



The Northeast Asian Economic Review

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Post-epidemic Era

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

SPEZZA Gianluca

The Northeast Asian Economic Review

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Development Trends of Cross-border Tourism Cooperation in Northeast Asia in the Post-epidemic Era*

SONG Linlin**

Abstract

The tourism industry is a labor-intensive industry with multiple levels of employment, a wide range of areas, and a broad market, which has a great driving effect on employment in the entire society. Since the beginning of 2020, the COVID-19 epidemic has begun to spread all over the world. So far, the medical and health fields have not yet been able to adopt effective methods to completely control the epidemic. Many industries have encountered almost “shutdown” control or impact. As an important carrier of cultural exchanges, social communication, and trade circulation, the operation of the tourism industry is based on the movement of people, and it is particularly affected by the rapid development and continuous spread of the global epidemic. This article first conducts a more detailed analysis of the basic situation of tourism cooperation in Northeast Asia since the outbreak of the epidemic and a series of issues that have emerged, and then explores a preliminary analysis of how countries and regions can deepen cooperation and promote development in the tourism industry in the era of symbiosis of the epidemic.

Keywords: the COVID-19 epidemic, Northeast Asia, cross-border tourism cooperation, development trend

JEL classification codes: O53, Z32

1. Introduction

Before the outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic in 2020, global tourism had experienced steady growth for over six decades, culminating in an estimated 1.5 billion international arrivals in 2019, an increase of 4% year on year, and two years ahead of previous forecasts. According to the Sustainable development Goals Report 2021 released by the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), global GDP from tourism increased at a higher rate than the rest of the economy over the decade preceding 2019 to account for 4.1% of global GDP in 2019. According to data from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) website, global expenditures on travel more than tripled between 2000 and 2018, rising from USD 495 billion to USD 1.5 trillion and accounting for 7% of global exports in goods and services (UNWTO, 2019).

Since the beginning of 2020, with the global pandemic of the COVID-19 epidemic, the world economy has suffered unprecedented losses. In order to prevent the spread of the epidemic, many countries around the world have announced the closure of borders or strict entry procedures and restrictions on personnel movements. The restrictions on international travel have led to a sharp drop in the number of international tourists, which has had an unprecedented impact on transnational and cross-border tourism. According to data released by the OECD, international tourism fell by around 80% in 2020. Globally, international arrivals decreased by 74% in 2020 compared to 2019, which represents a loss of \$1.3 trillion in inbound tourism expenditure, more than 11 times the loss resulting from the 2009 global crisis. An estimated 100 to 120 million tourism jobs are at risk because of the pandemic, with a disproportionate effect on women. Under the general trend, tourism exchanges and cooperation among countries

in the Northeast Asia are obviously hindered. At present, the world as a whole has entered the “normalized epidemic prevention and control era”. Northeast Asian countries have successively introduced new measures to rebuild the tourism industry, supporting the continuous recovery of the tourism industry with more flexible tourism products, and promoting the digitalization and greenization of the tourism industry. Transformation redefines the future development model of tourism.

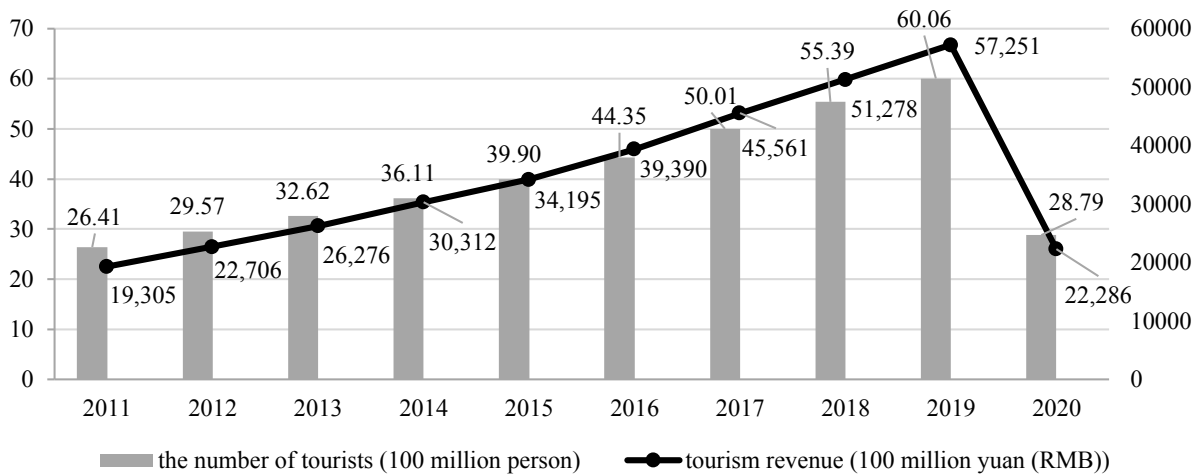
2. Tourism Development Status in Northeast Asian Countries

2.1 China’s Tourism Industry

2.1.1 A Trend of Gradual Recovery on Domestic Tourism

According to the 2020 Cultural and Tourism Development Statistical Bulletin, in 2020, there will be 2.879 billion domestic tourists in the whole year, a decrease of 52.1% over the same period of the previous year.(seen from Figure 1) Domestic tourism revenue was 2.23 trillion yuan, a year-on-year decrease of 61.1%. As the country that was the first to fight against the epidemic and was the first to “zero out” the epidemic, China’s domestic tourist numbers and tourism revenue have gradually recovered after bottoming out in the first half of 2000.

