

Discussion

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Thank you very much for the opportunity to comment on Professor Preutu's paper. I think it is an ambitious initiative that places Romania and the Korean peninsula in comparative perspective—a pairing that, at first glance, seems unusual and unfamiliar one, but is actually very illuminating.

1. On Main Argument

The paper advances a comparative outlook: on one hand, Romania and DPRK shared similar Cold War experiences.: The two socialist states cultivated autonomy within the communist bloc to a degree and experimented with its own invention of nationalism as a legitimizing strategy. And on the other hand, their post-Cold War trajectories toward transition to liberal democracy diverged.

- In Romania, nationalism was woven into Marxism-Leninism but coupled with a foreign policy of relative openness, which enabled eventual reintegration into Europe and a transition to liberal democracy.
- In North Korea, nationalism crystallized into Juche ideology(주체사상), producing ideological self-sufficiency, structural isolation, and long-term regime survival even in the middle of global, geopolitical systemic crisis.

As I read, if I understood correctly, this article suggests that the fate of socialist regimes in moments of systemic shift depends not only on external pressures and exogenous structural change, such as the end of the Cold War and collapse of the communism as one dominant, governing ideology, but also on **internal cultural-historical factors and collective mentalities**, Romania's European identity versus North Korea's collective identity informed of neo-Confucianist collectivism.

2. Implications and Distinctiveness

I'd like to first discuss some important implications of this paper and its argument.

1. Comparative innovation. Most comparative Cold War/post-Cold War scholarship places Eastern Europe or any country from East and Central Europe against Post-Soviet space, mainly Russia or other European nations. AND a lot of literature focusing on North Korea consider DPRK as a unique case, or put it in a comparative perspective against China, South Korea or other dictatorial countries rather than transitioned countries from the communist bloc. Few works directly compare "Romania and the DPRK", two states on the periphery of their respective regions. And I think, after reading this article, we may need more works comparing these states as they share a very distinctive characteristics during the Cold War era, which is, both countries were led idiosyncratic leaders, Ceceascu and Kim Il-sung and Kim Jung-il, carving out its own autonomy from a powerful neighboring nation.

2. Re-centering ideology and culture. The paper highlights how a long standing national identity, historical memory, and somewhat social collective mentalities shaped the latter parts, which are, more

recent parts of regime trajectories, namely for Romania, transition to liberal democracy and for DPRK, its own consolidation toward a personalist authoritarian regime. Romania's "boomerang effect of détente" shows how earlier openness created expectations for European integration, while North Korea's embedding of Juche in neo-Confucian social structures and tradition explains why popular uprising such as in 1989's Romania was unthinkable.

3. Broader theoretical takeaway. I think the article pushes us to reconsider how "systemic, global-level crises interact with local cultural traditions": under identical geopolitical shocks, societies fall back on familiar repertoires. This is a valuable insight to structuralist accounts that tend to overstate the significance of the international system change and underestimate local structures and its path-dependent effects in the long term.

3. Critiques & Comments

Clarifying the comparative framework.

- At times, Romania and the DPRK are treated as starkly parallel cases, but I sensed that each causal logic in each case, is at loggerheads at each other, as Dr. Preutu in detailed explains: in Romania, its autonomy and use of nationalism during the Cold War era facilitated openness due to its collective mental proximity to Europe and more liberal values despite the communist and plan economy experience.; in North Korea, that worked, obviously in the opposite direction. Nationalism, its Juche ideology facilitated closure, isolation, and consolidated personalist regime. So, in effect, the similar point in both regimes, which was autonomy and legitimizing strategy exploiting traditional and national culture, weighed on their future trajectory very differently.

- I would encourage the author to more explicitly define the comparative method—are these “most similar cases with divergent outcomes, or “most different” cases with similar strategies of autonomy? Tightening the framework could strengthen the analytical payoff.

On Conceptual precision

- The paper uses terms like _collective mentality_, _boomerang effect_, and _cultural levers_. These are evocative, and very innovative conceptions which I'd like to see more developed and thoroughly defined. They could benefit from sharper conceptualization and when possible, operationalization. How, specifically, does one define and understand “collective mentality”? Is it measured through institutional design, public opinion, or political discourse? Clarifying and narrowing this would help readers situate the argument within comparative politics and political culture debates at large.

On Transition after the Cold War

The Romanian section is particularly rich, but at times reads more descriptive than analytical. For example, the contrast between _shock therapy_ and _planned, gradual, and designed reform_ is well presented, but I think the paper did not delve into how this feed back into the paper's main, earlier claim about the impact of cultural-historical legacies? As an interested reader, I wanted to learn more about how

the neo-liberal turn in the transition period can be reconciliated with the cultural and historical roots of one's country.

Similarly, the DPRK section highlights neo-Confucianist element that was embedded in its history and culture, and how it led to collectivism. However, as I read, I didn't quite see what the neo-Confusionism was and what it meant on the ground when it comes to governing the war-torn, de-colonized, and somewhat half-modernized country since then end of the WWII. And With what path did the neo-Confusionism influence the collectivist mindset and culture that could be exploited by North Korea leaders and elites. The causal link between ideology and regime trajectory could be more concretely tied if the author could unpack mechanisms how the legitimacy symbols in society and history help the practice of control by the Kim regime in DPRK.

I thank the author again for this stimulating paper, and I look forward to our discussion.