

Stephan Blancke  
(Editor)

# East Asian Intelligence and Organised Crime

China

Japan

North  
Korea

South  
Korea

Mongolia



Verlag Dr. Köster  
Berlin

Reihe  
Geheime  
Nachrichtendienste

# Geheime Nachrichtendienste

Bd. 9

ISSN 2192-3744

**Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek**  
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.dnb.de> abrufbar.

Wissenschaftliche Betreuung: Dr. Bodo Wegmann

Umschlaggrafik: Druck mit freundlicher Genehmigung von [planiglobe.com](http://planiglobe.com)  
Kartengrafiken im Buch: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>

1. Auflage September 2015  
Copyright 2015 by Verlag Dr. Köster  
10179 Berlin

Verlag Dr. Köster  
Ohmstr. 7  
10179 Berlin  
Tel.: 030/ 76403224  
Fax: 030/ 76403227  
[info@verlag-koester.de](mailto:info@verlag-koester.de)

[www.verlag-koester.de](http://www.verlag-koester.de)

ISBN 978 - 3 - 89574 - 888 - 2

## Table of contents

	page
Foreword <i>Stephan Blancke</i>	1
East Asian Intelligence and Organized Crime: An Introduction <i>Peng Wang</i>	3
<b>China</b>	
The Role of Guānxì for Doing Business in China A Theoretical Approach <i>Susann Grune</i>	13
Intelligence-led Police Investigation in the Context of the Modernisation of Economic Crime Investigation <i>Tie Ni</i>	35
The Death Penalty for drug offences in China and human rights - the leap of faith <i>Saul Takahashi</i>	71
North Korean Drug Trafficking and its evolving threat to East Asia <i>Peng Wang, Stephan Blancke</i>	89
WMD Proliferation Through China <i>Ian Stewart</i>	105
<b>Japan</b>	
Right Wing Organizations, Organized Crime, and the State in Japan – Historical Discourses and Developments <i>Dolf-Alexander Neuhaus</i>	117
Japanese Intelligence in Manchuria through the Russo-Japanese War: An Overview <i>Simon Hall</i>	133
State Intelligence in Japan <i>Simon Schwenke</i>	155
Organized Crime in Japan – Yakuza and Company <i>Koichi Shinoda</i>	169
<b>South Korea</b>	
Historical development of organized crime in South Korea <i>Eunyoung Kim</i>	183
The Long March to Gaining Control of the NIS: A short Case Study of South Korea's National Intelligence Service <i>Jens Rosenke</i>	197
Organized crime in the contemporary South Korea <i>Minwoo Yun</i>	227
<b>North Korea</b>	
The Soprano State: Criminal Sovereignty and Organized Crime in North Korea <i>Joseph Fitsanakis</i>	253

Terrorism scheme and North Korea: a focus on North Korean cyber attacks	<i>Nicolas Levi</i>	279
North Korean Regime Stability: The Chinese-North Korean Border Region as Test Case	<i>Adam Cathcart, Christopher Green</i>	291
North Korea - Still an Intelligence Problem	<i>Stephan Blancke</i>	303
North Korean Intelligence and the Making of a National-Security State	<i>Joseph Fitsanakis</i>	317
From state-organised crime to legal business: Transforming North Korea – A criminological approach	<i>Charles von Denkowski</i>	343
<b>Mongolia</b>		
Mongolia confronts transnational crime issues in its new democracy	<i>Alicia Campi</i>	399
Intelligence Services in Democratic Mongolia	<i>Jargalsaikhan Mendee, Adiya Tuvshintugs, Julian Dierkes</i>	439
The historical and cultural elements behind Mongolia's legal system and definition of crime	<i>Alicia Campi</i>	461
Authors		475

## North Korean Regime Stability: The Chinese-North Korean Border Region as Test Case

Adam Cathcart and Christopher Green

This article uses a number of data points emerging from the Sino-North Korean border since early 2014 to argue that Kim Jong-un and the North Korean state reside in a perpetual imbalance between anxieties about the dangers of that frontier and eagerness to exploit its economic potential. Questions of North Korean leadership, border security, intelligence, economics, and tourism, while frequently treated separately, are here seen as part of an overall whole. The picture that emerges is one wherein the North Korean state is not fully in control of its northern frontier, but maintains totalitarian aspirations even as economic advantage is sought around the margins. Throughout, readings of official and unofficial sources -- including news items in Chinese -- undergird the systemic analysis of the region, providing a new and different prism through which to review regime strength.

