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"Everyday Politics" in North Korea

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This article examines daily life in North Korea from the perspectives of recent North Korean defectors from a variety of social backgrounds. The following three questions are explored: how does the individual live from day to day; what tactics does one continuously evolve in order to survive; and, most importantly, what theoretical and methodological frameworks are available to explain the strategies for survival employed by the country's population? Employing the concept of "everyday politics," this study argues that state-society interactions once constrained by a highly centralized regime, characterized by an emphasis on political and moral motivations, have yielded to more fragmented and autonomous systems strengthened by realization of individual self-interest. In the process, the state and society have reshaped patterns of interaction regarding information flow structures, rules of behavior, and motivations. That is, both the state and society seek coexistence, and the "market" spontaneously developed by the population functions as a shock absorber.

Introduction

During the hundredth anniversary of Kim Il Sung's birthday on April 15, 2012, Kim Jong Un, who was appointed as the vice chairman of the party's Central Military Commission in 2010 and came to power after the death of his father Kim Jong Il in 2011, emphasized that "the great plan for the future and eventual success lie on the independent, military-oriented and socialist path that the Great Comrade Kim Il Sung and Comrade Kim Jong Il has paved for us.… We are responsible for realizing Comrade Kim Jong Il's effort in building an economically-strong state and improving the lives of ordinary people" (Yonhapnews 2012). However, no detailed policies and strategies were mentioned in the long speech, which contained 6,627 words.

A recent defector who participated in the interviews for this research argued that North Korean society has transformed from a state, controlled by force, coercion, and state ideology, to a living space in which an individual can trust only himself or herself. In this process, North Korean society is witnessing increasing disparity between those who have political power and economic wealth and those who do not, and a deepening conflict between the generations who experienced the Korean War (1950–53) and extreme collectivism firsthand, and the younger generation, which has learned consumerism through expansion of the market. The North Korean media that once celebrated "socialist heroes" now warn against "antisocialist deviation." What are the implications of such social changes for state-society relations in North Korea? This article explores

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this question based upon the everyday life experience reported by recent North Korean residents who have managed to leave North Korea.

In social sciences methodology, microscopic research on "everyday life" allows researchers to better understand subjects' daily lives and living spaces, their interactions within such spaces, and the structures that define the ordinary lives of diverse people through collecting specific experiences of individuals (Bovone 1989; Elias 1987; Heller 1984; H. Park 2000; Scott 1985, 1992). In this regard, two recent works on Burma/Myanmar employing the concept "everyday life," or "a politics of the daily" are notable (Prasse-Freeman 2012; Thawnghmung 2011). An "everyday life" indicates a livelihood of an undistinguished individual or a collective existence in a society, which repeats over a long period of time without a special event. It also indicates "repetition of behavior which sometimes occurs unconsciously, as if there is no sense of purpose" (Cho and Yim 2008, 7). Through this perspective, a study of "everyday life" can be identified as research on "history from the bottom" (Cho and Yim 2008, 6–8; Hong 2008).

Many studies have focused on North Korea as a socialist state and the fact that its political system is based on highly structured totalitarianism, where collective rules and political and ideological solidarity are emphasized over individual activities (Armstrong 2011; Chen and Lee 2007; Eberstadt 1999; Mazarr 2007; Scobell 2005). As a result, researchers have given undue value to macro-discourses, such as the North Korean power structure, state-produced ideology, and foreign policy and security issues. However, this methodology tends to result in overemphasizing the North Korean structure of power and methods of governance, and thus neglects the existing studies of the ordinary people in North Korea (Demick 2009; K. Park and Hong 2009).

There are twenty-two million North Koreans, and sometimes they obey the state and sometimes they deviate or resist state orders to survive on a daily basis. Whether their motivations are political or economic, they engage in an intricate game of survival on a daily basis, employing strategies of obedience, deviation, resistance, and compromise. This research will therefore explore the "everyday politics" of the population in North Korea with elaborations of "how they [North Koreans] behave, how they define their world, what is important to them, why they say and do what they do, and what structural and contextual features influence their thought, behaviors, and relationships" (LeCompte et al. 1999, 85).

"Everyday Politics" in the North Korean Context

A central concept used to explain a socialist society is the "routinization of politics" (J. Kim 2009; K. Kim 2008). A socialist state induces the general populace to internalize ideology, propaganda, and standards, while compelling such standards of behavior to all the surrounding organizations and networks as well as to itself. In order to realize the "routinization of politics," the state mobilizes various mechanisms other than oppression and punishment, such as mass games, large-scale mass ceremonies, arts, and sports (Myers 2010). Through these collective rituals, the people in the socialist states accept commitment to the group and loyalty to the state as absolute truths. An ideology of commonality, with commitment, solidarity, and loyalty as central virtues, is formed between the state and the people.

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In order to ensure dominance of state ideology, state and bureaucratic organizations become larger, penetrating deeply into ordinary residents' everyday lives. Through the "routinization of politics," every aspect of people's lives is colonized by the state and its bureaucrats (Habermas 1984; Lefebvre [1947] 1991). The people internalize the state's standards, and thus state-propagated standards naturally and subconsciously rule over the people's everyday lives. Because deviation from these standards translates to both a violation of the collective interests and a challenge to the state and the leader, who "guards" all the interests of the entire group, such resistance is regarded as a behavior to be punished and eradicated (K. Park and Hong 2009, 43–46).

