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Political Elites in Transition and Unification: German Lessons for the Korean Peninsula?

Lars Vogel & Heinrich Best*

Abstract: »Politische Eliten in Transformation und Wiedervereinigung: Erfahrungen aus Deutschland als Optionen für Korea?«. The following paper investigates the role of political elites in the prelude to and trajectory of German transition and re-unification since 1989 and takes it as a point of departure to identify experiences transferable to the situation on the Korean peninsula. Thereby it builds upon the German experience and contextualises it within the international research on elite theory and political transition in order to distinguish between general results and those specific to Germany. The structures of North and South Korean elites as well as changes in these structures will be analysed in order to identify similarities and differences vis-à-vis developments in Germany. Lastly, in light of these underlying conditions some conclusions will be drawn concerning potential future developments in North Korea, thereby assessing the transferability of German findings as well as their potential for generalisation. In methodological terms, this paper is a comparison between Germany and Korea, albeit with an asymmetric comparative perspective, in the sense that the trajectory of transformation and re-unification is well-known in the case of Germany, while considerable uncertainty persists with regard to possible scenarios for the Korean peninsula.

Keywords: Elites, Transformation, Korea, Germany, German Unification, Representation, Elite Change, Regime Change, National Integration, GDR, East Germany.

1. Introduction¹

The theoretical foundation of our contribution is provided by the ‘new elite paradigm,’ according to which the establishment of a stable and pacified political order always necessitates agreements among elites in which relevant elite groups reach an understanding concerning the access to and distribution of

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¹ Findings for Germany are based on the research of the projects A1 and A3 of the Collaborative Research Centre 580 at the Friedrich-Schiller University (Jena) and the Martin-Luther University (Halle-Wittenberg) between 2000 and 2012, which investigated the premises, structures and consequences of transformation in Germany and Europe since 1989.

power in a given or future political system (Higley and Lengyel 2000; Higley and Burton 2006). Elite groups are therefore key to the success or failure in processes of transition or unification. National unification can only succeed on the basis of an integration of perhaps not all, but at least large sections of the involved territorial units' elites, that is, by reinforcing their interest in the establishment and consolidation of unification. Yet the key insights of the new elite paradigm extend even further: Elites can cooperate even in the absence of institutions grounded in an underlying consensus provided that such cooperation permits them to pursue their own interests. Such an 'antagonistic elite cooperation' (Best 2009) could be observed over long periods of German division. It resulted in the preservation of a common society in two states during the years of division and was thereby key to successful German re-unification in 1989-90. The national (re-)integration of East Germany, however, would have been equally impossible without the replacement of the communist power elite's top echelon before the collapse of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), coinciding with the ascent of secondary and functional GDR elites,² who received numerous opportunities for inclusion and advancement in eastern Germany. This process facilitated the rapid formation of a structurally and normatively integrated all-German political elite. Correspondingly, no relevant political actor today questions German re-unification, and no particularistic, let alone separatist, tendencies can be found. However, this rapid integration of elites also engendered a distance on the part of the East German population towards democracy and its central actors.

The theoretical analysis and empirically informed depiction of antagonistic elite cooperation up to 1989 will be elaborated in the following (2). Subsequently, the development of the social structure of the GDR and later East German elite and their paths of recruitment will be examined (3), as the adaptability of the social structure of elites in the East and in the West represents a crucial precondition for the successful integration of elites in Germany following the exchange of power elites already completed in the GDR. The next section then addresses this exchange of elites as well as depicting subsequent elite integration and its resulting effects in terms of political representation of the population (4). In a next step, the social structure of the GDR and later East German elite is compared to that of current North and South Korean elites. This allows for an assessment of interests and motives of Korean elites, and those of

² 'Elites' are those collective and individual actors who occupy central leadership positions within their respective political and social subsystems. The term 'functional elites' includes persons who hold leadership positions in the various sub-systems and are thus in a position to influence developments concerning society as a whole, while the power elite is characterised by the ability of its members to actually decide on and implement measures that affect society as a whole. 'Secondary elites' denotes persons who occupy subordinate positions instead of actual leadership positions, but who have good chances of advancing into a top-level position at some point.

the North Korean one in particular, in a context wherein reconstructing the attitudes of the actors involved is often difficult (5). In the conclusion, we turn to possible scenarios of developments resulting from this comparison and the theoretical implications of the analysis.

2. Antagonistic Elite Cooperation before 1989

The political elites in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the GDR cultivated a particular, because antagonistic, form of cooperation. The term ‘antagonistic cooperation’ was coined by the early American sociologist William Sumner and describes a situation in which adversaries pursue their respective special interests in a cooperation restricted to certain areas of their relations (Best and Vogel 2014). This cooperation is based neither on common values nor on close social ties, nor does it require resolution of the conflict at the root of the antagonism. Antagonistic cooperation requires, however, mutual trust in adherence to common agreements, as no institutions exist that could enforce them. Moreover, both sides must assume that the conflict will not be settled in favour of one’s own side in the foreseeable future, be it through military action or any other measures that may cause either one of the antagonists to break down.

The elites of the FRG and GDR, respectively, may well be described as antagonists, because they were representatives of two incompatible political and social systems whose relationship ranged from peaceful coexistence to the mutually declared will of both sides to pursue a hostile takeover of the other. Yet owed to their incorporation into a global confrontation between two power blocs, which in fact granted some degree of stability, changes in the situation seemed unlikely in the near to medium term. Furthermore, elites in both the FRG and GDR shared cultural traits and a common national history, particularly including the experience of World War II and thus an awareness of the dangers threatening Germany should the conflict between East and West escalate. Against this backdrop, elites of both states cooperated throughout the country’s period of division, right up to the day of re-unification. That said, this relationship was frequently tested, such as during the popular uprising in the GDR in 1953, the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961 or the repeated disagreements over the status of West Berlin. Outcomes of this cooperation, such as economic and financial aid for the GDR in exchange for ‘humanitarian relief’ with respect to intra-German traffic of people, goods and information, were formalised in several agreements. The most important of these was the Basic Treaty of 1972 (*Grundlagenvertrag*), which entailed the FRG lowering down its claim to sole national representation and confirmed the recognition of the GDR as an independent state (Block 1986, 1993; Bender 1996). For the GDR elite, this represented one of the main goals driving their antagonistic cooperation in the first place, namely reinforcing the legitimacy and thus the stability of their own

state. Other motives included the prospect of economic support and access to western European export markets (Kruse 2005). This economic aspect played an increasingly significant role beginning in the 1980s, as part of an attempt to deal with mounting trade deficits and the threat of negative credit rating, as well as cultivating more independence from the Soviet Union, its economic problems and, in particular, its attempts of political reform. For West German elites, the desire to influence the GDR's overall situation aimed at changing it ('change through rapprochement' (Egon Bahr)),³ as well as the prospect of humanitarian relief to soften the material consequences of Germany's division, served as central motives.

In fact, these intended goals were realised, at least partially. The GDR elite received formal recognition of their statehood and access to western European export markets, and were simultaneously able to meet creditors' demands in spite of their state's dire economic and financial situation. The stabilisation they desired, however, would only last until 1989: Access to western European markets, although certainly earning foreign currency for the GDR, came at the price of reduced investment in the maintenance and expansion of domestic productive capacities, while efforts to increase independence from the Soviet Union resulted mainly in a decrease of Soviet support for the preservation of the GDR as an independent state.

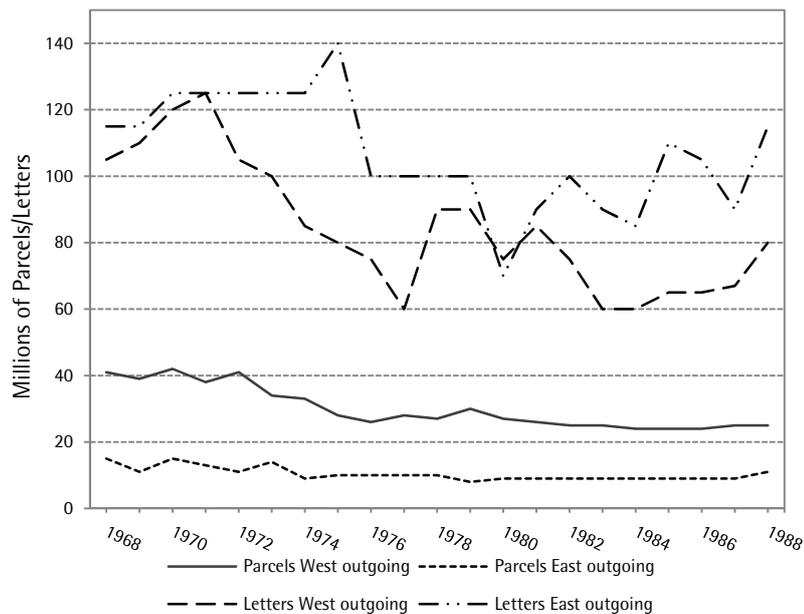
Whether or not the FRG's elites were able to achieve their goals remains open to interpretation, for despite the intended change through rapprochement, the GDR's regime was able to suppress almost all signs of political opposition until the spring of 1989. On the other hand, it can be clearly seen that the GDR's abrupt transformation in 1989-90 and subsequent re-unification would not have happened in the context of a policy of isolation or containment, and, on the other hand, *without* humanitarian relief, the maintenance of close economic ties between East and West Germany, the GDR population's access to West German media or the inclusion of the GDR in the Helsinki Process.

