

FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

KIM WAS KOREA AND KOREA WAS KIM: THE FORMATION OF JUCHE  
IDEOLOGY AND PERSONALITY CULT IN NORTH KOREA

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

ASIAN STUDIES

by

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2017

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my parents, for escaping another infamous personality cult of history so that I may research this one freely.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank the members of my committee, Dr. Thomas A. Breslin, Dr. Steven Heine, and Dr. Amy Bliss Marshall, for their support and confidence in this thesis and me. I especially thank them for humoring my fascination with Kim Il-Sung. I also wish to thank Dr. Jeff Buller for being a constant source of inspiration and guidance in my life.

I wish to thank the professors in South Korea who encouraged my studies on North Korea and the Korean language, especially Dr. Jae-Cheon Lim at Korea University Sejong Campus and Professor Sujeong Lee at Seoul National University.

Finally, I would like to thank my friend Sang Kyu Lee for providing Korean language help for this thesis, Amanda S. Torres for her invaluable knowledge on Christianity, and my sister Andreia for her moral support and proofreading.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS  
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Florida International University, 2017

Miami, Florida

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Juche ideology, created by founder Kim Il-Sung, governs all aspects of North Korean society. This thesis attempts to answer the questions of why and how Juche ideology and the cult of personality surrounding Kim Il-Sung were successfully implemented in North Korea. It is a historical analysis of the formation of the North Korean state that considers developments from the late 19th century to the late 20th century, with particular attention paid to the 1950s-1970s and to Kim's own writings and speeches. The thesis argues that Juche was successfully implemented and institutionalized in North Korea due to several factors, including the rise of Korean nationalism, the personal history of Kim Il-Sung, the Korean War and resulting domestic strife, and the influence of the international socialist movement. It provides a historical explanation of Juche and its importance within North Korea, which in turn is necessary for understanding North Korea as a whole.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
Section I. Introduction .....	1
What is Juche? .....	6
Section II. Historical Context .....	15
Korean Nationalism and Communism.....	17
Korean Liberation and Statehood .....	20
The Korean War.....	23
Section III. North Korea after the Korean War.....	26
North Korea-South Korea Rivalry .....	32
Section IV. The Personality Cult .....	38
Pyongyang: The Juche Stage .....	42
Juche as State Religion .....	46
The Deification of the Kims .....	56
Korean Historiography.....	61
The Personality Cult and Isolationism.....	65
Section V. Conclusion .....	68
Bibliography .....	75
Appendix.....	80

## Section I: Introduction

Despite being categorized as a Communist state, North Korea has functioned under the ideology of *Juche*, or self-reliance, since founder Kim Il-Sung first formally introduced the idea in a speech in 1955. *Juche* was, at its inception, an attempt to apply tenets of Maoist, Stalinist, and Marxist-Leninist thought to the particular cause of the Korean socialist revolution in combination with Korean nationalism. By the time *Juche* was officially inserted into the North Korean Constitution in 1972, it had become the means of justifying Kim Il-Sung's authoritarian rule and cult of personality in all aspects of North Korean society. The Kim personality cult went beyond a political dictatorship in that it dominated the daily lives of every citizen in the state, oversaw every decision, and came to resemble religious worship.

The primary purpose of this research is to examine how and why *Juche* and the personality cult of Kim Il-Sung were successfully implemented in North Korea. Specifically, it examines the internal and external influences on *Juche* ideology, including the historical and international political contexts, the role of Confucianism and religion within Korea, and Kim Il-Sung's own personal history and experiences. It considers the various different arguments and approaches of researchers and authors and enhances the overall scholarly discussion on *Juche* ideology and North Korea. Many of these works approach the formation of *Juche* ideology from strictly one perspective. This thesis serves to synthesize the aforementioned authors' arguments into one comprehensive, coherent, and multifaceted analysis of the different factors that contributed to the creation of the *Juche* ideology. It also refers heavily to the writings and speeches of Kim Il-Sung himself and of Kim Jong Il.

The study is significant for understanding the history and ideology of North Korea. Juche ideology has remained fundamentally unchanged since Kim Il-Sung first implemented it as state ideology, so understanding Juche is necessary when considering virtually all aspects of North Korean domestic and foreign policies since the Korean War. This thesis is a historical study of the factors surrounding the formation of the North Korean state, Kim Il-Sung's rise to power, and the implementation and institutionalization of Juche ideology. It considers the context of the rise of Korean nationalism, especially in the late 19th century and during Japanese colonial rule in the early 20th century. It also considers the international political context of the mid-20th century, especially the aftermath of the Korean War, and relations between the socialist states.

Countless works on North Korea and its history exist, detailing a broad range of topics and approaches. Martin (2004), Lintner (2005), and French (2005) provide some of the more comprehensive works on North Korea, though their works focus on explaining all aspects of contemporary North Korea. While their works are incredibly informative, their references to Juche and the early years of North Korea are limited to building an understanding of contemporary North Korean society.

The majority of other works on North Korea, its history, and its ideology focus on one particular aspect, be it Korean nationalism, Confucianism, or relations with other socialist states. Robinson and Robinson (1986) and Armstrong (2003) argue that the decline of the Joseon dynasty in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century set the scene for the rise of Korean nationalism. Robinson (1988), Helgesen (1991), Kihl (1994), Seth (2011), Kim (2012), and Sō (2013) all emphasize the role of Japanese colonial rule of Korea from 1910-1945 in breeding a strong sense of Korean nationalism and drawing revolutionary guerrilla

fighters to Communist thought. This thesis builds upon their arguments by comparing one example of early nationalistic Korean writings with the speeches of Kim Il-Sung on Juche. Lankov (2002) and Szalontai (2005) have provided in-depth accounts of Soviet-North Korean relations. Their work reveals that, with the death of Stalin in 1953, international Communism lacked a strong central figure for Kim to follow. The Soviet process of de-Stalinization beginning in 1956 further distanced Kim Il-Sung from full adoption of a Stalinist model of socialism in North Korea (Lankov 2002).

This study also considers the indigenous or cultural aspects of Juche ideology. Lim (1982) and Belke (1999) attempt to analyze the religious aspects of Juche from a Christian perspective, but fall short of drawing direct parallels between Juche and Christianity. This thesis builds upon their work and compares texts on Juche to Bible verses and other Christian texts to highlight their similarities. Helgesen (1991), Kihl (1994), Medlicott (2005), Kang (2011), David-West (2011), Aguirre (2014), and Kim (2014) argue that Juche absorbed many of the characteristics of Joseon Korea (1392-1897), especially Neo-Confucian ideology. As Fridell (1976) points out, Juche also incorporated aspects of Japanese colonial rule over Korea, including emperor-worship. Furthermore, these authors argue that Juche combined aspects of different approaches to Communist ideology with Confucianism to produce a unique brand of Korean socialism.

Suh (1988) and Kim (2014) highlight several important aspects of Kim Il-Sung's formative years and rise to power that may have contributed to his creation of Juche and especially of the personality cult. These include his childhood in a Christian family, competition with other Korean revolutionary fighters in Manchuria, and return to Korea after decades of exile with limited knowledge of the Korean language. Suh in particular

has provided an extensive and rich biography of Kim Il-Sung. Juche ideology justified the purges of his opponents who favored Stalinist or Maoist approaches to ruling North Korea (Suh 1988, Kihl 1994, Lankov 2002). Kim (2012) and Kihl (1994) also argue that the devastating loss of the Korean War (1950-1953) prompted the purges and introduction of Juche to restore Kim's popularity with the North Korean people. Other aspects will be also considered, including the role of Kim Jong Il in expanding the personality cult to bolster his own legitimacy before his succession as leader of North Korea, discussed by Lim (2011), and the idea of domestic isolationism, as coined by Turku (2009), applied to Juche ideology.

This thesis is divided into five sections. The latter half of this introductory section defines Juche as an ideology and explains its role in North Korea. It compares Juche to the Communist ideologies of Marxism-Leninism, Stalinism, and Maoism to emphasize how Juche is different from these approaches. The second section explains the historical context of the creation of Juche. It focuses on the birth of Korean nationalism in the late 19th century and the period of Japanese colonial rule of Korea (1910-1945). It discusses the roles of the Soviet Union and China in creating the first Korean Communist parties, as well as Kim Il-Sung's rise to power with the help of the Soviet Union after the partition of the Korean peninsula in 1945.

The third section focuses on North Korea after 1953, in the aftermath of the Korean War and the death of Stalin, during which Kim consolidated his power and introduced the idea of Juche. It discusses the international political context of the time and how it influenced the implementation of Juche, with specific focus on the process of de-Stalinization in the Soviet Union as well as the Sino-Soviet split and Kim's reluctance

to align with either the Soviet Union or China. It examines the internal conflict occurring within the Korean Workers' Party, which at the time was the disagreement between the Soviet-aligned and China-aligned factions on how to govern North Korea. The section examines Kim Il-Sung's own personal history and experiences and how they influenced the personality cult. It considers his perceived weaknesses, especially during the foundation of North Korea and after the Korean War, and why he enacted purges against his opponents. It also considers the rivalry between Kim Il-Sung and President Rhee Syngman of South Korea, who were both attempting to appear more genuinely Korean to the world than the other, and the role of Juche in this context.

The fourth chapter examines in detail the personality cult of Kim Il-Sung and provides concrete examples of its manifestations in North Korea. It discusses how Juche justified and necessitated a cult of personality. It considers how aspects of Korean history and culture, such as isolationism and Christianity, were utilized to legitimize the personality cult and Kim's absolute power. It considers the influence of Korean Confucianism as well as Japanese colonial rule and the distortion of the Confucian tenets of filial piety and familial hierarchy in the creation of the personality cult. This chapter also examines Kim Jong Il, the son of Kim Il-Sung, and his role in the creation of the personality cult. It discusses the importance of including the Kim family in the personality cult and their rewriting of Korean history in their favor in order to legitimize the dynastic succession of power from father to son.

The conclusion summarizes the creation of Juche and the personality cult. It argues that Juche was successfully implemented in North Korea because it utilized uniquely Korean elements that catered to North Koreans' desire for national pride and

esteem after a damaging and tumultuous period of history. It was also successful because Kim ensured it would be the only ideology in North Korea through ruthless purges of opponents and control of information. The conclusion considers contemporary applications of the information presented in the thesis. Specifically, it will discuss how the rigidity and unchanging nature of Juche has affected North Korea since the death of Kim Il-Sung, and how the succession of power to Kim Jong Un, Kim Il-Sung's grandson, may be understood through Juche and the personality cult.

What is *Juche*?

*Juche*, written as 주체 in North Korean *Chosongul*<sup>1</sup>, is a word of Sino-Korean origin. It is formed by the *hanja*<sup>2</sup> 主 meaning lord, master, owner, or ruler, and 體 meaning body, whole, essence, or substance. It thus translates roughly to "master of one's own body or self" and is often translated as "self-reliance" in political discourse. As Kim Jong-Il notes in his 1982 treatise to the National Seminar on the Juche Idea, "Our leader created the great Juche idea after acquiring a deep insight into the requirements of a new era when the oppressed and humiliated masses of the people became masters of their own destiny. Thus he developed their struggle for independence onto a higher plane and opened up the age of Juche, a new era in the development of human history." (Kim 1982,

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<sup>1</sup> The Korean alphabet is called *Chosongul* in North Korea and *Hangul* (or *Hangeul*) in South Korea. Both names correspond to the states' official Korean names: 조선민주주의인민공화국 (*Chosŏn Minjujuŭi Inmin Konghwaguk*) for North Korea, and 대한민국 (*Daehan Minguk*) for South Korea, which in turn link both states to periods of Korean history, the 조선 (Choson/Joseon) and 삼한 (Samhan) periods.

<sup>2</sup> *Hanja* (한자, 漢字) is the Korean name for Chinese characters and was the main medium of reading and writing Korean until the acceptance and proliferation of hangul in the 19th and 20th centuries. Sino-Korean words may be written in hanja with Korean pronunciation, though "native" Korean words are always written in hangul.

3). Juche was thus intended to be the Korean people's chance to pave their own road, and achieve socialist revolution, relying on their own minds and spirits rather than existing as a people subjugated by the forces of imperialism. Specifically, the basis of Juche is "Man," who is master of all matters, especially his own fate. Juche declares that Man may use his independence, creativity, and consciousness to bend Nature and Society to his whims and create a world better suited to him.

Under the overarching principle of self-reliance, Juche aims to achieve several goals in North Korea, which Kim termed the monolithic ideological system (Suh 1988, 302). With Juche as ideology, North Korea could achieve *chaju* (independence) in the political realm, *charip* (self-sustenance) in economic endeavors, and *chawi* (self-defense) in military affairs. These goals fit the notion that Man is the master of his own destiny, and in more practical terms, that the master of revolution is the people, Koreans armed with self-reliant thought and an ideology they may consider "uniquely Korean." French (2005) argues that these principles have dictated much of North Korea's policies, including negotiation on the international front—as *chawi* assumes all states have equal rights and importance— and military-first policies to preserve independence (*chaju*) in the face of imperialism.

The three elements of Juche, Nature, Society, and Man, may only come together successfully under the guidance of the leader, *suryong*, who is the center of society (Suh 1988, 304). Loyalty to the leader is the core element of a victorious socialist revolution in Korea, and in turn the core element of the Juche ideology. Thus, the ideology created a framework in which the cult of personality of Kim Il-Sung was a justified and logical method of inspiring unquestioning loyalty to the leader.

Juche was first introduced in 1955 as a Korean expression of the universal principles of Marxism-Leninism. Kim Il-Sung, in his 1955 speech on Juche, advised against accepting dogmatic ideas and relying solely on foreign countries' experiences; rather, he encouraged a critical analysis of other countries' socialist revolutions and a self-reliant approach to structuring the Korean socialist revolution. He specifically said, "When we study the history of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the history of the Chinese revolution, or the universal truth of Marxism-Leninism, it is all for the purpose of correctly carrying out our own revolution" (Kim 1955).

Although Kim acknowledged the basis of Juche in the "universal truth" of Marxism-Leninism, all references to the latter were largely erased from official Juche texts (French 2005, 33). French (2005) in particular argues that Kim initially emphasized a creative departure from Marxism-Leninism rather than an outright replacement of it to avoid falling out of favor with the Soviet Union, upon which North Korea was still heavily dependent before the 1970s. Despite Kim's rejection of dogmatic theory, French notes that Juche itself is "dogmatic in essence" and "operates on the basis that facts should fit the theory" (French 2005, 32). The highly dogmatic nature of Juche is essentially what granted Kim his absolute power over North Korea and has prevented any large-scale reform or change within the state.

