

# Rashomon in North Korea? Comparing Northeast Asian approaches

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## **Abstract**

The DPRK's progressive nuclearization has evoked different responses in its Northeast Asian neighbors. A comparison across Japan, South Korea, and China offers a useful arena for addressing important debates in comparative and international politics. The three states differ with regards to their political systems and classical power disparities. The article distills general trends in their approach in light of—and sometimes in spite of—these differences. First, notwithstanding differences in regime type, there has been a shared secular trend away from positive inducements. Second, the precise mix of inducements differed significantly across all three cases in tandem with their domestic constraints and levels of political polarization. Third, classical neorealist drivers of international behavior have been rather secondary for explaining approaches to the DPRK's nuclearization. Finally, the panoply of strategies spanning the positive and negative spectrum has failed to deliver desired objectives. This outcome highlights the centrality of the domestic regime type of target states to the effectiveness of inducements.

Economic sanctions geared to dissuade states from acquiring nuclear weapons have often been considered the best alternative to the use of military force. However, academic and policy debates regarding the effectiveness of sanctions on Iraq, Iran, Libya, and the DPRK have not been settled. There are significant discrepancies in the literature regarding the extension of positive inducements as well. For many, exhibit A for that failure is the DPRK (Democratic People's Republic of Korea). The literature on DPRK nuclearization is massive but we focus here primarily on a comparison of

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Northeast Asian states' approaches to North Korea's nuclearization. This focus is logically prior to the more commonly addressed problem of collective action among senders in the international relations literature, a theme that is beyond our scope here. The emphasis here is rather on the domestic considerations that shape those respective approaches, the raw material for arriving at varying degrees of collective action.

The DPRK's nuclearization evoked different threat perceptions among its Northeast Asian neighbors, offering what seem like 'Rashomon'-style accounts of their respective dilemmas. Competing domestic constraints and subjective priorities have mediated their approaches to the issue. A comparison across Japan, South Korea, and China offers a useful arena for addressing important debates in international and comparative politics. First, a core focal point here is to examine the extent to which differences in domestic regime type have led to dramatically different approaches to DPRK nuclearization in an overall sense. Second, the article process traces more specific commonalities and differences across the three states in the evolution of positive and negative inducements to dissuade the DPRK from developing nuclear weapons. Third, the analysis identifies important implications regarding neorealist assumptions of international politics. The next section explores different sets of expectations about the role that domestic politics in Japan, South Korea, and China may play in shaping policy via-a-vis DPRK nuclearization. The subsequent three sections provide a detailed empirical analysis of the serious internal dynamics and dilemmas the DPRK created in each case. The conclusions distill similarities and differences across the three and broader implications for international and comparative politics. The most recent North Korean test brings to relief the possibility of greater convergence among the Roshomon views elicited by North Korea's nuclearization.

## **Explaining commonalities and differences in approaches to the DPRK**

Sanctions and inducements are instruments of statecraft specifically geared to change the target state's behavior. A working definition of sanctions (negative inducements) in this issue-area refers to international instruments of statecraft that punish or deny benefits to leaders, ruling coalitions, or broader constituencies in a given state, in an effort to dissuade those targets from pursuing or supporting the acquisition of nuclear weapons. Conversely, positive inducements are benefits or rewards extended to leaders, ruling coalitions, or broader constituencies in target states, with the expectation that they will persuade recipients to eschew nuclear weapons (Solingen, 2012). The experience of China, Japan, and South Korea in this realm is particularly useful because of their extensive initial use of positive inducements. The evolving mix of negative and positive inducements by

all three states reveals as much about their own internal politics as about DPRK intransigence.

A classical argument in the literature for explaining potential differences across Northeast Asian states relates to their different political systems. Accordingly, democratic Japan and South Korea would be expected to experience far more biting domestic constraints relative to authoritarian China. Democracies must presumably come to terms with the outcomes of domestic political polarization on any given issue at the ballot box. Japan and South Korea have indeed exhibited particularly high levels of polarization vis-a-vis DPRK nuclearization. China's political system allowed much less expression for latent polarization on the topic until recently. Levels of polarization within sender states can be consequential for the effectiveness of non-proliferation statecraft. As Kahler and Kastner suggest, unconditional reliance on economic interdependence (positive inducements) to transform foreign policy goals in target states—which they label 'transformative strategies'—are more likely to succeed when a broad consensus exists in the sender state (Kahler and Kastner, 2006). Beyond that, however, audience costs may not necessarily be higher for democracies than non-democracies. Nor are democracies necessarily more prone than non-democracies to rely on positive or negative inducements. Indeed, both democratic and non-democratic leaders may be sensitive to domestic criticism when positive or negative inducements fail to deliver expected results. Recent findings suggest significant differences among authoritarian regimes in their foreign policy behavior. Some are more responsive to significant elite constituencies or 'selectorates' (as in China) whereas others are much less accountable to such constituencies (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003; Chen Weiss, 2014; Christensen, 2011; Shirk, 1993, 2007; Weeks, 2014).

A different conceptual approach would classify China, Japan, and South Korea as sharing an internationalizing political-economy model of political survival in power that creates similar incentives for addressing potential threats to that model. Internationalizing models—in contrast to inward-looking models such as Maoist China or the DPRK—privilege economic growth driven by integration into the global political economy.<sup>1</sup> At times internationalizing constituencies and their inward-looking competitors carve out different parts of the state. The two competing models of political survival thus co-habit a hybrid state divided by internal coalitional competition. Competition between these two ideal-typical models is a perennial fixture of a globalized political economy nearly everywhere, across the democracy/non-democracy divide. Clearly, institutional differences across internationalizing models can lead to different ways of coping with domestic public opinion and electoral considerations. But Northeast Asian states have, for the most part, gravitated toward internationalizing strategies. The latter are averse to regional conflict that might disrupt their objectives, including macroeconomic and regional stability. The primacy of stability and growth in leaders' survival calculations thus predicts aversion to more extreme policies—

such as regime change and armed conflict—that can derail internationalizing objectives.

