

Introduction

Reframing the Debate

WAR IS STILL A POSSIBILITY on the Korean peninsula. No peace treaty was ever signed following the armistice that ended the Korean War in 1953.¹ More importantly, Korea is still divided into two mutually antagonistic camps: the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, or North Korea) and the Republic of Korea (ROK, or South Korea).² Conflict between North and South still has the potential to spill over into large-scale killing and destruction. In that event, the United States would be directly involved because of its defense commitments to South Korea. China, Japan, and even Russia might also intervene, directly or indirectly. In other words, the unresolved Korean conflict is inherently an international security problem. Its resolution would help bring stability, not just to Koreans on both sides of the border, but to East Asia as a whole. Bringing peace to the peninsula would eradicate a continuing threat to international peace and security.

This book argues that understanding the possibilities for reducing international insecurity and promoting a stable peace inherently requires understanding the reconstituted national security priorities of the DPRK. After the creation of the state in the 1940s, a conception of national security as territorial integrity underpinned the DPRK's national security doctrine. After the economic crisis of the 1990s, the DPRK government included human security priorities, in terms of providing for the basic

food needs of the population, along with the more conventional policies of national defense, in a reoriented national security policy. The dominant goal of regime survival was the primary reason for both the former and the latter approach to national security.

The human security concerns shaping the DPRK's new international orientations were to secure freedom from want, mainly in terms of providing enough food to feed the population. These new priorities were consciously developed in the wake of the state's inability to feed the population in the 1990s—a policy failure that resulted in nearly a million dead of starvation and malnutrition-related diseases. More problematic for the DPRK government was any recognition of the necessity of incorporating the other half of the human security equation—freedom from fear—in a reconstituted system of national priorities. On the contrary, fear of violence from a foreign military invasion was used to justify the maintenance of a political system in which political and civil freedoms remained restricted. Some signs of the possibility of change could be glimpsed by the early years of the twenty-first century, however, when the DPRK government demonstrated some willingness to engage seriously with external actors even on these most sensitive of policy issues. The human rights dialogue with the European Union and Switzerland provided the most visible demonstration of this new thinking.

This book investigates three related themes. The first is the dramatic socioeconomic change that has taken place in North Korea since the early 1990s. The second is how freedom-from-want concerns reshaped DPRK national security policy. The third is how the international humanitarian community addressed changing North Korean security dilemmas and found a way of working with the DPRK government.

Helping external actors to learn from the experiences of the humanitarian community in responding to human security needs in the area of freedom from want and in the realm of freedom from fear provides a core objective of the book.

The overall purpose of the book is to contribute to improved understanding of the DPRK so as to find feasible alternatives to war as a method of conflict resolution on the peninsula. The alternative proposed assumes that the conditions for radically improved human security for the North Korean population must be first articulated and evaluated before good policy can be developed and implemented. Sustainable improvements to



the human security of North Korea's population will contribute to the creation of a stable peace. They are also, most importantly, an ethical end in themselves.

The Theoretical and Analytical Framework

The framework for consideration of what I call the human/national/international security nexus in the DPRK is provided by a reconsideration of international relations theories as they have been applied to the study of the DPRK. Conventional ways of understanding (theories) of the DPRK and international security argue both for the DPRK's unpredictability and for its evil intent in international relations. The development of weapons of mass destruction is viewed as an example of evil intent that, combined with the country's purported unpredictability, makes for a grave threat to international peace and stability. Underpinning this approach is the assumption and assertion that little is or can be known about the DPRK and that, therefore, worst-case options must always be assumed.

The Arguments

In this book I first argue that the DPRK is both knowable and predictable. Second, I argue that conventional state-centric notions of international relations can contribute to a partial explanation of DPRK foreign policy, but paradigmatic blinkers need to be abandoned to allow researchers and analysts to make full use of the knowledge about the DPRK that has become available since the mid-1990s. Third, I argue that orthodox theories always fail to understand fully interstate relations and activities, including (but not confined to) those of the most inscrutable states, such as the DPRK. The reason is that they fail to comprehend that, in the end, states are a conglomeration of human beings, organized in social groups, across as well as within territorial boundaries, who propel the state into action in international (and domestic) affairs. States pursue different policies and objectives as a result of volitional acts (including decisions and nondecisions) taken by human beings—sometimes as individuals and sometimes acting within groups, most importantly within governments. States' actions and reactions also result from the unintended consequences of social group activity.

