

Behind the news:1

Aiden
Foster-Carter

Korea: from dependency to democracy?

Korea is a country much less-known than it should be, on the left as elsewhere. Despite its having been the theatre of a global war in 1950-53, and the scene of spectacular economic growth thereafter, Korea rarely gets attention. That began to change during 1987, with political unrest in South Korea where a brave opposition movement may have at last forced democratic change: direct presidential elections were due by the end of the year. Yet even here there has been a lack of real understanding, with over-emphasis on 'the Olympic factor' (Seoul will host the 1988 Olympics) and misleading comparisons to the Philippines.

This article claims no more than to provide some background to current events in Korea, and encourage the left to focus on this increasingly important and always fascinating country.

8 **History**

Some historical background is essential, not only for itself but also because Koreans today have an acute sense of national history. The last century in particular, not without reason, is seen as one of successive humiliations and tragedy.

Korea is an unusually 'natural' nation: a peninsula in north-east Asia (not south-east, as is sometimes loosely said). Equally a rarity is its ethnic homogeneity: virtually all the nation's 62 million or so inhabitants – 42 million in the south, about 20 in the north – are Koreans. It is also an old nation. Korean identity goes back at least 2,000 years, and most of the peninsula was politically unified by 667AD.

For much of its history, Korea was formed within the sphere of Chinese cultural and political influence, while retaining a distinct cultural identity and practical political autonomy. From China were acquired Buddhism (still the major religion), Confucianism (dominant after a change of dynasty in 1392), and the basic structures of government and society: a monarchy, and an aristocracy/literati ruling class (*yangban*). There is debate about whether this society should be called 'feudal'.

Korean civilisation had its moments, including the invention of the world's first moveable metal type-face in the thirteenth century, and a pioneering phonetic alphabet for the language (which is nothing like Chinese) in the 1440s. By the late nineteenth century, however, when it mattered, the Yi (or Chosen) dynasty was in serious decline – just at the point when Western interest in 'opening up' this hitherto little-known land was increasing.

The impact of Western imperialism in east Asia is usually told in terms of the contrasting destinies of Japan and China: the former first isolating itself but then drastically modernising in order to keep up, the latter falling victim to semi-colonial humiliation. Sandwiched between those two ('a shrimp among whales', as a Korean proverb balefully puts it), Korea suffered a worse fate than either. Its efforts to keep the world at bay earned it the soubriquet of 'the hermit kingdom' – but Korea crucially lacked the concomitant Meiji-style internal modernisation which alone could have made isolation work.

As a result, by the 1890s Korea was a plaything for rival regional powers, principally China, Russia and Japan. After Japan trounced the other two in successive wars, Korea's fate was sealed. In 1905 de facto, and formally in 1910, it was annexed by Japan, and remained a Japanese colony until 1945.

For those who still think of colonialism as something that white people inflicted on blacks, Japan's occupation of Korea makes an interesting comparison. As colonialism, while relatively 'late', brief and concentrated, it was profoundly destructive and transformative in classic ways: indeed, it could make a textbook case for Bill Warren vs. Walter Rodney-type arguments. On the 'positive' side, Japan laid the foundations for economic modernisation: a railway network, improved agricultural techniques and a proper land survey, plus in the 1930s some industrialisation (based on northern Korea's abundant mineral wealth).

Koreans themselves, however, experienced all this overwhelmingly as the dispossessions and degradations of early capitalism (especially in its colo-

nial form). On the land, the great majority of farmers were reduced to tenancy, often in wretched conditions. While production of rice in Korea doubled, its consumption by Koreans halved. Dispossessed peasants formed the nucleus of an industrial proletariat, not only in Korea's mines and factories but also in those of Japan. There were two million Koreans (at the peak) in Japan, where they played an important part in the early labour and socialist movements; and where their descendants (some 700,000) are today split between loyalties to North and South Korea or (increasingly) to neither, while continuing to suffer from Japanese racism.

The Japanese colonial assault had a cultural dimension too, especially towards the end in a kind of enforced 'integration' whereby Koreans were even forbidden to use their own language, and forced to take Japanese names and worship at Shinto shrines. This helps explain the complex animosity which many Koreans profess towards Japan even today, forty years after colonial rule ended. (South Korea's first president, Syngman Rhee, angered his US sponsors by steadfastly refusing diplomatic relations with Japan, which were not established until the mid-1960s.)

