Media Liberalization:
Control and Consumption of Foreign Media
in North Korea, China, and East Germany

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The pervasive consumption of smuggled foreign media in North Korea means that societal changes may bring political economic changes. To analyze how drastic political and economic changes may relate to and resulted from changing media systems and cultures, we conducted a 3-country comparison between present-day North Korea, China from the late 1970s to present day, and East Germany before the reunification with West Germany. We compared government control of media ownership and content; the flow and consumption of foreign media among citizens; the sizes of the media economy and the black market in which legal and illegal media, respectively, circulates; and the adoption of nonlocal cultures in relation to citizens' political views. Reflecting on the experiences of China and East Germany, we believe that the North Korean case is more similar to the East German case rather than to the Chinese case because the government cannot effectively control foreign media consumption and its influence on the citizens, so the country may eventually allow for some foreign media in the country.

Keywords: cross-country comparison, economic and political transformation, media control, illegal media consumption, North Korean media, East German media

In an increasingly globalized world where the boundary of nation-states no longer constrains the flows of media goods and technologies, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK; hereafter North Korea) is one of the few isolated countries in the world where few media goods are exported from and imported into the country. The North Korean government prohibits citizens from using any form of foreign media (including news, entertainment, and the Internet) because they are deemed harmful to socialist ideals. However, North Korean defectors shared in the Western and South Korean press that most citizens have acquired various movies and television shows from South Korea, China, Russia, and the U.S. from

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the black market (Baek, 2018; Kim, 2014). In addition, government officials who can travel outside the country have opportunities to consume foreign media and may bring them back to the country (Zhang & Lee, 2019). The circulation of foreign media in North Korea may mean that citizens are exposed to ideas and images banned by the North Korean government. How would these new ideas effect government-driven, large-scale media reform in North Korea? How would media reform, in turn, prompt social, political, or economic changes?

Studying how North Koreans are influenced by foreign media is difficult because of the lack of empirical and primary data. There are few academic studies on North Korean media, and most are analyses of how the media from South Korea, China, and the U.S. represent North Korea. In the absence of empirical data, neither a single case study nor quantitative analysis is feasible. Thus, a comparative method could be an effective way to discover differences among cases and to deduce parallel processes of change in the contexts of the cases (Collier, 1993; Lijphart, 1971; Skocpol & Somers, 1980). To mitigate the issue of the existence of many variables in comparative studies, we focus on cases that are comparable to North Korea by focusing on the transformation of media policy in closed and divided socialist countries that have or had black markets of nonlocal or Western media.

We have chosen two cases for a systemic three-way cross-country comparison. The first is the People's Republic of China (hereafter PRC or China) because of its economic liberalization in late 1970s; the second is the German Democratic Republic (hereafter GDR or East Germany) during the Cold War era. China and the former East Germany are chosen because they had once been closed to the outside world and their governments strictly controlled all media sectors, and because there is abundant and reliable information about the two countries. The similarities or differences among China, East Germany, and North Korea would inform how foreign media may challenge the North Korean political and economic systems.

A cross-country comparison, however, does not predict whether and how the North Korean media will reform, because the absence of empirical data made it impossible to single out factors for such analysis. This exploratory study instead aims to look holistically at how foreign media consumption can be contextualized in political, economic, and cultural contexts. Therefore, this study does not aim to test a certain theory, but rather to reflect how the North Korean media system might reform in time.

A Three-Way Comparison: North Korea, China, and East Germany

North Korea, China, and East Germany are comparable for a few reasons. First, they were established at the end of World War II and belonged to the Eastern Bloc during the Cold War. Second, similar official media policies are/were adopted during the respective time periods on which this study focuses. Third, nonlocal/foreign media are/were smuggled into the countries despite the ban from the government. Fourth, these illegal media are/were sourced from neighboring countries that share similar culture and language (namely, North Korea with South Korea; China with Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Macau; the GDR with West Germany). Lastly, the consumption of illegal media required the governments to respond to the inflow of media.

