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**A 'HERMIT KINGDOM' NO LONGER? KIM JONG-UN'S TWO YEARS OF  
DIPLOMATIC SUMMITS AND WHAT NORTH KOREAN MEDIA CAN TELL US  
ABOUT THEM**

by

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**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS**

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## ***Introduction***

In March of 2018, North Korean leader Kim Jong-un joined Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing for a secretive four-day meeting, marking Kim's first foreign trip and first meeting with another head of state since taking power in 2011. It was three weeks after U.S. President Donald Trump had announced his intention to meet with Kim, and China, it seemed, wanted to make sure it was involved. There was much speculation over what exactly happened during this meeting — foreign news media could only base their coverage off accounts by Xinhua, China's state-run news agency, or North Korean state media.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, scholars observed the extensive Chinese media coverage after the visit and the “overwhelmingly positive read-out in China's official media,” coming to a few conclusions: “Chinese leaders appear to want to signal to a domestic and international audience that: 1) Beijing and Pyongyang each see it as in their interests to repair relations, 2) Beijing is determined to play a decisive role in any diplomatic process for dealing with the Korean Peninsula, and 3) Xi is the elder statesman in his relationship with Kim.”<sup>2</sup>

Over the next 15 months, Kim would meet with Xi four more times. He would also meet with Trump four times, making Trump the first U.S. president to ever meet with a North Korean head of state and the first sitting U.S. president to set foot in North Korea. During this time, Kim would also meet with South Korean president Moon Jae-in. Of course, this is not the first time this traditionally isolated state has engaged in diplomacy with other countries. These two years,

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<sup>1</sup> Steven Lee Myers and Jane Perlez, “Kim Jong-un Met With Xi Jinping in Secret Beijing Visit,” *The New York Times*, March 27, 2018,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/27/world/asia/kim-jong-un-china-north-korea.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Ryan Hass, “What we know—and don't—about the meeting between Kim Jong-un and Xi Jinping,” *The Brookings Institution*, March 28, 2018,

<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/03/28/what-we-know-and-dont-about-the-meeting-between-kim-jong-un-and-xi-jinping/>.

however, marked an unprecedented flurry of activity that put Kim in the media spotlight and left outside observers furiously predicting what would happen next.

Direct meetings between state leaders have been a part of foreign policy for centuries, but only became popularized in the late 20th century as logistical barriers to meeting in person disappeared and international organizations flourished.<sup>3</sup> In his comprehensive review of the practice, David Dunn defines summitry as “the meeting of political leaders for official purposes, an activity which constitutes diplomacy at the highest level.”<sup>4</sup> However, it has not been often used with North Korea due to the reluctance of the U.S. and many in the international community to legitimize its totalitarian regime, making the sudden succession of meetings between North Korea and three of its most intimately involved countries worthy of attention. Even more interesting is the minimal amount of planning and preparation for some of the meetings between Trump and Kim, with the June 30, 2019 meeting seemingly initiated by a tweet by Trump merely two days prior.<sup>5</sup> Before that, the last high-profile meeting was Secretary of State Madeleine Albright’s visit to Pyongyang at the end of the Clinton administration in 2001, where she met with Kim Jong-il to convince him to halt his missile testing. North Korea had wanted Clinton to visit as well, but Clinton’s attention was diverted to the Middle East to negotiate an Israel-Palestine peace deal and his time ran out.

### ***Leading Up to the Summits***

During Kim’s time in power, he has pushed for sweeping economic and agricultural reforms, pivoting away from his father’s military-first policy. However, the continued emphasis

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<sup>3</sup> J. Robert Schaetzel and H. B. Malmgren, “Talking Heads,” *Foreign Policy*, no. 39 (1980): 131, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1148416>.

<sup>4</sup> David H. Dunn, *Diplomacy at the Highest Level: The Evolution of International Summitry* (Springer, 2016): 20.

<sup>5</sup> Donald Trump, Twitter Post, June 28, 2019, 3:51 P.M., <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1144740178948493314?s=20>.

on the “*byungjin*” (parallel development) policy of economic and nuclear development — first announced in a March 2013 plenary session — has not disappeared. This strategy means “a legitimate guideline that realizes the achievements of ‘constructing a socialist strong and prosperous nation’ through strengthening deterrence and speeding up economic construction.”<sup>6</sup> One of the tasks laid out was “to legally affirm North Korea’s nuclear power status, and to expand and bolster nuclear forces in both quality and quantity until the world is denuclearized.” Economic growth and nuclear development; one would not happen at the expense of the other, even as the world tries to convince Kim otherwise. North Korea intends to continue building up its nuclear armory for self-defense “until the world denuclearizes.”<sup>7</sup>

The year 2017 was marked by near-monthly missile launches by North Korea, indicating rapid and significant developments in its nuclear program. This was met with a strong reaction from the international community in the form of UN Resolutions 2371 and 2375, which targeted its principal exports, such as coal, iron, seafood, and textiles. In response, North Korea said it would “make the U.S. pay dearly for all the heinous crime it commits against the state and people of this country.”<sup>8</sup> Trump threatened North Korea with “fire and fury,” calling Kim a “little rocket man,” and Kim in turn called him a “mentally deranged U.S. dotard.”

Then, Kim pivoted. At the beginning of 2018, Kim took a conciliatory tone toward South Korea in his traditional New Year’s speech. In February 2018, North Korea indicated to South Korea that it was willing to talk to the U.S. and halt missile testing while engaging in dialogue with South Korea.<sup>9</sup> When South Korean national security chief Chung Eui-yong informed Trump

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<sup>6</sup> “The full text of Kim Jong-un’s remarks at the plenary session of the Party Central Committee,” *Korean Central News Agency*, April 1, 2013.

<sup>7</sup> Seong-Whun Cheon, “The Kim Jong-un Regime’s ‘Byungjin’ (Parallel Development) Policy of Economy and Nuclear Weapons and the ‘April 1st Nuclearization Law’,” Korea Institute for National Unification, 4, <https://repo.kinu.or.kr/bitstream/2015.oak/2227/1/0001458456.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> “Statement of DPRK Government,” *Korean Central News Agency*, Aug. 7, 2017.

<sup>9</sup> Joshua Berlinger et. al, “North Korea willing to talk to US about giving up nuclear weapons, Seoul says,” CNN, March 7, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/03/06/asia/north-korea-summit-intl/index.html>.

that Kim had expressed a desire to meet, Trump said yes — to the surprise and skepticism of many. The date was set for June 12 in Singapore. Trump abruptly pulled out of the meeting May 24 after some North Korean officials disparaged Vice President Mike Pence, but he quickly reinstated the meeting a week later.

### ***Why now?***

Putting aside Trump's unconventional and often erratic foreign policy, this period of time represents an unprecedented amount of engagement and dialogue between Kim and the rest of the world. In general, many agree that Kim's engagement in summit diplomacy showed his "commitment to shifting the country's focus from nuclear to economic development" and North Korea's "desire to appear as a normal state."<sup>10</sup>

North Korea has long sought to normalize relations with the U.S., prioritizing a guarantee of national sovereignty and the preservation of the Kim family regime. The U.S.'s goal has always been to denuclearize North Korea by diplomatic means, with varying levels of engagement during each U.S. administration. South Korean policy toward North Korea has varied between administrations as well, reaching a height in economic engagement and friendly relations during the Sunshine Policy of President Kim Dae-jung's administration. And though China opposes North Korea's nuclear arms build-up, it has historically prioritized stability in the Korean peninsula and limiting U.S. influence in East Asia. With so many interests involved, North Korean policy has always been difficult to coordinate.

