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Through the Hermit's Shell - The Regulation of NGOs in North Korea

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THROUGH THE HERMIT'S SHELL-
THE REGULATION OF NGOS IN NORTH KOREA

A Capstone Experience/Thesis Project

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

the Degree Bachelor of Art with

Honors College Graduate Distinction at Western Kentucky University

By

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2014

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ABSTRACT

North Korea gained the moniker “Hermit Kingdom” as the country largely withdrew from interactions with the West during the Cold War. However, NGOs have quietly worked within the country since a famine in the mid-1990s pressured the North Korean government to request international aid. How did these NGOs begin operations in North Korea? How are the rules and regulations governing these NGOs decided? This research attempts to answer these questions through interviews with individuals who have worked or are currently working in North Korea, as well as, through related literature, both academic and non-academic. The findings are as follows: the rules that apply to each organization contain general trends, but are determined on a one-by-one basis with several key factors heavily influencing what regulations apply. Case studies are included to illustrate this point as well as a discussion of the influence NGOs have on North Korean policies.

Keywords: North Korea, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Non-Governmental Organizations, NGOs, Regulation, Policy Influence

Dedicated to my family, and the teachers and professors who have impacted me throughout my life. Each of you have blessed my life at the right moment, and without your encouragement, preparation, and guidance this would not have been possible.

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I would also like to thank the Honors College for empowering students like myself to do research. Many opportunities have been opened to me here at Western Kentucky University and this process has allowed me to produce something of which I am proud. Finally, my family deserves a million thanks for encouraging me to complete the thesis process. I know you are proud as well and I hope this is a reminder that we can all accomplish unimaginable things if there are others cheering us onward.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Today the nickname “Hermit Kingdom” has been appropriated to describe the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, or North Korea. It implies that North Korea is withdrawn, different, and disconnected from all the ties that bind the modern international community together. The transfer of ideas, economic interdependence, human movement – all of these are hallmarks of globalization. According to conventional wisdom, all of these have passed by North Korea without so much as stopping for a glance. However, conventional wisdom is wrong.

Since the mid-1990s, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have been increasingly active in the DPRK. These organizations work in a myriad of areas within the country, providing medical assistance in combatting tuberculosis, increasing foreign educational opportunities for North Korean students, and improving the nutritional status of the people among many other causes. For a country that so many believe is entirely sealed off from the world, a limited number of foreign workers form a continuous presence on the ground. They have, in a sense, passed through the hermit’s shell and they have come to know his home quite well.

Though North Korea is not nearly as isolated as many of us believe, there is – as the saying goes – a grain of truth at the heart of most perceptions. North Korea is

certainly wary of foreign influence. The country continuously gauges foreign interest, has relatively few economic connections to the world, and works tirelessly to control the movement of anyone in its borders. Because of these circumstances, the fact that NGOs have developed a consistent presence in the country is striking. It is also an historic opportunity to learn. This thesis attempts to derive lessons from a few of those NGOs and their time in North Korea.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

Methodology

This thesis is based on qualitative research performed in two ways. The first, a literature review of available information from academic authors such as Andrei Lankov in *The Real North Korea*, as well as older works like *Paved with Good Intentions: The NGO Experience in North Korea* by L. Gordon Flake and Scott A. Snyder. Material not produced from academic circles was also used, such as news articles related to specific NGOs, government white papers from the United States of America Congressional Research Service, and documents from two organizations affiliated with the United Nations, the Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Food Programme.

The second form of research was conducted by interviewing eight individuals who have at one point or another worked for an NGO in North Korea or who have experience with inter-Korean relations. These interviews were conducted over the span of seven months in multiple locations and through video calls. All interviews were conducted in a flexible format following a set list of guiding questions,¹ but allowing for the use of follow-up questions. The individuals interviewed, ordered by date of interview, are the Reverend Bill Moore, Director Heidi Linton, Director Matt Ellingson,

¹ The Two Sets of Guiding Questions – one for NGOs and the other for academic experts – are located in the Appendix of this document.

Dr. Jong Yun Bae, Director Matt Reichel, Dr. John Linton, Mr. Erich Weingartner, and Mr. Victor Hsu.² From these interviews, multiple common threads were highlighted in an attempt to develop an outline of the regulatory system in place, typology of the factors that can influence the conditions an NGO operates under, and an understanding of the different forms of influence NGOs can have in North Korea.

Limitations

Before beginning, there are specific limitations in this study that need to be addressed. First and foremost, this research was done with no knowledge of the Korean language. As a result, it is likely that literature in South Korea, where the topic of NGOs working in North Korea should draw more interest, has been almost entirely missed despite attempts to the contrary. Also, developing contacts among South Korean and European NGOs was more difficult than expected. These factors limited this research largely to the North American perspective of NGO activities. Research has certainly been impacted by this in that no NGOs with residency in North Korea were interviewed (which mostly includes European NGOs), and no South Korean NGOs were interviewed. This may not have been an entirely negative development, however, as it made it easier to draw parallels among the NGOs most directly involved in this research. Also, the presence of Erich Weingartner and Victor Hsu, who both worked with NGO consortiums and began their interactions with North Korea through the World Council of Churches, among those interviewed provided a wider view of NGOs from other world regions, just not in specific detail.

² For those interested in reading about specific NGOs four case studies are included for Christian Friends of Korea, The Pyongyang Project, Pyongyang University of Science and Technology, and Samaritan's Purse in the Case Studies section.

Other less topic-specific factors, such as a small number of interviews, also influenced this research. However, given that the NGO community working in North Korea is small and spread out and that some NGOs did not wish to speak on this topic, the limited number of interviews is understandable. Also, the fact that this research was conducted by an undergraduate student could have deterred some NGOs or individuals who preferred interviews with more experienced and prominent researchers. Another factor affecting data collection, is that initial interest over NGOs in North Korea peaked in the early 2000s and has cycled with North Korea's importance in the international community. This has limited the amount of academic work related to this research. Finally, this research has been qualitative and would likely benefit from collection of related quantitative data.

CHAPTER 3

HISTORY OF OUTSIDE ACCESS

Korea and Foreign Influence

Understanding why North Korea is extremely cautious regarding any foreign influence geopolitics is an enlightening place to begin. The Korean peninsula is separated from China by the Yalu River and lies only 130 miles from Kyushu,³ the closest of Japan's four main islands. This placement has allowed modern day South Korea to flourish between two large markets. However, in the past the peninsula's position ensured the Korean nation fought continuously to maintain its territorial sovereignty and cultural identity.⁴

Even during the Joseon Dynasty, which ruled Korea for nearly five centuries, Korea closely guarded its independence. Yearly tribute missions were sent to Beijing to maintain cordial relations with Ming China. Major invasions by Japan in 1592 and 1598 were warded off through the combined efforts of the Joseon and Ming armies. Heavy foreign influence subsided until the late 1800s when Korea became a target of Meiji-era Japan, Qing China, and Imperial Russia. All three states were highly invested in the outcome of the race to carve a sphere of influence in northeast Asia. Ultimately, the Korean peninsula was forced from its tributary relationship with Qing China after the

³ The distance from Busan, South Korea to Fukuoka, Japan.

⁴ A map of Northeast Asia is in the Appendix under the title (Document III).

Sino-Japanese War in 1895, and Japan formally annexed the territory into the Japanese Empire in 1910.

Thus, it may be argued that Korea's wariness of foreign influence can be attributed to its long history in struggling for domestic safety from political, cultural, or military forces. Added to this history is the knowledge that nationalist sentiments were sweeping through East Asia during the late 1800s and early 1900s. For a country already keenly aware of its difficulty in maintaining domestic control, nationalism must have crystallized the sentiment that foreign people should not be allowed to dictate the fate of the Korean nation. Kim Il Sung, the first Great Leader of North Korea admitted later in life to being a nationalist, as well as a communist.⁵

Another aspect of North Korea's reticence to allow foreign access comes from the country's policy-guiding concept of Juché. Kim Il Sung and other leaders of the Korean Workers' Party developed Juché as reaction to Korea's inability to control its own affairs during the first half of the 20th century.⁶ Juché is often defined as "self-reliance." This principle inspired North Korea to set up its own factories and plan economic development in much the same way that other Communist countries did during their initial break with capitalism. In short, Juché calls for a form of autarky.

Juché is the policy embodiment of the desire to reduce foreign influence within Korea, and the philosophy provides its own example. Juché was branded as a form of Communist thought, even though it is largely Nationalist, to ensure that North Korea

⁵ Andrei Lankov, *The Real North Korea: Life and Politics in the Failed Stalinist Utopia* (New York: Oxford, 2013), 6.

⁶ L. Gordon Flake and Scott Snyder, *Paved With Good Intentions: The NGO Experience in North Korea* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 1.

could claim a unique Communist perspective.⁷ It is easy to imagine that the motivation for the development of Juché came from a desire to separate Korean intellectual currents from contemporary Communist centers of thought, specifically Moscow and Beijing.

The Juché philosophy was expressed through the development of domestic industrial capacities in order to protect the North Korean state from any destabilizing economic forces. For example, in the past North Korea used limestone (which is abundant within the country) to create a synthetic fabric known as Vinalon. Despite higher costs and requiring more physical inputs than foreign synthetic materials, Vinalon became the material of choice within the country. After a period of strong growth through the 1960s, the North Korean economy began to slow down and remained in a steady equilibrium through most of the 1980s.

During the 1980s, North Korea began to lose the luxury of asking allies within the Communist bloc for loans and aid, which were exceptions to the idea of self-sufficiency espoused by Juché. First, the economic reforms of Deng Xiaoping widened the ideological split between North Korea and the People's Republic of China. Then the political reforms destabilized the Soviet Union leading to the dissolution of the Communist bloc's largest, though admittedly, moribund economy. The loss of these resources forced North Korea to begin looking outward, but it does not obscure the facts. North Korea is extremely cautious when allowing any foreign influence within the country's borders and is, in fact, often opposed to it.

Famine

⁷ Andrei Lankov, *The Real North Korea*, 67.

It should be remarked that this isolation from the outside world functioned for an astonishing amount of time. Kim Il Sung built a society that could meet the people's needs (with large amounts of aid from China and the Soviet Union)⁸ without the need for the average North Korean to interact with foreigners. The North Korean government acted as the only interface between the outside world and the North Korean people.