On the morning of 27 December, 2014, a North Korean soldier left his post on the edge of North Hamgyong Province, strode across the frozen Tumen river and entered Chinese territory. Armed with a handgun and a knife, he went into a small borderland farming community called Nanping (南坪镇; 난핑 촌), where he proceeded to kill four civilians. He was then wounded and apprehended by Chinese border guards stationed near the village, which is administratively part of Helong City and the broader Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture. The hungry and armed defector-soldier then died while in Chinese custody, making his repatriation a simpler if not entirely pleasant affair.<sup>1</sup>

In an article which was subsequently censored, China's major foreign affairs tabloid, the *Huanqiu Shibao* (Global Times), did not mention the specific village which had been the site of the violent events, but did describe the soldier's probable motivation as being "severe hunger." The newspaper also recalled a similar incident in December 2013 in Yilanzhen (依兰镇; 이란진), a small village just north of the city of Yanji, where a defected North Korean soldier loaded down with guns and knives stole

---

<sup>1</sup> Beijing News, "Details Revealed in the Case of North Korean Deserter-Soldier Shooting Four Chinese People Dead" 「朝鲜逃兵枪杀4名中国人案详情披露」, *Xinjingbao*, January 5, 2015. (<http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2015-01-05/162031362606.shtml>), accessed June 1, 2015.

20,000 RMB from villagers and took off for Beijing, where he was eventually apprehended. When similar incidents recurred along the same stretch of border, the Chinese media was less restrained. The North Korean media did not cover these incidents in the least, of course.

The lack of official information about the incidents from North Korea itself makes for a gap in the narrative. Yet a picture emerges nevertheless of competing sources of bilateral tension, rooted in the borderland dynamics with China. While it is difficult to ascertain regime strength or stability in aggregate, by using the available data on rogue soldiers, tourism, and cross-border joint ventures, it is possible to at least provide an alternate perspective.

Soldiers from the North Korean military have had the propensity to cross the river border into China since early in the history of the North Korean state and for a variety of reasons, but the Chinese media is often reticent to report on such events lest it should upset the balance of relations at both the local and national level. In 2015 this reticence was ameliorated, perhaps partially under pressure from foreign media reports that could not readily be denied.

Most notable among these are a single gunman who shot four Chinese in a robbery before being shot himself, and two men who fled across the border in late March 2015 but were eventually apprehended. Finally came news of a Chinese investigation into the death of three Chinese in a border community in May.<sup>2</sup>

While testimonials from defectors and individuals within North Korea remains very important for our understanding of regime security on the frontier, Chinese news media remains a relatively under-exploited source. The *Huanqiu Shibao* (Global Times), which has correspondents in Pyongyang, does very little original reporting from the North Korean capital. Nevertheless, the paper continues to make the interests of Chinese citizens along the North Korean frontier a kind of cause celebre, as seen in a prominent series of reports in 2010-2011 from Sanhe and the border zone.<sup>3</sup> PRC media has also reported on drug flows from North Korea, and

---

<sup>2</sup> Lee Sang Yong, "2 N. Korean Soldiers AWOL in China," *Daily NK*, March 20, 2015 (<http://www.dailynk.com/english/read.php?catald=nk00100&num=13018>), accessed June 1, 2015; see also Lee Sang Yong, "Arrest Images of AWOL N. Korean Soldier Revealed," *Daily NK*, March 23, 2015 (<http://www.dailynk.com/english/read.php?num=13023&catald=nk00100>), accessed June 1, 2015; and Agence France Presse, "China confirms murderous North Korean soldier killed," *Capital News*, January 8, 2015 (<http://www.capitalfm.co.ke/news/2015/01/china-confirms-murderous-north-korean-soldier-killed/>), accessed June 1, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Rank, 'Chinese border village takes steps against North Korean refugees,' *NK Economy Watch*, July 2, 2011, 292

from border cities like Dandong into the Chinese interior.<sup>4</sup>

North Korean crackdowns, when they come, would appear to mitigate against illegal activities and staunch the flow of refugees. But negative incidents also mobilize Public Security Bureaus and border guards on the Chinese side of the river. The murders in December 2014 sparked a response by the Public Security Bureau in Wangqing County, an area with a very heavy concentration of ethnic Koreans just to the northeast of Yilanzhen. A Yanbian government press release describes full traffic stoppages in the county for security purposes that continued a full two days after the murders.<sup>5</sup>