We will examine the cases of North Korea, China, and East Germany by looking at the following aspects: government control of media ownership and content; the flow and consumption of foreign media among

citizens; the sizes of the media economy and the black market; and the adoption of nonlocal cultures in relation to citizens' political views. By focusing on the interaction among politics, economies, and cultures, each of the cases will show how the governments negotiated tension among political control, market liberalization, and underground media cultures. How China and East Germany differently managed the tension illustrates the possible path that North Korea may choose shall the leaders reform its media sector. In the conclusion, we argue that the current condition of foreign media distribution and consumption in North Korea is more similar to the case of East Germany than to China.

The Case of North Korea

Government Control of Media Ownership and Content

North Korea is one of the least free countries in the world (Freedom House, 2018). The media system is one of the most repressive (Freedom House, 2017), ranked the worst among 66 countries with unfree media (Freedom House, n.d.). The North Korean media is controlled and managed by the Workers' Party of Korea, and it plays the dual function of education and propaganda. The mass media is a mouthpiece of the government that disseminates leaders' news to the citizens. Citizens have few choices—only a dozen national and provincial newspapers as well as a handful of television and radio stations. The content is not diverse at all: Television and radio sets are pretuned to government channels.

The distribution and consumption of foreign media are banned. The only access to international cable news is television in state-owned hotels where non–North Korean visitors stay. North Koreans who consume foreign media, if found, will be prosecuted. Repeated offences can lead to execution. The information age has not yet reached North Korea. The Internet is only accessible to very few government officials (speculated to be a few hundred; Central Intelligence Agency, 2018) who search for medical and scientific information online. There is an intranet that connects government departments and universities (Ko, Lee, & Jang, 2009). E-mail access is limited to employees at trade companies with business partners outside the country. Cell phones are prohibitively expensive to the average worker. The government monitors citizens' e-mails and cell-phone communication so that it is impossible to share foreign media by these means (Martin & Chomchuen, 2017).

Sizes of the Media Economy and the Black Market

The size of the media economy in North Korea is unknown primarily because it is not seen as a business. However, some suggested that there is a vibrant black market of media goods (Hastings, 2017). Despite the limited access to media, North Koreans access foreign media in a number of ways. Chinese traders (especially Chinese Koreans who live close to the border) smuggle cheap media players and foreign media goods by crossing the Chinese–North Korean border. The black market sells bootleg DVDs of Hollywood films and thumb drives loaded with South Korean television shows. Citizens also "hack" radio sets so that they can receive programs from outside North Korea (Baek, 2016). North Koreans who have family members in South Korea may also receive a "Chinese cell phone" with which they receive phone calls from South Korea or China (Kretchun, Lee, & Tuohy, 2017). The North Korean government knows of these illegal activities, but have not been consistent at cracking down on them (MacDonald, 2017). The government tolerated black market activities during economic downturn so as to lessen citizens' dissatisfaction.

The Case of China

Government Control of Media Ownership and Content

China's economic liberalization in the 1970s was a watershed moment in government's media control. During the Mao's era (1949–76), the central government, run by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), owned and controlled all media sectors. The media acted as the party's "throat and tongue" to instill the anti-imperialism and anti-Westernization political doctrine of that time. Foreign media, except those produced by other socialist countries, were banned, as they were viewed as "political, economic, military, and cultural invasions of the West" (Y. Z. Liu, 1999, p. 217). The central government reviewed all domestic media content and censored anything that was deemed politically sensitive or ideologically subversive. Additionally, media organizations were staffed mostly by former military officers and loyal party members. Therefore, at the end of Mao's era, there were few media products, and the quality was low.

China's economic liberalization since 1978 partially drove media reform because the central government was incapable of funding indebted state-owned enterprises, including the media. Before the reform, not only did the government pay for the production and distribution of media goods, but they also distributed them to the population free of charge. During the reform, the central government reduced its financial burden by asking the media to be more profit oriented and financially self-sufficient while remaining state owned (Hong, 2014). Media liberalization was also seen to be a tactic to reinvigorate economic growth. This is evident by the government changing references to the media from "cultural system" to "cultural market" in 1988, "cultural economy" in 1991, and eventually "cultural industry" in 1992. Another explanation for media liberalization is the central government's hope for commercial media fulfilling people's needs for entertainment. The government believed that when citizens are adequately entertained, society will be stable.