Nevertheless, when the distribution of social resources, monopolized by the state and its bureaucrats, does not function properly, ordinary people attempt to resist, avoid, and compromise with the state and its surveillance agencies. In other words, when the residents encounter a reality in which they have to seek social resources and survive on their own, they begin to resist against the regime through informal and private methods in passive but clever ways. This phenomenon is defined as "everyday politics" or "everyday life resistance" (Haggard and Noland 2010, 19–20). In response to the routinization of politics from the top, the general populace creates "everyday politics" to ensure conditions for self-preservation and survival in the midst of national economic failure and social oppression. The routinization of politics firmly constructed by the state and bureaucrats gradually collapses from the bottom due to "everyday politics." Then, state-society relations evolve into the dual structure of control and resistance, oppression and consent, and conflict and conspiracy (J. Kim 2009; Prasse-Freeman 2012). In this process, the public expresses desire, frustration, and agony, switching between various "masks (personas)" and "wigs," which blurs the boundary between obedience and resistance (Hong 2008).

Goff (1980) suggests there are three conditions that enable social change—distance from past reified ideas, confrontation and challenge, and communication with others. These three conditions promote critical reflection and allow an individual and society to escape from the "false consciousness" that had constrained them in the past (Haddad 2003, 51–68). Social changes in North Korea can also be analyzed as having resulted from changes in these three conditions. However, the everyday life of the public, especially the livelihoods of residents who endure constant and extreme survival crises, is ambiguous and complex—it is not easy to theorize about their everyday lives. Nonetheless, if such a phenomenon is a "social fact," how can it be approached and analyzed? How can one understand their continuously evolving resistance tactics used to survive under authority and coercion? An empirical study of the "everyday politics" formed by ordinary people in order to seek survival mechanisms under the totalitarian regime must be the starting point for such research.

Methodology

Through a collaboration between the Settlement Support Office for Dislocated North Koreans of the Ministry of Unification of Korea and the Institute for Far Eastern Studies, the author conducted in-depth interviews from January to August 2009 with thirty recent North Korean defectors (as two of them were interviewed

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twice, there were a total of thirty-two interviews) from diverse social and economic backgrounds.[1] To minimize validity issues, especially the problem of "contamination," the author asked the Settlement Support Office to recruit interviewees who had been outside of North Korea (either in China or other third countries) for fewer than two years. The interviews were conducted based on a semi-structured questionnaire prepared beforehand, focusing on five variables: (1) structure of information flow (INFO), (2) rules of behavior (ROB), (3) motivations of both the state apparatus/officials and the population (MOTV), (4) people's perceptions (PCEP), and (5) livelihood situations (SES), such as food consumption, income, education, employment, housing, health, and so on. The first three variables, that is, information flow structure, rules of behavior, and motivation, were selected based on Kornai's works (1992, 2000, 2006). Kornai argued that these three variables play key roles in transitioning from a socialist planned economy to a market-oriented economic system. North Korea is not in the transitional phase precisely because the country still adheres to the ideology of a *Juche* (self-reliance) economy. Nevertheless, exploring changes in economic structure and management systems with the three variables is expected to enhance our understanding of interactions between the state and the population in the country.

Although the thirty-two in-depth interviews covered the questions related to the aforementioned variables, interviewees were allowed extra time to elaborate on issues or significant relevant topics not contained in the protocols. This flexibility provided many more vignettes and ideas for the study. Upon completion of the interviews, the author developed a coding scheme categorized into five primary coding themes and twenty-seven sub-coding themes. In addition to the thirty-two interviews, in December 2009 and January 2010 the author also conducted follow-up interviews with seven selected North Korean defectors who came from a relatively higher socioeconomic status in North Korea.

Despite the efforts to minimize validity problems, this study does have some limitations. First, although the geographical mobility and degree of information exchange between North Koreans have increased, it remains the case that information exchange and freedom of migration are still very limited in North Korea, where the state and its surveillance agencies maintain a strong control over the society. Therefore, interviewees' experiences may only be relevant to a particular event or area. In other words, the collected information and analysis cannot be generalized. Secondly, considering the characteristics of totalitarianism, the feedback relationship between the state and society is extremely narrow, and it is virtually impossible for ordinary residents to participate in the policymaking process. Thus, it is difficult to deduce the positions and visions of elite groups affiliated with the party and state organizations from the testimonies of interviewees, who were not members of the elite. The third issue is the demographic background of the North Korean defectors. Approximately 85 percent of defectors have come from border regions, such as the North and South Hamgyong (Hamgyong Bukdo and Hamgyong Namdo) Provinces, which have endured the most severe

[1]Given the demographics of North Korean defectors, 75 percent of whom are females, males were overrepresented for this study. However, as the purpose of this study was to analyze ordinary people's daily lives, and as the society is still dominated by males at both the household and societal levels, we had the same number of cases between men and women.