Figure 1. China’s Domestic Tourism Development Status (2011-2020)



Source: China Tourism Statistics Bulletin (2011-2020).

Note: China’s tourism data in this article refers to mainland tourism data, excluding tourism data from Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan.

According to *the Analysis Report on Tourism Economy Operation in the First Half of 2021* issued by the China Tourism Academy on July 9, 2021, the operation of China’s tourism economy in the first half of 2021 showed the characteristics as follows: the tourism consumption confidence had risen steadily; favorable policies were gaining momentum; industry momentum would further accumulate; the stability still needs to be strengthened. In the first half of 2021, domestic tourists reached 2.355 billion, returning to 77% of 2019; domestic tourism revenue was 1.95 trillion yuan, returning to 70% of 2019.

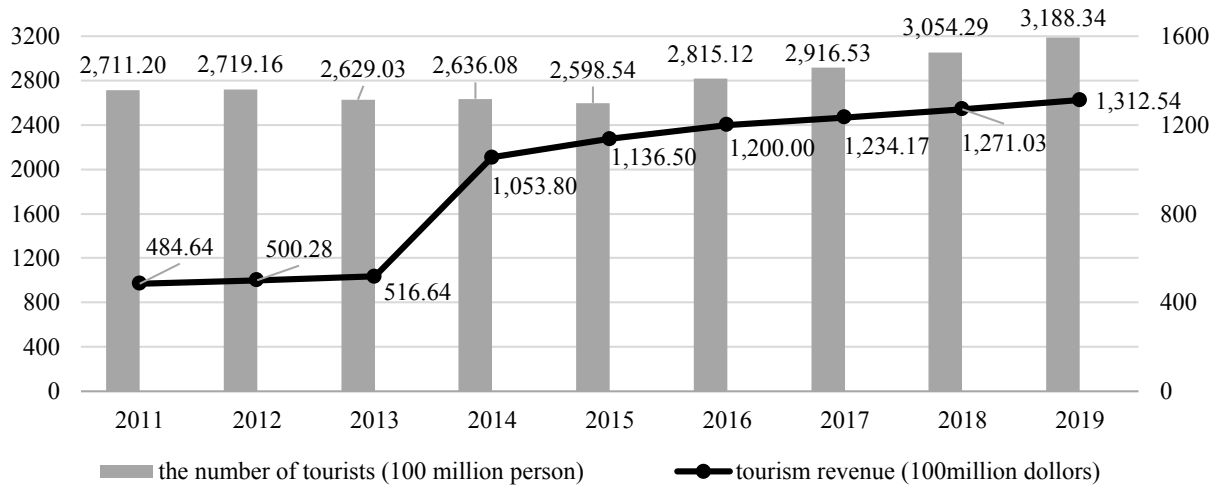
According to calculations calculated by the Data Center of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, from October 1st to 7th, there were 515 million domestic tourist trips across the country, a year-on-year decrease of 1.5% on a comparable basis, and a return to 70.1% of the same period before the epidemic on a comparable basis. Domestic tourism revenue reached to 389.061 billion yuan, a year-on-year decrease of 4.7% and recovered to 59.9% of the same period before the epidemic.

According to the above-mentioned data, it can be judged that the fundamentals of the tourism economy will be further stabilized. Tourism development expectations are expected to shift from cautious optimism to relative optimism. China's tourism market is expected to continue to improve.

2.1.2 Difficulties in the Overall Recovery of Cross-border Tourism

In 2019, China's inbound tourism market continued to maintain its growth trend since 2015, (seen from Figure 2) and China received a total of 145 million inbound tourists, a year-on-year increase of 2.9%. The sudden epidemic in 2020 has restrained the original growth trend of inbound tourism. According to the latest statistics from the China Tourism Academy (Data Center of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism), in the first half of 2020, 14.54 million Chinese inbound tourists were received, a year-on-year decrease of 80.1%. Among them, the decline of inbound overnight tourists and foreign inbound tourists also exceeded 80%. In addition, according to *the number of foreign tourists inbound and outbound* on the official website of the Mongolian Statistics Bureau, in 2020, there were 18,656 Mongolian tourists into China, a year-on-year decrease of 91.1%; in the first half of 2021, there were only 2,827 tourists, a year-on-year decrease of 79.2%, and a sharp drop to 96.6% compared with the same period in 2019.