With regard to the subsequent re-unification, the non-intended and indirect effects of elite cooperation deserve special consideration. Elite cooperation secured the continuation of family and friendship networks and close economic ties between the two German states, ties which in turn contributed to the persistence of elements of a common German society and economic space. It can be demonstrated, for example, that the intensity of communication between the two German sub-states did not, despite the ongoing separation, decrease around the 1970s, but, on the contrary, increased again during the 1980s (see Figure 1). Moreover, intra-German patterns of communication tended to resemble those

³ Egon Bahr, one of the architects of the FRG's foreign policy towards the communist countries, in particular towards the GDR and the Soviet Union, since the late 1960s (*Neue Ostpolitik*) used this term first in a speech (15 July 1963) to describe the basic idea of this new policy.

within a single society rather than those between two distinct societies (Best 1990 [2008]). Continuing notions of and hopes for *national* solidarity and loyalty preserved re-unification as a quasi-natural political option, even if its implementation was conceived as a long-term effort. Consequently, neither the vast majority of the East German population nor the elites in both GDR and FRG considered the continuation of the GDR as state a serious option in 1989.

Figure 1: Postal Traffic between the Federal Republic/Berlin (West) and the GDR/Berlin (East)



Source: Best (2008 [1990]).

However, antagonistic elite cooperation came to an end in 1989 when a profound asymmetry developed between the elites in the FRG and the GDR. In light of the mass exodus from the GDR and mass demonstrations within it, and especially after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, West German elites were able to assert their position of economic and financial superiority as well as their international standing, while GDR elites, confronted with meagre support from the Soviet Union and mass protests on the part of the domestic population, became paralyzed. West German elites were therefore no longer dealing with an antagonist on equal footing. By the time the Berlin Wall fell and re-unification was firmly on the agenda, West German elites had every reason to doubt that their erstwhile GDR counterparts would remain much longer a useful instrument for influencing GDR politics. These doubts were confirmed by the first and last free elections to

the GDR parliament, the so-called People's Chamber (*Volkskammer*) in 1990, which ratified the exchange of elites and allowed a new GDR political elite to establish itself sharing a fundamental democratic attitude and desire for national re-unification with the West German elite. The relationship between the new GDR elites and the old FRG elites, however, was no longer characterised by antagonistic cooperation, but instead followed the logic of asymmetric integration. One crucial premise for that integration of elites in unified Germany, and subsequently national integration, were successful under these conditions can be found in the structure and recruitment patterns of these new GDR elites, whose origins date back to long before 1989.

3. Structure of the GDR Elite and Changes to it Prior to Re-Unification in 1990

Primary criteria for the recruitment and subsequent careers of GDR elites up to 1989 included ideological conformity, loyalty and efficiency (Salheiser 2009). However, vertical and horizontal differentiation among the GDR's power and functional elites in terms of patterns of recruitment and career trajectories, that is to say, the specific weight of recruitment criteria, corresponded to the respective social sub-sector and the level of position in question. Apart from demographic characteristics (such as gender and age), the possession of social and cultural capital (social networks and educational degrees) proved particularly decisive.

Until roughly the mid-1960s, an aggressive education and recruitment policy ensured that elite positions were staffed with persons from working class backgrounds who demonstrated loyalty to the regime. This policy served to put an end to the 'bourgeois educational privilege' and simultaneously helped the ruling Socialist Unity Party (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*, SED) consolidate its power. By the late 1960s, however, these same forms of social and cultural capital – and thus of the elite status itself – were increasingly passed on through familial inheritance. As a result, opportunities for education, power and inclusion for members of the lower ranks of the working class and white collar workers diminished significantly.

Within the central elite circles concentrated in the military and security apparatus, families in which up to four generations were closely linked to the state and the party ideologically, biographically and professionally, known as 'red dynasties,' were a typical occurrence (Best 2012). The mid and top-level elites in the economy, the sciences, and the health sector often came from the educated middle class and commonly exhibited outstanding professional qualifications and, sporadically, a 'relative distance to politics.' Ultimately, however, professional and ideological criteria were never fully separated, preventing a complete professionalization of elites in the western sense. Until the system's

collapse, the primacy of the SED effectively determined employment choices – as it did in all important issues.

Besides the increasing self-recruitment, holders of elite positions furthermore remained in their offices and functions for very long periods ('gerontocracy') and accumulated multiple positions and offices. This blocked the younger generation, or secondary elites, who found themselves stuck on standby in secondary and tertiary leadership positions. Anyone who chose not to join the SED was additionally blocked; only rarely did these individuals advance into leadership positions, but instead occupied mid-level leadership posts.

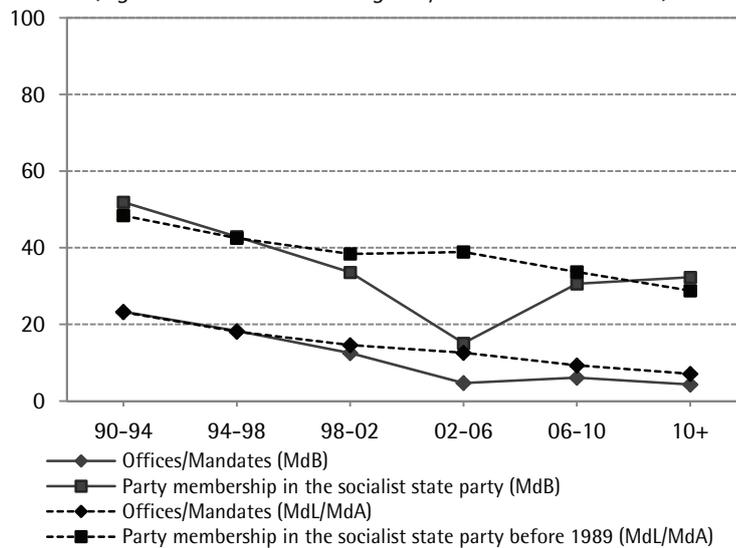
Conversely, in order to accelerate or secure professional advancement, many became members of the SED or one of the bloc parties. These persons need not necessarily be classified as system loyalists, although they, similar to the majority of the non-affiliated population, pursued no oppositional agenda either. The proportion of active members of the opposition was very low, and were not established as a counter-elite. When modernisation bottlenecks and the economic crisis intensified in the GDR from the mid-1980s onwards, parts of the functional elite (particularly in the fields of economy, science and culture) perceived and reflected these developments, but they hardly contributed to the peaceful revolution of 1989, as even rank and file, secondary elites were privileged over the rest of the population when it came to consumer goods, housing, etc. Although many voiced criticisms privately, the majority ultimately remained loyal to state and party.

The increasing self-recruitment of the GDR elite, the associated mechanisms of recruitment and selection and their sector-specific differentiation had established an order of inequality and thus created a high degree of compatibility with West German capitalist society. The members of the secondary elites and persons whose advance into elite positions was blocked by the long office terms of their predecessors were particularly well-positioned to establish themselves under the new conditions and opportunity structures due to the social and cultural capital they had accumulated in the GDR (Best, Gebauer and Salheiser 2012, 83).

In the spring of 1989 it was not yet foreseeable that this new general framework would be created so rapidly. One factor contributing to this impression was the state's apparatus of repression, which remained effective into the summer of 1989, hindering any oppositional efforts and thus the formation of a public, visible opposition. However, following the mass exodus in the summer of 1989 and in particular the state's reluctance to violently suppress the Monday Demonstration in Leipzig on 9 October 1989, the old GDR elites' threat of repression rang increasingly hollow, and now not only oppositional groups but the aforementioned 'blocked' loyalist generation began to push for changes in the GDR as well. The beginning of the transition period was therefore characterised by attempts to introduce reforms in the GDR through compromises between the – once blocked, but now upwardly mobile – generation loyal to the

system and the opposition at the round tables. Despite a massive retreat of the old (political) top-level elites, this phase was marked by a remarkable dominance of the blocked loyalists, who could be found largely among functionaries of the SED's secondary ranks (Derlien 1997).