Even as it revealed aspects of cross-border violence, the *Huanqiu Shibao* editorialized that Chinese readers should remain calm and not draw too many inferences from the incidents about North Korea's stability, much less the ability of any single incident to turn relations with China. As the paper noted: "any person with common sense can see clearly that this is a case which occurred in the Sino-Korean border region, and that the North Korean military perpetrator does not represent the North Korean government, nor does he represent the North Korean people as a whole."<sup>6</sup> At the same time, the pattern of border guards behaving out of control could not be seen as new, nor was it welcomed.

Chinese media noted the presence of multiple "regulatory loopholes along the border." As one piece concluded:

Officials dealing with with specific sectors of North Korea affairs should not think too much [不应自己想得太多], rendering what had been simple matters into complex ones. Sino-North Korean relations are surely able to adapt into a more conventional type of inter-State relations. If the DPRK is unable to go along with such adaptation, we should guide them toward adaption, without being excessively accommodating. Because if

---

(<http://www.nkeconwatch.com/2011/07/02/chinese-border-village-takes-steps-against-north-korean-refugees/>), accessed June 1, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Justin Hastings, "The Economic Geography of North Korean Drug Trafficking Networks," *Review of International Political Economy*, 22(1), 162-193; see also "A civil policeman in Dandong charged with the death penalty for manufacturing Drugs; 20 kg of methamphetamine hidden in his residence" [丹东一民警制毒获死刑 家藏冰毒40斤], *Xinjingbao*, June 18, 2015 (<http://leaders.people.com.cn/n/2015/0618/c58278-27173240.html>), accessed July 7, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Yanbian Provincial Government, "Yanbian region to carry out unannounced safety inspections before the holiday" [我州开展节前安全生产巡视暗访工作], December 31, 2014

([yanbian.gov.cn/tpl/xl2012031611081743.jsp?infolid=35102](http://yanbian.gov.cn/tpl/xl2012031611081743.jsp?infolid=35102)), accessed June 1, 2015.

<sup>6</sup> "Editorial: Don't Allow South Korean Media to Inform Us that a North Korean Deserter has Entered China" [社评：别让韩媒告诉我们朝鲜逃兵进了中国], *Huanqiu Shibao*, January 6, 2015.

common sense is not adhered to, China will have to pay the imbalance in the bill with perplexity and division within our own society.<sup>7</sup>

The Chinese state clearly does not feel confident about the state of law enforcement on the frontier with North Korea. North Korean state media has done little to mitigate this problem, and in fact, as shall be see in the following case, has only heightened Chinese perceptions of a disregard for PRC sovereignty.

## 1. Espionage in Dandong

On March 26, 2015, the Korean Central News Agency reported at length on an unusual press conference in Pyongyang, brandishing Kim Kuk Gi and Choe Chun Gil, two men who admitted to a range of anti-DPRK espionage activities in the Chinese border city of Dandong.<sup>8</sup> Prefaced by remarks by a North Korean security official, the "confessions" offered by Kim Kuk Gi and Choe Chun Gil encompassed serious accusations on a number of sensitive subjects. Particularly implicit in the document was the idea that China is not interested in protecting North Korean interests -- particularly the North Korean leader in the process of border-crossing into China. In other words, North Korean state media has consistently implied that China is collaborating actively with South Korean intelligence, and could be actively permitting Dandong -- and the border region as a whole -- to be used as a staging ground for attacks on the social system and regime of the DPRK. None of the messages was stated overtly, but observers might consider Pyongyang's boldness in releasing such allegations of Chinese complicity with South Korean intelligence precisely when Beijing was waiting for the approval of a new Ambassador, and when the city of Dandong has been rapidly expanding cooperation with South Korea.