In 2019, the number of outbound tourists from Chinese citizens was 155 million, a year-on-year increase of 13.9%. Among them, the number of tourists to South Korea and Japan increased by 25.8% and 13.7% respectively. In 2019, the overseas expenditure of outbound tourists exceeded 133.8 billion U.S. dollars, a growth rate of more than 2%. Among the top 15 Chinese outbound tourist destinations, Japan, South Korea, and Russia ranked fifth, sixth, and twelfth respectively. However, due to the impact of the epidemic, the year-on-year growth rate of outbound tourists in the first half of 2020 was negative. Therefore, referring to the above-mentioned data and the statistics in the following Tables 1, 3, 5, and 7 in the text, it can be concluded that in 2020, China's cross-border tourism cooperation with other countries in Northeast Asia had been severely hindered, that China's outbound tourism market had almost stagnated, and that situation is still continuing in 2021.

Figure 2. China's Inbound Tourism Development Status (2011-2019)

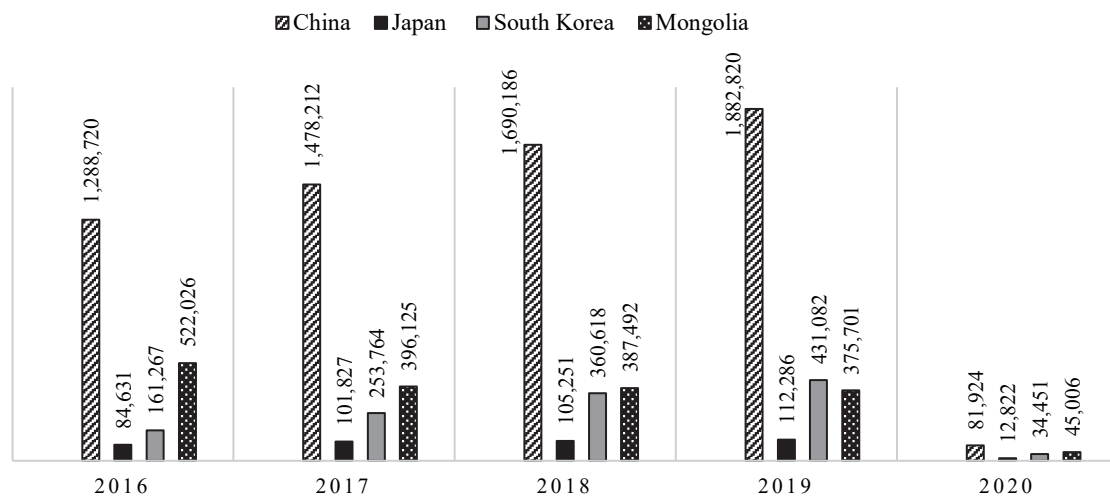
Source: China Tourism Statistics Bulletin---Annual tourism data (2011-2019).

2.2 Great Hindrance to Russia's Cross-border Tourism Cooperation

According to *the Number of Inbound Foreign Tourists to Russia 2014-2020* released on the official website of Federal Agency for Tourism, before the outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic, Russia's cross-border tourism cooperation has been showing a steady development trend. However, due to the COVID-19 epidemic in 2020, the number of inbound foreign tourists for tourism from 69 countries and regions in the world dropped to 6.359 million, a year-on-year decrease of 73.96%. According to the statistics shown in Table 1, in recent years, the number of inbound Chinese tourists to Russia has always ranked first. In addition, the upgrading of China-Russia strategic cooperative partnership has injected new impetus into Sino-Russian cross-border tourism cooperation. At the same time, relationship between Russia and Mongolia has always been in a continuous and positive development trend, which has laid a good foundation for multi-field cross-border cooperation between both, and is also conducive to close personnel exchanges.

Affected by the epidemic, the global tourism industry encounters difficulties, and the development momentum of cross-border cooperation in Northeast Asia is severely hampered. In 2020, the number of inbound foreign tourists from China, Japan, South Korea, and Mongolia in Northeast Asia is 81,924, 12,822, 34,451, 45,006 respectively, a year-on-year decrease of 95.6%, 88.6%, 92.0%, and 88.0%. As shown in Table 1, the proportion of the total number of inbound foreign tourists from China, Japan, South Korea, and Mongolia is still showing a downturn, which has fallen to 2.7%, only about one-fifth of 2019.

Figure 3. Statistics on the Number of Inbound Foreign Tourists from the Northeast Asian Countries (2016-2020)



Source: The number of inbound foreign tourist to the Russian Federation in 2016-2020.

Table 1. Proportion of the Total Number of Inbound Foreign Tourists from the Northeast Asian Countries (2016-2020)

year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Total number from the world	24,570,518	24,390,002	24,550,910	24,418,749	6,358,969
Total number from the Northeast Asia	2,056,644	2,229,928	2,543,547	2,801,889	174,203
%	8.4	9.1	10.4	11.5	2.7

