



PRÍSTUP TEORIE ROLÍ A SEVEROKOREJSKÉ ANALÝZY ZAHRANIČNÍ POLITIKY

ROLE THEORETIC APPROACH AND NORTH KOREAN FOREIGN POLICY ANALYSIS

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Článek analyzuje zahraniční politiku KLDK s využitím teorie rolí. Tento teoretický a konceptuální aparát je nejprve představen a zohledněna jsou specifika jeho aplikace na případovou studii KLDK. Následně je věnována pozornost metodě obsahové analýzy, s jejíž pomocí jsou identifikovány role, které KLDK ve zkoumaném období deklarovala a rovněž je za pomoci těchto rolí interpretována zahraniční politika KLDK. V závěru je kriticky zhodnocen ústřední předpoklad teorie rolí o existenci korelace mezi deklarovanými rolemi a praktickou zahraniční politikou. Případová studie KLDK většinou potvrdila platnost tohoto předpokladu.²

Klíčová slova: KLDK, teorie rolí, národní role, obsahová analýza, analýza zahraniční politiky

In this article, I analyse DPRK's foreign policy using the role theoretic approach. I introduce the role theoretic approach with emphasis on specifics of the North Korean case. Furthermore, attention is paid to the method of content analysis, which stands for crucial methodological instrument helping me to identify the roles DPRK declared. Right after identification of the roles declared, the DPRK's foreign policy is interpreted. Finally, the core assumption of the role theory is examined, i.e. that a correlation exists

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between rhetorically declared roles and practical foreign-political steps. I conclude with the assertion that this core assumption seems to be mostly valid but some contradictions were also discovered in North Korean case.

Key words: DPRK, role theory, national role, content analysis, foreign policy analysis

JEL: F5, Y10

1 INTRODUCTION

In last twenty or thirty years, the North Korean foreign policy has become a popular topic for researchers all over the world. Very often, papers emerging in that particular field of interest numerically exceed those dealing with the North Korean domestic policies. Recently, we have seen the appearance of historical works mapping the developments of North Korean diplomacy (e.g. Armstrong 2013), publications dealing with the DPRK's relations with particular countries (e.g. Suh 2014), increasing bulk of works whose authors try to detect crucial processes and determinants influencing North Korean foreign policy formation (e.g. Frank 2010) and many more. In comparison with its domestic policy, North Korean foreign policy can be examined and interpreted relatively more easily (although hardly without problems and methodological challenges). We have been able to approach more resources and materials, mainly statements and discourses delivered by North Korean political elites that were dedicated to the international community. Despite this, our knowledge in this sphere is far from complete.

I argue that the role theory can contribute significantly to the ongoing academic debate on the DPRK's foreign policy. Working with this innovative conceptual framework enables us to track down both the continuities and changes of the North Korean foreign policy and also to follow its patterns relying exclusively on primary resources. Therefore, in this paper, I decided to apply the role theoretical approach for studying the North Korean foreign policy that has not been comprehensively used in this context yet and thus, it can bring us to interesting findings. The goals of this article are threefold. Firstly, I aim to identify the roles declared by the North Korean regime between 2011 and 2015. Secondly, I want to detect and interpret changes of the North Korean role sets that emerged after the death of Kim Jong Il. Using role theoretic approach, I intend to observe both foreign-political patterns of Kim Jong Un's regime and its delimitation against his father's one. Simultaneously with the identification of the role the DPRK declares, I also provide interpretation of its foreign policy based on my role theoretical background. Third, I aim to test the core assumption of the role theory, i.e. that a correlation exists between rhetorically declared roles and practical foreign-political steps (or the role performance/enactment).

The structure of this paper is the following. First, I introduce the conceptual framework of the role theory that I intend to use with particular emphasis on its application in the North Korean case, which surely is highly specific. In this part, I highlight possible challenges that may arise from the application of the role theory on the North Korean case. Second, the methodology of the content analysis I intend to employ in addition to the role theory will be briefly presented. Third, I will apply the role theoretic framework to the analysis of foreign policy of the DPRK between 2011 and 2015. Simultaneously with the analysis of the North Korean roles I will interpret the changes in the North Korean role sets in relation to both the development of the North Korean contacts with “significant others” in the international environment (see below) and its leadership transition.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND KEY CONCEPTS

In the very beginning of this section, I feel obligated to declare my metatheoretical background as it is not automatically obvious with a mere enactment of the role-theoretical approach. I perceive myself as a moderated social constructivist. I believe I can generate useful knowledge about the world we live in, i.e., I can actually approach the roles North Korea declares using the method of content analysis of North Korean discourses. Therefore, from epistemological point of view, similarly as Alexander Wendt (1999, p. 39–40) does, I believe in science in the framework of socially constructed world. As it has probably become obvious after reading the previous paragraph, my aim on the field of science is the understanding: I want to better understand how the North Korea perceives the part it plays in the international politics and how its interaction with other actors impact that as it can potentially facilitate the communication with the DPRK. Besides other things, I assume the change of North Korean roles relates to the interaction with the so called significant others, i.e. the primary socializing agents for particular role beholder (comp. Harnisch 2011).

The role theory I work with here has not always inclined to social constructivism. Initially, i.e. in the 1970s and afterwards when it had been introduced by Kalevi J. Holsti (1970), the absolute majority of authors working with it were strong IR realists. However, starting with the end of the Cold War and culminating after the year 2000, most authors accepted the constructivist (or interactionist) background. The interactionist role theory scholars stressed the relevance of role demands and Alter's expectations when contemplating about the role enactment and paid more attention to the process of role learning where the actors decision to accept or not to accept a role is shaped both by the others' expectation and by their own judgement of particular situation (Wehner – Thies 2014, p. 415; Harnisch 2012, p. 49; McCourt 2012, p. 379). This is the stance I accept in this paper as well.

By admitting the significant, others are the important source of the roles North Korea declares, the need emerges to find out who they are in the North Korean context.