Juche attempted to break away from the materialist ideas of Marxism-Leninism and emphasized instead the individual's (Man's) sovereignty over his own life and destiny. According to Helgesen (1991), standard Marxism-Leninism thought was driven by an overarching determinism, so that all forces were acting towards the creation of a highly-developed socialist, and eventually communist, society, as soon as the proletarians

came together as a community or collectivity. This thought also focused primarily on social classes, productive forces, and political parties, with the idea that production and material eventually gave way to advanced ideology and society. Juche lacked determinism; Man alone was capable of morphing material and society at will.

Juche was considered revisionist by Soviet and other Marxists because it dictated that a society could progress directly from feudalism to socialism without experiencing capitalism, which is the stage necessary for inciting socialist revolution in standard Marxist-Leninist thought. Standard Marxist thought also held the belief that society was divided between the capitalist and proletarian classes, and differences did not exist within the proletarian class. French notes that differentiations between workers and peasants continued in North Korea despite attempts at proletarianization of peasants into workers through collective farms. Juche's departure from the idea of class struggle was appropriate to the Korean situation because Korea was still a feudal, agrarian nation with little industry or capitalist structures in the 20th century. However, according to French, Soviet Marxists were not pleased with Kim's interpretation of Marxism-Leninism.

Kim's introductory 1955 speech on Juche, as well as all future mentions of Juche, stress a necessity to "Koreanize" the socialist revolution, and to tailor it to the specific needs of the Korean people. Helgesen argues that the need to create a "uniquely Korean" approach to socialism was in part driven by the need to inspire ideologically the Korean youth in a matter they would understand—Man is the master of his own destiny—rather than through the abstract Marxist-Leninist notions of matter and determinism. In his 1984 treatise on Juche, Kim Jong Il states,

The popular masses' consciousness of independence plays a decisive role in the revolutionary movement. Therefore, in the revolution and construction one must place the main stress on ideology and give priority over all work to the remoulding of ideology, the political work, which is aimed at raising the consciousness and activeness of the masses. (Kim 1984, 47)

Therefore, North Korean elites, especially Kim Il-Sung, were highly aware of the need to invigorate the people through an ideology to which they could relate. Moreover, Helgesen argues that this need ultimately stemmed from the inherently Confucian nature of the Korean people, which he believes is inseparable from the idea of Korean culture and did not align itself well with standard Marxist-Leninist thought. He argues both Kim in North Korea and Mao in China had to "rectify" Marxism-Leninism to fit the culture of the people in inherently Confucian societies. The Confucian nature of Juche will be discussed to a greater extent in Section IV, which details the cult of personality of Kim Il-Sung and his family.

Juche is often referred to as "Kimilsungism" which bears different connotations depending on the source. Within North Korean documents, Juche was referred to as Kimilsungism to liken it to and elevate it to the level of Marxism-Leninism, especially during the 1960s and 1970s when the monolithic ideological society was being actively implemented in North Korea (Cheong 2000). Outside of North Korean political discourse, Kimilsungism refers to Kim Il Sung's ideology, which includes Juche, the cult of personality, militarization of society, and other aspects of his rule including purging.

Kimilsungism in this regard is often compared to Stalinism in that the rulers had much in common, though references to Stalinism in North Korean documents are largely absent. The most obvious comparisons to be made are the absolute rule and cult of personality of both Kim and Stalin, the institutionalization of their ideas, as well as the

establishment of monolithic ideological systems in North Korea and the Soviet Union, control over all intellectual life within their respective societies, and a "political culture of terror" (Cheong 2000, 157). Furthermore, Kim began to consolidate his power through ruthless purges in 1956, demonstrating his displeasure with the idea of de-Stalinization, and official North Korean documents continued to praise Stalin while other socialist states portrayed him as having distorted Leninist ideas (Cheong 2000). Kim's knowledge of Stalinism and Stalin's role in the establishment of a North Korean state will be discussed in Section II of this thesis.

Kim also utilized aspects of Maoism in creating the Juche ideology, though official documents on Juche do not acknowledge a Maoist influence or basis as they do with Marxism-Leninism.<sup>3</sup> The most important borrowings from Maoism are the emphasis on the mass line and need for a Party for the masses, and the role of the national leader (*suryong*) as a guide for policy decisions at all levels. In his 1955 speech, Kim Il-Sung emphasized the masses at length, and defined them:

By the masses we mean the main masses we are relying on — the workers and peasants, and our allies who support and follow us. We should listen to them and defend their interests. Everyone, whether a Party worker, an administrative official or a functionary in a social organization, must work consistently in the interests of the revolution and the masses. (Kim 1955)

The emphasis on the masses was a departure from the elitist party system of the Soviet Union; Kim was proud to make the Korean Workers' Party an inclusive one, and its membership of over one million by 1955 created solidarity within the north and was important in establishing Kim's popularity in the formative years of the North Korean state. Kim's rise to power will be further discussed in Section II, which provides the

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<sup>3</sup> Various sources claim these Maoist influences. See French (2005), Armstrong (2004), Kim (2012), Suh (1988).

historical context for the creation of Juche. Another strategy Kim used for gaining popularity and legitimacy among the masses was "on-the-spot" guidance tours, also taken from Maoism, in which Kim and his son Kim Jong-Il often visited factories and collective farms throughout the country to provide individualized guidance and advice to the workers there. These visits became more staged, highly-reported, and subject to fanfare as the personality cult expanded and became more intrusive.

It is important to distinguish the differences between Maoist and Juche thought. Maoist thought emphasized the masses—peasants and workers—while downplaying the importance of intellectuals and scholars. Juche theory supports an alliance between intellectuals, workers, and peasants, which French (2005, 36) postulates may be a reaction to the large departure of intellectuals from north to south after the official establishment of North Korea. Another crucial difference between the two is Chinese socialism's ability to change and adapt, especially considering the usurping of supposed political and theoretical absolutes in the transition from Mao Zedong to Deng Xiaoping in the late 1970s and 80s. In comparison to Maoism, French argues that "Juche presents a substantially more fixed, rigid, and hierarchical ethic, based to a significant degree on the ancient systems of organization and caste structure in Korea but in communist clothing and with new gods" (French 2005, 41). Juche, rigid and inflexible, has resisted virtually all reform even in the face of economic disaster.

Official North Korean publications celebrate the unchanging nature of Juche; Kim Jong-Il's 1991 speech to senior officials of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea proclaimed, "Our socialism centered on the masses shall not perish" and "The practical experience we have gained in our revolution clearly shows that when the Juche

stand is firmly maintained, any problem, however complex and difficult... can be solved" (Kim 1991, 1, 13). Kim Jong-Il developed the idea of "Socialism of Our Style," also called "Our-Style Socialism" or "Korean-Style Socialism", in his 1990 speech delivered to senior officials of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea. In this speech, he praised "the immortal Juche idea" (Kim 1990, 3), credited it for North Korea's survival as other socialist states began to crumble, and blamed their demise on their strict applications of Soviet-style socialism rather than creating their "own" styles as had Kim Il-Sung with Juche.

Kim's monolithic ideological system of North Korea, as mentioned, consisted of Juche in ideology, chaju (independence) in politics, charip (self-sustenance) in economics, and chawi (self-defense) in military affairs. These principles all dictated a need for independence, self-reliance, and a strong patriotic or nationalist consciousness. Despite the nationalist sentiment intrinsic in the very idea of Juche being a "uniquely Korean" ideology, Kim discussed in his 1955 speech the complementary nature of patriotism and internationalism in regards to the international socialist movement. He says,

He who does not love his own country cannot be loyal to internationalism, and he who is unfaithful to internationalism cannot be faithful to his own country and people. A true patriot is precisely an internationalist and vice versa. If we cast aside all that is good in our country and only copy and memorize foreign things in ideological work, it will certainly bring losses to our revolution, and thereby prevent us from properly carrying out our internationalist obligations to the international revolutionary cause. (Kim 1955)

Therefore, the patriotism in Juche was necessary for creating a strong socialist state which in turn strengthened the international socialist movement and the solidarity among socialist states in the face of imperialism. However, both Suh (1988) and French (2005)

note that Kim's embrace of Marxist-Leninist internationalism allowed him to be theoretically anti-colonial and strongly anti-Western while still appearing globally progressive. In general, Juche has been described as "a doctrine of markedly xenophobic character" (Aguirre 2014, 1926), "nothing more than xenophobic nationalism" (Suh 1988, 313), and a "racial-nationalist history" (Seth 2011, 357), as well as "Korean self-reliance steeped in hyper-nationalism" (Turku 2016, 91), because of its implication of the Korean people as racially pure and virtuous and all other peoples as inferior and threatening. The nationalist or hyper-nationalist sentiment inherent in Juche was a response to a history of Korean subjugation under dominant powers and the need to establish national pride after the Korean War, both of which will be further discussed in Sections II, III, and IV of this thesis.

## Section II: Historical Context

It is necessary to understand the historical context of Korea to understand the creation of Juche. The situation on the Korean peninsula in the 20th century, namely Japanese colonial rule from 1910-1945 and the partition of the peninsula after World War II, spawned the first Korean nationalist movements of which Kim Il-Sung was a part. For Kim and other young Koreans at the time, struggle for Korean independence from Japan was part of daily life and more nationalist than socialist in nature.

The origins of Korean nationalism may be found as early as the 1880s, during the decline of the Yi or Joseon/Choson dynasty, which lasted from 1392 to 1910 (Lee 1963). From the 1880s onwards, Korean intellectuals began a reevaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of traditional Korean thought, especially in the face of new Western feats of strength. Many of the first nationalist publications,<sup>4</sup> as analyzed by Robinson and Robinson (1986), grappled with the concept of *sadae*,<sup>5</sup> or the Yi dynasty's subservience to the greater power China, and how to frame Korean identity within this context. The Chinese influence over Korea extended into the cultural and political spheres, including the adoption of Neo-Confucianism as the official ideology of the society, the emphasis placed on civil service examinations, the use of Chinese characters (*hanja*) in writing, and a hierarchical social stratification.

The negative view on *sadae*, and the desire to express Korean "national spirit" (Robinson and Robinson 1986, 41), also stemmed from the Yi dynasty's inability to

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<sup>4</sup> The first nationalist organization in Korea, the Independence Club, founded in 1896, often attacked the concept of *sadae* in its official publications, and was disbanded by the court in 1898.

<sup>5</sup> *Sadae* literally means "serving the great" and was a neutral term to describe Chinese-Korean relations during the Yi dynasty (Robinson and Robinson 1986). Yi Korea was a part of the Chinese tributary system.

prevent foreign interference in Korean affairs, especially a violent encounter with a U.S. armed merchant steamer in 1866, intrusive railroad construction started by Russia in the north, and increased pressure from Japan in the 1890s.<sup>6</sup> Korean intellectuals blamed Korean subservience on the Yi court's dependence on dogma<sup>7</sup>, which they believed stifled innovation on the peninsula. Robinson and Robinson (1986) note that the first mention of *juchesong* (consciousness of autonomy) occurred in this period, in the writings of intellectual and historian (and later, political exile) Sin Chaeho. Sin was interested in developing a Korean historical consciousness independent of what he believed was previously distorted by Confucian ideas of morality and Sinocentrism. Therefore, the origins of the Juche concept may be traced to expressly nationalist, not socialist, discourse.

Indeed, most scholars (Suh 1988, Armstrong 2003, French 2005, Seth 2011, Kim 2012) agree that the first socialist-leaning organizations founded in colonial Korea were less concerned with ideology than with liberating Korea from colonial rule. The first left-leaning Korean group, the Korean Socialist Party, was founded in 1918 by anti-Japanese guerrilla fighter and Korean Bolshevik Yi Tonghwi for Korean exiles living in the Russian Far East (Armstrong 2003, 10). By the early 1920s, the party had nearly seven thousand members, and communist thought became the standard of anti-colonial political discourse and resistance among Koreans both in and outside of Korea.

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<sup>6</sup> The General Sherman Incident will be mentioned again in Section IV as an example of the rewriting of Korean history to suit the Kim personality cult.

<sup>7</sup> It is interesting to note that this debate still holds in North Korea today. *Sadae* still exists in practice in North Korea, which remains dependent on China to a large degree, and reliance on dogma ultimately has once again stifled Korean innovation.

## Korean Nationalism and Communism

Seth (2011) argues that the Korean nationalist movement gained traction in Korea rather quickly and uniformly because of the "strong sense of Korean cultural identity, the homogeneity of Korean society, and the intrusive and intense nature of Japanese colonial rule" (Seth 2011, 299). Japanese rule over Korea in the first half of the twentieth century was harsh, destructive, and extremely debilitating to the Korean people (Kim 2012, 321). In the first decade of rule, the Japanese, through a highly centralized system, relied on an intense military policy to quell any and all Korean resistance, and stripped Koreans of civil liberties such as free speech, suffrage, and representative government (Kim 2012, 322). The peninsula was exploited by Japan to serve solely Japanese purposes, and Japanese people viewed Koreans as a weak, conquered, and culturally inferior people. Koreans, conversely, saw themselves as culturally superior to the Japanese, and thus continued resistance attempts against Japan.

The proliferation of the "national spirit" in Korea in the early 20th century, despite repressive efforts by the Japanese, is generally credited to Korean homogeneity and historical unity. Robinson (1988) observes: "The Korean masses were... unified and culturally homogenous, sharing a well-developed folk culture closely tied to their long history as a tightly knit agrarian society—a fact that eased the process of developing a strong national consciousness in the twentieth century" (Robinson 1988, 17). The most important resistance movement, the March First Movement, began on March 1, 1919. Both peaceful and violent demonstrations took place with nearly two million participants (Seth 2011, 269). The Japanese retaliated harshly, killing and arresting thousands, and eventually suppressed the demonstrations. However, the movement was a success in

uniting the Korean people in the shared desire for independence. The March First Movement is considered the birth of organized Korean nationalism, or the consolidation of several small nationalist groups into one large and inclusive movement (Seth 2011, 269). In the years leading up to the movement, independence groups formed by exiles appeared in Manchuria and Vladivostok.

Despite the success of the March First Movement, formal Korean organizations did not have much success due to ideological disagreements and Japanese oppression. Japanese colonial rule over the Korean peninsula stifled any calls for independence or public nationalist movements, preventing any members of the Korean professional class from gaining the reputation and credibility needed to serve as a national leader. Therefore, the men who did eventually become national leaders in 1945-49 were exiles with no domestic legacies—Rhee Syngman in the south, and Kim Il-Sung in the north.