Until 2018, however, the least amount of diplomatic engagement has happened during the Kim regime compared to his predecessors. Only two official DPRK-U.S. negotiations occurred

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<sup>10</sup> Gi-Wook Shin and Rennie J. Moon, "North Korea in 2018: Kim's Summit Diplomacy," *Asian Survey* 59, no. 1 (February 2019): 43, <https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2019.59.1.35>.

between December 2011 and January 2017.<sup>11</sup> Xi has largely ignored Kim, his nuclear activities making him more a liability in the region than an asset for China. The conservative Park Geun-hye administration took a hardline stance against North Korea, and it wasn't until Moon Jae-in came into office in 2017 with a promise to return to the Sunshine Policy that tensions thawed again.

Some have speculated that economic sanctions by the international community were a critical reason why Kim has taken a sudden interest in summit diplomacy.<sup>12</sup> Though sanctions of varying severity have been in place for years, lack of cooperation from China and Russia — North Korea's primary trade partners — has rendered them ineffective. However, China's enforcement of sanctions in late 2017 and early 2018, a result of frustration with North Korea's barrage of missile tests in 2017, has been a real blow to North Korea. According to the Bank of Korea, the total volume of trade decreased by 15%, and the country's GDP decreased by 6.8%, the smallest growth rate since 1997.<sup>13</sup> China's imports from North Korea dropped to almost zero by the beginning of 2018, though exports have remained consistent, according to Chinese trade data.<sup>14</sup>

Others have said Kim has reached a "satisfactory level of military deterrence" and feels no further need to continue developing nuclear weapons.<sup>15</sup> In an April 2018 plenary meeting, Kim declared that the country has "perfectly accomplished the great historic cause of building

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<sup>11</sup> Lisa Collins, "25 Years of Negotiations and Provocations: North Korea and the United States," *Beyond Parallel*, *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, <https://beyondparallel.csis.org/25-years-of-negotiations-provocations/>.

<sup>12</sup> Joseph DeThomas, "Are Sanctions Part of the Problem?" *38North*, Sept. 13, 2018, [https://www.38north.org/2018/09/jdethomas091318/#\\_ftn2](https://www.38north.org/2018/09/jdethomas091318/#_ftn2).

<sup>13</sup> "Gross Domestic Product Estimates for North Korea in 2018," Press Release, *Bank of Korea*, July 20, 2018.

<sup>14</sup> Daniel Wertz, "China-North Korea Trade: Parsing the Data," *38North*, Feb. 25, 2020, <https://www.38north.org/2020/02/dwertz022520/>.

<sup>15</sup> Shin, "North Korea in 2018," 37.

the state nuclear force.”<sup>16</sup> He pledged to cease nuclear and inter-continental ballistic missile testings and that nuclear weapons would never be used against another country unless there was nuclear threat and provocation against the DPRK first. From then on, all of the party and country’s efforts would be focused on “socialist economic construction.”<sup>17</sup>

What was North Korea trying to accomplish regarding these three countries at their respective meetings? Though there are no government documents to examine or officials to interview, we can base our assumptions on decades of negotiation with North Korea and previous public statements by the government. When it comes to exactly what happened during those meetings, we can also look at official reports from North Korean news agencies for more insight.

### ***The Korean Central News Agency***

The Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), the official news agency of North Korea, was founded in December 1946. In January 1997, it launched its website with dispatches available in English. It provides radio and television broadcasts as well as reports from North Korean newspapers like the Rodong Sinmun, publishing daily news stories in Korean, English and Spanish. It also delivers external news to domestic media, producing summaries of international and inter-Korean news for distribution to officials and to Pyongyang-based embassies and international organizations. It is also a member of the Organization of Asia-Pacific News Agencies. Journalists at KCNA have trained overseas with Reuters and BBC.

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<sup>16</sup> “3rd Plenary Meeting of 7th C.C., WPK Held in Presence of Kim Jong Un,” *Korean Central News Agency*, April 21, 2018.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*



The role of the KCNA, according to a Marxist-Leninist concept of the press, is to function as “an agitator, a propagandist, and an organizer.”<sup>18</sup> Throughout the country’s history, media has been an important tool for spreading socialist thought — in 1995, Kim Jong-il urged news media to “intensify their functions of indoctrination and control to help solidify the country’s regime.”<sup>19</sup> The KCNA is a subsidiary organ of the cabinet, speaking on behalf of the Korean Workers’ Party and the DPRK government, and is administered by a political bureau.

Foreign news media has periodically been allowed into North Korea, though the only full time foreign correspondents as of 2019 were from Russia’s TASS news agency; China’s People’s Daily, China Central Television (CCTV) and Xinhua news agency; and Cuba’s Prensa Latina.<sup>20</sup> The Associated Press, Agence-France Presse and Kyodo News Agency have bureaus in Pyongyang, though none have a full-time presence in the country. Subsequently, the KCNA is one of few easily accessible sources of information about North Korea. Summitry especially entails vast media attention, enlarging the usual sizes of international and domestic audiences. Especially for the more secretive meetings that took place in China and North Korea, the KCNA was a primary source of information for external news outlets seeking to report on the course of events.

This study attempts to answer the question, how does English-language North Korean state media coverage of the 2018-2019 summits that took place between Kim Jong-un, Xi Jinping and Donald Trump reflect North Korea’s foreign policy goals and stances toward the respective countries? In the next section, we will look at previous analyses of North Korean state

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<sup>18</sup> Shelton A. Gunaratne, ed., *Handbook of the media in Asia*, (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2000), 588.

<sup>19</sup> Gunaratne, *Handbook*, 591.

<sup>20</sup> Oliver Hotham, “Havana’s man in Pyongyang: Cuba’s first full-time North Korea correspondent,” *NK News*, March 21, 2019, <https://www.nknews.org/2019/03/havanas-man-in-pyongyang-cubas-first-full-time-north-korea-correspondent/>.

media and what they have revealed about how the country employs specific rhetoric in their news coverage.

### ***Previous Research on North Korean Media***

Much of the research on North Korea, especially in the history discipline, has relied on external documents, such as those that were declassified after the fall of the Soviet Union. Due to the limited amount of information and authoritative documents on North Korea that actually originate from the country, many scholars have also made extensive use of defector interviews as well as KCNA coverage to conduct empirical research on North Korea. Many humanitarian organizations have had extensive access in North Korea as well, though they do not offer their information freely as to not jeopardize their presence in the country and to protect their sources.

Timothy Rich has done extensive research involving analysis of English-language North Korean media. In a 2010 study analyzing all KCNA daily reports in 2010, Rich found a strong association between the U.S. and nuclear issues in contrast with the other countries at the Six Party talks.<sup>21</sup> His 2012 study then looked at how references to Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il corresponded with certain political and economic rhetoric. He uses corpus frequencies and descriptive statistics to look at explicit references to topics such as “military, songun politics, economics, anti-imperialism, *juche*, nuclear issues, peace, reunification, revolutionary, socialism, sovereignty, and war,” finding clear distinctions in rhetoric between Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il.<sup>22</sup> A side analysis also found that mentions of the U.S. fell far below mentions of China and Russia, with all three well under mentions of Japan and South Korea. In his 2014 study, he examines North Korea’s nuclear rhetoric over time in correlation with different variables, such as

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<sup>21</sup> Timothy Rich, “Deciphering North Korea's Nuclear Rhetoric: An Automated Content Analysis of KCNA News,” *Asian Affairs An American Review* 39, no. 2 (April 2012): 73-89.