Some actors (such as the United States or South Korea) seem to be obvious representatives of this group whereas the influence of other actors (such as various human rights groups or coalitions) on the North Korean roles' formation is much less apparent. So far, there has been a serious lack of literature dealing with this issue and thus, it is one of my component objectives in this paper to determine who the significant others were in the time period I examined.

At this place, it is also necessary to present the notions crucial for both role theoretical approach and this study. Firstly, it is a concept of role or national role which stands for the North Korean regime's expressions of its commitments, tasks and duties that are formed in the process of North Korean interactions with the significant others. In other words, the roles should be understood as a combination of self-conceptions held by Ego and expectations of the Alter (comp. Maull – Kirste 1996). By accepting the interactionist point, the claim that the roles are stable perceptions held by foreign policy makers (comp. Wish 1980) becomes increasingly challenged.

Another concept we should explain is the role set. Role set is a sum of national roles in a given time framework. Basic time unit I work with is the year and therefore, the role set as I understand it in this paper is a sum of national roles that were identified in twelve months. Furthermore, I refer to role deviance and role change in this study. Dirk Nabers (2011, p. 84) defines the role change as “a change in the shared conception and execution of typical role performance and role boundaries”. He also urges us to carefully distinguish the role change from the deviance which can be understood as behaviour which is not connected with given role and thus falls outside its frame (ibid.).

The last concept I should briefly introduce here is the role enactment. Holsti (1970, p. 245) defines it as foreign political actions or practical diplomacy employed by states. Other authors work with this concept similarly (comp. Shih 1988, p. 601).

3 METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES OF APPLYING ROL THEORY ON THE DPRK CASE STUDY

When applying the role theory to the North Korean case we must take into consideration certain methodological implications. Role theorists concur in the point that the roles are declared and enacted by the foreign-political elites or by the highest foreign policy representatives. However, when approaching the North Korean foreign policy we are confronted with a situation where we cannot unequivocally say who exactly are the foreign policy representatives constantly influencing the shape of North Korean role sets. As Lim (2002) or Koga (2009) point out, we are unable to determine the precise mechanisms of duties and responsibilities in the DPRK political system. The important foreign political statements are delivered by various authorities on various levels. Moreover, some crucial discourses such as the New Year editorials, which are generally perceived as one of the most important objects of reference for the

DPRK's policy analysis of the Kim Jong Il's era (and in the first year of Kim Jong Un's era), were published with no reference to particular author and had institutional authorship. Last but not least, after Kim Jong Un came to power in the very end of 2011, he initiated various changes in North Korean decision-making structure which became more obvious recently.³ This situation leads us directly to the first challenge regarding the content analysis I intend to do: the North Korean settings make an a priori selection of the principal elites consistently in charge of foreign policy (comp. Le Pestre 1997, p. 13) questionable. Facing this problem, certain modifications of the existing approach were necessary.

It was my focus on the North Korean national roles' presentation abroad which helped me to reduce the spectrum of sources suitable for the content analysis. First, there are not many consistently accessible platforms where the DPRK presents its national roles. I argue that the North Korean English-written newspapers and magazines are the only place one can use for consistent and long term period-oriented content analysis. Additionally, my focus on the DPRK's roles abroad actually eliminated various Korean-written newspapers such as *Rodong Sinmun* (Workers' Newspapers in English) that are often used by the DPRK-oriented scholars from the scale of potentially useful resources as these are primarily dedicated to the domestic audiences.

In particular, I focussed on relevant parts of North Korean English-written newspaper named *The Pyongyang Times*.⁴ After I did so, I thoroughly went through

³ It became obvious that in the framework of the process of consolidation of his power, Kim Jong Un initiated the changes in the decision-making structure as well. Most recently (in the end of June 2016), this resulted in the establishing of a new lead government body named the *Commission on State Affairs* chaired by Kim Jong Un which actually replaced National Defence Commission which stood for the crucial decision-making organ of Kim Jong Il's era. (comp. Grisafi 2016 or Kim 2016).

⁴ In the framework of existing English-written North Korean medial landscape, *The Pyongyang Times* is the best resource for the purposes of my analysis. Of course, there is the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) website providing news adopted by North Korean medial scene. On the first sight, it might seem the KCNA could function as ideal source where one should search for the NRs. Nevertheless, this resource has many issues. First, the reports published here are often too short and thus, they do not provide sufficient space for roles to appear. Second, the reports relevant for the purposes of my investigation (i.e. the foreign political texts that are rather general) seldom appear. More often than not, the KCNA publishes either insignificant news (for example about the floral baskets or congratulations received by regime) or propaganda articles focused mainly against the United States, South Korean conservative political scene or Japan. If the foreign policy-related reports appear, they usually announce the past foreign delegations' visits to the DPRK or similar events austerely. Third, there is serious problem with availability of the online archive. Up to June 2015, the online archive of reports going back to year 1997 was available on the official KCNA website. Nevertheless, the website had been transformed thoroughly in the end of June 2015 which resulted in deletion of the archive. Additionally, even when the archive had been available, the DPRK authorities were known to alter or delete content which made systematic long-term investigation based on the

these texts for the first time and eliminated those that were too tied with particular foreign political measures. This step I made is also supported by the method used by authors in the book edited by Le Pestre (Le Pestre [ed.] 1997). In his chapter, Le Pestre points out all the authors in the book made an effort to select “only general foreign policy pronouncements, that is, the speeches that embraced a variety of issues” (Le Pestre 1997, p. 13). By identification of such general statements, I was also able to reduce the spectrum of elites who delivered the relevant texts. Kim Jong Un, North Korean Foreign Ministers, their deputies, members of the Workers' Party Korea Central Committee, National Defence Commission, Presidium of the DPRK Supreme People's Assembly, Korean Peoples' Army General Political Bureau/Supreme Headquarters, Cabinet, Academy of Social Sciences and the North Korean representatives/delegations at various international bodies have had significant influence on the articulation of roles.