Knowledge of the DPRK substantially increased as an unintended by-product of humanitarian activity in the country from the mid-1990s on. This accretion of knowledge in itself can contribute to peace and security on the Korean peninsula without any radical reorientation of theories of international security. This is because increased knowledge can lead to more predictability, reduce the possibility of dangerous miscalculations, and lessen threat perceptions. Better knowledge of the DPRK can, for instance, contribute in the short run to an attenuation of North-South Korea conflict and therefore a diminution in the immediate risk of violent conflict—helping in the creation of “passive peace” on the peninsula.

I argue, however, that because classical international relations theories cannot extend beyond the confines of the “state as black box” approach, we also need to understand the status of human security needs in the DPRK, to evaluate when these are satisfied and when they are not. In this way we can more fully understand the conditions that would allow for a consolidated or sustainable peace and stability on the Korean peninsula. A passive peace will be inherently unstable if human security needs are not met in the DPRK. In the end, an “active” or stable peace will come to the Korean peninsula only if the human security needs of the DPRK’s population are more or less met in a sustainable, credible, and long-term manner.³

I further argue that an unanticipated effect of humanitarian community operations was to contribute substantially to the potential for active peace on the peninsula. In some ways these operations provided a motor and model for peacebuilding initiatives. I do not argue that an overt objective of humanitarian intervention was to bring peace or that humanitarian community activities could achieve peace on their own. This outcome can only be attained through cooperation between South and North Korea, the growth of interdependent societies, and the implementation of a regional peace and security agreement. I do, however, argue that for an active or stable peace to be attained, all actors need to better understand processes as much as outcomes of negotiations and peacebuilding. Thus they need to carefully choose appropriate means as well as desirable ends in building an effective security strategy for the Korean peninsula. The processes of confidence-building and negotiated compromise, alongside the judicious use of economic instruments, are part of the panoply of

instruments available to diplomats. The experience of humanitarian diplomacy in the DPRK provides lessons for state diplomats in the modalities of achieving objectives in the DPRK.

The book argues that international policymakers need to recognize the DPRK government's shifting priorities in its efforts to provide for human security for its population. By channeling policies so as to assist the population but also to encourage change in a way that does not militarily threaten the DPRK government, international policymakers could support peaceful political, social, and economic change on the Korean peninsula. International policymakers should continue to assist the DPRK government in its efforts to provide for human security in terms of freedom from want. In practical terms this means continued humanitarian support to relieve the chronic food and health crisis facing most of the country's population and economic cooperation for agricultural and industrial redevelopment and restructuring.

International policymakers should also work with the government to encourage the implementation of policies and the building of institutions that can provide the framework for the population to enjoy freedom from fear—an equally important component of the notion of human security. In practical terms this means supporting the transfer of economic assistance only in the context of institution building, including the building of the rule of law, an independent judiciary, an accountable policing and penal system—all based on predictability and transparency in the justice sphere of civil administration.⁴

Another significant contribution that international policymakers can make is to negotiate and conclude a peace agreement on the Korean peninsula. This would cut the ground from under the feet of those conservative elements in the DPRK who continue to advocate the internal suppression of personal liberties on the grounds that war is still a possibility.

Positive change in governmental policy can and should be encouraged through what I call “intelligent intervention” by those outside powers that have the potential for diplomatic and economic engagement with the DPRK. Misdirected external policies are not neutral but dangerous. They will reinforce domestic policies that cannot relieve the misery of a hungry, poor, and deprived population and increase regional and international instability.

The Politics of Data

Questions of assumptions, methodology, and data in the study of the DPRK have never been of merely technical or academic interest. Disputes as to reliability, quality, and accuracy of information have, for instance, formed the basis for U.S. congressional resolutions condemning the DPRK for its lack of transparency. Such disputes were also part of the rationale for the cutoff of Japanese food aid to the North Korean population in 2001. The DPRK, in turn, often viewed demands for more data as akin to requests to allow foreign spies unimpeded access.

