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Indice

Prefazione	
<i>Federica Casalin, Franco D'Agostino</i>	9
Introduzione	
<i>Marina Miranda</i>	11
PARTE I – ARTE	
1. Notes on a Stone <i>Stūpa</i> -shaped Pagoda from Yecheng (Hebei Province, PRC)	
<i>Hong Li</i>	25
PARTE II – LETTERATURA	
2. Gli spazi della poesia nella Cina odierna: versi in voce tra i ciliegi di Shanghai	
<i>Martina Benigni</i>	43
3. L'istituzionalizzazione della morte: traduzione del manoscritto di epoca Qin * <i>Taiyuan you sizhe</i>	
<i>Mirko Bergamini</i>	57
4. Traduzione annotata e analisi de <i>Qike song</i> di Wu Li: i sette vizi capitali in versi classici cinesi	
<i>Yuanyuan Bu</i>	71

5. Tra il serio e il faceto: massime di medici e filosofi sul vivere raffinato nel *Laṭāʾif al-ẓurafāʾ min ṭabaqāt al-fuḍalāʾ*
Michela Davolos 85

6. Le Lettere di Na Singöl e le pratiche di scrittura della Corea del XV secolo
Daniele Di Pasquale 95

PARTE III – LINGUISTICA

7. Joseph Edkins and the Introduction of Western Physiology in China through the *Shenli qimeng*
Viola De Monte 107

8. *Ouhua yufa*: un'analisi comparativa degli studi in Cina e all'estero
Marzia Imperato 119

9. Revisiting the Grammaticalization of Verbs in Chinese: A Perspective Inspired by Ma Beijia
Erica Lo Presti 137

10. La diffusione nell'accademia cinese dell'approccio storico-discorsivo (DHA): uno sguardo iniziale
Alessia Paolillo 147

11. Eight Boat Names: A Corpus-based Study of Arabic Nautical Terminology in the Mediterranean Migration Context
Giuseppe Pensabene Perez 167

PARTE IV – STORIA

12. Adaptive Hegemony: A Gramscian Analysis of North Korea's July 1st Economic Measures
Irene Chianese 199

13. Classi dirigenti e strutture dello Stato in Algeria: il contributo di Nāṣir Ġābī	
<i>Lorenzo Scala</i>	217
14. Fengtian Girls' Normal School (1906–1911): A Case Study of Local Institutional Experimentation in Late Qing China	
<i>Peipei Tang</i>	229
15. La figura di Fei Xiaotong tra eredità storica e riletture contemporanee	
<i>Francesca Vomeri</i>	253
PARTE V – STUDI CULTURALI	
16. The Birth of the Archive of Family Images in the Songzhuang Area (Beijing, PRC)	
<i>Désirée Marianini</i>	279
17. Pixelated Borders: East Asia's Game Industry Between Regional Integration and Global Flows	
<i>Sara Morini</i>	291
Abstracts	299
Autori	311

12. Adaptive Hegemony: A Gramscian Analysis of North Korea's July 1st Economic Measures

Irene Chianese

12.1. Introduction

The July 1st Economic Management Improvement Measures (2002), also known as 7.1 Measures or July 1st Measures, mark one of the most significant policy shifts in North Korea's post-Cold War economic history. Implemented amidst the aftermath of a devastating famine and the erosion of the centrally planned economy, these reforms introduced market-oriented practices while the regime maintained a firm grip on ideological and political control. Rather than indicating a liberal turn or systemic transformation, the 7.1 Measures encourage a deeper examination of how authoritarian regimes manage crises without relinquishing power.

At the center of this paper lies the question: how do the July 1st Measures reflect the adaptive strategies of North Korean hegemony? Can they be understood as a form of passive revolution, in the Gramscian sense, rather than as a step toward democratic transition as suggested by transitology?

To answer this, the paper adopts a theoretical framework grounded in the political thought of Antonio Gramsci, particularly his concepts of hegemony, passive revolution, and the integral state. This approach is chosen in critical response to interpretations that regard the July 1st Measures as the beginning of systemic transformation or a decisive step toward market liberalization. While such readings emphasize institutional change or economic pragmatism, they often overlook the regime's capacity to selectively integrate reforms while preserving its

core structures of control. Gramsci's theory allows for a more nuanced analysis of the dialectical relationship between coercion and consent, offering a lens through which to interpret the complex strategies authoritarian regimes employ to preserve dominance in the face of structural stress.