Media liberalization was implemented in several ways. First, the central government selectively funded certain media. The government subsidizes the China Central Television (CCTV) and the *People's Daily* newspaper as party and governmental propagandists (Wu, 1984), but it asked most media to be financially self-sufficient through generating advertising revenue. Second, the central government decentralized the media sector at the local level, allowing provincial and local governments to own and operate media enterprises as long as they cover the news distributed from the central media. Additionally, unlike the central media where "every word represents the will of the Party" (B. Y. Liu, 1990, p. 91), local media has more autonomy at deciding the content (Huang, 1994). As long as the local media do not violate the central government's ideological guideline, the central government will not censor local content. Third, a liberalized media sector promotes professionalism by hiring young, college educated media practitioners (Huang, 1994).

Sizes of the Media Economy and the Black Market

The media market boomed under economic reform. In 1978, there were only 32 television stations in China; in 1988 and 1992, the number rose to 422 and 591, respectively. The size of the television audience rose from 78 to 800 million (Huang, 1994). During the same time period, the number of radio

stations increased from 93 to 666 (Ai, 1991, as cited in Chan, 1994). In such a vibrant media market, the advertising industry grew at an average rate of 40% annually; per capita expenditures grew more than 12 times from the late 1970s to 1992 (Chinese Advertising Association, 1993). By 1988, local television stations could earn 40%–70% of their operation budget from advertising (Ai, 1991, as cited in Chan, 1994; Guo, 1988). More importantly, the government lifted its ban on foreign films and has allowed theaters to show more foreign films.

Despite the growth, media piracy also became prevalent among the population because pirated media is believed to better fulfill consumers' entertainment needs (S. Wang, 2003). In addition, legal copies of foreign goods are expensive; they are also released to the public late because the government needs time to screen their content. Because of the high demand, many media businesses sell pirated media goods to make money (Nordstrom, 2000; Wang & Zhu, 2003).

Media piracy in China went through several development stages. In the late 1970s and 1980s, pirated media were easily accessible and traded above the ground. Because of geographical and cultural proximity, most populations in the Guangdong and Fujian provinces could receive television and radio signals spilled over from Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan. These regions also became the major sources of pirated media for China (Chan, 1994). When satellite television became available in Asia, many people installed reception dishes at home to enjoy free media outside the mainland. By 1993, it is estimated that 97% of Guangdong households could receive Hong Kong television signals ("Audience Survey in Guangzhou and Shenzhen," 1992). Once recording and duplication technology such as VHS, VCD, and DVD became available in China, foreign programs were recorded and distributed to the rest of the country.

Even though China's domestic laws prohibit piracy and the government has joined a number of international organizations that condemn the infringement of intellectual property,[1] local governments often tolerate piracy for the sake of economic growth. In some cases, local authorities and state-owned enterprises even capitalized on foreign signal reception technologies. For example, they restricted the sale of reception dishes, intercepted foreign signals, and sold the dishes to local communities for profit. Nonetheless, in the 1980s, when the international community increased pressure on China to enforce intellectual property laws, the central government cracked down on piracy, which drove the domestic supply chain of pirated media underground. Eventually the production moved to other Asian countries such as Malaysia and Myanmar (National Anti-Piracy and Pornography Working Committee, 2000; Wang & Zhu, 2003).