Little is known about Kim Il-Sung's life before his return to Korea in 1945 due to the incomplete and often fabricated information available to researchers.<sup>8</sup> He was born Kim Song-Ju in 1912 to a peasant family near Pyongyang, who attempted to escape poverty by moving to Manchuria (Suh 1988, 3). He became involved in various anti-Japanese struggles in Manchuria (controlled by the Japanese and called Manchukuo from 1933-1945), joining Korean nationalist groups and the Northeast Anti-Japanese Army in 1935 (Seth 2011, 310). He led several invasions of Japanese outposts along the China-North Korea border in the late 1930s. Around the same time, Kim changed his name to Il-Sung, meaning "one star" (Suh 1988, 11). Kim became a notable guerrilla fighter and was well-respected by other guerrilla fighters and members of the Chinese Communist Party,

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<sup>8</sup> Section III considers the influence of Kim's formative years on his policies.

of which he was also a member. His education in Chinese schools and fluency in the language helped him establish rapport with high-ranking Chinese guerrillas, which may have spared his life in the Minsaengdan purges of 1934.<sup>9</sup> These purges occurred within the Korean groups of the Chinese Communist Party in order to expel suspected Japanese infiltration, and Han (2013) notes that an estimated 500 to 2,000 Korean communists and sympathizers were killed or punished in these purges. Japanese forces eventually quelled all guerrilla activity occurring in Manchuria, and Kim fled to the Soviet Union from 1940 to 1945.

After the formal Korean Communist Party collapsed in 1928, the largely-communist Korean resistance movement survived Japanese attempts at destruction through underground meetings in Korea, absorption into foreign parties, and exiled communists' meetings abroad. Different factions, or groups of communist revolutionary guerrilla fighters, were thus created based on their locations, and their members would become the founders and elites of the North Korean state after 1945. Kim Il-Sung's guerrilla unit was known to be active in the Kapsan region, near the Korean border with Manchuria, and his group came to be known as the Kapsan faction (Lankov 2002, 22). The Korean Socialist Party, founded in Russia, would form the faction of Soviet Koreans. Most Soviet Koreans were born in Russia and had little to no connection to the Korean peninsula. The Yan'an faction consisted of Korean communists who left Korea in the 1920s and 30s to form the largest Korean Communist organization abroad in Yan'an, China. While the Soviet Koreans were the most directly connected to Soviet-style

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<sup>9</sup> The Minsaengdan, or People's Livelihood Corps, was a Korean group within the Chinese Communist Party in Manchuria. The Minsaengdan purges were an unfortunate result of the mistrust among Chinese, Koreans, and Japanese in Manchuria in the early 1930s.

socialism, the Yan'an faction brought Maoist political ideas to North Korea. Finally, the Domestic faction consisted of Korean communists who remained in Korea during the colonial period and carried on underground revolutionary activity. The conflicts among the different factions, who represented vastly different beliefs and approaches, would shape North Korea in the 1950s after the Korean War.

### Korean Liberation and Statehood

The question of Soviet influence or control over the establishment of a North Korean state is often brought up in literature on North Korea. Lankov (2002) argues that both external and internal factors must be considered in the formation of the North Korean state, thus it is a product of both indigenous social change and Soviet control.

Armstrong (2003) notes that despite fabricated information exaggerating Kim Il-Sung's role in the struggle for Korean independence, Kim did become one of the leading figures in the Chinese and Korean guerrilla armies by the late 1930s, and his prominence contributed to his and the Kapsan faction's rise to power in North Korea. Armstrong argues that the direct link between guerrilla prominence and Korean leadership explains much of Kim's policies, including Juche, as he and other North Korean elites were shaped by their guerrilla experiences (Armstrong 2003, 27).

The Soviet Union became involved in the formation of a North Korean state at the end of World War II. The special forces of the Soviet Far East prepared to enter the war against Japan in late 1945, and at this time also prepared to meet with Manchurian guerrilla fighters to designate Chinese and Korean units to work towards reconstruction in their home countries (Armstrong 2003, 38). Armstrong (2003), Lankov (2002), and

Suh (1988) agree that Kim Il-Sung was not Stalin's handpicked choice for leading the Soviet occupation government, as he himself preferred the Soviet Koreans to the peripheral Kapsan faction to which Kim Il-Sung belonged. At the time, the Soviet Union planned to act defensively to protect its borders and prevent the re-militarization of Japan rather than spread communist thought through East Asia. These authors also agree that the Soviet Union was quite unprepared to occupy Korea after the Japanese surrender, lacking any Korean experts or interpreters. Lankov (2002) observes that most Soviet decisions regarding Korea were improvised, and the foundation of a pro-Soviet government was influenced by the necessity to create a buffer against potential Japanese threats. Meanwhile, the United States began to ponder the future of the Korean peninsula in 1943, well before the conclusion of World War II. After Japan surrendered in 1945, the United States hastily decided to split the Korean peninsula at the 38th parallel to prevent potential Soviet and leftist expansion into East Asia.

The Allied forces agreed, at the Moscow Conference of 1945, that the division would be temporary. Specifically, the agreement called for the establishment of a provisional democratic government in Korea, as well as a Joint Commission of United States command in southern Korea and Soviet Union command in northern Korea to aid in the formation of the provisional government. The Joint Commission and the Korean government would form a trusteeship to aid in the political, economic, and social growth of the Korean peninsula, and the proposals would then be agreed upon by the governments of the United States, the Soviet Union, China, and the United Kingdom to create a four-power trusteeship over Korea to last up to five years. The Joint Commission was impossible to enact in the context of the Cold War; as Kim states, "To guarantee the

participation of rightists in Joint Commission activities, the United States never adhered to the strict application of the accord” (Kim 2012, 374). Similarly, the Soviet Union opposed any compromises that would reduce its role in northern Korea. Although Korea was free of Japanese rule, it had not achieved the independence it so strongly desired; conversely, Korea had no role in its own fate and it was now a divided peninsula. The feelings of betrayal and disappointment manifested in large riots and uprisings in South Korea and certainly contributed to anti-U.S. and anti-Western sentiments in North Korea that supported Juche theory.

The Manchurian guerrilla groups residing in the Soviet Union were incorporated into the Soviet Far Eastern Command. Kim Il-Sung was elected by fellow guerrilla leaders to represent Korean communists' interests in this new military organization, and was highly recommended to Soviet forces (Lim 2008, 15). As mentioned, Kim was not handpicked by Stalin to lead the occupation government, but because of his prominent guerrilla background and esteem among his comrades, he was deemed more appealing to the Korean people than any Soviet Koreans who had never set foot on Korean soil. Kim Il-Sung arrived in Pyongyang in late September 1945, and gave his first speech to the Korean people on October 14, 1945. While Soviet forces in northern Korea at the time heavily promoted the image of Kim as leader, referring to him as "leader of the Korean people," Lankov argues that "...In 1946 and even in 1949 he was hardly the real ruler of Korea. The Soviet military authorities and the apparatus of advisers had a decisive influence on the life of the country, and in the first years of the DPRK Kim was only nominally ruler" (Lankov 2002, 59). Regardless, the Soviet Union played a large part in bolstering his popularity as a leader, placing his picture in public places next to that of

Stalin, and naming the main university in North Korea the Kim Il-Sung University in 1946 (Seth 2011, 314). The Soviet Union helped create a centralized government with branches on all local levels, enacted a massive land redistribution reform in 1946 and 1947, and made the first steps towards a command economy in 1947 through the nationalization of industry. At the same time, the Soviet Union also expropriated for its own economic needs the few Korean industrial facilities that still stood after World War II, and Soviet forces were reported to be lacking discipline and self-control in their treatment of the Korean people (Kim 2013, 68). Kim Il-Sung began exercising and increasing his power over North Korea after the Korean War, when he introduced Juche, distanced himself from the Soviet Union, and purged his political opponents.<sup>10</sup>

### The Korean War

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea was officially proclaimed on September 9, 1948, less than a month after the formation of the Republic of Korea in the south. As Kim (2012) notes, each state claimed to be the sole government of the entire Korean peninsula and was intent on reunifying Korea on its own terms.

Kim Il-Sung was ready to invade South Korea by late 1949, and had begun lobbying for a Soviet-backed invasion. According to Kim (2012), the Soviet Union “pre-planned, blessed, and directly aided” (406) the North Korean war effort, and insisted that China also back North Korea. Although the Soviet Union was prepared for war with

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<sup>10</sup> It is worth noting that Kim was quite popular as a leader in the early years of North Korean statehood. Several authors (Lankov 2002, Seth 2011, Kim 2012) observe that protests against his regime simply did not occur, especially in comparison to the mass protests and demonstrations occurring against the Rhee regime and US influence in South Korea at this time. The peasant farmers who benefitted from the land reforms of 1946-7, on top of being welcomed as Party members, provided a powerful basis of support that helped legitimize Kim's rule early on.

South Korea, it is difficult to say whether Stalin and Mao had previously discussed the possibility of war. Korea, “Mao’s second priority in terms of foreign relations” (Westad 1998, 12), did not even come up in conversation at the 1949 Moscow Summit between China and the Soviet Union. However, Whiting (1999) argues that Mao was probably informed of the impending attack on South Korea due to a “timely relocation” (45) of CCP troops from southern China to Manchuria prior to the onset of the Korean War. However, Cotton and Neary (1989) and Westad (1998) suggest that neither the Soviet Union nor China had any particular interest in invading South Korea, especially given Stalin’s wariness of rousing U.S. suspicions as expressed during the Moscow Summit, but ultimately both Stalin and Mao approved Kim’s plan and provided aid.

The Korean War began on June 25, 1950, when North Korean forces crossed the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel and swiftly overwhelmed the unprepared South Korean forces (Kim 2012, 407). The United States sent support under General MacArthur, and a UN Security Council resolution on July 7 established him as commander of all United Nations Command forces, which included forces from fifteen nations and the armed forces of the Republic of Korea (Kim 2012, 409). North Korean forces advanced far south into South Korea, but the U.S.-led counterattack of September pushed the forces back over the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel and then attempted to advance into North Korea with the intent of reunifying the peninsula. At this point, Mao hesitated to send Chinese troops to support North Korea, but Stalin eventually changed his mind (Westad 1988, 13). Mao sent troops into North Korea in October of 1950 under the guise of the Chinese People’s Volunteer Army, to enable China to enter war against the United States without a formal declaration (Kim 2012, 413). The gravity of the Chinese intervention pushed UN forces completely out of

North Korea. Chinese and UN forces would continue to fight along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel, and occupation of Seoul changed four times throughout the duration of the war (Kim 2012, 414). Although all sides were seemingly ready to negotiate an end to the war in 1951, the war lasted until 1953 due to disagreements between Stalin and Mao as well as mixed messages from Washington to U.S. forces in South Korea.

The Korean War drastically changed the political environment in North Korea. Emerging from an unsuccessful and costly war he had initiated, Kim Il-Sung acted to preserve his power and reinvigorate the North Korean people swiftly and effectively. The external conflict occurring among socialist countries at the time as well as the internal conflict in North Korea among the different factions, and the rivalry between North and South Korea, provided Kim Il-Sung the breeding grounds for Juche ideology and the cult of personality.

### Section III: North Korea after the Korean War

The historical context of the Korean peninsula in the late 19th century and early 20th century set the scene for the creation of Juche ideology, but it was successfully implemented and institutionalized because of the Korean War and the domestic and international conditions of the 1950s. The North Korea of today began to take its distinct shape in the 1950s, and Juche and the cult of personality would be refined well into the 1970s and as late as the 1990s.

The Korean War and the immediate aftermath was a time of weakness and uncertainty for Kim. As early as 1951, Kim Il-Sung began to blame other elites for the losses of the Korean War, during which North Korea suffered the most damage. Kim lashed out against his own faction, as well as the general undisciplined conduct by generals and officials and mismanagement of the war effort (Suh 1988, 122). Prominent officials were expelled from the party, though they were reinstated once the war situation appeared less dire. The first major purge also occurred in 1951. Ho Ka-i, the highest-ranking Soviet Korean, believed the Korean Workers' Party should have been an elitist party in the style of the Soviet Union, while Kim argued for a mass party in the style of Maoist China. Ultimately, Ho was purged for disobeying Kim's orders and the Soviet Koreans began to lose favor within the party.

Although the Soviet Union and China both contributed to the war effort as well as postwar reconstruction efforts, Chinese contributions far outnumbered Soviet aid and, as Lankov (2002) notes, the Chinese did not attempt to interfere with domestic North Korean politics as the Soviet Union had done. Lankov suggests that the war significantly weakened Soviet influence in the country, and Suh (1988) notes that this fading influence

gave Kim free rein in hurling a variety of accusations at Ho Ka-i. In fact, Soviet influence on North Korea had begun to fade before the Korean War. "...The fact that the Workers' Party had a very small number of Marxist ideologues, provided a fertile ground for 'Korean style' thinking and national ideology to take root" (Kim 2013, 69), although the Korean War also spawned internal factional conflict in North Korea.

The failure of the Korean War to unify the peninsula and the lack of direct Soviet military participation weakened the legitimacy of Kim's rule. Kim was then challenged by the entire Domestic faction and its leader, Pak Hon-yong, who had enjoyed support from communists in both North and South Korea during and after Japanese colonial rule. The Domestic faction planned a secret military coup against Kim's regime, but all conspirators were arrested by early 1953 and were either executed or sentenced to long prison terms.

In his 1955 speech introducing Juche, Kim blamed the failure of a certain anti-Japanese struggle on these very "factionalists":

It is true that the struggle was greatly hampered by the factionalists who had slipped into it. Considering that even after liberation, the Pak Hon Yong-Li Sung Yop spy clique crept into our ranks and wrought mischief, it goes without saying that in those days the factionalists could carry on subversive activities more easily. But, even so, was the struggle itself wrong? No, it was not. Although the struggle ended in failure because of a few bad elements who had wormed their way into the leadership of the organization, we cannot deny its revolutionary character; we should learn a lesson from that failure. (Kim 1955)

It is difficult to say with certainty whether the struggle in question, the June Tenth Independence Movement (1926), failed because of factionalist "subversive activities" or because of Japanese counterrevolutionary forces, but the reference casts suspicion on the

factionalists' true motives, while implying that Kim always fought for the good of the Korean people and the Korean revolution.