Gramsci's relevance lies not only in his critique of liberal-capitalist societies but in his ability to elucidate how power can be reproduced through adaptation, reform, and ideological containment. This framework enables us to see the July 1st Measures not as a departure from North Korea's political logic, but as a calculated reconfiguration of it.

Methodologically, this study is conducted through qualitative, interpretive analysis. It draws on a close reading of North Korean policy documents, official discourse, and secondary literature from political science, economics, and Korean studies. The paper applies Gramscian concepts as analytical tools rather than empirical variables, enabling a critical engagement with the ideological and structural dynamics underpinning the July 1st Measures. By situating these reforms within the broader context of North Korea's hegemonic project, the paper aims to show how they functioned not as a break from the regime's logic, but as an adaptive maneuver, what Gramsci might call a "revolution without a revolution".

12.2. Gramsci's theory and its relevance

The July 1st Measures were welcomed by many North Korea experts as the beginning of an inevitable process of liberalization. This interpretation was shaped in part by the broader literature on transitology, which, closely tied to modernization theory, experienced a surge in the 1990s following the collapse of the Eastern Bloc and the onset of North Korea's economic crisis. Within this framework, regime change was viewed as a linear and almost deterministic outcome of economic reform and institutional transformation. Predictions of North Korea's imminent collapse have continued to surface at regular intervals. In 1999, for instance, Oh and Hassig argued that economic reform would inevitably lead North Korea down the path toward democratization. Their position reflects the dominant trend of the time, when the fall of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc gave rise to a wave of studies focused on post-socialist transitions and regime change toward

democracy¹.

This trend persisted despite the clear evidence from cases like China and Vietnam, which demonstrated that economic reform does not automatically lead to democratic transition. In the immediate aftermath of the 7.1 Measures, Cho *et al.* (2003) offered a positive assessment, viewing them as a potential steppingstone toward deeper institutional reforms. Similarly, Frank (2005), while not explicitly stating so, conveyed a cautious optimism that the reforms might signal a shift toward a more capitalist trajectory in North Korea. Again in 2011, Andrei Lankov reiterated the same paradigm in North Korea's Choice: Collapse or Reform, predicting that Kim Jong Un would be unable to maintain power due to the economic crisis and the ongoing spread of marketization. More recently, Park Won Gon (2025) has revived this collapsist narrative once again. Much of this scholarship rests on the belief, or perhaps more accurately, the hope, that the expansion of marketization would eventually lead to the regime's collapse. However, historical developments have consistently disproven these expectations, instead highlighting the regime's remarkable resilience and its capacity for strategic adaptation. Therefore, the July 1st Measures should not be interpreted as the starting point of a (long) transition toward democratization and economic liberalization. Rather, they demand a framework capable of explaining how authoritarian regimes manage limited reforms while maintaining political control, something that transitology fails to account for. It is precisely here that a Gramscian approach offers greater analytical traction.

Gramsci's enduring popularity among scholars across various disciplines can be attributed to his dynamic and comprehensive understanding of society and the State. His concept of hegemony has proven especially influential, serving as a functional tool for analysing and interpreting power dynamics in diverse socio-political contexts, including those of non-democratic regimes facing systemic stress (Caterina 2021). Within this paper, Gramsci's theory will serve as the analytical foundation for understanding North Korea's July 1st Economic Management Improvement Measures (2002) as a strategic response aimed at preserving the regime's hegemonic control.

¹ On the debate regarding post-socialism and post-socialist transition see Korhonen (2012), Gans-Morse (2004).

In his *Quaderni*, Gramsci distinguishes between political hegemony and cultural hegemony², a differentiation that reflects the dual mechanisms by which ruling classes secure dominance: through material control and ideological leadership (Cospito 2016a). These two forms are not contradictory but instead represent complementary dimensions of a broader hegemonic project, illustrated by the notions of dominance (*dominio*) and direction (*direzione*). For a social group to be considered truly hegemonic, it must possess the capacity both to control and to culturally influence other social groups, ensuring their participation or at least acquiescence in the existing order. In *Quaderno I*, §48, Gramsci articulates this duality, stating that the “normal exercise of hegemony in the classic context of a parliamentary regime [...] is characterized by a combination of force and consent that are balanced, without force overwhelming consent too much. Instead, force appears to be supported by the consent of the majority, as expressed through the so-called organs of public opinion”³.

