

**North Korea in the Globalizing Era:  
Why is it critical to understand North Korea through  
history, culture, norms, and the Kim family**

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## I. Introduction

### **Background and Research Question**

As many scholars in the political field point out, it has become *en vogue* to suggest that globalization entails the gradual or eventual dissolution of the traditional nation-state. During the past few decades, the forces of globalization have undoubtedly shifted the role of traditional boundaries of values, institutions, and governance towards uncharted directions. Recently, there have been continual rebellions and upheavals, known as the Arab Spring, against the oppressive regimes in Egypt, Tunisia, Lybia, Yemen, and Syria. At the same time, many nations such as China and Saudi Arabia have opened up to international trade to increase their economic growth and investment to appease the public for their repressive measures. More and more societies, groups, and people are able to express their voices through technology, social networks, and demonstrations, which diminish the role of the values, institutions, and governance established by the state. However, North Korea continues to be in uncontested power and manages a very high level of control over the public despite the obsessive government policies of mass games, strict control of information, economic deterioration, and harsh punishment. The puzzle seems to be – is it purely because the public are brain-washed and under-threat to think otherwise (on top of being isolated from any communication with other countries), or is it because they really benefit in some form from the regime? To solve this puzzle, I will focus on the research question of this study – what policies have the North Korean government implemented to enforce the public to believe in their political leaders, and what is perpetuating this faith, despite the destitute conditions that they have faced during the last decades?

### **Brief Literature and Theory Review**

Because of the various autocratic regimes throughout history, there are many theories on the policies of autocratic regimes that help maintain and manage public support and opposition. These theories will be very useful in providing a lens to look at North Korea and the regime's policies. For literature review, I will cover two groups of theoretical models that highlight controlling policies of autocratic regimes: co-optation and coercion. Co-optation includes policies of redistribution and mass politics, while coercion includes policies of suppression and favoritism institutionalization, and personalized ideology.

#### a) Co-optation

In order to control the public, an autocratic leader must not only repress his opponents, but also increase the amount of their opponents to stay in power. The more members in the opposition groups, the dictator's welfare and security interests surround on less and less people to a more manageable size. As a result, more people of the country become repressed and indigent.<sup>1</sup> This helps to explain the growing numbers in political camps, and the extreme poverty that the North Korean people face. The growing number of prisoners decreases the threat to Kim's security because oppositions are locked and it reduces the amount of people the Kim regime redistributes to.

Also, totalitarian regimes implement mass politics in order to create nationalistic support for the regime. They do this in a couple ways. First, a regime is founded by indoctrinating the

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<sup>1</sup> Dan Slater. "Iron Cage in an Iron Fist: Authoritarian Institutions and the Personalization of Power in Malaysia." *Comparative Politics* 36, no. 1 (2003): 19.

masses with the party ideology and mobilizing them for a revolution.<sup>2</sup> Second, a regime raises collectivism as a prerequisite for achieving individual security. In this way, the regime seeks to inculcate individuals to find greater value as a member of society and creates social pressure that discourages people from being different.

#### b) Coercion

Using measures of terror such as imprisonment and torture is quite common in any political system, but the use of terror in totalitarian regimes is somewhat different. Dictators use terror to target not only the apparent opponents, but also the entire population by treating them as potential threats. Stalin, Hitler, and Mao used terror through various means, such as purges, concentration camps, mass liquidation, public executions, and political struggle sessions, which successfully generated fear among people so that they would not attempt committing any anti-government activities.<sup>3</sup>

Totalitarian coercion can also involve government policies to institutionalize and personalize power. Personalization and institutionalization of power has a positive relationship, in which the dictator enforces his policies through packing.<sup>4</sup> Packing is the appointment of loyalists and purging rivals in order to create institutions with loyalists. Through packing, the regime can create a highly personalized and institutionalized regime that can garner loyalists who work to suppress opposition and control the public sector. In this way, North Korea generally employs *inminban* leaders who are from loyal class families and some from wavering class who show absolute loyalty to the government so that they can report and suppress any sign of disagreement or disloyalty in the society.<sup>5</sup>

The theoretical models show there are various strategies in which totalitarian regimes can succeed in controlling the regime's citizens. However, these theories reflect many autocratic regimes such as China under Mao, Soviet Union under Stalin, Libya under Gaddafi, and Egypt under Mubarak which either collapsed or had to loosen their autocratic policies. However, North Korea has not seen a tipping point in their regime to collapse nor loosen their policies. Thus, it is vital to analyze North Korea beyond a theoretical perspective and more of a historical and cultural approach to understand the political leadership, values, institutions, and governance under the Kim regime.