As I have briefly mentioned above, I also worked with the articles focused on the foreign politics written by the given magazine/newspaper's redaction members. With respect to the fact news redactions members' statements articulated in articles (again, these articles cannot be too tied with description of any particular foreign political measures) are regime-controlled, it is possible to accept them as relevant resources where one should also look for the roles. To give just one example, in the beginning of the year (mainly in January or February), The Pyongyang Times usually publishes an article emphasising the crucial principles of the foreign policy for the given year where the NRs are articulated very clearly. If I omitted this kind of materials from my analysis, I would lose important resource where the roles are articulated.

Another methodological challenge which applies to the DPRK case is the non-democratic nature of the country itself leading us to important questions. What if the role-declaring actors were neither genuine nor rational? When searching for suitable analytic tools for the foreign policy analysis of the Third World countries, Sofiane Sekhri (2009) touches this issue and her conclusions can be linked to North Korean foreign policy analysis too. In particular, Sekhri (2009, p. 431) argues that neither dishonesty nor irrationality is pretext to decline the usefulness of the role theoretic approach. This is especially relevant for this paper too. Besides the fact these features can easily be found even in Western democracies, the sincerity is not really the issue I aim to investigate here. Rather, I focus on how the North Korean elites represent the role the DPRK should play in international politics and how this representation impacts the way how they conduct the actual foreign politics. Therefore, the starting point for me is the analysis of North Korean roles perceived as self-presentations of a nation on the international scene.

KCNA online archive even more unfeasible. Due to above mentioned difficulties I decided to omit the KCNA as a source for searching for the roles.

4 SEMANTIC CONTENT ANALYSIS⁵ AND ROLE THEORY IN NORTH KOREAN CONTEXT

At the end of this theoretical section, I would like to briefly outline specific features connected with applying the content analysis as a crucial instrument for the identification of roles North Korea declares.

Generally speaking, the main aim of the content analysis I conduct is to find the statements consistent with the national roles. My research is mainly interpretative and qualitative. After sorting out the relevant extracts of the texts, I ascribe certain “qualities” to them which I call the national roles. On the basis of this ascription of “qualities”, I subsequently interpret the North Korean foreign policy. In order to delimit sufficiently representative sample of statements and articles for the content analysis, I sort out the texts according to *location, language and thematic relevance*. I have already described this process above. Therefore, it is sufficient to state here I search for rather general statements of the DPRK's regime elites and articles focused on the foreign politics in The Pyongyang Times.

There is a scale of possible ways we can implement when identifying the roles in the assorted texts. There is a possibility to *a priori* adopt Holsti's typology of 17 roles (comp. Holsti 1970) together with their delimitation. Nevertheless, if I did so, I would have become both overly tied with his categories and unable to consider the specifics of the North Korean case. Therefore, I am favorable both to taking account of the North Korean specifics when I work with Holsti's categories and to the identification of the new roles' categories if they fit North Korean case.

In particular, I start actual analysis with the identifying the relevant key words in the *baseline texts* (i.e. the texts from year 2011). These texts function as so called *referential texts*, i.e. the texts that set the standard used for subsequent comparison with the texts of the following years (comp. Hájek 2014, p. 41). I carefully analyse the baseline texts and locate the extracts where the role-expressing statements are present. Afterwards, I look at these extracts identifying rather general *key words* that regularly occur in correlation with the occurrence of a role. Like Le Pestre (1997) I believe that the observation of the key words surroundings enables me to localize the relevant extracts of texts where I can expect the occurrence of NRs. This claim is further supported by Martin Hájek who argues that “the application of such a categorized vocabulary helps us to distinguish the passages of text which deal with specific topic” (Hájek 2014, p. 39).

The key words identified in this process are: “duty”, “responsibility”, “world”, “motherland”, “people”, “country”, “nation”, “international”, “foreign”, “we” and

⁵ Semantical content analysis refers to the processes enabling the classification of symbols (or in our case, references national roles) according to their meaning (Janis according to Krippendorff 2013, p. 50).

“DPRK”, whereas the most relevant key words, i.e. key words whose surroundings most frequently implied the role statement, seemed to be “people”, “nation”, “country”, “we” and “international”.⁶ Having identified the roles expressed in key words' surroundings, I label the relevant text extracts by *codes*, i.e. by the name of particular role. Subsequently, I continue with the content analysis using the key words in the following years of our dataset (i.e. the relevant texts published between 2011 and 2015). Firstly, I observe the presence of roles articulated and identified earlier. Secondly, I examine whether some new roles occurred. As the role theoretic scholars generally perceive the roles as relatively stable categories, I can expect that the roles that the majority of roles that were present in previous years will probably occur in the following years as well. Using this method, I gain a picture of the North Korean role sets which provide me with a good stepping stone for a subsequent analysis.

Let me now explain how I understand the function of the codes in my analysis. As Hájek (2014) claims, codes can have two possible functions: factual and referential whereas the latter is more relevant for my analysis. The *factual coding* requires exact definition of the actual content of the codes in advance. On the other hand, the *referential coding* refers to those codes that are created “on the fly” which implies we cannot guarantee the exact contents of the referential codes in advance. Therefore, if I accept the referential function, the code labels particular text extract as relevant with regard to the analysed topic and it actually represents rather heuristic tool which one can use for the construction of categories (ibid, p. 63–64). What are, however, the implications of accepting the referential function of the codes?

If I accepted the code in its factual function, I would have to exactly delimit and define the content of the individual NRs (used as codes) in advance. Nevertheless, with adopting of this approach, I would loose the elasticity of roles' categories, i.e. I would *a priori* decline the possibility of the meaning transformation in the framework of particular role. Therefore, I decided to work with the codes in the referential way. This means I will not guarantee the *a priori* exact meaning of the roles. Rather, I let the codes “develop on the fly”. I believe this approach is more fruitful if my aim is to observe the patterns of transformation and change of North Korean roles and role sets. I provide the definitions of individual roles in following chapter.