Added to the humiliation of being ruled so harshly by a neighbour whom Koreans themselves regarded as inferior (Korea having in the past been a conduit for Chinese civilisation into Japan) was Koreans' seeming inability to mount any effective resistance. Korean nationalism was real but fissionary, split into (and within) left and right, political and cultural nationalists, internal and external groups. Communist ideas were influential after

1917: a substantial Korean community had crossed the border into Siberia (from whence in the 1930s Stalin would deport them to Kazakhstan). But Korea in the Comintern was a byword for factionalism, and successive CPs were penetrated and broken by the Japanese secret police.

1945 onwards: liberation, division and war

In 1945, as half a century earlier, Korea again found itself profoundly affected by external forces. The good news was that, after the A-bombs, Japan surrendered more promptly than had been expected; Korea was free. The bad news was that the Allies had suddenly to decide what to do about Korea, and most immediately who should take the Japanese surrender. Soviet troops were already advancing down the peninsula; US troops had yet to arrive. A hasty meeting pencilled in an agreed line on a map, at the 38th parallel: strictly temporary, and solely for purposes of disarming the Japanese. Astonishing as it may sound, so casually was the ancient nation of Korea sundered in two, a division which was to become one of the most rigid, bitter and enduring of the post-war period.

The ensuing five years were crucial, and have been brilliantly illuminated by Bruce Cumings' revisionist historiography. For obvious reasons, both Korean regimes are systematically evasive about this, the period of their foundation. My own view is that it is essential to avoid the teleologies of both right and left, which see the southern and northern regimes respectively as incarnating the manifest destinies of the 'free world' and 'democracy' on the one hand, versus 'national liberation' and

10 'the transition to socialism' on the other. Rather, I would regard the establishment of both regimes as processes, indeed projects: politics which had to be actively created.

In both halves of Korea, an ambiguously liberating foreign army provided the conditions whereby some Korean political forces could systematically destroy others. In the south, the US sponsored the veteran and long-exiled rightist Syngman Rhee, who cracked down viciously not only on left-wing parties and labour and peasant organisations, but also on other right-wingers less inclined to accept the country's division and more willing to co-operate with the left. In the north, the Russians brought in a young unknown former partisan called Kil Il Sung, who rapidly established his own power vis-à-vis other communists with better credentials as well as his Soviet sponsors.

Within three years of Korea's de facto division, separate regimes were formally proclaimed in 1948, each claiming to be the only legitimate government: the 'Republic of Korea' (ROK) first in the south, followed by the 'Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea' (DPRK) in the north. The DPRK quite possibly had the edge in popularity: parts of the south were in a state of virtual civil war in the late 1940s, while the north's land reform in particular certainly inspired a similar (and ultimately also surprisingly far-reaching) effort in the south.

Against this background, civil war was perhaps inevitable. It finally came in June 1950. The DPRK has always denied starting the war, but their armies swept south and would have reunified Korea had it not been for US intervention (under UN auspices).

MacArthur then pushed deep into the north, which brought China in on the DPRK's side and re-established the lines of battle not far from where they had originally started. An armistice was signed in 1953; there is still no peace treaty.

All of Korea was devastated, almost unimaginably, in the three years of war. The north suffered worst, from US air power: the bombers were eventually grounded because there were literally no more targets left standing. Napalm was widely used, to defoliate Korea's thickly-wooded mountainous terrain. Both physical destruction and civilian casualties were horrendous. Even today, arguably, this 'war before Vietnam' has not really had its origins and implications thought through (unlike Vietnam).²

Post-war development. I: The north

It would have seemed barely credible, in 1953, to imagine that anything much could be built on the ruins of Korea. Yet in fact the subsequent third of a century has witnessed spectacular economic development in both halves of the country. The north was quicker off the mark, chalking up remarkable rates of industrial growth in the 1950s and early 1960s. Communist regimes have a certain aptitude for forced-march industrialisation, and North Korea's mineral endowments helped. Interestingly, the USSR attempted to discourage Kim Il Sung from emulating Stalin's economics, but they underestimated their erstwhile protégé's tough nationalism in economics and politics alike. North Korea has never joined COMECON, and it has remained successfully neutral in the Sino-Soviet dispute.