The system that Kim Il Sung built began to fall apart shortly before his death in 1994. The first event that unsettled the North Korean system was the movement of China towards capitalist reform during the 1980s; this reduced China's willingness to support North Korea's inefficient economy and forced North Korea's elite to rely more heavily on the Soviet Union's generosity. This dependency dealt North Korea a particularly hard blow after the Soviet Union fell in 1991. In fact, between 1989 and 1998 the North Korean economy shrank to half its previous size.⁹

The yields of the North Korean agricultural sector, heavily reliant on industrial inputs such as fertilizer, followed the trends of the greater North Korean economy. As a result, the once reliable Public Distribution System was forced to provide smaller rations. In 1995, the World Food Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organization found that the food reserves in North Korea rapidly declined beginning in the early 1990s, indicating that the food security had been deteriorating long before North Korea opened its borders to aid.¹⁰

⁸ Andrei Lankov, *The Real North Korea*, 73-74.

⁹ L. Gordon Flake and Scott Snyder, *Paved With Good Intentions*, 2.

¹⁰ World Food Programme, *Full Report of the Evaluation of DPRK EMOPs 5959.00 and 5959.01 "Emergency Assistance to Vulnerable Groups"*, Rome: World Food Programme Office of Evaluation, Published September 2000, Accessed January 14, 2014, <http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/reports/wfp007326.pdf>.

The chronic food insecurity within North Korea was exacerbated in 1995 by heavy rain and extensive flooding. Domestic agricultural yields in 1996 fell to 2.5-2.8 million metric tons against the 5.0-5.5 million metric tons of grain required to feed North Korea's population. During the famine, which continued acutely from 1995 until 1998, it is estimated that anywhere between 450,000 to 2 million people died (between 2.5% and 10% of the entire North Korean population).¹¹ Though the estimations vary widely, it is clear that this was a devastating time for the citizens of North Korea.

International Access

The famine that began in 1995, however tragic, did lead to a watershed moment. The North Korean government called on the international community to help address the famine conditions and provided limited access within the country. For a country so ready to close its borders to foreigners almost entirely, this shift in policy was monumental and unprecedented. Dr. Jong Yun Bae, of Yonsei University, discussed the change as a shift in strategic policy, not necessarily a shift in North Korean officials' perceptions of the international community. For him the North Korean opening to NGOs represents a new awareness of benefits from NGOs: "It's something like a business model to earn economic benefits from international society."¹² The possibility that North Korea sees foreign aid as an asset in the country's international diplomacy toolbox is recognized by other academics as well.¹³ The decision to open to international aid is doubly significant within the context of Juché because North Korea was no longer asking allies of similar

¹¹ Andrei Lankov, *The Real North Korea*, 79-80.

¹² Dr. Jong-Yun Bae. Interview by author. Digital Recording. Yonsei University in Seoul, South Korea, July 24, 2013.

¹³ Daniel Byman and Jennifer Lind, "Pyongyang's Survival Strategy: Tools of Authoritarian Control in North Korea," *International Security* 35, no. 1 (Summer 2010): 64-66.

political ideologies for assistance. Instead, they were directly undercutting Juché's emphasis on self-sufficiency by asking the entire international community for assistance.

Many governments were hesitant to provide aid until the bleak conditions in North Korea could be confirmed and as a result NGOs initially filled the gap. According to Erich Weingartner, who worked in North Korea in the 1980s with the World Council of Churches and served as the first director of the Food Aid Liaison Unit (FALU), during the first few months donations outpaced those of governments.¹⁴ FALU served as a monitoring agency for a consortium of NGOs until its closing in 2005 and resided within the offices of the United Nation's World Food Programme.

NGOs and the North Korean agency regulating their entry, the Flood Damage Rehabilitation Committee (FDRC), had to create new norms on both sides.¹⁵ From the beginning, North Korea worked tirelessly to control the organizations coming into the country and project a positive image of the country despite the famine. This included refusing Korean speaking aid workers from entering the country and requiring that monitoring trips be scheduled in advance,¹⁶ precluding the use of surprise checks to ensure aid was reaching designated regions of the country. For the NGOs' part, education about NGOs was important because there is no equivalent in North Korea where the government embodies civic society.¹⁷ There were also strong efforts to impress upon North Korean officials the importance of verification and successful attempts to

¹⁴ Erich Weingartner, "Memoirs of an Aid Worker in the DPRK," *CanKor*, Published between February 14, 2012 and March 18, 2014, Accessed January 1, 2014, <http://vtncankor.wordpress.com/memoirs-of-an-aid-worker-in-the-dprk/>.

¹⁵ Erich Weingartner, "Memoirs of an Aid Worker in the DPRK", *CanKor*.

¹⁶ L. Gordon Flake and Scott Snyder, *Paved With Good Intentions*, 6.

¹⁷ Erich Weingartner and Victor Hsu, Interviews by author, Digital Recording.

gain residency within the country for aid workers (particularly for NGOs in the European Union).

As both NGOs and the government agencies they work with have become more comfortable and familiar with each other, many of these restrictions have softened. Interactions with local North Koreans are less controlled, Korean speakers are allowed into the country, and projects are now often collaborative and development-oriented. This shift in project focus was afforded by the easing of famine conditions in the country in the early 2000s, which has allowed NGOs and government agencies to direct more resources towards meeting other needs and building capacity.

Program Diversification

This collaboration and familiarity has led to an interesting shift in NGO projects in North Korea. Famine conditions eased by the early 2000s, but even in 2013 North Korea still required 340,000 metric tons of cereal imports to meet the population's food needs.¹⁸ Despite the persistent need for food, this improvement has allowed NGOs to shift their focus into areas of development and away from emergency aid.

Today there are many different development-oriented projects underway in North Korea by NGOs. To begin with, several groups continue to provide targeted food aid in many forms to the people of North Korea. Two groups, Christian Friends of Korea and the Eugene Bell Foundation, have focused their efforts on combatting North Korea's tuberculosis epidemic through a variety of initiatives. Christian Friends of Korea,

¹⁸ World Food Programme, "Harvests in DPR Korea Up Five Percent For Third Year, But Chronic Malnutrition Persists," *World Food Programme*, Published November 28, 2013, Accessed January 7, 2014. <http://www.wfp.org/news/news-release/harvests-dpr-korea-5-percent-third-year-chronic-malnutrition-persists>.

working in partnership with experts from Stanford University School of Medicine, has developed North Korea's first ever National TB Reference Laboratory. Which is needed to diagnose and support the treatment of individuals with TB and multi-drug resistant (MDR) TB.¹⁹ Samaritan's Purse, famous for its Operation Christmas Child program, has developed projects assisting farming development and dental health in the country.²⁰ The Pyongyang Project, another group based in Vancouver, operates as a social venture providing tours of North Korea. The group uses the resulting income to fund study abroad opportunities for North Korean university students.²¹ This is only a small portion of the organizations currently active in North Korea.

This diversification of aid efforts should be viewed as a redefining trend in North Korea's interaction with the outside world. First, it establishes long term commitment both by aid organizations and the North Korean government. In the early days of the 1990s famine, the North Korean government focused on securing emergency food aid and agricultural inputs, as opposed to development works. This focus dramatically limited the intensity and duration of long term interactions between North Korea and foreign aid providers²². With the diversification of NGO activities into development-oriented projects, more intense and longer term interactions have occurred.

Second, the diversification of aid has increased North Korea's exposure to globalization. As stated above, key hallmarks of globalization include the movement of

¹⁹ Richard Stone, "Public Enemy Number One," *Science Magazine*, Volume 340, April 26, 2013, 422.

²⁰ Matt Ellingson, Interview by author, Digital Recording, Samaritan's Purse Headquarters in Boone, NC, June 12, 2013.

²¹ Matt Reichel, Interview by author, Digital Recording, Videoconferencing Between Seoul and Vancouver, August 2, 2013.

²² Brianna M. Smrke, "North Korea Hunger, Politicized," *Undercurrent*.

people, economic activity, and the exchange of ideas. Several NGOs have permanent resident status (especially European NGOs which is a requirement for government aid), and many others make multiple visits to the country each year. Of course, food aid and other goods enter the country as part of NGO operations. Finally, and possibly most importantly, North Korea is now more heavily linked to the transfer of professional and technical ideas. Samaritan's Purse, for example, has hosted dental clinics between Western dentists and their North Korean counterparts to discuss techniques for improving dental health. The diversification of programs has altered the NGO relationship with North Korea.

CHAPTER 4

THE REGULATORY SYSTEM

The regulatory system put into place by North Korea follows a fairly predictable pattern. First, discussion must occur between NGOs and individuals within the North Korean government, outlining the broad parameters of working and exploring mutual areas of interest and possible engagement. This forms the North Korean government's gateway, which allows screening of interested NGOs for trustworthiness and reliability. At this point, each NGO project is sponsored within North Korea by a specific government agency. The NGO then prepares a letter of application to visit, outlining the needs, participants, and proposed schedule for a visit related to achieving proposed goals. The letter is circulated to the relevant North Korean government entities for consideration, and some weeks later, a schedule is agreed upon for a visit. This includes confirmation that visas for delegation members will be forthcoming. The NGO then arranges transportation into North Korea. The delegation is met at the airport by the sponsoring government agency who guides aid workers within the country, organizing food and shelter along the way. These agencies also ensure that NGOs are working within the guidelines stated by their letter of application, as well as domestic laws. From this point forward the process is repeated for each new related visit or project.

As stated earlier, an NGO must develop relationships within North Korea. This can be accomplished through personal connections or by working with an organization

already active within North Korea. Among the groups that have entered the country this connection has been established in a myriad of ways. Christian Friends of Korea, for example, was formed based on a family missionary history on the Korean Peninsula and developed connections by assisting Billy Graham's visits to the country in the early 1990s.²³ The founder of the private Pyongyang University of Science and Technology was actually detained under suspicions of being a spy, based on his frequent appearance and requests to start a university in North Korea.²⁴ Other NGOs were formed largely by individuals of Korean ancestry which is the case, according to their website, for Christian Association of Medical Missions.²⁵

During interviews with multiple individuals who had worked with NGOs operating in North Korea, the question was asked, "Would it be possible for a new organization to begin programs in North Korea today?" In almost all of the interviews, individuals stated it would be possible, though some disagreed on whether entrance was more or less difficult today than in the past. However, almost every person interviewed stated it would be easier to enter North Korea by working with an NGO already established there.²⁶ As a prime example, Stanford University's participation in the development of the National TB Reference Laboratory was facilitated by Christian

²³ Heidi Linton, Interview by author, Digital Recording, Christian Friends of Korea Headquarters in Black Mountain, NC, June 11, 2013.