In 1953 and 1954, Kim ordered a large restructuring of the party, filling old positions with loyalists and creating new positions for those who pledged absolute loyalty to him. At this time, Kim also introduced economic policies focused exclusively on heavy industry at the expense of the production of consumer goods, policies later justified by the principles of Juche. He publicly confronted anyone who opposed him or who had the potential to oppose him; he also began to promote himself as the chief, sole propagator of the Korean revolution at this time and spoke out harshly against potential factional struggle.

Kim's crackdown on internal factional disagreements and perceived disloyalty in the 1950s may be explained by his own perceived weaknesses following the failure of the Korean War. Kim particularly wished to establish his own revolutionary experiences as the only proper Korean revolutionary struggle while also advising that the different revolutionary backgrounds of North Korean elites were not sufficient reasons for factional struggle (Suh 1988, 142-143). In reality, Kim's revolutionary experiences, largely in Manchuria, were less "Korean" than those of the Yan'an or Domestic factions. Kim insisted on propagating what he considered truly Korean and completely dismissing anything else. His specific definitions of Korean-ness were an expression of what Suh (1988) calls his attempts "to find his Korean self-identity" (143) as he may have felt inferior to the Domestic faction Koreans, who had remained in Korea throughout Japanese colonial rule, and superior to the Soviet Koreans, many of who had never been to Korea.

Kim went so far as to ridicule Ho Ka-i for claiming to understand the needs of the Korean Workers' Party without being able to speak proper Korean. Meanwhile, Kim, having spent most of his life in Manchuria, arrived in Pyongyang in 1945 with little grasp of the Korean language himself. His first speech, written by Soviet officials, was littered with Russian idioms that did not translate well into Korean and confused much of the crowd (Lankov 2002). Therefore, his ruthlessness towards his opponents in the 1950s may have been a manifestation of his perceived shortcomings, especially his insecurity within his own Korean-ness, which weakened his claim of being the sole propagator of the Korean revolution.

The external and internal conflict occurring in the early 1950s provided the context for the official introduction of Juche in Kim Il-Sung's 1955 speech, "On eliminating dogmatism and formalism and establishing Juche in ideological work." Despite official North Korean claims that Kim had developed Juche as early as the 1930s (at the age of eighteen), the content of the speech reveals that it was initially used to attack the other factions and delegitimize their own revolutionary struggles, which Kim claimed were not true to "Korean traditions" and too dependent on foreign ideas. In this speech, Kim warned that the Korean revolution could not succeed if it ignored the particular circumstances of Korea, including its traditions and history. He says, "...many of our functionaries are ignorant of our country's history, and so do not strive to discover and carry forward its fine traditions. Unless this is corrected, it will lead, in the long run, to the negation of Korean history" (Kim 1955). It becomes apparent that the "functionaries" to whom Kim refers are the Soviet Koreans, most of whom had never

lived in Korea and could be accused of ignorance of its history and customs. His attack becomes more specific when he singles out Soviet Korean Pak Chang Ok:

The mistakes made recently by Pak Chang Ok and his kind, too, may be attributed to their negation of the history of the Korean literary movement. They closed their eyes to the struggle of the fine writers of the "KAPF" — Korean (Coreen) Artiste Proletarienne Federation—and to the splendid works of Pak Yon Am, Chong Da San and other progressive scholars and writers of our country. We told them to make a profound study of those things and give them wide publicity, but they did not do so. (Kim 1955)

It is difficult to ascertain whether Kim himself was deeply familiar with what he refers to as the fine traditions and history of Korea at this time, and his knowledge of the Korean literary movement is especially doubtful due to his lack of formal education and having grown up in China surrounded by Soviet and Chinese socialist works. Lankov ascertains that "...his [Kim's] weaknesses were determined by an obvious lack of general education; he hardly ever had time for serious study" (Lankov 2002, 62), and that his emphasis on Korean tradition in Juche stems from his own rudimentary understanding of society through familiar Korean traditions. The works of Korean Neo-Confucian scholar Chong Da San, mentioned in the excerpt above, did play a role in shaping Juche ideology,<sup>11</sup> therefore, it may be concluded that Kim familiarized himself with Korean literature before the 1960s when Juche began to be heavily promoted.

The death of Stalin and the Sino-Soviet split also affected Kim's domestic decisions. Krushchev's proposal of "peaceful co-existence" among socialist and non-socialist states did not sit well with Kim, who still harbored plans to unify the Korean peninsula under his rule despite the failure of the Korean War (Szalontai 2005, 179).

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<sup>11</sup> Chong Da San's works and their influence on Juche ideology will be discussed in Section IV.

Furthermore, the deterioration of Sino-Soviet relations and the eventual Sino-Soviet split actually benefitted Kim Il-Sung. It allowed him to play both sides to secure aid from each country, especially in the early 1960s (Szalontai 2005, 200). This break in international socialist solidarity gave Kim more freedom to pursue policies independent of the Soviet Union and of China, and to attack Soviet- and Chinese-aligned members of the Workers' Party.

Kim was particularly displeased with the de-Stalinization process, seeing it as a direct threat to his own regime (Szalontai 2005, 187). Internationally, he began to side largely with China. Szalontai notes that "Pyongyang's intraparty propaganda outdid even Beijing in reviling Krushchev" (Szalontai 2005, 200). Domestically, he took out his anger on the Soviet Koreans, whom he accused of defaming Stalin. Kim also claimed that "Some... disparaged Korea's traditional legacy as backward and held up the Soviet culture as modern and advanced" (Kim 2013, 78). Some were removed from their posts, but the purges were only beginning to escalate.

During the August 1956 Plenum of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party, in what is known as the August Incident, several members of the Yan'an faction and some Soviet Koreans openly criticized Kim and his policies. News of this challenge traveled, and a Sino-Soviet delegation was sent to Pyongyang to pressure Kim into loosening his grip on power and pardoning those he planned to purge. Kim did not heed the delegation, instead enacting large-scale purges that virtually wiped out the Yan'an faction by 1958. The following years also saw the political annihilation of the remaining Soviet Koreans. Most were forced to return to the Soviet Union, but many others faced interrogation, forced labor, and execution within North Korea (Lim 1983). Lim Un, a

North Korean defector and former official, reports that "...after the war, over 70 generals were massacred or purged... This means that ninety-five percent of the generals who participated in the Korean War were purged by Kim Il-Sung" (Lim 1982, 196).

In terms of internal struggle, Kim had emerged as the single victor by the end of the 1950s, and had established that dissidence was unacceptable through violent purges that resulted in the deaths of thousands from all ranks of society. Lankov notes that Kim had proven to be a "skilled tactician" and demonstrated "...an uncanny ability to exploit contradictions between his enemies, as well as his friends" (Lankov 2002, 62) in the 1950s. By the early 1960s, Kim Il-Sung had successfully consolidated his power over North Korea. By the late 1960s, Kim Il-Sung began to distance himself from China as its generosity in providing aid had waned. Freed from international pressures linked to the Soviet Korean and Yan'an factions, as well as freedom from Soviet and Chinese influences, Kim was able to launch his Juche ideology in full force. Although Juche had first been introduced in his 1955 speech, it had been notably absent from all other discourse until 1963. Kim had been wary of propagating Juche while still dependent on the Soviet Union and China, but the new international scene from the late 1950s to the late 1960s brought Juche to the forefront of North Korean ideological and political discourse, which in turn gave way to the Kim cult of personality.

#### North Korea-South Korea Rivalry

Kim Il-Sung and North Korea also had to face a growing rivalry with South Korea after the Korean War hardened the division of the peninsula and bolstered antagonism between the two states. In the aftermath of the Korean War, both states sought to project their

version of Korean-ness as the sole version, refusing to acknowledge the existence of two separate Korean states.

Pyongyang, the capital of North Korea, was essentially leveled by the destruction of the Korean War. Although Pyongyang was rebuilt by the painstaking labor and sacrifices of North Koreans, Kim Il-Sung officially receives the credit. The city experienced its own rapid growth through what Atkins (1996) deems the "propaganda gift" (3) of emphasizing the role of North Korea as victim of the Korean War and of past oppression. The state was able to mobilize its population into reconstructing the city at a rapid and impressive pace. In general, annual economic growth in North Korea far surpassed that in South Korea in the early postwar years, reaching 20 percent in 1961 (Kim 2012), though it was a poor reflection of general living standards and the condition was very short-lived. Pyongyang's rapid reconstruction and urbanization were an effort to project North Korean superiority over South Korea at a time when both were vying for international legitimacy.

Beyond proving their economic legitimacy, the two Korean states were locked in an ideological battle stemming from the Cold War division of the peninsula. Rhee Syngman, the first president of South Korea, was a devout anticommunist who believed that embracing communism meant rejecting traditional thought and culture. Helgesen (1991) argues that Rhee, along with most Western leaders at the time, viewed communism as "...a break with everything considered to be good custom or convention, with accepted norms of behavior and morality," and specifically to Korea, "...it was portrayed as being anti-Korean, culturally alienating and therefore a threat to the people's national identity" (Helgesen 1991, 192). Therefore, Juche had to emphasize (and even

overemphasize) Korean culture and thought to ensure Kim's regime in North Korea was a legitimate expression of Korean-ness.

The hyper-nationalist and even xenophobic sentiment of Juche ideology may have also arisen as a direct opposition to Rhee Syngman's personal beliefs and ideologies. In a 1904 patriotic work titled *The Spirit of Independence*, Rhee bemoaned the state of the Korean peninsula in comparison with advanced and prosperous Western nations and the Koreans' rejection of foreign influence to preserve its own weakened structures. He argues that Koreans should "...learn and follow the methods of foreigners so that we can benefit from them" (Rhee 1904),<sup>12</sup> especially through education and scholarship, in order to properly exercise the right of self-government. Later, somewhat similarly to Kim Il-Sung, Rhee received formal education abroad in the United States before returning to South Korea to become its first leader. The large degree of Western influence on Rhee's ideologies and rule over South Korea were certainly threatening and seen as illegitimate in the eyes of Kim and North Korean elites, who considered South Korea a puppet of U.S. imperialism, and may have contributed to the exaggeration of Korean racial superiority in Juche ideology.

It appears Kim was aware of this rivalry and necessity to "out-Korea" South Korea when first introducing Juche in 1955. He stated,

The Kwangju Student Incident... was a mass struggle in which tens of thousands of Korean youths and students rose against Japanese imperialism; it played a big part in inspiring the anti-Japanese spirit in broad sections of the Korean youth. As a matter of course, we should publicize this movement widely and educate youth and students in the brave fighting spirit displayed by their forerunners. Our propaganda workers have failed to do so. Instead, Syngman Rhee has been making propaganda of this movement in his favour. This has created a false

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<sup>12</sup> Cited from Sources of Korean Tradition, Vol. II, 2000, edited by Yong-ho Ch'oe, Peter H. Lee, and Wm. Theodore de Barry.

impression that the Communists disregard national traditions. What a dangerous thing! It will be impossible for us to win over the south Korean youth if we go on working in this way. (Kim 1955)

Kim was aware of the necessity to embellish episodes of recent Korean history "in his favor" so that these episodes became exemplary of the socialist Korean revolution of the north rather than the anticommunist movements of the south. This is an early example of the rewriting and fabrication of Korean history that occurred in North Korea to justify Juche as the logical, and only, contemporary expression of Korean national identity. At this time, as Xu (2016) argues, the Korean governments "realized that building historical narratives [became] a race in which governments competed for political legitimacy" (Xu 2016, 139).

The reality is that Kim's and Rhee's ideologies and speeches bore a number of striking similarities and both regimes sought to use Korean-ness as propaganda to maintain their own strength in a time of instability. By juxtaposing Kim's 1955 speech on Juche (and Korean nationalism) and Rhee's 1904 work on Korean patriotism, the similarities become obvious:

Once I visited a People's Army vacation home, where a picture of the Siberian steppe was hung. That landscape probably pleases the Russians. But the Korean people prefer the beautiful scenery of our own country. There are beautiful mountains such as Mts. Kungang-san and Myohyang-san in our country; there are clear streams, the blue sea with its rolling waves and the fields with ripening crops. If we are to inspire in our People's Army men a love for their native place and their country, we must show them many pictures of such landscapes of our country...

Moreover, there were pictures of huge factories in foreign countries, but there was not a single one of the factories we were rehabilitating or building. They do not even put up any diagrams and pictures of our economic construction, let alone study the history of our country...

I noticed in a primary school that all the portraits hanging on the walls were of foreigners such as Mayakovsky, Pushkin, etc., and there were none of Koreans. If children are educated in this way, how can they be expected to have national pride? (Kim 1955)<sup>13</sup>

Our land is located in the temperate zone between the southern ocean and the northern landmass, and the weather is mild. The soil is rich and productive and grains and fruits are bountiful. Fish and salt are also plentiful. Deposits of gold, silver, copper, and iron are buried throughout the country, arousing foreigners' covetous envy for a long time; if we learn new technology, procure machinery, and excavate using proper methods, we could build a rich nation by ourselves. Everywhere, mountains and rivers present unparalleled scenic beauty... With our remarkable people and rich land, why should we be resigned to being inferior to other nations? (Rhee 1904)<sup>14</sup>

Both leaders make detailed references to the physical beauty of Korea and the richness of its culture in order to instill national pride in a way best suited to their respective regimes.

In North Korea, creating national pride after 1955 escalated from denouncing foreign influence to denouncing anything foreign altogether; in South Korea, national pride stemmed from accepting the benefits of foreign influence to maximize the potential of the Korean landscape and people. In reality, the two states' interpretations of national pride were not wildly different, but Kim opted to erase the obvious foreign influences on Juche ideology more to legitimize his authority and justify his absolute rule than to reinvigorate the North Korean people's sense of ethnic and national identity. Regardless, Juche proved successful in achieving both causes by synthesizing the two so that national identity meant absolute loyalty to Kim Il-Sung, the personification of the Korean revolution.

In Sections II and III, it has been established that the international and domestic political contexts of the early 20th century created an environment for Juche ideology to

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<sup>13</sup> Sources of Korean Tradition, Vol II, p420-425

<sup>14</sup> Sources of Korean Tradition, Vol II, p299-305

be introduced in the 1950s and allowed for the successful implementation of it as the monolithic ideological system of North Korea in the 1960s. Specifically, the destruction of the Korean War after half a century of subjugation and oppression under Japanese colonial rule left Koreans with a weakened sense of national pride or unified identity which could then be expressed through the highly-nationalist Juche ideology. Moreover, the internal factional strife within North Korea, Kim's weakened legitimacy after the failure of the Korean War, and his own perceived inferiority and lack of Korean self-identity, drove him to consolidate his power through ruthless purges of all potential opponents and establish his thought, and Juche, as the sole acceptable expression of Korean revolution. Lastly, the de-Stalinization process occurring in socialist states, especially in the Soviet Union, and the resulting Sino-Soviet split, distanced North Korea from the socialist internationalist movement and allowed Kim to freely denounce foreign influences and undermine Soviet and Chinese influence on the formation of the North Korean state and ideology.