A third perspective, neorealism, suggests first that states with varying power capabilities should exhibit different international behavior. Differences across China, Japan, and South Korea in power capabilities should thus yield different responses to the North Korean debacle. Second, the implications of power disparities between China, Japan, and South Korea on the one hand—as senders of sanctions—and the DPRK on the other—as the target of sanctions—should without question favor the former. Each of the three has massive superiority over the DPRK by every relevant measure of power (military, economic, political, and cultural). Stronger powers are assumed to be able to subdue smaller ones, an expectation particularly pertinent to a context where the second and third largest economies (China and Japan) and an overwhelmingly superior middle power (South Korea) face one of the world's most impoverished states armed with significant but cruder military capabilities. As the famous Thucydides saying goes, 'the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must.' A third expectation from neorealist frameworks predicts that, under conditions of high threat, security dilemmas trump all others and become the primary driver of foreign policy. Different variants of neorealism differ with respect to the role of domestic politics. Waltz argued that domestic politics play virtually no role in explaining systemic outcomes although they do influence state responses to systemic constraints. But even neoclassical versions of neorealism—more attentive to domestic considerations—expect states to subsume those considerations to the very real strategic threat emanating from DPRK nuclearization in both its capabilities and verbal menaces.

### **Japan's dilemma: DPRK nuclearization and the *racchi jiken***

Many consider Japan to be the most likely target of DPRK unconventional capabilities. As argued, neorealist theories predict such circumstances to constitute the most crucial driver in Japan's response, one that might lead it to counter such threat with nuclear weapons of its own. Yet, adding to many other anomalies for neorealist theory, the most important driver in Japan's policies on this issue has not been a push for nuclear weapons but a domestic debate over Japanese citizens abducted by the DPRK (*racchi jiken*) in the 1970s (Michishita, 2012, Solingen, 2010). The over-view below traces how Japan's policies in the last two decades have largely shifted from positive to negative inducements and why the *racchi jiken* have been central to this shift.

In the early 1990s Japan and the DPRK held several rounds of 'normalization talks.' Japan delivered 300,000 tons of rice to the DPRK after Kim Il Sung's death and in 1995 Premier Murayama Tomiichi expressed remorse and apologized for Japan's colonial rule and World War II atrocities. Engagement through the Agreed Framework was Japan's main policy, also reassuring an anxious South Korea. Domestic pressures over *Nihonjinzuma* (reparations) and

abductees remained a powerful barrier to normalization but did not yet thwart engagement efforts. The DPRK's launch of a Taepodong-1 missile over Japan in 1998 was a milestone on its road to nuclearization. Premier Obuchi, endorsed by DPJ opposition leader Kan Naoto, called for better warning systems and its own satellite. The Deputy Cabinet Secretary responsible for DPRK talks raised the possibility of banning all financial remittances, freezing assets of pro-DPRK organizations, and suspending trade and visits. Japan also pushed for United Nations sanctions but was instead asked to pledge \$1 billion for KEDO reactors to the DPRK. Pressures to re-consider engagement began mounting. Diet politicians warned against DPRK missiles built with Japanese-made aluminum alloy. Obuchi acknowledged differences with the US and South Korea driven by different domestic considerations.

An imminent DPRK missile test in 1999 led to suspension of remittances and Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Abe Shinzo, heading a government taskforce on the abductees, advocated a stick-and-carrot approach, conditioning the lifting of sanctions and provision of food aid on DPRK suspension of the missile launch and rejecting demands for reparations while reiterating Muraya-ma's apology. Following the 2000 first inter-Korean Summit, Japan's Federation of Economic Organizations (Keidanren) launched an initiative to spur business projects in the DPRK. Japan offered to purchase all DPRK Rodong missiles in exchange for a freeze and oversight over its missile program. Under Premier Koizumi Junichiro the Diet gave Japan's Coast Guard permission to fire on suspected spy boats (*fushinsen*), invoked when Japan sank a suspected DPRK vessel within Japan's 200-nautical mile Exclusive Economic Zone. Amidst a credit union scandal involving pro-Pyongyang groups, public demands increased for freezing all negotiations over normalization and designating the General Association of Korean Residents in Japan (*Chongryun*) as a subversive organization. The return of abductees had become a precondition for normalization, overturning the Foreign Ministry's 1991 position holding no preconditions for a final settlement. All parties backed a Diet resolution urging a tougher stance on the abductees.

Koizumi's surprise announcement of his Pyongyang visit and the 'Pyongyang Declaration'—addressing both Japan's colonial past and the abductees—increased his popularity from 43 to 67 percent; yet 75 percent opposed a rush to normalization (Kihl and Kim, 2006: 165). A visit by five abductees fueled demands for information on the others. Pyongyang's nuclear activities, short-range missiles tests over the Sea of Japan, and NPT withdrawal raised new obstacles. LDP Diet members proposed to ban spy ships' port calls and Tokyo's Governor Ishihara Shintaro called for Japan's rearmament, cutting aid and seeking revenge for DPRK abductions. As opposition to normalization rose from 33 to 50 percent, new Diet measures expanded SDF prerogatives (*Asahi Shimbun*, 2003). With the launching of the 2003 Six-Party-Talks (SPT) polarization deepened even within the LDP. Vice-Foreign Minister Takeuchi Yukio countered Abe's insistence on resolving