²⁴ Bill Powell, "The Capitalist Who Loves North Korea," *CNN Money*, Published September 15, 2009, Accessed December 18, 2013, http://money.cnn.com/2009/09/14/magazines/fortune/pyongyang_university_north_korea.fortune/.

²⁵ Christian Association for Medical Missions, "About..." *Christian Association for Medical Missions* website, Accessed January 7, 2014, <http://christianassociationformedicalmissions.org/about.html#history>.

²⁶ Multiple interviews recorded during this research mentioned this, including interview with Matt Ellingson, Heidi Linton, Bill Moore, Matt Reichel, and Erich Weingartner.

Friends of Korea's already established relationship.²⁷ Another possibility for NGOs interested in North Korea would be to bolster the resources of NGOs already operating in North Korea through donation. Though not developing new relationships with North Korean officials, this alternative was brought up in two separate interviews with the Reverend Bill Moore, a board member of Christian Friends of Korea, and Erich Weingartner.^{28 29}

Once an NGO has developed relationships, it can propose a project to its North Korean partners or, in some cases, an NGO's North Korean partners may request assistance on an issue. This occurred with Christian Friends of Korea during its early history as the Eugene Bell Centennial Foundation when prize money awarded for tuberculosis work in South Korea was applied to a North Korean project and resulted in the North Korean government's request for assistance in tuberculosis.³⁰ Once significant interest for a project arises from North Korea and sufficient resources are gathered by the NGO, the entry process begins.

Initially, the details of a project are defined in a trip application, or perhaps more formally through a Letter of Intent, which is sent to the specific government ministry that is sponsoring the project. A Letter of Intent must be sent for new projects undertaken, even if the NGO and sponsoring government ministry have a well-established relationship.³¹ Once the trip application or Letter of Intent is approved, the appropriate

²⁷ Richard Stone, "Public Enemy Number One," *Science Magazine*, 422.

²⁸ Rev. Bill Moore, Interview by author, Digital Recording, Phone Interview between Bowling Green, KY and Lexington, KY, April 17, 2013.

²⁹ Erich Weingartner, Interview by author, Digital Recording, Videoconference between Wilmore, KY and Callander, ON, Canada, January 6, 2014.

³⁰ Rev. Bill Moore and Heidi Linton, Interviews by author, Digital Recording.

³¹ Matt Reichel, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

visas are secured, usually through North Korea's consulate in Beijing. The two main types of visas issued specifically allow only temporary visits or short term residency (generally requiring renewal every three months). According to Victor Hsu, long term residency is largely reserved for organizations from countries that have diplomatic relations with North Korea, which allows for norms of international relations to be fully implemented.^{32 33} Also, according to Erich Weingartner, organizations operating through an Intergovernmental Organization (IGOs) with ties to North Korea, like the United Nations or the European Union, can gain residency due to other member states' relationships.³⁴ Large IGOs with their own projects in North Korea, such as the World Food Program, negotiate more permanent Memorandums of Understanding³⁵ because they often work within a wider geographic and programmatic scope.

This means only European NGOs have residency, largely because they are required to do so by the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid Office in order to receive funding.³⁶ In 2005, the North Korean government removed the residency status of NGOs operating in the country, forcing many into following the visit model used by North American NGOs in the country. This created a dilemma for the European NGOs, and as a compromise the North Korean government designated them official representatives of the European Union (which in legal terms, nominally removed NGOs

³² Victor Hsu, Interview by author, Digital Recording, Videoconference between Wilmore, KY and Taiwan, January 23, 2014.

³³ Currently, only twenty-five countries have diplomatic relationships with North Korea. Among them are many current or former communist countries including China, Russia, and many eastern European states. Sweden has longstanding diplomatic relationship and has been joined by the United Kingdom and Germany. Brazil most recently established diplomatic relations with North Korea.

³⁴ Erich Weingartner, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

³⁵ Matt Reichel, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

³⁶ L. Gordon Flake and Scott Snyder, *Paved With Good Intentions*, 7.

from residency in the country).³⁷ What this means is that future NGOs may find it extremely difficult to gain resident status if they attempt to do so. Resident status would likely only be obtained by an organization completely backed by countries with diplomatic relations with the DPRK, or a strong intergovernmental body like the United Nations.

By and large, most non-European NGOs working in North Korea operate by using a visit model. When shipments of aid or equipment are sent into North Korea, NGOs will visit to monitor their aid delivery and begin work on projects related to the transported equipment. While this does make monitoring and communication more difficult, it does not make doing projects untenable. The Pyongyang Project, which guides cultural visits in North Korea and uses the proceeds to fund study abroad opportunities for North Korean university students, has opened an office in Beijing staffed by a North Korean citizen.³⁸ This has allowed the organization to navigate the different ministries within the North Korean government and maintain stronger relations. Other groups make multiple visits a year as a way of staying in touch and keeping up with projects.

Once a visiting NGO team reaches North Korea, the group is met by officials from the sponsoring government ministry, who accompany the team and facilitate the visit. In the beginning years of North Korea opening to aid, this sponsorship was used as a method of controlling NGOs' access within the country.³⁹ While the restrictions enforced by these "mindors" often frustrated NGOs trying to maintain transparency

³⁷ Erich Weingartner, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

³⁸ Matt Reichel, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

³⁹ L. Gordon Flake and Scott Snyder, *Paved With Good Intentions*, 5.

among donors at home, they are easier to understand when viewed through the North Korean government's desire to control outside influence and serve a practical purpose in a country most NGO workers had never seen before. Victor Hsu, who worked in North Korea through the World Council of Churches, the Private Voluntary Organization Committee, and World Vision, pointed out the utility of minders in this story: "I have told North Koreans, 'You know there are so many complaints about your being busy, about your being the watch dog. Why don't you just tell them to go?' ...they wouldn't know where to go and besides there are no car rentals. So, you have to rely on government vehicles and you will probably have to pay an arm and a leg, just to get lost."⁴⁰ According to many of the interviews performed during this research, many of the most restrictive rules put in place have been relaxed.⁴¹ This relaxation can be attributed to the growing familiarity with expectations on both sides, and to the strengthened trust and relationships between North Korean minders and the NGOs for which they are responsible.

During the interview with Erich Weingartner, an important observation was made. During the opening days of NGO entry into North Korea, things were more fluid. Standard operating procedures, so to speak, were not yet in place among North Korean minders, who did not know what their boundaries were. Thus, for those NGO workers willing to push the envelope, an element of "randomness" could be added during monitoring visits that may be less possible under today's more defined relationships and guidelines.⁴² According to Heidi Linton, the Director of Christian Friends of Korea, this

⁴⁰ Victor Hsu, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

⁴¹ Heidi Linton, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

⁴² Erich Weingartner, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

decline in flexibility has been partially reversed by cell phone usage and the resulting increase in communication speed when requesting permission for additions to trip itineraries.⁴³

To add to the history regarding the government agencies that work with an NGO entering North Korea, when the initial famine occurred, the North Korean government wanted to establish a bureaucratic body to regulate NGOs' entry into the country. As a result, the Flood Damage Rehabilitation Council (FDRC) was established by the North Korean government to handle incoming groups. The FDRC existed from late 1995 until 2005, during which time it acted as the official relief gateway into North Korea. In 2005, the FDRC was replaced by multiple new organizations facilitating receipt of NGO assistance from the major aid donating areas of the world. The Korean American Private Exchange Society (KAPES) is one of these organizations, and similar organizations for other regions were formed, such as the Korea Canada Cooperation Agency (KCCA).

Depending on the project undertaken by an NGO and where they have been able to develop relationships within North Korea, some NGOs also work with technical government agencies. Some prominent examples come from the Ministry of Public Health. Christian Friends of Korea is able to do much of its work in tuberculosis with that agency,⁴⁴ and Samaritan's Purse has also worked with the Ministry of Public Health to coordinate professional meetings between North Korean dentists and dentists from the West.⁴⁵

⁴³ Heidi Linton, Interview by author, Additional Notes and Comments.

⁴⁴ Heidi Linton, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

⁴⁵ Matt Ellingson, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

One general structure of North Korea's government that also affects the regulatory system is the government's tendency toward stove-piping. Stove piping refers to a hierarchical system in which information moves only vertically. Different government agencies within North Korea rarely interact or transfer information horizontally.⁴⁶ NGOs are affected by this system in two ways. The first is that NGOs can utilize only the resources available to their sponsoring government agency. In this situation, working with a technical government ministry can be more effective because they may already have project specific resources. The second way stove piping impacts NGOs is through the comfort level of North Korean government workers. Because government agencies do not often interact, many government bodies within North Korea are still not acquainted with foreign NGO workers, and thus are more leery of their efforts.⁴⁷ This means the recent development of NGOs working with technical government ministries, as opposed to KAPES, has often resulted in more rapid and deeper achievement of results. This development has also allowed more North Koreans to become comfortable in collaborating with foreign NGO workers.

Despite the relative predictability of the process NGOs follow in developing operations in North Korea, the structure of the system is actually surprisingly flexible due to a deeply cultural emphasis on trust and personal relationships. Among the interviews conducted, each individual cited duration of contact as a key indicator of strong government-NGO relationships.⁴⁸ This is similar to other cultures in East Asia. The only

⁴⁶ Hong Nack Kim, and Young W. Kihl, *North Korea: The Politics of Regime Survival*, Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2006, eBook Collection (EBSCOhost), EBSCOhost (accessed January 7, 2014), 50.

⁴⁷ Erich Weingartner, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

⁴⁸ All interviews recorded during this research mentioned this, including interview with Matt Ellingson, Heidi Linton, Bill Moore, Matt Reichel, and Erich Weingartner.

inflexible piece of the system is the enforcement of domestic laws, which can be vague. As a result, actions in North Korea must be conducted in an honest and straight forward manner. However, because much of the system is relational, NGOs can improve the situations they operate under simply by remaining invested in their North Korea programs and by showing consideration and respect for the guidance provided by North Korean counterparts.

CHAPTER 5

REGULATIONS

NGOs working in North Korea operate under specific and unique conditions. However, it is important to note that the terms *rules and regulations* used throughout this paper should be understood loosely. A couple of individuals interviewed during this research questioned the idea of concrete rules and systematic regulations as terms that even apply to NGOs operating in North Korea.⁴⁹ Since the terminology *rules and regulations* was used to frame this paper, the wording has remained the same, but these terms denote more about the conditions, environment, and general trends of operating in North Korea rather than a strict, systematically applied set of rules.