Figure 2: Political Experiences in the GDR up to 1989 of Members of the German Bundestag (MdB) and the State Parliaments (MdL, MdA) (Figures Indicated Chronologically since 1990 in Percent)



Source: Collaborative Research Centre 580 of the German Scientific Foundation, Project A3, "Jena Parliamentary Survey"; Offices/Mandates: Minister/Secretary of State before Dec 1989/Deputy in the Volkskammer before Mar 1990 and offices/mandates at regional (before Mar 1990) and/or municipal level (before May 1990).

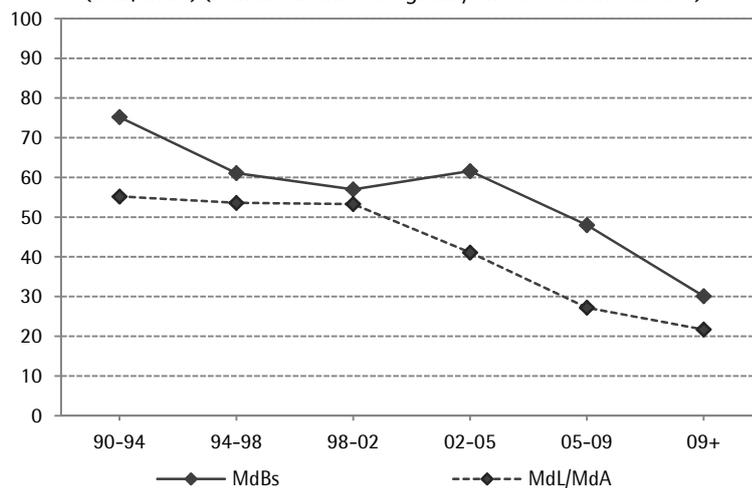
Reading aid: 23.3 percent of the eastern German members of the German Bundestag in the years 1990-1994 conducted public offices/mandates in the GDR before 1989.

Yet these attempts were overtaken by events on the ground: firstly, by the fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November, and secondly by the politics of the West German government, which heavily influenced events in the GDR in anticipation of re-unification under West German auspices. This perspective severely curtailed the advancing SED generation's scope of action, as well as that of the opposition at the round tables. Before the results of the *Volkskammer* elections in March 1990, effectively regarded as a referendum vote on re-unification, any kind of substantial policy had become nearly impossible. In this sense, the fall of the Wall had already handed over the initiative to the West German political elite, who then, following the *Volkskammer* elections, conclusively determined the framework in which the GDR's transitional elite was permitted to act. The post-communist de Maizière government that took office after the *Volkskam-*

mer elections in March 1990 then finally broke the continuity with the advancing second row of SED elites.

Beyond a handful of exceptions, no members of the former top stratum of the GDR elite were among the persons now moving into elite political positions. In the years up to 1994, only one fifth of former GDR executive personnel were able to continue their careers without interruption (Gebauer 2012). The new political elite in eastern Germany, however, was only recruited from the ranks of the opposition to a small extent – even though it remained disproportionately represented in relation to its share of the total GDR population. The new elites emerged primarily from the technical, scientific and medical professions as well as from positions of middle management, whose social and cultural capital acquired during the GDR era secured them the required social connectivity in the new order. Membership in the SED was not in itself an obstacle, while having held a higher party function in the GDR certainly was, as an exemplary but generalizable analysis of the group of parliamentary deputies demonstrates (see Figure 2).

Figure 3: Political Experience during the Transition Period of Eastern German Members of the German Bundestag (MdB) and the State Parliaments (Mdl, MdA) (Indicated Chronologically since 1990 in Percent)



Source: Collaborative Research Centre 580 of the German Scientific Foundation, Project A3, "Jena Parliamentary Survey."

Experiences: Minister/Secretary of State after Dec 1989/Deputy in the *Volkskammer* after Mar 1990/Member of a civic movement at national or subnational level/regional and/or municipal public offices or mandates after Mar/May 1990.

Reading aid: 75.2 percent of eastern German members of the German Bundestag in the years 1990-1994 held political offices during the transitional period in the GDR.

For this reason, people were now ascending into the political elite who had taken at least initial steps towards becoming members of the functional elite in the GDR before either voluntarily abandoning their mobility because of the increased political commitment it entailed or who found themselves blocked because elite positions were vacated so rarely. In most cases, the *political* activity of the new eastern German elite from the ranks of public administration and parliaments did not begin until the period of upheaval or the first elections in the federal states or the Bundestag elections of 1990 (Figure 3). In the chronology, there is no detectable return of the old GDR elites, whereas transition politicians accounted for the largest share of the political elite until the late 1990s (Welzel 1997; Edinger 2004; Best and Vogel 2011).

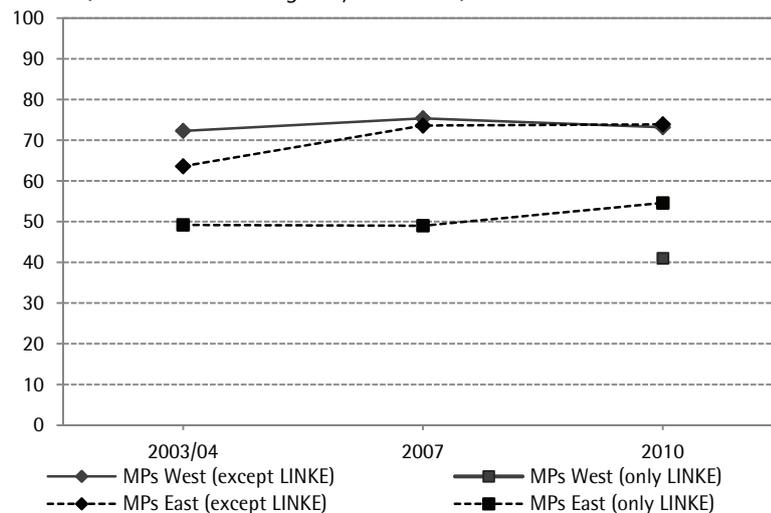
Thus, the predominant pattern in the transition process was the replacement of central power elites coinciding with the ascent of secondary and functional elites. Apart from opposition members, and politically unaffiliated and opportunistic citizens loyal to the system, ‘imports’ from West Germany constituted another recruitment pool for the new East German elites. Though their proportion was relatively small among the East German political elite compared to other elite segments, influential and visible positions in East Germany, for instance that of head of government of some single states (*Länder*), have often been (and continue to be) occupied by West Germans. Between 1990 and 2010 their share in all acting *Länder*-governments in East Germany was between 20 to 30 percent so that through their visibility they have (at least temporarily) contributed to a perception of “colonisation” (Best and Vogel 2011). The influx of a pool of West German elites facilitated the establishment of institutional structures in East Germany without relying on the former elites and their organisational or professional knowledge. What can be noted, particularly with view to the high levels of elite continuity in other post-Communist states, is that the comprehensive replacement of the top-level elite in the East was not least a result of the availability of the West German elite reservoir, a resource that is only available in the case of a re-unification of a country (Bürklin and Hoffmann-Lange 1999; Best and Vogel 2011).

4. Elite Integration in Germany after 1990

Given that members of parliament represent the main pool of recruitment for political elites at the regional and national levels, we can still, more than twenty years after re-unification, speak of a convergence of elites and thus of a structural and normative integration of elites – the few exceptions prove this rule. Parliamentary deputies in both East and West Germany hardly differ from one another in terms of social background and recruitment patterns. Similarly, few differences can be identified with view to their respective political attitudes and preferences, while a marked sense of common identity transcending party and

regional boundaries can be observed (see Figure 4). Even where differences persist, processes of change run somewhat parallel, suggesting similar patterns of perception and decision-making processes among East and West German elites. This convergence has occurred mainly in the form of adaptation on the part of East German parliamentary deputies to more resemble their West German colleagues (Best and Vogel 2011, 2012).