As my analysis is qualitative, I have to go through the texts manually in order to grasp the changing qualities of roles in a satisfactory way. Nevertheless, I used the Scantailor and Adobe Acrobat Pro 9 for the preparation of the scanned materials. *Scantailor* was mainly used for refining of the scanned materials. It helped to erase the imperfections which occurred during scanning process as these imperfections could hinder the transfer of the scanned materials to the plain text later. After refining, I transferred the materials to the plain text using *Adobe Acrobat Pro 9*. This step is

⁶ I aimed at selecting relevant key words that are as general as possible in order to prevent me from extensive focus just on the foreign-political particularities.

especially helpful as it enabled me to explore the key words' surrounding using the search engine built in the Adobe Acrobat Pro 9 which made the content analysis a bit easier.

5 NORTH KOREAN ROLE SETS BETWEEN 2011 AND 2015

Tab. 1 below represents the role sets declared by the North Korean regime between 2011 and 2015.⁷ The particular roles were arranged in a descending order according to the frequency of their occurrence. When identifying the role sets in the selected time framework, I paid special attention to how the meaning of individual roles has been developed and transformed. Let me now approach to the analysis of roles I identified.

Internal Developer. As we can see, the role *internal developer* has been dominating the role set in every year examined. When looking at the data in a pie chart (again, see *tab. 1*), this role stands for 27 % of the role set in 2011, 29 % in 2012, 23 % in 2013 and 30 % in both 2014 and 2015 role sets. In sum, it has been a stable part of the North Korean role sets and every year, it accounted for almost one third of the role sets. I identified the role *internal developer* according to various North Korean commitments to build a “thriving nation/country”, “powerful nation/country”, “prosperous nation/country”, or “civilized nation/country”. This role was also defined by Holsti in his pivotal article. He argued that its main point is that the government focuses most on issues of internal development and makes little reference to any particular function of the state in the international system. However, by perceiving itself as an *internal developer*, the state does not automatically rule out international cooperation, particularly in technical and economic matters (Holsti 1970, p. 269). This seems to work in the North Korean case too.

⁷ The table represents occurrences both in whole numbers as well as percentages. Please note that role incidence expressed in percentage is approximate and corresponds with the data depicted in the pie charts. I worked mainly with the printed edition of The Pyongyang Times and the online one available at <http://naenara.com.kp/>.

Tab. 1: North Korean Role Sets 2011–2015

| 2011 | occurrences | 2012 | occurrences | 2013 | occurrences | 2014 | occurrences | 2015 | occurrences |
|--------------------------|------------------|--------------------------|------------------|--------------------------|------------------|--------------------------|------------------|--------------------------|------------------|
| internal developer | 16 (27 %) | internal developer | 18 (29 %) | internal developer | 19 (23 %) | internal developer | 14 (30 %) | internal developer | 17 (30 %) |
| independent | 11 (18 %) | dignified isolate | 11 (18 %) | independent | 11 (13 %) | independent | 6 (13 %) | independent | 7 (12 %) |
| active independent | 8 (13 %) | independent | 7 (11 %) | anti-imperialist agent | 10 (12 %) | dignified isolate | 5 (11 %) | active independent | 7 (12 %) |
| regional peace protector | 7 (11 %) | united nation | 6 (10 %) | dignified isolate | 9 (11 %) | united nation | 4 (9 %) | united nation | 6 (11 %) |
| anti-imperialist agent | 4 (7 %) | powerful country | 6 (10 %) | bastion of revolution | 9 (10 %) | powerful country | 4 (9 %) | anti-imperialist agent | 5 (9 %) |
| bastion of revolution | 4 (7 %) | bastion of revolution | 4 (6 %) | regional peace protector | 8 (9 %) | anti-imperialist agent | 4 (9 %) | powerful country | 4 (7 %) |
| global peace protector | 4 (7 %) | anti-imperialist agent | 3 (5 %) | active independent | 5 (6 %) | active independent | 3 (6 %) | dignified isolate | 4 (7 %) |
| united nation | 3 (5 %) | active independent | 2 (3 %) | global peace protector | 5 (6 %) | global peace protector | 3 (7 %) | bastion of revolution | 3 (5 %) |
| dignified isolate | 2 (3 %) | example | 2 (3 %) | united nation | 4 (5 %) | bastion of revolution | 2 (4 %) | global peace protector | 2 (3 %) |
| liberation supporter | 1 (2 %) | regional peace protector | 1 (1 %) | powerful country | 4 (5 %) | regional peace protector | 1 (2 %) | regional peace protector | 1 (2 %) |
| example | 0 | global peace protector | 1 (2 %) | liberation supporter | 0 | liberation supporter | 0 | liberation supporter | 1 (2 %) |
| powerful country | 0 | liberation supporter | 0 | example | 0 | example | 0 | example | 0 |
| Total | 60 (100%) | Total | 61 (100%) | Total | 84 (100%) | Total | 46 (100%) | Total | 57 (100%) |

Source: created by author. Data extracted from all The Pyongyang Times issues published between January 2011 and December 2015 excluding The Pyongyang Times vol. 2850, no. 23 of June 6, 2015.