With that said, there are strong general trends in what regulations NGOs, particularly visiting NGOs, must operate under. First, NGOs operating in North Korea, like their counterparts in other countries, have to adhere to domestic laws. Second, resident NGO workers have privacy within their own living quarters and in the diplomatic compounds.⁵⁰ NGOs are also expected to cover the costs of their lodging and personnel transportation, as well as pay a service charge for material shipments in country.⁵¹ However, outside of those areas NGO workers must be accompanied by a

⁴⁹ Dr. Jong Yun-Bae and Victor Hsu, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

⁵⁰ Erich Weingartner, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

⁵¹ Victor Hsu, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

minder who supervises their actions. For NGOs working with temporary visas, this surveillance is constant.

One point of contention between NGOs and the North Korean government, especially in the early years of large humanitarian aid shipments, was the ability to spot check villages and towns receiving aid. At that time, the North Korean government required a notification period of one week before spot checks could be carried out.⁵² When the NGO workers interviewed discussed the diversion of aid to healthy groups in North Korean society like the military, most felt current monitoring practices were effective. Heidi Linton, described their monitoring process as “pushing” and “pulling” aid through the system.⁵³ There is now enough contact between NGOs and the communities they now serve to ensure that aid is reaching its intended targets. In addition, Victor Hsu, who headed a consortium of NGOs working in North Korea and previously worked for World Vision, stated in an interview that the notification period had been negotiated down to twenty-four hours.⁵⁴

According to the reviewed literature and these interviews, the regulations that NGOs active within North Korea must observe are decided using six factors: (1) North Korean domestic law, (2) national origin of the NGO, (3) sponsoring government agency, (4) familiarity with North Korean contacts, (5) the terms of the trip application or Letter of Intent, and (6) the amount of resources the NGO commands. It is important to note that among these factors only domestic law affects all NGOs in the same way. The other

⁵² Erich Weingartner, “Memoirs of an Aid Worker in the DPRK”, *CanKor*.

⁵³ Heidi Linton, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

⁵⁴ Victor Hsu, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

factors affecting what conditions NGOs operate under are variable between different NGOs.

These regulation determining factors can be further classified into two categories by asking a simple question: Does an NGO have the ability to alter this factor? The factors of sponsoring government ministry, familiarity with contacts, terms of the trip application or Letter of Intent, and the command of resources can all be altered by an NGO to some degree or another.⁵⁵ In fact, the system is quite flexible when diligent, sincere attempts are made to improve relations. Obviously, foreign NGOs have little control over the domestic laws of North Korea or their national origin, and these factors cannot be altered.

⁵⁵ Matt Reichel, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

CHAPTER 6

THE UNALTERABLE FACTORS IN REGULATION

As mentioned above, the two unalterable factors that affect how regulations and rules are applied to each NGO are the domestic laws of North Korea and the national origin of the NGO in question. While these factors may not be altered by NGOs, it is still important to be aware of their contexts and ramifications.

Domestic Law

Domestic laws are unique in their status affecting every NGO equally. However, this is not a situation unique to North Korea's regulations. NGOs are expected to operate under the laws of the countries they enter (assuming the state has not failed in the region).⁵⁶ This is the standard within the NGO community, particularly among organizations providing aid and development assistance.

Due to its human rights reputation abroad, North Korea is often an exception to this norm. The government of North Korea maintains a high degree of control, but the state still vigorously defend against an active "black market" of NGOs and individuals that ignore the country's domestic laws. In recent history, the BBC has controversially

⁵⁶ Erich Weingartner, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

sent undercover reporters into the country,⁵⁷ other groups send up balloons that drift into North Korea and drop anti-government fliers over the countryside, and a reduced though stable market exists for helping North Koreans cross the Chinese border and travel to countries willing to grant asylum.⁵⁸ For most countries, outside observers would acknowledge that these are infringements on sovereignty, however in North Korea's case, the standard of compliance with domestic law is often ignored. For any NGO pursuing an official relationship with North Korean officials, the "black market" activity of NGOs raises the bar and makes it imperative that aid workers be in full compliance with the law. In this sense, NGOs operating legally in North Korea likely maintain some of the best practices among NGOs in the world when it comes to compliance with the domestic law.

National Origin of the NGO

The other unalterable factor affecting NGOs is their country of national origin. Given North Korea's history over the last sixty years, a definite hierarchy of countries has developed. South Korean NGOs must surmount the most obstacles in developing projects within North Korea.⁵⁹ In fact, despite the dozens of NGOs based in South Korea that provide aid for North Korea,⁶⁰ the on-the-ground presence of South Koreans (outside of the government negotiated Kaesong Industrial Zone and a few tourist ventures) in the North is negligible. The next most challenged group comes from the United States,

⁵⁷ Rosa Silverman, "BBC exploited me says LSE student who went to North Korea," *The Telegraph*, Published April 16, 2013, Accessed January 17, 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/bbc/9996948/BBC-exploited-me-says-LSE-student-who-went-to-North-Korea.html>.

⁵⁸ Andrei Lankov, *The Real North Korea*, 94-97.

⁵⁹ Erich Weingartner, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

⁶⁰ David Lumsdaine and James C. Schopf, "Changing values and the recent rise in Korean development assistance," *The Pacific Review* 20, no. 2 (2007): 237, Accessed April 7, 2014, DOI: 10.1080/09512740701306881.

which is still technically at war with North Korea. However, American NGOs have been largely successful in developing a visit model for program development in North Korea. Canadian NGOs operate in the same manner as American NGOs do at this point. The NGOs granted the most flexibility – based on their nationality – originate from Europe, which is viewed as more politically neutral. As mentioned earlier several European NGOs still maintain residency in North Korea.

The national origin of an NGO does not only effect an NGO's operation based on past history between countries. Another aspect of NGOs is that they are affected in North Korea by the modern politics of their home country. Dr. John Linton, who works in the International Clinic of Yonsei University's Severance Hospital and has worked in North Korea had this to say: "I think that's what's frustrating is when the American government would do something negative towards North Korea, then we're directly affected and sometimes sort of held responsible or you know, at least we hear about it...NGOs are totally apolitical, but the reality is, the most frustrating thing is, you're affected by politics."⁶¹

⁶¹ Dr. John Linton, Interview by author, Digital Recording, Yonsei University's Severance Hospital, International Clinic, Seoul, South Korea, August 9, 2013.

CHAPTER 7

THE ALTERABLE FACTORS IN REGULATION

This section concentrates on the factors affecting regulation that NGOs can control. Again, these factors include the NGO's sponsoring government ministry, familiarity with contacts, terms of the trip application or the Letter of Intent, and the amount of resources an NGO commands. The North Korean system is based on the development of relationships and trust.⁶² An NGO's ability to sincerely and intentionally foster relationships will directly improve its ability to influence these factors and improve.

Government Partner

First, an NGO's sponsoring government ministry can have a large impact on the way rules and regulations are enforced. This variability derives from the government ministry's own intentions. If a government ministry is focused on working closely with an NGO and has the resources to aid projects when needed, then the partnership will likely be less restrictive. However, in the words of Matt Reichel, the Director of the Pyongyang Project, "sometimes you realize that it's not going anywhere, their goals are not oriented towards your goals or they're financially motivated to the extent that it's

⁶² Heidi Linton, Matt Ellingson, and Erich Weingartner, Interviews by author, Digital Recording.

actually hampering the development of any kind of project that you wanted to start.”⁶³ In these situations it can be quite difficult to work with an organization and the restrictions that apply to an NGO may be more rigorous.

When determining why there is so much variability between government agencies in North Korea, it helps to look at the condition of North Korea’s current governmental structure. The government is much less centralized than during the Kim Il Sung era (the time period occurring from independence until the early 1990s). Likely due to the lack of government resources, many government agencies are now fiercely competitive, both internally and externally, because they must generate revenue for their own budgets. This can make it extremely difficult on NGOs that attempt to work with multiple government agencies because these agencies guard their access to resources (including those presented by NGOs) and because they do not collaborate horizontally.⁶⁴

Also, with less dependence on the central government and a growing market economy,⁶⁵ some North Korean agencies largely focus on filling out their budgets. These organizations may be unfit partners for some NGOs because they attempt to gather funds without being clear about their intentions. This is a difficult situation for NGOs, which operate transparently to maintain the support of donors. However, there are also government agencies in North Korea that are more transparent. The Pyongyang Project’s current government agency partner, Pyongyang Technology Services Center (PTSC)⁶⁶ is

⁶³ Matt Reichel, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

⁶⁴ Matt Reichel, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

⁶⁵ Andrei Lankov, *The Real North Korea*, 82-91.

⁶⁶ The Pyongyang Project, “People and Partners,” *The Pyongyang Project website*, Accessed December 17, 2013, <http://www.pyongyangproject.org/about/people.html>.

upfront in stating that every Letter of Intent that is signed will include a \$3,000 coordination fee.⁶⁷

The flipside of the North Korean government's disjointed nature is this: many government agencies, within the limits of their influence and power, pursue their own objectives and loosely adhere to visions cast by the leadership of the country.⁶⁸ Erich Weingartner confirmed this situation: "Often there was a conflict because the Foreign Ministry and Interior Ministry, Ministry of Security, Ministry of Agriculture, et cetera. They were all competing for resources from the outside."⁶⁹ The resulting competition is intense, so it is possible for some NGOs to be selective and collaborate with partners who have similar interests, powerful technical capabilities, and greater levels of transparency. The government agency an NGO collaborates with can greatly enhance both organizations' abilities to meet desired goals.

Familiarity with Contacts

Second, the familiarity with contacts can be altered. This can be viewed as one of the easiest factors to alter because it simply requires being intentional with North Korean contacts and the project over a long duration of time. An interesting idea posited during one interview is that familiarity and comfort can be cultivated in two ways within North Korea, through casual and official means.⁷⁰ Among the casual events, Matt Ellingson, the Director of Program Development for Samaritan's Purse, cites karaoke, pool, ping pong, and viewing natural landscapes as "fertile ground for a true relationship to build."

⁶⁷ Matt Reichel, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

⁶⁸ Hong Nack Kim, and Young W. Kihl, *North Korea: The Politics of Regime Survival*, 50.

⁶⁹ Erich Weingartner, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

⁷⁰ Matt Ellingson, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

A way of improving relations in official capacities can be to successfully complete projects. Heidi Linton states it this way: “We try not to promise anything, but to over deliver.” As simple as it sounds, proving trustworthiness and capacity is an extremely effective way of improving familiarity and comfort with North Koreans because they value those traits highly.