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economic hardship and have been alienated from the center of North Korea historically, economically, and politically (M. Lee 2008; O. Lee 1988, 1993). Defectors from these provinces are more likely to provide unfavorable testimonies compared to the residents living in more privileged regions in North Korea. Despite these methodological limitations, this research has made every effort to overcome the weaknesses of qualitative research on North Korean defectors. In particular, in order to develop coding schemes and triangulate the statements obtained from the interviews, the author conducted consultations and verifications with field experts and scholars who have closely traced North Korea's politics, economy, and social changes.

Results

An Overview of Socioeconomic Situations in North Korea since 2000

The interviews reveal everyday lives characterized by poverty and starvation, though not at the level of extreme survival crisis experienced during the period of the Arduous March in the 1990s. Every interviewee, regardless of occupation, age, and gender, answered that he or she had participated in a legal or illegal market activity, and testified that "it was impossible to live without the market, and all the necessities were purchased from the market." The types of market activities differed between urban and rural areas, Pyongyang and other regions, border regions and inland areas, and coastal and mountain areas in terms of scale, trading goods, and business networks, according to their testimonies. For example, a resident in the mountains or countryside often lives in a tent in the mountains and needs money with which to buy food, because the mountainous terrain is not suited for farming. He or she makes a living by chopping down trees to sell as firewood, secretly digging out ginseng or antique treasures, and, in the areas where gold mines are present, digging for gold with a shovel and pickax for sale to brokers who trade with China. Sometimes, the competition for this kind of market activity escalates, resulting in conflicts between the poor or a significant drop in the selling price.

On the other hand, the urban areas have merchants who trade with China on a relatively large scale, either directly or through brokers, and some interviewees gained considerable profits in major cities like Pyongyang by importing shoes, other products, and used items with famous brands such as Nike or Adidas. Moreover, they established a network in each region (e.g., Sinŭiju, Wŏnsan, Chŏngjin, and Pyongyang) and exchanged information about exchange rates and prices with merchants in other regions, and cooperatively adjusted exchange rates and prices of goods. The interviewees also testified that it was common for urban merchants to make connections with the military and businesses, bribe them, and use their registered vehicles as transportation for their "private" business.

A recent study indicates that the credibility of merchants mainly depends on whether they are personally acquainted with one another and through whom they were introduced (Cho and Yim 2008, 200–26, 273–78). Documented contracts are not yet established for transactions between individuals, and most transactions are done in cash. (If the scale is large, dollars, Chinese yuan, and euros are also used. Local currency is used for small-scale transactions.) As cash transactions between individuals, which are strictly banned by the law, become increasingly common, "petty capitalists" (*donju*)

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who accumulate wealth through trade begin to emerge. Sometimes, they lend money to businesses and individuals with interest rates of 15 to 20 percent. The interviewees reported that in some cases, people borrowed money and lent it to someone else (refinancing) with higher interest rates of about 30 percent. Those who cannot pay back their loan have to give up their houses. In principle, houses cannot be bought or sold between individuals because they are nationally owned. However, using the exceptive clause, which "enables an exchange" based on an agreement between the parties, the housing market has been overtly formed, and the largest brokers in the housing market appear to be street-level officers.

The state periodically curbs market activity by enforcing the age limit of market participants and regulating products and prices, but most people do not abide by these regulations (C. Choi 2010; Yang 2008). Bribes and the prices of goods increase as regulation strengthens, creating a vicious cycle. Because an excessive enforcement of regulations would also damage their own "means of livelihood," the officials who police the market activity tend to just fulfill the quota assigned to them by their superiors. People with money or connections are released without much difficulty, but small-scale merchants and the residents who participate in the market on a small scale are often subject to enforcement measures and sent to detention centers. Many interviewees had been detained at least once for three to six months or longer, and most people who engaged in large-scale business also had similar experiences. Interestingly, their time at the detention center actually allowed them to gain networking opportunities and information about business and escape routes.

Some studies on systematic corruption in North Korea argue that it is routine for front-line officials in charge of food and market management to receive bribes from merchants (Lankov 2006; J. Lee 2009; Yim 2008). The merchants usually approach them first with a specific need and then maintain the connection over time. Bribery and corruption have become embedded in the system as exiting officials refer particular merchants and financiers to their replacements. Among the interviewees, there were four former officers from the military and State Security Agency who used the information gained from arresting and interrogating captured defectors and those who engaged in illegal market activities to later actively become involved in trade. Some of them escaped from North Korea by using the routes gleaned at the time.

Though some interviewees testified regarding their own experiences of resistance to state control, or stories they had either witnessed or heard, most North Korean residents still fear the oppressiveness of the state, and criticism against leaders like Kim Jong Il is rare, even among close friends. Although information from the outside is strictly controlled, the interviewees reported watching popular South Korean dramas and movies at night and talking directly to relatives in South Korea and China through cellular phones. Most interviewees had spoken to their families in North Korea on the phone and have sent remittances to their families by paying a certain amount of commission (around 30 percent of the total amount) to brokers.

Asked about the direction of North Korea's future, the interviewees replied differently. Some answered, "It would be desirable if the future were to be like the era of Leader Kim Il Sung"—implying that they may not have defected from North Korea if it had been like the "good old days"—and others answered, "There is no hope for North Korea." There were also different views on the state of external aid to North

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Korea; some were in favor, arguing, "As the misappropriated rice would eventually return to the market, the price of rice would drop," while others stated, "Because the residents get nothing anyways, the food aid should be suspended immediately."