In retrospect, North Korea's four decades or so of existence fall into two halves. The first period was not without its heroism: a new beginning, land reform, the enactment of women's rights; survival, if not victory, against the military might of the United Nations (a unique distinction); followed by rapid reconstruction and industrialisation, plus expansion of education and health services. Politically, for these first twenty years North Korea was a fairly normal communist country. Thereafter, however, the rot set in. Economically, the pace of growth has slowed, and in particular the qualitative leap to new technologies is proving difficult: North Korea cannot make a silicon chip. The country still trades very little, partly because debts incurred on a buying spree of Western technology fifteen years ago have not been paid for. Consumer goods are few and poor; life is frugal. Despite some tinkering, there has been no serious economic reform. The planning process remains excessively centralised, and in consequence bottlenecks, shortages, and all manner of 'Kornai effects' abound.

The reasons for all this are political. Kim Il Sung, now 75, is the doyen of world political leaders; and his 'fatherly embrace' is slowly suffocating the society which he once helped to build. Over the past twenty years, North Korea has in a sense become a *reductio ad absurdum* (or indeed *ad nauseam*) of two tendencies perhaps inherent in all communist politics, but which elsewhere have been checked by the death of a leader and/or other political reforms. The first is totalitarianism: a term understandably suspect on the left, but really there is no other word for the unprecedented social engineer-

ing which is the avowed aim of the Pyongyang regime. 'Ideological monochromaticity' (sic) is the watchword; unity is all; difference equals deviance or dissent, and is intolerable.

Secondly, the focus and symbol of unity is of course The Great Leader. Kim Il Sung is now the object of a cult of personality far exceeding that of Stalin or Mao. Indeed, the veneration extends to his entire family, and this too has been taken to its bizarrely logical conclusion: he has chosen his son as his successor. Whether Kim Jong Il will succeed in succeeding is another matter. It is quite unclear whether he has any ability or power base of his own. Ironically Kimilsungism's effect has probably been to create a system seemingly strong but in reality very brittle, which is likely to crumble when its founder is gone. Serious infighting may be expected, with a military coup as one possible outcome.

In sum, North Korea in the late 1980s is such a peculiar place that most reactions to it consist solely of horror and derision. While not inappropriate, such responses are inadequate. What Kim Il Sung tried to do did make a certain sense, especially in the Korean context. A tough half-educated nationalist, bitterly resentful of Korea's oppression by its neighbours ('friend' and foe alike), Kim has succeeded in establishing his half of Korea as militarily strong, politically independent, and economically industrialised (up to a point). Yet the strengths of his much-touted *juche* (self-reliance) philosophy have concomitant weaknesses. The old 'hermit kingdom' instincts, just like a century ago, have become a brake on further modernisation. Pyongyang's dealings with the outside world are too few and often all too crude, while in-

- 12 ternally fear of grasping the nettle of reform ensures that stagnation continues. Little can be expected while Kim Il Sung survives.³

Post-war development. II. The south
South of the Demilitarised Zone (DZ), the auspices for recovery at first seemed much less promising than in the north. In retrospect, Syngman Rhee's massive expansion of education (as in the north) surely laid a basis for subsequent growth. Yet at the time of Rhee's overthrow in 1960 – as a result of student demonstrations, a recurring factor in South Korean politics – the Seoul regime was generally regarded rather like much of Africa is today, as a hopeless basket case: the recipient of vast amounts of US aid, which disappeared into networks of cronyism and state interference while producing little or no discernible economic growth.

As everyone knows, over the past quarter century that picture has dramatically altered. South Korea in 1987 has a GNP approaching \$100 billion (four times that of the north, or twice as great per capita), and is a major world trading nation in sectors ranging from textiles to heavy industry and electronics. This transformation occurred under Park Jung Hee, who seized power in a military coup in 1961 and ruled by fair means or foul until assassinated by the head of his own CIA in 1979.

How should the Park era and its changes be evaluated? There are two conventional views, both of which are flawed. Internationally, South Korea under Park and subsequently has been widely touted as a textbook case for neo-classical economics: going for exports on the basis of comparative

advantage, opening up the economy, leaving it to the market, 'getting the prices right'. This interpretation has one serious defect: it is simply untrue. As an accumulating body of research has now shown,⁴ the South Korean regime has been thoroughly and successfully élitist, dirigiste, and interventionist. Although some economic liberalisation is now beginning (largely at US prodding), the pattern is basically state capitalism.

