultures of other countries through the sources of media sold through black markets and often watch imported DVDs and other media formats. These platforms have become accessible for a significant portion of the population, which is growing in number, despite the regime's attempts to keep them out of the reach of the North Korean people. "The private market has provided more than food and clothing — it has also provided TVs, bootleg South Korean movies and K-pop videos, USBs and DVDs. As a girl in North Korea, I saw "Titanic," "Cinderella," "Pretty Woman" and "Snow White" — not to mention WWE wrestling." (Park, 2014). For many, this exposure to outside media not only generates shifts of perceptions of the outside world, but also creates desires to attain what is accessible in other countries. Brewing dissatisfaction and doubts amongst members of the North Korean society, even amongst some members of the elite class that are well provided for, is owed much to the growing awareness of a world outside of the country.

4.3 Possible Trajectories

The outlook for the future of the North Korean regime is debatable, and experts have proposed multiple possibilities that are not all mutually exclusive. For example, one potential

outcome, the collapse of the regime, can be followed by another such as the reunification of the two Koreas. This section will explore multiple elements of possible pathways.

One component is the possibility of collapse. The previously discussed changes within North Korea as well as other evidences point towards the instability of the current system and call into question its sustainability. Some believe that a sustaining of the regime was more likely in the past when the influence of regimentation was evidently strong and durable, but that with the more recent reports of changes and continued deterioration within the country, it seems more reasonable to conclude that the nation's governing structure is not sustainable as it is. The potential of collapse depends largely on the state of the economy, which has been in a process of transition. David Kang, in the economy section of "North Korea, a country study," states that "although it is tempting to predict that the regime- and the economy- will collapse in the near future, prudence cautions against any predictions about prospects." (Kang, 2008, p. 178). Kang (2008) also states that although the former economic structure no longer exists, North Korea has yet to fully embrace market capitalism and that as more information from outside the country has been penetrating the country, market signals are starting to spread throughout the economy. The author states that this will surely have a transformative effect on the nation, although how soon this will occur is uncertain.

Another is the preservation of the regime through the successful continuation of its restrictive rule. Tudor and Pearson (2015) state that many have predicted collapse and reunification for decades, but have witnessed the continuation of the regime, and that the DPRK's geopolitical environment is well-balanced and political control is still intact, meeting with ruthlessness any challenges or posed threats. They further argue that the rising capitalist class has mostly been seeking to become a part of the elite through marriage and business ties

instead of undermining it (Tudor and Pearson, 2015). The authors, like many others, predict that a gradual opening up is the most likely of scenarios for the country.

A gradual reform, perhaps one that is similar to that of China, is a third possible component of North Korea's future. With the mounting evidence of an increase in changes that reflect an "opening up" of the country, one might anticipate a continuation of this process towards an open-door policy. Although the intentions behind actions that appear to signify a softening are questionable and critics of engagement argue that interactions only equip the regime to further its self-serving agendas, it is undeniable that reform simultaneously happens as well, though it may be far from expeditious. Additionally, a significantly decisive factor in the future of the state of North Korea is the support of other nations, or the backing of its closest ally, China. China's relationship with the DPRK has also been in transition, particularly because of increased international pressures, and China is no longer as strong a supporter to North Korea as it once was.

Another possibility that can come about with or without regime collapse is reunification with South Korea. Many that predict a reunification also hope that a one like that of East and West Germany will take place. There are hopes that a successful and peaceful reunification of the two Koreas will happen in the future, despite the extreme differences between the two nations, and this might be achievable while there is still a sense of oneness, or common nationality, for some. However, while this sentiment may still currently be present for both North and South Koreans, it will likely cease to exist for future generations as the history of a unified peninsula becomes a more distant past with the passage of time. The more common perception of reunification seems to be one that views it as being too great an economically and socially damaging feat to pursue.

Considering the potential impending trajectories of the DPRK, there appears to be only one conclusive element that is highly probable in all possible pathways, even in the most rigid of hypotheses: that significant transformation is inevitable. And assuming that the stirrings for major changes have been occurring within the DPRK and that reconstruction resulting from incremental change, deliberate reunification, or unintended collapse of some form is in its future, it is important to consider the needs of the country and the challenges it will face when rebuilding a system that has experienced decades of detachment from the worldwide network of nations, industries, media, technologies, economies, etc. Once the DPRK develops an open-door policy, it will undoubtedly need to integrate itself into the global community and become a part of its systems. To survive and develop within this network, North Korea will need to become politically, economically, and environmentally sustainable. And whether the goal is market competition, agricultural development, or any other progressive task, education will naturally be the key to achieving the desired goals. It will be through the education system and other educational programs that people will learn technologies and skills, be vocationally trained, and become informed citizens. It is for this reason that educational exchange is significantly relevant to North Korea issues not only in the present day, but will also greatly impact them in the future.