the abductees issue first. Japan-DPRK trade was now at its lowest since 1999 and lawmakers approved legislation to restrict remittances and trade further, independent of UN resolutions. Over 78 percent of the public supported sanctions in 2004; only 17 percent opposed them (Yoshida, 2004). Pressure from abductee families mounted with a petition by over 1.3 million demanding deeper sanctions. Koizumi returned to Pyongyang promising no further sanctions in exchange for a missile launch moratorium. Yet he failed to persuade Kim Jong-Il to abandon the nuclear weapons program or provide information on abductees, increasing criticism of Koizumi within and beyond his party. Abe, now LDP secretary general, urged immediate sanctions and DPRK regime change by exploiting bilateral asymmetries. Whereas Japan was the DPRK's third-largest trading partner in 2005, the DPRK played a minuscule role in Japan's trade. Inflammatory DPRK rhetoric threatening to destroy Tokyo continued but it was evidence that presumed remains of abductee Yokota Megumi were in fact not hers that drove Koizumi to enact minor sanctions. About 82 percent of lawmakers and 63 percent of the public across major parties supported sanctions over the abductees (*Asahi Shimbun*, 2004; *Kyodo News International*, 2004). Despite a DPRK announcement of its 'de facto' nuclear power status in 2005, Foreign Minister Machimura declared that Japan could not impose sanctions immediately given ongoing diplomatic efforts. Yet the Diet approved inspection and rejection of DPRK ships that lacked proper insurance—hurting some Japanese fisheries and consumers—which Abe dismissed as a trivial cost for denying funds to Pyongyang. Bilateral trade plummeted further.

Normalization talks resumed in early 2006 but lawmakers across the board approved sanctions unless the abduction issue was resolved. Keidanren Chairman Mitarai Fujio and other peak industrial associations blamed new DPRK missile tests for threatening Japan and Foreign Minister Aso Taro sought UN and G-8 sanctions backed by 80 percent of the public. UNSC Resolution 1695 called UN members to cease all transactions connected to DPRK missiles or nuclear efforts. Japan's financial institutions were banned from sending remittances to DPRK-linked financial institutions. Abe Shinzo asserted Japan's legal self-defense right to attack DPRK missile bases and, as Premier, pushed for constitutional revisions to enhance Japan's collective self-defense capabilities. The DPRK's 2006 nuclear test led to UNSC resolution 1718 condemning the test as polls revealed high public concern (82 percent) and skepticism (74 percent) that the SPT would resolve DPRK nuclearization (Izumi and Furukawa, 2007; *Yomiuri Shimbun*, 2006). MOFA now supported banning all DPRK imports and ships, reiterating that sanctions would remain in place until *both* the abduction and nuclear issues were resolved. The DPRK shut down the Yongbyon reactor in 2007 and committed to disable other facilities but only 16 percent of Japan's public regarded these as promising steps. Only 27 percent thought the SPT would lead to DPRK denuclearization and only 17 percent supported US plans to

remove the DPRK from the state-sponsors-of-terrorism list (*Asahi Shimbun*, 2008). DPJ opposition leader Ozawa Ichiro criticized the government for following US requests. Premier Fukuda Yasuo, abandoning a more conciliatory tone once bilateral talks failed, reiterated Japan's insistence on keeping the DPRK on the terrorist list. The Diet's *racchi jiken* committee adopted a resolution to that effect backed by most parties. Under pressure regarding the abductees, Fukuda extended sanctions.

The US withdrew the DPRK from the terrorist list even as the DPRK announced the restarting of its nuclear facilities. In May 2009, however, the DPRK's second nuclear test realigned US-Japanese positions, revitalized trilateral cooperation with South Korea, improved Sino-Japanese and trilateral US-Japan-China relations, and reinforced Japan's calls for replacing the SPT with a Five Party system to contain the DPRK (Tanaka, 2009). UNSC resolution 1874 condemned the test and Japan banned all goods exports to the DPRK. With the sinking of the ROK's naval vessel Cheonan, DPJ Premier Hatoyama Yukio restricted remittances further. Only 16 percent of the public favored 'dialogue' at this point and engagement remained a moot point for the next three years (*Nikkei Shimbun*, 2010).

Abe Shinzo's second term solidified hardline policies, confirming in his first policy speech to the Diet that the abduction issue was Japan's highest foreign policy priority. The DPRK's third nuclear test in 2013 led to UNSC resolution 2094 and new financial sanctions. Abe reiterated that Japan would provide no rewards until the DPRK gave up its nuclear and missile programs and released all abductees. Over 88 percent of the public identified the abductees as the most pressing issue regarding the DPRK (Cabinet Office of Japan, 2009). Under heavy pressure from abductees' families, Abe announced a new dialogue. The DPRK agreed to conduct comprehensive investigations and establish a Special Investigation Committee in exchange for Japan's removal of some sanctions. Despite strong public support for serious dialogue, 65 percent still opposed sanctions relief (*Yahoo News Japan*, 2014). DPRK failure to deliver led to new sanctions in 2015 and growing support (77 percent) for stronger sanctions, with only 14 percent endorsing 'dialogue' (*Yahoo News Japan -BS-Asahi [ima-seka]*, 2015). Following the DPRK's fourth nuclear test in January 2016 Japan restored sanctions including banning remittances to the DPRK and DPRK ships' access to Japan, and refused to allow officials of the General Association of Korean Residents in Japan (Chongryon) to return to Tokyo. Following the DPRK's launch of short range ballistic missiles unto the Sea of Japan, defense minister Shigeru Ishiba said Japan was ready to conduct a pre-emptive strike with ballistic missiles if North Korea resorted to force against Japan.

### **China's dilemma: From 'lips and teeth' to uneasy friendship**

The evolution of China's policy vis-a-vis the DPRK reflects, in many ways, the evolution of China's transformation from an inward-looking to an

internationalizing model (Solingen, 2013). Chinese-DPRK relations were as close as ‘lips and teeth’ under Mao Zedong. China’s economic opening led to a thaw in Chinese-South Korean relations and support for South Korea’s ‘sunshine policy.’ President Jiang Zemin’s policy of regional peace and stability played an important role in China’s economic opening and DPRK deterioration threatened China’s stability. The 1990s famine—with about one million casualties—had led 100,000 DPRK refugees into China. Following the 1998 missile test, China provided the DPRK with crude oil, grain, and fertilizers, and hosted the second-ranking DPRK official, Kim Young-Nam, who attempted to tame DPRK criticism of China-style market reforms. During Kim Jong-Il’s visit to China and meeting with Jiang, both committed to bolstering bilateral relations. Premier Zhu Rongji hosted Kim Jong-Il in Shanghai to showcase China’s achievements. Jiang also visited Pyongyang, reiterating that peace and stability was of utmost importance and encouraging DPRK normalization with South Korea and Western countries.