Within South Korea, on the other hand, large swathes of especially the intellectual opposition to successive dictatorships – notably the student movement, but also radical Christians and some trades unionists – have embraced dependency theory to explain and criticise their country's fate. They cite Seoul's dependence on overseas markets, its massive debt (\$40 billion), large negative trade balance with Japan, low wages (especially for women) and long working hours; all of which for them add up to an essentially imposed and inauthentic type of development, foisted upon Korea by the US and Japan.

Such an analysis has its attractions, and the political and moral courage of its proponents is not in doubt. Yet there are difficulties with this account.⁵ To the outside observer, what is striking about the Seoul model is rather where it *differs* from other would-be 'developing' countries. For one thing, it is Korean and not foreign firms which have been the spearhead (funded by the state). Contrary to its image, Seoul has never been very welcoming to foreign investment – which is one reason that the government went for loans instead. That in turn entailed debt, but repayments have never been a problem and the total is now declin-

ing. Japan is a major source of technology (hence the trade imbalance); but the Koreans go to great lengths to ensure that technology really does get transferred, such that Korean firms now compete with the Japanese in world markets in everything from ship-building to VCRs. Wages are still shamefully low, but rising, and it is hard to see low wages any longer as a *structural* precondition for the South Korean accumulation model.

In sum, while the dependency analysis of South Korea is politically understandable – in Kitching’s sense, it is classic ‘populism’⁶ – intellectually it is no more convincing than its neo-classical mirror image. Indeed both err similarly, in giving too much weight to the external context and factors. Instead, South Korea’s basic strategy should be seen as economic nationalism à la Fredrich List.⁷ National military strength was the goal; industrialisation was the means; and export-orientation merely the ‘means within the means’, given that southern Korea lacked the raw material base for Pyongyang-style autarky.

Put like this, Seoul and Pyongyang have more in common than either would care to admit. Pursuing associative and dissociative strategies respectively, each aimed to industrialise in order to be stronger than the other. By one of history’s cruellest ironies, Korea’s tragic division may in this sense have actually helped as well as hindered its economic development.

Current politics

Already in Park Jung Hee’s later years, rather like what was happening simultaneously in Brazil (a much better comparison than the Philippines for South Korea), economic success had

created increasingly large and restive middle and working classes, who each had their own reasons to oppose the dictatorship. Medium- and small-scale business, starved of loan capital, resented the government’s preferential treatment of a few giant firms, the *chaebol* (like Japan’s *zaibatsu*). The growing salariat disliked press censorship and other denials of democracy. Workers, meanwhile, had obvious demands: higher wages, and the right to organise and strike.

A few courageous individuals and groups had always battled against the dictatorship. One such was Kim Dae Jung, a charismatic politician with a power base in Cholla, Korea’s relatively neglected south western province. Kim almost defeated Park in the presidential elections of 1971, and was subsequently kidnapped from Japan by Park’s thugs and jailed in Korea. Kim is the commonest surname in Korea, and another prominent oppositionist is Kim Young Sam whose base is in the south east, especially the port of Pusan, Korea’s second city. The south east was the major centre of the industrial and political unrest in 1979 which led to Park’s assassination. Significantly, the assassin (yet another Kim) was a relative ‘dove’, despite being CIA chief, who shot Park because he feared that the president was only listening to hard-liners.

The same dilemma – to crack down on opposition or to ease up – has also confronted Chun Doo Hwan, the general who seized power in 1980 on the pretext of restoring order; an intervention made easier by the unfortunate factionalism among democratic politicians, notably the two Kims. But whereas Park inspired a certain grudging respect, Chun’s regime was from the start widely seen as illegitim-

14 ate, principally because of the 'Kwangju incident'. That city, the capital of Cholla, rose in revolt against Chun's coup in May 1980, and was briefly a kind of Paris Commune before Chun's paratroopers put down the rising, in an orgy of slaughter which left hundreds (possibly thousands) dead. Although for some years it could hardly even be mentioned in the press, the Kwangju incident has haunted the regime – as has its disgraceful treatment of Kim Dae Jung, who was sentenced to death on patently trumped up charges of sedition, later commuted to life imprisonment soon followed by exile to the US.