Gramsci's notion of hegemony also extends into the economic sphere, an especially relevant aspect when examining state responses to economic discontent. For Gramsci, the starting point of establishing consent is often found in material compromises between dominant and subordinate groups (Im 1991). The dominant class, holding decisive control over economic resources, may offer selective economic concessions to mitigate unrest and secure passive consent from marginalized groups. Such material compromises, however, are never unconditional; they are part of an ongoing negotiation to stabilize the hegemonic bloc and prevent systemic rupture. Furthermore, the dominant group projects its material goals onto subordinate groups, seeking to integrate their expectations and behaviours into the dominant ideological narrative (Im 1991). This strategy aims to prevent subordinate classes from forming autonomous interests or ideologies

² The differentiation between the two categories is not in antithesis but represent more of a continuum of the materialization of the concept of 'hegemony', as well synthesized by Cospito (2016b).

³ My translation is based on the Italian edition of *Quaderni dal carcere*. I have chosen not to use the existing English translations of Gramsci's works due to the extensive 're-elaboration' carried out by the translators, an issue documented in academic studies such as Boothman (2004) and Boothman *et al.* (2015), which involved modifications that sometimes altered Gramsci's intended meaning. This decision is also informed by the fact that Italian was the author's native language.

that could challenge the existing power order.

Another central concept in Gramsci's theory that enhances the analysis of North Korea is that of the integral State (*Stato integrale*). Gramsci defines the integral State as a synthesis of political society (institutions, the military, the legal apparatus) and civil society (cultural, educational, and ideological structures) (Caterina 2021).

In *Quaderno VI*, §88, Gramsci emphasizes that the integral State is capable of extending its control not only through coercive means but also by reshaping civil society spaces to align with new economic realities without loosening political control:

the integral State is the combination of political society and civil society, in the sense that the State is the result of the consent of the exploited, maintained by civil society, and the use of force, managed by political society⁴.

Connected to the integral State is another key Gramscian concept, the one of passive revolution. This term, as defined by Gramsci in *Quaderno II* and *Quaderno IV*, refers to a process where the ruling class initiates top-down reforms in response to crisis, making limited concessions without fundamentally altering the social order (Caterina 2021), or in the words of Gramsci «a revolution without a revolution».

In this framework, it is important to note that an economic crisis does not automatically lead to a hegemonic crisis. According to Gramsci, only when economic discontent translates into a crisis of political authority and ideological legitimacy does it constitute a true crisis of hegemony (Choi 2017). Therefore, whenever there could be an economic crisis that could transform into a hegemonic one, according to Gramscian logic, the integral State should try to block the emergence of counter-hegemonic⁵ forces by conceding some freedom of action while at the same time maintaining the control of the political power.

In sum, Gramsci's theoretical tools, including hegemony, integral state, passive revolution, and counter-hegemony, provide a comprehensive framework for interpreting the July 1st Economic Measures not

⁴ My translation from the Italian edition of the *Quaderni dal carcere*.

⁵ Counter-hegemony, as defined by Im (1991), is not a real hegemony in a strict sense, but the economic, political and ideological preparations for hegemony before winning State power.

as signs of liberalization, but as a strategic recalibration of the North Korean State's hegemonic apparatus. These concepts help explain how the regime has maintained its capacity for adaptive control, selectively integrating economic changes while reinforcing ideological and political dominance.

12.3. Political and economic background of the July 1st Economic Measures

To fully grasp the significance and function of the July 1st Economic Management Improvement Measures, it is essential to situate them within the broader historical and structural context of North Korea's political economy. Far from being sudden or isolated, the 2002 reforms emerged in response to a prolonged period of economic deterioration and systemic stress that severely challenged the regime's traditional mechanisms of control.