Bilateral exchanges increased significantly in 2001 and the Korean Workers’ Party Central Committee Secretary even praised China’s achievements in ‘socialist modernization.’ To the DPRK’s acknowledgement of its reconstituted nuclear program in 2002 China responded with calls for dialogue, direct talks, support for non-proliferation, and opposition to sanctions. Yet the DPRK expelled IAEA inspectors, announced its withdrawal from the NPT, threatened to abandon the 1953 armistice, lobbed another missile into the Sea of Japan, and resumed Yongbyon operations—not precisely signs of DPRK recognition of China’s formidable rise. While China criticized the NPT withdrawal and severed oil supplies for three days it also cajoled Kim Jong-Il to enter multilateral talks. In another clear affront—while its delegation attended talks in Beijing—the

DPRK declared possession of a nuclear arsenal and intentions to sell some of it to the highest bidder. Friction in Sino-DPRK relations became more evident when Chinese textbooks revisited the official line that South Korea had launched the 1950 war. The 50th anniversary of the armistice was marred by mutual recriminations. China softened some commitments embedded in the Sino– North Korean Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance. Despite serious reservations vis-a-vis the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), China announced it would no longer allow DPRK armament shipments through Chinese territory, naming the DPRK among countries of concern. China also sent 100,000 troops to the DPRK border to prevent refugee flows, warning the DPRK indirectly. While opposing nuclear proliferation China also obstructed UNSC deliberations and sanctions. Hardline PLA and party advisors supporting the DPRK exerted considerable influence on Hu Jintao, who chaired the Central Military Commission. The party’s policy planning Leading Group on Foreign Affairs, also presided by Hu, rejected ending the mutual defense treaty as proposed by reformers in the scholarly and policy communities, revealing growing diversity of views on the DPRK problem (Lam, 2013; Solingen, 2013).



Younger Chinese also identify more closely with modern South Korea.

A political scientist observed that Chinese ‘go to North Korea and we can see ourselves in the 1970s. We see bad conditions. We ask the North to change, to reform, but they don’t. Then they criticize us—when they are dependent on our oil and energy’ (cited in Marquand, 2003: 7). A Chinese economist suggested that Kim Jong-Il would acquire nuclear weapons whether his people live or die instead of developing the economy and improving living standards. His article—later removed from the website under DPRK pressure—also stated that the DPRK had ignored Sino-DPRK friendship and China had no moral responsibility toward it except preventing war (Tkacik, 2004). Similar statements by Chinese analysts and scholars began depicting the Sino-DPRK alliance as an outdated relic that damages China’s reputation and relations with other regional and global powers. Even regime change and Korean reunification were sometimes deemed to represent better outcomes for China. In another departure from official emphasis on Sino-DPRK friendship, a semi-official publication characterized the DPRK in 2004 as an ungrateful trouble-maker that barred Chinese tourists, a country with a backward system and flawed international outlook with people living in wretched conditions under massive political persecution; and a source of plots that exacerbate tensions in US-China relations (Straits Times, 2004; TigerLikes-Rooster, 2004). The PLA, however, remained closer to the DPRK alliance.

Positive inducements—aid and investment—to secure Pyongyang’s attendance at a new round of SPT continued, as bilateral trade reached a record high in 2004. Yet China also forced the closure of a casino and urged the DPRK to return to talks. Pyongyang’s announcement that it had manufactured nuclear weapons triggered an uncommonly critical response from state-run Chinese media but China resisted US pressure for sanctions. Though increasingly frustrated with DPRK refusal to resume the SPT, China reiterated that there were no good alternatives to engagement while warning against a potential nuclear test in 2005, defining it as a ‘red line in diplomacy’ and sending a special envoy to Pyongyang (*Yonhap News Agency*, 2005). China also pushed for a ‘draft statement of principles’ at the SPT to end the DPRK’s nuclear program but refused to co-sponsor an IAEA measure condemning DPRK NPT violations. While visiting Pyongyang, Hu Jintao offered additional positive inducements including development of an oilfield. China now accounted for nearly 53 per cent of DPRK trade, arguing that ‘normal trade flow should not be linked up with the nuclear issue,’ and opposing ‘strong-arm tactics’ (Kahn and Sanger, 2005). Kim Jong-Il made another secret visit to China in 2006 as China proposed to unfreeze sanctioned Banco Delta Asia accounts. The US refused, urging unconditional DPRK return to the SPT.

Following continued DPRK defiance, including missile tests in July 2006 and China's resistance to further UNSC sanctions, a weakened resolution condemned the tests, prevented trade in missile-related items, and 'strongly urged' the DPRK to abandon its nuclear program. China and Russia opposed mention of Chapter VII that might justify military action. DPRK rejection of the resolution and SPT led to an unusual level of official exasperation, with China emphasizing the negative effects of missile tests while reiterating its canonical support for DPRK sovereignty but also cutting off oil supplies to the DPRK briefly (Kahn, 2006).

Following the 2006 nuclear test, China provided unprecedented support for a unanimous UNSC resolution imposing sanctions, using the word *hanran*, a brazen, flagrant, or serious affront to the nation's dignity by countries that have historically been enemies. The DPRK labeled the resolution 'a declaration of war' and China began inspecting cargo to the DPRK, suspending regular flights and tourist trains to Pyongyang, and closing customs offices. Hu's special envoy carried an undisclosed message urging Kim Jong-Il to resume the SPT. Peking University's expert Jia Qingguo suggested, 'for the SPT to resume, North Korea must have made certain promises, such as declaring it would not conduct another nuclear test in the near term' (Oon, 2006). Chinese oil, food, clothes, appliances, and communications technology exports to the DPRK resumed in exchange for coal, electricity, and minerals in transactions that were now more attentive to market forces and China's needs for raw materials.