Kwangju aside, the Chun regime like its predecessor could not escape the political consequences of continuing economic growth. Early in 1985, a newly-formed opposition party, the New Korea Democratic Party (NKDP) did unexpectedly well in national assembly elections, taking all the major cities, rich and poor suburbs alike. The two Kims, working together this time (Kim Dae Jung having made a daring return from the US, Aquino-style, and survived – albeit mostly under house arrest), were the eminences grises of the new party. From that point on the government was politically on the defensive, even though until this year it seemed able to keep control.

The constitution of Chun's 'Fifth Republic' provides for a president, elected indirectly by an electoral college for a seven-year term. Aside from general issues such as press censorship, political imprisonment, torture, etc., opposition criticisms focussed on the electoral process. Although Chun proclaimed his intention to step down on schedule in 1988, there was wide-

spread scepticism; people had not forgotten how Park Jung Hee had rigged the constitution so as to give himself an illegal third term. Alternatively, even if Chun could be trusted, the electoral college was thought to almost guarantee that no opposition candidate could win. The NKDP's platform therefore centred on demands for direct presidential elections. (The identical issue, it may be recalled, was at the heart of Brazilian political debate a few years previously.)

While the government agreed to hold constitutional talks, it counter-proposed a different model again: a cabinet-based system, with a strong prime minister and a relatively weak president. This move was intended to split the opposition, since Kim Young Sam (unlike Kim Dae Jung) had been known to favour in principle this 'Westminster model'. However, the two Kims stood firm, even though the NKDP's parliamentary leadership wavered. Hence the opposition regrouped, with the majority forming the new and boldly-named Reunification Democratic Party (RDP), even more closely aligned to the two Kims.

Constitutional talks dragged on for several months during 1986 and 1987, with little progress. On the streets, meanwhile, the student movement grew increasingly combative. Student radicalism is something of a tradition in South Korea (remember 1960). At one level, it might be seen as just a phase in the lifecycle for rich kids who will go on to good jobs (rather like in other countries). There were changes in the mid-1980s, however. The Chun regime massively expanded higher education, which now involves a higher proportion of the relevant age group than in the UK. However, not only do universities still fail many each

year to try to keep the numbers manageable, but graduate unemployment has grown sharply. So students have grievances of their own.

Ideologically, meanwhile, their role as self-appointed vanguards has elements of both continuity and change. On top of the old Confucian tradition of criticising unjust rulers are several newer layers. One is *minjung* theology.⁸ South Korea is 25% Christian, and while most is self-centred salvationism there is a cadre of social and political activists who have developed a distinctly Korean brand of populist liberation theology. Another strand, already mentioned, is dependency theory. Anti-Americanism is a new theme in recent years; although some 40,000 US troops remain in South Korea, until the 1980s there had been no overt criticism of the US role. Finally, Marxist ideas have some influence, although it is unclear how much. The total ideological cocktail is rather bewildering, the dominant flavour being a strongly nationalist populism, which is long on slogans but short on analysis or even clear cut strategy.

Sometimes, however, correct theory is less important than winning the streets. South Korea's student and other demonstrators do not lack courage, and in June 1987 they had their victory. Until then, and to some extent subsequently, the constitutional and extra-parliamentary struggles had been proceeding in a somewhat uneasy informal alliance. Opposition politicians like the two Kims neither trust nor are trusted by the farther fringes of the student movement. Yet the politicians obviously used the demonstrations (and the fear of more and worse to come, especially during the Olympics in 1988) as a stick with which to try to

beat concessions out of the government.

Nonetheless, until June the regime held the streets and contained the protestors. It survived massive demonstrations earlier in the year over the officially admitted death of a student under police torture. It even appeared to have got away with Chun's announcement in April that there would be no more constitutional talks until after the Olympics (i.e. not till after September 1988). The straw that finally broke the camel's back was the government party's nomination of Roh Tae Woo on 6 June as its presidential candidate. Roh is another ex-general, a military classmate of Chun's, and the prospect of more of the same until 1995 was too much. This time the demonstrations were uncontrollable; they spread well beyond the students, and commanded visibly enthusiastic middle-class support (the workers were as yet harder to discern).