### **Abstract and Hypotheses**

In North Korea, the regime makes use of autocratic strategies such as the nationalization of the economy, labor camps, control of information, and personality cult but these strategies are uniquely combined with the Confucius culture, religious beliefs, history, legacies of the Japanese occupation, and the spirit of one *Han-Minjok* (one race) in North Korea. In the next four chapters, I explain the policies of the Kim regime that propped up a high level of public allegiance, constantly suppressed regime oppositions, and created an ideological justification of the absolute rule of the Kim family. By analyzing the origins and effects of such policies, my hypotheses are that along with the totalitarian policies of labor camps and institutionalizing loyalists, the culture, history, and norms that have been built up by Kim Il Sung's policies have increasingly secured

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Tucker, "The Dictator and Totalitarianism." *World Politics* 17, no. 4 (1965): 559.

<sup>3</sup> Ronald Wintrobe, "Dictatorship: Analytical Approaches." In *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 385.

<sup>4</sup> Slater, "Iron Cage," 25

<sup>5</sup> Robert Collins, *Marked for Life: Songbun, North Korea's Social Classification System* (Washington DC: HRNK Publications, 2012).

the Kim family and the political leadership with omnipotence over the values, institutions, and governance of the country despite the globalizing effects of today. The policies of Kim Il Sung have acculturated into North Korea's society, allowing the Kim regime to maintain ascendancy despite the 1990s famine, public riots during the currency reform in 2010, and rapid information inflow; thus, the inheritance of the policies have sustained stability of Kim Jong Un's government and power structure.

### **Methodology**

In order to answer the research goals, I will opt to assess my hypotheses on the following North Korean policies of control: communist policies, systematic terror, *Juche* ideology, and the cult of personality. I will assess these policies by taking a historical approach, which will help review the government policies in different periods and explain the effects of the North Korean policies. Along with primary data from Woodrow Wilson Center archives, I also made use of secondary resources in the form of news articles, recent data, and videos to support the garnered data. Once I delineate the policies and their effects on the North Korean government, I will conclude with my thoughts on the implications of North Korean regime's totalitarian policies on the Kim Jong Un succession and viable options to plan long-term strategy for North Korean denuclearization and reformation.

## II. Creating National Dependence on the Government through Communism

Because of Soviet Union's ascendancy over North Korea after the Korean War, the Soviet Union critically influenced the rise of communist political figures and government policies. Kim, being under Soviet Rule and the North Korean communist party, used communist ideology and policies as a means to influence and gain public allegiance. While the original goal behind communism was equality and the abolishment of social classes, the Kim regime used communist policies to control the public and population by creating a nation dependent on the government. When the citizens were absolutely dependent on the government for food and economic assistance, citizens were not only forced to obey government rules, but also desired to catch dissenters in order to gain reward from the government.

In order to create a nation dependent on the government and its ideology, Kim emphasized a collectivist identity by discouraging different views and mandating automatic membership to social groups. Article 63 of the North Korean Constitution stated that individuals existed for the society. The constitution sought to "turn the whole society into a single collective unit in comradeship."<sup>6</sup> As illustrated in the Constitution, the Kim regime pursued ideological and political unity in order to strengthen such nationalistic spirit. Also, North Korean government placed greater importance on the society than on individuals, so the individuals were asked to devote and sacrifice themselves for the sake of the country. Such collectivist identity and ideology were reinforced by the automatic membership of different social groups. From the childhood to old age, every North Korean is obligated to join an organization in the order of nursery, Juvenile Corps, Socialist Youth League, and Trade Unions.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Andrei Lankov, *North of the DMZ: essays on daily life in North Korea* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2007), 38.

<sup>7</sup> Bradley K. Martin. *Under the loving care of the fatherly leader: North Korea and the Kim dynasty* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2004), 89.