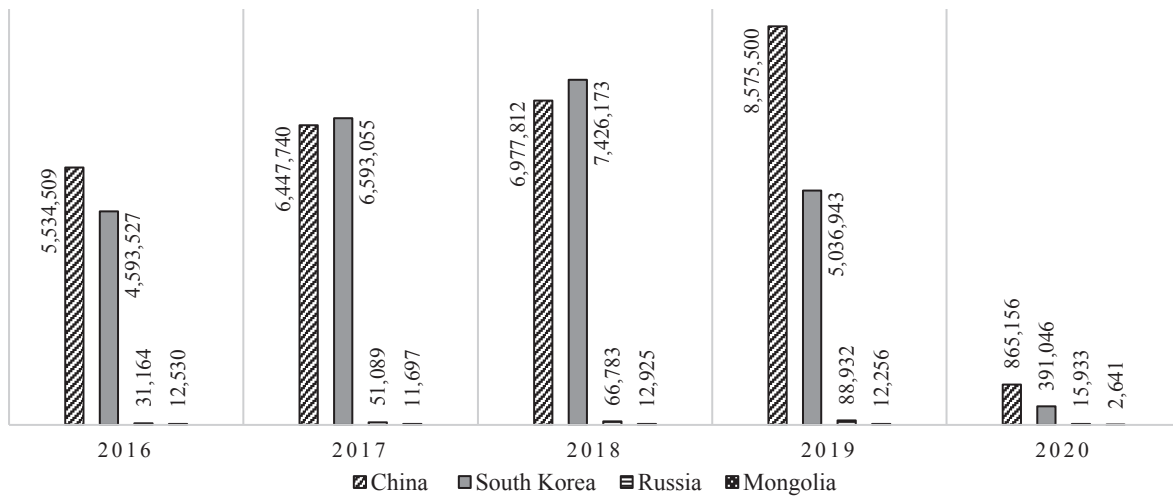
Unit: person, %

Source: The number of inbound foreign tourist to the Russian Federation in 2016-2020.

2.3 A Standstill of Japan's Cross-border Tourism Cooperation

In order to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 epidemic, many countries in the world have adopted measures such as restricting overseas travel. The Japanese government also requires the suspension of cross-border traffic except for special circumstances, and further strengthens quarantine and invalidation of visas. For this reason, international movement for tourism purposes continues to be restricted. According to the statistics released by the Japanese Government Tourism Bureau, the number of inbound foreign passengers to Japan in October 2021 was 22,100, a decrease of 99.1% compared with the same period in 2019. In addition, in 2020, the number of inbound foreign passengers to Japan reached 4,115,828, a year-on-year decrease of 87.1%; among them, passengers for tourism purposes were 3,312,228, a decrease of 88.3% from 2019 (Table 2). In the first eight months of 2021, the number of inbound foreign passengers to Japan was 173,263, a decrease of 99.2% compared with the same period in 2019; among them, passengers for tourism purposes were 60,566, a decrease of 99.7% compared with the same period in 2019. From the above-mentioned statistical analysis, it can be seen that compared with the number of inbound foreign passengers to Japan in the same period in 2019, the number of inbound foreign passengers to Japan in 2020 had dropped significantly, and the cross-border tourism industry in Japan in 2021 was almost stagnant.

Figure 4. Statistics on the Number of Inbound Foreign Tourists from the Northeast Asian Countries (2016-2020)



Source: Japan National Tourism Organization: *the Number of Visitors to Japan by Country/Region/Purpose(2016-2020)*.

Table 2. Proportion of the Total Number of Inbound Foreign Tourists from the Northeast Asian Countries (2016-2020)

Unit: person, %

year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Total number from the world	21,049,676	25,441,593	27,766,112	28,257,141	3,312,228
Total number from the Northeast Asia	10,171,730	13,103,581	14,483,024	13,713,631	1,274,776
%	48.3	51.5	52.2	48.5	38.5

Source: Japan National Tourism Organization: *the Number of Visitors to Japan by Country/Region/Purpose(2016-2020)*

As shown in Figure 4, in 2020, the number of inbound foreign passengers from China, South Korea, Russia, and Mongolia for tourism purposes in Northeast Asia was 865,156, 391,046, 15,933, and 2,641, respectively, representing a year-on-year decrease of 89.9%, 92.2%, 82.1% and 84.7%. In addition, according to *Visitor Arrivals by Country/Area & Purpose of Visit for Jan.-Aug. 2021 (provisional figures) (Compared to 2019)* released by Japan National Tourism Organization, the number of inbound foreign passengers from China, South Korea, Russia, and Mongolia for tourism purposes in Northeast Asia was 3,380, 1,708, 1,674, and 232, respectively, representing a year-on-year decrease of 99.9%, 99.9%, 96.9%, and 97.9%.