Most interviewees said they were absolutely obedient to Kim Jong Il before defecting from North Korea, and opined that the "economic hardship was not Kim Jong Il's fault, but was due to the corrupt bureaucrats in the middle, who did not implement the directions from the top properly." They testified that expressions such as "ragged and starving South Koreans" disappeared almost completely from North Korean textbooks after 2000. Information about the outside world, including the United States, is accessible only to a few senior officials. North Korean residents have been taught that the United States is to blame for the nuclear development and the economic crisis, and many interviewees still agree with this perspective. However, people who have had more opportunities to learn about the North Korean situation from other sources of information appear to have some doubts about such claims.

The Change in the Information Flow Structure

The Sources of the Change in INFO: In the market, information about goods, prices, and trade locations circulates simultaneously with information about social phenomena and political situations in the other regions, due to the characteristics of information flow. Before the market (both formal and informal) was revitalized, the structure of information circulation in North Korea was planned, produced, and monopolized by the party and state organizations (S. Park 2004, 16–45). The controlled information was delivered or directed vertically through the party organizations and the state agencies, and the lower organizations and the residents had to carry out such orders faithfully.

In a weekly, monthly, quarterly, or annual "self-reflection" meeting that lasted one or two days, interviewees reported having to evaluate how well they had complied with directions from the party and state through self- or mutual criticism. In particular, the "Ten Principles to Establish the Monolithic Structure," which pledged loyalty to Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il and stipulated specific guidelines of behavior, became the most crucial standard of assessment.[2] Such a unilateral system implied that there was no information or feedback flowing from society to the state, but rather only a unidirectional flow from the state to society. Nevertheless, in a situation where the absolute superiority or control of the state is weakened, the flow of information, especially when related to market activities, gradually shifts from vertical and unilateral relations to horizontal and open ones.

It is inaccurate to suggest that there was no channel whatsoever for information exchange at the micro-level in, for example, the farmers' market. However, the range and content of such information were always under state control. As the monopoly and control of information by the state weakened, the content of circulated information

[2]"The Ten Principles to Establish the Monolithic Structure" were declared on April 14, 1974, by Kim Jong Il in his congratulatory address for Kim Il Sung's birthday. From then on, all North Koreans were required to memorize the principles and apply them to every aspect of their social lives.

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began to change. For ordinary residents who had to survive on their own, information circulated in the markets was more crucial for survival than that provided by the state. For the interviewees, the very nature of information underwent a change from something instilled by the state to an important "resource" to be actively collected and utilized for survival. In response to a question asking, "What was the most important information for you when you were in North Korea?" a female interviewee who was engaged in informal market activities in the Wŏnsan area answered:

> Even if there is a plenty of information, I don't need to hear all of it. There is certain information I would gather. First of all, I hear this and that, and how would I make money out of them? The information that can be turned into money is the most important. Then, there is something that I can use to prevent laws and regulations from taking my money—the information about new regulations or enforcements. I paid close attention to such information. … Ninety-nine percent of people would rather take a nap than listen to the political propaganda. No one really keeps anything political in mind, either. It's all about formality. No one cares about the contents at all. It's a mere formality that confirms attendance.

Information and "pricing" mechanisms: Where, then, do the residents collect such information, and how do they exchange and utilize it? As quoted below, markets represent the most crucial space of information exchange, where not only information related to small-scale trade, but also information about external food aid or distribution handled by the state organizations, which is leaked by officials pursuing their own interests, is circulated. Such information is utilized by merchants in collusion with the officials as a means to pursue profits.

> All sorts of information circulates in the market. My province has a port, so there is a lot of incoming rice. How do I know when the rice is coming? For example, if the rice is going to arrive at the port of Chongjin, the Director General of Food Policy of North Hamgyong gets that information first. Then, he orders the food policy officials in the People's Committee to notify the military about when the rice will arrive. "The rice is going to come around this date, so do something, something." Then, those people will again inform the ration centers about the incoming date. Through this process, the merchants and the residents will learn this information. But, most importantly, when the rice actually arrives, say, for example, there is 100,000 tons of incoming rice, some of it will be sold informally.

As the market expanded, the scale of private and illegal trade with China grew, and the exchange with Chinese residents on the border, especially with Korean minorities (*Chosun Jok*), became very active. There is a long history of illegal trade over the PRC-DPRK border region, and the state used to overlook many illegal transactions over the border in order to calm local demands and temper dissatisfaction (M. Lee 2008; O. Lee 1988, 1993). Although unlawful trade dwindled at the start of the 1990s when the socialist economy was relatively stable, it was revitalized as North Korea

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went through a serious famine and economic crisis. The local residents in the border regions were already knowledgeable about these historic illegal trades.

Responses from interviewees who engaged in border trade reveal a "pricing" mechanism in North Korea. North Korean wholesalers first bargain with Chinese merchants for imported goods and, based on this "wholesale price," sell the products to retailers across the country, adding their profit margin to the price. The retailers add their own margins to the price, and sell the products to residents. Through this process, the final "market price" is formed. Although the state fixes prices on some major items (e.g., rice, gas, sugar, and cooking oil), the network of national stores has structural limitations, making them passive and slow in responding to changes in the market because of their inability to respond promptly to the market demand, lack of enthusiasm among the clerks, slow transportation of goods, and the disparity between the official price and the market price of necessities. Accordingly, the state cannot establish prices for all items, so the national stores usually tune their prices to the market price.