Flow and Consumption of Foreign Media Among Citizens

Before the reform, the government officially imported foreign media from socialist countries such as the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. After the reform, media goods were imported from the United States, Western Europe, Japan, Hong Kong, and Taiwan (J. Wang, 1993). The Ministry of Radio, Film and Television

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[1] China was the signatory of a number of conventions of intellectual property, including the Convention Establishing the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) in 1980 and the Paris Convention for Protection of Industry Property in 1985.

was in charge of setting quotas for foreign media programs, balancing genres and countries of origin of imported media, as well as reviewing content before releasing it to the public (Chan, 1994). In practice, local media stations bypassed the quota restriction by forming joint ventures with foreign media firms (Chan, 1994) to obtain distribution rights, access foreign capital, lean on foreign expertise, produce Western-style media products, and be more competitive in the market. In return, foreign partners gained rights to advertising time and revenue (Huang, 1994).

The local audience's preference of foreign(-influenced) content is evident by imported Western programs occupying more airtime in local television stations and attracting more audience and advertising revenue; domestic media producers quickly adopting foreign media genres, such as game shows and soap operas (Chan, 1994; Stockmann & Gallagher, 2011); the domestic box office being dominated by films coproduced with Hong Kong and from Hollywood (Shackleton, 2019); as well as the central government nationalizing joint ventures to improve media quality.

Adoption of Foreign Cultures and Political Views Among Citizens

Hong Kong and Taiwan formed the bulk of smuggled media content during liberalization (Chan, 1994). The most popular genres were soap operas and entertainment programs with subtitles (Chan, 1994). Overall, people considered nonlocal media content more entertaining, relaxing, varied, and "better produced" than the domestic ones (Chan, 1994). Wang and Zhu (2003) found that consumers of Western media felt empowered, as the content made them feel trendy and more connected to the world. The young, educated, and urban populations view foreign media positively because it is associated with a more Western lifestyle (Hartley & Montgomery, 2009; Wei & Pan, 1999). In addition, Zhong (2003) found that Chinese viewers prefer playing PC games and singing karaoke on their television sets rather than watching state-produced shows. Additionally, Chinese viewers also believe foreign information sources to be more trustworthy than those coming from state-run media (Shirk, 2011; Stockman, 2011). One negative consequence of Westernized and commercialized content is the promotion of consumerism among the audience (Wei & Pan, 1999). It should also be noted that despite some audience's preference of foreign content, they still strongly identify with Chinese nationalism, culture, and traditions. In short, the preference for Western-styled content does not mean the sense of nationalism is weakened.

Implications From the Chinese Case for North Korea

The Chinese government liberalized and decentralized the media sector to facilitate economic liberalization. Local governments and private media companies were given more autonomy over content. However, media liberalization and decentralization by no means weakened the central government's control of media freedom. After all, the goal of the reform was not to establish a free market, but to use a market economy to serve socialist purposes and enforce government's authority. Most Chinese media are still technically state owned, and all of them are subjected to administrative orders due to licensing requirements.

Similarly, the relationship between the local and central governments matters in media content. A more liberalized media does not mean that the government gives up the authority to censor media content, it simply picked and chose what kinds of media content to scrutinize. It is more relaxed with entertainment,

economic, and technological news (Chan, 1994), but closely monitors social and political issues. Although the local governments were given more control over local media, they do not have the freedom to produce whatever content they want. In fact, local media exercises self-censorship partly due to the cadre evaluation system[2] used by the CCP to control local leaders' policy choices (Edin, 2003), partly due to the cost of policy change, and partly due to local leaders' political ideology and their connections to the top leadership.

To conclude, economic liberalization in China took place because some liberal leaders initiated the reform and saw its implementation. The road to liberalization was not without obstacles—conservative and liberal leaders competed and disagreed on the reform pace and direction (Meisner, 1999). The conservatives considered media and economic liberalization to be risky because more information could potentially trigger citizens to demand more from the government. Therefore, at times of potential social instability or political dissents, the conservatives gained the upper hand to tighten control on domestic and foreign media.

The Case of East Germany

Government Control of Media Ownership and Content

Similar to the North Korean media system, the East German media system was under tight control by the ruling party, the Socialist Unity Party (SED). The ruling party controlled the media system by instilling a "news monopoly" without official censorship (Impekoven, 2004, as cited in Meyen, 2011). However, government control of the media weakened over time.