Figure 4: Sense of Belongingness among East and West German Members of the Bundestag (MdB) and of the State Parliaments (MdL, MdA) (Indicated Chronologically in Percent)



Source: Collaborative Research Centre 580 of the German Scientific Foundation, Project A3, "Jena Parliamentary Survey 2003, 2007 and 2010"; Question: "Do you feel a sense of belongingness with fellow Members of Parliament from other parties and parliamentary groups, or do you feel no sense of belongingness with them?", here: yes; N(2003): 943, N(2007): 1201, N(2010): 1272.

This convergence and thereby the emergence of a consensually unified representational elite could not be anticipated from the outset, as East German elites were in all respects new to parliamentary democracy and first had to learn the functional requirements of the new institutions. Their experiences in the distinct social and political order of the GDR constituted a potential obstacle to this learning process, thus raising the prospect of dysfunctional patterns of opinion formation and behaviour. Simultaneously, around the time of reunification economic and social troubles in East Germany were already emerging; major differences between the attitudes and value systems of East and West Germans were becoming visible, and the asymmetric constellation of reunification was leading to a widespread sense among East Germans that their

experiences, preferences and biographies were depreciated. This raised the question as to whether East German elites would harness this conflict potential by portraying *the* East Germans as a disadvantaged social group and establishing themselves as their political representatives, thus turning regional differences into a political fault line.

The reasons why elite integration occurred rather than any of these other scenarios, include, apart from the already mentioned socio-structural features of the GDR's secondary and functional elites, most particularly the transfer of institutions implied in the asymmetric re-unification of the two Germanys (Lehmbruch 1993). As a result institutional frameworks became identical for elites in both east and west. At the same time, these institutions provided East German elites with a sufficient amount of positions and opportunities for participation and inclusion. The adoption of West German institutional structures and adjustment to the corresponding new requirements, role expectations and patterns of behaviour constituted the most promising option for the East German representational elite to gain political scopes of action. After all, rejecting the transfer of institutions would have entailed a suspension of *resource* transfers from the west to the east, and thus further uncertainty regarding the stability of the new order in the east of Germany – not least of all considering the presence of Soviet, or rather Russian, troops until 1994.

Furthermore, the multi-level federal system contributed significantly to elite integration, firstly by creating a multiplicity of offices and mandates and, secondly because east-west differences play a minor role in regional politics, since the single states rather than East Germany represent the primary point of political reference. Correspondingly, the integration of elites is even more pronounced at the level of state parliamentary deputies.

A final relevant factor is the party system, which, following the fusion of the bloc parties with their West German counterparts and the citizens' movements' inclusion in the West German Green Party and the reconstitution of the SPD, was very similar to the West German system. One important difference, however, is that for historical reasons *Die Linke* has remained far more influential in East than in West Germany. During the 1990s, the successor party of the SED, the communist "Socialist Unity Party" (then called the Party of Democratic Socialism, PDS) attempted to establish itself as the representative of East German interests and experiences. Yet as a result of the ideological and organisational continuity with the SED, only a certain section of the East German population accepted it as a legitimate representative and gave the party its electoral support. Nevertheless, the PDS/*Die Linke* in this way accomplished an act of integration and familiarised its followers and members with the principles and practices of representative democracy. Even so, 25 years after re-unification *Die Linke* maintains a kind of semi-distance to the consensually unified 'all-German' elite (see Figure 4), as debates about its participation in government at a national level frequently exceed the boundaries of normal

political dispute in that the party's fundamental legitimacy is repeatedly questioned by the other major parties. However, the party has since then shifted away from the focus on serving as representative of East German particular interests, instead seeing itself as a mouthpiece for the reservations of certain segments of the (all-) German population vis-à-vis representative democracy.

As a consequence of the meagre partial representation of East German experiences and interests, the appropriation of West German institutions by elites occurred without any substantial political reappraisal of East German experiences and interests, which thus remained confined to a kind of proto-political space (*Ostalgie*, i.e. nostalgia for East Germany). For this reason – and because the general population is naturally less involved with political institutions than elites – the processes of adaptation and accommodation by East German elites were not accompanied by a corresponding shift in the East German population as a whole. Hence, one outcome of this successful elite integration is that, even today, the distance in attitudes between the 'all-German' political elite and the eastern German population is greater than that between elites and the general population in West Germany. Likewise, acceptance of national institutions and corresponding elites is less pronounced among the East Germans. Without the partial representation of East German interests by the PDS and now *Die Linke*, however, this distance would be even greater (Best and Vogel 2011, 2012).

5. Elite Structures in North and South Korea

5.1 Social Structure and Elites in North Korea

The preconditions for elite transition and elite integration as the basis for successful re-unification can be found in the structures of the North Korean elite and the action options relevant to them. A corresponding analysis of the North Korean case should therefore not simply focus on a potential counter-elite, but must also look for groups within the ranks of the power- and functional elites who may not behave openly as a counter-elite but would be unopposed to re-unification under certain conditions, or indeed may even act as its bearers.

An initial inspection of the structures of the North Korean elite ought to take into account the distinction between three elite groups made by the North Korean state itself and adopted by many observers: 1) the descendants of Kim Il Sung, 2) the veterans of the struggle for independence against Japan and their descendants, including persons who were close to Kim Il Sung politically, and 3) the 'heroes,' who are further divided into the heroes of the Korean War and the Heroes of Labour in the construction of socialism. It is unclear whether or not their descendants are to be included in the 'hero' category as well.

Despite various differences and a general vagueness within these categories,⁴ they emphasise the fact that genealogy is essential to status assignment in North Korea, and moreover is officially legitimated. Correspondingly, inheriting privileges and offices is a widespread practice (Hyeong-Jun 2013). In the GDR, on the other hand, although intra-familial status inheritance became increasingly prevalent over time, it nevertheless remained ideologically undesirable and was therefore never legitimated, as the effects thereof would have called into question elite recruitment based on political loyalty and meritocracy, or more generally the mechanisms of position and status assignment in a presumably ‘classless’ society (Best 2012).

This schema, deployed by the South Korean side as an analytical heuristic, emphasises the primacy of politics, because intra-familial, comradesly or ideological loyalty towards political leaders and the political system are central and thus do not indicate any further differentiation of additional recruitment criteria. Furthermore, this categorisation is of an official nature in North Korea, underscoring how vital centrally and hierarchically determined political decisions are in the shaping of elite status and the allocation of privileges and positions.

However, a degree of caution must be observed when using this status schema to examine the elite structure because, to begin with, in addition to the lack of analytically disjunctive separation, we also lack a quantification of these groups that goes beyond mere estimates. Furthermore, membership in these groups is defined primarily by access to privileges. These privileges,

⁴ Accordingly, several variants of this typology are known in both North and South Korea. It is possible that the criteria are deliberately kept vague so as to allow for individual case-specific decisions. The prominent position of the anti-Japanese partisans and their descendants, however, can be found in all of the typologies. As an example, here are three such typologies:

(Ewha Universität 2013)	(Soyoung 2003)	(Lee et al. 2013)
Descendants of Kim Il Sung	1st revolutionary generation (anti-Japanese partisans, born before 1920) and 2nd revolutionary generation (their descendants)	1st revolutionary generation (anti-Japanese partisans)
Anti-Japanese partisans		
Heroes of the Korean War and of socialist construction		2nd generation (heroes of the Korean War and of socialist construction)
	1st non-revolutionary generation (born before 1920) 2nd non-revolutionary generation (born after 1920)	
	3rd generation (born after 1950)	3rd generation (no details indicated)
		4th generation (born since 1970)

however, do not necessarily translate into political, economic or other forms of influence which – particularly in the political arena – are usually secured, including in North Korea, through the assumption of formal executive positions, especially in the state security service (EWhA Universität 2013, 33). Therefore, and specifically with a view to the third group, membership tells us very little about the respective elite status of a given individual, as this group also includes local and regional office holders who could potentially be members of the secondary elite and thus potential members of the primary elite – but only when given the possibility of advancing to higher positions from that office.

What the schema does offer, however, especially if we also take the non-privileged into consideration, is a self-description of the North Korean social structure utilising the categories of upper, middle and lower class. Membership in one of these socio-structural groups is accompanied by highly unequally distributed opportunities for participation and status hierarchies which also find expression – even in the case of elites – in sector-specific and positional differences. Correspondingly, the first group of descendants and relatives of Kim Il Sung occupy the central positions in politics, administration, the economy and culture. However, due to its naturally small size it is forced to share this privilege with members of the second group. If we compare the first two groups with the third group, then, there is a clear asymmetry in status, for the highest and most important leading positions – with one exception – are generally unachievable for members of the third group due to their familial background, while their own position and allocation of privileges always depend on decisions taken by the first and second groups (EWhA Universität 2013, 37). Members of the third group essentially represent blocked secondary elites. In contrast to the GDR, however, where this blockage was owing to the over-accumulation of offices and the long sitting periods of the office holders well into old age, in North Korea they are blocked primarily by the ascriptive character of status assignment.