Another communist policy was the nationalization of farms and land in order to enforce national dependence on the government for food and work. By 1954, a third of North Korea's families joined the state initiated cooperatives, which were grouped families in charge of planting and harvesting agricultural farms. By 1956, the government claimed the nationalization of 95.6 percent of all arable land and by 1958, the entire rural population worked under government cooperatives.<sup>8</sup> The rationing of food began in 1946, first toward government employees, but with nationalization, it expanded to the entire country by the 1960s. In 1957, the government executed a law prohibiting any private trade of rice, which is one of the most important sources of calories in the Korean diet.<sup>9</sup> This dependency gave the government ability to give orders to the people, where they would have to obey or they would be unfed and unemployed.

Moreover, education and indoctrination of ideology was a critical policy inherited from China and the Soviet Union. To control the education system, the Democratic Youth League was inaugurated by the Party, and the North Korean People's Committee implemented strict state control of the education system.<sup>10</sup> In 1953, technical and cadre schools were prioritized, and the Songdo College of Politics and Economics and People's College of Economics were built to train new party cadres in higher-level government.<sup>11</sup> In 1960, all cadre schools changed their name to Communist Colleges with the purpose of training Party cadres on local level enterprises and cooperative farms.<sup>12</sup> This helped create loyalists to the Korea Worker's Party, and the Party strictly controlled every aspect of the education system from administration to research to personnel to teaching.<sup>13</sup> The teachers were trained to become representatives of the Party and teach students to "learn by heart," having communist work-ethic and absolute faith in Kim Il Sung.<sup>14</sup> These teaching methods closely intertwined with Confucian culture and Christianity, and those who did not adhere to these rules were demoted from their positions and even sent to prison. For example, according to diplomatic conversations by the director of Kim's cult of personality, professors who taught with their interpretation, even if it was according to the content of the books, were fired from their jobs and punished for their "improper" behavior; thus, many do not even speak freely in their household.<sup>15</sup> By 1966, Party instructors constituted nearly 95 percent of the 80,000 teachers in North Korea. This allowed the government to have continuing control of the education system by employing only party partisans as teachers.

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<sup>8</sup> Andrei Lankov, "Kim Takes Control: The "Great Purge" in North Korea, 1956-1960." *Korean Studies* 6, no. 1 (2002).

<sup>9</sup> Andrei Lankov, "North Korea: De-Stalinization from Below and the Advent of New Social Forces." *Harvard Asia Quarterly* 10, no. 4 (2010): 23 – 4.

<sup>10</sup> Balazs Szalontai, *Kim Il Sung in the Khrushchev era: Soviet-DPRK relations and the roots of North Korean despotism, 1953-1964*. (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2005), 25

<sup>11</sup> Robert A. Scalapino, and Chong-sik Lee. *Communism in Korea* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 904

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 915

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 913

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 910

<sup>15</sup> Notes from a conversation between the 1st Secretary of the PRL Embassy in the DPRK with the director of a department in one of the ministries on 5.I.1958," 5 January 1958, North Korea International Documentation Project (NKIDP) Archives, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, D.C.

### III. Systematic Terror

Kim Il Sung's reign of terror started during the establishment of North Korea as he received political support from the Soviet Union. He purged most of his rivals and in order to continue suppress opposition he used hard and soft policies. Hard policies include public trials and executions and punishment in labor or concentration camps. Soft policies include *inminbans*, information control, mutual supervision, and struggle sessions. By using a combination of these policies, Kim effectively terrorized the public, silenced potential opponents, and deprived the people of the possibility of criticizing or questioning the Great Leader, himself.

As one of the soft policies, the Kim regime created *inminbans* – groups comprised of 30-50 families. *Inminbans* not only served to indoctrinate the Kim's *Juche* ideology<sup>16</sup>, but also cultivated collectivist, and possibly, nationalistic sentiment towards one's group and nation. To enforce government control, the leaders of the *inminbans* kept a watch on the families and carried out policies or commands of the government.<sup>17</sup> Also, leaders of the *inminbans* gathered food rations for the people, but the fundamental mission of leaders was to report any criticism of government and suppress opposition.<sup>18</sup> To create an incentive, the leaders gave rewards to those who reported criticism of others' miss-doings and those who practiced self-criticism to become better subjects of Kim Il Sung. Charles Armstrong points out that this strategy of self-criticism was similar to evangelical testimony and adapted to the Confucian culture, in which people are corrected through self-reflection.<sup>19</sup> Thus, people had to be careful of their actions and follow the laws of the government in order to protect themselves and their families. This created an effective form of policing and maintaining surveillance for the Party.