<sup>22</sup> Timothy Rich, “Like Father Like Son? Correlates of Leadership in North Korea's English Language News,” *Korea Observer* 43, no. 4 (Dec. 2012): 8.

conservative or liberal United States-South Korea presidential dyads. Through analyzing coverage from 1997-2012, Rich's study found no correlation between liberal or conservative leadership and nuclear references, rather finding that nuclear references have been increasing steadily over time.<sup>23</sup> He also confirmed again that like in his 2010 study, nuclear coverage is strongly connected to the U.S. Overall, Rich attempts to demonstrate that North Korea's own English-language materials are not just "boilerplate propaganda," and analysis of these materials can find "intentional variation" that may provide insight into the inner workings of the DPRK.<sup>24</sup>

Research by Whang, Lammbrau, and Joo used KCNA coverage to deduce North Korea's intentions behind its nuclear testing program. They found that North Korea's nuclear rhetoric under Kim Jong-il was targeted at an international audience, and increased usage of words in KCNA like "suppression" and "downwithimperialism" was detected directly before a nuclear test.<sup>25</sup> Articles emphasizing North Korea's ties with sympathetic countries like China and Russia were also published. In contrast, nuclear rhetoric under Kim Jong-un targeted a domestic audience through references to his father.<sup>26</sup> Whang, Lammbrau, and Joo used supervised machine learning to analyze KCNA coverage, first utilizing the machine learning process on a training data set before applying it to a test data set.

A comprehensive analysis of 42,000 KCNA articles — covering every KCNA article published in English from 1997-2006 — by Mason Richey in 2019 focused specifically on North Korea's "internationally-directed belligerent rhetoric." Richey looked for correlations between this kind of rhetoric and various events, such as major U.S.-led military exercises, top-level

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<sup>23</sup> Timothy Rich, "Propaganda with Purpose: Uncovering Patterns in North Korean Nuclear Coverage, 1997–2012," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 14, no. 3 (2014): 435.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 428.

<sup>25</sup> Taehee Whang et. al., "Talking to Whom? The Changing Audience of North Korean Nuclear Tests: Changing Audiences for North Korean Nuclear Tests," *Social Science Quarterly* 98, no. 3 (Sept. 2017): 983-984.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 986.

North-South Korea summits, Japan-North Korea negotiations, and North Korean provocations.<sup>27</sup> However, he only found a very weak pattern of more inflammatory rhetoric during times of higher tension and less inflammatory rhetoric during times of lower tension, leading him to conclude that North Korea's belligerent rhetoric is a complex "mixture of signal and noise."<sup>28</sup>

Debin Zhan's analysis of KCNA and Rodong Sinmun coverage of China, Russia and the United States over a period of time found increasingly negative coverage of China, leading to the conclusion that there was a change in North Korea's attitude toward China. During that time, the KCNA published many more articles per month on Russia and the U.S. Coverage of the U.S. was still overwhelmingly negative, but the increase in the number of articles showed North Korea's shift to prioritize DPRK-Russia and DPRK-U.S relations. The proportion of negative articles per month stayed the same for Russia and the U.S. but increased significantly for China since July 2014, showing the KCNA has "engaged China as a quasi-hostile country."<sup>29</sup> Weiqi Zhang and Dmitry Zinoviev's 2018 study took a comprehensive look at coverage of China as well, but used certain terms classified as positive and negative to come to a more nuanced conclusion about North Korea's attitude toward China. Survival in the international sphere meant a need to preserve good relations with China, but at the same time, they could not portray too much reliance on China in order to preserve Kim Jong-un's domestic authority. "To achieve this goal, the KCNA under Kim Jong Un focused on promoting ideological sentiment, such as the "traditional" friendship between the two countries, and downplayed China's role in the North Korean economy."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Mason Richey, "Cheap Talk, Costly Talk, Crazy Talk: Patterns in North Korea's English Language Propaganda," *The Pacific Review* 32, no. 4 (July 4, 2019): 548.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 562.

<sup>29</sup> Debin Zhan, "Analysis of Changes in North Korea's Cognition of China through Its Media Coverage," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 28, no. 2 (June 2016): 212.

<sup>30</sup> Weiqi Zhang et. al., "How North Korea Views China: Quantitative Analysis of Korean Central News Agency Reports," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 30, no. 3 (Sept. 2018): 390.

Many scholars have also examined media coverage of the Six Party Talks, a series of meetings between North Korea, South Korea, China, Japan, Russia and the United States from 2003-2007. Jang, Hong and Frederick focused on the idea of media framing, looking at how China's Xinhua news agency framed the talks compared to KCNA. They coded articles based on how positive or negative the depictions were of each nation involved, as well as three national interest frames: cooperation, conflict and threats.<sup>31</sup> This was done by two independent coders who cross-examined all the articles for inter-coder reliability. Their approach was adopted from Giffard and Rivenburgh in their analysis of news coverage by major international news organizations — AP, IPS, and Reuters — of six major U.N. summits, to investigate how effective hosting U.N. summits is as an “image management strategy.”<sup>32</sup>

With the exception of Jang, Hong and Frederick's study, most studies that have analyzed North Korean media coverage have examined a large body of news coverage in attempts to uncover overarching patterns in rhetoric related to the Kim leaders, topic and country correlations, or changes in coverage prompted by events. Less research has been done on how North Korean media might cover specific events, especially ones that Western media have little to no access to. Though meetings in neutral locations such as the Joint Security Area, Hanoi and Singapore were more accessible for international press, meetings that took place in China — often without warning — and North Korea were less so. In those cases, sources like the KCNA can be important in shaping the outside world's perception of those meetings.

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<sup>31</sup> Won Yong Jang et. al., “The Framing of the North Korean Six-Party Talks by Chinese and North Korean News Agencies: Communist Propaganda and National Interests,” *Media International Australia* 154, no. 1 (February 1, 2015): 46.

<sup>32</sup> C. Anthony Giffard et. al., “News Agencies, National Images, and Global Media Events,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 77, no. 1 (March 1, 2000): 9.

This study theorizes the following: State media of authoritarian governments such as North Korea, when covering news of diplomatic summits, will include different language, themes or topics that reflect the country's negotiation position and goals.

To examine this theory, each country will be analyzed against the following hypotheses:

News articles about meetings between Kim and Xi will emphasize China and North Korea's long-standing friendship and cooperation.

News articles about meetings between Kim and Moon will emphasize economic cooperation and peace on the Korean peninsula.

News articles about meetings between Kim and Trump will emphasize denuclearization and a normalization of DPRK-U.S. relations.

### ***Data and Methodology***

Interpreting possible foreign policy goals expressed through North Korea's media coverage requires a methodology that both allows for interpretation of public statements that may have changing underlying meanings depending on the context and a quantitative look at the language used to look at which topics may have been emphasized. Consequently, this paper uses a software-assisted discourse analysis that is often used to analyze media discourses to look at the context of language used as well as gather quantitative data on topics or themes discussed.