The Change in Rules of Behavior

The first principle of the socialist system is production and distribution based on collectivism. What naturally follows is the prohibition of private ownership of the means of production and a state monopoly on the functions of planning, production, and distribution. In order to achieve socialist collectivism, the pursuit of individual interest must be actively constrained. Instead, an individual is guaranteed a ration by the state, and transfers his or her labor and production to the state (Kornai 1992, 110–56). This is the contract between the state and society in a socialist planned economy, and maintaining this kind of contract relationship is only enabled by a considerable level of state oppression in the socialist system, in stark contrast to the liberal system (Walder 1995, 6–8). The sacrifice of free will and private interest becomes the foundation of collectivism.

Since 2000, official North Korean documents have increasingly criticized the antisocialist deviation of the ordinary residents and the ideological laxity of government officials. Even Kim Jong Il (1998) criticized the "betrayal of socialism" and identified superstition, disorder, and bribery as "immoral" antisocialist behaviors that "abandon the trust of the people." The essential reasons for such behavior would be the residents' changing perception of "money," the expansion of "individualism," and the rampant corruption among the bureaucrats, which were then followed by the expansion of the market. The phenomenon is widespread across society in its entirety, and the professional class is not an exception (Cho and Yim 2008; B. Choi and Koo 2009). Indeed, the professionals are actually more organized in terms of corruption, and their structure of bribery is also more systemized (J. Kim 2009, 23–47; Yim 2008, 105–12). Here is an example of illegal dealings in foreign-donated medicines by pharmacists and doctors:

> Sometimes, medical supplies are donated (by the foreign countries). And soon after, the UN sends out investigators. We have to pretend that we have all the supplies, so we fabricate the records. Let's say a group of investigators came from the UN to check the arrival of the medical supplies. They ask us about

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> all sorts of things. If investigators come to a particular hospital, then we tell the residents that the hospital is going to give out medicines. The medicines stay at the hospital until then, but as soon as the investigators leave, these medicines go to somewhere else. The hospital fabricates all the documents. Some of medicine is sold in the market, and some is sold to private wholesalers.

The socialist economic system and the economic crisis caused a crack in the three monopolized functions of the state—planning, production, and distribution—which then led to the weakening and collapse of the "contractual" relationship between the state and society. Against this backdrop, the "organized dependency" between the state organizations and society, an essential pillar of the socialist system (Walder 1994, 297–323), began to crumble, and the two entities attempted to seek their survival separately. More specifically, as the state lost its function of planning, production, and rationing, it began to lose its control of state-owned enterprises, which signaled a national failure of production and distribution. The failure in the state sector soon led to the loss of control over the residents (J. Lee 2009). The weakened controls over labor and increased worker dropout rates from production sites due to the failure in rationing implied that "socialist morality," by which all residents were expected to abide in their everyday lives, was collapsing.

Compromise, Conspiracy and Coexistence: In the socialist system, obedience to the state is often compelled by mechanisms of oppression and ideology (Kornai 1992, 53–61). However, obedience may also mollify dissatisfaction toward social policies, especially rationing. If following the directions of the party and the state is more successful than the pursuit of private interests in bringing stable benefits, the residents naturally adapt to the system of state monopoly, or incorporate into the rationing structure, and incline toward collectivism rather than seeking individual profits. Even if some individuals are found pursuing private interests, collectivism can be effectively managed by criticizing such individuals as "cowards," "deserters," or "traitors," and the oppression can further help to limit individualistic behavior (Kornai 1992, 59).

Nevertheless, as the guarantee of everyday life represented by rationing collapsed, and it appeared that collective interest could not ensure individual survival, the rules of behavior that individuals followed began to change. The transformation took shape in three ways: deviation from collectivism, expansion of activities to seek private interests by mobilizing public and private means, and private use of work hours. A man in his thirties who left his workplace provided the following report:

> There was no work at my workplace. So, even if I didn't get to work for a month, they would just say, "Pay 3,000 won or 5,000 won, and you can take a leave." [If I engaged in business] I could make not just 3,000 won but 30,000 won or even 300,000 won in a month. So, I was like, "Yes, I'll do that," and didn't go to work. People who were unable to do that would just go to the workplace, but they wouldn't have many things to do there, and would only waste time.

In factory operations and enterprises, the North Korean socialist planned economy may be characterized as a "unified supply system of materials." In this unified system, the state directly delivers materials—from domestic production, imports, or inventories—to

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each enterprise through the central materials company (Yim 2008, 135). However, the socialist system, founded on state coercion and central planning and resource distribution, became dysfunctional. This naturally led to a change in how residents conducted their lives. The decisive collapse of the system meant that citizens would no longer comply with the state, and the collapse of the controlling authority of the state indicated that maintaining control over the residents would not be possible by following previous methods (C. Choi and Lecy 2012; Frank 2010). Thus, seeking individual survival in the name of "autonomy" rather than obedience to the state emerged as an urgent issue, and state agencies and educational organizations were not exceptions to this phenomenon. In this process, the people in charge at the lower levels sought both individual and organizational coexistence by exchanging or lending resources to one another.