Straddling positive and negative inducements, China's diplomacy took a new turn when Premier Wen Jiabao declared at a 2007 meeting with Premier Abe that Beijing would assist in resolving the abductees' issue. China continued supplying the DPRK with energy-related equipment despite new missile launches in 2008. Pyongyang's decision to remove surveillance cameras and seals from the Yongbyon reactor, and its second nuclear test in 2009, triggered another UNSC Resolution calling for cargo inspections, financial sanctions, asset freezes, targeted travel bans, and bans on all trade in nuclear and missile components with the DPRK. Wen visited Pyongyang for the 60th anniversary of Sino-DPRK diplomatic relations, the first visit by a Chinese premier since 1991, and offered crude oil and food aid in exchange for returning to the SPT. Even after the DPRK sank the Cheonan vessel and shelled Yeonpyeong Island in 2010 China diluted UNSC resolutions, now concerned with instability regarding Kim Jong-Il's succession.

The DPRK conducted its third nuclear test in February 2013, merely a few months into President Xi Jinping's administration. China's now routine condemnation of the test and endorsement of another UNSC resolution was followed by a more significant decision to relax restrictions on media censorship, allowing more open criticism of the DPRK. The deputy editor of the Central Party School journal, for instance, suggested that 'China should consider abandoning North Korea [and] take the initiative to facilitate North Korea's

unification with South Korea' (Deng, 2013). The editor of *Global Times* commented that 'North Korea is headed down the wrong path. Its people will pay the price for the country's mistakes' (Foster-Carter, 2013). A prominent academic expert urged a much tougher stand vis-a-vis the DPRK, labelling it an 'embarrassing maverick' that, far from appreciating China's aid and diplomatic cover, offered nothing but lies, insults, and provocations (Shen, 2013). Other experts suggested that China should deny the DPRK assistance in reforming its economy because South Korean investors should be financing such transformation. As China's leadership was becoming more sensitive to public criticism of DPRK defiance, it informed UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon that China would 'not allow troublemaking' at its doorsteps.<sup>2</sup> Xi Jinping declared at the 2013 Boao Forum—without mentioning the DPRK explicitly—that no one should be allowed to throw a region or the whole world into chaos for selfish gain.

Such statements were not able to prevent further acts of defiance. As Kim declared that the DPRK had developed a hydrogen bomb (a contested claim), China cancelled a Beijing concert by Kim Jong-II's favorite band in December 2015. Following the DPRK's fourth nuclear test, which many regarded as a specific snub to China, a new UNSCR 2016 deepened efforts to undermine illicit DPRK activities overseas from China to Russia, Iran, and Syria. Calling on states harboring such activities to expel DPRK diplomats and operatives that violate UNSC resolutions, these measures raised questions of sovereignty, so sensitive to China, to a new level. These were the toughest sanctions China agreed to impose in seven decades of UNSC membership. Following yet more missile tests Foreign Minister Wang Yi declared that China does 'not recognize the nuclear status of the DPRK,' and would 'block further [its] development of nuclear weapons' while chastising the possible deployment of a US missile defense system in South Korea (Dyomkin and Solovyov, 2016).

### **South Korea's dilemma: From sunshine to sunset?**

In 1988 President Roh Tae-Woo launched Nordpolitik, a policy encouraging North-South dialogue and normalization with the Soviet Union and China. This was a crucial tool of its internationalizing model for increasing domestic and regional stability and deepening South Korea's global trade, investment, and technology exchanges. Roh's 'Economic Commonwealth' policy included direct trade and investment with the North to enhance the prospects of a China-style DPRK 'soft-landing.' The policy led to the 1991 Joint Declaration on denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and the DPRK's 1992 nuclear safeguards agreement with the IAEA. The DPRK's intermittent meandering around its commitments described thus far, however, created severe dilemmas for successive South Korean administrations, including the problem of reunification, the Gordian knot in domestic debates over policies vis-a-vis the North.

President Kim Young-sam endorsed positive and negative inducements, pressing for NPT compliance while urging moderation as the Clinton administration sent a stern warning to the DPRK. Conservative opponents—including the military—seized on this two-track policy to characterize Kim Young-sam as *naengtang ontang* (blowing hot and cold), arguing the erratic policy only propped up the DPRK's regime (Foster-Carter, 2003). South Korea played a central role in supplying two nuclear reactors to the DPRK under the 1994 Agreed Framework. Leading business firms associated with KOTRA (Korean Trade-Investment Promotion Agency) promoted trade with the North to benefit from lower wages, maintain stability, and attract foreign investment and tourism. President Kim Dae-Jung retained this approach, offering food aid to a starving population, but Kim Jong-Il called for wartime mobilization to counter South Korea's alleged military build-up. Kim Dae-Jung responded with more positive inducements: a meeting with Kim Jong-Il, more economic benefits and humanitarian aid, and a joint venture to develop Mt. Kumgang as a tourist site. Even the capture of a small DPRK submarine in its territorial waters in 1998 did not alter the sunshine policy, and although it responded to the DPRK's firing of a Taepongdong missile by increasing the range of its own missiles, it also reduced its 1999 defence budget for the first time since its founding 50 years earlier.