The only exception that allows for members of the third group to access central leading positions and thereby become what could be seen as members of the primary elite, is the military. According to South Korean experts, here the heroes in fact occupy the majority of leading positions from the officers' rank upwards (EWhA Universität 2013; Hyeong-Jun 2013).

There exists a tendency for this status assignment along political-ascriptive criteria to be challenged by the emergence of a proto-market, a process that can be observed since the mid-1990s. After all, the appropriation of private property and the accumulation of economic capital may lead to a new channel of resources, privileges and influence distribution that is independent of state-directed allocations, de-centralised and non-hierarchical, i.e. market-based. This observation, however, must take into consideration the fact that access to those market-like structures has thus far been determined by one's position within the political elite. The notion of a 'political capitalism' (Staniszkiś,

Kisiel and Szelenyi 1991) therefore seems to a certain extent applicable to North Korea (Hyeong-Jun 2013).

By the time North Korean foreign trade was established in the 1970s, members of the second group were already endowed with certain privileges, as they usually led the companies in charge of foreign trade. Following the economic collapse in the 1990s and the accompanying famine ('Arduous March'), it was the underclass, i.e. those without any privileges, who were the first to initiate barter trade and thereby engage in market-like activities in order to secure their livelihood. Subsequently, members of the third group (the 'heroes') became increasingly active in the emerging markets, an activity which was motivated by several factors. Firstly, these market activities became necessary for the third group as their privileges could no longer be guaranteed under such bleak economic conditions. In spite of their elevated status they found themselves directly affected by food shortages, something which did not apply to members of the first two groups. In this situation of relative status loss, the asymmetry between the distinct elite groupings, or rather between upper and middle classes, became increasingly visible. Another factor was that the military as an institution was itself permitted to a certain extent to engage in market-economic activities, ensuring its ability to perform regardless of decreases in state funding. The military – and thus large sections of the third group – was ideally equipped for market-like activities, as it enjoyed access to a sufficiently large pool of labour and the extensive transportation capacities required for export-oriented market activities while being relatively protected from police and state security services.

In a system in which private property is tolerated but essentially illegal, protection from state interference is essential to market-economic activities. Each shift in the political winds can just as well imply an end to this tolerance. This is all the more so given that members of the first two groups, already in the 1970s (see above) but also more recently, engage in market-economic activities as well. Consequently, even though a differentiation of the mechanisms of resource and privilege allocation can be observed, political status assignment remains a priority. In this sense, the North Korean situation resembles that of the GDR in its basic premises, where meritocratic elements also played a role in addition to the main criteria of loyalty and conformity, particularly in areas distant from the circles of power. However, the sector-specific differentiation of recruitment criteria in the GDR was further developed, as formal education and professionalism generally became more important factors the greater the distance a given area was from the centre of power.

With view to either a possible transformation of North Korea (a far-reaching change of the social structure), a transition (changes to institutional structures), or even re-unification, the central question remains whether the third group's access to economic resources and privileges in combination with the top-level military positions the members of this group occupy will generate a conflict

potential between the first two groups on one side, and this group acting as a counter-elite on the other. The answers to this question are rather diverse.

Speaking for such a conflict potential is the combination of the relative deprivation and inferior positions of members of the third group in most elite sectors, their lack of advancement opportunities into the primary elite, and the alternative option of accumulating economic resources, not to mention their control over the means of military power. A conflict arises out of this situation as soon as the economic options of the third group are curtailed because, for instance, the first two groups view themselves as being threatened by market structures and the establishment of economic elites, and in turn seek to either restrict market-economic activities or appropriate them for their own gains.

If no such limitation occurs, the outlined constellation suggests a more long-term transition. The reason for this is that market structures create alternative possibilities for the third group to appropriate resources and privileges, while at the same time blocking market access for the non-privileged, because of the combination of their ascriptive and state-guaranteed status assignment, so that the social closure by economic elites is legitimated by the political order. In this case the first, second and third groupings would all have an interest in preserving the existing political order, at least as long as it continues to secure their privileges. In essence, then, the potential for conflict develops once the first and second groups extend their access to market-like structures too far. Since internal quarrels among North Korean elites tend to be first of all distributional struggles over privileges rather than over political or ideological reforms, the third group's inclination to act as a counter-elite and carrier of political reforms is highly questionable.

With view to a possible re-unification, however, our investigation of German re-unification and its conditions and impacts within the elite structure allows for a different projection. In the German case, the GDR's secondary and functional elites behaved equally loyally and did not constitute a counter-elite. The prospect of re-unification that arose in November 1989 translated into an opportunity to thrive in an alternative social and political order for these groups. This alternative proved more appealing, as it offered greater opportunities for advancement and basic access to resources, while the primacy of political loyalty and conformity promised to be less dominant in it. Moreover, the basic functional logic of non-socialist societies had already been present in the GDR through exchanges with Western economies – the extent of which again varied from sector to sector – while socio-structural mechanisms of differentiation based on the transmission of social and cultural capital within families were already working behind the façade of socialist equality. As a result, the residue of identification with the socialist social order proved insufficient to counter the centrifugal forces unleashed by the prospect of re-unification. This was especially true for the secondary and functional elites of the GDR, whose loyalty was essentially pragmatic and not founded on ideology. If a possible re-unification is tied to a guarantee of privileges, it

can be assumed that at least members of the third group would not stand in its way, especially since their privileges are not legally codified in North Korea and therefore exposed to the uncertainty of shifts in political direction and leadership within groups one and two.

In summary, the socio-structural configuration of North Korean elites is characterised by the fact that the upper classes dominate the power elite and the primary functional elite (save for the military) simultaneously, while participation of the middle class, i.e. the third group, is confined to the secondary elite and the ongoing development of market structures. In this sense and for the most part, no congruence of social status and membership in elite groups can be observed among members of the third group. Against this backdrop, the current differentiation of status and resource allocation through the establishment of private property and market-like elements changes in particular the socio-structurally specific opportunities for accessing economic elite positions.

5.2 The North Korean Central Committee

The analysis of the social structure of North Korea's primary and secondary power elites and of groups with potential access to such positions primarily serves to identify central socio-structural core groups of the elite and their potential counter-elites. The concept of elites commonly applied in the international debate, however, is usually defined more narrowly. According to this definition, elites are the bearers of central leading positions, capable of regularly and substantially influencing decisions of national significance (Burton and Higley 1992). Against this backdrop, processes of internal differentiation among elites have been identified as crucial factors in the transformations of the Chinese and Soviet systems (Soyoung 2003), and, incidentally, in the process of German re-unification (see above). As in the GDR, this differentiation encompassed career paths required for recruitment to elite positions and their associated characteristics and abilities. Over the course of such a differentiation, which always entails the abandonment of ideological in favour of functional recruitment criteria, elites' loyalty towards the state socialist system can erode. That said, the system can also stabilise itself, as heterogeneous elites ensure greater responsivity vis-à-vis social developments and are better suited to adequate functional performance. Hence, internal differentiation does not necessarily lead to transition or even social transformation. These processes of internal differentiation among North Korean elites will be elaborated below.