The ability to develop familiarity with contacts can also benefit an NGO by insulating it from negative situations. Long term relationships are also extremely important if an NGO feels it is necessary to give criticism. The commitment shown by developing relationships likely clarifies whether the criticism is intended as constructive or as shaming, which sometimes comes from the international community, the recent UN Report on North Korea being an example. According to Erich Weingartner, “North Koreans, they have a long memory and they like relationships. You may think not because they’re restricting the relationships, but no, if you stick with it for a long time...I can say very critical stuff about them and to their face that a lot of other people do and they honor that. They honor the long term relationship. By and large.”⁷¹

Terms of the Trip Application or Letter of Intent

The terms of the Trip Application or the Letter of Intent are also alterable factors affecting what NGOs must do to operate in North Korea. While not a contract, the Letter of Intent is still a form of accountability for NGOs and their North Korean counterparts. It may also allow the North Korean government the opportunity to reign in an NGO considered to be working too far from its stated purpose. Due to the fact that both

⁷¹ Erich Weingartner, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

documents are periodically revised, it is actually a very useful tool for NGOs to alter the rules and regulations they work under. Periodic revisions allow NGOs to expand and redirect their projects or change direction completely once a specific project has been completed.

Having a history of past success is crucial to the successful negotiation of a new Letter of Intent. There is perhaps no better way to describe this than the words used by Matthew Reichel of The Pyongyang Project: “As you do a project it becomes mature and they let you do it again, but they give you a longer leash. So, when you do it the second time you can start adding in different components that were not possible to do the first time.”⁷² In making a trip application for visas or negotiating the Letter of Intent, a history of success provides more justification of an NGO’s capacity and allows the NGO to expand and reconfigure its operations in North Korea.

Amount of Resources Commanded By an NGO

Finally, the amount of resources an NGO commands can also influence what leverage it has in determining its operations. In the past, an NGO bringing larger quantities of goods into North Korea had a more extensive access for monitoring.⁷³ In some cases, the amount of money an NGO has available for a project can determine whether an NGO’s program is even taken beyond the proposal stage. According to Matt Reichel at The Pyongyang Project, their organization has never been accepted to work on a project unless the project’s budget was greater than \$40,000.⁷⁴ This experience was not

⁷² Matt Reichel, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

⁷³ L. Gordon Flake and Scott Snyder, *Paved With Good Intentions*, 28.

⁷⁴ Matt Reichel, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

universal among all NGOs interviewed.⁷⁵ The impact of how many resources an NGO commands may be mitigated by other factors.

Obviously, there are constraints on an NGO's ability to muster more resources than they currently do. However, to the degree that this can be altered a change in desirability for North Korean government agencies also occurs. As mentioned above, North Korean government agencies often compete for scarce resources, of which NGOs are one. Due to this, government ministries are more likely to desire a well-resourced NGO because it directly improves the amount of resources that government ministry can in turn bring to bear.

NGOs working in North Korea operate in a particularly difficult situation when it comes to increasing their resource base. Because North Korea is viewed as a rogue state and often uses military exhibition to force interaction, most notably during the missile tests of spring of 2013 and 2014, it can be extremely difficult to increase the donor base due to the political tensions between North Korea and the rest of the world. NGOs do have the benefit of working on a topic that strikes a chord with those of Korean heritage, which has been indispensable. However, support for development projects might begin to fade as South Koreans grow less in favor of reunification⁷⁶ and increasingly identify themselves as being a separate nation from North Korea. Religious NGOs meanwhile have the ability to tap the strong missionary and service oriented mindsets of church congregations.

⁷⁵ Heidi Linton, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

⁷⁶ Andrei Lankov, *The Real North Korea*, 157-162.

Still, the strong political headwinds involved with working with North Korea force many NGOs to look for other income sources. As an example, The Pyongyang Project chose to operate as a social venture because it needed a sustainable source of income for its efforts to help North Korean students study abroad. Operating on donations was not a viable option.⁷⁷ Also, many NGOs receive some funding from the government, either as grants or as middlemen between state-to-state transactions. Especially in North Korea, this is a politically based source of funding for both foreign governments and the government of North Korea.⁷⁸ An example of this occurred in 2008-2009 when the United States asked five American NGOs to confirm delivery of 100,000 metric tons of food aid to North Korea. Despite a successful implementation, the North Korean government ended these transactions in 2009.⁷⁹ A ban on providing government supported food aid was enacted in 2012 by the United States Congress after North Korea tested another long-range missile in April of that year.⁸⁰

Another major factor affecting NGO's ability to increase their donor base is the perception that North Korean aid is diverted from its intended recipients. However, many of the individuals interviewed heavily discounted the occurrence of diversion. Erich Weingartner, the former Head of the Food Aid Liaison Unit, questioned the definition of diversion because some organizations send aid with few requirements for its

⁷⁷ Matt Reichel, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

⁷⁸ Brianna M. Smrke, "North Korea Hunger, Politicized," *Undercurrent*.

⁷⁹ Mark E. Manyin and Mary Beth Nikitin, "Foreign Assistance to North Korea," *Congressional Research Service*, Published June 1, 2011, Accessed January 14, 2014, <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/166793.pdf>.

⁸⁰ Mark E. Manyin and Mary Beth Nikitin, "Foreign Assistance to North Korea," *Congressional Research Service*, Published June 11, 2013, Accessed January 14, 2014, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R40095.pdf>.

use,⁸¹ meaning NGOs that specify aid uses are respected. Matt Ellingson, of Samaritan's Purse, stated that most occurrences of aid diversion took place in the late 1990s when NGOs were first beginning operations in the country.⁸²

Both of these arguments stand up in reason. As NGOs and North Korean government officials became acclimated to each other and their systems (we must remember that North Koreans did not originally understand the concept of a civic society independent from the government), some aid was likely diverted. However, because NGOs now understand how to adeptly monitor their aid and more importantly, because North Korean officials now appreciate that accountability improves the willingness of donors and NGOs to provide aid, diversion is no longer an issue. It is likely that any diversion of aid occurring today in North Korea is the opportunistic kind that would be seen in any country where resources are scarce.⁸³ The intentional and systematic diversion of aid by the government is highly unlikely.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Erich Weingartner, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

⁸² Matt Ellingson, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

⁸³ Erich Weingartner, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

⁸⁴ Mark E. Manyin and Mary Beth Nikitin, "Foreign Assistance to North Korea," *Congressional Research Service*. Published June 11, 2013.

CHAPTER 8

CASE STUDIES

There are clearly a myriad of factors and inputs that influence NGO activities in North Korea. NGOs can express interest in working with North Korean officials in multiple ways and, as a result, the path to entry for many NGOs can vary greatly. Also, the factors discussed above can impact NGOs before and once they begin operating in the country. These characteristics are indicative of the lack of systematic regulation of NGOs in North Korea. Interactions are handled on a case-by-case basis with general trends visible.

Common experiences among NGOs are derived from norms in the country, such as the presence of “minders” or sponsorship of a government ministry. To highlight general trends, but also to show the variety within each NGO’s interactions in North Korea, consider the brief case studies below, presented in alphabetical order. These will largely address the path of entry for each represented NGO and discuss some of the regulation determining factors that currently affect them.

Christian Friends of Korea (CFK) began as an official organization in April 1995 and is based in Black Mountain, North Carolina. Originally, the organization operated under the name of the Eugene Bell Centennial Foundation. A founding member of the Eugene Bell Centennial Foundation initially developed relationships with North Koreans

during a ping pong visit in 1979 and maintained those connections with members of North Korea's then observer mission at the United Nations in New York. When Billy Graham visited North Korea in the early 1990s, these connections were used to negotiate the terms of his visit and fostered familiarity. The organization, being founded months before the flooding that sparked famine in North Korea, immediately responded to the unfolding disaster by shipping brown rice from Louisiana to North Korea as emergency aid.

A couple of years later, the Eugene Bell Centennial Foundation donated an ambulance to North Korea. The ambulance was purchased with prize money awarded to the mother-in-law of CFK's current Director, Heidi Linton, for her work fighting tuberculosis in South Korea. When North Korea learned about the prize allowing the purchase of the ambulance, they requested assistance in dealing with their own growing tuberculosis issues, which now includes the spread of Multiple-Drug Resistant (MDR) strains of the disease. From this point onward, the Eugene Bell Centennial Foundation focused almost entirely on tuberculosis related issues working largely with the Ministry of Public Health.

In 1998, the Eugene Bell Centennial Foundation was reorganized and renamed itself as Christian Friends of Korea to better reflect its motivation and purposes; meanwhile the Eugene Bell Foundation was newly organized and registered in Maryland. Each organization now works separately to fight tuberculosis in different provinces of the country. CFK now works to provide holistic support to about 30 tuberculosis, hepatitis, and pediatric care centers. CFK's projects include repair of hospital infrastructure, clean water initiatives, enhancement of local food security through greenhouse technology,

renovation of operating rooms, ongoing food and healthcare assistance, and other projects. A notable achievement is the development of North Korea's first ever National TB Reference Laboratory in Pyongyang, a collaborative multi-year effort with Stanford University and other expert volunteers that has included significant facility renovation, equipment delivery, and intensive ongoing training in advanced laboratory diagnostics, treatment, program development and disease surveillance. Also notable is CFK's participation in providing US government food aid to North Korea as part of a team of five NGOs in 2008-2009.

CFK's entry into the country during the 1990s is more typical of NGOs in North Korea, who responded to the famine that began in 1995. The organization has become successful in expanding emergency aid operations into a technical development program based on responding to tuberculosis, hepatitis, and other health and nutrition issues within the country. The organization, drawing resources mainly from private funders, including individuals, foundations, and churches (including Korean church congregations and those with missionary ties to the Korean peninsula), leverages a modest cash budget with considerable in-kind contributions to impact the communities they serve. They also enter the country at least four times a year, bringing work teams for weeks at a time. These work teams join with North Korean partners to complete projects. CFK has developed strong and open contacts within the Ministry of Public Health through frequent visits. Given the associated political climate, these actions have signaled to North Koreans the organization's deep commitment to the country.^{85 86}

⁸⁵ Rev. Bill Moore and Heidi Linton, Interviews by author, Digital Recording.