The following section will delve into the cultural and traditional (or, "uniquely Korean") factors of Juche that granted it legitimacy among the North Korean people, and also explores the spread of the monolithic ideological system and Kim cult of personality into all aspects of North Korean society in the 1960s and 1970s.

#### Section IV: The Personality Cult

A personality cult is not merely a dictatorship. A personality cult is distinguished from a dictatorship in that the propagator of a personality cult transcends political dominance. Hunter (2012) notes that a personality cult is born when the figure at the center of the personality cult becomes the absolute authority on all aspects of society. A personality cult does not merely affect, but dominates the daily lives of every citizen in the state and every decision that is made. Ravine (2011) observes the importance in culture to the success of a personality cult: "Controlling the culture gives a person control over the people's mindset by giving his people a pride and national identity on which each person defines him or herself" (Ravine 2011, 6).

Most authors agree that of the major personality cults in the socialist world, none has come close to the vastness of the Kim personality cult in North Korea, or has had such thorough theoretical justifications as those present in Juche. French, in particular, argues that reforms seen in other socialist states— Khrushchev's de-Stalinization, or Deng's reconsidering of Mao's decisions, for example— would be impossible in North Korea, as the personality cult is so entrenched within Korean society that removing it would result in a total collapse of the state. Unlike other cults of personality, which mention or celebrate other important figures as allies, such as Zhou Enlai in China or Che Guevara in Cuba, North Korean official works do not credit anything to anyone other than Kim Il-Sung. Thus, Juche ideology, and North Korean society as a whole, is completely defined by the cult of personality of Kim Il-Sung.

The origins of the personality cult are found within Juche ideology. Helgesen (1991) notes that, "...In an authoritative textbook on Juche one can be convinced of the fact that the cult is not an undesirable side effect of a great idea, but a precondition of that very idea" (Helgesen 1991, 205). Thus, the very existence of Juche depends on absolute loyalty to the Great Leader, or suryong. Helgesen argues that the concept of Man within Juche, the master of his own destiny, does not exist as an individual, but as part of the masses. The masses, then, may only realize their full potential under the guidance of the leader. Without the leader, the principles of Juche cannot be followed and Man cannot realize his potential.

Despite this flawless justification, the personality cult around Kim Il-Sung was first constructed as a response to the uncertainty of the post-Korean war period. As has been discussed, Kim enacted domestic purges and distanced himself from the international socialist movement in order to secure his undisputed control over the state, so that constructing a cult of personality arose from this necessity to secure control. French notes that "the first decades of the existence of the DPRK saw Kim Il-Sung's personality cult grow, first to secure power, then to motivate the population, and finally to dominate the country" (French 2005, 49). In reality, the Soviet Union played a role in first establishing the cult of personality when selecting Kim as the leader of the new North Korean state. At this time, before the Korean War, photos of Kim and buildings named after him were already being erected in North Korea. French quotes a 1945 newspaper article hailing Kim as "the incomparable patriot, national hero, the ever-victorious, brilliant field commander with a will of iron... the greatest leader that our people have known for the last several thousand years" (French 2005, 53).

Kim would adopt many titles and descriptions, most notably *suryong*, or Supreme Leader.<sup>15</sup> Other descriptions include, "The great leader Comrade Kim II Sung... the sun of the nation and the lodestar of the reunification of the fatherland..." (DPRK Const. Pmbl.), "the leader who unfolded paradise" (Martin 2004, 93) and "peerless patriot, national hero... the red sun of the oppressed people of the world, the greatest leader of our time" (Suh 1988, 322). Interestingly, Suh points out that before the Sino-Soviet split and the mainstreaming of Juche, Kim used to refer to Stalin as *suryong* of the working people of the world, and Mao as *suryong* of the Chinese people (Suh 1988, 316). Kim only began to call himself *suryong* after 1967, when Juche ideology and the idea of "self-reliance" began to dominate North Korean thought.

North Korea was founded as a socialist state which prioritized the Korean Workers' Party before all else, but Juche converted the state into Kim's domain. Kim's personality cult reached its apex in the 1970s. The new North Korean constitution of 1972, which made Kim president of the republic, symbolized his total dominion over state and society by this time. The entire Preamble essentially praised Kim as the sole leader of the Korean revolution and lifeblood of Korean society: "The DPRK Socialist Constitution is a Kim II Sung constitution which legally embodies Comrade Kim II-Sung's Juche state construction ideology and achievements" (DPRK Const. Pmbl.).

Further down the page:

Comrade Kim II Sung was a genius ideological theoretician and a genius art leader, an ever-victorious, iron-willed brilliant commander, a great revolutionary and politician, and a great human being. Comrade Kim II Sung's great idea and achievements in leadership are the eternal treasures of the nation and a

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<sup>15</sup> *Suryong* (수령) is essentially a most superlative designation in Korean; no Korean leader prior to Kim II-Sung assumed this title or used it to address others.

fundamental guarantee for the prosperity and efflorescence of the DPRK.

The rest of the 1972 Constitution, including all amendments made to it since, listed his own ideas as the guiding principles of the state and his revolutionary tradition as the only tradition of the North Korean people. Suh argues that Kim practiced "not communism in the so-called socialist state but a peculiar brand of oriental despotism" (Suh 1988, 315). Evidence of this despotism is found in virtually all aspects of North Korean society.

Absolute obedience to Kim and Juche became the norm in the 1960s and 70s as dissidence transformed from unacceptable to unimaginable. All mass media, including art, literature, cinema, and music, served as state propaganda promoting the infallibility of the *suryong*. Suh and most other North Korean scholars agree that adulation of Kim in North Korea often borders on fanaticism. While Kim continued his "on-the-spot guidance" tours to connect with all levels of his society in the 1960s, these tours demanded a huge display of grandeur, including large-scale choreographed demonstrations. The places he visited then became sacred. For his sixtieth birthday in 1972, a massive bronze statue of Kim was erected in Pyongyang along with a marble museum recounting his heroism in ninety-two exhibitions (Seth 2011, 359). All North Koreans were (and still are) required to wear a badge with his photo emblazoned on it, and photos of him were placed in every room of every building. His photograph is displayed before the national flag and emblem, and countless songs, poems, essays, films, and stories are dedicated to him. There is even a flower named after him, the *Kimilsungia* (Suh 1988, 316). Through the personality cult, justified by Juche, Kim was able to create successfully a world in which his name was synonymous with the state, where, as Ford and Kwon (2008) say, "Kim was Korea and Korea was Kim" (48).

It is not difficult to understand or see the vastness and extremity of the personality cult surrounding Kim in North Korea. It is difficult, however, to understand how and why it was successful in North Korea. It is necessary to examine the various aspects of both indigenous Korean culture and external influences utilized in the creation of the personality cult to understand why it was implemented successfully in North Korea. One major reason it was successful was its intrusive nature: manifestations of Juche and images of Kim are physically present throughout North Korea, especially the capital Pyongyang, and they are a constant theme in the education, arts, and leisure of North Korean citizens. Furthermore, the cult of personality employs aspects of Korean culture and society, including religion, history, and familial relations, to appear legitimate to the North Korean people.

#### Pyongyang: The Juche Stage

The capital city of Pyongyang itself exists as a physical expression of Juche and the personality cult, and, as Kim (2007) notes, a "stage for a narcissistic self-portrait of the North Korean regime and its leader" (25). She argues that the near-flattening of the city during the Korean War created a literal empty stage in which any kind of show could be orchestrated. Although Pyongyang was rebuilt by the painstaking labor and sacrifices of North Koreans, Kim Il-Sung officially receives the credit. The stage metaphor, if it is even a metaphor at all, is easily continued, as Kim notes: "His role here is quite comparable to that of a stage director supervising the construction of the stage set designed to bear his exalted self-portrait" (33).

Pyongyang was literally constructed to adhere to the ideology and legitimize the state. Atkins (1996) sees landscapes in North Korea as "concretised representations of discourse and continuing participants in that discourse" (2). Kim Il-Sung himself stated that "Pyongyang must be a model for the whole country in all the ideological, technical and cultural spheres, so that it can give foreign visitors a complete picture of the development of our country" (quoted in Atkins 1996, 3). Therefore, the North Korean state toiled greatly to plan a Pyongyang in which the Juche ideology was perfectly written and easily read by foreign visitors. The leveling of Pyongyang during the Korean War, as mentioned, gave the state a unique advantage and opportunity to rebuild the entire city in its image: "The planners had a tabula rasa on which to write, without the usual complications of property boundaries which hamper reconstruction under capitalism" (Atkins 1996, 3).

It may be argued that every building, monument, and road in Pyongyang spells out Juche and the nationalism propagated by the North Korean regime. Prokopljevic (2014) notes that, "Supposedly, the architecture created following the Juche idea is based on shapes and details that match the national taste to such extent, that it is difficult to evaluate them from a non-Korean point of view" (3). Despite this claim, the urban spaces of Pyongyang are meant to be admired and understood by both North Koreans and foreigners. Atkins (1996) provides several examples: the Tower of the Juche Idea, completed in 1982 to celebrate the seventieth birthday of Kim Il-Sung, was designed to exceed the height of the Washington Monument by one meter, a seemingly-innocuous detail which in fact legitimizes (to North Korea) the strength of the Korean regime over

the United States. Atkins' (1996) further analysis reveals that no detail in Pyongyang is arbitrary:

The Juche Tower is faced with 70 tiers (one for each year of Kim's then age) of 25,550 stones (one for each day). On one facade of a pedestal which is fifteen metres long by four metres high (Kim was born on 15 April) there is a poem in twelve stanzas (his birth year was 1912) praising his immortal revolutionary feats and benevolence. Finally, a 'shrine' at the base preserves the congratulatory plaques from juche study groups in seventy countries. (6)

Extraordinary attention to detail in Pyongyang does not assume a passive role in the city by any means. Quite to the contrary, citizens are encouraged to visit and study its monuments regularly. Revolutionary sites celebrating the heroic feats of anti-Japanese revolutionaries and the achievements of the Korean War (called the Fatherland Liberation War in North Korea) are juxtaposed with parks and other areas of leisure, so the image and idea of Juche, and in turn Kim Il-Sung, never escape North Koreans.

The imagery present in Pyongyang is, indeed, hyperreal. Kim (2007) and Atkins (1996) make several references to the performative aspects of the city, where image and reality blur into one. Joinau (2009) embarks on what he deems a "topo-mythanalysis" of Pyongyang, in which he attempts to analyze the Juche mythology "carefully written by the authoritarian North Korean regime in the stones and bricks of Pyongyang" (67).

Joinau's analysis reveals that the ideology is present in the layout of the city. The 75,000 square meter Kim Il-Sung Square was completed in 1954, almost immediately after the conclusion of the Korean War. The square became the focal point for the regime's displays of strength and provided a "three-dimensional layout of its ideology" (75). The massive statue of the legendary *Chollima* horse, located in the northern part of the city's central north-south axis, represents the swiftness of economic and social revolution in

North Korea. Images of Kim Il-Sung abound in Pyongyang, with the most dominant (and domineering) image, a colossal bronze statue known as the Grand Monument, located in Mansudae complex in the ideological heart of the city. *Mansu* signifies "10,000 years" and refers to Kim's eternal rule over North Korea (76). The Taedong River played an important role in the layout of the city. According to Joinau (2009), the Tower of the Juche Idea, along with the Grand People's Study House and the Grand Monument, created an ideological triangle that signified the city center along the Taedong.

Urban planners in Pyongyang created a city meant to be put on display. The city is a physical manifestation of Juche and Kim Il-Sung's personality cult; it legitimizes the regime both to North Koreans and to foreign eyes. It may be argued that this is the only consideration actually given to Pyongyang residents. Atkins (1996) argues that "The consumers of landscape are obedient and willing participants, yet they live in a 'framed' space in which everyone is an outsider" (8), and Kim (2007) agrees, saying that Pyongyang exists as an arena for "self-glorification, rather than as functional environs serving the needs of their inhabitants" (25). The personality cult and Juche in its entirety may be described the same way.

Actual performances, such as parades and highly-choreographed dances that occur regularly in Pyongyang, truly denote its status as a stage on which to display and flaunt the regime's supposed successes, as well as evoke religious loyalty among the North Korean people. In particular, Jung (2013) argues that the Arirang Festival, a mass state production of callisthenic and performance arts in Pyongyang, "anchors the Father [Kim Il-Sung] in both the body and psyche" of the North Korean people and elevates "Jucheism" to a religious experience for them (Jung 2013, 96). Springer (2003) notes that

"through such political theatre, the regime creates its own reality" (37). It may be argued that this reality is projected both inward and outward: outward, to flaunt the regime's power to the world; inward, to prove to its own people, who suffer constant shortages of basic goods and countless human rights abuses, that Pyongyang is truly the utopia of which they are taught. A tangible example is the Ryugyong Hotel. Originally intended to be the tallest building in the world at 105 stories, construction began in 1989 and only the exterior was ever completed. The hotel, thus, would appear to serve no practical purpose, but it serves a theatrical purpose to citizens as the tallest building in the world, a concrete example of the state's supposed capacity.

#### Juche as State Religion

The absolutism of the Juche ideology and the worship of Kim Il-Sung, as Kim (2012) notes, bear a striking resemblance to a fanatical religious cult (Kim 2012, 458). Belke (1999) notes that Juche is "considerably more than mere nationalism" in North Korea and that it demands a drastic degree of religiosity from North Koreans. He also notes that "...Since the lines separating religion and politics are virtually non-existent under Juche, allegiance to [Kim] is both a sacred religious and a political concept" (Belke 1999, 88). To this day, Kim Il-Sung is essentially a god in North Korea; he is the country's "Eternal President" who guided his people along the "road to paradise" (Cumings 1997, 411) and through Juche is said to have achieved one of the greatest examples of modern thought. Replacing religious worship in North Korea with worship of Kim through Juche essentially made Kim a god-like figure who could do no wrong.