Mounting evidence of Yongbyon activities in violation of the 1994 agreement elicited warnings from the Grand National Party (GNP) opposition. The United Liberal Democrats (ULD), while in coalition with Kim Dae Jung's National Congress for New Politics party (NCNP), also warned against unconditional commitment to the sunshine policy. A naval clash near Yeonpyeong Island following the DPRK's violation of the maritime Northern Limit Line led to dozens of deaths and rising public criticism of the sunshine policy. Yet Kim Dae-Jung called a military option an excessive response, urging continued talks and the easing of US and Japanese sanctions. Unconditional engagement remained the leading policy but GNP control of the legislature signaled public discontent with Kim's sunshine policy. Both parties proposed an inter-Korean Summit that stimulated further *chaebol* interest in DPRK investments, reopening of border liaison offices, and reconnection of the Seoul-Sinuiju (Kyongui) Railroad Line that had ceased operation for 55 years. Yet the GNP raised concerns about South Korean war prisoners and abductees, opposed aid, and criticized state support for Hyundai's DPRK activities that benefitted the DPRK's military. South Korean policy began to diverge further from US policy under George W Bush, but public opposition to concessions for the DPRK rose from 54 percent after the summit to 70 percent a year later (*Chosun Ilbo*, 2001). Support for the sunshine policy declined from 49 to 34 percent and the GNP won sweeping victories in parliamentary by-elections. While a new naval clash led to suspension of rice aid in 2002, the GNP and ULD demanded cessation of all aid and Mount Kumgang cooperation. The sunshine policy continued even after DPRK admission of a clandestine nuclear weapons program in 2002 but with

DPRK resumption of nuclear activities and NPT withdrawal even some chaebols became wary of instability. South Korea remained opposed to UNSC sanctions, endorsing dialogue and railroad reconnection.

President-elect Roh Moo-hyun (Millennium Democratic Party, MDP) announced his willingness to visit Pyongyang, but a day before being sworn the DPRK launched another missile. Roh pledged to continue a 'peace and prosperity policy' pivoted on the Kaesong Industrial Park, a project launched by 13 companies led by Hyundai-Asan. Positive inducements were expected to provide a stable environment that decreased military expenditures and lowered the eventual costs of unification by subsidizing investments in the DPRK. Roh proposed Russian gas provisions to the DPRK in exchange for abandoning its nuclear ambitions but his abstention from a UN Commission on Human Rights' resolution condemning DPRK abuses triggered public censure, with the GNP labelling it an irresponsible act, decrying the poor results of engagement and financial aid to the DPRK's military. In 2002 South Korea overtook Japan as the DPRK's second largest trade partner after China as inter-Korean trade rose by 59 percent. Yet the DPRK declared the 1992 North-South denuclearization agreement null and void. Roh resisted sanctions or military action but DPRK acknowledgement of completed reprocessing activities and plutonium diversion for nuclear weapons weakened Roh's domestic standing and deepened cleavages within his party. Over 100,000 South Korean veterans and supporters demonstrated against DPRK nuclearization and human rights abuses. The rift over the sunshine policy reached new heights as the GNP demanded thorough investigation of an alleged 'cash-for-summit.' Roh refused to extend the special counsel investigation that found the Kim Dae-jung government responsible for secretly sending the DPRK \$100 million shortly before the 2000 summit (Foster-Carter, 2003). Hyundai's additional payment of \$400 million was considered legitimate fee-for-business. The main architect of Kim's sunshine policy was indicted and a former culture minister arrested for inappropriate pressure on the Korea Development Bank to loan funds to, and accept bribes from, Hyundai.

Trade, food, and aid continued, with the DPRK as South Korea's top export destination ahead of China and Japan, despite its progressively more defiant nuclear behavior. South Korea's approach at this point was still close to China's unconditional engagement, rejecting sanctions, criticizing Japan for moving closer to sanctions, and pressing the US for concessions to the DPRK. About half of respondents favored this policy, 60 percent were willing to purchase goods from Kaesong, nearly 75 percent supported another intra-Korean summit, and only about 23 percent favored sanctions and freezing the 'peace and prosperity policy' (*Chosun Ilbo*, 2005; *Korea Times*,

2004). This support enabled Roh to resist calls for referring the DPRK nuclear file to the UNSC and when the DPRK committed to disable its nuclear program in 2005, even GNP chairperson Park Geun-hye pressed for a more flexible GNP policy vis-a-vis the North. The GNP had lost ground to Roh's Uri Party in 2004 congressional elections, arguably reflecting a backlash to Roh Moo-hyun's impeachment. But Park also labelled South Korea's abstention from a UN vote censuring DPRK human rights abuses a moral failure. Faulty DPRK implementation of nuclear commitments did not derail Rho's policy but new missile tests led him to endorse a unanimous UNSC resolution and condition aid on DPRK return to the SPT. He remained opposed to sanctions and committed to Kaesong, which employed over 6000 North Koreans by 2006.

Rho's policies did not prevent the 2006 DPRK nuclear test, condemned by most South Korean parties. With the GNP chastising Roh's policies and urging sanctions, Roh suggested a new approach at a meeting with business leaders invested in Kaesong and Kungang, opposing military action but considering financial sanctions. UNSC resolution 1718 imposed new sanctions and allowed South Korean cargo inspections. Yet South Korea declared it irrelevant to inter-Korean business links and rejected PSI's interdiction of banned weapons transfers. Indeed the Chamber of Commerce and Industry warned that South Korea was falling behind China in developing and extracting DPRK natural resources while the National Crisis Council of Korea criticized Roh's policies. Public support for another inter-Korean summit rose from 11 to 30 percent between 2005 and 2006 but 41 percent conditioned it on the North's denuclearization. Only 17 percent now favored US lifting of DPRK sanctions and two-thirds cautioned against hasty resumption of talks (*Korea Times*, 2007; *Yonhap News Agency*, 2006). As Uri legislators accompanied business missions to the DPRK, Park Geun-hye criticized Roh's policy for leading to crisis, encouraging instead far more conditional policies with clear time frames for dismantling DPRK nuclear facilities. With elections looming in December 2007, the GNP criticized presidential hopeful Chung Dong-young for his proposed Kaesong summit but unconditional engagement remained in place as the GNP unexpectedly announced support for a more conciliatory approach.