5. Educational Exchanges with the DPRK

Important changes have unquestionably been taking place in the country of North Korea. However, the DPRK has yet to achieve the kind of significant reform that would satisfactorily address the needs of the population or bring accountability to the leadership in control of the well-being of the citizenry. The different opinions on engagement with the DPRK are many and

one's stance on the issue will largely depend on his views of the topics mentioned in previous chapters. For example, if he believes North Koreans to be indoctrinated to a degree as to leave them without much capacity for change of ideology, he is likely to hold an anti-engagement perspective because from that perspective, the risks may outweigh the possible advantages. The issue of engagement is incredibly complex because of the many factors involved and particularly because there is such a vast void in the global community's comprehension of the country, as a result of it having been in isolation for close to 70 years. The opinions of experts will be referenced to address some of the relevant issues that should inform attitudes towards engaging with the DPRK, which will in turn affect postures towards educational exchanges with the country.

5.1 The Issue of Engagement

International responses to the challenges and threats that the DPRK has posed have included various types of sanctions such as travel bans and asset freezes to prevent the exports of arms of certain goods and cutting off access to financial systems. The effectiveness of such moves is debatable. Although there is some evidence that there were economic effects of sanctions in the past, they have not greatly deterred the regime from making bold moves such as launching its first nuclear device test or sinking the South Korean navy ship *Cheonan* (Haggard & Noland 2011a). Sanctions have apparently not been persuasive enough to contribute to any changes in the regime's fidelity to its agendas or genuine shifts in its postures towards diplomacy with other nations. They can also push the country further into isolation and worsen relationships

between countries. Recommending U.S. re-engagement and diplomatic leadership, Hazel Smith states:

“The North Korean government has the primary responsibility under international law to ensure that citizens are treated fairly and humanely. International organizations, states and non-governmental organizations are right to insist on denuclearization by the North Korean government and morally correct to support a transformation to peace and freedom but, in the end, it is the twenty-four million population of North Korea that will effect that change” (2015, p.332)

If it is not the pressures from other nations that will ultimately bring about transformation in the DPRK but rather the gradual changes from within, it is essential to aid in the development of tools to be the agents of change themselves. And in the context of education, experiences of educational exchange would provide valuable opportunities for increasing an understanding of one another as well as expanding knowledge and skills necessary for gradual change. Furthermore, exposure to new knowledge and cultures cannot leave the participants untouched, as in-person encounters have played an important part in breaking down personal biases and mistaken beliefs on both ends, which in turn support the DPRK’s process of opening itself up to the rest of the world.

5.2 Motivations for Educational Exchange

“Of all the joint ventures in which we might engage, the most productive, in my view, is educational exchange. I have always had great difficulty-... in trying to find the words that would persuasively explain that educational exchange is not merely one of those nice

but marginal activities in which we engage in international affairs, but rather, from the standpoint of future world peace and order, probably the most important and potentially rewarding of our foreign-policy activities” - J. William Fulbright

The common motivations for participants of educational exchange with North Korea include, but are not limited to, humanitarian concern, bridge-building, and research/professional advancement (Lee & Shin, 2011). Those concerned with the humanitarian aspect of working with North Korea are driven by the desire to help alleviate the hardships that afflict many in the country because of poor conditions of living. They aim to help the cause by sharing knowledge and skills to equip the North Koreans with the means to improve living conditions. The goal of bridge-building is to foster relationships that will prevent the dehumanization of the “other” and contribute to the development of positive outcomes (Lee & Shin, 2011). The practitioners who hold such a view believe that knowledge sharing programs facilitate the country’s entry into better relations with the global community (Lee & Shin, 2011). This knowledge sharing can also be pursued for the purpose of the training and personal advancement of the North Koreans involved in the exchange (Lee & Shin, 2011). The DPRK is also motivated by the desire for research and professional development, which is evident in the fields of interest for educational exchange. Exchanges have been concentrated in the fields of international law and business, agriculture, medicine, energy, and the English language (Park, 2011).