This paper compiles and examines North Korean state media coverage of summits between Kim Jong-un and other state leaders over the course of 2018 and 2019 to come to an understanding about how North Korea utilizes state media in foreign policy, and what foreign policy goals can be derived from the media coverage during that time period. I examined a total of 11 meetings that took place between Kim and Trump, Kim and Moon, and Kim and Xi, beginning with Kim and Xi's March 25-28, 2018 meeting and ending with the brief meeting

between Kim, Moon and Trump on June 30, 2019. Though there may be differences in KCNA's Korean and English coverage, this study analyzes the English content produced by KCNA itself rather than English translations of its Korean coverage. This would better capture North Korea's signaling to an international audience for foreign policy purposes, as its English coverage is presumably not targeted toward its domestic audience. I ended up analyzing 80 articles, applying codes for particular phrases and topics.

The Rodong Sinmun newspaper is regarded as the official mouthpiece of the Workers' Party of Korea, often announcing official policies or declarations. Subsequently, many scholars have also used content analysis of the Rodong Sinmun in research, or a combination of the two. The Rodong Sinmun website contains articles in both Korean and English, but the English articles only go back to Jan. 2, 2018. However, because KCNA ([kcna.co.jp](http://kcna.co.jp)) contains articles stretching back to 1997, scholars doing research that requires a large amount of data over time have preferred KCNA over Rodong Sinmun. All the articles on summits used in this particular research project can be found on both KCNA ([kcna.co.jp](http://kcna.co.jp)) and the Rodong Sinmun, but only a select number are on [kcna.kp](http://kcna.kp).

My approach is similar to that of Jang, Hong, and Frederick, where two human coders read through all of the articles and analyzed the articles for topic framing and whether it gave a favorable or unfavorable depiction of the countries involved. Due to resource constraints, I was not able to have my data analyzed by multiple researchers. Though analysis solely done by one human (myself) may naturally be prone to errors and personal biases, this problem can be minimized by establishing clear guidelines and explanations for when to apply the codes, similar to Giffard and Rivenburgh's approach that Jang, Hong, and Frederick's approach was adopted from. When applying codes, I noted down specific words and phrases as indicators for when to

apply a certain code. Re-reading the articles several times and re-checking all the codes can ensure that the codes created while analyzing the later articles will be applied in the earlier articles as well. Even so, the problem of code selection bias and potentially significant omitted topics or phrases that I did not code for exists as another limitation of my study. Some may question why I did not treat the word “comrade” as significant or why I included “reconciliation” and “unity” within the umbrella of the “cooperation” code. However, these choices were simply made with my judgement as a researcher and journalist as which themes may be most important in news coverage of diplomatic negotiations.

I did not directly look at word frequencies or perform regression analyses between correlated codes because of the vastly smaller body of data I examined compared to other scholars. The total number of references coded were in the low hundreds, compared to the thousands found in some studies like Rich’s analysis of nuclear rhetoric. This is a limitation of my study, as it is difficult to come to definite conclusions on North Korea’s relationships with the other two countries based on statistically significant evidence.

This paper also does not use machine learning techniques or sentiment analysis as used by some other scholars analyzing North Korean media. Automated analysis techniques may be less adept at distinguishing when a certain paragraph or phrase is irrelevant and should not be included in analysis. Though this might not impact the results when working with a large body of data, it is significant when working with a small number of articles covering just 11 distinct events. For example, if an article describing Kim Jong-un’s departure included North Korean officials warmly sending him off and wishing him the best, the positive interaction indicated by the word “warmly” should not be included because it has no relation to the media’s portrayal of the summit events themselves or the opposing country.



Unlike some other studies, my analysis did not involve trying to determine an overall positive or negative sentiment toward China and the U.S. As the purpose of summits are to foster cooperation and oftentimes produce an agreement or declaration, it is unlikely for any country to be producing outrightly negative rhetoric toward the country they are engaging with. Additionally, during the period of time these meetings were held, relations between North Korea and the U.S. went from highly antagonistic to exchanging words of praise.<sup>33</sup> Moon was also pursuing a strategy focused on engagement and cooperation reminiscent of the Sunshine Policy during previous South Korean presidents Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun's administrations. For such a specific and nuanced period of time, a positive or negative frame would not have been particularly useful.

Finally, my study does not include other KCNA articles published about the summits during the same time frame the summit articles were picked out from. This excludes editorials, which are sometimes used to express stronger opinions — often belligerent or critical ones — and may have included insights on North Korea's sentiment toward the summit or certain topics at that time. This was mainly due to resource constraints and to narrow the body of data for examination. However, the KCNA is ultimately part of the DPRK's propaganda arm and any article, regardless of whether it is classified as a news article or editorial piece, only portrays what the regime chooses to reveal to the world. Even an analysis of just the articles specifically covering the meetings between Kim and the other world leaders should accurately portray North Korean sentiment, as previous scholars have discovered in their studies.

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<sup>33</sup> Aaron Rugar. Twitter Post. Sept. 29, 2018, 5:25 P.M.  
<https://twitter.com/atrupar/status/1046194339301527552>.

### *Gathering Articles for Analysis*

I accessed the [kcna.co.jp](http://kcna.co.jp) website using a VPN with the location set to Japan. For each meeting date(s), I looked at the KCNA stories starting three days prior to the start date and lasting to three days after the start date, downloading any article related to the summit as a PDF. This includes describing Kim Jong-un leaving for or returning from the summit, activities or events attended by any of the parties involved, as well as speeches given by any of the parties. Though there may be articles covering the meeting that exist outside the three days before and after time range I chose, this range was chosen to limit the scope of the project, as well as reflect a period of increased international attention to North Korean news and any information accessible by the public.

Several stories were excluded from my analysis. Articles describing Kim Jong-un's visits with the Singaporean Prime Minister and the Vietnamese embassy during the summits with Trump were not included, as well as an article describing Kim's tour around Singapore. The content of the articles had no relevance as they made no mention of the summit itself. However, they were included in numerical article counts, as they are still part of the overall coverage and media attention given to the event. An increased number of articles published by KCNA — essentially a propaganda tool for the DPRK — even if only to describe Kim waving at eagerly waiting crowds, can show more emphasis or attention sought for a summit. During this time period of meetings, Kim also had his first meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin on April 25, 2019. This meeting was not included because of its one-time occurrence and scarce number of articles for adequate analysis.

After identifying and downloading the articles for analysis, I imported them into Atlas.ti, a program used to analyze discourse by attaching certain “codes” or phrases and sentences to

find recurring patterns or themes within a set of data. I applied these codes based on a set of definitions I created (see Appendix 1). The articles were sorted by world leader; one meeting that involved both Trump and Moon was included in the Trump category because it was an impromptu meeting initiated by Trump (see Appendix 2).

