



Tübingen Korean Studies Lectures

튀빙겐 한국학 특강

North Korea Series 1:

The Advance of Marketization in North Korea – Between Political Rigidity and Economic Flexibility

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November 22, 2017 (Wednesday) | 6:00-8:00 PM

Wilhelmstraße 133 | Room 30

in Cooperation with the King Sejong Institute in Tübingen

Abstract: North Korea is a unique regime that has not followed the 'mono transition' path (economic reform under modified one-party rule) of other surviving communist regimes (China, Vietnam, Cuba) in the post Cold War era. Debates over North Korea's unique features (reluctance in economic reform, absence of political modification, international troublemaking) have generated two contending interpretations. The mainstream interpretation attributes North Korea's uniqueness to its regime's highly rigid political system ('monolithic leadership system'). For the alternative interpretation, structural pressures and political calculus have driven the monolithic regime towards economic reform ('marketization from above'), making it more convergent with the 'mono transition' regimes, at least in the economic aspect. In support of the latter interpretation, this paper will delve further into three contentious issues that represent the most common doubts about the advance of marketization in North Korea. First, how can the regime reconcile marketization with the interests of its 'core constituencies'? Second, since 'crony socialism' exists, how does it influence distribution and productive activity? Third, how does marketization advance in view of the persistence of monolithic rule? In so doing, it will show how the sources of economic reform (structural factors and political calculus) have enabled the marketization constraints to be overcome.

Tat Yan Kong is Reader in Comparative Politics and Development Studies at SOAS, University of London, and Co-Director of the London Asia-Pacific Centre for Social Science (SOAS and King's College). He is interested in issues of comparative and international political economy (varieties of capitalism, socialist to market transition, regional integration) with reference to East Asia (and to the Korean Peninsula in particular), and is the author *The Politics of Economic Reform in South Korea: A Fragile Miracle* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000).