The North Korean regime's ideological and institutional foundations were shaped by a unique synthesis of Marxist-Leninist principles, anti-colonial nationalism, and the personalist rule of Kim Il Sung (David-West 2007; Stock 2018; Brown 2022). Following liberation from Japanese colonial rule in 1945 and the Korean War (1950–1953), the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) established itself as the hegemonic force at the centre of the newly formed State's political and social structures. Through the 1960s and 1970s, the regime maintained strict centralized control over all sectors of life, guided by the ideology of *Juche*, which is often translated as self-reliance⁶. Nevertheless, by the

⁶ Scholars have long debated the meanings and functions of the North Korean ideological apparatus, arriving at a range of interpretations. While there is general agreement that voluntarism lies at the heart of *Juche*, opinions differ on how this emphasis emerged. Some argue that it stems from the neo-Confucian tradition (Cumings 2012), others view it as a product of the decolonization struggle and post-colonial late development (Gray 2023), while still others interpret the centrality of human agency as drawing, to some extent, on Hegelian thought (Frank 2015). Another group of scholars takes a different approach, considering *Juche* as a strategic tool that theorizes and enacts a rhetoric of constant and permanent revolution (Park 2015). Another important aspect of *Juche* ideology is its association with self-reliance and autarky. However, this emphasis became prominent only under the leadership of Kim Jong Il, whereas Kim Il Sung had acknowledged the importance of imports and exports as a means to balance the economy (Brown 2022).

early 1970s, the economy had already begun to stagnate, and economic growth started to decline (Lee 2022), largely as a result of the decision to concentrate efforts on the development of heavy industry at the expense of light industry.

In addition, during the 1990s the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc trading partners and the floods of 1995 aggravated a situation that was already in precarious balance, leading to widespread famine, known domestically as the Arduous March (*konanŭi haenggun* 고난의 행군), marking a period of severe systemic stress that would test the regime's hegemonic capacity. The State's Public Distribution System (PDS), which had been the cornerstone of economic control and food supply, effectively collapsed (Lee 2022). In response, ordinary citizens began to organize grassroots survival strategies, giving rise to informal markets known as *jangmadang* 장마당 (lit. marketplace). These markets have become essential spaces for trade and livelihood, operating largely outside the State's direct control. For the first time since its establishment, the North Korean leadership faced the reality of losing its monopoly over economic life (Lankov 2016).

In Gramscian terms, this period can be seen as the onset of a hegemonic crisis, where the regime's ability to secure consent through both material provision and ideological narrative was severely undermined⁷. Moreover, the weakening of State capacity, the erosion of the PDS, and the population's increasing reliance on informal markets signaled the emergence of new social actors operating outside the State's traditional structures of control (Kim 2022). In particular, distinct groups began to emerge within the sphere of informal markets and economic activities, functioning independently of State oversight. This trend is connected to the so-called marketization process, which can be defined as the gradual reduction of the socialist planning system's scope and influence, leading to the expansion of market⁸ until it becomes the dominant mechanism (Song 2022). The expansion of

⁷ Choi (2017) discusses the concept of a hegemonic crisis in North Korea, arguing that the economic crisis has led to increased State control over the population. He suggests that this tightening of control could mark the beginning of the collapse of the regime's power structure.

⁸ The term "market" here is to be intended as a general term that includes economic activities that occur outside the framework of a planned socialist economy.

markets led to the dualization of the economy⁹, dividing it into a formal, State-planned sector and an informal, market-based sector (Lee *et al.* 2015).

The formation of social groups defined not anymore by the social structure defined by the regime¹⁰ but by their monetary capital, raised the question among scholars whether these changes could bring to a regime change or a bottom-up revolution. There is in fact a vast literature on transition and regime collapse linked to marketization that predicts the demise of the North Korean State as we know it. Although the spread of informal activities potentially mined the authority of the regime, this phenomenon also compelled the regime to reconsider its strategies for maintaining control, ultimately setting the stage for the July 1st Economic Measures of 2002.