A Knowledge Vacuum

One of the key inhibitors to normalizing the relationship between the DPRK and the rest of the world was the absence of credible information about the country. The DPRK's overweening obsession with national security meant that all socioeconomic data were viewed as potentially helpful to the enemy and therefore not made public. The DPRK's isolation meant that very little credible sociological, anthropological, or cultural analysis of the society has ever been completed or disseminated outside the country. The lack of information on this country prior to the 1990s can hardly be overstated, and its consequences have been severe and detrimental to building peace. Those with genuine fears of potential DPRK aggression were forced to use worst-case scenarios as a substitute for empirical analysis.

Others viewed the possibility of a DPRK-initiated attack as slight, particularly from the late 1980s. Nevertheless, their ability to "talk up" the threat from the DPRK was made all the more easier because of that country's unwillingness to reveal the most insignificant and mundane (to the outside world) pieces of information. Its society, because it was largely unknown except through the understandably biased testimonies of defectors, was presumed evil, demonic—literally *indescribable*. The consequences for foreign national security analyses were grave. If a society was so outlandish, outside the pale, and bizarre, then the predictable reaction would be the one most prevalent in what I describe in this book as the "securitization" literature. The society must be destroyed or, at best, absorbed by its southern neighbor.

The DPRK had active interchanges with China, Russia, Eastern Europe, and members of the nonaligned movement during the Cold War and had much more contact with foreigners than is generally understood or reported.⁵ Reporting from these sources, however, tended to be uncritical. In some cases foreign interlocutors were themselves from closed or Communist societies where the free flow of information was not possible or encouraged. In other cases the links were superficial, and visitors were not inclined or able to investigate DPRK society independently. During the Cold War period, however, UN agencies such as UNDP and UNICEF started to report basic social information.⁶ The latter conducted an important nutrition survey in the southeastern province of Kangwon in 1988.⁷

The Impetus for Opening . . . and the Limitations

From the mid-1990s, as a consequence of the nuclear crisis of 1993–94 and the humanitarian crisis of the 1990s, the government faced pressures toward transparency from a number of different external sources. It was pushed into intensive negotiations with adversaries, not just on the food and humanitarian crisis, but also on nuclear issues, economic reconstruction, and a whole host of political and security issues, including armaments and proliferation. In engaging with the DPRK, various foreign actors gained relatively large amounts of information about the country, particularly in their discrete sectors of expertise. The DPRK was initially deeply uncomfortable with the data-gathering aspects of foreign activity and seemed unable to distinguish between legitimate data collection and espionage. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, however, these knowledge-collection exercises began to be accepted with a little more equanimity, particularly those that were clearly necessary for effective planning of humanitarian and economic programs and activities.

From the mid-1990s on, in a development that accelerated after the breakthrough June 2000 Pyongyang Summit of North and South Korean leaders, the DPRK hosted literally thousands of foreign visitors. These included foreign businesspeople, particularly from South Korea. They also included hundreds of foreign technical experts, including U.S. military personnel working to recover the remains of those reported missing in action during the Korean War (1950–53). Compared to those who visited the DPRK for short delegation-type visits and tended to be shown only

the sights, these visitors were engaged in serious interactions with North Koreans and often made repeat visits. Some—not only South Koreans but also foreigners—spoke Korean fluently. They were thus in a relatively good position to develop useful analyses of the sectors of the economy or the society with which they were engaged. Unfortunately, the nature of the business conducted by many of these visitors precluded wide dissemination of their analysis, given that pressure from both sides limited disclosure of findings and activities.

Diplomats, even in these days of “open diplomacy,” prize confidentiality and discretion and were therefore less able than the international humanitarian agencies to publicize their myriad interactions with DPRK officials. Most resident foreign diplomats also had little exposure to life outside Pyongyang—or sometimes, to life outside the diplomatic compound in Pyongyang. International business, to preserve its competitive edge, also tended not to disseminate its research on the DPRK.⁸ The Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO), predominantly consisting of South Koreans and Americans, was active in the DPRK from 1994 until the breakdown in 2002–3 of the agreement that had established its operational framework. Throughout, KEDO stuck to its energy briefs, not wishing to complicate an already sensitive activity with extensive publicity.⁹

The U.S. military, which since 1997 has sent teams that included Korean speakers to search for the remains of soldiers missing in action in the Korean War, provided summaries of its activities but did not use its experiences to provide expanded public analysis of the country.¹⁰ Like businesses, militaries in any country are not structurally open organizations. The U.S. Department of Defense was also sensitive to the potential for domestic political fallout over its payments to the Korean People’s Army in return for assistance. It was anxious to maintain a low profile and avoid political controversy, so as not to jeopardize the operation.