Kim Il-Sung may be thought of as a Christ-like or god-like figure to North Koreans, or his followers, and it is possible that aspects of Christianity were intentionally incorporated into the Kim personality cult. Religion and philosophy undeniably influenced Kim Il-Sung in his youth, as he lived in a Confucian society and belonged to a Christian family.<sup>16</sup> Martin (2004) argues that "Experience in church-related activities played a considerable role in training one of the most successful mass leaders and propagandists in the history of the world... for his own eventual elevation to divine status" (Martin 2004, 12). Several parallels may be drawn between Juche and Christianity. Belke observes that worship of the suryong includes "standard religious practices" such as homage, prayer, and unquestioning allegiance (Belke 1999, 84). State-sponsored ceremonies pay homage to the suryong on a grand scale, and individual North Koreans are expected to bow before Kim's massive bronze statue in Pyongyang and lay flowers before his tomb in the Kumsusan Palace of the Sun, also in Pyongyang. Prayers at these locations are also common and encouraged by the state in official media (Belke 1999, 87). Mangyongdae, the birthplace of Kim Il-Sung, was designated a "sacred place similar to Jerusalem or Mecca" to which North Koreans make pilgrimages. (Lim 1982, 275).

The worship within the personality cult is reminiscent of the idea of trinity within Christianity. The trinity may be perceived in different ways. Cho (2002) notes that "...The formula of the leader-the party-the masses in the Juche idea is analogous to that of God-Church (or Christ)-Christians in Christianity" (Cho 2002, 99). This trinity suggests an intimate relationship between the North Korean people and the state, which was

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<sup>16</sup> Kim and his parents were part of the Presbyterian community in Korea. After they fled to Manchuria, they would attend services at a local chapel, where Kim learned to play the organ (Martin 2004, 16).

encouraged as early as 1955 in Kim Il-Sung's speech introducing Juche. He said, "A party divorced from the masses is like a fish out of water... Such a party will not only be unable to win in the revolution, but also will eventually find its very existence endangered" (Kim 1955). Kim emphasized again the intimate relationship between the Party and the people in a meeting with the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea in 1965, using the metaphor of the Party as mother to the people. He told party members, "Party officials must become truly people's servants who show motherly concern for their living and work devotedly in order to improve their lives... to fulfil their responsibility and role as the workers of a motherly Party... Party officials must have genuine traits of a real mother" (Kim 1965).

Ryang (2000) argues that the "effeminizing" of North Korean society occurred to ensure a passive loyalty from the people. The people play a feminine role in returning the love Kim Il-Sung bestowed upon them. She notes that "North Korean men and women were "in love" with Kim Il Sung, adoring his image, cherishing his figure, admiring his manly beauty and wisdom, and totally submitting to his command" (Ryang 2000, 341). This imagery of love between a man and woman may be related to the concept of identifying the Christian Church as the bride of Christ. The Christian Bible likens the union of man and woman to the union of the Church (the body of believers) to Christ: "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25, NRSV). In this case, we may consider the relationship between Kim Il-Sung and the North Korean people to be a union of love and sacrifice.

Moreover, the Bible also refers to Christ as head of the church and savior of its body: "For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the

body of which he is the Savior" (Ephesians 5:23, NRSV). We may draw a parallel between this verse and Kim Jong-Il's theory of the socio-political organism. The theory postulates that the socio-political life of the masses has the potential to be immortal, but only when joined with the brain (the suryong) and the central nerve (the Party) to create a socio-political organism that functions as a collective whole (Lim 2008, 64). In relation to the Bible verse, the husband/Christ (the suryong) is the head (or brain) of the wife/the church (the masses), and by linking as one socio-political organism, the body (the masses) achieves immortality, or is saved, through the Savior (the suryong).

The Holy Trinity may be perceived another way in Juche. Rev. Bahn-Suk Lee argues that "Kim Il-Sung copied and twisted the Christian Trinity... Kim Il-Sung was the almighty, eternal father; Kim Jong-Il was the active word, the son; and Juche ideology was the very spirit of the revolution... the life-giving breath of their god" (cited in Belke 2002, xi). This trinity may also be connected to the socio-political organism, in that the masses may only connect to the suryong through Juche. The work *On the Juche Idea* stresses the importance of living through Juche: "All Party members and working people should clearly understand the truth of the Juche idea, and think and act strictly in accordance with its requirements" (Kim 1982, 1). Through Juche, the masses may achieve "ideological consciousness" (Kim 1982, 23) and complete the revolutionary struggle under the guidance of the suryong. In relating the Juche idea to the Holy Spirit of Christianity, we may then relate the ideological awakening of the masses to the Christian Pentecost. The Pentecost, during which the Holy Spirit entered the followers of Christ, is considered the beginning of the church (or body of believers). Therefore, we may

consider Juche as the start of the North Korean body of believers who will carry out the revolution under the father and the son.

The deification of Kim Il-Sung as eternal father and Kim Jong-Il as son were especially important in legitimizing the succession of power from the former to the latter. Several legends surround the birth of Kim Jong-Il, created to deify him, and both he and his mother Kim Jong Suk are credited with healing powers, granting of miracles, and other superhuman feats similar to those of Jesus Christ (Belke 2002, 305).

North Korean defector Lim Un argues that in North Korea, "There is no difference in the faith of blind believers toward God in religion. The principle of fidelity and absolute obedience to a leader is the same as religious commandments" (Lim 1982, 275). In fact, Kim Jong-Il made the monolithic ideological system official in 1974 through the publication of the Ten Principles,<sup>17</sup> which bear a striking resemblance to the Ten Commandments of Christianity. Each of the ten principles emphasizes loyalty to Kim Il-Sung and mentions him by name. While the principles are vaguer than the Christian commandments, they essentially provide North Koreans with instructions on how to live as good North Koreans, as the Ten Commandments are instructions on how to live as good Christians. North Koreans are expected to know them by heart. The eighth principle states, "We must value the political life we were given by the Great Leader comrade Kim Il-sung, and loyally repay his great political trust and thoughtfulness with heightened political awareness and skill" (quoted in Kim 2008). This principle implies that Kim Il-Sung, like a god, or a Holy Father, gave life to North Koreans and they owe him their lives, and also relates back to the theory of the socio-political organism.

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<sup>17</sup> See Appendix, p.79.

The idea of a father giving life to the people, Aguirre (2014) argues, is not rare in personality cults. The figure at the center of a personality cult typically portrays himself as a venerable father, a paternal figure who gives life to every individual of the state. Once a personality cult has instilled itself in the identity of a people, the people will act in accordance to what the figure at the center of the personality cult decrees. Aguirre describes the paternal aspect of the personality cult as such: "People operate in light of their identity, that is to say, of their system of values... and if these values gravitate in the direction of the Fatherly Protector... who rescues us from fear, the people will consequently respond under this motto: "That which is good for everyone, is good for me. And who says which things are good for everyone? Father.'" (Aguirre 2014, 131). The paternal figure, the object of the personality cult, indisputably knows what is best for his state and for his children.

The idea of the "fatherly leader" as seen in Juche is also reminiscent of Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism and can be seen as an extreme version of filial piety. Seth (2011, 369) observes that leadership in North Korea was portrayed in a markedly Confucian way: Kim Il-Sung was a benevolent ruler, and society was one large family exercising constant reciprocal love. The philosophy of Confucianism could be applied to governing a country as well as familial relations, and it was always "deeply embedded in the fabric of Korean society" (Kim: 2012, 65). Therefore, it would not have been difficult for Kim, as a product of this Confucian society, to modify aspects of Confucianism and apply it to Juche, as it would then appear more familiar and legitimate to North Korean people.

Neo-Confucianism was the dominant ideology of the Joseon dynasty. Considered a revival of classical Confucianism, Neo-Confucianism attempted to remove references to abstract and religious ideas and solidify the importance of personal morality. Levi (2012) notes that Neo-Confucianism defines social order "in terms of the harmonious integration of individuals into a collective whole which present the harmony of the natural order" (Levi 2012, 5). In Neo-Confucian thought, relationships between individuals were more hierarchical and based on subordination, and filial piety more demanding, than in standard Confucian thought. The early Joseon elite of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries reinterpreted Confucianism to protect their interests in a period of strife and uncertainty. According to Kang (2011), "...the great emphasis on consanguinity on the one hand and on the other, the obsession with ritual formality and dogmatic ideological imposition, became the major characteristics of Koreanized neo-Confucianism" (Kang 2011, 67). The emphasis on filial piety and inflexible, dogmatic ideology are easily identifiable in Juche ideology. Veneration of strong leaders was an important aspect of Neo-Confucian Joseon society, and this may have carried over into the veneration of Kim Il-Sung. Harrison (2002) argues that "the built-in readiness of his [Kim Il-Sung's] people to accept as truth what is dispensed from higher authority made it possible for him to win widespread voluntary acceptance of his rule" (Harrison 2002, 23). Harrison suggests that the history of centralized rule in Korea led to voluntary acceptance of the cult of personality in North Korea because Koreans had not known any type of rule beyond that of Neo-Confucian Joseon, and Kim Il-Sung continued the traditional type of rule.

As mentioned earlier, Kim Il-Sung himself endorsed Neo-Confucian scholar Chong Da San (Chong Tasan) and his "splendid works" in his 1955 speech introducing

Juche. It may be argued that at the time, the mention of Chong only served to underline Kim's main point that Korean ideology was more important than foreign ideology to creating a Korean state. Before the spread of the personality cult, Chong Da San's image was used in North Korea as a symbol of nationalist pride. David-West observes that North Korean stamps in 1960 displayed both Kim Il-Sung's image and Chong Da San's image. He argues that these stamps "constituted a political victory statement, saying that Kim was the inheritor and successor of the great national and cultural traditions of Korea" (David-West 2011, 97).

Although Da San's image disappeared as the personality cult grew, David-West argues that the scholar's works were heavily assimilated into Juche. In particular, Da San's works argue that man is the only being who escapes predetermined rules of nature, and thus may bend nature to his whims. The Juche idea of "Man" may thus have been adapted from Da San's works. Da San also wrote of a "benevolent king" or ideal leader, and David-West connects this to Kim Il-Sung's title of "benevolent leader" (David-West 2011, 109). He also argues that in 1950s North Korea, Da San's philosophy was far more respected than Kim's idea of Juche, which was hardly a philosophy, and Kim attempted to assimilate Da San's thoughts into Juche thought to increase its popularity and its inherent "Korean-ness". According to David-West, "Juche became Stalinism-Tasanism" (David-West 2011, 104), and this may help to explain why the personality cult was able to expand within North Korea.

In general, (Neo-) Confucianism was an important aspect of Kim's personality cult. The image of a "fatherly leader," as mentioned by Aguirre (2014), was central to his authority and legitimacy. North Koreans were taught to believe that natural life came

from their biological parents, but social life came from the Great Leader, Kim Il-Sung (Kim 2012). North Korean propaganda promoted the idea of Kim as a paternal figure, often showing him in scenes surrounded by smiling children. The scenes symbolized Kim's rule over the people: the omniscient father wholly committed to the needs of his grateful, loyal, obedient, and happy children. Citizens bowed before his portrait and gave thanks to him instead of actual parents. Belke observes that children in school are taught to place loyalty to the state, and to Kim Il-Sung, above loyalty to their own parents (Belke 1999, 121). The media emphasized the idea that Kim was a humble, simple, and doting father, saying: "Comrade Kim Il-Sung, a genius of revolution... has lived his entire sixty years only for our people's freedom and happiness and the victory of the Korean and world revolutions" (Cumings 1997, 411). It is worth noting that the image of Kim Il-Sung was constantly projected in contradictory manners: he was both mundane and a deity, humble and poorly-educated yet omniscient and omnipotent, on the same level as all North Koreans but also their Supreme Leader. He was benevolent and doting, but demanded great sacrifice for little reward.

In terms of the productivity of North Korea, Confucianism was present in the self-sacrificing aspect of Juche. French (2005) notes that family achievement, important in Confucianism, was "extended to produce a sense of national self-confidence" (38), especially in the aftermath of the Korean War. Juche demanded that North Koreans sacrifice personal gratification for the benefit and betterment of the North Korean state, and mobilization attempts invoked sentiments of Confucian collectivism: "Citizens' rights and duties are governed by the principle of collectivism, where the individual exists for the collective, and the collective for the individual" (French 2005, 39). Although Juche

does not directly mention Confucius or his teachings, nor does it encourage study of Confucian thought, Kim Il-Sung himself defended his personality cult by claiming, "We live by Confucian culture" (French 2005, 40).

Juche was also Confucian in nature because of familism and what Lew, Choi, and Wang (2013) call "collective representation." Filial piety involves groups rather than individuals, because those who represent and remember their ancestors exist as a collective whole. Among Confucian families, collective representation spurs competition and economic advancement to guarantee successful representation of the ancestors. It creates a need for family members to "stimulate and supervise each other's secular performance so that every family member can fulfill their totality of roles and contribute to collective representation" (Lew, Choi, and Wang 2013, 38).

In North Korea, where society is depicted as one large family, Kim Il-Sung is the father and the ancestor. Representing and remembering Kim is enacted through direct actions towards his memory, like bowing to his image, and, more importantly, through loyalty to the state and to Juche. Jung observes, "Their [North Koreans] being one is homage to the Father, whose life was devoted to reviving and raising the Family that is North Korea" (Jung 2013, 101). French (2005) observes this as well, saying, "Juche reinforces the concept of a supreme leader using Confucian and Korean traditional thought to establish the notion of a leader that embodies unity of thought and action. To question Juche is to question the leader, while loyalty will lead to success" (French 2005, 40). Disobeying Juche is, thus, betraying the ancestor Kim and endangering his eternal existence, and North Koreans are taught to supervise one another to ensure loyalty in all levels of society.

The personality cult surrounding Kim Il-Sung may also have been influenced by Japanese colonial rule, in particular, *kokutai* nationalism, that was imposed on the Korean peninsula.<sup>18</sup> Fridell observes that, "...Within the central institutional system, all institutions were seen as units of a pyramiding family-state, or family-nation... over which the emperor presided as the supreme national father-figure..." and that "...filial piety extended to the national level found its highest expression in emperor-loyalty" (Fridell 1976, 550). Emperor-loyalty, or emperor-worship, was expected of Koreans under Japanese colonial rule in the first half of the twentieth century. Harrison (2002) notes this bears a "striking resemblance" to loyalty to the *suryong* in *Juche*, and it is possible that Kim Il-Sung maintained this remnant of Japanese colonial rule within the cult of personality because the framework of the practice was already established in Korea at the time.