Another soft policy was the *yon-jwa-joe* policy, which gave the justification of associating one's crime with also his family and ancestry. Party critics and oppositions were sent to labor camps, and as part of the policy of *yon-jwa-joe*, meaning guilt of association, families were sent together, even if only one of the family members committed a crime.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, future generations of political criminals were punished as well. This policy effectively discouraged people and groups from opposing the Party. The *yon-jwa-joe* policy is closely related to the intimate bond of kinship embedded in Confucian culture through ancestral worship and filial relationships. In one of the interviews taken by Jin Woong Kang, a defector claimed that because of his familial relation to a labeled anti-Party family, his children were not allowed to attend schools, forced to live in labor camps, and harshly monitored.<sup>21</sup>

As a hard policy, the government used labor camps, prisons, and executions as means to stir terror and fear. North Korea built two types of prisons: the ordinary prison and political detention prison. People who committed minor crimes were sent to the ordinary prison, *gyohwaso*, a "reeducation center." Surrounded with barbed wire and high walls, the inmates were mandated to complete at least ten hours of labor for seven days a week. While the facilities and foods are destitute in these centers, they were in better condition than the second type of prisons,

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<sup>16</sup> *Juche* ideology is explained in chapter four

<sup>17</sup> Jin Woong Kang, "The 'Domestic Revolution' Policy and Traditional Confucianism in North Korean State Formation." *Harvard Asia Quarterly* 10, no. 4 (2006).

<sup>18</sup> Armstrong, *North Korean Revolution*, 191

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* 212 - 3

<sup>20</sup> Lee, Sung-Yoon. "North Korea's Ideology and Mindset." Class Lecture. DHP-P275. Fletcher Graduate School, Medford. 23 Feb. 2010. Lecture.

<sup>21</sup> Kang, "Domestic Revolution Policy," no pages.



the political detention camps known as *gwalliso* (“control and management centers”).<sup>22</sup> Many inmates die of beatings, torture, starvation, and illnesses.<sup>23</sup> Hassig and Oh also explain that people do not dare fight back against the officers or the system because they fear possible retaliation against their family members.<sup>24</sup>

#### IV. *Juche* ideology

In order to strengthen his party and leadership, Kim developed his political ideology called *Juche*. Kim gave his first speech in 1955 on *Juche*, meaning self-isolationism and self-identity of Korea.<sup>25</sup> Through the *Juche* ideology, the Kim regime managed to create a government isolated politically, economically, and militarily. With such isolation, people became forced to believe in the regime because they are cut off from the outside world and were denied any other thought of ideology.

For economic independence, Kim focused on rebuilding his country using North Korea’s own national resources and developing economic ideology that abolished reliance on international trade. The North Korean government built a balanced plan to develop agriculture and industry, but with a larger investment in heavy industry. North Korea needed to produce enough agriculture and light industries in order to support the production in the heavy industries. This plan was called the *Chollima* movement, in which the government used national resources and mobilized thousands to work extremely hard.<sup>26</sup> The *Chollima* movement was employed into the Three Year plan (1954 – 56) and the Five Year Plan (1957 – 61) and GNP growth reached 20.9 percent to 30.1 percent a year.<sup>27</sup> In the Three Year and Five Year plans, North Korea received about 22 million dollars (US) annually from socialist countries.<sup>28</sup> The Three Year Plan, Five Year Plan and *Chollima* movement started to begin the effort for economic independence as the economy grew; however, the country continued to rely on foreign aid for economic production and growth, but managed to reduce trade with foreign nations significantly. Although North Korea received significant aid from Communist nations, the focus on natural resources and independency allowed for the government to block exchange with foreign contacts and information that could downgrade and slander the government.

For military independence, Kim stirred patriotic nationalism by forming a nation-wide army to be ever-ready for the reunification of Korea. Kim endeavored to do this through the military armament of the entire country. Through thorough militarization, Kim hoped to instill in the people hatred towards the Americans, Japanese, and anti-Party members and cultivate nationalistic sentiment.<sup>29</sup> In 1962, the government announced to “arm the entire populace, to fortify the entire country, to train every soldier to become cadre, and to modernize military

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid. 208

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 210

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 211

<sup>25</sup> Suh, Dae. *Kim Il Sung: the North Korean leader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 143

<sup>26</sup> The Chollima movement was similar to the Stakhanovite movement in USSR that expedited production and cut cost. However, Chollima was different in that it also emphasized extreme self-sacrifice from the people to increase production, and the movement was extended to all aspects of North Korean society, such as education and agriculture (Park 34).