***Facilitating Knowledge:
The Crucial Role of the Humanitarian Community***

From the mid-1990s on, the growing role played by the humanitarian community in responding to government requests to help provide relief for famine victims brought an increasingly useful, systematic process of

data collection and dissemination.¹¹ More by accident than design, external humanitarian intervention helped outsiders gain an understanding of the country, increasing knowledge of the DPRK's society, economy, and governmental behavior. Most of the humanitarian agencies demanded transparency and accountability and, because of their unique and necessitous relationship with the DPRK government, were able to achieve results in the production of data on the DPRK that had not previously been possible. If the DPRK had not complied, at least to some extent, with the demands of the international agencies, the population would have again faced starvation, with unimaginable political consequences for the government.

Publicity, visibility, and transparency are imperatives of humanitarian agency operations, as agencies must report back to donors and convince the public in donor countries to continue to support and finance humanitarian assistance. An intrinsic aspect of the mission and mandate of the humanitarian communities in the DPRK, therefore, was to obtain information about humanitarian needs and to disseminate that information to the wider world. Another objective of collecting and disseminating good information was to demonstrate the necessity of giving scarce resources to the DPRK in the face of many other equally compelling human tragedies competing for donor attention and assistance throughout the world. The pressures to justify humanitarian assistance to the DPRK were particularly intense, given the initial lack of reliable knowledge about social and economic conditions and the reluctance of the DPRK government to allow independent monitoring of food aid distribution.

In the case of the DPRK, the implications of implementing standard operating procedures for humanitarian organizations were revolutionary. Collecting and disseminating information—a routine operation anywhere else in the world—had potentially enormous consequences for the wider politics of the Korean peninsula. The immense distrust between the DPRK and major donors was such that every action or omission on either side could inadvertently become a potential trigger for serious political conflict. At the same time, information obtained for legitimate humanitarian purposes also contributed to the “normalization” of the DPRK. It provided a better understanding of the country and thus helped to bring an element of predictability into its relations with major

humanitarian donors—countries that were also the DPRK's major political adversaries.

The international humanitarian community did, of course, encounter difficulties with reliability, verifiability, accuracy, and access to information.¹² But even with these problems, the information made available was uniquely usable both for humanitarian activity and as a contribution to peacebuilding. Data from humanitarian community sources helped to elucidate social change in the DPRK by allowing an evaluation of who got what and where and how this had changed, particularly since the 1990s. This was so because the scale of the crisis resulted in a nationwide humanitarian operation, by April 2002 covering 85 percent of the population and 163 out of 211 counties.¹³ The information gathered by the humanitarian community on basic human needs, particularly in relation to food, health, and agriculture, although incomplete, was nevertheless comprehensive in that it was virtually nationwide in coverage. By 2001, comparisons could be drawn among different parts of the country, and by 2003, eight years after the establishment of the humanitarian presence, data were available over a fairly long period—allowing for temporal as well as spatial comparative assessment of socioeconomic diversity and change.

Some agencies, and certainly some donors, were aware that the unintended consequence of humanitarian activity was to provide a transmission belt for information sharing and dialogue between the DPRK government and donor governments. Indeed, an argument raged within the humanitarian community as to whether it was ethically acceptable for humanitarian assistance to have any connection with politics or peacebuilding.¹⁴ This debate was largely resolved by the 2000s. Pragmatically, it was accepted that, while the job of humanitarians was to respond to humanitarian crisis, particularly to food insecurity and hunger, they were also responding, whether intentionally or not, to a different type of hunger—the population's hunger for peace.

The Consequences of Analytical Failure

Analysts were slow to catch up with the scope and scale of the socioeconomic change that followed the breakdown in the state's capacity to feed the population in the 1990s. They were caught up in paradigmatic

assumptions that were long past their sell-by date. The DPRK continued to be seen as an unchanging society and state, despite mounting evidence that the DPRK socioeconomy had undergone irrevocable transformation.