*Table 1: Results of Code Analysis*

	<b>Donald Trump</b> (15 article analyzed)	<b>Moon Jae-in</b> (34 articles analyzed)	<b>Xi Jinping</b> (32 articles analyzed)	<b>Totals</b> (80 articles analyzed)
<b>Cooperation</b>	4	28	11	43
<b>Denuclearization</b>	10	13	2	25
<b>Familial</b>	0	2	17	19
<b>Friendship</b>	3	0	95	98
<b>Historic</b>	26	43	6	75
<b>Metaphor</b>	1	5	5	11
<b>Mutual</b>	6	4	0	10
<b>New Relations</b>	7	0	0	7
<b>Overcoming Challenges/Past Hostilities</b>	17	12	3	32
<b>Past Leaders</b>	0	0	14	14
<b>Peace</b>	19	34	13	66
<b>Peninsula</b>	18	26	20	64
<b>Positive Interactions</b>	5	33	49	87
<b>Reunification</b>	0	13	0	13
<b>Success/Results</b>	10	8	13	31
<b>Sincerity/Honesty</b>	6	9	29	44
<b>Socialism</b>	0	0	27	27
<b>Totals</b>	132	230	304	666

*Table 2: Code Co-occurrence*

	<b>Denuclearization</b>	<b>Familial</b>	<b>Friendship</b>	<b>New</b>	<b>Past</b>	<b>Peace</b>	<b>Peninsula</b>	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Reunification</b>	
				<b>Relations</b>	<b>Leaders</b>			<b>Interactions</b>		
<b>Denuclearization</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	19	0	0
<b>Familial</b>	0	0	7	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
<b>Friendship</b>	0	7	0	0	0	10	2	5	0	0
<b>New Relations</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Past Leaders</b>	0	0	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Peace</b>	8	2	2	0	0	0	0	35	0	6
<b>Peninsula</b>	19	0	5	0	0	0	35	0	0	4
<b>Positive Interactions</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Reunification</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	4	0	0

### *Meetings With Xi Jinping*

Consistent with expectations, KCNA articles about the Kim-Xi summits strongly emphasized the long-standing special relationship between China and North Korea. The “friendship” code appeared in 24 of the 32 Xi articles and was applied to phrases such as “DPRK-China friendship” and “friendly relations.” Of the 98 instances coded with “friendship,” 95 were found in Xi articles with the remaining 3 in the Trump articles. It was often accompanied by adjectives like “comradely,” “deep revolutionary,” and “traditional.” It’s interesting that this code did not appear in any of the articles about meetings with Moon, and only appeared in two of the Trump articles in the form of the phrase “friendly feelings.” Based on skimming other daily KCNA articles, it seems that friendship is a term that is reserved for fellow socialist countries.

In the same vein, 18 of the 20 mentions of “familial” appeared in Xi articles with the remaining 2 in Moon articles. This code was used to identify instances where the relationship between the DPRK and China was depicted as going beyond friendship and more akin to a brotherly or family-like connection. The word “fraternal” — of or like a brother or brothers — was often used along with “sealed in blood,” and a luncheon between Kim, Xi, and their wives was described as having a “happy family atmosphere.”<sup>34</sup>

Other codes exclusively found in articles on Xi summits were “socialism” and “past leaders.” Mentions of socialism emphasized a common struggle of the DPRK and China for the socialist cause. In one instance, the KCNA writes, “socialism is the unchangeable core of the DPRK-China relationship.”<sup>35</sup> Nine articles also made references to previous North Korean leaders Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il or “leaders of elder generations” of both countries as the

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<sup>34</sup> “Kim Jong Un Meets Xi Jinping again,” *Korean Central News Agency*, May 8, 2018.

<sup>35</sup> “Supreme Leader Kim Jong Un Hosts Banquet for President Xi Jinping,” *Korean Central News Agency*, June 21, 2019.

bedrock of DPRK-China cooperation and friendship. These references indicate a promotion of the traditional relationship between the DPRK and China and an emphasis on ideological sentiment, like previous scholars have found in KCNA's coverage of China.<sup>36</sup>

The code "sincerity/honesty" was also found throughout coverage of the Xi meetings. Gratitude was "heartfelt" and actions were done with the utmost "sincerity." These descriptors may have played into North Korea's attempt to portray an image of trustworthiness, as the failures of past agreements can cause countries to call into question North Korea's willingness to actually follow through with any deals that are made in negotiations.

Kim's meetings with Xi either immediately preceded or followed every single meeting with Trump. However, the purpose of the Xi meetings compared to those with Trump and Moon, was very different — one that remains relatively unknown beyond speculation. They did not result in any signed documents or declarations, only verbal promises of respect and support. The Xi articles also included descriptions of lengthy orations on friendship and destiny and sermonizing on the common cause of socialism. Descriptions of the talks remained general, as exemplified by this excerpt from an article on their March 28, 2018 meeting:

"The supreme leaders of the two parties and two countries of the DPRK and the PRC exchanged views on important matters including the development of the DPRK-China friendly relations and the issue of handling the situation of the Korean peninsula."

In general, Xi articles included a large number of what I classified as "positive interactions," which described interactions between the world leaders and people involved in the summits. Kim and Xi never just greeted each other; they "warmly" greeted each other or exchanged "warm" greetings. They "warmly" welcomed, "warmly" waved, "warmly"

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<sup>36</sup> Zhang, "How North Korea Views China," 390.

congratulated and had “warm” send-offs. This code was found 49 times throughout the articles covering the Kim-Xi meetings.

China is North Korea’s oldest ally and biggest trade partner, and has frequently defied international efforts to sanction the isolated country. North Korea has long acted as a buffer state between China and the U.S. troops stationed in South Korea, and also serves as leverage when negotiating with the U.S. But after a year of frequent missile testing, China was frustrated along with the rest of the world — expressing those frustrations by voting in favor of UN sanctions and issuing condemnations of North Korea’s ballistic missile launches.<sup>37</sup> The two countries are also party to the 1961 Sino-North Korean Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance, a mutual defense treaty that says China will come to North Korea’s defense in the event of an attack. This treaty automatically renews every 20 years, with the next renewal coming up in 2021.

Under these circumstances, North Korea’s repeated mentions of friendship and historical ties may have been an effort to signal that they are (or would like to be) back in China’s good graces. Just a year earlier, KCNA criticized China in a rare move accusing the country of “dancing to the tune of the U.S.” and publishing a commentary saying “The DPRK will never beg for the maintenance of friendship with China.”<sup>38</sup> However, on March 6, 2018, South Korean National Security Advisor Chung Eui-yong announced that Trump had agreed to meet Kim by

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<sup>37</sup> Joshua Berlinger, “China, Russia condemn North Korea’s missile launch,” *CNN*, Feb. 13, 2017, <https://www.cnn.com/2017/02/12/asia/north-korea-missile-test-china/index.html>.

<sup>38</sup> Don Melvin et. al., “North Korea Condemns Lone Ally China Publicly for 'First Time',” *NBC News*, Feb. 24, 2017, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/north-korea/north-korea-condemns-lone-ally-china-publicly-first-time-n725086>; Reuters Staff, “North Korean media issues rare criticism of China over nuclear warnings,” *Reuters*, May 3, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-china/north-korean-media-issues-rare-criticism-of-china-over-nuclear-warnings-idUSKBN17Z1TA>.



May.<sup>39</sup> Kim and Xi's first meeting took place less than three weeks after that. A seemingly closer relationship between North Korea and China is beneficial for both countries when it comes to dealing with the U.S. It signals that North Korea has other options, and Kim does not have to make a deal with Trump; China's support strengthens its bargaining position. China signals its continued presence and influence in the region.

### *Meetings With Moon Jae-in*

Coverage of the meetings between Kim and Moon did include mentions of economic cooperation and peace on the Korean peninsula, partially supporting the hypothesis. However, these mentions are limited to a few articles detailing the agreements made after each summit, and there are other significant codes that contribute to a more complex analysis of this set of articles. KCNA articles on the Moon summits included coverage of signings of declarations and agreements, or at least detailed descriptions of the topics discussed: denuclearization, NGO and humanitarian cooperation, family reunification, etc.