Table 2: Socio-Structural Characteristics of the Members of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea

		1980		1990		2000		2012	
Size (persons)		145		180		158		124	
Newcomers		41.1		22.2		13.1		-	
Proportion of women		4.1		5.0		5.7		4	
Average age		57.3		64.6		72.1		-	
Age	80+	0.0	0.0	2.2	2.6	10.1	12.3	23	32.5
	70-79	6.2	7.0	17.2	19.9	48.7	59.2	21	31.3
	60-69	23.4	26.6	50.6	58.3	19.0	23.1	20	30.1
	under 60	58.6	66.4	16.7	19.2	4.4	5.4	4	6.0
	unknown	11.7		13.3		17.7		33	
Region of birth	Pyongyang (city and province)	21.4	28.7	23.9	32.4	23.4	33.0	16	38.5
	Hamgyong	31.0	41.7	28.9	39.6	27.2	38.4	11	26.9
	Others	9.7	12.9	10.0	13.7	11.4	16.2	10	23.1
	Outside of North Korea**	12.4	16.8	10.0	13.6	8.9	12.5	3	7.7
	Origin unknown	25.5		26.9		29.1		58	
Higher education****	Mangyongdae Revolutionary School	15.9	23.3	18.9	26.1	19.0	26.8	10.5	19
	Kim Il Sung University	31.7	47.4	33.9	46.8	36.1	51.4	12.1	22
	Others	19.3	28.8	18.9	25.8	18.4	26.1	19.4	35
	Abroad (mostly USSR)	50.3	75.3	51.7	71.0	47.5	67.6	13.7	25
	No higher education	5.5	8.2	3.3	4.5	0.0	0.0	-	-
	Unknown	33.1		27.2		29.7		44	
Political generation***	Anti-Japanese partisans and their descendants	52.0		49.4		45.1		-	
	1st and 2nd non-revolutionary generation	48.0		50.6		54.9		-	
Relatives of Kim Il Sung		8.3		10.9		12.0		3.0	
Sector of Origin	Party	33.6		34.9		41.8		-	
	State bureaucracy	33.6		36.6		24.8		-	
	Military	24.2		21.1		23.5		-	
	Society*****	8.6		7.4		9.8		-	

Source: Authors' own compilation and calculation based on: Soyoung 2003; Lee et al. 2013. The grey italicised columns indicate the respective total percentage based on all members of the Central Committee. For reasons of simplicity, percentages were calculated based on those members for whom information is available.

* Newcomers since the last Party Congress, in 1990 since 1985 and in 2000 since 1995, as no Party Congress was held from 1980 to 2010.

** USSR, China, South Korea

*** Soyoung 2003

**** For the period between 1980-2000 several educational degrees were counted for each person, which does not raise their number to 100.

***** e.g. youth organisations, trade unions, international friendship associations (Korean-Soviet Friendship, etc.), media and the press.

Because the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea is the highest body of the most important organisation in North Korea, to which, moreover, representatives of the various social sectors such as politics, the economy, the

military, etc. are appointed, its members could be considered as part of the power elite in the sense described above. In the analysis of the Central Committee's socio-structural composition, there are two sources which allow for an examination of more long-term developments: Soyoung's research (2003) covers the period from 1980 to 2000 and can be expanded with the study conducted by Lee et al. (2013) up to 2012, that is to say, from the 6th and hitherto last Party Congress until the 3rd Party Conference of the Workers' Party. It must be noted, however, that this expansion should be interpreted with a degree of caution, due to some data related problems (particularly with regard to the data pertaining to 2012) and diverging categorisations.

A first parallel to the GDR is the development of age patterns. From 1980 to 2000, the average age in the Central Committee steadily rose from 57.3 to 72.1, suggesting a low rate of fluctuation among its members. The equally steadily decreasing share of newcomers to the Central Committee, which can be observed at least in the data available until the year 2000, further underscores the aspect of over-ageing ('gerontocracy').

If, however, we trust the data for 2012 despite a relatively high rate of missing information, then some signs of a slight reversal in the trend can be observed. Though the share of the very old cohort (80+) has continued to increase, it has not necessarily done so to the detriment of the 'young' cohort of 60 to 69 year-olds. For the first time the age cohorts are now, with the exception of the few under 60-year olds, more or less equally distributed, suggesting that the reduction of the Central Committee's size was accompanied by either the (forced) abdication of some members of the older cohort and/or the ascendance of some members of the younger cohort (60 to 69 year-olds). Taken together with anecdotal reports of massive changes in personnel in favour of younger generations at the level of secondary power- and functional elites (Lee et al. 2013, 56 et seq.), a generational transition seems to be occurring, the impact of which extends, albeit in mitigated form, into the Central Committee itself.

Nevertheless, this generational transition in no way alters the fact of male numerical dominance. The share of female members of the Central Committee continues to be negligible.

There seem to be some changes concerning the aspect of place of birth, however, even though, once again, we must be very careful given the large amount of missing data for 2012. The figures still possess a certain plausibility, as they in fact continue a trend observed since 1980, namely the decrease in numbers Central Committee members born in the region of Hamgyong. The disproportionately large share of this region through the 1980s can be explained by the fact that it was a centre of anti-Japanese partisan activity; hence the veterans thereof belonged to the first revolutionary generation. Therefore, the increase in members from the city and province of Pyongyang as well as of the remaining provinces signifies a differentiation of regional backgrounds, alt-

though a regional asymmetry in recruitment persists, as more than half of the Central Committee's members still come from only two regions.

Data on the educational background of Central Committee members point to several trends. We again must be cautious though, not only because of missing data for 2012, but also because in the study by Lee et al. in 2012, in contrast to studies from the previous years, multiple educational degrees were not specifically considered. To begin with there is a constantly high proportion (90 percent) of members with a formal school leaving qualification. Although many of these degrees are from the Mangyongdae Revolutionary School, which, along with some – but not most – of the academic institutions subsumed under ‘other,’ is actually a party and military school, it nevertheless becomes clear that a high level of formal education is an important prerequisite for joining the Central Committee. At the same time, the presence of the Mangyongdae Revolutionary School does provide rough estimates of the proportion of members of the first two groups, North Korea's upper classes, given that only members of these groups are permitted to attend that institution (Soyoung 2003, 107). Correspondingly, for 2012 we can assume that a minimum of 10 percent of Central Committee members belong to these two groups, although the share is likely higher if we take figures from previous years into account as well. Moreover, the data also indicate a differentiation with regard to formal education, as the share of graduates from other academic institutions has risen. In contrast, the share of graduates from foreign universities, mainly in the USSR, has decreased which, given existing age patterns, cannot be attributed to the Soviet Union's collapse following 1992, for members of at least 60 years of age in 2012 would have completed their degrees in the early 1970s.

The data for the period up to the year 2000 relativize at least a few statements by South Korean observers concerning the North's class structure and the mechanisms of status assignment active therein. They indicate that many members of the first and second non-revolutionary generations are neither related to Kim Il Sung nor participated in revolutionary activities during the anti-Japanese partisan war, that is to say, they belong to neither the first nor second groups as detailed in the first section. They also do not belong exclusively to the third group of society's ‘heroes’ (Soyoung 2003, 95). Rather, these members owe their upward mobility to a career in the Workers' Party or the state bureaucracy. Evidently, advancing into the Central Committee is also possible without meeting the genealogical criteria, for this group constituted almost half of the Central Committee's members during the 1980s, and its share had risen even more by the year 2000. Family ties to Kim Il Sung continue to be an important factor, but one that due to biological realities does not and cannot find expression in a higher share of Central Committee members.

Since 1990 and up to 2000, developments were marked by a rising share of Central Committee members emerging out of party careers and – in contrast to the USSR and China before their transformation – by a consistently high pro-

portion of members from the military. A further analysis substantiates this, showing that almost half of all newcomers to the Central Committee since 1990 had completed a military career (Soyoung 2013).

In summary, we can identify two contradictory developments that occurred until the year 2000. On the one hand, the reduction of the Central Committee while simultaneously appointing fewer new members, the increased weight of party and military backgrounds, as well as the continuing dominance of two specific academic institutions, two specific regions and one generation of partisan fighters (or rather, their descendants) all suggest a closed power elite within the Central Committee, united by their similar backgrounds, experiences and shared basic ideological convictions, and increasingly striving for internal homogeneity and social closure. We can assume that these developments were a reaction to Kim Il Sung's death in 1994, and to the downfall, or radical transformation, of the Soviet Union, the countries of the Eastern Bloc and China, all of which were responded to with an increased closeness.

At the same time, however, we find traces of internal differentiation, for instance with regard to the rising share of members lacking experience in revolutionary partisan warfare. Any statements made about developments up to 2012 must be cautiously evaluated due to the problematic data available to us. Indeed, the number of members has been reduced further and the share of higher age cohorts has risen markedly. That said, over-ageing has slowed to a certain extent. Simultaneously, new institutional and geographical origins of members have been established alongside the more traditional ones, suggesting at least rudimentary moves towards internal differentiation.

5.3 Structure and Experiences of South Korean Elites

A direct comprehensive comparison of North and South Korea is a demanding undertaking, due to the distinct structures and institutions of the respective political systems, not to mention the difficulties posed by a lack of reliable data for North Korea. Nevertheless, we can identify groups of persons – in both a socialist, totalitarian, one-party system on the one hand, and a market-economic, presidential, pluralist democracy on the other – whose position(s) allow them to frequently and substantially influence or even make decisions with significant national impact. In South Korea, ministers and members of parliament, beside the president and her closest staff, are considered to be the main decision makers (for an overview on this issue see: Dormels 2006, 43-8). The data referred to here encompasses ministers from 1993 to 1998, i.e. under the Kim Young-sam presidency (Dormels 2006), and the members of parliament for the years 2006-7 (TRI 2007). Regardless of all these limitations, the juxtaposition of individual characteristics already indicates the contours of distinct elite configurations.