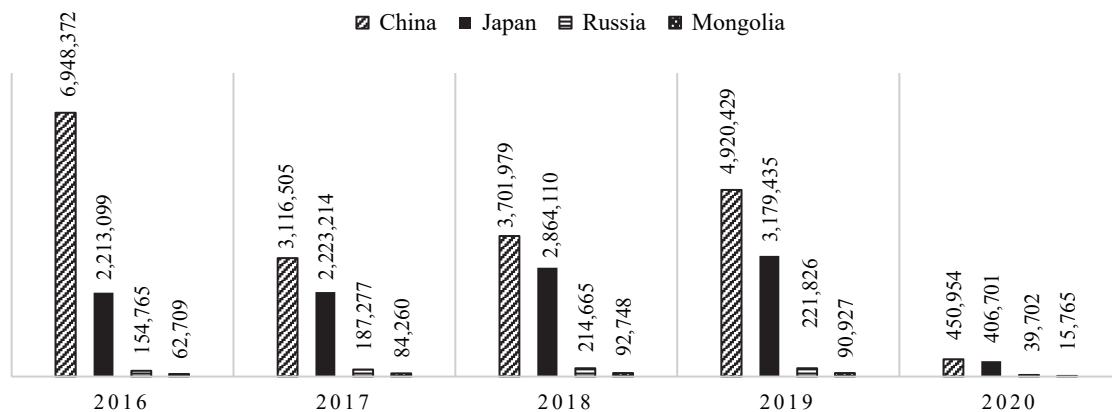
As shown in Table 2, in recent years, the proportion of the total number of inbound foreign passengers from China, South Korea, Russia, and Mongolia for tourism purposes in Northeast Asia reached about 50%, which indicated that cross-border tourism cooperation with Japan had shown a steady improvement. As result of outbreak of the epidemic, the proportion had fallen to 38.5% in 2020, and Japan's cross-border tourism cooperation with other countries in the Northeast Asia region would be affected.

2.4 Difficulties in South Korea's Cross-border Tourism Cooperation

Severely affected by the epidemic, South Korea's cross-border tourism cooperation is in trouble. According to statistics released by the Korea Statistics Bureau, in 2020, the number

of inbound foreign visitors to South Korea was 2,519,118, a decrease of 85.6% year-on-year; among them, visitors for pleasure were 1,653,471, a year-on-year decrease of 88.5%. In the first half of 2021, there were 420,187 foreign visitors, a year-on-year decrease of 80.4%; among them, visitors for pleasure were 73,427, a year-on-year decrease of 95.4%. Based on the statistical analysis in Figure 5, compared with the same period in 2019, the number of inbound foreign visitors to South Korea for pleasure in 2020 had dropped significantly. The development of cross-border tourism in South Korea in 2021 is still precarious.

Figure 5. Statistics on the Number of Inbound Foreign Tourists from the Northeast Asian Countries (2016-2020)



Source: KOSIS Statistical Database: *Visitor Arrivals-by purpose / by nationality*

As shown in Figure 5, in 2020, the number of inbound Korean visitors from China, Japan, Mongolia, and Russia in Northeast Asia for pleasure was 450,954, 406,701, 15,765, and 39,702, respectively, representing a year-on-year decrease of 90.8% and 87.2%, 82.7%, 82.1%. In the first half of 2021, the number of inbound Japanese visitors from China, Japan, Mongolia, and Russia for pleasure was 6,301, 198, 428, and 1,505, respectively, representing a year-on-year decrease of 85.9%, 100.0%, 97.2%, and 96.4%. Based on the above-mentioned statistical analysis, the number of inbound visitors from other countries in Northeast Asia has dropped sharply under the background of the epidemic sweeping the world. As shown in Table 3, in recent years, the number of inbound foreign visitor for pleasure from China, Japan, Mongolia, and Russia in Northeast Asia accounted for more than half, and in 2016 it accounted for nearly 70%. This shows that South Korea has a strong attraction for inbound tourism from other countries in Northeast Asia.

Table 3. Proportion of the Total Number of Inbound Tourists from the Northeast Asian Countries (2016-2020)

Unit: person, %

year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Total number from the world	13,932,925	10,415,594	12,414,348	14,432,275	1,653,471
Total number from the Northeast Asia	9,378,945	5,611,256	6,873,502	8,412,617	913,122
%	67.3	53.9	55.4	58.3	55.2

Source: KOSIS Statistical Database: *Visitor Arrivals-by purpose / by nationality*

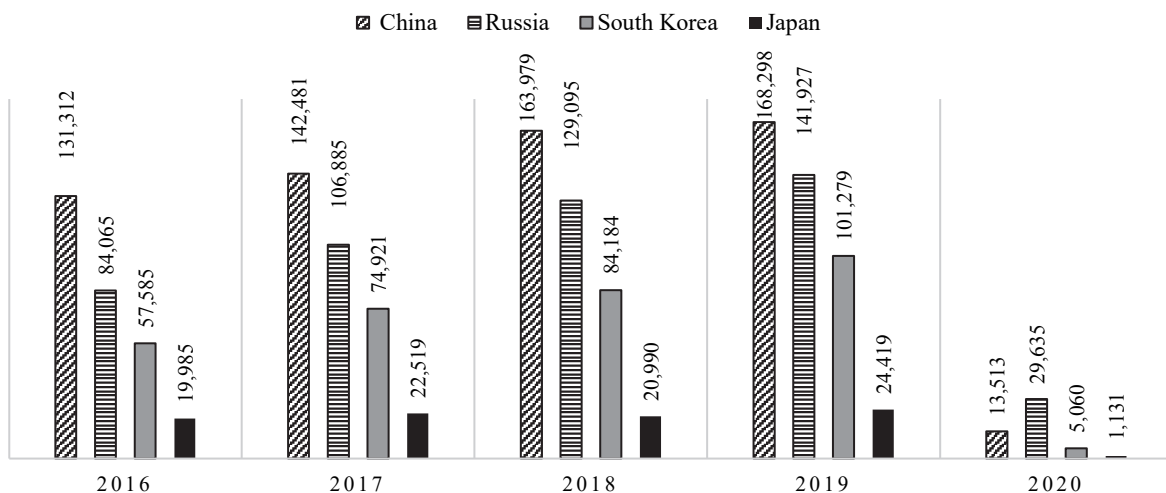
2.5 An Unprecedented Impact on Mongolia's Cross-border Tourism Cooperation