<sup>27</sup> Park, Phillip. *The Development Strategy of Self-Reliance (Juche) and Rural Development in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea*. 1 ed. New York: Routledge, 2002., 120

<sup>28</sup> Ibid 46

<sup>29</sup> Scalapino and Lee, *Communism in Korea*, 991

weapons and equipment.”<sup>30</sup> Thus in the 1960s, Kim increased his military budget from 3 percent to 33 percent.<sup>31</sup> First, this policy created the Worker-Peasant Red Guards that included more than 1.5 million people and the Red Young Guards of 700,000 people. People from age seven to late sixties were militarily trained to use guns and weapons. Second, the country was mobilized towards military production. Underground shelters, arsenals, barracks, factories, and storages were built, and many people were displaced to rural areas from urban areas. Third, the soldiers were trained to become higher officials in order to manage more recruits in times of emergency.<sup>32</sup> These efforts induced the North Korean people to hold military type allegiance to the government and Party.

For political independence, Kim’s policy as the leader of the Worker’s Party was to start his own Great Purge, like that of Stalin, to free his country from any reliance with foreign nations. After the Korean War, Kim focused on reconstruction of North Korea and purging his enemies to gain near absolute power. Kim gave a speech to the Party, emphasizing the importance of unity in the Party and purging all those who opposed his policies. To eliminate any threat, Kim painted his rivals as spies for US, factionalists, revisionists, opportunists, or sycophants and purged them through trials and assassinations.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, Kim endeavored to create a Korean identity and claimed that all those who were non-Korean should be condemned.<sup>34</sup> Because of the de-Stalinization campaign by Nikita Khrushchev to support peaceful negotiation with the West, Kim used this opportunity to purge his Soviet-Korean rivals, who as he claimed, were imperialists.<sup>35</sup> By the end of the 1960’s, Kim Il Sung held unrestricted sway over the country, while the earlier North Korean political dependence on Soviet and Chinese sponsorship greatly diminished.<sup>36</sup> By then, there were no competing factions, all international forces were withdrawn, and Kim held absolute power with his guerilla fighters in top official positions and Party members who pledged loyalty to Kim. With such political support, Kim would be able to implement his ideological and personality cult that would praise him and his family.

## V. Paranoid Personality of the Cult

Towards the end of the 1960s, Kim endeavored in his campaigns to spread his cult of personality to the people. Kim’s cult was unique in that it blended the ideas of Marxism, Confucian culture, Christianity, Chinese influence, and Shintoism. He created a cult of personality that exceeded Stalinism in permanence and influence.<sup>37</sup> Through his cult of personality, Kim took on various titles, idealized his image in different ways, and became the symbolized center of the country.

Through the process of deification of his identity, Kim revised history, copied tenants from Christianity, and stressed his qualification as North Korea’s leader. In Korea, leaders were highly revered for their long ancestral history of patriotism and achievements. Thus, Kim claimed that his family lineage was a descent of patriotic leaders, including King Sunjo from the

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<sup>30</sup> Suh, *Kim Il Sung*, 213

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. 310

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 214

<sup>33</sup> Lankov, “*Great Purge*,” no pages.

<sup>34</sup> Suh, *Kim Il Sung*, 143

<sup>35</sup> Lankov, “*Great Purge*,” no pages.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Armstrong, *North Korean Revolution*, 222

Chosun dynasty. His father and grandfather were alleged anti-Japanese patriots.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, Kim stressed his filial piety, which was a highly praised trait in Korea. A story recapitulated his return to Korea, in which he showed deep filial piety through his longing reunion with his grandmother.<sup>39</sup> Between 1957 and 1960, the state reported that 95.8 million publications lauding Kim's historical significance were distributed, amounting to nine volumes per North Korean citizen. In the 1950s, Christianity was strongly visible in Pyong Yang and many parts in North Korea.<sup>40</sup> Thus, Kim's cult of personality was able to stress many Christian values and practices such as absolute faith, history as a struggle, and Kim's destiny as the leader of Korea. Moreover, unwavering commitment to Kim as well as faith without question was required. In this way, purism was idealized and harsh punishment was carried out to those who opposed it.