From the end of World War II to the establishment of the GDR in 1949, media politics followed the Soviet model under which the media was centralized and understood as a means for propaganda, agitation, and dissemination of socialist ideology. In 1946, the Soviet occupation forces compelled the Communist Party (KPD) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD) to unify the SED, leading to less diverse voices in the media. The newspaper *Neues Deutschland* was born and became the SED's party organ and the official flagship newspaper in the GDR. All newspapers of record published news about politics and economy but hardly covered news about tragedies, crimes, or religion (Meyen, 2011). The GDR constitution of 1949 prohibited press censorship ("DDR Mythos," 2018), but the government, in practice, controlled media content by restricting the circulation of information (Boyer, 2003). This is evident by all news on centralized media networks being provided by one information service, Allgemeiner Nachrichtendienst (General News Service). In addition, the Karl Marx University in Leipzig provided education and training for all journalists (Boyer, 2003). Furthermore, the Central Committee Secretary for Agitation and Propaganda held daily press conferences and instructions for the press. Lastly, the government centralized and controlled broadcasting on the five state radio stations and the two state television stations ("DDR Mythos," 2018).

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[2] The Chinese government evaluates all officials annually. The weights of each criterion are set by the central government, even though they may vary among regions. Local officials have the freedom to design and implement policies based on local conditions. Because the political future of officials depends on the evaluation, the central government generally can achieve policy goals and maintain control over local governments even when authorities are decentralized.

From 1950 to 1971, the media sector was firmly controlled by the SED's First Secretary, Walter Ulbricht, who preferred isolationist politics. Media censorship was tightened up when the Berlin Wall was built in 1961. Licensing for press was centralized and controlled by the Press Office of the Council of Ministers (Kuschel, 2016). Television news were aired for the first time in 1952 on Josef Stalin's 73rd birthday ("DDR Mythos," 2018). However, TV sets were rarely privately owned—they were installed mainly on factory floors or in public TV rooms—which also served as "agitations rooms." Until the mid-1980s, community antenna systems were used to control people's media consumption rather than using systems in private homes (Kuschel, 2016).

From 1971 to 1989, the media was progressively liberalized during Erich Honecker's leadership (Otto, 2015). In 1973, Honecker ratified the basic treaty between the two German states that regulated their partnership, and officially claimed their peaceful coexistence. In the course of this treaty, Honecker stated that any GDR citizen could use West German broadcasting because he had accepted the pervasive, though illegal, consumption of West German media in East Germany (Kuschel, 2016).

Sizes of the Media Economy and the Black Market of Media

The East German media economy was planned and implemented by the state. The newspapers, as organs of the SED, enjoyed better treatments—such as a wider distribution and more resources—than the bloc party's newspapers (such as the Christian Democratic Union Party of the GDR) as well as other nongovernmental newspapers and magazines. The two state newspapers were *Neues Deutschland* (the SED's main news outlet) and *Junge Welt*. In 1989, the former had a 1.1 million daily circulation and the latter had 1.5 million circulation ("About Us," 2018). The total number of the titles of newspapers and magazines in the GDR was, however, unclear ("DDR Mythos," 2018; Otto, 2015). In general, the state did not see the media as a profit-making sector.

There was a flourishing black market for Western media goods: Press, books, comics, and records were all bought and sold behind the state's back. Most of the West German media products came by post to the GDR. In the 1960s, about 420,000 copies of West German publications were confiscated per year (Kuschel, 2016). Television sets were also sold in the black market because of the limited supply rationed by the government. The government tried to stop illegal trades but citizens would always find ways to buy and use Western media and technologies (Kuschel, 2016).

Flow and Consumption of West German Media Among Citizens

The consumption of West German media was rather widespread among GDR citizens. About 90% of East Germans were said to consume West German media in the mid-1960s, including the majority the Socialist Unity Party members (Holzweißig, 1995). They consumed Western media to receive alternative information, seek entertainment, and perform "inner emigration"[3] (Holzweißig, 1995; Meyen, 2011). Before the Berlin Wall was built, consumption of Western media was comparatively easy, especially in Berlin. Movie theaters in West

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[3] Inner emigration means citizens would not publicly oppose the government, but they would privately criticize the government and may even support oppositional forces (Dreesen, 2015).