The "historic" code appeared the most frequently in KCNA coverage of meetings between Kim and Moon. Everything was historic — there was seldom ever a mention of the "north-south summit" and "Panmunjom declaration" without the word "historic" in front of it. Next was the word "peace," which was tagged with "peninsula" 14 out of the 33 mentions. Other codes found in conjunction were "reunification" and "denuclearization." Note that "reunification" used in this context refers to family reunification and not reunification of the Korean peninsula. "Reunification" was not mentioned in any of the Trump or Xi articles. This makes sense as the topic is more of a concern for those on the Korean peninsula and not as much

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<sup>39</sup> Chung Eui-yong, "Seeking 'Peaceful Resolution': Transcript of South Korean Adviser's Remarks," Published in *The New York Times*, March 8, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/08/world/asia/transcript-south-korea-nuclear-trump.html>.

policy-wise for the U.S. and China. This is a reflection of the complexity of North Korean diplomacy — its fate is intimately tied to decisions by major world powers, who all have widely different objectives and priorities. At the same time, it must think of its own people and the country it inhabits the peninsula with.

Instances of the code “overcoming challenges/past hostilities” were found 12 times, which is not as significant but still worthy of mention. In these instances, past relations between North and South Korea are characterized as the following: “division and confrontation,” “extreme hostility and confrontation,” and “mistrust and disputes.” Some instances also characterize the summits as the start of a new era of relations between the two countries and a fresh start.

Though Kim and Moon only met three times compared to Kim meeting Xi five times, KCNA published more total articles on the meetings with Moon than the meetings with Xi. They included detailed descriptions of all the activities the two did together, such as climbing Mt. Paektu, having a luncheon on the shore of Samjiyeon (Lake Samji), watching an artistic performance, and planting a symbolic tree during both the April 2018 and September 2018 meetings. This may be one reason why the Moon articles also had a high number of “positive interactions” that took place during the course of those relatively low-stakes activities.

There were only 8 instances of “success/results” in the Moon coverage compared to 10 in the Trump coverage and 13 in the Xi coverage. The Moon summits seemed to be, at least from an outside observer’s eye based on the KCNA’s own coverage, the most successful of the three. During the course of the Kim-Moon summits, the two leaders signed two joint declarations: the “Panmunjom Declaration on Peace, Prosperity and Reunification of Korean Peninsula” in April

and the “September Pyongyang Joint Declaration.” Both were filled with specific objectives and significant agreements about economic and cultural exchange.

In the Panmunjom Declaration, the two boldly declared they would “totally stop all hostile acts against the other side,” “declare the end of war this year,” and that their joint target was to turn the Korean peninsula into a nuclear-free zone through “complete denuclearization.” It also mentioned frequent communication and cooperation in the future regarding NGOs, family reunification, relinking railways, and participation in the 2018 Asian Games — during which the two countries competed together as “Korea” in three sports.

The May meeting was largely skipped over by the KCNA, with only a single article published about the meeting. It was held just two days after Trump abruptly announced that he would be pulling out of the slated June 12 Singapore summit but quickly said it might be back on again. What we know about the meeting comes from an address from Moon, who said the two discussed the upcoming Kim-Trump summit and made plans for more high-level talks between the two Koreas.<sup>40</sup>

In September, Kim and Moon met again as planned, signing the “September Pyongyang Joint Declaration.” This agreement included implementing a north-south joint military committee, reopening the Kaesong Industrial Complex and Mt. Kumgang tourism project, and making a joint advance into the 2020 Summer Olympics as well as considering a joint bid to host the 2032 Summer Olympics. Regarding denuclearization, Kim also agreed to shut down the Tongchang-ri missile engine testing site and, if the U.S. takes “corresponding actions in line with the spirit of the June 12 DPRK-U.S. joint statement,” the Nyongbyon nuclear facility.

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<sup>40</sup> Moon Jae-in, “Full address by South Korean President Moon Jae In on May 26 inter-Korea summit,” Published in *The Straits Times*, May 27, 2018, <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/full-address-by-south-korean-president-moon-jae-in-on-may-26-inter-korea-summit>.

With the exception of the brief meeting with Trump at the Joint Security Area in June 2019, Kim and Moon did not have any additional meetings that year.

Many observers were thrilled with the outcome of the May declaration, with one declaring that “the risk of inter-Korean conflict [is] now close to zero” and “this means no more nuclear tests, missile launches, reconnaissance operations, or even escorted forays into disputed waters by North Korean crab fishermen.”<sup>41</sup> In retrospect, several of the plans Kim and Moon did come to fruition. The first family reunions since 2015 were held in August 2018, allowing 88 elderly South Koreans to meet with family members in the North for three days.<sup>42</sup> In November 2018, the first South Korean train crossed into North Korea since 2008, carrying experts that examined the country’s outdated rail system.<sup>43</sup> However, relations have only deteriorated since, and in early 2020, North Korea blew up its joint liaison office with the South in Kaesong — the very office established in the Panmunjom declaration from April 2018. North Korea had withdrawn from this office in March 2019 after a failed summit with the U.S. in Hanoi.

For Kim, who announced in 2018 a pivot to economic development, this time period represented a window of opportunity for engagement with South Korea. After the conservative Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye administrations, which took harsher stances toward North Korea involving the cutting off of economic and diplomatic ties, the Moon administration marked a return to the Sunshine Policy from the Kim Dae-jung and Roh time period. Detailed description of the agreements made and characterizations of positive interactions and success can improve North Korea’s image and aid in encouraging further engagement with the country. Due

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<sup>41</sup> Patrick Monaghan, “Don’t Forget About the Panmunjom Declaration,” *The Diplomat*, May 30, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/05/dont-forget-about-the-panmunjom-declaration/>.

<sup>42</sup> Choe Sang-hun, “Korean Families, Separated for 6 Decades, Are Briefly Reunited,” *The New York Times*, Aug. 20, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/20/world/asia/north-south-korea-family-reunions.html>.

<sup>43</sup> “South Korean train crosses DMZ into North Korea,” *BBC News*, Nov. 30, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-46395408>.

to the often complicated optics involved with working with North Korea — public opinion, domestic foreign policy apparatus, international opinion — these meetings must be worthwhile to continue. We know that KCNA does not always report in this kind of matter — when the Kaesong complex was destroyed, an article wrote that the destruction of the “useless house” was “in reflection of the zeal of our enraged people to punish human scum who challenged the noblest dignity and prestige of our country and those who sheltered the scum, perpetrators of shuddering crime.”<sup>44</sup> The mentions of peace on the peninsula and warm relations between Kim and Moon in the coverage of this set of meetings are consistent with what we believe were Kim’s objectives in these meetings.

The “historic” and “overcoming challenges/past hostilities” codes were more unexpected, as my initial assumption was that coverage would portray the two countries’ engagement as something that was natural and expected as one people. However, the repeated mention of the historic-ness of these meetings as well as the challenges and hostile relations from the past that had to be overcome certainly made them seem like bigger and more significant achievements. The only previous meetings between South Korean and North Korean presidents were in 2000 between Kim Dae-jung and Kim Jong-il and 2007 between Roh Moo-hyun and Kim Jong-il. It may have been a way to signal that North Korea was coming to the bargaining table once again with a fresh mindset, but like with the U.S., they still come with the baggage of past hostilities and failed negotiations.