To sum up, the main point of this role in the North Korean case is the constant emphasis on the need of internal development. The articulation of this role reflects the North Korean dismal situation regarding the constant energy and food shortages. When closely analysing the North Korean enactment of its *internal developer* role, the really interesting aspect appearing is how this role has been transformed. Between 2011 and 2012, the DPRK emphasised building a “thriving (socialist) country”, “great prosperous country” or “prosperous and powerful country” (comp. Rodong Sinmun, Joson Inmingun and Chongnyon Jonwi 2011, p. 1, or Kim 2012a, p. 2). Although these phrases may seem to be quite vague, they are closely linked with the need of strengthening of military (and especially, nuclear) capacities and the meaning of the *internal developer* role used to be closely connected with the military build-up. Nevertheless, it started to change slowly from 2013 when regime put increasing emphasis to “economic giant building”, “civilized” or “powerful/thriving/civilized nation” building. This shift partially reflects the tendency of Kim Jong Un regime to put equal emphasis on both economy and development of nuclear weapons and it is widely known as the *byungjin* policy⁸ (or policy of parallel development of economy and military in English). This trend became even more obvious in 2015, when special emphasis was put on building a “civilized (socialist) country” (comp. Kim J. U. 2013, p. 2, or Kim 2015a, p. 2). The prominence of references to economic development in the North Korean role statements is understandable if we consider the grave economic situation faced by the DPRK. However, how can we interpret the emphasis on “building a civilized nation/country”?

The Cambridge Dictionary defines the notion “civilized country” as a country that has a “(...) developed system of government, culture, and way of life and that treats the people who live there fairly” (Cambridge Dictionaries Online 2015). What is important here is the reference to the fact that a civilized country “treats the people who live there fairly”. This is especially interesting when we take account of the radically increased pressure on solving the North Korean human rights issues emerging from significant others. Of course, this pressure was already present in the U.S. North Korean policy after 2001. However, it was not until 2012 when the International Coalition to Stop the Crimes against Humanity in North Korea (ICNK) required more rigorous investigation of the North Korean human rights record and the pressure intensified. Even more significant in this respect was the establishment of the UN Commission of Inquiry to investigate Crimes against Humanity in North Korea in 2013.

Thus, we may interpret the North Korean references to “civilized-nation building” as possible expression of its sensitivity to the increased human rights pressure coming from the significant others. In simple terms, the regime seems to feel

⁸ *Byungjin* policy firstly appeared on March 31, 2013 during the plenary session of the Korean Workers' Party (comp. Cheon 2013, p. 1).

the necessity to assure the international public that either nothing is wrong or that it is working to improve the situation. This conclusion shows us that even a non-democratic regime of the North Korean style does pay attention to its image, prestige-building and react on the pressure from abroad. Rüdiger Frank arrives at a similar conclusion regarding image building arguing that North Korea attaches high importance to it (Frank 2010, p. 20).

Furthermore, this may remind us existing debates about the influence of norms and taboos in the international environment as discussed by Richard Price and Nina Tannenwald (1996, p. 2). They try to find out why the nuclear weapons were not used and provide the alternative explanation to the deterrence theory. In particular, they claim the social and cultural meanings became attached to these weapons which gradually resulted in the refusal to use them. I argue that similar mechanism may be emerging in case of human rights norms' influence on the DPRK. Although the evidence is still very young, it seems the DPRK has actually started to reflect something what we might call *human rights abuse taboo* by labelling itself as “civilized country” recently.

Surely, this claim is relatively brave and further evidences and investigation would be needed to further support it. Nevertheless, if looking at the overall frequency of North Korean use of word “civilized” in The Pyongyang Times between 2011 and 2015, we can see its occurrence frequency has been significantly increasing as well. In particular, the articles in The Pyongyang Times tend to use this word in connection with the lives of North Korean people or above mentioned civilized nation building after 2012.⁹ As the extract of the texts where the reference to word “civilized” were often not declarations of a role, I could not include them to my data sample. Nevertheless, this rise of occurrence frequency supports my statement about possible forming of human rights abuse taboo.

Independent. This is another role that has been an important and stable part of the North Korean role set. Having a brief look at *Table 1*, we can see this role accounting for approximately 18 % of the whole role set in 2011, 11 % in 2012, 13 % in 2013 and 2014 and finally, for 12 % of the 2015 role set. This role was defined by Holsti as the effort to “(...) make policy decisions according to the state's own interests rather than in support of the objectives of other states” (Holsti 1970, p. 268). He also claims that the country's acknowledgement of a policy of non-alignment is usually connected with the role *independent*. This seems to be valid even in case of the DPRK. North Korea keeps emphasising its affiliation to the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)

⁹ Besides many others references, see for example Rodong Sinmun, Josoninmingun and Rodong Chongnyon 2012, p. 6; The Pyongyang Times 2012, p. 1; Bok 2013, p. 2; Bok 2014, p. 3, or Kim 2015a, p. 1. On the other hand, if going through the Pyongyang Times issues between 1994 and 2011, the word “civilized” in connection with North Korea occurred only very scarcely.

ideals and policies (comp. Pak 2012, p. 7) despite the fact that this platform seems to be rather inactive during the last decades.

The DPRK's statements indicating role *independent* demonstrate that the regime understands the ideal of independence as a certain condition for reaching a proper internal development of the country. As Jong (2012, p. 2) argued: "The spirit of national independence of the Korean people (...) enables them to push the development of the country". It is needed to point out that independence and self-reliance have been absolutely crucial values for North Korean regime practically since 1950s. As Charles K. Armstrong points out, ideology of Juche (which is closely connected with the principle of self-reliance) has been "the most extreme and uncompromising expression of national and economic sovereignty in the world" (Armstrong 2013, p. 53). Thus, we can expect that the role *independent* is rooted very deeply in the North Korean role sets, that it constitutes cornerstone of the DPRK's identity and that the issue of sovereignty and independence is indeed absolute and indivisible for North Korea, as Armstrong (*ibid.*, p. 292) claims. Given to such a deep nesting of the role *independent* in North Korean identity, it is neither probable this role vanishes from the role sets nor its saliency drops significantly.

From pragmatic point of view, role *independent* (and, to certain extent, *dignified isolate*, see below) are probably preserved in the role sets not only due to their firm link to North Korean identity as such as Armstrong (2013, p. 291–292) claims but also because there are strongly tied with the regime survival as such. In other words, being *independent* functions as a way for ruling elites to retain power.¹⁰ This claim seems to be relevant especially in the situation when the human rights pressure gained clearer contours and became more consistent recently.