Berlin even offered discounted tickets to East Germans. The West German press was likewise widely consumed among GDR citizens. Western newspapers were available as contraband goods. The government stopped them with "social control" methods, such as searching people's bags (Kuschel, 2016). The West German broadcasting signal was theoretically accessible in the GDR, except for a few regions around Dresden and the very Northeastern part of East Germany due to geographical reasons. In general, East Germans consumed more West German broadcasting because of easier access (Holzweißig, 1995). As a result, the U.S. radio broadcasting in West Berlin, Radio in the American Sector (RIAS), introduced a program that specifically addressed East Germans. Although the SED government tried to defame RIAS and jammed the signals, these tactics did not deter the consumption of West German broadcasting (Kuschel, 2016). After all, the GDR government acknowledged that if it could not prevent its citizens from watching foreign media, then they had better compete with foreign media for the audience. The massive demonstrations and the final turnaround in 1989 are sometimes labeled as "TV revolution" or "media revolution." These labels underscore the importance of the media to effect political changes through social movements (Hickethier, 1992).

Adoption of Western/"Capitalist" Cultures and Political Views Among Citizens

To respond to the widespread use of West German media among East Germans, the local media adopted "Western" elements, such as providing more entertainment programs and fewer political ones (Meyen, 2010). For instance, the popular show *A Kettle of Color* (*Ein Kessel Buntes*) was introduced in 1972, in which international and East German celebrities performed. This show was meant to compete with West German shows (Kuschel, 2016). State-controlled media also failed to attract teenage viewers, so in 1989, the government tried to attract this population by introducing programs for adolescents, such as the show *Elf99*, which provided entertainment through airing a mixture of sports, news, music videos, and TV series. These examples show that East German citizens consumed West German media not necessarily for political purpose, but for entertainment and the desire to be assimilated into Western culture (Kuschel, 2016).

Despite state-controlled media changing some content, they still produced content primarily for propaganda. For example, the TV program *The Black Channel* (*Der schwarze Kanal*) had the host presented pieces of Western German TV programs and commented on them in a polemic way (Kuschel, 2016). Hence, the state-controlled TV broadcasters contextualized Western media content that supported the GDR's ideology. But programs like this did not interest East Germans, who gravitated toward West German entertainment. It may not be surprising that *The Black Channel* suffered from low ratings (Mihelj & Huxtable, 2018). However, East German citizens sometimes rejected West German news and its critical coverage on East Germany (Mihelj & Huxtable, 2018).

Implications from the East German Case on North Korea

The East German government controlled the media system as well as the content, and they also tried to stop citizens' use of Western media by controlling the import of West German media and jamming broadcasting signals. Nonetheless, GDR citizens had easy access to Western media, making the consumption widespread. Citizens installed antennas to receive Western broadcasting signals, and turned to the black market to acquire West German media products. To respond to the pervasive consumption of West German media, the East German government decided to change the local media to counter West German illegal media goods by

Westernizing broadcasting programs and adding more entertainment features. In the early 1970s, the East German government realized they could not prevent citizens from using Western media. Eventually, they had officially accepted Western media as part of social life. Finally, the liberalization of the media system came along with the turnaround in 1989. The East German government's steps toward a Westernized and liberal media system could serve as a model for North Korea if the government decides to reform the media. The East German government first incorporated Western elements in local programs, then officially accepted the use of Western media among its citizens.

The Path for North Korea's Media Liberalization: An East German or a Chinese One?

The media systems of China and East Germany are both characterized by strong governmental control, especially in the first few decades after the nations were established. The ruling party imposed a news monopoly to control the kinds of news and media content to be produced and distributed. Despite the rigidly controlled systems, citizens of both countries found ways to consume Western and foreign media—in particular, entertainment—that was overlooked by socialist media. Some citizens also sought news from Western and foreign media to obtain alternative information not provided by the state. Citizens in China and East Germany saw foreign media as a gateway to the Western world.