Faced with losing control completely, Roh Tae Woo gambled boldly. On 29 June, he called for a series of reforms which conceded all the key opposition demands: press freedom, an end to political imprisonment, and above all direct presidential elections. On the surface it was an astonishing volte-face. But it has the desired effect: the demonstrations stopped, and the stock market rose 4%.

It was a brilliant move. At a stroke, Roh transformed his image from Chun's clone and crony to a brave harbinger of democracy. (Chun, by contrast, has been sulking in his 'Blue House', and conceding only reluctantly. If it is a double act, it's a very good one.) Roh must hope that large sections at least of the middle class will now transfer their allegiance to him, and will doubtless play up the country's

16 continued economic success (GDP will grow by over 10% in 1987, for the second year running).

For the opposition, on the other hand, it is a rather Pyrrhic victory. Roh has stolen their clothes, so they have to find some new ones – or show that they fit them better. Above all, they have to decide who will run for president. At the time of writing, the fragile alliance between the two Kims shows every sign of breaking down, and they are looking more and more like rival regionally-based political bosses. The RDP in reality is not a party so much as the sum of their respective factions, plus some others. Depressingly, inner-party democracy is if anything even less in evidence than in the ruling Democratic Justice Party (DJP), which in the wake of Roh's conversion to democracy has actually begun to show signs of life.

By the time this article appears, we shall know not only who is running but probably also the result (the elections are due in December). If the two Kims both stand, they will probably let Roh in; although Kim Dae Jung, fresh from a triumphal return to his home base, is reported to think that by carrying Cholla and Seoul he can win outright. There is also a possible third candidate, Kim Jong Pil, a former prime minister under Park Jung Hee whose regional base is in the centre-north, and who might take votes away from Roh. Yet a 'two Kims' ticket would probably be unbeatable. That does not mean it will happen, however; Korean factionalism dies hard. Moreover, the newly-revised constitution does not allow for a vice-presidency; there is only one top office to run for.

And what about the workers? They had their moment in August, in a spate

of strikes and demonstrations all over the country's industrial regions. If such actions were unprecedented, even more astonishing for South Korea was the generally mild government response. If anything, the regime made it clear that it expected especially the larger firms to concede not only substantial wage increases (albeit not as huge as some of those demanded) but also the wholly new principle of free trade unions. By and large, this is what happened; and the workers have duly gone back to work, leaving a blip of perhaps \$0.5 billion in lost exports – just over one per cent of the likely annual export total.

These changes should neither be over- nor underestimated. The revolution it was not. Despite the explosion of long pent-up grievances, the key demands were bread and butter ones: wage rises, and trade union recognition. Attempts by students and other dissidents to further politicise the labour movement do not seem to have borne fruit. On the other hand, the principle of free trade unions and wage bargaining can hardly fail to create a wholly new context for industrial relations. Henceforth, one may predict, capital and labour alike will be less willing than in the past to accept the *diktat* of the state. Politics in South Korea will be different, whoever wins the election.

Two final footnotes on current politics in South Korea. First, it cannot be ruled out that the entire process might be interrupted, or reversed, by a military coup from the right. This is the more likely if Kim Dae Jung shows signs of winning, given that more backwoods elements among the military persist in regarding him as a crypto-communist (he is actually a rather

conservative Catholic populist). On the other hand, the fact that Roh and the DJP have put themselves firmly in favour of the democratic process will make such 'gorilla' intervention that much more difficult.

Secondly, while many such pitfalls lie along the way, I would emphasise that there is no intrinsic reason why the rapidly maturing South Korean economy should be unable to effect the transition not only to Western-style democracy but also to something approaching a welfare state. This too is an area where dependency analyses (along with kindred terms, such as 'marginalisation' and 'bureaucratic authoritarianism') have perhaps tended to mislead. While not exempt from the general problems of capitalism, the South Korean economy can certainly 'afford' (in structural terms) the transition to higher wages and better welfare, just as Japan did thirty years ago. Indeed, with a population of 42 million the increasing affluence of its own home demand can go some way towards supplementing, while never replacing, Seoul's overseas export markets.

The Korean future: one, two, three *aberturas*?