#### The Deification of the Kims

Kim Il-Sung's personality cult eventually encompassed his entire family and created the "Kim dynasty." To ensure his larger-than-life image would prevail even after his death, Kim Il-Sung named his son, Kim Jong-Il, the successor to rule of North Korea.

Furthermore, as Ford and Kwon (2008) note, Kim Il-Sung was driven to choose a direct successor to guarantee the continuation of his work after witnessing the betrayal of Stalin and Mao in the Soviet Union and China. Kim Jong-Il would prevent any attempts to "de-Kimilsung" North Korea; in fact, he would achieve quite the opposite. Aguirre (2014)

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<sup>18</sup> *Kokutai* nationalism, which Fridell also refers to as "Shinto nationalism" or "State Shinto" (Fridell 1976, 548), is specifically related to the period in Japanese imperial history (1868-1945) during which the Japanese state used Shinto elements to mobilize loyalty.

notes that leaders of personality cults "Attempt to transcend death... by way of the perpetuation of the revolutionary myth and the attainment of political utopia which they embody" (Aguirre 2014, 249), and Kim Il-Sung perpetuated his own revolutionary myth through the addition of his family. Statues and shrines honoring the Kim family joined those of Kim Il-Sung throughout the country.

It can be argued that the personality cult, and indeed Juche, was created and propagated to secure Kim Jong-Il's control of power. Lacking the charisma and revolutionary guerrilla background of his father, Kim Jong-Il relied on the deification of his family and the myth-making of Juche to legitimize his rule over North Korea. Kim's only true claim to legitimacy, despite the many titles bestowed upon him, was his role in expanding the role of Juche and the personality cult in North Korea. Kim Jong-Il was credited as the author of the most comprehensive publication on Juche ideology, *On the Juche Idea*, delivered as a Treatise to the National Seminar on the Juche Idea in 1982. French notes that Kim had "...no background in the military, as a political theorist or as an economist, yet as the interpreter of Juche he accrued power" (French 2005, 44). He climbed the ranks of the North Korean elite in the 1970s and 80s and he was officially designated heir in 1980; therefore, his influence in the myth-making of Juche and deifying of the Kim family may have been quite large while Kim Il-Sung was still in power.

In order to legitimize the leadership of Kim Il-Sung and Kim Jong-Il, and elevate them to god-like status, the personality cult dictated a complete rewriting of Korean history. Modern Korean history became a celebration of the Kim family's achievements. North Korean historians attempted to rewrite all of Korean history to fit the current ruling

ideology. As Ch'oe says, North Korean history was specifically written to "glorify the uniqueness of Korea's historical legacies in order to satisfy the particularistic ego of nationalism" (Ch'oe 1981, 503). Lintner notes that North Korean historians traced Kim's ancestry back twelve generations and added a great deal of embellishments and exaggerations to feats that may or may not have been carried out by members of the Kim family (Lintner 2005, 77). Kim's own history, which as mentioned is vague at best, has been filled with rich details. Details that contradict the idea of "self-reliance" have been omitted: Kim's Chinese education and youth in Manchuria has been erased from his personal history, and official references to Marxism-Leninism have largely vanished.

North Korea's version of history views the modern period as a national struggle against foreign aggression, and members of Kim Il-Sung's family naturally played the predominant role. One instance is a particularly important example of the Korean people's resistance to U.S. imperialism: the sinking of the U.S. merchant ship General Sherman near Pyongyang in 1866. North Korean scholars inserted Kim Ung-U, Kim Il-Sung's great-great-grandfather, into the history, claiming he led the attack on the ship. Burdick (2010) notes that Kim Ung-U's role in sinking the ship was not added to North Korean official history until the 1980s, and was inserted to prove Kim Il-Sung's merit as a revolutionary leader through heredity and genetics— not coincidentally around the same time that Kim Jong-Il was preparing to be his father's successor. North Korean historians later inserted Kim Il-Sung's father, Kim Hyong-jik, in the March First Movement of 1919, evident in a North Korean history textbook calling him "...the great and eminent leader of our nation's anti-Japanese people's movement..." (Hart 2000, 153),

and claiming that six-year-old Kim Il-Sung also participated. Ch'oe argues that these claims "are totally new and unfamiliar to the outside world" (Ch'oe 1981, 520).

Most important to legitimizing the succession of Kim Jong-Il was the deification of his mother, Kim Il-Sung's first wife, Kim Jong Suk. Propaganda celebrating Kim Jong Suk first appeared in the late 1960s. Ryang argues that Kim Jong Suk became the most important role model for Korean women around the time that Kim Jong-Il, her son, was preparing to take over leadership of North Korea from his father Kim Il-Sung. Belke (1999) argues "...since Kim Jong-Il does not have any basis for being god, deifying Kim Jong Suk adds to his credibility... Thus, the recent reinvention of Kim Jong Suk is, at its core, the calculated use of [Juche] to bolster Kim Jong Il's legitimacy..." (Belke 1999, 73). Elevating her position in the North Korean mythology legitimized the dynastic succession of father to son in the leadership. According to Park, Kim Jong Suk's "achievements during the revolutionary period have been praised in newspapers, publications by the Democratic Women's Union, commentaries by the Central Broadcasting Station, poems, songs, and slogans such as 'Learn from Comrade Kim Jong Suk'" (Park 1992, 28). She is an important figure in the North Korean mythology because she represents and personifies the anti-Japanese struggle, sacrifice in the name of the state, and undying loyalty to Kim Il-Sung.

According to Park (1992), and to her own biography, Kim Jong Suk was one of the few women revolutionary fighters in the anti-Japanese struggle of the 1930s. Her entire family succumbed to harsh conditions or brutality from Japanese officials, inspiring her to join the revolutionary movement at a young age. Her biography states "Kim Jong Suk began to realize, already in her childhood, the nature of the contradictions

of the exploitative society that brought her misery and sorrow. She felt hatred for the Japanese imperialists and her class enemies." Of course, the wording strongly suggests that Kim Jong Suk was drawn to socialist ideas, or even the beginnings of Juche ideas, from a young age, simply through her everyday ordeals rather than through education or exposure to these ideas.

The biography clearly serves to bolster the images of both Kim Il-Sung and Kim Jong-Il. Kim Jong Suk had three children and passed away during childbirth in 1949; however, her official biography omits these details, focusing solely on Kim Jong-Il. Her biography in its entirety reveals very little about Kim Jong Suk's character or personality; the only image projected of her portrays a woman entirely devoted to, first, the revolutionary struggle, and later, the welfare of Kim Il-Sung and in turn, of the new Korean state.

Kim Il-Sung, in his autobiography<sup>19</sup> *With the Century*, very clearly states that Kim Jong Suk's most important role and contribution was being mother to Kim Jong-Il:

If there is any heritage she left with us, it is that she brought up Comrade Kim Jong Il to be the leader of the future, and presented him to the motherland and the Party. You say I brought him up to be my successor, but in actual fact the foundation was laid by Kim Jong Suk. This is the greatest service she rendered for the revolution." (Kim 2003, 1852-1853)

Although Kim Jong-Il was born in Siberia in 1942, (Suh 1988, 51), official North Korean history states that he was born on Mt. Paekdu, a sacred site in ancient Korean mythology and the supposed birthplace of the founder of Korea, Tangun. Belke notes, "...The concocted lore of Kim Jong-Il being born on Mt. Paekdu of Kim Il-Sung (a god) and Kim

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<sup>19</sup> "Autobiography" is used loosely here. Defector and former North Korean official Hwang Jang-Yop claims that the autobiography had been "created by artists who had been writing scenarios for revolutionary novels and films" and calls it a "masterpiece of historical fabrication" (quoted in Martin 2004, 12).

Jong Suk (a goddess) recalls the ancient Tangun legend..." (Belke 1999, 73). The incorporation of ancient legend further served to deify the new leader, Kim Jong-Il.

### Korean Historiography

The personality cult of Kim Il-Sung and his family was successfully established and reached extreme levels of profundity because it catered to a uniquely Korean worldview, which had been shaped by Korean history and rocked by Japanese colonial rule and the Korean War. All aspects of the personality cult are reminiscent of aspects of Korean culture and history. As Seth (2011) notes, "... [Self-sufficiency in] North Korea was carried out with such a particular urgency that, coupled with the country's isolation, its authoritarian ruthlessness, and its ultranationalism, gave it a unique quality" (Seth 2011, 357).

The Korean War was only one tragedy of many for Koreans in recent history. The principle of *sadae*, or serving the superior China, adopted by the Joseon dynasty (1392-1897), its various conflicts with Japan and the Western world, and the period of Japanese colonial rule were considered humiliating to Koreans in the mid-twentieth century (Seth 2011). Koreans saw these events as past weaknesses and collective national failure. Perhaps also from a Confucian perspective, Koreans viewed these events as examples of poor governance, similarly to the Confucian tradition of viewing prior rulers' actions as a mirror for current governance (Schultz 2004). The discontentment and humiliation from these historical episodes was only amplified by the destruction brought about in part by the United States during the Korean War. Juche as an ideology and worldview grew in power and influence in the years following the Korean War partly

because North Koreans did not wish to repeat the errors of their past, especially those wrought by foreign influence on the Korean peninsula.

The complete rewriting of Korean history to suit the Juche ideology was also possible because of the longstanding Korean tradition of historiography. Hart (2000) argues that Korean national identity is based on two ideas: "National history is both eternal (history is an unfolding story with today as the logical arrival point) and natural (we are who we are because it is our essential character to be)" (Hart 2000, 138), and Korean historiography has always catered to these ideas. Therefore, rewriting history with the teleological intent of justifying Juche makes it appear as the only logical step in the continuing history of Korea. Even before Japanese colonial rule, the Korean peninsula had seen many versions of its own history written and rewritten to suit the needs of the current ruling dynasty. Korean historiography was important to reaffirming the uniqueness of the Korean people, especially during times of struggle and subjugation.

After Japanese colonial rule had ended, various versions of Korean history existed. The Japanese version stressed the Koreans' cultural inferiority and limited the vastness of its ancient dynasties (Kim 2012, 353), while nationalistic histories from the same period sought to refute and discredit Japanese historiography and stress the importance of the struggle for Korean independence. These histories were thus further divided between nationalists with communist leanings and those without. With such a large array of historiographies existing in Korean history, especially in the period directly before Kim Il-Sung's rule, it is not difficult to understand how North Korea was able to completely rewrite Korean history with relative ease.

Moreover, as Confucian historiographers of the ancient dynasties used historical accounts to bolster the power of the current ruler and reflect on the errors of past rulers, North Korean historiography also utilizes Korean history to legitimize its regime. North Korea, despite calling itself Joseon (Choson), actually denounced the Joseon dynasty for its weaknesses, mainly its feudalistic class structures and debilitating interactions with the outside world. It emphasizes a stark difference between the feudal era of Joseon and the modern period of Joseon, which is North Korea under Juche.

Despite North Korea's official denunciation of the Joseon dynasty, much of Kim Il-Sung's ideology may find its roots in Joseon thinking (Kim 2012, 320). The idea of the "Kim dynasty" in itself draws from the long dynasties of Korea's past, Joseon being the longest, and the Neo-Confucian social order present in Joseon is present in North Korea, especially in loyalty to a single ruler of the state. North Korea may have adopted the Joseon name for several reasons. Since the dynasty ruled for nearly five hundred years before falling to Japanese colonial rule, the North Korean government was able to assert its legitimacy by claiming to be a direct continuation of Joseon and erasing the period of Japanese colonial rule. Levi (2012) notes that the dynastic succession was a logical step for Kim because he had created the perception of North Korea as a continuation of the Joseon dynasty to erase the prewar era of subjugation under Japanese colonial rule.

Joseon was a strictly Confucian state in which dynastic succession was a rule. Therefore, Kim decided to adhere to the established rules of an earlier Korea, which also granted his regime more legitimacy in that it connected itself to a largely successful, independent period of Korea's past. Through calling itself Joseon, North Korea also

celebrates its ancestry in the very foundation of the Korean people— the Gojoseon<sup>20</sup>— and, in turn, asserts its legitimacy by connecting itself to the ancient history of the peninsula. As mentioned, references to the founder of Korea and the Gojoseon, Tangun, abound in North Korean texts, especially to connect Kim Jong-Il to the sacred and legendary history of Korea.

Having considered the various cultural influences, both indigenous and foreign, on the personality cult, we may better understand why it was successful in North Korea. The indigenous influences on the cult of personality, in particular the aspects of Christianity and Korean Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism, in combination with foreign influences such as other socialist cults of personality and Japanese emperor-worship, bolstered the legitimacy of Juche to the North Korean people and presented them with an ideology that did not appear particularly foreign to them. Rather, the "Korean-ness" of Juche and the cult of personality appealed to Koreans who had spent much of recent history subjugated by foreign powers. Genuine admiration for Kim Il-Sung, given his charisma and nationalist guerrilla background, allowed the personality cult to expand profoundly. Contrastingly, ruthless purges of perceived opposition, brutal tactics of suppressing dissent, and complete state control over virtually all types of information also allowed the cult of personality to expand.

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<sup>20</sup> Exact dates of the Gojoseon kingdom are unknown. The legend of Tangun has the foundation of Korea occurring in 2333 BC, though no evidence exists to support this. The kingdom is estimated to have fallen in 108 BC (Kim 2012).

## The Personality Cult and Isolationism

One final consideration for the successful implementation and expansion of the cult of personality in North Korea is its degree of isolationism. Kim (2012) describes historical Korea as a "single homogeneous nation that has kept its identity despite repeated invasions by surrounding countries and peoples" (Kim 2012, xi) and argues that it maintained a degree of isolationism as a form of self-preservation in the face of countless invasions. The Joseon dynasty in particular received the name "The Hermit Kingdom" after closing itself off to foreign influence. Contemporary North Korea is also often referred to as "The Hermit Kingdom." As has been discussed in this thesis, despite the demand for "self-reliance" through Juche, Kim Il-Sung hardly practiced international isolationism. The foreign influences on Juche alone contradict its claims of being entirely indigenous and "uniquely Korean." Kim's dependence on the Soviet Union and China also contradicts the main tenets of Juche ideology. However, a degree of isolationism still existed (and exists) in North Korea, and this allowed Kim Il-Sung and later Kim Jong-Il to reign as kings over the state.