The main audience for the KCNA report, however, was not Chinese -- predictably so, insofar as the DPRK state media rarely curtsseys to Beijing. Instead, in describing plots being hatched on Chinese territory, the audience was Korean. In particular, South Korean (in the sense that the document rips the lid off of National Intelligence Service operations in

---

<sup>7</sup> "Editorial: Don't Allow South Korean Media to Inform Us that a North Korean Deserter has Entered China" [社评: □让韩媒告诉我们朝鲜逃兵进了中国], *Huanqiu Shibao*, January 6, 2015.

<sup>8</sup> "Spies of S. Korean IS Confess to Truth behind Their Espionage against DPRK," KCNA, March 26, 2015 (<http://www.kcna.co.jp/item/2015/201503/news26/20150326-30ee.html>), accessed June 8, 2015.



Dandong), and North Korean (in terms of being broadcast on state television). For North Korean viewers, the messages were multiple: that Manchuria has always been and remains a very dangerous place, that religion – specifically Christianity – is a tool of enemy agents and US imperialists, that economic and cultural chaos can be laid at the feet of such foreign agents, and that the North Korean security services can and will defuse any and all plots to kill their leader. These are themes that were also prevalent in a case during the summer of 2012, when state media “uncovered” a plot to blow up a statue within sight of the Chinese border.<sup>9</sup>

At that time, the details of the conference and the way that domestic propaganda continued thereafter indicated that Pyongyang was using the episode as a way to heighten war-readiness in North Korea by playing up the theme of an American plot to encircle the DPRK. Jon Yong Chol, the protagonist in the 2012 press conference, was seen in North Korean poster art and television broadcasts, his face a reminder to the populace of the presence of external enemies, the need to protect the symbols of the state, and the need for loyalty to those symbols. Embedded in those themes were other connotations, such as the potentially destructive action of engaging in illegal cross-border cell phone calls on the northern frontier.

As described in their March 2015 press conference, the activities in Dandong of Kim Kuk Gi and Choe Chun Gil were multiple. The first “crime” which Kim was accused of undertaking involved things that tourists regularly do along the Sino-North Korean border: Taking pictures of bridges. This was considered to be dangerous behavior because Kim was further interested – along with the Chinese government, who would not allow its publication at the time – in the particulars of when and where Kim Jong-il crossed the Sino-North Korean border during his bilateral visits in 2009 and 2010.

Kim’s alleged work of collecting photos and basic information about North Koreans operating in Dandong was trumped in the press conference by notes on his acquisition of “information about nuclear weapons [and] winning over members of the north side’s missions in China and those on business tour.” It was indeed rare to see an open North Korean admission of concern over military intelligence leaking out through Dandong. That missions into China would be targets for foreign intelligence is not at all

---

<sup>9</sup> Adam Cathcart and Brian Gleason, “North Korean Claims of Terrorism from Inside Chinese Territory: An Annotated Analysis,” *Sino-NK* (online), August 14, 2012 (<http://sinonk.com/2012/08/14/north-korean-claims-of-terrorism-from-inside-chinese-territory-a-n-annotated-analysis/>) accessed July 7, 2015.

illogical, but stating it publicly helps to justify for domestic cadres the reason why they may not be going abroad. This can be connected to a story released (probably rather prematurely) by Al-Jazeera about British intelligence going after a North Korean diplomatic target in South Africa, apparently with some — although hardly conclusive — success.<sup>10</sup>

The document secondarily addresses another significant realm — the information war along the Chinese-North Korean frontier. Reports and op-ed pieces about the need to flood North Korea with USBs and tablet computers loaded with subversive information are now so numerous as to be commonplace, but surely their prevalence should not be taken in any sense as official complacency toward the phenomenon. The potential for such media to directly target the “supreme dignity” of the top leadership is a natural cause not just for concern, but also for arrest.

The North Korean state can and does frequently handle international pressure on its human rights record, and does so with relative success, if the goal is to keep the enemy off balance and unable to investigate conditions on the ground. The UN Commission of Inquiry (COI) process has changed the dynamic here, but not completely. In sum, the document points out how dangerous international human rights criticism becomes when it is fed back into the domestic rumor mill, and how quickly it needs to be confused and defused by the state. Note that Kim was not guilty of sneaking into North Korea to interview starving rural dwellers for use in human rights videos abroad, but instead of sneaking human rights materials into North Korea itself, while the mention of “a university in Hawaii” links to previous DPRK assertions that academics are very much part of the cabal to collapse the North Korean system and may be entering the country with an intent of subverting the system. Kim concluded his long admission with a teaser about his economic crime of counterfeiting currency from Dandong and infiltrating it into North Korea, all of which had the intention of “brining people’s mindsets into confusion.”