The COVID-19 epidemic has brought an unprecedented crisis to Mongolia's tourism industry. According to statistics from the Mongolian Bureau of Statistics in 2020, there were 66,940 inbound foreign passengers, a decrease of 89.5% compared with the number of 636,960 in 2019. Among them, the number of tourists was 58,859, a decrease of 89.8% compared to 2019. In the first half of 2021, the number of inbound foreign passengers was 13,292, a year-on-year decrease of 72.7%; among them, the number of tourists was 11,474, a year-on-year decrease of 73.8%.

From this analysis, it is concluded that the number of inbound foreign tourists to Mongolia in 2020 had dropped to the lowest value in nearly 20 years. In the first half of 2021, the development of Mongolia's cross-border tourism industry has shown signs of getting better after being hit hard by the epidemic. As shown in Figure 7, in 2020, the number of inbound foreign tourists from China, Japan, South Korea, Russia were 13,513, 1,131, 5,060, 29,635, respectively, representing a year-on-year decrease of 92.0% and 95.4 %, 95.0%, 79.1%. At the same time, according to the statistics released by the Mongolian Bureau of Statistics, in the first half of 2021, the number of inbound foreign tourists from China, Japan, South Korea, Russia was 2,397, 95, 424, 4,986, and 0, a year-on-year decrease of 72.4%, 91.0%, 91.2%, 99.5%.

As shown in Table 4, cross-border tourism cooperation between Mongolia and other countries in Northeast Asia has shown a good momentum of high-quality development, and the total number of inbound foreign tourists from the four countries remains high. However, due to the impact of the epidemic, the number of inbound foreign tourists to Mongolia has dropped significantly. Although the total number of inbound foreign tourists from the four Northeast Asian countries to Mongolia in 2020 will be as high as 83.8%, the highest value in the past 20 years. However, the absolute number of cliff-like declines cannot judge the recovery time of Northeast Asian countries' tourism cooperation with Mongolia.

Figure 6. Statistics on the Number of Inbound Foreign Tourists from the Northeast Asian Countries (2016-2020)



Source: Mongolia Statistical Information Service: *Number of Inbound Tourists, by Country*

Table 4. Proportion of the Total Number of Inbound Tourists from the Northeast Asian Countries (2000-2020)

Unit: person, %

year	2000	2005	2010	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Total number from the world	154,207	338,768	456,090	386,204	404,163	469,309	529,370	577,300	58,859
Total number from the Northeast Asia	122,869	272,010	371,748	282,187	292,849	346,806	398,248	435,923	49,339
%	79.7	80.3	81.5	73.1	72.5	73.9	75.2	75.5	83.8

Source: Mongolia Statistical Information Service: *Number of Inbound Tourists, by Country*

3. Negative Influence of the COVID-19 Epidemic on Regional Tourism Cooperation in Northeast Asia

3.1 An Significant Interruption of the Cross-border Tourism Market due to Entry Restrictions

In order to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 epidemic, to ensure national security and protect public health, countries around the world have successively introduced entry restrictions. In the early days of the outbreak, Northeast Asian countries quickly introduced relevant entry restrictions, including continued tightening of entry visa policies, suspension and reduction of international flights and closure of land border ports, and called on residents to avoid unnecessary travel abroad, which almost interrupted cross-border tourism market among Northeast Asian countries.

Table 5. Northeast Asian Countries' Relevant Entry Restrictions

Northeast Asian Countries	Time	Restriction
China	March 28, 2020	temporarily stopping foreigners' entry with current valid visas and residence permits; suspending the entry of foreigners with APEC business travel cards, as well as policies such as port visa, 24/72/144-hour transit visa-free, Hainan visa-free entry, Shanghai cruise visa-free, 144-hour visa-free entry to Guangdong for foreigners from Hong Kong and Macau, and Guangxi visa-free entry for ASEAN tourist group.
Russia	March 18, 2020	promulgating Decree No. 635-R on March 16, 2020 to ban foreign citizens' entry.
	March 30, 2020	restricting people from entering the territory of the Russian Federation through roads, railways, walking, and rivers in accordance with Order No. 763-r.
Japan	March 3, 2020	restricting arrival airports for passenger flights from China or Republic of Korea to Narita International Airport and Kansai International Airport
	March 8, 2020	suspending single and multiple-entry visas in China (including Hong Kong and Macau) and Republic of Korea.
South Korea	March 13, 2020	suspending 89 of the 124 routes operated by Korean Air.
	April 10, 2020	temporarily suspending all valid short-term visas that were issued on or before 5 April 2020, and visa-free entry and visa-waiver programs for nationals of countries imposing entry bans on Koreans.
Mongolia	February 1, 2020	closing all air, rail and road transport borders with China and most of the non-regular border crossings.
	February 27, 2020	suspending regular international flights to Asian routes.
	March 11, 2020	suspending the remaining regular international flights and virtually closing the country