An analytical error that bedeviled study of the DPRK polity was to equate the category of social change with the category of policy change. Social change is different from policy change. It is a simple question of logic and observation to note that governmental policies can help to facilitate social change, negatively or positively, but there is clearly no automatic correlation between the two categories. As often as not, policy is a response to social change. It is a way to manage change. In the case of the DPRK, because there were no dramatic policy changes in the past decade, analysts sometimes assumed an absence of socioeconomic change. This assumption provided a false picture of DPRK society and, inevitably, where this analysis was used as a foundation for policy, led to poor policy outputs.

One of the reasons international security policymakers poorly understood social change in the DPRK was that they were not able or willing to separate analytically socioeconomic change from policy or political change, or to disaggregate state and society in the DPRK. Continuing to treat the DPRK as a monolithic entity or as an impenetrable “black box,” international policy analysts could not differentiate between discrete sources of security threats for DPRK policymakers. Many of these were related to the human (in)security conditions of the population. These analytical failures meant that, at critical junctures, the international security community failed to appreciate opportunities both to develop nuanced interventions in support of desired changes and to discourage negative developments. The broader objective of obtaining a durable peace on the peninsula thus suffered.

The Analytical Alternative

The DPRK should be analyzed exactly as social scientists would analyze any other state—democratic or authoritarian, theocratic or secular. As with all states, the DPRK was not and is not a monolithic actor. Like all governments, the DPRK government was propelled and motivated by a mix of domestic and international imperatives that changed over time. Understanding the relationship between the diversity and complexity of

the society and the socioeconomic change that followed the economic and food crisis of the 1990s helps to explain why some policy options were chosen by government and other actors, and other policies were not.

Methodology

The methods used in this book include research in libraries, in archives, on the Internet, and in the field, as well as interviews and observation. My work in the field introduced an element of participant observation to the process. I was fortunate enough to be able to work in the DPRK for extended periods of time with the major agencies: UNICEF from April to May 1998; UNICEF and the United Nations World Food Program (WFP) from October to December 1999; the WFP from August 2000 to July 2001 (during which period I was transferred to the UNDP for a few weeks); and the Caritas program in September 2001, as an evaluator. I have also directed and implemented a training project with DPRK Ministry of Foreign Trade officials since 1999. I left the country in 2001 but returned regularly on shorter visits in the context of that project. All of the extended periods of research could have generated a book in themselves about doing research in the DPRK, but here I want to illustrate how international agencies conduct investigations in the DPRK by reviewing two projects I undertook in-country.

Field Research on Gender in the DPRK

One investigation I undertook for the WFP was to review, for internal use, the gendered aspects of WFP programs and activities. This task involved several interviews with North Korean staff in the WFP, particularly with one woman who was extremely knowledgeable and helpful about culture and customs regarding food habits and pregnancy. The second part of the research involved field visits to rural and urban districts in the vicinity of Hamhung, Wonsan, and Kaesong. Days were spent interviewing nursery, primary school, secondary school, and orphanage staff, pregnant and nursing women in their homes, women and men working on large food-for-work sites, county engineers who supervised the projects, and county and provincial officials in each area. Most of the interviews were conducted with a North Korean WFP staff member and colleague also acting as translator.

Officials were much more forthcoming than the women interviewed in their homes. That was not surprising, given that home visits involved me, a male interpreter, and the local county and provincial officials interviewing often very shy women who had either just given birth or were about to.

The term “gender” was a new concept to the DPRK. However, in practice the chief engineers had routinely taken into account the different gendered or social roles of men and women in planning projects. Officials had often given some thought to how work tasks might have a disproportionately negative impact on women’s health and nutritional status. One particularly memorable discussion took place on the edge of a large embankment reclamation site employing 5,000 male and 5,000 female workers, on a very cold December afternoon (minus twenty degrees centigrade). Seven or eight elderly Korean male engineers and I discussed the sanitary needs of menstruating women working on the site. Without prompting by an outside observer, these engineers had provided for make-shift toilet and washing facilities for women (and men) through local contributions of material and labor. They had reasoned that the UN, through the aegis of the WFP, would not provide financial support for these particular “non-food” items.