The 2007 summit produced a Joint Declaration to increase exchanges but GNP candidate Lee Myung-bak veered to a more conditional policy. DPRK failure to submit a comprehensive list of nuclear activities led newly elected Lee Myung-Bak toward a new policy, pressuring the DPRK to disclose all its nuclear activities, reform its economy, and respect human rights. Aid and reconciliation would now be conditioned on complete denuclearization; the sunshine policy's unconditional annual supply of rice and fertilizers would end. With the shooting of a South Korean tourist in Kungang and the DPRK's second nuclear test in 2009, Lee also joined PSI and re-aligned South Korea with US policy triggering sharp criticism of conditional engagement from the opposition. South Korea

demanded information on South Korean abductees and war prisoners but also transferred communications equipment and medical assistance despite DPRK missile tests and incursions into its territory. In 2010 the DPRK threatened South Korea and the US with ‘unprecedented nuclear strikes’ to protest their coordination against potential DPRK instability yet inter-Korean trade increased by nearly 90 percent from 2009 and Kaesong now employed 43,000 North Koreans.

The sinking of the Cheonan triggered South Korean demands for an apology and punishment of those responsible, affirmed the principle of proactive deterrence, called off inter-Korean economic cooperation, and implemented harsher sanctions labelled ‘5.24 measures.’ This phase represented a retreat from even conditional engagement and an indefinite shutdown of humanitarian aid. Saenuri candidate Park Geun-hye criticized preceding administrations for their single-handed focus on either coercion or appeasement, advocating ‘trustpolitik,’ combining toughness and flexibility to build trust. A DPRK satellite launch violating the ban on ballistic missile tests led to another UNSC resolution and an ever more defiant DPRK threatening all-out nuclear attack, conducting its third nuclear test, and triggering yet another UNSC resolution. ‘Trustpolitik’ as the road to harmonious unification gained 67 percent approval when Park assumed office but Kim Jung-un responded with unilateral withdrawal of DPRK workers from Kaesong, the only project that had survived the previous administration (Asan Institute for Policy Studies, 2013). Pyongyang agreed to re-open Kaesong under new terms following a surprise visit by DPRK officials during the 2013 Asian Games. Park announced her initiative to emulate ‘the ‘miracle on the Rhine’ (German reunification) by launching the ‘Miracle on the Han’ (peaceful Korean reunification) pivoted on an agenda for humanity—family reunions and humanitarian assistance; an agenda for co-prosperity—transportation and communication infrastructures; and an agenda for integration—joint development of education and non-governmental exchanges. She also lifted the ‘5.24 measure’ banning supplies of fertilizers. Support for ‘Trustpolitik’ reached 55 percent, higher than Lee Myung Bak’s hardline policy, attracting about 35 percent approval. But DPRK nuclear and missile tests continued, leading to strong support for Park’s decision to cancel Kaesong operations that helped finance North Korea’s military programs. The DPRK responded by freezing all assets, expelling 11 South Koreans, and declaring Kaesong a military area. The Kaesong’s operations of South Korea’s sunset industries could no longer be sheltered and the survival of the sunshine policy was, more than ever before, under question.

## **Conclusions**

Careful process tracing of the policies of Japan, China, and South Korea vis-a-vis DPRK nuclearization suggests important implications for the conceptual approaches introduced in the first part of this article. First, despite differences in

regime type and international power, Japan, China, and South Korea exhibited initially a shared secular trend in their overall approaches to dissuade the DPRK from its nuclear ambitions. Their internationalizing political-economy models shaped similar incentives to address potential threats to that model through positive inducements. Those incentives induced aversion to more extreme policies of regime change and armed conflict that might disrupt macroeconomic and regional stability. Their policies closely resembled Kahler and Kastner's 'transformative strategies' of unconditional reliance on economic interdependence to transform the goals of the DPRK leadership. In time, all three Northeast Asian states shifted toward greater reliance on conditional strategies, linking economic ties to changed behavior in the target state. Eventually, entrenched DPRK defiance helped congeal a more pronounced shift toward greater reliance on sanctions in all cases, perhaps unsurprisingly given the meagre results of positive inducements.

Second, despite these shared overall trajectories, the path toward greater reliance on sanctions highlights the specificities of each case, a path deeply rooted in their respective domestic considerations. Japan moved soonest and farthest away from reliance on positive inducements, followed by South Korea. As leaders and parties in both states faced free and competitive elections, the viability of positive inducements became less and less tenable given intransigent DPRK behavior. In particular, the success of transformative strategies of unconditional engagement requires high levels of consensus in sender states. Indeed, as Kahler and Kastner argue, even conditional strategies linking economic ties to changed behavior in the target state are less likely to succeed when initiating states are democracies. This is especially the case when underlying economic incentives to trade or invest in target states are strong, as was the case in South Korea. Domestic political polarization also undermined consensus intermittently, particularly in South Korea. In a far more controlled context, China's centralized leadership could stay the transformational course longer than Japan and South Korea. Lingering support for the DPRK among certain PLA and nationalist constituencies—buttressed by leader's incentives to avoid a complete collapse of the DPRK, the influx of North Korean refugees, and potential Korean unification—explain the longevity of China's commitment to positive inducements. Yet DPRK defiance enhanced internal polarization over the merits of transformational expectations. By humiliating China, the DPRK fueled popular concerns that China's leaders could not translate rising international influence into solutions to Northeast Asia's tinderbox. As one of the single most divisive foreign policy issues in China, DPRK behavior has sensitized China's leaders to the domestic impact of ineffective control over Korean developments.<sup>3</sup> Avoidance of threats to internal and external stability remains crucial for a leadership invested in an internationalizing model hinging on continued economic growth and a 'well-off society.' Hence, from a firm commitment to sovereignty, the rights of others to acquire nuclear weapons, and



complete rejection of sanctions under Mao, an internationalizing China evolved from unconditional to conditional engagement and ever more receptivity to stronger sanctions. Shi Jinping's campaign to assert central power over the military and sustain economic reforms reinforced a tougher approach to DPRK nuclearization. This significant evolution notwithstanding, China remains the DPRK's economic lifeline.