In order to maintain a symbiotic relationship, the oppression mechanism controlled by the state has to be more flexible. The residents internalize an ambivalent attitude toward the authorities who regulate their behavior, often deriding the regulators. Because the government is also aware of the gap between the order from above and reality, it simultaneously delivers an official order and an unofficial request. Sometimes, the government even pleads for its situation and asks for understanding from the residents in regard to their illegal activities. As the residents also know that the orders from the government are perfunctory and will change soon, they become Janus-faced in their everyday lives.

The Change in Motivations

Collectivism vs. Fragmented Survival: Before the internal contradictions of a controlled economic system became unsustainable and the socialist shortage economy reached its nadir, the socialist system continuously instilled the role of the state and the socialist principles through public education. In other words, the "routinization of politics" was constantly promoted by underlining socialist collectivism and the public interest. Conflicts between members of society, which, it is suggested, would result if individuals seek private interests, represent the greatest harm to the socialist principle, the socialist economy, and the completion of the socialist society. Collectivization and nationalization of the means of production are also political measures to suppress individual selfishness and to orient people toward collective interests.

However, when the state failed to fulfill its end of the bargain, the North Koreans stood at a crossroads of starvation and individual survival. Socialist principles and the spirit of collectivism could no longer control the ordinary residents, and eventually the most basic desire of survival clashed with socialist collectivism. The desire for survival allowed an individual who had deviated from collectivist principles to develop various survival mechanisms to avoid punishment by the government. For instance, in response to stricter controls on market activities after 2005, North Koreans survived through "hiding," "duplicity," "bribery," or any other necessary measures (B. Choi and Koo 2009; J. Lee 2009; Yang 2008). As surveillance became stronger, bribery became more rampant, creating a seemingly endless feedback loop.

The newfound orientation of North Koreans toward private interests was also observed in state-operated factories and enterprises. As the governmental supply of

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the means of production was halted completely or substantially decreased, each enterprise had to procure such materials and distribute on its own, which encouraged these enterprises to participate in the system of illegal dealings and corruption. More importantly, "illegal activities within the legal sectors" became a widespread practice across society, and those eliminated from the competition could not expect even minimal support from the state (Jung 2000, 119–36; B. Choi and Koo 2009, 108–15). Socialist principles and collectivism were downplayed significantly, while competition between enterprises and managers became more intense, and the desire to fulfill needs through corruption and illegal activities grew increasingly.

On the other hand, young people in their twenties who had to leave their workplaces are concerned about their individual interests in a qualitatively different way from older generations or those in management-level positions in factories and enterprises. Regardless of their loyalties, the collapse of the normal labor structure forces them to engage in marginal or illegal work, which at best only secures a minimum livelihood. Consequently, the youths become day workers, housekeepers, substitutes for mobilized labor, and even prostitutes in order to earn cash.

> I was the only daughter, and worked as a typist at the post office. I felt sorry for my parents every time I asked for money.… I saw some people who were younger than me, but made money on their own without giving a burden to their parents. So I thought, "I should train myself through such experiences like them," and decided to quit my job and engage in business.

> People our age, the youths, are required to go to their workplaces no matter what happens. But, now, because life is so difficult, young people think it is stupid to go to work. They don't ever pay you at the workplace. So, there are a lot of youths who get a taste of money and continue to stay in the market.

Collision between Embedded Socialist Norms and Self-Interest: Survival became a matter of "capacity of an individual or organization," and the disparity between groups that were backed by the state institution or power and those that were not began to widen even further. Furthermore, as the structure of symbiosis and autonomy in daily life became more established, distrust toward state agencies and bureaucrats deepened. The only way to avoid the destabilization of the state's organizations and bureaucrats was to make money and succeed. People began to realize their ambitions for success by pursuing higher education and laundering their previous social statuses. In a society where social mobility is strictly limited, the relationship between money and power is virtually the only way to secure a higher social standing. Therefore, in many cases, people who have profited from business deliberately approach bureaucrats to pursue larger profits and to protect their activities.

Some local officials make profits by informing about or leaking in advance central regulation guidelines. This kind of collusion takes place not only between civilians and front-line regulators, but also among lower-level officials as well, and the central directions are either shoddily implemented or neglected altogether. The "routinization of politics" maintained by the state begins to collapse at the level of lower-level bureaucrats. The residents and lower-level officials continue to avoid the central orders and rules skillfully,

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and resist against the control strategy (at least in a passive way) in order to serve their interests and goals. A local party supervisor in his forties testified as follows:

> The party sends out various directions these days. Later in the period of evaluation, we report back, "It was carried out this way." Then, we gather the people and tell them, "We have this direction from above today, let's at least pretend we are carrying out the order." They would follow. Then, we report, "We accomplished such and such." But, if we get unlucky, we may be dismissed, or in a worse case, sent to a training camp.