Active Independent. This role seems to be a relatively important milestone of the DPRK's foreign policy, too, and has been present in the role sets in every year examined. Holsti defined it as an expression of an effort of particular nation to stay *independent* and uninvolved in the military and ideological commitments together with an effort to cultivate relations with as many countries as possible (Holsti 1970, p. 262). In North Korean context, I identified mainly two dimensions of this role. First, it combines DPRK's willingness to establish multiple diplomatic relations with multiple countries whereas very vague¹¹ or no conditions are laid for this. Second, this role can be perceived as an expression of an effort to avoid any impact of increasing diplomatic ties on North Korean right to self-determination and independence. Despite the fact that the commitment of being an *active independent* is relatively vague and has rather been related to a certain group of countries than to any particular one, the DPRK has

¹⁰ The experience with disintegration of the Soviet Union probably strengthens North Korean unwillingness to renounce the roles *independent* and *dignified isolate*.

¹¹ If at all, the DPRK's role declaring actors typically laid very vague conditions for establishment of new diplomatic ties. For example, they spoke about the "friendly countries", "peace-loving countries", "independence-loving countries" or "progressive countries".

consistently adhered to it. Specifically, the *active independent* role is manifested in the North Korean effort to “(...) develop relations of friendship and cooperation with countries that are friendly” (Rodong Sinmun, Joson Inmingun and Chongnyon Jonwi 2011, p. 1) or to “(...) continue to boost the friendship and cooperation with regional countries in line with its foreign policy of independence, peace and friendship” (Pak 2011, p. 8). If we analyse these role statements, the DPRK delimits the target group of actors with whom it is willing to be allied, i.e. with states (no non-state actors till 2015, see below) that are basically against the principles advocated by significant others (willingness to develop relations with independence-aspiring and justice-seeking nations) and which are prepared to cooperate with North Korea (this refers to a group of similarly thinking states, often outsiders within the international community with unfavourable reputation).

The DPRK probably aims not to restrict the spectrum of states with whom the cooperation might be feasible. Ming Lee (2009, p. 166) deals with the concept of “friendly countries” shortly in his study arguing that North Korean definition of “friendly countries” is judged by their willingness to support “(...) the DPRK's ideological commitment to build up a socialist fortress in the North, (...) the DPRK's bid for national unification and (whether or not, added by author) they join the United States and its camp in 'interfering with North Korean internal affairs' (like exerting pressure about North Korean human rights)” (Lee 2009, p. 166).

Starting from 2015, it seems this role has broadened its meaning. Whereas between 2011 and 2014 it was basically limited to developing friendly relations with peaceful *countries* that respect sovereignty, in 2015, for the first time ever, the regime declared its commitment to multilateralism and willingness to engage with non-state actors as INGOs or IGOs: “It [*DPRK, added by author*] plans to promote multilateral exchange and cooperation (...) with all nations (...) on both governmental and nongovernmental levels and international organizations that respect the sovereignty of the country and are friendly to it” (Sin 2015, p. 7).

If looking at *tab. 1* again, we can say the *active independent* role was prominent in 2011 (13 % in the role set) but its position in the North Korean role sets radically dropped in 2012 (3 %), 2013 (6 %) and 2014 (6 %). In 2015, it seems its relevance has increased again (12 %). We could interpret these changes as relating to the leadership change. At the time leadership transition started after the death of Kim Jong Il in December 2011, Kim Jong Un started to pay attention to power consolidation rather than turning to his allies. This explains the very small number of references to this role in 2012 and its recently increasing relevance.

Similar logic can be applied to other roles suggesting a more active foreign policy such as *regional peace protector* (it dropped from 11 % in 2011 to 1 % in 2012) or *global peace protector* (dropped from 7 % in 2011 to 1-2% in 2012). In 2012 at the same time, we can observe a strong increase of frequency of *dignified isolate* role that

implies a rather passive foreign policy and inward-looking tendencies reflecting Kim Jong Un's efforts to consolidate regime.

Anti-Imperialist Agent. This role represents another North Korean delimitation against the so-called arbitrariness and high-handedness of the significant others or the “imperialist states”. The DPRK has often declared the need to struggle against them as it is the only way to protect its dignity (comp. Choe 2011, p. 8). Holsti (1970, p. 264) naturally perceives this role as a typical one for the communist states that simply perceive imperialism as a serious threat they should fight against. Also, he argues that the main sources of this role include ideological principles, anti-colonial attitudes and perception of threat (ibid., p. 296).

In the North Korean case, this role was present in all the years we analysed and its content remained relatively stable – not much modification is possible regarding this role. What has slightly changed, however, is its frequency (7 % in 2011, 5 % in 2012, 12 % in 2013 and 9 % in 2014 and 2015). The increased emphasis on the *anti-imperialist agent* role in 2013 may be explained firstly, by the North Korean increased activity as far as its nuclear program is concerned that caused strong condemnation by the significant others. Secondly, the already mentioned bolstered human rights issue pressure on North Korea could also have a significant effect on the North Korean need to protest against the so-called “imperialist high-handedness” (comp. Kim 2015a, p. 3).

Bastion of Revolution – Liberator. This role has also been a steady part of the North Korean role sets (7 % in 2011, 6 % in 2012, 10 % in 2013, 4 % in 2014 and finally, 5 % in 2015) and is also defined by Holsti as an expression of willingness of a state to lead various types of revolutionary movements abroad and to liberate other nations or states and provide them with physical, moral, political or ideological support or inspiration (Holsti 1970, p. 260–261). Furthermore, he points this role has its source in anti-colonial attitudes, desire for ethnic unity and ideological principles (ibid., p. 296). This is in exact compliance with the North Korean statements oscillating around the aim to achieve “global independence” (Rodong Sinmun, Joson Inmingun and Chongnyon Jonwi 2011, p. 1) or around its effort to “build a new, independent and peaceful world, which is free from domination and subjugation and from aggression and war” (The Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea, the Central Military Commission of the WPK, the National Defence Commission of the DPRK, the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly of the DPRK and the Cabinet of the DPRK 2011, p. 3).