In Table 1, we summarize the cases of China and East Germany in terms of state control of media, the circulation of Western media among the citizens, and the adoption of Western culture.

Table 1. Comparison of Media Control and Consumption of Western Media in East Germany and China.

	Media ownership and content	Circulation of Western media among citizens	Adoption of Western culture
China	Media as the "throat and tongue" of the party-run government; state licensing, controlling, and centralizing media; news monopoly; eventually, a market economy was implemented that serves socialist purposes	Black market with all types of media goods (coming primarily from Hong Kong and Taiwan); widespread reception of Hong Kong broadcasting in the southern region	More entertainment in state-owned media; media was seen by the citizens as a gateway to the West; increasing professionalism in the media sector (e.g., journalists' education)
East Germany	Media as means for agitation and propaganda; state licensing, controlling, and centralizing media; state controlled education for journalists; news monopoly	Black market with all types of media goods (coming primarily from West Germany); widespread use of West German broadcasting; consumption of West German media, which was eventually officially accepted	More entertainment in the East German media, less politics; citizens sought alternative information from Western media; media as a gateway to the West

The Chinese and East German governments liberalized the control of media systems and content. As a result, media products became more Westernized and commercialized over time. However, the paths of liberalization were different between the two countries because of the different conditions under which media liberalization took place. In the East German case, the leaders believed that if the government could not deter the consumption of West German media, they may as well lift the ban of West German media. Consequently, a general political and societal opening to the West led to a relaxation of the state-controlled media.

In the Chinese case, media from Hong Kong and Taiwan "leaked" through the border via spillover broadcast signals, initially to the southern part of the country. Later, foreign media were illegally duplicated and distributed throughout the country. Meanwhile, the pursuit of economic growth led the Chinese government to tolerate Western media, to liberalize media content to allow for more entertainment, to allow for local-level ownership, and to promote professionalism in the media sector. Nonetheless, the market economy in China, after all, serves the political purpose of preserving socialism so the government limited the amount of foreign media and restricted the complete liberalization of the media system.

How the GDR and China managed the tensions among politics, economies, and cultures have implications on North Korea's media systems and content should the government decide to reform its media system. First, both the East Germany and China cases show that citizens can easily access and consume foreign media from either the black market or spillover broadcast signals, forcing governments to respond to foreign media. The two cases, however, differed because of the population size and the leaders' political will to economic reform. In the case of China, because only citizens in the southern part had reliable access to foreign media and because the Chinese government was determined to pursue economic reform, the Chinese government liberated part of the media industry but maintains control of some content to enforce political and ideological status quo. In comparison, East Germans had more reliable access to West German media so the government could not effectively deter its consumption.

North Korea faces a situation similar to East Germany. Because of its geographical proximity to South Korea and the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Region in China, many North Koreans could receive spillover radio and TV signals. Moreover, North Koreans can easily acquire DVD and USB drives with foreign content in the black market; it is estimated that 70%–80% of North Koreans have watched foreign media (Baek, 2016), and foreign media is their most important source of information (MacDonald, 2017). Therefore, the condition under which the North Korean government may pursue media reform is more similar to the case of East Germany. In fact, the North Korean government has already incorporated more entertainment in its media. For instance, the government not only formed the Morangbong Band, an all-girl popular band, to mimic and counter South Korean pop culture, but the state television station also staged Disney characters for Kim Jong-un (Fackler, 2012). Other evidence of general tolerance of Western media includes the sale of Western animation movies at state-run shops (MacDonald, 2016) and fashion styles from South Korea (Carroll, 2017).