The Pyongyang Project (TPP) was founded in 2009 in Vancouver, Canada with the intention of building human capacity within North Korea. The founders of the organization, using strong backgrounds in speaking Mandarin Chinese, developed contacts with North Koreans in the Chinese city of Shenyang, which is close to the North Korean border. From there, TPP has developed relationships with seven different government organizations focusing on different aspects of technical and cultural education. This activity is supported by TPP's business in providing tours of North Korea.

TPP mainly provides opportunities for North Korean university students to study abroad for long periods of time, between six months and one year (past campuses have included the University of Cambridge, Yanbian University, and Utrecht University). The organization also does technical training. In the past TPP has brought women's health specialists to North Korea for collaboration and training with local doctors. All of these programs are funded using a business model focused on alleviating social problems. TPP recognizes the difficulty in raising donations, which can be unreliable based on political tensions. The organization, motivated by a desire to avoid paternalism, decided to build a revenue stream by guiding educational and cultural excursions into North Korea.

The Pyongyang Project's entry into North Korea in more recent years is actually rather unusual, as is the organization's model of covering operational costs. TPP works hard to approach North Koreans as partners, and co-founder Matthew Reichel has now been in the country over thirty times, which has led to much stronger relationships. The

⁸⁶ Richard Stone, "Public Enemy Number One," *Science Magazine*, Volume 340, April 26, 2013, 422.

organization has broken the mold by developing relationships with multiple government agencies and utilizes a revenue stream that is directly linked to North Korea. They have operated on multiple Letters of Intent and have achieved a level of familiarity that gives them considerable freedom in interacting with North Korean government ministries.^{87 88}

Pyongyang University of Science and Technology (PUST) officially opened its doors in 2010. PUST operates as the only private university in the country and has been on the drawing board of its parent organization the Northeast Asia Foundation for Education and Culture (NAFEC) for decades. PUST started as a dream of James Chin-Kyung Kim, an American citizen of Korean ancestry. Mr. Kim originally planned to found a university in North Korea, but knew he needed money. He came to the United States from South Korea and developed three strong businesses, concurrently gaining American citizenship. Using his resources and passport, Mr. Kim managed to found Yanbian University of Science and Technology in Yanji, China (where The Pyongyang Project has an office). That university conducts instruction in three different languages, Mandarin Chinese, Korean, and English, and provided a test run for Mr. Kim's future hopes.

YUST now ranks among the top-100 universities in China and its success attracted North Korean interest. After being held as a suspected spy in Pyongyang and later released, Mr. Kim was approached by North Korean officials about founding a university. An official agreement to found a private educational institution in North

⁸⁷ Matthew Reichel, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

⁸⁸ The Pyongyang Project, "People and Partners," Accessed January 10, 2013.

Korea's capital was filed in March of 2001.⁸⁹ PUST began as an idea to help North Korea develop human resources in engineering, health, information systems, finances, agriculture, and foreign languages. The university has also begun sending its students abroad for study in Europe. The high level of exposure between North Koreans and the Western professors teaching their courses is also unique aspect of PUST.

PUST's founding and operation has much to do with persistence and the ability to prove the organization's capacity and trustworthiness through the founding of YUST, as well as, by providing food aid in the northeastern part of the country. The Ministry of Education is a government agency that works alongside PUST. Obviously, given the permanence of PUST, the relationships Mr. Kim has been able to develop are extremely influential and powerful within the North Korean government. The same applies outside the country. The construction of PUST was initially funded by Christian congregations and individuals. Professors, who raise their own living funds, generally come to PUST from religious-affiliated universities. The massive mobilization of monetary and human resources is possible due to the organization's strong fundraising arms in multiple countries. This level of support is exemplary among North Korea-focused NGOs. PUST also operates on a residency model unheard of among NGOs not based in Europe.^{90 91}

Samaritan's Purse is the only non-Korea specific organization among these case studies and is the humanitarian legacy of Billy Graham based out of Boone, North Carolina. Billy Graham's initial interest in North Korea grew from the experiences of his

⁸⁹ Pyongyang University of Science and Technology, "Facts," *The Pyongyang University of Science and Technology Website*, Accessed December 17, 2013, <http://www.pust.co>.

⁹⁰ Pyongyang University of Science and Technology, "Facts," *Pyongyang University of Science and Technology Website*.

⁹¹ Bill Powell, "The Capitalist Who Loves North Korea," *CNN Money*.

wife, who attended a boarding school in Pyongyang (Ruth Graham's parents were missionaries in China) before the peninsula was divided. The organization developed its North Korean contacts directly through Billy Graham and his visits to North Korea. An initial gift of a motorhome retrofitted as a mobile dental unit began humanitarian and capacity building projects in the country. Samaritan's Purse joined in efforts to provide emergency food aid to North Korea once the call for food aid was made. Samaritan's Purse also continued its work in the dental field by forming training centers, providing equipment, and organizing technical meetings between North Korean dentists and dentists from the West.

Samaritan's Purse has handled large amounts of aid at some points. Along with Christian Friends of Korea, Mercy Corps, World Vision, and Global Resource Services, Samaritan's Purse participated in the USNGO food delivery effort of 2008-2009 as the middleman between the United States and North Korean governments to transport and monitor food aid in North Korea. This aid was discontinued in 2009 when the North Korean government refused to continue receiving aid from the United States government. A similar aid program was approved by the Congress of the United States and agreed to with the North Korean officials on Feb 29, 2013, but was cancelled shortly thereafter in response to the rocket launches of early 2013.

Samaritan's Purse has worked on separate occasions with both the Korean American Private Exchange Society and the Ministry of Public Health. Their partnership largely depends on whether a project's nature is general or related to health. Samaritan's Purse also derives funding for its programs from donations through evangelical church circles; however, given the size of the organization, it commands much greater resources

than a North Korea-focused NGO normally would. However, the organization still struggles to attract donors when stories of diverted aid or political tensions arise. Samaritan's Purse has been in North Korea long enough to develop strong relationships in the country which allows North Korean monitors to be more relaxed and trusting.⁹²

Summary of Case Studies

Now among these case studies, several trends appear, with the first issue being the entry of the NGOs into the country. All four of these NGOs' initial entries were predicated on forming individual relationships and trust. Christian Friends of Korea and Samaritan's Purse both entered the country following Billy Graham's early visits and gained a strong initial purpose while providing food aid during the famine of the mid-1990s. Their entry experience was split between two catalysts, one based on the relationship that was established between Billy Graham and Kim Il Sung, and the other being based on the precipitating moment of the famine in the country.⁹³ The fluidity of the situation during calls for aid in the 1990s will likely not be replicated, barring a major natural or political upheaval, so that avenue of entry likely cannot be used by future NGOs. However, the enduring lesson from the experience of the entry of CFK and Samaritan's Purse is that an NGO's entry into North Korea can still occur on the currency of a foreign individual's relationship with influential officials in North Korea.

The Pyongyang Project and the Pyongyang University of Science and Technology are examples of what is now probably a more accessible pathway for NGOs to enter the country of North Korea. To develop a path of entry both organizations used contacts or

⁹² Matt Ellingson, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

⁹³ Matt Ellingson and Heidi Linton, Interviews by author, Digital Recording.

initial operations in northeastern China (Shenyang, Dandong, and Yanji specifically), which is linked ethnically and economically to North Korea. To use this pathway for entry into North Korea, NGOs must have Chinese language capabilities, which Matt Reichel cited as one of The Pyongyang Project's best assets when building the organization.⁹⁴ Using northeast China as a launch point for working in North Korea is likely to be more dependable than following the path of internationally recognized individuals entering the country (such as former NBA player Dennis Rodman, who is sometimes viewed as unstable) or waiting for another call for international aid (which is unpredictable).

The lens of these case studies also helps in understanding how the regulation factors create variation in the conditions of NGOs in North Korea (this excludes the domestic laws of North Korea which apply to all legally operating NGOs equally). The first is the national origin of these NGOs. The Pyongyang Project is a Canadian NGO, the Pyongyang University of Science and Technology has strong ties in the United States, South Korea, and China but is headed by an American, and Christian Friends of Korea and Samaritan's Purse are both American. Among the ways this affects NGOs is residency, since only European NGOs generally gain residency. PUST is unique among the four as it has managed to gain residency due to the project's permanence; however, the campus is within a guarded sector and at present staff and student movement is severely curtailed,⁹⁵ which is similar to the experience of Erich Weingartner during his

⁹⁴ Matt Reichel, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

⁹⁵ Heidi Linton, Interview by author, Additional Notes and Comments.

residency in the diplomatic compound of Pyongyang.⁹⁶ The other three NGOs all operate on a visitor model.

The first of the alterable factors is the government agency sponsor an NGO has. CFK works routinely with the Ministry of Public Health (and occasionally with KAPES) and has expressed satisfaction in these partnerships.⁹⁷ The Pyongyang Project works with Pyongyang Technology Services Center and through them works almost directly with Kim Il Sung University. Matt Reichel, from The Pyongyang Project, expressed satisfaction with this setup and believes it has aided their operations compared to previous partnerships.⁹⁸ The Pyongyang University of Science and Technology gained official approval for its operations from the Ministry of Education.⁹⁹ Finally, Samaritan's Purse has worked with both KAPES and the Ministry of Public Health depending on the nature of their projects. The Pyongyang Project, to the knowledge of this interviewer, is unique in having worked with ten different government agencies in North Korea throughout its short history.¹⁰⁰

By working with more discipline-focused government agencies such as the Ministries of Public Health or Education, these NGOs represent the growing trend of working with organizations beyond KAPES or the Korea Canada Cooperation Agency, both of which were established in 2005 to work with foreign organizations like NGOs. According to Erich Weingartner, this trend is crucial in exposing North Korean officials

⁹⁶ Erich Weingartner, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

⁹⁷ Heidi Linton, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

⁹⁸ Matt Reichel, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

⁹⁹ Pyongyang University of Science and Technology, "Facts," *Pyongyang University of Science and Technology* Website.

¹⁰⁰ Matt Reichel, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

to working with foreign NGOs because the government's stove-piped nature otherwise prevents officials from sharing their experiences with other government agencies.¹⁰¹

The second alterable factor affecting the rules and regulations that NGOs must follow is the level of familiarity and trust between NGO workers and their North Korean counterparts. Christian Friends of Korea counts the relationships they have developed in North Korea as a considerable asset, and the organization takes great pride in having provided consistent assistance through the various political climates surrounding North Korea.¹⁰² The Pyongyang Project seems to have put more effort into finding a good partnership rather than building a long term relationship. However, The Pyongyang Project is relatively new in North Korea, and this fluidity will probably stabilize now that comfortable operating partners have been found. For Pyongyang University of Science and Technology, Mr. Kim's own strong interest in North Korea and trips to the country laid the groundwork for success.¹⁰³ Without strong, developed relationships, developing a private university in Pyongyang would be all but impossible. Samaritan's Purse has also had some of the longest standing relationships with North Korean officials, considering their entry came before the call for international aid was given.