One feature the South shares with North Korea is the marginal position of women, in spite of its higher share among ministers and parliamentary deputies. Although Park Geun-hye, the daughter of the former, autocratic president Park Chung-hee (1961-1979), became the first woman elected president in South Korea, she nevertheless represents a major exception within the sphere of the political elite.

Table 3: Socio-Structural Characteristics of South Korean (SK) Elites (In Percent)

		Ministers 1993-1998	Deputies 2006/7
Size (persons)		100	
Proportion of women		8	9.8
Average age (in years)		56	52.9
Age	80+	0	-
	70-79 (Deputies 65+)	0	8.6
	60-69 (Deputies 55-64)	19.8	29.1
	Under 60 (Deputies under 55)	80.1	62.3
	Age unknown	0	-
Region of Birth	Seoul/Kyonggi	20	-
	Kangwon	3	-
	Ch'ungch'ong	17	-
	Cholla	17	-
	Kyongsang	38	-
	Outside of South Korea	5	-
Higher education *	No higher educational degree	-	3.2
	Seoul National University	66	-
	Abroad (mostly USA)	53	-
Sector of origin **	Politics	15	-
	State bureaucracy	35	-
	Military	8	-
	Society	42	-
Member of Christian denominations (Roman Catholic, Protestant)		-	59.9

Source: Authors' own compilation based on Dormels 2006; TRI 2007.

* Several higher educational degrees were counted per person, as a result of which the total number does not amount to 100.

** here: teaching/research; law, media, the economy, summarised for the purpose of comparison.

A comparable process of over-ageing cannot be identified in South Korea, although the average age of parliamentary deputies is roughly seven years higher than in corresponding international findings (Best and Cotta 2000). Yet, the differences between North and South Korea are much more striking. For instance, in South Korea no members of parliament are older than 80, while in North Korea this age cohort makes up about one third of comparable social groups. This would imply that, in contrast to North Korea, only a precious few members of the South Korean political elite can actively recall a unified Korea

from personal experience. Instead, most of them were politically socialised during a time when the division of the peninsula was already in place. Taking into account the experiences of German re-unification, however, it would be implausible to view these divergent experiences as a central obstacle to communication or integration as such.

The regional origins of South Korea's political elites are more diverse and thus more differentiated than in the North, although Kyongsang exhibits a privileged position similar to that of Pyongyang. Neither finding is a peculiarity of an historical snapshot, but rather can be demonstrated to varying extent in almost all South Korean administrations (Dormels 2006, 321 et seq.). We find pronounced regional asymmetries in both North and South Korea, suggesting similar formation processes of political support: political networks and loyalties continue to be based on regional origins and ties to a significant degree, despite the fact that the functional differentiation of an industrial, or – in the case of South Korea – rather post-industrial society engenders sector-specific relations of dependency.

The analysis of formal education also points to common areas of experience among South Korean elites comparable to those in North Korea: here a similar academic institution, Seoul National University, is attended by half of the political elite. However, studies abroad are more frequent not only with regard to extent but also to the diversity of destination countries. While North Korea's elites nearly exclusively studied in the USSR, albeit decreasingly so, about half of South Korean government ministers earned their academic degree in the USA.

Sectoral origin of elites, then, clearly reflects differences between the two societies. Although up until the 1980s an almost identical share of elites in both Koreas had previously pursued a career in the state bureaucracy, in North Korea this share subsequently dropped significantly. Today, the dominance of party and the military and the simultaneous lack of experience in the civil sector characterises North Korean elites, while in South Korea elites from the civil sector dominate, and military or other elites with a markedly political background have comparatively little weight.

One rather important factor in the successful integration of East and West German elites was the confessional structure: compared to the general population in the east, the share of denominationally affiliated Christian representational elites was much higher (with the exception of *Die Linke*), marking an important similarity to West German representational elites. These shared experiences and mindsets were suited to facilitate mutual rapprochement on a pre-political basis (see above). This advantage cannot be utilised for any possible agreements between North and South Korean elites: while at least 59.9 percent of South Korean members of parliament are affiliated to one of the Christian denominations – a much larger share than among the general population – this possibility can be entirely ruled out for North Korean elites.

The conclusions from this partial comparison must be stated with caution. It seems safe to say that North and South Korean elites exhibit marked differences in their respective socio-structural composition, which reveals diametrically opposed recruitment criteria. However, there are also similarities suggesting social and cultural commonalities dating back to long before Korea was divided. These include the significance of regional asymmetries and the role of common regional origins, reflected in both states by the privileged status of certain regions. As well there is the dominance of particular educational institutions which in turn point to the significance of shared spaces of experience. Nevertheless, the integrational potential of these commonalities must be assessed with a degree of scepticism, as elites in both countries share no common areas of experience, but instead are simply confronted with similar – because universal – logics of elite recruitment. These logics may have similar effects in both states and pose a number of similar challenges to both South and North Korean elites, but they do not unfold any real potential for integration. This is not least of all due to the fact that the common features identified, at least in the case of North Korea, clearly represent secondary elements of the opportunity structure.

Aside from structural characteristics, we must also take into account South Korean elites' experiences. One of the central ones that might influence South Korean elites' approach to North Korean elites is the elite settlement of 1987, as a result of which military rule was ended and the transition towards a democratic state order was implemented largely peacefully, while the once divided South Korean elite was transformed into a *consensually unified elite* (Burton and Ryu 1997).⁵ The heart of this *elite settlement* was an agreement between the previously antagonistic elites on a democratic constitution in the framework of which the acquisition and passing on of government power would be determined exclusively by free elections with opposition participation. Through their approval of the draft constitution on 31 August 1987, the military elites headed by Chun Woo Wan and Roh Tae Woo handed over their control of government to the civil institutions of parliament and president. General Roh Tae Woo, who then won the presidential elections in 1987 after the opposition fielded two competing candidates, took no steps to reverse any of the new constitution's provisions. This support for the new political order emphasises that the erstwhile opponents were able to mutually accept one another and agree that compromise and concession would be the central instruments of politics in the future. Such a successful *elite settlement*, its subsequent stabilisation and the emergence of a *consensually unified elite* entails a host of preconditions. The military elites' willingness to make concessions had steadily risen in the period prior to the *elite settlement*. One of the underlying reasons for this was how the opposition demonstrated its remarkable mobilising capacities not

⁵ The depiction of developments in South Korea until the mid-1990s is based on Burton and Ryu (1997).

only in the form of mass protests and strikes, but also in the general elections of 1985, in which the oppositional New Democratic Party was able to gain a significant number of seats in its first time standing candidates. Simultaneously, the USA demanded more willingness to make concessions on the part of the military elites, while economic elites no longer supported the repression of democratic activities, as they now viewed it as an obstacle to the pursuit of their interests. In this situation, reformers within the military elite won the upper hand and advocated for concessions.

An important component of this trajectory was the assurance to Chun Doo Wan that no criminal investigation against him or his colleagues for their seizure of power or the Gwangju massacre would be filed – although this occurred in the end. At the same time, opposition elites were also prepared to withdraw their insistence on their maximum demands (investigation of the Gwangju massacre, creating the post of vice-president and profit sharing for workers) as a condition for passing the draft constitution of 31 August 1987. Two further events were also helpful in consolidating a consensually unified elite, signaling to the erstwhile autocratic ruling elite that politicians in the new democratic order would not act against the former's fundamental interests: correspondingly, the first president Roh Tae Woo was not a candidate of the opposition, and the two most important opposition parties under Kim Young-sam and Kim Jong-pil merged with Roh Tae Woo's party, thus consolidating power sharing at an organisational level as well. Under the presidency of Kim Young-sam, charges were brought against Chun Doo Wan, Roh Tae Woo and other former rulers relating to their seizure of power and the Gwangju massacre, but even after Chun Doo Wan was sentenced to death and other defendants given lengthy prison sentences, military elites showed little inclination to intervene against these punishments. The fact that the main defendants were later pardoned may be seen as a further component of the *elite settlement*.

At first glimpse, the positive experience of this elite settlement may be useful in managing re-unification via an understanding between and integration of North and South Korean elites, as it would entail rapprochement between two previously hostile elite groupings. However, one precondition for this would be a stable and effective elite consensus on the South Korean side, since only a lasting and consistently positive experience can ensure other elite groups' openness to integration. Against this backdrop, we must finally incorporate the assessment by members of the South Korean National assembly as recorded in a survey conducted in 2006-7 (TRI 2007). These findings suggest several problems within the elite consensus, even though the data concern mainly political elites organised in political parties and cannot necessarily be seamlessly transferred to relations between elites from distinct respective sectors.