Despite these social changes, individual or organizational motivations of collectivism and standards of behavior instilled in the past are still deeply embedded in many North Koreans' perspectives (Armstrong 2003, 82–90). The ordinary residents are, in fact, confused about the disparity between the changing present reality and the individual or organizational standards established in the past. In particular, "honor" (face saving) and the "culture of collectivism," which are traditional characteristics of Korean society, still exist in North Korea. Such characteristics are particularly noticeable among males over the age of forty. They were unable to talk about their own economic hardships because of their "honor," and considered it of utmost virtue to achieve the target announced by the state, regardless of any difficult circumstances.

> If someone gets a bad assessment in terms of his performance, he will be put to shame. Because, we, the North Koreans, are still bound to collective norms, we don't want to face dishonorable results in front of the other people. The government uses such mentality.… The North Koreans are not accustomed to living individually like here [in South Korea]. So, even if someone engages in business or his wife has a lot of money, he would still be afraid of ostracism within the organization. He would think that being criticized in front of people in his organization is the worst humiliation. Such perception is especially strong among the [male] officials.

Perceptions of the State and Society in the Eyes of Ordinary Residents: How, then, do the North Korean residents who have experienced such social changes perceive the state and society, and what do they think the future will bring? The interviewees' answers to these questions provide meaningful predictions as to how North Korean residents' behaviors and motivations might change in the future. The last section of this article explores the future of North Korean society, with respect to (1) perceptions of the leadership (the state, the party, and Kim Jong Il); (2) values, norms, and social changes; and (3) prospects for the future of North Korea.

Perceptions of the Leadership: During the extreme survival crisis in the mid-1990s, chaos, frustration, and resentment from ordinary civilians toward the state order to "survive on your own," coupled with widespread starvation, forced a change in state-society relations. The residents fully realized they could not survive if they solely depended on the state and the party. A change in perception of the "Mother Party" can be the most powerful indicator to describe this fundamental change in North Korean society. Despite the decline of its authority in economic affairs, the party still

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dominates the nation's political and ideological domains, as well as the mindsets of its citizens. The following interview reveals this mentality among North Korean residents:

> Before the 1990s, the party was like a mother. People confessed all their private secrets to the party. Then, a new order was formed after the 1990s, and the party also gave up being a mother. After the 1990s, when people went to the party, they said, "Why are you still coming to the party?" Now, the residents were in the middle of nowhere.… There were some people who starved to death right in front of the statue of Kim Il Sung. Some people cried, "Oh, Dear Leader, why are you doing this to us?" There were a lot of people who were still loyal to the party. I never thought the Mother Party would change so fast.…

This statement given by a former state media reporter indicates that although North Korean society is changing from the bottom, it has not yet been able to transform the operating system that has thus far sustained the state— that is, oppression, institutionalization, and ideology. All North Korean residents have lived in "some sort of organization." Men, in particular, have to serve at least ten to thirteen years of military service between the ages of seventeen and thirty. Thus, the notion of loyalty and devotion to the organization is still deeply embedded among many North Koreans. While unapproved behaviors are still punished by the state and only passive deviations are allowed, time and a change in political and social conditions are necessary for antisocialist behaviors to develop into anything resembling "organized resistance." As demonstrated by the quote below, even North Korean defectors have not significantly changed their perceptions of the state and its leader. Hence, it is not unreasonable to suggest that those still residing North Korea still feel deep loyalty toward the state and its leadership.

> North Hamgyong suffered most severely. As you know, the Dear Leader Kim Il Sung worried so much about the people's livelihoods in North Hamgyong and passed away due to a heart attack.

> General Kim Jong Il does well, but the middle officials are corrupt in North Korea.… People think that everything's the fault of mid-level bureaucrats, not knowing that the upper level is also corrupt.… Because they lack such knowledge, they are still afraid of the state.

> People here [South Koreans] do not know about North Korea yet. Most people who defected to South Korea didn't have good social bases in North Korea … though there are some exceptions, of course. People with a good background, for example, if their grandfathers took part in "Paekdoosan" [an anti-Japanese partisan group led by Kim Il Sung], they can advance to the party members or police officers without studying so hard.… They don't need to learn so much, and don't need to spend so much effort.… North Korea will not collapse in the near future [as long as they maintain their power].

> Honestly, when I was there [in North Korea] working as a party secretary [at the county level], I felt proud of the North Korean society about one thing. North

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> Korea is confronting the United States, right? That was the only pride I had in North Korean society.

As exemplified above, North Koreans still believe that the "Dear Leader" "passed away due to a heart attack" because he "worried so much about the people's livelihoods," and "General Kim Jong Il does well," but the "problem is the officials below him." Thus, criticism that should be directed toward the state and the leader is, in actuality, expressed against the front-line lower-level officials who directly clash with the residents, and the "antisocialists" who chase after profits through market-based trade (C. Choi 2010; Yim 2008, 242–46). Even as residents have developed their own alternate methods of livelihood, they still appear to believe in the socialist state ideology, which shows how sophisticated and integrated the hegemonic practices of the state are.

Money: The Core of the Changing Values: The expansion of market activities, along with the diversification of goods, geographical expansion of trade, and exchange of market information, has resulted in changes in the perception of money and, more importantly, altered North Koreans' perspectives of the world. Such phenomena as "a couple and a father eating separately," "independent living after marriage," and "demanding a divorce from an incapable husband" are new phenomena about which North Korean residents are surprised themselves, as an interviewee testified. One interviewee testified that North Korean society is transitioning into a "society where the only desire at the bottom is to live on." Some people play a role as financiers, providing funds to factories and enterprises and receiving interest on their loans.