The third alterable aspect of an NGO's relationship with the North Korean government is the trip application or Letter of Intent. During interviews the definition and frequency of use for the Letter of Intent was not clear. Matt Reichel at The Pyongyang Project stated that the document was used for every new project.¹⁰⁴ However,

¹⁰¹ Erich Weingartner, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

¹⁰² Heidi Linton, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

¹⁰³ Bill Powell, "The Capitalist Who Loves North Korea," *CNN Money*.

¹⁰⁴ Matt Reichel, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

Christian Friends of Korea director Heidi Linton discussed Letters of Intent as being reserved only for exceptionally large, long-term, and complicated programs. Other projects were detailed only through the trip application.¹⁰⁵ No information regarding these documents was collected for Pyongyang University of Science and Technology, which should operate in an entirely different manner due to residency, or Samaritan's Purse. However, the importance of documents defining trip and project parameters lies in the ability to periodically revise these documents. This allows an NGO the flexibility to develop or expand trips and programs each time, which affects the conditions they operate under.

The fourth alterable factor affecting the regulations an NGO operates under is the amount of resources an NGO commands. In this category Christian Friends of Korea is not a large operation, consisting of a few employees and mostly conducting work through volunteer power. However, the organization has shown itself capable of mustering considerable non-monetary resources through major partnerships, such as with Stanford University, and facilitating USAID food delivery during 2008-2009 by contributing Korean-speaking and culturally sensitive staff".¹⁰⁶ The Pyongyang Project is also not a rich NGO; however, it is distinct in having full command of its revenue.¹⁰⁷ Though its tour-based revenue model is still susceptible to political shocks, the fact that The Pyongyang Project directly controls income means it is insulated from donor concerns and can develop flexible and experimental programs.

¹⁰⁵ Heidi Linton, Interview by author, Additional Notes and Comments.

¹⁰⁶ Heidi Linton, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

¹⁰⁷ Matt Reichel, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

The two other NGOs deal with much higher levels of donor support and capacity. Pyongyang University of Science and Technology is considerably well-resourced, enough so that its parent organization, the Northeast Asia Foundation for Education and Culture (NAFEC), has been able to build two universities and run other programs, particularly along the North Korea-China border.¹⁰⁸ Much of the support for PUST has come from the Korean Christian community, but the program has also drawn notable support from individuals. Malcolm Gillis, the former president of Rice University, and Ben Rosen, the co-founder of Compaq Computer,¹⁰⁹ are among its supporters. Samaritan's Purse, run by Franklin Graham, also commands significant resources as an organization supported strongly by the evangelical Christian community. The organization operates in multiple countries, so, resources are not focused on North Korea alone.

¹⁰⁸ YUST, PUST Foundation, "PUST Introduction," *YUST, PUST Foundation Website*, Accessed January 17, 2014, <http://www.yustpust.org/learn/pust>.

¹⁰⁹ Bill Powell, "The Capitalist Who Loves North Korea," *CNN Money*.

CHAPTER 9

THE IMPACT OF THE NGO ON POLICY

One topic that has not yet been discussed, but was covered in this research, is the impact of NGOs on North Korea's own policies (both domestic and foreign). This ability to influence North Korean government policy is real, but should not be overstated. It is largely an extension of the actions of individual NGOs and their relationships with North Korean government agencies. Because the North Korean government is stove-piped, this influence remains concentrated among specific agencies and does not spread quickly.¹¹⁰ Also, because the NGO community operates as a set of independent functional units, there is less collective action than is possible.¹¹¹ Despite those handicaps, however, the ability of NGOs to shift North Korean government policy is real. According to this research, NGOs' direct influence exists in at least three forms of influence: spotlighting, modeling, and trust-building.

The first form of influence comes in the form of "spotlighting." Spotlighting can be defined as drawing attention to particular unnoticed issues or improving the priority particular issues receive among government agencies in North Korea. A discussion of this form of influence came from Christian Friends of Korea Director Heidi Linton: "I think it also helped the North Koreans realize that if we felt it was a critical issue, if we

¹¹⁰ Erich Weingartner, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

¹¹¹ Matt Reichel, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

were willing to take on such a huge project with enormous risk and expense and make it actually happen that this was something they needed to do. That this was something they needed to focus on and I think it helped serve as a catalyst, I really do, which is amazing.”¹¹² In a sense, spotlighting is the same technique many NGOs use in the United States as part of civic society; they represent an interest or cause within a region. While not nearly as powerful, foreign NGOs can perform similar actions within North Korea by acting as an intermediary between local partners and government officials.

An example of an organization using resources to champion certain causes within North Korea comes from The Pyongyang Project. Since the fall of the Communist bloc, the number of North Korean students studying abroad has declined.¹¹³ By providing a form of revenue through its business model, The Pyongyang Project facilitates programs that are not otherwise open to North Korean university students.¹¹⁴ When an NGO commits resources to an issue, the strength of spotlighting increases due to the scarcity of government appropriations for North Korean government agencies. If the North Korean government still operated from a position of centralized financial strength, as it did until the mid-1990s, then foreign NGOs would have much less influence over policy priorities.

The second form of influence NGOs have regarding North Korean government policies is in “modeling.” Due to the economic situation in North Korea and the decentralized government funding structure discussed earlier, many government agencies must heavily prioritize their objectives because they do not have the resources to pursue all desired projects. However, when an NGO brings resources to bear in a specific area,

¹¹² Heidi Linton, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

¹¹³ Bill Powell, “The Capitalist Who Loves North Korea,” *CNN Money*.

¹¹⁴ Matt Reichel, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

it facilitates projects that can yield dramatic benefits. Once these projects advance, the most successful characteristics are often adapted locally. Modeling is one of the most dramatic forms of influence because the replication of successful projects multiplies the impact an individual NGO can have in the country. The impact of modeling rests directly on the resources and expertise of an NGO rather than the NGO's ability to draw attention to issues. Examples of this influence come from the many agricultural development projects being undertaken in North Korea by groups such as the Mennonite Central Committee, whose successful experimental projects could be scaled up by the Ministry of Agriculture.¹¹⁵

It is worth pointing out the spotlighting and modeling can be easily confused. This confusion largely stems from the fact that spotlighting and modeling often occur at different times in the same project; a progression takes place from becoming aware of a problem (among both the NGO workers and the North Korean government) to investing NGO resources to resolve the problem to investing North Korean resources to expand the solution. However, the two forms of influence are not inextricably connected. It is easy to imagine North Korean officials requesting help on a particular issue, as they did in the initial pleas for emergency food aid in the 1990s. NGOs would have the option of addressing that issue or ignoring it, but they would not be spotlighting the need. It is also easy to imagine a financially-limited NGO making recommendations for a project, but not having the resources to commit to the problem. In this case, the North Korean government must make the decision to shift resources to that problem without the proof

¹¹⁵ Erich Weingartner, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

of success that modeling provides. In this scenario, the risks of shifting resources are much greater and thus less likely to occur.

The previous scenario in which the North Korean government approaches an NGO requesting assistance on a specific issue has led to a phenomenon mentioned earlier in this thesis: the entry of NGOs, or other organizations such as educational institutions, into North Korea as partners with already present NGOs. Now almost twenty years after the calls for aid in the 1990s, the relationship between NGOs outside North Korea is still fluid and developing. The number of NGOs exiting North Korea has declined significantly in the last ten years (with Doctors without Borders and Oxfam being the last major NGOs to leave).¹¹⁶ The number of organizations entering North Korea seems to be modest, but positive, with the main issue being maintaining sustained contact with and interest in North Korea. In almost all of the interviews conducted during this research, partnerships were described as the most effective and quickest ways to begin work in the DPRK.¹¹⁷ Of course, the collateral put up in exchange for accelerating North Korea's interaction with new organizations is the trust between the original NGO and its North Korean counterparts.

This development of partnerships and new organizations entering North Korea begs an extremely important question about one last form of policy influence that NGOs in North Korea have in trust-building. How do NGOs already present in the country affect North Korea's perception and treatment of other foreign NGOs? The answer is directly and indirectly, but also dramatically. NGOs' impacts on the perception of other

¹¹⁶ L. Gordon Flake and Scott Snyder, *Paved With Good Intentions*, 7.

¹¹⁷ Rev. Bill Moore, Matt Ellingson, and Matt Reichel, Interviews by author, Digital Recording.

foreign NGOs, both within and outside the country, can also be either positive or negative.¹¹⁸ An illustration that helps is imagining the NGOs in North Korea as part of a web; every push upward in reputation and every slip downward in reputation by a single organization pulls the other NGOs along in the same direction. This is particularly true among NGOs conducting similar projects or working with the same partners.

In some cases, a new level of trust has been so generally established that it reshapes the policies every foreign NGO operates under in North Korea. An early example of this was the initial exclusion of Korean speakers from entering North Korea as part of aid teams. This issue actually became a main point of contention between North Korea's attempts to control the flow of information around foreign workers and the NGO community's need for transparency to secure donor trust.¹¹⁹ Erich Weingartner even stated in his interview that he was likely approved by North Koreans as the head of the Food Aid Liaison Unit due to his lack of Korean language skills.¹²⁰

However, this prohibition on Korean speakers has been done away with and now most organizations operate with Korean speakers. Several factors help explain this shift in government policy: increased trust towards foreign NGOs, the shift towards development projects requiring more intense interaction, the number of NGOs entering the country being large enough to make the rule unenforceable,¹²¹ and the improved project outcomes, especially in technical areas, when communications are more streamlined.¹²² While many factors likely contributed to the breakdown of the

¹¹⁸ Matt Reichel, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

¹¹⁹ L. Gordon Flake and Scott Snyder, *Paved With Good Intentions*, 5.

¹²⁰ Erich Weingartner, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

¹²¹ L. Gordon Flake and Scott Snyder, *Paved With Good Intentions*, 5.

¹²² Heidi Linton, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

requirement that in country aid workers not speak Korean, a key level of trust must have been achieved that allowed North Korean officials to decide NGO aid with its insistent demands was worth more than the increased security that might result from restricting NGOs linguistic access.