In order to reinforce his fabled heroic and moral character, Kim has been given various titles. Kim took on titles as *oboi suryong* to show his filial piety and patriotism. *Oboi* means parent in Korean and the name *Suryong* in Korean society is given to someone who has exemplified greatness as a political leader.<sup>41</sup> Also, Kim imitated the image of Shinto with his title as "Sun of the Nation." As the Sun of the Nation, he was portrayed as someone divine and omnipresent. Kim's title of Sun of the Nation created a powerful image similar to the Japanese Sun-Goddess Amaterasu as they both were portrayed with a divine image as the sun.<sup>42</sup> With such titles, Kim utilized Confucian ancestral worship, *chesa*, to be done only to Kim's family.<sup>43</sup> Thus, one's filial piety and duty toward his family, community, and nation were directly linked to Kim and his family.

## V. Conclusion

One leader Kim Il-sung and his party members achieved to create a nation able to not only suppress any sign of opposition, but also develop a personality so entrenched that anything falsifying it would be considered blasphemy. The Kim regime was able to achieve this through a combination of various policies including communistic policies, systematic terror, isolationism, and a personality cult. First, with communistic policies, the leader and the party were able to build a nationalistic identity as well as employ loyalists in bureaucratic institutions to instill government propaganda. Then, the regime sought to inculcate individuals to find greater value as a member of society and creates social pressure that discourages people from being different. The communistic policy sought to mobilize the mass to revolutionize the entire Korean peninsula, meaning unifying two Koreans under the Juche ideology. It emphasized collectivist identity, which asks people to place the goal of society – completing the revolution – before satisfying individual interests.

Second, in order to uphold the infallibility of his ideas, he used terror to repress any potential threats inside his country. Systematic terror allowed the regime to use terrorizing means

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<sup>38</sup> Tai Sung An, *North Korea in transition: from dictatorship to dynasty*. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1983), 172 – 3

<sup>39</sup> Armstrong, *North Korean Revolution*, 226

<sup>40</sup> Armstrong, Charles K.. *The North Korean Revolution, 1945-1950 (Studies of the East Asian Institute, Columbia University)*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004. Print., 117

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* 223

<sup>42</sup> Helen Hardacre, *Shinto and the State, 1868-1988 (Studies in Church and State)* (Princeton, 1991), 27 – 8; Armstrong, *North Korean Revolution*, 223

<sup>43</sup> Armstrong, *North Korean Revolution*, 225

to target not only the apparent opponents, but also the entire population by assuming them as potential threats. The government was able to maintain a high level of surveillance through *inminbans*, suppress opposition through harsh punishments in labor camps, and implement familial guilt punishments through the *yon-jwa-joe* policy. Third, in order to better mobilize people and encourage them to work for the government, Kim created his ‘immortal’ *Juche* ideology, which claims the greatness of the Great Leader and the inerrancy of his thoughts. *Juche* ideology effectively propagandized the government as the highest and best institution by gaining military, economic, and political independence from the great powers. Lastly, Kim also bore a very critical role in the country because of his personality cult that portrayed him as infallible guiding leader. Through stories, news, and manifestations of his cult, Kim was known as an exceptional political genius who developed the original and infallible revolutionary *Juche* ideology. Kim’s attachment to his own ideology and his desire to make it an inerrant doctrine led him to not only terrorize the public, but also develop the paranoiac personality, which eventually helped to entrench ideological faith in Kim and the government into the society.

Kim’s cult of personality is prevalent in the entire country. It is manifested through visible icons, artistic works, the public spaces and institutions named after Kim Il-sung, and the numerous honorific titles given to him. The extreme cult of personality has been achieved through many indoctrinating measures, such as education, history, legal consequences, and information control. Under such pervasive indoctrination and rigid control, it seems almost foolish not to follow the norm, especially when one is indoctrinated with an ‘infallible’ ideology supposedly developed by Kim alone. However, *Juche* was not creative or original enough for Kim to claim his authorship, since it was a mixture of selected ideas of pre-existing influences that would only benefit in establishing his undisputable authority.