Having at several points compared the recent political economies of Brazil and South Korea, one might add that the Brazilians have a word for all this: *abertura*, or opening. In Brazil, the return to democracy has been accomplished (albeit as yet without direct presidential elections), but great political and economic problems remain. In South Korea, the economy is buoyant, and this may well assist the transition to democracy.

Yet Korea, uniquely, faces not one

but three potential *aberturas*: necessary openings, which are also perilous passages. The second is North Korea's: desperately needed, but there is as yet very little sign of it. Pyongyang's eventual *abertura* will look like Deng's China, or Gorbachev's USSR. But one cannot say which, nor when it will come.

Nonetheless, by the mid-1990s at the latest, successor regimes will be in place in both North and South Korea. Inevitably, and at long last, they will talk to each other. This will be the third *abertura* – and the world will breathe a sigh of relief. For while the original division of Korea was a cruelty imposed by the emerging super-powers, the persistence of such acute tension between Seoul and Pyongyang forty years later in a greatly changed international environment is largely due to Korean stubbornness. Whatever their past role, all four 'sponsoring' powers – the USA, Japan, USSR, and China – would now welcome a reduction of tension on the peninsula, plus some form of de facto recognition, trade, family visits, etc.; in a word, Germanisation. Many people outside Korea are unaware just how impermeable a barrier the DMZ is. In a country where the dislocations of colonialism, partition and war have ensured that almost all Koreans have some relatives in the other half of the country, these families have been divided without any contact or communication for a third of a century. This appalling human tragedy should be no less compelling than the continuing risk of military tension and potential conflagration, as armed forces totalling at least 1.3 million face each other (with nuclear weapons on the ROK/US side). Neither of these aspects of the Korean tragedy,

18 however, typically commands much world attention.

It is just possible that Seoul-Pyongyang relations will improve very rapidly. In 1985 this looked to be happening, with several rounds of economic, political and Red Cross talks which actually led to a highly stage-managed exchange of homeland visits. The north, however, broke off all talks in early 1986. The last current ray of hope is the Olympics, where there is an outside chance that a deal will be reached on Pyongyang staging some of the events. If that happens, inter-Korean relations will be irreversibly transformed for the better. Otherwise, change will have to await the death of Kim Il Sung.

What I have called 'Germanisation' seems, in the longer run, inevitable in Korea. That in itself would be an improvement over the status quo, on both humanitarian and strategic (tension-reducing) grounds. Might this process go further? In the early years of Korea's partition, and of frantic attempts by nationalists to avoid it, one suggested model was Austrian-style neutrality, guaranteed by four-power agreement. In the 1940s, however, the shrimp had little power against the four whales. Yet things are different in the late 1980s. Although Korean self-perceptions (often compared, not uninterestingly, to the Irish) are slow to change, the fact is that Korea today has the two strongest states in its entire history: more like a couple of agile dolphins than shrimps. If those states each had governments that were serious about reconciliation and eventual reunification, it is hard to see who could actually stop them. That is the future challenge for Korea, and for all who have its interests at heart.

Notes

1. Bruce Cumings (1981) *The Origins of the Korean War*. Guildford: Princeton University Press.

2. A point made by Jon Halliday, whose excellent articles on Korea add up to what is perhaps the *only* sustained attempt by a Western socialist to engage with the modern Korean experience. See especially his 'The North Korean Enigma', *New Left Review*, no. 127, May-June 1981; and 'The North Korean Model: Gaps and Questions', *World Development*, vol. 9, no. 9/10, 1981.

On the Korean war, among a spate of recent works, see Peter Lowe, *The Origins of the Korean War*. London: Longman, 1986; and Callum MacDonald, *Korea: The War Before Vietnam*. London: Macmillan, 1986. A Thames TV series, to be broadcast in 1988, should also be worth waiting for.

3. This analysis of North Korea is elaborated in my 'North Korea: the end of the beginning', *Journal of Communist Studies*, forthcoming special issue on communism in East Asia (probably December 1987). This article also contains further references on Korea in general and the north in particular.

4. I refer chiefly to the work of (a) the 'Sainsbury' or 'Gatsby' group at IDS, Sussex; and (b) Tony Mitchell in Hull. For introductions to both, see Robert Wade and Gordon White (eds), *Developmental States in East Asia*. Brighton: IDS Bulletin, vol. 15, no. 2, April 1984.