### ***Meetings With Donald Trump***

Consistent with expectations, KCNA coverage of the Kim-Trump meetings heavily emphasized the summits as the start of a new normal in DPRK-U.S. relations as well. Like the

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<sup>44</sup> “Ominous Prelude to Total Catastrophe of North-South Relations,” *Korean Central News Agency*, June 17, 2018.

Moon articles, the most common code in the Trump articles was also “historic,” with the word used before mentions of “summit,” “DPRK-U.S summit,” “meeting,” or “handshakes.” The next most common codes were “peace” (appearing 19 times) and “peninsula” (appearing 21 times), with 14 instances of the two occurring together. “Peninsula” was almost always accompanied with “peace,” “denuclearization,” or “cooperation.” It only appeared by itself 3 times.

The Trump articles only included four instances of “positive interactions,” with the phrases “amicable,” “pleasant,” and “warm.” However, they focused on the historical antagonistic relationship between the two countries and overcoming or departing from them. There were 17 instances of the “overcoming challenges/past hostilities” code, which included phrases such as “putting an end to the decades-long hostile relations” and “end the evil cycle of confrontation and antagonism.” When characterizing the past relationship between North Korea and the U.S., these instances make frequent use of the “hostile” and “hostilities.” However, like with South Korea, there is also emphasis on a new start, or era to DPRK-U.S. relations. The exact phrase “new DPRK-U.S. relations” was used four times in just the one article announcing the joint statement signed by Kim and Trump after the June 2018 meeting. Adding to the emphasis on “historic,” the KCNA acknowledges the failures and frustration of the past and frames the summits as an end to all of it — they mark the start of a new era. The high number of codes is significant due to the fact that the number of articles analyzed for Trump is half that of Moon.

The “cooperation” and “friendship” code were found very few times in the set of Trump articles. The word “friendship” itself was never even used; only “friendly” made its way in a handful of times.

The Singapore summit ended with a joint declaration with ambitious, yet vague promises for cooperation and peace. It reaffirmed the commitment North Korea already made in the April 27, 2018 Panmunjom declaration to work toward the “complete denuclearization of the Korean peninsula.” The joint declaration also included a line on prisoner of war/missing in action remains and repatriation of those already identified. However, declarations require plans to put them in action, and we have not yet seen details for the implementation of the Singapore declaration.

The summit in Hanoi is of special interest because it ended early after Kim and Trump could not agree on a deal and was labeled a “failure” by observers.<sup>45</sup> In press conference remarks made at 2:15 p.m. local time on day 2 of talks, Trump said, “On North Korea, we just left Chairman Kim. We had a really, I think, a very productive time. We thought, and I thought, and Secretary Pompeo felt that it wasn’t a good thing to be signing anything.”<sup>46</sup> Trump attributed the inability to reach an agreement to North Korea’s demand for all sanctions to be lifted. Regarding sanctions, Trump said, “They were willing to denuke a large portion of the areas that we wanted, but we couldn’t give up all of the sanctions for that.”<sup>47</sup>

However, the KCNA article “Supreme Leader Kim Jong Un, President Trump Hold Second-day Talks,” made no mention of the early breakdown of the talks. It concluded with:

“The top leaders of the two countries appreciated that the second meeting in Hanoi offered an important occasion for deepening mutual respect and trust and putting the relations between the two countries on a new stage.

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<sup>45</sup> Sue Mi Terry, “Assessment of the Trump-Kim Hanoi Summit,” *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, Feb. 28, 2019, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/assessment-trump-kim-hanoi-summit>.

<sup>46</sup> Donald Trump, “Remarks by President Trump in Press Conference,” Feb. 28, 2019, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-press-conference-hanoi-vietnam/>.

<sup>47</sup> Trump, “Remarks by President Trump in Press Conference.”

They agreed to keep in close touch with each other for the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and the epochal development of the DPRK-U.S. relations in the future, too, and continue productive dialogues for settling the issues discussed at the Hanoi Summit.

Kim Jong Un expressed his thanks to Trump for making positive efforts for the successful meeting and talks while making a long journey and said goodbye, promising the next meeting.”

The following two days, the KCNA published detailed articles on Kim’s meeting with the president of Vietnam. The rhetoric used in those articles was quite similar to that of the Xi articles, emphasizing socialism, previous leaders, traditional friendship, and cooperation. Reading the KCNA, one would not even know that the Hanoi talks had ended early. Instead, Foreign Minister Ri Yong Ho gave a statement to the international media in Vietnam, contradicting Trump’s statement by saying that North Korea was only seeking partial sanctions relief, not a complete lifting of sanctions.<sup>48</sup> They had also offered to permanently halt nuclear tests in addition to dismantling the Yongbyon nuclear complex.

According to Elizabeth I-Mi Suh, communication between North Korea and the United States had taken place only through state media outlets — “overlaid by ideological propaganda” for decades, with the first direct negotiations occurring during post-Cold War engagement.<sup>49</sup> Since then, new channels of communication have opened up, yet use of media coverage and indirect statements are still being utilized in negotiations. The Trump administration has been egregious in its use of media during those summits. Suh also notes that state media under the Kim regime has been particularly optimistic in its media narratives since 2018 and relatively cautious in mentioning the U.S. administration by name compared to its attacks on its southern

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<sup>48</sup> Reuters Staff, “North Korea offered proposal but U.S. asked for more at summit: foreign minister,” *Reuters*, Feb. 28, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-usa-conference/north-korea-offered-proposal-but-u-s-asked-for-more-at-summit-foreign-minister-idUSKCN1QH2BZ>

<sup>49</sup> Elizabeth I-Mi Suh, “Making it Personal: Signaling Between Donald Trump and Kim Jong Un,” *Security and Peace* 38, no. 2 (2020): 88.



neighbor. This may indicate North Korea feels that it has more leverage in its negotiations with South Korea compared to the United States.

Finally, Kim and Trump met briefly at the Joint Security Area on June 30, 2019, generating only one KCNA article of coverage. It was again a historic meeting, marking the first time a U.S. president had ever set his foot in the DPRK across the Military Demarcation Line. Kim mentioned “good personal relations” with Trump, a phrase he did not mention elsewhere.<sup>50</sup> And despite the short and last minute nature of the meeting, both leaders “expressed great satisfaction,” the KCNA reported.

In many ways, these summits were historic — no U.S. president had ever met with a North Korean head of state. However, they also came with the baggage of nearly 25 years of negotiations over North Korea’s nuclear program, starting from North Korea’s signing of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1985, threats of withdrawal in 1993, and negotiations that eventually led to the October 1994 Agreed Framework. Since then, sanctions have been removed and re-imposed, more talks have been held, but North Korea does not appear to be any closer to denuclearizing — all the while conducting more and more missile and nuclear tests.<sup>51</sup> Many argue that the unsuccessful negotiations are the result of the failure to uphold their side of the bargain on both sides, but regardless, it still stands that North Korea has only moved forward in their nuclear development agenda. Like KCNA coverage of the South Korean summits, the emphasis on the historic-ness of the meetings and the accomplishment of covering past hostilities may have been an attempt to signal North Korea’s apparently newfound enthusiasm for engagement with the U.S. and convince them to continue that engagement beyond the first and second summits.

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<sup>50</sup> “Supreme Leader Kim Jong Un Has Historic Meeting with U.S. President Donald Trump at Panmunjom,” *Korean Central News Agency*, July 1, 2019.