A *Rodong Sinmun* reporter asked the two detainees a question, demanding more specificity in enemy operations in Dandong. This unleashed a torrent of titles and place names in the Chinese city. This document then needs to be thought about from the perspective of a what it tells any prospective North Korean working or employing workers in Dandong. The message might be paraphrased as follows:

---

<sup>10</sup> Rahul Radhakrishnan and Will Jordan, “Cables describe British attempt to recruit N Korean spy,” *Al Jazeera*, February 23, 2015.  
<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/02/spy-cables-british-attempt-recruit-korean-mi6-recruit-south-africa-north-korea-guard-150219190022268.html>

The city in which you are working is crawling with South Korean agents. They will be coming into our business and filing reports both with Seoul and with their colonial masters in Washington about it, about you. These agents are watching your movements, so it's better not to move anywhere. Don't go to the places visited by Kim Kuk Gi and Choe Chun Gil; their statements confirm that much of Dandong is a field of South Korean spies who would be all too happy to abduct you, infect you with Christianity, and give you illegal materials which can only bring trouble to us all. Moreover, their money is probably counterfeit, so be particularly careful when they settle the bill at the restaurant.

## 2. The Role of Cross-Border Joint Ventures

The problem with perpetually reinforcing an image of Manchuria as a dark and dangerous place, the better to stop residents leaving, is that an increasing number of people know this narrative to be untrue. Whilst there is an abundance of documentary evidence that the North Korean state and its many apparatuses, full embassies included, have used illicit trade as a means to make ends meet and fill state coffers since the 1970s, there is another side to the story. There are scores of Chinese-DPRK joint ventures (JVs) and other business opportunities in the region, and many employees from North Korea working for them. Since Kim Jong Un came to power at the end of 2011, this trend has become all the more prevalent.

One cannot state with certainty that North Korea's licit joint ventures with Chinese partners are not also fronts for illegality of one sort or another. However, it is abundantly clear that the Chilbosan Hotel in Shenyang, for instance, with its brightly lit marble entrance, coffee shop, Air Koryo booking office, Mansudae Studio sales outlet, and continental breakfast, seeks a slice of the mid-range accommodation market in Northeast China's key industrial and city.

Thus, computer hackers entering the servers of ill-protected South Korean financial companies more or less freely could perhaps populate a whole floor of this four-star hotel. But if they do exist, they are not visible, whereas large groups of fee-paying Chinese and South Korean tourists certainly are. Ask a *Dongbei* local (or half a dozen) about this hotel, and they will invariably mention its North Korean roots. This is not a whispered secret, for the flags of both people's republics flutter gaily outside, and *hanbok*-wearing staff and their business-suited Chinese colleagues openly

share the work of satisfying the various needs of guests.

Elsewhere, local informants describe another business activity ~~known to bring in a significant percentage of Pyongyang's~~ licit hard currency earnings in this region: shellfish. Seafood is a major trade, albeit one that does not always result in happy bilateral conclusions. Said informants also speak of DPRK restaurants doing business all across North Korea's near abroad, forming a significant percentage of an estimated 60 such eateries worldwide. The visitor can see these for him or herself: big new homes for existing restaurants in Ji'an and Yanji, and a brand new outlet opening in Changchun during 2014. The Chilbosan Hotel is not the beginning and end of North Korea's interactions with luxury accommodation, either: Yanji has a new boutique hotel, allegedly run from Pyongyang.

While the actual profitability of these businesses is open to question, it seems that the desire to be profitable is not.

### 3. Tourism

In recent months and years, the Kim Jong-un regime has made various public attempts along the Chinese-North Korean frontier to indicate its openness to tourism and cross-border business interactions. While the amount of money made in North Korea with these ventures cannot be terribly high, and the number of overall European and American-based tourists was said to be down in 2014, the state still counts on the visits for some amount of hard revenue, and the large numbers of Chinese willing to travel to North Korea on a day or two-day trip is a market which the country can yet take advantage of.