Restructuring the Information Base

While working for the WFP in 2000–2001, my main task was to evaluate and restructure the information, monitoring, evaluation, and reporting systems. This mammoth task involved reviewing every piece of information available to the WFP and trying to better systematize future collection, organization, and dissemination. The whole country team was mobilized over one year to carry out this task. Dozens of meetings were held throughout the entire process, involving North Korean and international staff, to work out what could and ought to be done (not always the same). Restructuring involved a range of discrete areas, from considering what the information would be used for (program management and donor reporting) to computer database development, revision of the sixteen monitoring checklists used throughout the country, and training of staff in interviewing, reporting, agriculture, and nutrition.

Technically the process was straightforward, involving first of all deciding on the unit of analysis. The county was chosen, as the province

would have been too large a canvas for programming purposes, and it was politically and logistically unfeasible to consider the household as a fruitful source of data for comparative analysis. Part of the exercise involved agreeing on a common romanization for the county names, as different spellings were being used both within the DPRK government and among the various international agencies. In some cases the agencies were using the South Korean names for the counties, as opposed to the sometimes quite different names prevailing in the DPRK. This ostensibly simple choice of unit of analysis then involved a massive follow-up exercise of standardization, undertaken with the active participation of the North Korean counterpart in the management of humanitarian operations, the Flood Damage Rehabilitation Commission (FDRC).

Second, a structured pilot evaluation in three different counties in three different parts of the country with three separate WFP teams, including local and national staff, was undertaken. The WFP teams were allocated one county each in three different provinces. They were given a set of questions to be used as a base both for archival research in the profuse but, at the time, nonsystematized Pyongyang WFP records and for discussion with North Korean officials at the county level. Interview techniques were discussed prior to the field trips so as to develop a common, nonthreatening approach that could not be interpreted as “spying” or information collection for its own sake rather than for program-related objectives. International and national officers were chosen for the pilot exercise based partly on their longevity in the field and partly on the trust they had developed with the county officials, with whom they already had working relationships. The results of this survey demonstrated what kinds of quantitative and qualitative data were available or could reasonably be collected on a regular basis (in the DPRK, the aim is to visit counties at least once every two months).

In the end the restructured system allowed for spatial and temporal comparison of detailed demographic, infrastructural, agricultural, nutrition, and beneficiary data. The general concern about reliability of quantitative information was balanced by a systematic use of qualitative data in the system. Reporting developed the use of comparative analysis—thus figures did not need to be completely accurate as long as they were consistently compiled from the same source. Throughout, a WFP computer pro-



grammer developed a county database into which quantitative and qualitative data could be entered, collated, and compared over time and space. This was to make regular reporting systematic and consistent.

The process of standardization revealed new areas in need of systematization, particularly in the initial stages. Potato production figures, for instance, had been calculated sometimes in gross metric tons and sometimes in what agronomists called the “cereal equivalent.” The cereal equivalent describes how many calories or how much nutritional value is obtained from a given quantity of potatoes compared with a given quantity of cereals—with corn and milled rice considered “cereals.” The potato-to-corn cereal equivalent in terms of tonnage harvested is 4 (potatoes) to 1 (corn). Analysis that treats production/tonnage figures and nutrition/cereal equivalent figures as one and the same is simply meaningless. Likewise, the term “malnutrition” was often used loosely by Korean and international staff alike. Some recorded severe malnutrition, while others identified situations as falling into the much larger category of chronic malnutrition. The process of systematization was aimed at eradicating all these sources of inaccurate reporting. The system also allowed for cross-referencing with information gained from other multilateral agency and NGO monitoring.

Knowledge . . . Not Anecdotes

The point of this rather detailed exegesis is to demonstrate the very serious and continuous evaluation by the WFP and all the other agencies of the basis for their knowledge claims. This means that when information from the agencies enters the public arena, it is not a product of anecdotal wisdom, or a weeklong delegation visit that assesses the conditions of the entire country from the safety and isolation of the country’s main hotel, the Koryo, or the Kobangsan Guest House (where U.S. short-term visitors tend to be housed). It is instead the product of serious and professional assessment.

Data and Sources

I have tried to substantiate knowledge claims throughout the book with references to sources that can be checked. For this reason I have, in the main, eschewed anonymous sources and nonpublic documentation as references.

Confidential information derived from the WFP system or any other source does not provide the foundation for anything written in this book. In some parts of the book, I have relied on my local knowledge of the DPRK. However, I have attempted throughout to build the core argument on sources replicable or accessible to a researcher.