In addition, individuals not only care about participating in the market to survive, but also are beginning to ask themselves, "How can I sell more goods? Should I arrange my goods this way or that way?" as one interviewee testified. People are beginning to think seriously about 'what they should sell to whom in what way in order to gain profits. Also, as some interviewees said, "People had to chop down trees and sell them as firewood on their own, but nowadays, they just need to take them to the market and someone else will sell it for them," and "I made candies at my house and gave them to a merchant, and he sold my candies at the market." These testimonies suggest that a tenuous form of division of labor is beginning to emerge. As the market expanded, division of labor developed among individuals. Different people specialized in different stages in the distribution of goods—including the procurement of materials, production, supply, and sales—and through this emerging structure, the society as a whole began to perceive the "efficiency" of a capitalist division of labor.

Prospects for Reform: It does not appear that the North Korean government will actively and openly transition to a capitalist market economy in the foreseeable future. There is a significant disparity between reform to complete the socialist society, emphasized by North Korean authorities, and reform to transition to a capitalist market economy, awaited by the outside world. The following is an excerpt from an interview with a former economics professor who explains the North Korean elites' perception and assessment of economic reform measures, which the outside world once interpreted as a signal for reform and an opening of North Korean policy:[3]

[3]These "reform measures" are known as "7.1. Economic Reform Measures." Following the measures, the North Korean government delivered the "Market Management Rules" set by

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> As the economic improvement management system changed [in 2002], there were many lectures and seminars on the perception of the economic management system for the faculty and students. Most of the lectures were given by the political economists from the central authority. And they all said that the economic management system was to strengthen the socialist economic management system and to complete the socialist system. Apparently, there wasn't anything mentioned about capitalism. The economics textbooks never changed. At first, I thought the economic management system would get closer to capitalism anyway, but I was wrong. Although they provided a lot of incentives to the workers after the "7.1. Measures," the system itself was still a strictly socialist system.

However, it should be noted that, despite such confusion (or belief) among North Korea analysts, North Korean civilians have actively adapted to a transitioning market economy and political reality in their daily lives. The market, which was spontaneously formed for survival, is now a "shock-absorber mechanism," reducing the likelihood of implosion in the country (C. Choi and Lecy 2012). Simultaneously, the residents have successfully developed systems of bribery and networks into which they have brought the ruling class and other officials to protect their private interests. While avoiding the oppressive regulatory monitors throughout the country, residents have claimed the market as a new space for "solidarity" and "conspiracy" (J. Kim 2009, 29–34). The "morality" and "loyalty" emphasized in socialist collectivism have, in reality, lost their legitimacy on the ground.

Conclusion

Presented here are two reports to bring this article to a conclusion. A woman in her forties (a wife of a senior government official) and a philosophy professor in her fifties, both of whom expressed their worries about North Korea today and the future of socialism, provide a summary of North Korea's past and present through their experiences:

> North Korea lost a lot of things during the Arduous March, but it also changed people's perceptions. The market was introduced during the Arduous March, and people began to realize, "I can live better than the others if I engage in business in this way." People were like, "I can survive if I work hard." … They learned about the capitalist market on their own.… Now, there's no sense of solidarity at all.… People curse those who are rich for looking away from the poor.

> I was a [philosophy] professor in a college. But I couldn't teach my students in line with my beliefs. When Eastern Europe collapsed, I emphasized that they

Cabinet Decision No. 27 on May 5, 2003, and the Department of Commerce announced the "Detailed Regulations for the Market Management" on May 12, 2003.

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> failed because they didn't have a singular leadership system and ideological educations. Personally, witnessing the collapse of Eastern Europe, I agonized over whether the socialist system was wrong or the people who were managing the system were doing wrong. The socialist economy should develop continuously in consistency with the plans, but the reality was different. So, I had a lot of inner conflicts.… As all sorts of goods flowed into the market, I began to perceive, "You can find everything except for firearms. It's quite convenient." … I speculated that socialism would only blossom in an aseptic society where there was no such virus as human selfishness.

This article confirmed that due to changes in the livelihoods of ordinary residents in the last decade, traditional state-society relations in North Korea can no longer be maintained through obsolete mechanisms, such as obedience to centralized directions, a vertical structure of information flow, collective rules of behavior, and an emphasis on political and moral motivations. The socialist plans and rules the state intends to reinstate cannot be restored through a few economic measures. As there is no capacity or willingness among the ruling class to solve the essential problem of survival for the rest of the population, the relationship between the state and society persists in frustration, confusion, and uncertainty.

Today, in 2013, the North Korean leadership and civilians alike are nervous about their future, and in such a state of uncertainty, seek their coexistence, despite the residents' daily suffering. Their fragmented survival mechanisms only indicate that neither the North Korean state nor society can determine what the future should look like. Even though Kim Jong Un has asserted in his first public speech celebrating Kim Il Sung's hundredth birthday that his grandfather and his father had paved the way for an "ideological and militarily strong" state, the cracks stemming from a huge discrepancy between the political rhetoric and the reality of "everyday politics" of the North Korean people have led the country into an untrodden and unpaved path.

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