Turku (2009) defines isolationist foreign policy as combining "a non-interventionist military posture with an ideological, social, and political agenda of state-centric economic nationalism and protectionism" (Turku 2009, 6). Protectionism is perhaps the most important aspect of the Juche ideology. Indeed, Juche existed to "protect" the Korean people from foreign aggression and can be considered a form of domestic isolationism, meant to exalt the formerly-oppressed Korean people. In Kim Jong-Il's *On the Juche Idea*, he states:

Koreans must know well Korean history, geography, economics, culture and the custom of the Korean nation, and in particular our Party's policy, its revolutionary history and revolutionary traditions. Only then will they be able to establish Juche and become true Korean patriots, the Korean communists. In order to establish Juche in thinking, it is necessary to possess a high sense of national dignity and revolutionary pride. Without the sense of national pride that one's nation is inferior to none, without the pride and honour of the revolutionary people, it would be impossible to live up to one's conviction in an independent manner, uphold national independence and dignity and emerge victorious in the difficult revolutionary struggle.

Therefore, Juche may only be successful if the Korean people are well-versed in their own culture and history (naturally including the "revolutionary traditions" of Kim Il-Sung) and if they truly believe that their nation is "inferior to none." Nationalism is a requirement in Juche, and the isolationist nature of Juche exists to foster that nationalism and to ensure the "independence" of the people from foreign influences.

Its geographical location in addition to the international political context of the 1950s-1970s undoubtedly played a role in the growth of the personality cult. The Korean peninsula maintained a degree of isolation from the rest of the world for much of its history because of its geographical location. Its interactions with foreign powers were largely limited to China and Japan, both of which mounted several invasion attempts on Korea, and Korea had virtually no exposure to the Western world until the sixteenth century (Kim 2012, 274). During the 1950s to 1970s, North Korea had little to no interaction with South Korea and with the rest of the democratic world. Turku (2009) argues that North Korea was isolationist partly because it chose to be isolationist and partly because the international community, led by the United States, chose not to interact and cooperate with it due to its totalitarian nature (Turku 2009, 15).

According to Kim, Juche represents "the independent stance of rejecting dependence on others and of using one's own powers, believing in one's own strength and displaying the revolutionary spirit of self-reliance" (Kim 1975, 117). Juche was, at its core, isolationist. However, North Korea has maintained diplomatic relations with many states, including China, which has been its biggest ally and trade supporter since the Korean War. Kim Il-Sung had alliances with several socialist rulers throughout Eastern Europe and Southeast Asia, and his leadership style inspired Nicolae Ceaușescu, communist dictator of Romania, to adopt his own personality cult. Therefore, domestic isolationism was always more crucial than international isolationism in maintaining the Kim regime in North Korea. The inherent contradictions of Juche ideology are not apparent to North Koreans, who are exposed only to information carefully censored by the state.

## Section V: Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to answer the questions of why and how Juche ideology and the cult of personality were successfully implemented in North Korea. The thesis undertook a historical analysis of the formation of the North Korean state, including the international and domestic context of this formation. It has concluded that Juche was successfully implemented and institutionalized due to several factors, including the rise of Korean nationalism, the personal history of founder Kim Il-Sung, the Korean War and the resulting domestic strife, the international political context of this time, and the nature of Korean culture. This thesis has provided a history and explanation of Juche ideology, which in turn is necessary for understanding North Korea as a whole.

This thesis has served to synthesize the many different approaches and arguments on Juche ideology into one comprehensive, coherent, and multifaceted analysis of the different factors that contributed to the creation of the Juche ideology. It has also enriched the overall discussion on Juche by presenting several original analyses of the formation of Juche ideology. Specifically, a juxtaposition of Kim Il-Sung's and Rhee Syngman's works on nationalism and Korean-ness highlighted the similarities and differences in their approaches to defining Korean national identity. The detailed comparison of aspects of the personality cult to verses from the Bible, and other aspects of Christianity, including the Holy Trinity and the Pentecost, demonstrated the religious aspect of Juche. These comparisons stress the striking similarities between Juche and Christianity and support the argument that, given the context of his Christian upbringing, Kim Il-Sung may have assimilated Christianity into his cult of personality. This thesis also applied Turku's concept of "domestic isolationism" directly to Juche to analyze how

the absolute state control over the domestic sphere allowed the regime to act in inconsistent matters and allowed Juche to function as an inherently contradictory ideology.

Understanding Korean history is crucial to understanding Kim Il-Sung's Juche ideology. Korea's encounters with the outside world since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century were largely negative. The birth of Korean nationalism among the homogeneous Korean population before and during the years of Japanese colonial rule contributed to the desire to find or create a national self-identity. Korea faced severe subjugation and dominance under Japanese colonial rule, followed by the division of the peninsula and the Korean War, which devastated the northern half. North Koreans at this time had no sense of national pride or identity. The "uniquely Korean" aspects of Juche, as well as the concept of self-reliance and rejection of foreign influence, catered to North Koreans at this time.

The Korean War also created factional strife within the North Korean leadership. Kim Il-Sung, who had lost the war, acted quickly to blame his failures on others to secure control over the state. Originally part of the Kapsan faction of revolutionary Koreans, Kim used factional differences to his advantage, and by the end of the 1950s, successfully purged most of his opponents from the leadership circle. He consolidated his power and introduced the concept of Juche, or self-reliance, in 1955, using the idea to blame factions for depending blindly on Soviet or foreign thought without relying on Korean thought.

Kim would not fully develop the idea of Juche until the late 1960s. He was careful to avoid the concept of "self-reliance" while still reliant on Soviet and Chinese aid. He skillfully used the Sino-Soviet split to his advantage to continue receiving aid from both states without declaring a side. After the death of Stalin in 1956 and the ensuing de-

Stalinization campaign in the Soviet Union, Kim began to distance himself from his former allies and the people who had originally put him into power in North Korea. Once Chinese aid to North Korea slowed in the mid-1960s, Kim began to develop the idea of Juche, and it became the main slogan for North Korean propaganda.

North Korea's rivalry with South Korea after the Korean War was also an impetus for the development of Juche ideology. Both states sought to project the sole image of "Korean-ness" to the world and did not acknowledge the existence of two separate Korean states. Kim Il-Sung's mistrust of anticommunist South Korean President Rhee Syngman was evident in his 1955 speech introducing Juche. Rhee's denunciation of communism as a break from tradition, especially in Korea, prompted Kim to develop Juche as a specifically-Korean ideology to demonstrate that North Korea was more connected to Korean tradition than South Korea.

The cult of personality resulting from Juche ideology was taking shape in North Korea as early as 1948. The Soviet Union planted its seeds by encouraging hyperbolic propaganda and newspaper articles on Kim Il-Sung to legitimize his rule to skeptical North Koreans. It expanded in profundity after the Korean War, while Kim was working to consolidate his power and silence all dissidence. All channels of information were controlled by the state and became outlets to spread the infallible and god-like nature of Kim. Kim's revolutionary struggle and traditions became the sole traditions of North Korean history, and his family was written into the revolutionary history of the peninsula.

The deification of Kim through the personality cult may be a result of his own perceived weaknesses and shortcomings. Having grown up in Manchuria speaking Chinese, Kim may have perceived himself as less Korean than other potential leaders,

and sought to compensate by exaggerating the nationalistic aspects of Juche ideology. A son to peasants, Kim was not well-educated and subsequently not well-versed in classic thought as had many other Korean factional leaders of the time. He may have felt inferior to and threatened by them, and decided to enact purges against anyone and everyone he considered suspicious. Lankov (2002) argues that Kim Il-Sung's actual feats as a revolutionary guerrilla fighter and his intelligence and quick-wittedness exemplified in his leadership have been devalued by the excessive embellishments of the personality cult and the brutal manners in which the regime enforces it.

North Korean defector Lim Un claims that the extreme reliance on Juche stems from Kim Il-Sung's desire to be taken seriously as a theoretician or ideologist, which he shared with Mao. Specifically, Lim quotes from the memoirs of Wang Ming, a leader in the CCP, a conversation between Wang and Mao regarding Mao's desire to create his own "ism." His reasoning is: "If a leader fails to establish his own 'ism,' he is liable to be overthrown by others, or attacked after his death. But once an 'ism' is established, the situation is different..." (quoted in Lim 1982, 268). Lim argues that the personality cult within North Korea was not enough to satisfy Kim; rather, he wished for Juche to be acknowledged universally as the supreme ideology of the time. David-West (2011) agrees that Kim felt inferior to the great thinkers of Korean history and thus assimilated their philosophies with his ideology to develop Juche into a theory applicable to all aspects of North Korean society.

Stemming from his perceived inferiority and desire to leave a legacy, the personality cult was also used to justify the transmission of power from Kim Il-Sung to his son Kim Jong-Il. Having witnessed the process of de-Stalinization in the Soviet Union

and the reconsiderations of Mao's policies in China, Kim feared the betrayal of his own policies in North Korea and thus chose Kim Jong-Il as his successor to ensure the continuation of Juche. Kim Jong-Il, even before being chosen as successor, was influential in institutionalizing Juche and the cult of personality. He is author of the seminal work on Juche, *On the Juche Idea*, and was considered the leading specialist on Juche in North Korea. The deification of Kim, and later his family, was also useful in legitimizing Kim Jong-Il's own rule, since he lacked the revolutionary background and traits of a charismatic leader of his father.

The cult of personality was successfully implemented in North Korea because North Koreans both admired Kim Il-Sung and were forced to admire him. The personality cult combined several aspects of Korean culture and history, therefore appearing indigenous and connected to the patterns of Korean history and making it more accessible or believable to the North Korean people. Specifically, it utilized aspects of Christianity, Confucianism, and Neo-Confucianism to create the concept of Kim Il-Sung as an immortal and benevolent father-figure to whom North Koreans owed their political lives. Since Juche blurred the lines between politics and society, North Koreans essentially owed their entire existence to Kim, and were taught to treasure the fatherly leader over their own parents. Worship of Kim and endless monuments, songs, poems, films, and performances praising him elevated him to a status of god-like creator and savior of the Korean people, and by the late 1970s, Juche resembled a state religion more than a political ideology.

State control of all information and all aspects of life in North Korean society ensured the legacy of Kim Il-Sung would never falter. As Ford and Kwon (2008) note,

Kim became synonymous with North Korea. French (2005) argues that the cult of personality is so deeply embedded into North Korean society that it would be impossible to remove it without causing the entire society to collapse. The rigidity of Juche has prevented any flexibility or reform within the North Korean state and caused it to stagnate in all aspects of production.

Juche first granted North Koreans a sense of self-identity and national pride because it claimed to be "uniquely Korean" and catered to "the unique Korean worldview." Juche takes advantage of Korea's historical isolationism through the "self-reliance" stance. It also postulates that interaction with the outside world could yield no benefits, with Japanese colonial rule, the Korean War, and foreign imperialism as evidence. Juche manipulated Korean history in favor of the North Korean elite, retaining the ideas of dynastic succession, isolationism, and absolute loyalty to the leader, and discarding anything that would not fit into the North Korean hagiography.

Juche elevated Korean nationalism into hypernationalism. Juche promoted the purity of the Korean people and xenophobia towards any other peoples. Juche functioned as what Turku calls "domestic isolationism" in that it focused inward rather than outwards. Under the framework of the world as an imperialistic threat, Juche could serve as a form of protectionism for the North Korean people, controlling all information for their own benefit. The guise of domestic isolationism and Juche protectionism allowed for endless contradictions in North Korean foreign and domestic policy.

Ultimately, Juche was made the dominant ideology of North Korea to perpetuate Kim Il-Sung's regime and personality cult. Juche was ingrained into the very fabric of North Korean society so that Kim's words were law and opposing him was unfathomable,

as it would be the equivalent of opposing all of Korean history and the struggles of the Korean ethnicity. Juche made Kim Il-Sung synonymous with North Korea and allowed his figure to surpass his actual life. Juche and Kim's personality cult have persisted in North Korea despite significant changes in the international field, though a lasting future under Kim's regime in North Korea seems precarious at best.

This thesis is useful in understanding how North Korea operates as a Jucheist rather than communist state. Understanding Juche extends to understanding past, present, and future North Korean policy decisions. Furthermore, as Turku (2009) argues, domestic isolationism is impossible to maintain in today's interconnected and interdependent world. Considering isolationism bolstered the intensity of Kim's personality cult, the world is not likely to see the rise of any similar personality cults in the near future.

Juche is vital in understanding the future of the North Korean regime. Ultimately, the “self-reliance” of Juche translates to reliance upon Kim Il-Sung. Having endured for over sixty years, outliving other socialist states and surviving the Cold War because of Juche, the future of the North Korean regime depends on its adherence to the Juche ideology. Specifically, how current leader Kim Jong Un, grandson of Kim Il-Sung, utilizes Juche will determine the survival of the regime. Whether he continues to uphold Kim Il-Sung’s legacy as his father did, or reinterpret Juche to suit his own desires, will be the deciding factor of the future of the North Korean regime. At this time, it appears that the young leader Kim has opted to distance himself from the past; his 2017 new year’s address made no mention of Kim Il-Sung, Kim Jong-Il, or even suryong (Cha 2017). This spells an uncertain future for a country that has virtually functioned as a Jucheist state under Kim Il-Sung’s words since its formation.

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## Appendix

The Ten Principles for the Establishment of the Monolithic Ideology System were officially announced by Kim Jong Il in 1974 (cited in Kim 2008 and Roh 2006).

1. We must give our all in the struggle to unify the entire society with the revolutionary ideology of the Great Leader Kim Il Sung.
2. We must honor the Great Leader comrade Kim Il Sung with all our loyalty.
3. We must make absolute the authority of the Great Leader comrade Kim Il Sung.
4. We must make the Great Leader comrade Kim Il Sung's revolutionary ideology our faith and make his instructions our creed.
5. We must adhere strictly to the principle of unconditional obedience in carrying out the Great Leader comrade Kim Il Sung's instructions.
6. We must strengthen the entire party's ideology and willpower and revolutionary unity, centering on the Great Leader comrade Kim Il Sung.
7. We must learn from the Great Leader comrade Kim Il Sung and adopt the communist look, revolutionary work methods and people-oriented work style.
8. We must value the political life we were given by the Great Leader comrade Kim Il Sung, and loyally repay his great political trust and thoughtfulness with heightened political awareness and skill.
9. We must establish strong organizational regulations so that the entire party, nation and military move as one under the one and only leadership of the Great Leader comrade Kim Il Sung.

10. We must pass down the great achievement of the revolution by the Great Leader comrade Kim Il Sung from generation to generation, inheriting and completing it to the end.