3.2 Suspension of Tourism Business and Closure of Tourist Attractions

In order to curb the spread of the epidemic, cut off the spread of the virus, and ensure the safety and health of the people, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of China issued an emergency notice on January 24, 2020. National travel agencies and online travel companies suspend operating group tours and “air tickets + Hotel” tourism product.

The World Tourism Organization predicts that in 2020, international tourism revenue will be reduced by 300-450 billion US dollars. Affected by the epidemic, the tourism industry of Northeast Asian countries has suffered a severe blow, and many tourism-related companies are facing a crisis of loss or even bankruptcy. In early March 2020, Japan’s Kobe Yeguang Cruise Company announced that it had filed for bankruptcy. This is the first cruise company to declare bankruptcy since the outbreak. According to data from the Korea Hotel Industry Association, in March 2020, the occupancy rate of Korean hotels exceeded 90%. It is estimated that the loss of 44 South Korean hotels in 2020 will be as high as 83.5 billion won, or about 480 million yuan. According to statistics from the National Bureau of Statistics of Mongolia, the number of tourism companies in the first quarter of 2020 decreased by 21% to 1,274, and there were 1,191 companies in operation in the second quarter, a year-on-year decrease of 27.0% and a month-on-month decrease of 6.5%. The loss and closure of tourism enterprises also means that tourism practitioners are forced to be “unemployed” and indirectly affect the development of cross-border tourism cooperation.

In order to curb the spread of the epidemic, cut off the spread of the virus, and ensure the safety and health of the people, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of China issued an emergency notice on January 24, 2020. National travel agencies and online travel companies suspend operating group tours and “air tickets + hotel” tourism product. Various provinces in China actively responded and adopted effective measures to promptly close tourist attractions, museums, cultural centers, theaters and other cultural tourism venues, stop performances, foreign visits, travel agency group operations, public gatherings, star-rated hotels, and large-scale events, and earnestly maintain them. The lives of the broad masses of the people are safe. The temporary closure of tourist attractions has led to the temporary loss of inbound tourist destinations, thereby interrupting the development of the inbound tourist market.

3.3 Weakened Tourists’ Willingness across Borders

On March 13, 2020, *the Survey Report on Tourists’ Traveling Willingness after the Epidemic* jointly issued by Ivy’s Joint Travel Advisory Agency, China Kanghui Tourism Group, and the Asia-Pacific Travel Association showed that 45% of the respondents would plan to travel abroad after the epidemic. Among them, Asian destinations are the first choice for many tourists, and 18% of the respondents said that the country they most want to go to after the epidemic is Japan. It can be seen that relevant countries in Northeast Asia are still the preferred cross-border travel destinations for Chinese tourists. According to *the 15 Discoveries and Traveling To Be Started: A Survey Report on Chinese People’s Traveling Willingness after the Epidemic* jointly released by the China Tourism Research Institute and the Ctrip Tourism Big Data Joint Laboratory, more than 90% of the respondents chose domestic tour. At the same time, according to the number of inbound tourists from Northeast Asian countries in 2020 shown in this text, it can be judged that due to the impact of the epidemic, tourists from various countries in the region have significantly

weakened their willingness to travel across borders, so that cross-border tourism cooperation within the region has been temporarily suppressed.

4. Trends of Cross-border Tourism Cooperation in Northeast Asia in the post-epidemic era and China's Response

4.1 Domination of the Combination of Industry, Official and University to Cross-border Tourism Cooperation

Since the outbreak of the epidemic, countries in Northeast Asia have always united and helped each other to fight the epidemic. Today, the epidemic has entered an era of normalization. Countries in the region are actively responding to the many challenges posed by the epidemic through various forms of cooperation, accelerating the full recovery of cross-border cooperation in multiple fields, and promoting the coordinated development of regional integration. On September 27, 2021, the "Northeast Asian Culture and Tourism Industry Development Forum" sponsored by the Foreign Affairs Office of the People's Government of Liaoning Province and the Liaoning People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries and undertaken by the Liaoning Northeast Asia Economic and Cultural Promotion Association was successfully held in Shenyang. This forum has received active participation and enthusiastic response from embassies of Northeast Asian countries in China, experts and scholars in related institutions, and business representatives. Adequate exchanges and discussions have further strengthened the confidence in the development of the cultural and tourism industry in Northeast Asia, and fully demonstrated the common desire of all parties in Northeast Asia to overcome the impact of the epidemic and strengthen mutually beneficial cooperation.