Moreover, an important component of this role in the North Korean case is emphasizing the need of justice in the international system: “As a member of the international community, the DPRK will make every endeavour to establish fair international relations and order” (Kim I. B. 2013, p. 7). According to Holsti (1970, p. 292), actual implementation of this role should involve sending military or other supplies to revolutionary movements in different countries and undertaking extensive programs of ideological propaganda abroad. Some of these activities are relevant in

North Korean case, especially the sending of military supplies abroad or consorting with the leftist governments or parties from Third World countries. There is serious lack of literature dealing with North Korean relations with the countries and actors I called “similarly thinking” above. The article of J. Owoeye (1991, p. 632) is one of the few. He shows the DPRK strived to gain the voting support of African countries at the UN General Assembly which was essentially aimed at the diplomatic isolation of South Korea¹².

Regional and Global Peace Protector. The role *regional protector* was defined by Holsti as an “(...) emphasis on the function of providing protection for adjacent regions” (Holsti 1970, 262). The role *global peace protector* was not identified in Holsti's study but can be identified in the North Korean case. The DPRK declared its responsibility to “(...) strive to ensure peace and security in Asia and the rest of the world” (Kim J. U. 2013, 1). Both roles seem to be a very peculiar part of the North Korean role sets as we may expect they will rather be declared by states that are endowed with material and power capabilities which the DPRK obviously lacks. Thus, how should we interpret the presence of this role in the North Korean case?

I decided not to analyse these roles separately as they basically indicate focus on the same issue (i.e. peace protection). They also share various features and important source of these roles is the threat perception which I have already mentioned before. Both of them are less significant and a complementary part of North Korean role sets which is reflected by the low level of their saliency. Both roles should be perceived as a declaration of ideational/spiritual support of peace which seems to pay lip service to the North Korean efforts to create a friendly image abroad. In that case, we may observe a certain departure from the basic statement of the role theory about an existing correlation between declared roles and practical diplomacy. During the first year of Kim Jong-un's rule, we could observe a substantially dropping frequency of both the regional and global peace protector role occurrences. In case of the global peace protector, it decreased from approximately 7 % in 2011 to 1-2 % in 2012 and in case of the regional peace protector role, the drop was even more evident, from 11 % to 1 % in 2012. Again, we could interpret this by the initial departure of Kim Jong Un's regime from rather outward-looking roles to the inward-looking ones.

¹² This tactic is similar to the competition between continental China with Taiwan. The biggest success of the DPRK's anti-South diplomacy in Africa was that it was able to strengthen its ties with Mauritania and Republic of Congo to such an extent that South Korean broke off relations with these countries in 1960s (Owoeye 1991, p. 633). In 1960s and 1970s, the DPRK even provided aid to its African allies, for example to Tanzania, Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Somalia, Algeria, Sudan, Egypt, Mali, Benin or Togo (ibid., p. 637–638). Last but not least, North Korea provided its African friends with military supplies as well. In this aspect, it is known it cooperated with Nigeria, Egypt, Libya, Uganda, Zaire, Angolan Front of National Liberation, or Mozambique Liberation Front (ibid., p. 639–642). As we can see, the North Korean ties with Africa were really vivid in the Cold War era and many have been preserved till present.

Dignified Isolate. In his pivotal article, Holsti (1970, p. 270) defines the role *isolate* as expression of a certain fear of external involvements and of emphasis on the principle of self-reliance¹³. I decided to add the adjective “dignified” to Holsti's role *isolate* as the DPRK's references to its dignity in relationship with the articulation of its *isolate* role have been common in all of the examined time period.¹⁴ To sum up, this role mainly refers to North Korean need to show the international audience that it perceives its sovereignty, dignity and political system as crucial values it is fully prepared to protect and that it is not willing to make any concessions in this respect at all.

It is interesting to observe the incidence of this role in the DPRK's role set as the enactment of this role nicely reflects the North Korean riven standpoint. On one hand, it wishes to develop relations (especially economical, technical and cultural ones) that seem to be favourable for the DPRK's regime or do not endanger the regime. This correlates with the enactment of the roles *active independent* and *internal developer*. On the other hand, the DPRK is highly suspicious to “cultural poisoning” from abroad (comp. Choe 2011, p. 8) or to any increase of foreign influence inside the DPRK, which reflects its enactment of its role “isolate”: “It is the unshakeable principle of the army and people of the DPRK not to tolerate (...) attempt to deride and encroach upon the dignity of the nation and the sovereignty of the country” (The DPRK Foreign Ministry 2012, p. 16). The suddenly increased occurrence of this role in the DPRK's role set in 2012¹⁵ reflects the initial departure of Kim Jong-un's regime from a rather outward looking roles relating to the regime consolidation, as already mentioned above.

Furthermore, it is interesting to observe the emerging hierarchy between isolation and peace protection. Starting in the first half of 2012, we can say the role *dignified isolate* became superior to the roles *regional/global peace protector* as the DPRK started to emphasize that “Peace is very dear to us but the dignity of the nation and the sovereignty of the country are dearer” (The DPRK Foreign Ministry 2012, p. 16). There were many similar statements of this type during 2012 but only one occurred in 2013 and 2014 and no statement of this kind was found in 2015. Thus, the former role hierarchy has gradually been disappearing.

¹³ DPRK has often declared the necessity to rely only on their own resources, effort and technologies, which also complies with the principle of self-reliance or *Juche*.

¹⁴ Dignity is a highly appreciated value in the North Korean context, which is also supported by Cumings (2013, p. 78) who points out that North Koreans hate to lose “face” that can be translated as “honour” or “dignity” representing an important guarantee of the regime's prestige.