12.4. The July 1st Measures through a Gramscian lens

The July 1st Economic Measures are a pivotal moment of adaptive governance in North Korea. While often interpreted as a step toward liberalization, I challenge here such assumptions by analyzing the 7.1 Measures through a Gramscian lens, framing them not as precursors to systemic transformation but as mechanisms of passive revolution. First, I will outline the main features of the reforms and their incorporation of market logic into the socialist framework; second, I will evaluate their function as a strategic, State-led adaptation aimed at preserving political control. By doing so, this analysis sheds light on how the North Korean regime has reproduced its hegemony not by resisting change altogether, but by selectively integrating it in ways

⁹ Here, I refer to dual labor market theory, which distinguishes between a primary labor market, characterized by higher wages, stable employment, and good working conditions, and a secondary labor market, marked by low wages, job insecurity, and poor working conditions. These concepts were also defined by the International Labor Organization (ILO) in 1972, which labeled them as 'formal' and 'informal' activities, respectively.

¹⁰ We refer here to the system called *Songbun*. Based on this system the society is divided into three groups based on the degree of loyalty to the Party and the leader: the core class, or loyal class; the wavering class; and the hostile class. The division was initiated by Kim Il Sung in 1975 when he consolidated his power and leadership over the Party and purged the ones not loyal to his faction. For a deeper analysis of *Songbun* see Collins (2012), and Suh (2005).

that maintain the fundamental architecture of authoritarian rule.

12.4.1. Market reform elements of the July 1st Economic Measures

In 1998, Kim Jong Il officially succeeded his father Kim Il Sung as North Korea's leader, inheriting a country devastated by a prolonged economic crisis and the tragic consequences of the famine. In an effort to address the shortcomings of the planned economy and revive production, the regime began introducing changes as early as 1998, starting with a constitutional revision that reformed regulations on cooperative farms, allowing residents to cultivate their own crops (Lee *et al.* 2015). However, it was in 2002 that more significant reforms were implemented through a set of policy measures announced on July 1, 2002, commonly known as the July 1st Economic Management Improvement Measures, or simply the 7.1 Measures. These measures marked a significant shift, as they partially incorporated market principles into the socialist framework in what appeared to be a strategic adaptation rather than a systemic transformation. The key features of the 7.1 reform measures included the decentralization of decision-making within State-owned enterprises, granting them the ability to adjust prices and sell surplus production (Yang 2021); reforms to wages and incentive structures aimed at boosting productivity; and an adjustment of the official exchange rate to better align with market conditions (Cho *et al.* 2003). Specifically, four major changes were introduced: first, the monetization of the economy involved dismantling the traditional socialist distribution system for food rations, thereby allowing prices to be determined by supply and demand. This shift was accompanied by adjustments to wages, bringing them closer to market levels. Second, economic decision-making was decentralized, transferring authority over agricultural and industrial production from the central government to individual production units. This aimed at stimulating competition, increasing productivity, and fostering a sense of responsibility among workers and managers. Third, the regime abandoned the artificially high value of the North Korean won, leading to major price and wage adjustments. In parallel, the government tolerated the operation of foreign currency shops, private restaurants, karaoke bars, and other small private businesses, although these changes also triggered inflationary pressures. Finally, Special

Administrative and Industrial Zones, also known as Special Economic Zones (SEZs), were established in border areas with China to promote foreign investment and cross-border economic cooperation (Lee 2022). In addition, as a result of the reforms in 2003 the Farmers' Markets (*nongmin shijang* 농민 시장) were transformed into Comprehensive Markets (*chonghap shijang* 종합 시장) further expanding private trading activities, particularly among women who began home-based production of garments and small goods¹¹.

These reforms signaled the State's response to the mounting tension between the rigid official economy and the informal realities of market activity that had emerged in the wake of the 1990s crisis.

12.4.2. Strategic adaptation, not systemic transformation

The July 1st Measures can thus be seen as an effort to reduce the contradiction between the State's legal-economic framework and the de facto marketization taking place on the ground. Some scholars interpret these measures as laying the groundwork for a rudimentary form of private property and a more capitalistic mode of production (Frank 2005). In particular, scholars anticipated, or perhaps hoped, that the 7.1 Measures would initiate reforms within the socialist command economy, potentially steering it toward a more market-oriented or capitalist model. This did not happen, and the State reaffirmed its ideological commitment to socialism.