4.2 Development of a New Digital Format for Cross-border Tourism Cooperation

The epidemic has brought a huge impact on global economic development, and at the same time highlights the important role of the Internet in the development of human society and the hard core strength and development vitality of the digital economy. Under the background of "Internet + tourism", the way of travel gradually tends to be mobile, individualized and personalized. At the same time, major changes on the consumer side, including experience enrichment, group segmentation, self-service travel design, rationalization of travel shopping, and e-commerce in the transaction process, have become important factors for tourists to consider when planning travel. In addition, new digital technologies such as artificial intelligence technology and big data technology are gradually being integrated into the tourism industry, effectively promoting the diversified integration of online and offline.

4.2.1 Deepening Multilateral Digital Economic Cooperation in Northeast Asia

In recent years, the digital economy of China, Japan, South Korea, and Russia in Northeast Asia has developed rapidly (Table 6). Under the situation of normalization of epidemic prevention and control, major countries in Northeast Asia can take advantage of the digital advantages of each country to carry out digital information technology integration and sharing, regional cultural and tourism resources collaboration and integration, and jointly create a "cloud travel in

Northeast Asia” smart cultural tourism platform project, through interconnection, Digital cutting-edge technologies such as the Internet of Things, artificial intelligence, and big data applications have multi-dimensional interpretation of the landscape effect on the scenic spot, creating a truly smart tourism experience, which can not only meet the travel needs of tourists who are difficult to travel across borders during the epidemic, but also can be used in the region through platform projects. The publicity of scenic spots in various countries attracts tourists’ eagerness to visit here after the epidemic is over, helping to accelerate the recovery of the cross-border tourism industry in Northeast Asia and further deepen international cooperation in the digital economy.

Table 6. Statistics on the Digital Economy Scale and Global Ranking of Related Countries in Northeast Asia (2018-2020)

Unit: US\$100 million

countries year	2018		2019		2020	
	total value	rank	total value	rank	total value	rank
China	47,290	2	51,954	2	53,565	2
Japan	22,901	4	23,949	4	24,769	4
South Korea	7,636	7	7,995	7	8,478	7
Russia	2,942	13	3,076	13	2,756	14

Source: CAICT: *White Paper on Global Digital Economy (2019-2021)*.

4.2.2 Launching Digital Industrial Integration of Culture and Tourism in China

Many provinces in China have launched smart cultural tourism projects, using the Internet platform to promote the integrated and innovative development of “culture + tourism + technology”, and launched a number of “cloud tourism” projects to meet the needs of tourists who are restricted from staying at home due to the epidemic. Therefore, smart cultural tourism is an important field for the development of the digital economy in the future, and it is also an objective need to realize the digital transformation and development of the tourism industry. “Cloud shopping” has entered people’s field of vision. The world as a whole has entered the “normalized epidemic prevention and control era”. Northeast Asian countries have successively introduced new measures to rebuild the tourism industry, supporting the continuous recovery of the tourism industry with more flexible tourism products, and promoting the digitalization and green transformation of the tourism industry so as to redefine the future development model of tourism.

5. Conclusion

In March 2020, when the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 epidemic to be a “global pandemic”, in order to prevent the epidemic from spreading on a large scale, various countries have adopted a “reclusive” policy to try to block the movement of people at home

and abroad. At present, the COVID-19 epidemic is still prevalent all over the world. Epidemic prevention and control measures in Northeast Asian countries will continue. It is worth noting that although the tourism industry in some regions is gradually restarting, cross-border tourism has shown a gradual and cautious liberalization trend. How to capture the new needs of the cross-border tourism market and how to seize the initiative in the cross-border tourism market competition are challenges for all countries in Northeast Asia. The new trends in the cross-border tourism market that the epidemic has spawned are a reshaping of the development of cross-border tourism. This requires countries in the Northeast Asia region to make innovations in tourism products, improve service quality, and improve tourism experience. Innovative thinking, constantly creating new forms of tourism, meeting the new needs of tourists, and creating a new situation for the development of cross-border tourism in various countries.

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

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Abstract

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

Keywords: North Korea (DPRK), Economy, Marketization, Legislation, Authoritarian Governance, Literature Survey.

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

1. Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

North Korean regime?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The view of North Korea expressed by United Nations agencies however, is different. To begin with, during the Cold War, North Korea enjoyed much better consideration from international institutions and media than it does today. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) opened its office in Pyongyang in 1980. UNESCO reported positively for years on many aspects of socioeconomic life in North Korea – particularly education – while UNICEF compared DPRK social indicators favorably to those of South Korea as late as 1987.¹⁴ Within the UN as well as in the European parliament, North Korea was not seen as the “last bastion of dictatorship” it later became known as. Until the late 1980s, troubles on the peninsula were largely regarded as an affair between two authoritarian regimes. The presence of a military dictatorship in Seoul, with its negative record on human rights, somehow balanced things out with the DPRK, as this was conventionally understood as a state akin to those within the Eastern Bloc.¹⁵

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

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

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

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

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

5. Conclusion

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

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

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

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

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