Third, the more fine-grained evolving mix of negative and positive inducements by all three states reveals as much about their own internal politics as about DPRK nuclear intransigence. The DPRK provided merely another arena for domestic political competition over a broader range of issues. The abductees issue congealed significant consensus in Japan across an otherwise divided public (on constitutional change, for instance), driving public support both in the legislature and public opinion toward greater reliance on sanctions.<sup>4</sup> Conditional engagement replaced unconditional trade and aid first, yet meager results undermined even conditional engagement as a viable policy. Conservative groups seeking regime change in the DPRK—such as the National Association for the Rescue of Japanese Kidnapped by North Korea (NARKN)—found the *racchi jiken* issue to be fertile ground for popular mobilization. DPRK missile and nuclear tests and threats to Japan played in the hands of additional slices of the political spectrum. As a Diet member acknowledged, admitting publicly that the nuclear issue was more important than the abductees became 'political suicide' (International Crisis Group, 2005). Domestic support for positive inducements eroded dramatically, with only 24 percent supporting normalization with the DPRK and barely 12 percent endorsing economic and other exchanges (Cabinet Office of Japan, 2009). The abductees issue also explains Japan's lukewarm support for the SPT and disappointment with the US decision to remove the DPRK from its list of state sponsors of terrorism. About 50 percent of public opinion considered this step to have adverse effects on the abductees; only 4 percent thought otherwise. Higher levels of domestic polarization explain policy gyrations in South Korea towards and away from the sunshine policy. South Korean leaders were forced to contend with sharp public opinion swings on policies vis-a-vis the North, typically keeping them from leaning too far toward either end of the inducements spectrum. Over time, however, the perception that Kaesong and Kungang had failed to realize the sunshine policy's transformational aspirations paved the way for more hardline policies under Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye.<sup>5</sup> Popular majorities continued to favor restraint, however; indeed the public remained sharply divided over the closure of Kaesong. About 64 percent supported reunification in 2007 but only 56 percent in 2014 (Seoul National University Institute for Peace and Unification Studies, 2014).

Fourth, despite very real strategic threats emanating from DPRK nuclearization, public perceptions of threat have been relatively subdued relative to other considerations. In Japan, concern with

abductees featured as a far more pressing issue than repeated threats from DPRK nuclear weapons, dominating responses as perhaps no other issue has (personal interview, Tokyo, 10 July 2015). Nearly 88 percent of the public expressed concern with this issue but significantly lower levels for nuclear weapons and missiles. Yet the DPRK's aggressive behavior enabled shifts in military postures and capabilities that conservative politicians had sought for Japan separately from the DPRK factor. DPRK nuclearization posed significant strategic dilemmas for China as well but, above all, raised concerns with the implications of DPRK defiance for broader dilemmas of regime survival. The threat posed by the DPRK to its southern neighbor would be hard to exaggerate, yet 59 percent of South Korea's public did not see their security undermined when the DPRK acknowledged manufacturing nuclear weapons. Despite repeated DPRK nuclear and missile tests, threat perceptions in the South increased from 6 to 14 percent between 2008 and 2014 (Brooke, 2004; *Chosun Ilbo*, 2005; Seoul National University Institute for Peace and Unification Studies, 2014). Only recently have those perceptions reached unprecedented scope, as popular majorities supported deployment of a US missile defense system and endorsed an independent nuclear deterrent for South Korea.

Finally, the fact that the panoply of positive and negative inducements, conditional and transformational, has failed to deliver desired outcomes challenges neorealist predictions that power disparities predict behavior and outcomes. The combined massive superiority of China, Japan, and South Korea has not altered the DPRK's behavior. Both international and domestic factors explain why military force or tougher measures were withheld in each case. But the fact remains that even China's overwhelming power could not prevent repeated DPRK nuclear and missile tests, its expulsion of IAEA inspectors and withdrawal from the NPT, and threats to Japan and South Korea that posed serious dilemmas for Chinese leaders. DPRK defiance also complicated China's efforts to steer multilateral talks. Aversion to more consistent tougher stands stemmed from the primacy of stability and growth in Chinese leaders' survival calculations. But even far more lenient transformational and conditional strategies have failed not only to dissuade the DPRK from climbing the nuclear ladder but also to persuade it to embrace China-style economic reform and soft landing. China may have only relied on 'hegemony lite' but whether a heavier hand would have yielded better results remains untested. Japan's domestic institutional constraints are well-known and undoubtedly influenced restraint vis-a-vis the DPRK as did South Korea's highly polarized political environment. Above all, the outcome suggests that the DPRK's autarkic *juche* ideology of regime survival is more central to its international behavior than whatever its Northeast Asian neighbors do.<sup>6</sup> The apparent failure of engagement or sanctions may therefore have less to do with the senders' strategies than with the nature of the target: a quintessential inward-looking autocratic state unreceptive to external

inducements of any kind.

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### **Notes**

1. Inward-looking models reject the global political economy and promote statist entrepreneurship and protectionism (Solingen, 1998).
2. More Chinese thought that the DPRK was a greater military threat to China than was South Korea (Genron NPO and *China Daily*, 2014). On surveys showing that a majority of Chinese dislike Kim Jong-II's regime, see Feng (2010).
3. On the centrality of the DPRK behavior in China's internal foreign policy debates, see Feng (2010).
4. On public opinion fragmentation vis-a-vis foreign policy, see Inoguchi (2014) and Pempel (2014).
5. Professor Moon Chung-in, a leading inspiration of the sunshine policy, argued that a more methodical implementation of the policy would have prevented the sharp escalation of tensions (*Los Angeles Times*, 2016).
6. On domestic dynamics in the DPRK, see *38 North* (US-Korea Institute at SAIS, available at: <http://38north.org>); Haggard and Noland (2012); Solingen (2007).

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