CHAPTER 10

CLOSING STATEMENTS

Implications of This Research

This research has implications for multiple groups, such as the governments of NGOs operating in North Korea, for those NGOs themselves, and for other NGOs or individuals that might develop projects in North Korea in the future. First, for the governments of NGOs operating in North Korea, the first lessons should be drawn on interactions with North Korea. As is clearly evidenced above, long term, sincere, and mutually beneficial relationships constitute the most effective way to improve interactions with North Korean government officials. For democracies, which operate on an election cycle, the need for long term relationships may be difficult to fill. It will be politically controversial to establish sincere and mutually beneficial relationships between North Korea and countries with populations that think of North Korea as a rogue state or a threat.

Another consideration of the governments of NGOs operating in North Korea is whether they should encourage the development of NGO operations in North Korea as a form of Track II diplomacy. There are many possibilities for insulating NGOs from the shocks of state-state interactions and decisions. The creation of an independent NGO advisory committee could provide input on how official home government-North Korea

interactions might alter NGO relationships in North Korea. Also, any legislation providing aid to North Korea, such as the 100,000 metric tons provided from 2008-2009, should be designed to with consistency in mind. A sudden halt in aid provision could be damaging to the reputation of any NGOs collaborating in aid delivery. One final option to improve NGO relations could be lifting targeted, specific sanctions that allow a wider definition for humanitarian aid. This tactic should be approached with caution because sanctions are an important tool in dealing with North Korea's nuclear ambitions. Some stories highlight how broad restrictions can be frustrating and ridiculous in the eyes of NGOs. In one story told by Victor Hsu, the United States government refused to allow the shipment of tractors to North Korea for agricultural projects because the Taliban had used them to hide missile launchers during the Russian occupation of Afghanistan¹²³.

There are lessons in this research for NGOs currently active in North Korea as well. The first is that tighter bonds within the NGO humanitarian aid community should be developed. This idea was spoken of by Matt Reichel, "The NGOs need to have even a private communication channel among each other that's more developed because we need each other everyone once in a while."¹²⁴ In the past, organizations such as the Food Aid Liaison Unit have coordinated aid and development projects, but these have been disbanded. The NGO community is knit by personal connections and collaboration, which was apparent throughout the networking aspects of this research, but much could still be learned through a centralized private forum. Particularly for new NGOs or smaller NGOs that sometimes escape notice, an official forum could provide a more

¹²³ Victor Hsu, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

¹²⁴ Matt Reichel, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

accessible way of sharing information, developing collaborative projects, and voicing united concerns.

Developing tighter connections could also yield benefits for NGOs in North Korea if they reached out to the many NGOs that focus on human rights in North Korea. There is a wide chasm between these two groups, which are split on the interpretation of how to alleviate human suffering.¹²⁵ The humanitarian NGOs operating in North Korea focus on the positives of engagement while human rights NGOs apply external social and political pressure in an attempt to end the grievous abuses that occur. A forum could lead to important dialogue that allows both humanitarian and human rights centered NGOs to operate more effectively and to create flexibility for both groups if the situation in North Korea changes. If North Korea began releasing political prisoners or altering its prison system, human rights organizations may require legitimate involvement on the ground.

The final set of implications this research has is geared towards any NGO that may become active in North Korea in the future. First and foremost, the growth of authentic relationships will be the most significant asset an NGO can muster while doing humanitarian work in North Korea. Second, due to the government's ingrained desire to reduce foreign influence, an NGO must maintain best practice standards, with particular emphasis placed on the equality of partnerships. A high standard of operation will generate trust and provide proof of capacity. Any NGO interested in North Korea should also recognize that entry and the initial development of contacts may be slow. Beginning with smaller projects will allow the NGO and government agency partner to develop a history of mutual success. This process can be accelerated by partnering with an NGO

¹²⁵ Matt Reichel, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

already active in North Korea. Improvements in the ease of operation in North Korea are largely time dependent, and following through on long-term commitments will reap major dividends.

Future Research Opportunities

Given the relatively unexamined nature of this topic area, more research opportunities abound surrounding NGOs operating in North Korea. Expanding the geographic scope of NGOs involved should be a first priority in future research. Vibrant NGO communities exist in Europe, and of course, South Korea.¹²⁶ A combination of language skills and contacts within these regions would greatly improve the ability to do research in these regions. The experiences of these NGOs would provide vastly different perspectives on how NGOs working in North Korea function, considering the country of origin and other factors affecting them. Also, in the case of South Korea in particular, research could be augmented by the substantial body of literature concerning North Korea.

During this research a couple of other questions formed. The first question: Does the collaboration of NGOs and educational institutions on complicated, multi-disciplinary projects reduce stove-piping and increase the horizontal communication of the North Korean government? A second question: Given the connections of The Pyongyang Project and Pyongyang University of Science and Technology's connections to northeast China, what local NGO activity exists in the ethnic-Korean communities in northeastern China and Japan? Connected to this: what NGO projects occur in the Rason Special

¹²⁶ David Lumsdaine and James C. Schopf, *“Changing values and the recent rise in Korean development assistance,”* 237.

Economic Zone along the North Korean-Chinese border? A final question that came about is more concerned with the process of research regarding NGOs in North Korea, since this has been a highly qualitative research project: In what ways can the relationship of NGOs and North Korean officials be quantified for larger data collection?

Conclusion

Legal entry into North Korea is often thought to be an oxymoron within the general public; however, relationships with North Korean government officials have been developed and greatly improved during the work of NGOs operating in the country. North Korea is still extremely wary of foreign influence due to a long history of Korean states fighting vigorously to maintain sovereignty and independence. However, the tragic famine conditions in the mid-1990s created many more opportunities for governments and NGOs to begin providing aid to the country, which developed into operations on the ground.

The regulatory system North Korea has developed to handle the influx of NGOs is fairly predictable. Initial relationships must be developed and a project or potential point of collaboration must be discussed and agreed upon. From there, trip applications or Letters of Intent are used to outline what will occur during a visit and the NGO's partnering government agency requests visas to accomplish mutual objectives.

The regulations placed on NGOs have become more relaxed as NGOs and their North Korean counterparts have become familiar with each other's standard operating procedures. Among the factors affecting the conditions NGOs operate under are domestic law, the national origin of the NGO, government partner, familiarity with contacts, the

terms of the trip application or Letter of Intent, and the amount of resources commanded by the NGO. These factors are present in case studies of individual NGOs, where it is also equally apparent that the North Korean system operates on a case by case basis. This produces NGOs with both common experiences as well as unique origins and contexts.

NGOs also carry a certain level of influence within North Korea. This manifests in three different forms: spotlighting, modeling, and trust-building. Spotlighting and modeling pertain to the impact of where NGOs' attention and resources are focused, though modeling directly increases an NGO's impact because the initial investment in new projects sets the stage for scalability. Trust-building has more influence in how it collectively affects NGOs working in the country, as well as North Korea's openness to other foreign organizations. Individuals involved with NGOs in North Korea constantly reaffirmed the importance of developing long-term relationships.

As a finishing remark, the growth of NGO activities in North Korea in the post-Cold War era is an exciting and positive development in the evolution of relationships between North Korea and the international community. North Korea is not a mysterious black hole in our understanding of international politics, despite what night-time pictures from the International Space Station might otherwise suggest. There is a stable community of NGO workers, partnering with North Koreans to alleviate the suffering that occurs in that country. Relationships in particular have been the key to driving these efforts and maintaining the hope for future improvements in international political relations with North Korean officials.

In every interview the question, “What are the biggest misconceptions people have about doing aid work in the DPRK?” was asked. A common theme emerged during several interviews. The sentiment is summed up in the words of Matt Ellingson from Samaritan’s Purse, “North Koreans have to feed their babies in the morning and go to work and love their family, and they’re not so different from us. With that said, there are some very, very significant and serious things that need to be dealt with. So, it’s not simple process, but having dialogue is a good.”¹²⁷ By entering North Korea and operating within the existing conditions, NGOs have sparked and perpetuated the longest lasting constructive dialogue with North Korean government officials in decades.

¹²⁷ Matt Ellingson, Interview by author, Digital Recording.

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APPENDIX A

NGO INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How did your organization go about beginning to work in the Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea (DPRK)? Did you discover any misconceptions when you began your work in the DPRK?
2. When and why did you first enter the DPRK?
3. What rules and regulations did your organization have to comply with to begin operations in the DPRK? How are those rules put in place or negotiated?
4. Are there limits on your organization's interactions with DPRK citizens or to certain areas within the country?
5. Do you believe The Pyongyang Project or other organizations working in the DPRK have had any impact on how North Korea treats foreign organizations?
6. What types of interactions or projects have improved your relationships within the DPRK (with the government or with other groups)? Have any interactions or projects led to worsened relationships within the DPRK?
7. In your experience, are foreign NGOs granted the same privileges in North Korea or are there differences between organizations in what they are allowed to do?

8. Have you encountered any frustrating policies or restrictions during your programs in the DPRK?

9. Would it be possible for a new organization to begin programs in North Korea today? What steps would an organization have to take to gain access?

10. What are the biggest misconceptions people have about doing aid work in the DPRK?

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR AN EXPERT

1. When and how did foreign non-governmental organizations (NGOs) begin interacting with North Korea?
2. Is there any indication of how officials within North Korea felt about the opening of the country to NGOs? Have opinions within North Korea changed concerning NGOs?
3. How does North Korea regulate the NGOs operating in the country today? What are the sources of those regulations (do they come from laws, negotiations between groups and government, etc.)?
4. How have those regulations changed since NGOs first entered the country?
5. The situation of South Korean NGOs is different. How do they operate considering the restrictions preventing South Koreans from entering North Korea?
6. In what ways have NGOs been successful in interacting with the North Korean government? In what ways have NGOs been unsuccessful in interacting with the government of North Korea?
7. Do NGOs have any impact on the policies of the North Korean government towards foreign organizations? If they do impact policy, in what ways?

8. Is there competition to form relationships with NGOs between different divisions of the North Korean government? Does that impact relationships between NGOs and North Korea in a substantial way?

9. What do you think are some of the biggest misconceptions about the way North Korea regulates foreign NGOs working in the country?

APPENDIX C

MAP OF NORTHEAST ASIA



“Maps of Northeast Asia.” *Economic Research Institute for Northeast Asia (ERINA)*.

Accessed April 4, 2014. <http://www.erina.or.jp/en/Asia/map/index.htm>.