When asked how or to what extent parties sought compromise in parliament, a total of 81.9 percent of legislators responded that willingness to compromise was 'bad' or 'very bad.' The mean value of 1.97 on a scale ranging from 1 'very bad'

to 4 'very good' is by far the lowest when compared to other transformation countries such as Chile (2.38), Poland (2.48) and South Africa (2.76).

According to the perception of interviewed legislators, the integration of elites through common and cross-party communication networks is very poorly developed: when asked about the quality of communication between government and opposition, three quarters of deputies described it as being of bad or even very bad quality. However, the mean value of 2.18 on a scale from 1 to 4 (see above) is more or less average if we once again compare it to similar countries (Chile: 2.07, Poland: 2.00, South Africa: 2.77).

A similar pattern can be observed regarding the statement that competition among political parties never leads to violent conflict. This statement is only confirmed by 34.7 percent of interviewed legislators ('I strongly agree' and 'I tend to agree'), while almost 40 percent remain undecided and about one quarter reject the statement. Although the mean value of 2.92 on a scale ranging from 1 'strongly agree' to 5 'strongly disagree' is not particularly pronounced in comparison with similar countries in transformation (Chile: 2.70, Poland: 3.43, South Africa: 2.85), at least two thirds of interviewees cannot rule out that conflicts between parties may become violent at some point in the future. In summary, the findings suggest that the elite consensus in South Korea is not entirely solid, and would have to be tested for its stability in the case of rapprochement or agreements either with current or transformed North Korean elites.

6. Implications

The experience of peaceful German re-unification as well as the peaceful transformation of South Korea demonstrates that elite agreements are a necessary prerequisite to the establishment of a stable and pacified political order. Consequently, the new elite paradigm can certainly be applied to the Korean peninsula where currently two political and social systems built on diametrically opposed basic principles face each other in an ongoing hostile confrontation. However, a direct transfer of the German experience onto Korea is essentially precluded due to the distinct historical preconditions and trajectories of the two countries. The prehistory of the Korean War – a brutal civil war costing hundreds of thousands of lives, the hermetic closure of both Korean sub-societies between which no social and (in comparison to the German case) very little economic exchange occurs, as well as North Korea's potential to threaten and blackmail owing to its nuclear armament – all suggest that the premises for an 'all-Korean' elite agreement and an elite settlement conducive to political re-unification on the Korean peninsula are rather bleak.

On the other hand, elites on both sides share a common Korean history unencumbered by historical guilt, as well as a grand cultural history marked by major achievements. Simultaneously, the regionalism and embryonic beginnings of de-

centralisation (even in North Korea) represent secondary structural elements that may be suited to institutionally support national integration. A process of national integration in Korea could base itself on these common national traits. In order to set such a process in motion, however, a convergence of interests between North and South Korean elites would have to be found that extends beyond the mobilisation of national sentiment and drives forward antagonistic cooperation. For North Korean elites, this may include expanded opportunities for economic appropriation and a significant improvement in their quality of life, all of which would likely result from closer cooperation with South Korea. Economic functional elites, i.e. individuals belonging to the third elite group would probably be the main beneficiaries of such a cooperation. This elite group, along with members of the state administration, would also benefit from institutional protection and legally codified guarantees in a transfer of elements of a functioning legal state to North Korea. To qualify this statement, however, it should be added that economic privileges in currently developing North Korean political proto-capitalism are limited and not guaranteed by legal security. Nevertheless, over the course of rapprochement – or even re-unification – possibilities to push competitors off the market through political interventions would diminish, even though opportunities for appropriation as a whole may expand. Consequently, not every form of rapprochement would prove equally appealing to members of the third group. Another problematic aspect is that economic privileges and legal guarantees are not or not equally relevant to top-level North Korean political staff, i.e. for members of the first and second groups, since hereditary and loyalty-based criteria for access to the highest elite segments would most likely proportionally decrease in relative importance.

For South Korean elites, the crucial gain from an elite agreement would be the achievement of national unity and sovereignty as well as a reduction of political tensions and the threat of war. For Korean elites as a whole, an elite agreement would imply a significant gain in sovereignty, entailing more independence from their geopolitical patrons, the USA and the People's Republic of China, respectively. The elaboration of a common Korean agenda, i.e. the identification of common goals and concerns, would represent the first step towards an elite agreement on the Korean peninsula. It would have to be followed up by the establishment and institutional protection of special fora for elite cooperation and conflict management. The goal would have to be the initiation and consolidation of social and economic points of contact, which in turn may lead to an autocatalytic process in which expanded elite cooperation and institutional structures of a Korean confederation begin to emerge, in pursuit of re-unification as a long-term goal.

Considering the totalitarian and human rights-violating character of North Korean elites, however, these functional deliberations aimed primarily at national integration inevitably raise questions of justice and acceptance. That said, any alternative option to that of elite cooperation and integration would

likewise entail problems of acceptance and legitimacy. A complete replacement of North Korean by South Korean elites, which could only occur in the wake of a collapse of the North Korean regime, could be perceived as colonisation by the North Korean population and could reinforce or even serve as an additional impetus for the creation of a separate or separatist North Korean identity. One alternative could be the appointment of non-elites distanced from official politics and hence with little experience in leading positions in North Korea. However, this would almost certainly be accompanied by problems of output legitimacy, for it would imply a complete disregard for the expert knowledge and experience of North Korean functionaries. Against this backdrop, we must keep in mind that in East Germany the central power elites were replaced by relatively untainted secondary elites during the GDR's last year of existence. That is to say, the fact that German re-unification occurred after a democratic transformation including an exchange of elites had already taken place (albeit forced by West Germany) represents a critical factor in successful elite integration and thus national integration.

Nevertheless, elite integration has led to a far more pronounced gulf between the population and political elites in the east than exists in the west, and continues to contribute to a de-legitimisation of established political personnel in the eyes of the East German population and to the latter turning away from democratic institutions.

Another possibility in a re-unified Korea could be that sections of the political elite politicise old or newly emerging regional differences between North and South. The less they are de-legitimised in the eyes of the North Korean population, the more successful they would be in endangering national integration. Should, however, these political elites be provided with incentives to integrate into the all-Korean power and institutional framework, then the transformation of regional differences into political fault lines seems unlikely. Having said that, the specific interests of the North Korean population may go without institutional representation in such a scenario, which would at least retain the possibility of a counter-elite establishing itself as representatives of the North Korean population. Yet if such a politicisation of North Korean interests and experiences does not occur, then growing dissatisfaction could lead to a lack of support for and acceptance of the institutions and actors of the re-unified nation state on the part of the North Korean population.

Given the uncertain nature of future developments on the Korean peninsula, the German experience offers no precise answers as to what could be an optimal balance between elite replacement, elite continuity and elite import or between the integration of regional sub-elites and the representation of the highly divergent experiences and interests of North and South Korea, nor is it possible to say what combination of transformation and re-unification may evolve on the peninsula. What the findings concerning the German case do

suggest, however, is that a balance of the various options may in fact help mitigate their respective negative side-effects.

Two conclusions arise regarding the theorems of the 'new elite paradigm.' On the one hand, the preconditions for the genesis of elite integration must be investigated more closely. In this sense, antagonistic cooperation does not require a consensus with respect to the rules of access to and distribution of power in an existing or future political system, but can nevertheless imply cooperation between elites who otherwise stand in antagonistic opposition to one another. The preconditions for this are the stability of the status quo and parity between elites involved. Proceeding from this basis, cooperation guided by the pursuit of perhaps not common, but at least not diametrically opposed interests, can potentially develop. Should such a cooperation repeatedly prove successful, a level of reciprocal trust is then established which in turn perpetuates and sustains this cooperation. Antagonistic cooperation can thus function as a precursor to a consensually unified elite, although it tends also to effect a stabilisation of the status quo, thereby preventing further elite integration.

A further aspect in need of closer examination, apart from the relationships between elites, concerns the consequences of elite integration for relations between sub-elites and their constituent population groups. Asymmetry in the pace of elite integration and that of the general population can engender an alienation between elites and segments of the population, which in turn is dysfunctional for processes of national integration. As a consequence, although elite integration by all means represents a necessary condition for national integration, it is certainly not a sufficient one.

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