5.3 Survey of Educational Exchanges

In summarizing the typology of exchange programs with the DPRK, Randall (2011) lists the following types for programs outside the country:

- University degree program
- Formal non-degree university study
- In-depth training programs
- Practical training
- Specialized study tour
- Familiarization study tour

and inside the country:

- Faculty at DPRK universities
- Teachers resident in DPRK-specialized programs
- Project training or joint installation of equipment or facilities renovation
- One-off lecture or workshop
- Normal technical project visits

While the following is by no means a comprehensive overview, it aims to highlight some of these different types of exchange programs that have taken place both within and outside of North Korea.

The Pyongyang Project was launched in 2009 by two Americans who began facilitating exchange programs for students from countries such as the U.S., UK, Canada, and others. The organization began putting together study tours that focused on cultural and academic exchange, and have made available both open programs, which are open to all, and independent programs,

which are private and highly educational. Their website (www.pyongyangproject.org) states that their programs “mix adventure tourism with education and person-to-person exchange for an in-depth experience in the DPRK”. The Pyongyang Project has maintained its diplomatic and apolitical stance and operates by a code of conduct: dignity and understanding, inclusivity, humanitarian imperative, fiscal transparency, and solution-based thinking.

The Choson Exchange, based in Beijing and Singapore, is a Singapore-registered non-profit organization focusing on economic policy, business, and legal training for young North Koreans. The programs offered are related to topics of economic strategy, fiscal policy, and financial sector development. The Choson Exchange also releases various research reports related to these subjects and aims to support young North Korean professionals in the finance/business sectors through various programs and legal knowledge-sharing.

At a more academic level, a noteworthy exchange program is the Knowledge Partnership Program (KPP), the DPRK’s only academic exchange program with North America (Hopper, 2013). It has taken place at the University of British Columbia (UBC), in which six university professors from three different universities in the DPRK spent a term at the Vancouver campus taking courses and living in the student dormitories- all under close supervision. This group of North Korean professors attended regular classes (in English, international trade, finance, economics) and at times took field trips to learn more about business in Canada. “Little is known of the program and details are carefully guarded from public scrutiny, but just as a U.S. ping pong team helped open Maoist China to the West, proponents contend that one of UBC’s most obscure international programs may hold the key to opening the borders of one of the world’s most closed countries” (Hopper, 2013). In Hopper’s article, the head of UBC’s Institute for Asian Research, Paul Evans, is quoted as saying, “The desire is not to prop up a regime in North

Korea, but to open up a country” and it is also mentioned that Kyung-Ae Park, the founder of the program and the director of UBC’s Center for Korean Research, was careful to remain strictly apolitical and steer around words like “reform” and “capitalism.” The responses of both Evans and Park indicate a policy of engagement while maintaining an apolitical position.

The Asia Foundation (TAF), with the aim of strengthening North Korea’s capacity for improving living standards and encouraging an open relationship with the international community, has worked to facilitate exchange between the DPRK and the United States and Asia (Reed, 2011). The content of the programs have primarily focused on agriculture, international legal issues, and English teaching methodologies and most of TAF’s efforts towards the exchanges have been placed on organizing visits in the US, but delegations of the DPRK have at times traveled to China and other Asian countries as well for the programs (Reed, 2011). TAF, along with the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), have facilitated a series of exchanges, in the last decade, between Cornell University and the DPRK. These interactions have involved scientists and administrators from both sides and consisted of exchanges related to mostly agricultural sciences (Haldeman, 2011).

One of the most groundbreaking exchange endeavors has taken place through the Pyongyang University of Science and Technology (PUST), which was the first privately funded university in North Korea. Its founding and financing have been made possible by people and associations outside the country, but the planning took place from sources from both Koreas and contributors from other nations, in particular China and the U.S. In 2001, an agreement was reached and formally signed between the Northeast Asia Foundation for Education and Culture and the North Korean education ministry to build the university. The school offers both undergraduate and graduate programs, but focuses on graduate degrees. BS and Ph.D. degrees

are offered in the areas of Electrical and Computer Engineering, Agriculture and Life Sciences, and International Finance and Management. All lectures are conducted in English and the faculty is comprised of all foreign professors who are there on a volunteer basis.