Therefore, the 7.1 Economic Measures of 2002 can be interpreted as a State-led response to an unfolding hegemonic crisis, wherein North Korea's ruling elite sought to stabilize the regime without liberalizing it. Within a Gramscian lens, this maneuver can reflect a case of passive

¹¹ The involvement of North Korean women in the informal economy has been widely discussed in academic literature. Research on the topic has followed several trends, often framing the phenomenon in contrast to Korea's traditionally patriarchal values. Market activity, historically considered a low-status occupation and even viewed as ethically questionable, has been culturally stigmatized. This perception partly explains why women, rather than men, who are more often engaged in the official labor market, have become the primary actors in informal economic activities. Moreover, women's participation in the informal economy is largely driven by push factors such as poverty, starvation, and the need for survival, rather than by pull factors like job security, personal autonomy, or the pursuit of freedom and independence. For further reading, see Jung *et al.* (2018), Park (2011), and Kang (2020).

revolution, due to the implementation of a strategy of controlled adaptation in which limited reforms are introduced to preserve rather than transform the existing power structure. Also, in the words of Gramsci (*Quaderno X*, §9):

A passive revolution would occur in the sense that, through legislative intervention by the State and via corporative organization, more or less profound changes would be introduced into the country's economic structure to strengthen the element of 'production planning.' In other words, socialization and cooperation in production would be intensified, without, however, affecting (or only regulating and controlling) the individual and group appropriation of profit.

While in this specific passage he refers to the fascist corporatist system, the concept can be meaningfully applied to the North Korean context, where State-led reforms have introduced structural changes aimed at increasing productivity without fundamentally altering the regime's control over wealth and resources. In addition, the integration of market mechanisms, such as partial price liberalization, incentive-based wages, and limited private trade, occurred without any parallel concession to political pluralism or democratic governance. This dual strategy allowed the regime to respond to mounting pressures, both from the post-famine social discontent and the structural weaknesses of the planned economy, without disrupting its monopoly on political authority. Through modest improvements in living standards and pragmatic economic concessions, the regime was able to alleviate immediate survival anxieties among the population, thereby securing a degree of popular consent. Official narratives emphasized that the reforms were not aimed at adopting capitalism, but at strengthening socialist management in accordance with the 'creative principle' inherent in Juche ideology¹². The leadership insisted that

¹² In his 1982 work *On the Juche Idea*, Kim Jong Il defined the human being as the core of Juche philosophy, identifying independence, creativity, and consciousness as its fundamental attributes. In particular, "creativity" refers to the human capacity for adaptation, enabling individuals to actively shape and respond to historical conditions. Moreover, by placing the human being at the center of history, Juche ideology departs to some extent from classical Marxism, taking a turn that appears more aligned with Hegelian thought.

markets were not inherently capitalist; rather, they were portrayed as neutral economic tools that could exist temporarily to complement State-directed production and improve efficiency (Frank 2005).

This balancing act between ideological rigidity and pragmatic adaptation is captured by Choson Sinbo's 2002 article, which stated that the reforms aimed at «comprehensively improving the people's living standards» while «maintaining socialist principles» (Choson Sinbo 2002). Moreover, the introduction of competition, referred to as «socialist competition», was framed as an ideological practice rather than a capitalist one. Factories were now subject to profitability assessments and market-like pressures, marking a significant departure from the orthodox centrally planned model where prices were politically determined and unrelated to scarcity. Still, the price reforms had unintended consequences, as they reduced purchasing power for ordinary citizens, exacerbating social inequality and hardship. Park (2015) argues that North Korea's leadership theorized market reforms as intrinsic to socialist construction, framing them as part of an ongoing revolutionary struggle rather than a step toward liberal capitalism. She interprets the regime's adaptive measures as part of a «permanent revolution» grounded in the Juche ideology, designed to preserve sovereignty and regime stability (Park 2015). Ultimately, the 7.1 Measures illustrate how the North Korean regime seeks to preserve its political dominance by selectively integrating market elements while ideologically insulating them from calls for systemic transformation. The reforms reflect the logic by which truth is acknowledged and revealed in what the regime fails to repress, suggesting that despite denials, significant change is unfolding beneath the surface.