Even though media liberalization was associated with the reintegration of the two Germanys, media reform in North Korea does not necessarily mean North Korea will be reintegrated with South Korea for a number of reasons. First, one reason for the reintegration of the two Germanys was the collapse of

the Soviet Union. Even though North Korea had suffered from the Great Famine in the early 1990s, the state has maintained political and social stability. Therefore, it may not see reintegration with South Korea as an urgent matter. Second, the West German media served as a source for alternative worldview and opinions to East Germans, which eventually, strengthened their critical attitude toward the government. In comparison, interviews with North Korean defectors showed that although those who have listened to radio signals from South Korea started to suspect the truthfulness of the government (Baek, 2016), the younger generation was not interested in social or political news; they only turned to South Korean media for entertainment (Yoon, 2015). Third, North Koreans have little freedom to move, even within the country: Citizens are not allowed to travel freely between city and rural areas, unlike East Germans, who were free to travel around the country. The lack of interactions between the urban and rural populations in North Korea means there is little information exchange even within the country, making it difficult to form cross-class mass mobilization. The elites could maintain their privilege but also, consume foreign content. Hence, North Korea may not be as easily reintegrated with South Korea as East Germany was with West Germany.

In comparison, the media liberalization path of China occurred under conditions that are not shared by present-day North Korea. The Chinese government sees the media as an important economic sector, so it considered media liberalization to be essential to achieving economic development while also maintaining political control. In contrast, even though the North Korean government allowed for contraband trade in the black market during economic crisis, it may not see the media as a viable economic sector because of its small population (Zhang & Lee, 2019). Unlike the case in China, where the domestic market is large enough to support commercial media, the domestic North Korean market is small. Its economy is also far less mature than that of South Korea, when the government decided to move away from a manufacturing-based economy to one that exports "soft power" for an international market (Kwon & Kim, 2014). Currently, the North Korean economy relies on exporting raw materials, chemicals, and counterfeits to other countries, but it is not yet at the stage of exporting media goods.

The comparison of the media systems in the three countries allowed us to conclude that the East German conditions under which media liberalization occurred were similar to those of present-day North Korea: first, the North Korean government cannot prevent Western media from flowing into the country; second, media liberalization is unlikely to unsettle political power; and third, North Korean leaders are not as determined as their Chinese counterparts to undergo sweeping economic liberalization.

Conclusion

This study compared the cases of North Korea, China, and East Germany to consider whether the conditions that allow for foreign media affecting North Korean political and economic development are more similar to China or to East Germany. Because of the lack of reliable information about North Korea, a comparative study was conducted to evaluate the impact of foreign media on sociopolitical liberalization in the examples of China and East Germany. The comparison shows that the GDR and pre-1979 China shared two commonalities: First, foreign media were pervasively consumed among the citizens, and second, the consumption of foreign media was accompanied by and caused significant social changes. However, the two cases differed because of the different economic and political environments of both countries. For example,

GDR citizens always had fairly easy access to media products from West Germany due to geographical and cultural proximity. Even though the GDR government sought to restrict citizens' exposure to Western media, the ban was eventually lifted as a result of political de-escalation between the GDR and West Germany. Nonetheless, the access to foreign media did not trigger much political or economic reform in the GDR until the end of Cold War.

The Chinese case shows that the liberalization of the media sector was in the broader context of economic reform. However, economic reform did not foment political reform. The Chinese government selectively capitalized on foreign media to pursue economic growth while filtering politically sensitive information via direct and indirect administrative methods.

Yet notable differences about people's media preference and political mobilization between North Korea and East Germany have to be considered. In North Korea, citizens are not allowed to travel freely within the country. Further, the young generation is more interested in entertainment than in political information. These two factors suggest that North Korean consumers are unlikely to initiate large-scale social changes because they cannot exchange information. Therefore, even though present-day North Korea shares more conditions with East Germany before it was reintegrated with West Germany, these similarities do not mean that North Korea will be reintegrated with South Korea because there are larger scale global changes that are unpredictable. For example, the collapse of the Soviet Union that fomented the tearing down of the Berlin Wall was unpredicted. All in all, the comparison of the three countries showed that while the experience in the GDR and China could shed light on North Korea, the lack of reliable information from North Korea, in particular the everyday life of North Koreans in different parts of the country, makes it impossible to assert any certainty.

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