The tourism business in the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture is particularly worth watching. On December 28 (the day after the murders on the Tumen River with which this paper began), Helong city, a subsection of Yanbian, hosted a major tourism gathering which brought together all manner of officials in that realm.<sup>11</sup> Tourism is big business in the region and North Korea, like it or not, is a necessary partner in the endeavor.

North Korean cooperation is also needed in order to keep the city of Hunchun growing, located near the terminus of the Tumen River delta. On

---

<sup>11</sup> Yanbian Government, "Opening Event for Helong's 2014 Chinese Snow Festival" [中国•和龙老里克赏雪节暨开园仪式开幕], December 30, 2014, (<http://yanbian.gov.cn/tpl/txt/2012031611081743.jsp?infolid=35086>), accessed June 1, 2015.

January 1, 2015, the city hosted a very early morning New Year's gathering celebrating what it was anticipating as big breakthroughs in the year ahead: High-speed rail, a route to the sea, more trade with Russia and North Korea.<sup>12</sup> Cross-border economic activity from Hunchun and the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture is up significantly since last spring, and there is a great deal of money to be made. China is far from disinvesting in the border region as a whole, nor is it turning its back on the necessary potential represented by North Korea (and its route to the sea) and the Tumen River delta.<sup>13</sup> Before departing for Beijing, China's Ambassador Liu Hongcai concluded a sports agreement with Pyongyang, and Li Jinjun, his successor, has been pressing Pyongyang to join up with China's plans for "One Belt, One Road."<sup>14</sup>

A possible breakthrough in Chinese-North Korean cross-border tourism was pointed out in early 2015 by Reuters, which wrote: "The [tri-national] zone is the latest push by North Korea to transform itself into a tourist attraction."<sup>15</sup> While it is true that North Korea has spent a huge amount of money on tourism prestige projects (i.e., Masik Pass Ski Resort) since Kim Jong-un came to power, it is far too early to attribute them with any agency whatsoever with respect to a new tourist project which appears to be, in point of fact, very much a "Chinese dream" of provincial officials in Jilin. According to a starry-eyed press release from the Yanbian provincial government North Korea has done precisely two things thus far to support the project:

First, they appear to have erected some kind of tourist welcome center at the foot of the Victory Monument in Namyang, the small city directly across from Tumen, PRC. While this was probably done back in April/May 2014, it made sense to cite the progress when the perception of progress was needed, even if the facility in its totality consisted of a tent and a desk. The second North Korean contribution was the launching of a

---

<sup>12</sup> Yanbian Government, "China-Russia-North Korea Three-Country Borderzone Cities Open the New Year with Mutual Activities" [中俄朝三国边境城市举行互动活动迎新年], (<http://www.yanbian.gov.cn/tpl/t12012031611081743.jsp?infolid=35125>), accessed June 1, 2015.

<sup>13</sup> Andrei Lankov, 'Without sponsors, can North Korea grow?' *NK News*, December 29, 2014 ([www.nknews.org/2014/12/without-sponsors-can-north-korea-grow/](http://www.nknews.org/2014/12/without-sponsors-can-north-korea-grow/)), accessed July 7, 2015.

<sup>14</sup> PRC Embassy in Pyongyang, 'Ambassador Liu Hongcai Represents China at a Sino-Korean Joint Signing of 2015 Agreement on Sport Exchange' [刘洪才大使代表中方与朝方共同签署2015年双边体育交流议定书], December 30, 2014, ([kp.china-embassy.org/chn/zxxx/t1224142.htm](http://kp.china-embassy.org/chn/zxxx/t1224142.htm)), accessed June 1, 2015.

<sup>15</sup> Reuters, 'China plans international tourism zone with North Korea, Russia,' *Japan Times*, February 15, 2015, ([www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/02/15/world/china-plans-international-tourism-zone-with-north-korea-russia/#.VPeOhfmsXTp](http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/02/15/world/china-plans-international-tourism-zone-with-north-korea-russia/#.VPeOhfmsXTp)), accessed June 1, 2015.

few fireworks from Namyang at about 7 a.m. on New Years' Day 2015.<sup>16</sup>

This suggests The Tumen River tri-national borderless tourism zone scheme is purely in the planning stages; much like the Greater Tumen Initiative has been for about the past 25 years. It also indicates that the plan has been designed and promoted by the folks in Jilin/PRC without North Korean participation. By releasing information about the proposed zone, Chinese state actors are trying to build some momentum for a project that got momentarily derailed by the Jang Song-taek purge of December 2013.