Simultaneously, North Korea's ideological apparatus, including State media, educational institutions, and party publications, was mobilized to frame the reforms not as a rupture with socialism, but as a reaffirmation of its core principles through creative adaptation¹³. Consistent with Gramsci's concept of the integral State, North Korea's management of the 7.1 Measures involved more than just top-down administrative reforms, it also deployed a discursive strategy aimed at

¹³ In North Korean sources there is no mention of the term 'reform' when talking about the 2002 Measures. This is an additional sign that the regime did not want to characterize economic changes as something that is in rupture with the North Korean socialist ideology.

reinforcing ideological cohesion across civil society. Rather than relying solely on repression, the regime mobilized Juche ideology as a flexible and encompassing discourse to legitimize the economic adjustments, framing them as a reaffirmation of socialist principles rather than a retreat from them. As Gramsci writes, the modern State is «the balance between political society and civil society» (Letter no. 210, 1931), and it exerts hegemony not merely through coercion but through the manufacture of consent. In this light, the regime's use of ideology functioned to reproduce hegemonic control even amidst structural shifts. By initiating reforms preemptively, the North Korean State forestalled the formation of a counter-hegemonic bloc, containing grassroots socio-economic change within an ideologically sanctioned narrative. The regime's strategy of controlled adaptation thus illustrates how hegemony can be reproduced through transformation, with the State reasserting control over evolving material conditions without relinquishing its monopoly on political and ideological authority. The discursive emphasis on Juche as a flexible and "scientific" guide for national development served to absorb the shock of reform while disarming potential ideological dissent. In this way, the July 1st Measures exemplify an adaptive hegemony that defuses crisis by reshaping consent, while reinforcing the fundamental architecture of authoritarian rule.

12.5. Conclusion

The July 1st Economic Management Improvement Measures did not mark the beginning of North Korea's transition toward liberal democracy or capitalist transformation, as many within the transitology framework anticipated. Rather, they exemplify the regime's capacity for strategic adaptation, an effort to absorb the pressures of internal crisis and growing marketization without ceding political control. Framed through a Gramscian lens, the 7.1 Measures can be seen as a form of passive revolution: a State-driven initiative to implement limited reforms in order to preserve, not dismantle, the existing hegemonic order.

By selectively incorporating market elements while maintaining a strict ideological narrative rooted in Juche and socialist principles, the North Korean regime effectively neutralized the disruptive potential

of grassroots economic activity. This allowed the leadership to reassert its legitimacy and contain socioeconomic change within a framework that reinforced, rather than challenged, the regime's authority. As Gramsci theorized, hegemony is not sustained solely through coercion but through a combination of material concessions and ideological framing, a balance that the 7.1 Measures sought to maintain.

The limited marketization allowed by the July 1st Measures has remained framed within State-defined ideological boundaries, thus constraining any potential war of position that could lead subordinate groups toward autonomous political mobilization (Choi 2017). Rather than opening space for a counter-hegemonic project, these reforms ultimately reaffirmed the regime's control by absorbing social demands and translating them into State-sanctioned adaptations.

In this light, the July 1st Measures must be understood not as a prelude to systemic transformation, but as part of an ongoing hegemonic project, one that demonstrates how authoritarian regimes can reinvent themselves in times of crisis without undergoing fundamental change. Gramsci's framework proves essential in illuminating this dynamic, offering a critical alternative to deterministic models of transition and underscoring the complex interplay between reform, repression, and brevity required by this paper, it was not possible to explore in greater depth several dynamics that further shape this process; future research will expand ideological continuity in North Korea's political economy. Due to the upon these aspects to provide a more comprehensive account of North Korea's evolving political economy.

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Abstracts

Adaptive Hegemony: A Gramscian Analysis of North Korea's July 1st Economic Measures

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This paper reassesses North Korea's 2002 July 1st Economic Management Improvement Measures through a Gramscian lens, arguing they signaled not genuine reform but a State-directed passive revolution meant to stabilize authority under mounting strain. Instead of marking systemic change, the measures acted as adaptive tools that absorbed socioeconomic pressures without loosening political control. By selectively integrating market practices into Juche socialism, the State improved daily conditions while keeping participation tightly managed. Marketization remained deliberately narrow, preventing it from becoming a source of autonomous social power. Qualitative research shows how these adjustments reshaped consent, reinforced hegemonic expectations, and redirected demands that might otherwise have encouraged reformist momentum. In this view, the measures constituted a calculated recalibration of State power rather than an opening toward liberalization.

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