Primary source material includes government documents, mainly from the DPRK, the ROK, and the United States. Extensive use is made of data from multilateral and bilateral humanitarian agencies and NGOs, mainly from Europe, South Korea, the United States, and Japan. I have made direct and indirect use of interviews in and outside the DPRK. I have also used material from interviews, talks, and conferences outside the country—mainly in the United States, China, Japan, and the United Kingdom. Over the past decade and a half I have interviewed North Koreans in English and through interpreters throughout the DPRK and outside the country. I have also drawn on interviews and discussions with many people concerned with the DPRK, including Americans, Japanese, South Koreans, Chinese, Europeans, Australians, and Canadians. I have spoken with those working in different sectors, particularly humanitarian assistance officials, the military, diplomats, intelligence agency officials, agronomists, health personnel, journalists, academics, and policy analysts.

Also useful have been a number of excellent websites that bring together primary source material in English, including translations of the South and North Korean media. These are referenced in the bibliography.

The secondary material is less useful, as much of it is still bounded by Cold War frameworks in the assumptions on which it is founded and the questions it sets for itself. The literature on external actors' relations with the DPRK, particularly the United States, is relatively profuse, compared to the scant analysis of DPRK domestic social and economic structures and processes. Useful secondary literature can be found in the references.

The core data for this book, however, come either directly or indirectly from work carried out by the humanitarian agencies in the DPRK. Before the humanitarian community began systematically collecting and disseminating information, it was virtually impossible to evaluate social change in the DPRK—much less to separate analytically socioeconomic change from DPRK governmental policy and further investigate how one affects

the other. This was not the case by the early 2000s. The enormous amount of data thus recorded provides the base for the preliminary assessment of key socioeconomic variables and the response from government and outside agencies that form the substantive core of this book. These data also provide the foundation for an evaluation of the differential impact of socioeconomic change on different sectors of society.

Assumptions and Terminology

The Kim Il Sung era and the post–Kim Il Sung era should not be regarded as different from each other because of the titular ruler. Ample evidence indicates that Kim Jong Il was the effective ruler of the DPRK for at least ten years before his father’s death. I have used the periodization, however, to distinguish roughly the period of absolute crisis, under the rule of Kim Jong Il, from the previous era under the presidency of Kim Il Sung, who died in 1994. This periodization is legitimate, given that Kim Il Sung’s policies framed the pre-crisis era and Kim Jong Il’s policies must shape the era of crisis.

In this book the term “regime” is used in a conceptually specific manner. It is not necessarily used in a pejorative manner—for instance, to describe a government we do not like. It is used more in the way the term is used in the international relations literature. Regime, therefore, is more “a set of governing arrangements” or “a set of principles, norms, rules and decisions-making procedures.”¹⁵ Ethical judgments are made in this book, but these are founded on substantiated argument rather than conceptual implication.

The Structure of the Book

I have chosen to write this book around a more or less chronological narrative, with the main exception of the theoretical and analytical framework provided by the next chapter. The chronological narrative is occasionally superseded for the sake of narrative and thematic coherence. For instance, in the short evaluation of land rezoning in chapter 3, I have continued the discussion to take account of how the policy developed into the new century, although the chapter focuses on the transitional period of 1994

to 1998. The chronological framework is of course only a narrative and analytical device designed to indicate important events in the particular time frame under consideration. Real life never fits so neatly into analytical time periods, and that caveat applies also to this book. I have argued, for instance, that government policy could be characterized as being in a state of paralysis during the mid-1990s. I would not wish to imply, however, that elements of proactivity were not present in this period or that trends toward continuing stasis were not very evident well after the mid-1990s. I am here using the chronological device merely to identify what I consider to be dominant characteristics of the period.

The substantive chapters deal with the conceptual and theoretical framework for understanding the DPRK; the heritage of the Kim Il Sung period and the human and economic disaster of famine; the transitional period when socioeconomic change took place in the DPRK but the government remained in policy paralysis; the response of the international humanitarian community to hunger and poverty and the process of interaction with the government; the government's more proactive domestic policies from the late 1990s on; the analogous government proactivity abroad; and the response of the DPRK's main external interlocutors and adversaries. The final chapter provides a summary of the arguments. It also posits policy recommendations based on the reconceptualization of Korean security dilemmas argued for in this book.