<sup>51</sup> Collins, “25 Years of Negotiations and Provocations.”

KCNA's coverage echoes what Kim said himself during the course of the summits. In Singapore, he said via translator, "There will be challenges ahead but we will work with Trump. We overcame all kinds of skepticism and speculations about this summit and I believe that this is good for the peace."<sup>52</sup> He also said, "Today we had a historic meeting and decided to leave the past behind. The world will see a major change," again using the word "historic." Trump made similar comments in Singapore. "The past does not have to define the future," he said, and claimed that this time would not be like past administrations' attempts to deal with North Korea.

**Table 3: Summary of Analysis**

Leader	Meetings	Articles	Major Themes
Xi Jinping	March 25-28, 2018	9	Historical friendship Brother-like relationship Positive interactions Socialism/ideological connection
	May 7-8, 2018	2	
	June 19-20, 2018	11	
	Jan. 7-10, 2019	2	
	June 20-21, 2019	7	
Moon Jae-in	April 27, 2018	9	Deals and achievements in economic relations and cooperation Peace on the peninsula and family reunification Overcoming past hostilities
	May 26, 2018	1	
	Sept. 18-20, 2018	24	
Trump	June 12, 2018	8	Denuclearization Peace on the peninsula Overcoming past hostilities Fresh start
	Feb. 27-28, 2019	6	
	June 30, 2019 (with Moon)	1	

<sup>52</sup> "North Korea summit: Trump, Kim sign 'comprehensive' document — live updates as they happened," *CBS News*, June 12, 2018, <https://www.cbsnews.com/live-news/trump-kim-jong-un-summit-north-korea-historic-meeting-singapore-to-day-2018-06-11-live-updates/>.

## ***Conclusion***

Though the themes found in the KCNA coverage was not exactly as predicted in the initial hypotheses for Xi, Moon, and Trump, there were distinct differences in the phrases and types of rhetoric discussed in coverage of meetings Kim had with each world leader. Analysis of this coverage shows that in an authoritarian regime like North Korea, where all media is controlled by governmental authorities, one of the purposes of state media can be to support foreign policy goals through coverage that is largely aimed at an international audience. Additionally, rather than only contributing to North Korea's negotiating position toward the country it is meeting with, coverage may also have been signaling to improve its position in subsequent meetings with other world leaders, as seen with the Xi meeting held right before Kim's first meeting with Trump.

KCNA coverage of the Kim-Xi meetings emphasized China and North Korea's historical friendship that is more familial than just regular friendship. This relationship will prove to be important to maintain for North Korea moving forward, as the country once again moves down a path of nuclear development that may put it at odds with other countries. Articles on the Kim-Moon meetings included details on the plans for economic cooperation and development of peace on the Korean peninsula, but also described a lot of positive interactions and used warm rhetoric to describe an air of friendliness between the two. They also emphasized the historicity of the summits between the leaders of the two Koreas that have been divided since 1945. Finally, coverage of the Kim-Trump meetings was similar to that of the Kim-Moon meetings in its emphasis on their unprecedented nature and a fresh start to the relationship between the two countries. It frequently mentioned denuclearization, as it has always been one of the most

prominent demands from the U.S. in all negotiations that have taken place between the two countries.

The events after this period of frequent meetings as well as recent events, however, have shown that regardless of what state media is saying at a given time, North Korea's position is constantly changing, and it is difficult to predict what their goals are — just like any other country. At the Eighth Party Congress that opened January 5, 2021, Kim once again called for a focus on nuclear development, saying, “We must do everything we can to increase nuclear war deterrence even further as we build the strongest military capability.”<sup>53</sup>

The KCNA reported that “U.S. hostile policy towards the DPRK has become more violent, not getting weak” and said “that a key to establishing new relationship between the DPRK and the U.S. lies in the U.S. withdrawal of its hostile policy towards the DPRK.” It also described North Korea as a “responsible nuclear weapons state.”<sup>54</sup> Regarding South Korea, it expressed an interest in continuing to improve relations between the two Koreas, but accused the south of “going against the implementation of the north-south agreement on guarantee of peace and military stability in the Korean peninsula.” However, it described North-South relations from three years ago as a “starting point of peace and prosperity” that they desired to return to, but it would depend on the “South Korean authorities’ behavior.” The engagement between North Korea and China, South Korea, and the U.S. was perhaps not as constructive as many had hoped, but KCNA reporting shows that at least at that time, North Korea may have been eager to use those opportunities to engage more with the international community and express their desire for cooperation. The commandeering of the summits by the young Kim were likely also useful for

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<sup>53</sup> Sangmi Cha, “North Korea's Kim urges stronger military capabilities as party congress ends,” *Reuters*, Jan. 12, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/instant-article/idUSL1N2JO020>.

<sup>54</sup> “Great Programme for Struggle Leading Korean-style Socialist Construction to Fresh Victory,” *Korean Central News Agency*, accessed at *KCNA Watch*, Jan. 9, 2021, <https://kcnawatch.org/newstream/1610502377-14004652/great-programme-for-struggle-leading-korean-style-socialist-construction-to-fresh-victory/>.

internal legitimacy — formal recognition by leaders of two of the most powerful countries in the world is certainly a boost for his authority. Overall this study demonstrates the potential usefulness of English-language KCNA output, and more analysis can be done as part of research on how state media is used in the authoritarian system of North Korea.

*Appendix 1*

<b>Leader</b>	<b>Dates</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b># of Articles Published</b>
Xi	March 25-28, 2018	Beijing, China	9
Moon	April 27, 2018	Inter-Korean Peace House (south side of Joint Security Area)	9
Xi	May 7-8, 2018	Dalian, China	2
Moon	May 26, 2018	North Korea	1
Trump	June 12, 2018	Singapore	8
Xi	June 19-20, 2018	Beijing, China	11
Moon	Sept. 18-20, 2018	Pyongyang, North Korea	24
Xi	Jan. 7-10, 2019	Beijing, China	2
Trump	Feb. 27-28, 2019	Hanoi, Vietnam	6
Xi	June 20-21, 2019	Pyongyang, North Korea	7
Trump (and Moon)	June 30, 2019	Freedom House (south side of Joint Security Area)	1

*Appendix 2*

<b>Code used</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
Meeting	Used to sort the articles by which meetings they were written about
Cooperation	Mentions of cooperation, reconciliation, unity
Denuclearization	Mentions of denuclearization or nuclear-free peninsula
Familial	Depiction of a relationship as connected by blood, brother-like
Friendship	Mentions of friendship, friendly relations
Historic	Any mention of historic or description of something as being the first time in history
Metaphor	Use of metaphor or figure of speech
Mutual	Any mention of mutual
Overcoming Challenges/Past Hostilities	Phrases involving overcoming past hostilities, breaking past cycles, or starting anew
Past Leaders	Mentions of previous North Korean leaders (Kim Il-sung, Kim Jong-il) or elder leaders
Peace	Mentions of peace, peaceful
Peninsula	Any mention of peninsula or the Korean Peninsula
Positive Interactions	Interactions between Kim and the respective leaders that included positive description words such as warmly, warm, amicable, pleasant
Reunification	Any mention of reunification
Success/Results	Mentions of successful or phrases that indicate satisfactory results
Sincerity/Honesty	Mentions of sincere, heart-felt, open-hearted, candid, honest
Socialism	Any mention of socialism or socialist

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