5.4 Relevant Concerns

In addressing the elements for success of educational exchanges with the DPRK, Reed (2011) states that there needs to be clearly defined and agreed-upon purposes for the programs and prevent cases in which the objectives differ and frustrations and misunderstandings occur. He also states that there needs to be initiative on the North Korean side and that successful exchanges are built on sustained institutional interaction, which builds a relationship between them (Reed, 2011). He also states that building trust, although difficult to accomplish with the DPRK because of a frequently occurring lack of transparency in interactions, is a crucial contribution to the success of exchange programs. Just as much as exchange participants of other nations may be suspicious of the motivations of North Koreans, they too can be distrustful of their exchange counterparts.

Using a survey of 66 cases of academic exchange programs at the non-governmental level, Kyung-Ae Park addresses observations and analyses based on these cases in “Lessons From North Korea’s Previous Exchange Programs” (Park, 2011). She states that the increase in the number of visits for exchange purposes is indicative of North Korea coming out of isolation from the international community and attributes the cause of simultaneous slowdowns and cancellations to the leadership’s desire to minimize exposure and prevent defections (Park, 2011). Park also stipulates, however, that this does not necessarily reflect deliberate effort on the part of

the regime to comprehensively open up the country and points out that the patterns of engagement reflect a rather careful selection of exchanges in the fields of agriculture, energy, medicine, and business- aimed to bring about political and economic gains to bolster the legitimacy of the regime (Park, 2011). Contributing to the legitimacy of an oppressive regime is obviously not what those who engage in educational exchange with North Korea are aiming for, but many are willing to participate in this less-than-ideal situation if it means that there are economic gains and the progression towards a better quality of life in store for the people of North Korea.

There is also the concern, however, that the knowledge/skills gained through exchanges will be used for agendas such as the development of nuclear arms. It is here that we find our biggest concern for educational exchange: the risk that these exchanges will ultimately aid agendas that are either counterproductive to the well-being and interests of the North Korean people or pose grave threats to the global community. It is a risk serious enough to consider a complete severing of ties of educational exchange with the DPRK. However, if proceeding with caution, the benefits of further exchange are many, and engagement in the form of educational exchange does not have to be an all-or-nothing endeavor. Just as North Korea has been cautious and selective about the types of knowledge sharing it has taken part in, the international community can also, with discretion, continue to build relationships with practitioners in North Korea.

Some would also argue that the types of educational exchanges that have taken place over the years have only been limited to the elite- those that have been and will continue to be supportive of the regime either because they possess genuine attitudes of loyalty, or out of fear of losing the standard of living they currently have the privilege to. The argument here is that

knowledge sharing, then, only benefits the top tier of North Korean society without trickling down to those that the exchanges are intended to ultimately help. This idea poses one way of looking at the process of reform in the DPRK- that genuine transformation will only be possible in a bottom-up direction. This view rejects the notion that reform in North Korea is likely to take a top-down form. While no one knows if/when or how significant changes will occur, the possibility that there is a very good potential for top-down reform needs to be considered. The elite in Pyongyang are perhaps those currently in the best position to experience a genuine change of thought and ideology. They are the ones with access to the educational opportunities that includes the most exposure to the outside world. For example, the groundbreaking private university PUST, where most members of the faculty are professors from foreign nations, is accessible only to a select group of students in the upper echelon of North Korean society. Most academic exchanges for which North Korean participants travel outside of their country involve scholars and academics in various fields that will be able to exert the most influence in their respective fields of study. Moreover, it is the elite that will occupy positions of power and influence over the governance of the nation.

The positive potential of educational exchange can also be argued from a comparative standpoint. Feigenbaum (2001), emphasizing the importance of reciprocal understanding of cultures in fostering international cooperation and commerce, references educational exchange programs that took place following the Second World War that were initiated by Senator Fulbright. He states that this and other exchange programs contributed to a “genuine opening up of the participating countries” and “had a beneficial economic impact” (Feigenbaum, 2001, p. 27). Many educational exchanges with China and the U.S. have taken place over the years, and in an analysis of U.S.-China educational exchange programs, Li (2007) refers to educational