5. I pursue the 'dependency' issue further, alongside many others, in the book of a 1985 conference in Seoul: Kyong-dong Kim (ed.), *Dependency Issues in Korean Development*. Seoul: Seoul National University Press, 1987.

6. Gavin Kitching, *Development and Underdevelopment in Historical Perspective*. London: Methuen, 1982.

7. For a brief sketch of this view, see my articles 'The Korean Paradox', *Inside Asia*, November-December 1984; and 'Friedrich List lives!', *Inside Asia*, September-October 1985.

For the neo-Listian position more generally, see Dieter Senghaas, *The European Experience*. Leamington Spa: Berg, 1985.

8. On *minjung*, see CTC-CAA, *Minjung Theology: People as the Subjects of History*. London: Zed, 1981.

Further reading

There is no single good brief introduction to Korea in English.

In addition to works mentioned in the footnotes, there is a useful basic bibliography on Korea compiled by Edward Wagner in his translation of Ki-Baek Lee, *A New History of Korea*. Seoul: Ilchokak, 1984; which is itself a basic work.

Although not easy to get hold of, the respective US Army *Country Studies* on both North and South Korea (Washington DC: The American University, 1981 and 1982) are recommended as introductions.

For Korean politics, a rare account which fairly compares both north and south

is Young Whan Kihl, *Politics and Policies in Divided Korea*. Boulder: Westview, 1984.

A useful recent Quaker effort is John Sullivan and Roberta Foss (eds), *Two Koreas – One Future?* Philadelphia: University Press of America for AFSC, 1987.

For those wishing to follow Korean affairs, the following sources are useful:

DAILY: *Asia Wall Street Journal*; *Korea Herald*, Seoul; *Summary of World Broadcasts*, BBC – better edited than FBIS, its US equivalent.

WEEKLY: *Far Eastern Economic Review*; *Korea News Review*, Seoul; *People's Korea*, Tokyo: pro-Pyongyang; *North Korea News*, Seoul; *Pyongyang Times* (for symptomatic reading only).

MONTHLY: *Korea Journal*, Seoul, UNESCO.

QUARTERLY: *Economist Intelligence Unit*; *Country Reports* (formerly *Quarterly Economic Reviews*) on North and South Korea (serial nos. 15 and 83 respectively); *North Korea Quarterly*, Hamburg; *Korea and World Affairs*, Seoul.

IRREGULAR: Joint Publications Research Services (JPRS), *Translations on Korea*.

ANNUAL: *Journal of Korean Studies*, Seattle; *Korean Studies*, Hawaii.

Vol V No. 4

December 1986

ISSN 0280-2791

**SCANDINAVIAN JOURNAL
OF
DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVES**

Forum on Africa

Raymond I.O. Akor and Daniel Mou	
Capitalist Development and Internal Migration in Nigeria	5
Ben E. Aigbokhan	
Size Distribution of Income in Nigeria: Decomposition Analysis	25
Kayode Soremekun	
Oil, Nigeria and Mexico: Parallels and Non-Parallels	34
Adedokun Jagun	
Housing Participatory Policy for the Urban Poor in Nigeria: Alternative Strategies	45

Forum on Development Alternatives

Tamas Szentes	
Delinking from the Capitalist World Economy	
How Possible a Strategy for the Periphery?	60
Robert Looney	
Termination of the Mexican Economic Model	81
Ernst W. Gohlert	
Partners in Development: The Role of Non-Governmental Organizations in Thailand's Aid Community	95
M. Alauddin and M.K. Mujeer	
Changes in the Crop Sector of Bangladesh: A Review of Performances and Implications for Policies	109
Abu N.M. Wahid	
Expansion and Organization of Monetary Sector: The Case of Bangladesh	126
Jide Owoeye and Franklin Vivekananda	
Japan's Aid Diplomacy in Africa	145
Book Reviews	159

This is a journal of interdisciplinary social sciences specially devoted to the studies of genuine development related to basic human needs satisfaction such as socio-economic problems, conflict and peace, human rights, migration, environment, North-South relations and anthropological views.

FORUM ON THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES

Subscription Rates:	Institutions	SKR 375 + 25
	Individuals	SKR 200 + 25

Please send your orders to:

**Managing Editor
Scandinavian Journal of Development Alternatives
Post Box 7444, 103 91 Stockholm, Sweden**