It is good to recall how short-lived optimism can be with respect to cross-border tourism in this area. North Korean state media did not say a word about the fireworks along the Chinese border, just as North Korean state media ignores the hulking bridge between Dandong and Sinuiju that is, factually speaking, by some margin the most impressive visible piece of infrastructure accomplished in the Kim Jong-un era.

In April 2014, a once-weekly passenger train was finally allowed over the border — which then abruptly closed not all that long thereafter to Chinese tourism on account of North Korea's intense Ebola quarantine. This is not to say that the publicized project could never happen. However, the present reality suggests that North Korea's primary contribution to the project to date literally vanished in a puff of smoke on New Year's morning. As February turns to March and the southern border of the DPRK becomes thunderous with tank fire and anti-tank fire, we would do well to keep our eyes peeled for puffs of rather more promising smoke on the northern border.

#### 4. Conclusion

Compared with this spring's total quarantine of the country and the closing of the long northern border, due supposedly to fears over an Ebola outbreak, North Korea is indeed still open for business — and tourism.

But Kim Jong-un's inability to leave his own country even for a few days ought to raise questions about what precisely he is afraid of. Kim Jong-un and his handlers are clearly rather nervous about his fragile domestic political legitimacy. The execution of Jang Song-taek (Kim Jong-un's uncle) in December 2013 was never meant to, and could not,

---

<sup>16</sup> Yanbian Provincial Government, "China's Hunchun, Russia's Hasan Village, and DPRK's Duman River City: Three Countries and Three Localities Greet the New Year Interactively" [延边州政府 中国琿春市 俄罗斯哈桑镇 朝鲜豆满江市三国三地友好互动迎 2015], January 14, 2015 (<http://tinyurl.com/pejf4kx>), accessed July 7, 2015.

permanently anchor a culture of fearful obedience to the Kim family; ongoing coercive and persuasive pressure is needed. Moreover, the personality cult does not axiomatically replenish itself. Repeating the family myths and portraying the young leader as a seasoned hand is not sufficient to prevent resentment or alternative factions from developing.

Kim Jong-un is also obviously not secure with travelling around his own country, let alone going beyond its borders. Shortly after April 15, the anniversary of Kim Il-sun's birth – a key day on the North Korean calendar – Kim Jong-un turned up on Mount Paektu, the peak associated in state propaganda with his family bloodline. Yet, after the trip to Mount Paektu, what was more remarkable was his rapid retreat from the region around the Chinese border.

In more than three years of ostensibly governing North Korea, Kim Jong-un has yet to set foot in any number of major cities and production points in the state. Cities such as Sinuiju, Hyesan, Musan, Namyang, Onsong, or Rason may be obscure to us, but they are all important in their own ways, not least due to their proximity to China, the potent and relatively wealthy leviathan which shares an occasionally dangerous 1,400km boundary with North Korea.

This is certainly not the behaviour of a confident dictator, let alone an effective politician. The irony is that Kim Jong-un's grandfather used to turn up in these northern cities, spending hours in epic rants about corruption and inefficiency, going on tangents about the need for more rabbit breeding in elementary schools across the country. (Yes, this was the solution to the age-old "food problem" given by Kim Il-sung in a speech in Chongjin in 1980; for some reason it never seems to have worked.)

In addition, North Korean security services appear to be spooked about the possibility that Kim Jong-un could be assassinated while he is on the road. The same young leader – who has taken to inspecting buildings in downtown Pyongyang on his personal jet – may be keen to travel abroad, but is being held back from doing so by his advisers and protectors. He has also never met with a counterpart head of state, and rarely greets foreign visitors.

A recent hour-long press conference in Pyongyang featured two captured South Korean "spies" accused by the Ministry of State Security of being "heinous terrorists who worked hard to do harm to the supreme leadership of the DPRK". One detainee, Kim Guk Gi, then "admitted" that South Korean spies had been maneuvering in Manchuria to kill Kim Jong-il on one of his several train trips into China in 2010-2011.

Kim Jong-un has made a few efforts since he came to power to

project an image of North Korea that is more open and globally updated than ever before, but he has also amplified the daily practice of his own personality cult, threatened nuclear strikes on the continental-US, and disappeared for long stretches of time.