¹⁵ In 2011, the role *dignified isolate* formed just 3 % of the role set. However, it grew to as much as 18 % in 2012 and its relevance in the North Korean role set was high in subsequent years too (11 % in both 2013 and 2014). Recently, we can witness a slight incidence decrease (to 7 % in 2015) which may be interpreted as a result of Kim Jong Un's regime gradual consolidation reopening a possible path to more active roles.

United Nation. This role is not present in Holsti's typology but it seems to be useful while analysing the DPRK case. The *united nation* is another role implying passive foreign policy. It represents the need of the North Korean regime to assure the international audience that, first, the people firmly stay behind their leader and, second, reading between the lines, that the DPRK will do whatever is needed to stay united: "The mental strength displayed by the army and people who are united single-mindedly behind the leader knows no limit (...)" (Jong 2012, p. 4). Although we could see references to this role even in 2011, its incidence significantly increased in 2012 (from 5 % to 10 %), dropped in 2013 (to 5 %) and increased again in 2014 and 2015 (to 9 % and 11 % respectively). We may interpret the 2012 increase as a North Korean reaction to debates throughout the international community about a possible regime change after Kim Jong Il's death. For the DPRK, the *united nation* role also functions as a certain rhetorical instrument that can be used in its fight against the enemy/imperialists. Thus, the NRCs *united nation* and *anti-imperialist agent* are frequently declared together as a mode of delimitation against the significant others.

Powerful Country. We can track the birth of this role back to the first half of 2012 becoming a stable part of the North Korean role set since then. In 2012, the elites firstly declared that the DPRK had successfully developed from a small and weak country that had constantly been under the dictate of great powers into their military, ideological and political power (nevertheless, they never mention the economic power, comp. Kim 2012b, p. 1). In 2011, the references to "powerful nation building" functioned as a part of the *internal developer* role. However, in 2012 for the first time ever, North Korea labelled itself as a "powerful country". Moreover, it seems that the DPRK's perception of itself as "powerful" is mainly based on military and ideological capabilities, not on the economical ones, which remain included in the *internal developer* role: "Today our people have grown up as the highly dignified, independent motive force of the revolution, and our country is rushing forward to attain the status of a knowledge economy and a civilized nation, demonstrating to the whole world its might as a politico-ideological power and a world-class military power" (Kim 2015b, n.p.).

6 NORTH KOREAN ROLE DEVIANCES

In the previous section, I presented and analysed the steady parts of the North Korean role sets. However, as we can see in *Table 1*, there were some roles that occurred just now and then. One of those roles was *liberation supporter*. Holsti defined this role as an expression of rather vague and further unspecified symbolical support for liberation movements abroad (Holsti 1970, p. 263). Simply speaking, it can be defined as much more passive form of above mentioned role *bastion of revolution-liberator*.

Another role that seems to be deviant from the DPRK role set is the *example* role. Holsti defined it as a state effort to emphasise “(...) importance of promoting prestige and gaining influence in the international system by pursuing certain domestic policies” (Holsti 1970, p. 268–269). Again, the North Korean case shows some specifics as far as the enactment of this role is concerned. It emphasises certain purity, mental virtues and morality of the North Korean nation that should be admired by the world. However, with an exception at the beginning of 2012, the DPRK has not declared this role anymore (so far).

7 CONCLUSION

If I return to the core assumption of the role theory about an existing correlation between articulated roles and practical diplomacy that I aimed to examine, the analysis of the North Korean role sets between 2011 and 2015 has brought me to interesting conclusions. Indeed, most of the time we could observe the assumed correlation. Roles *internal developer* and *independent* constituted a significant part of the role sets of each of the examined years reflecting the DPRK's passivity in the international arena. Moreover, the roles *dignified isolate* or *united nation*, its relevance having even been strengthened during the Kim Jong Un's era, also correlate with the North Korean foreign-political passivity. However, at some places, we could observe deviations from the core assumption of the role theory. For example, the roles *global* and *regional peace protector* are supposed to imply both stronger engagement in international affairs and significant material and power capacities that the DPRK obviously lacks. As we already mentioned above, both of those roles seem to pay lip service to the North Korean efforts to create a friendly image abroad. Consequently, it is safe to say that the core assumption of the role theory seems to be mostly valid but some contradictions were also discovered.

When reflecting the transformation of the role sets in the examined time framework, the role theory seems to be a useful instrument to grasp both changes and continuities that occurred during the power transition period. There was a quite stark contrast between the role sets of 2011 and 2012. The trend was that the DPRK turned even more to a rather inward-looking foreign-political course. That was represented by a substantial increase of the *dignified isolate* role that has remained a highly relevant part of the Kim Jong-un regime's role set until nowadays. Last but not least, it seems to us that the recent North Korean role set has been shifting back to its 2011 form, with a certain enrichment, though, namely in the form of the *powerful country* role and a strengthened emphasis on the *united nation* role.

Generally speaking, the DPRK opted for rather passive and inward-looking roles that reflect its overall inactivity in the international arena. The dataset also shows that the North Korean roles were often strongly derived from its relations with the significant others. The transformation of the *internal developer* role or *bastion of revolution - liberator* role represents this. At the same time, the material prerequisites

remain an important source of the North Korean roles, which is demonstrated by the enactment of many roles implying a rather non-ambitious and inward-looking foreign policy.

To conclude, by using the role theoretic approach we proposed an innovative interpretative framework of the North Korean foreign policy, which seems to be a fruitful analytical instrument enabling us to grasp both continuities and changes in the DPRK's diplomacy. Furthermore, the role theory also opens space for further research of North Korean foreign policy. In particular, it would be valuable to examine North Korean role sets' composition and their changes in longer time period as it could bring interesting revelations as far as the roots and origins of individual roles are concerned. In future research, the attention could be paid on *problematique* of the role conflict: I was able to grasp only some bits and pieces of it in this article. Last but not least, deeper analysis of North Korean relations and interactions with Third World countries which has been scarce so far could bring us to interesting revelations too.

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