exchange as being “most effective in spreading knowledge and ideas across the civilizational divide” (p.2). This conceptualization of educational exchange as a necessary and beneficial factor in diplomatic relations with other cultures and nations has been developed and strengthened over the years, even in the midst of serious doubts about the value of exchanges because of risks to national security. For example, when the Smith-Mundt Act (The U.S. Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948) was first introduced, there was strong opposition in Congress and opponents argued that it would expose Americans to communists and agitators (Bu, 1999). However, after joint investigations by the House and Senate were conducted to gather information about the dangers of Soviet propaganda as well as about educational exchange programs, it was decided that educational exchange was to become an integral part of the nation’s foreign affairs (Bu, 1999). Amidst controversies and potential threats, educational exchange as a means of improving foreign relations and mutual benefit has maintained legitimacy throughout the course of history. As Evan M. Ryan, Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) states, “International education is crucial to building relationships between people and communities in the United States and around the world. It is through these relationships that together we can solve global challenges...”

Educational exchange with North Korea is not only a necessity for encouraging reform in the present but will also be of utmost importance to the country once it completely opens up to the rest of the world. It is at this time that the country will be in need of much assistance and have greater opportunities for engagement and exchange with other nations than any other time in its history. Having access to new information and technologies will undoubtedly fuel an eagerness for development and desire for access to new knowledge, for which educational exchange will play a substantial role.

Conclusion

“Information and education are powerful forces in support of peace. Just as war begins in the minds of men, so does peace.” – Dwight D. Eisenhower (Remarks at Ceremony Marking the Tenth Anniversary of the Smith-Mundt Act)

After coming into contact with numerous resources for developing an understanding of North Korea- through films, documentaries, articles, books, and conversations with people involved in some line of work in connection with North Korea, I was left with the impression that many representations of the state unintentionally contribute to the formation and solidification of imbalanced perspectives. These portrayals focus mostly on either the extremely dark attributes of the regime or the more normal attributes of its society in an effort to “humanize” the people of the DPRK while ignoring or even denying the existence of the problems of the nation. Furthermore, not only have the three Kim leaders been caricatured as eccentric by various media outlets and subjected to ridicule, but the North Korean people too have often been depicted as in a dehumanizing manner- often as brainwashed automatons or helpless victims incapable of bringing about change.

The skewed perceptions that people commonly have about the DPRK are activated by natural human inclinations. It is a part of human nature to be drawn to news that is shocking and sensational, to categorize and stereotype, to find humor in things that are beyond what we as a society deem to be “normal”, and also to be outraged by injustice and moved to compassion for victims of oppression and abuse. And North Korea issues perhaps draw out these capacities at a maximal level because the conditions are themselves extreme and severe. After learning about

the horrific conditions of political prison camps and various human rights violations, it is difficult not to be disturbed and difficult not to gravitate towards a perception of the enforcers of such injustices as villainous.

To truly humanize a person or group, however, is to take into account all aspects of their humanity- including traits such as the potential to be overtaken by an unhealthy ideology, the possibility of taking an active part in perpetuating the oppression of others, the need for compassion and aid when living with difficult life circumstances, the desire for ordinary enjoyment, affinity for societal trends, fashion, and technology, etc. In a book about his experiences teaching students in Pyongyang during the course of two years, Stewart Lone states, “Who, for example, would have thought, in a society routinely dismissed as reclusive and repressive, that schoolchildren learn about Ireland, about Maoris and their customs, have discussions on being creative and on animal rights, that young boys idolize a Barcelona footballer, and that a favourite joke concerns a North Korean army deserter?” (2013). It is important that our perception of North Koreans is balanced, that it takes into account all of the realities without detracting from the humanity of the people.

And one of the most defining characteristics of North Koreans, just like all other human beings, is that they too are intrinsically social in nature. Virtually all of the problems in the DPRK have been exacerbated by their position of isolationism. It is through isolation from the rest of the world that the Kim family of rulers has been able to exert its influence and system of oppression without being held accountable for their decisions. It is through isolation that beliefs in a religion-like ideology were strengthened and given the means of tremendous influence on a population. Based on such history, one might object that perhaps the leaders of the country are not at all concerned with international relations, and that efforts to engage with the pursuit of

ultimately helping to bring about a transformation in thought may be in vain. The reality is, however, that the North Korean leadership has actually shown significant interest in the global community's attitudes and opinions of the country. Given this interest in addition to recent signs of the stirrings of transformation already being in the works, continued and increased engagement, pursued with caution and achieved through various types of exchanges such as educational exchange programs, appears to be the optimal course of action for helping to bring about meaningful change in the DPRK.

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