Thus, Kim’s effective totalitarian dictatorship and his cult of personality which permeated through every aspect of North Korean society inculcated North Koreans to believe in their political leader as their god. The nature and the extensive indoctrination of *Juche* ideology played a vital role in perpetuating their faith in their Great Leader. In fact, *Juche* has successfully achieved its mission: creating a fabricated world where Kim eternally resides as the one and only Great Leader in people’s hearts.

As Kim’s policies became norms of society, Kim Jong Il was able to continue Kim’s policies and successfully become the first to succeed a Communist regime as the son of the leader. Like his father’s policies, Kim Jong Il’s (KJI) used the unresolved division of the two Koreas and formed his policies to unite the nation ideologically and militarily. KJI’s main policy was called the *Sŏn'gun* policy, and *Sŏn'gun* literally means, military first policy. With the *Sŏn'gun* policy, KJI united the people to continue to fight against the US-imperialists and work towards re-unification. Nearly 30 percent of the state’s budget was spent towards the military and people were continued to carry on the “revolutionary spirit” and work as hard as they can.<sup>44</sup> As another factor helping his succession, KJI’s preparation for leadership began in the early 1970s, which amounts to more than twenty years of preparation. Lastly, the nuclear program completed by KJI established North Korea as a strong, independent country, uniting its people and KJI was portrayed as a credible anti-US imperialist leader.<sup>45</sup>

On the other hand, Kim Jong Un (KJU), the successor of KJI, will face rather larger difficulties than those of Kim Jong Il. KJU is a little known figure, 29 years old, and the third son

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<sup>44</sup> Szolantai 108

<sup>45</sup> Myers 113 - 4

of KJI. It will be difficult for KJU to successfully establish his political leadership with little preparation and the infiltration of North Korea's isolation through heightened globalization forces such as technology, trade, foreign exchanges, mobility, investment, and communication. Already, half-dozen media organizations in Northeast Asia work on smuggling information to and within North Korea.<sup>46</sup> Also, China and private companies have invested significantly into North Korea's informal markets, state trading companies, and military, helping these organizations and people to become more independent from the government.<sup>47</sup>

It is true that the globalization of technology, information inflow, and trade have also played a role in shaping the values, institutions, and governance of North Korea, thus deteriorating the Kim regimes' control of the values, institutions, and governance of the public; however, these factors have not significantly deteriorated the control of the regime over systematic terror, the communistic and command economy, isolationist policies, and the entrenched personality cult that continue to shape the history, culture, fear, and norms of the country. The control of such powerful policies allowed the continuation of the regime as we saw during the major famine of the 1990s and the current destabilized economy.<sup>48</sup> Political mobilization from the military or political faction may one day overthrow Kim Jong-un, analysts must understand the power structure of the political party and military that keeps leaders in check through vicious purges, selective benefits, labor camps, highly pervasive over-watch, and constant competition. Any military and political faction would need unity amongst each other like the recent Arab Spring, but this is hindered and always checked through the power structure, systematic terror, and spies. Thus, if any serious changes are to occur in North Korea, it must come from the top because only the Kim family and the top officials have the power to change these dictating policies.

### **Policy Implications**

For the international community, North Korea and its nuclear programs pose a serious dilemma against international security. North Korea's nuclear tests in 2006 and 2009 affirmed itself as an atomic power, creating instability and concern internationally with the possible use and spread of weapons of mass destruction. Moreover, North Korea's isolationist, secretive, and totalitarian characteristics limit the carrots and sticks available to the international community to influence Pyongyang and allow it to continuously violate treaties, hide unrecorded plutonium, and acquire the resources the regime needs for survival. Previous policies of engagement and containment towards North Korea have largely failed because of their misunderstanding of North Korea's history, Kim family, isolationist policies, and the motivations of North Korea to attain nuclear weapons. The United States had many times lifted sanctions and acceded to North Korea's demands in return for North Korea's false promises to prevent, freeze, and dismantle its nuclear program in many stages.

But in light of this study on North Korea's government policies of communistic policies, systematic terror, *juche* ideology, personality cult which have shaped North Korea's history,

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<sup>46</sup> Robert Boynton, "North Korea's Digital Underground." *The Atlantic*, April 2011. Accessed February 2012. <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2011/04/north-korea-8217-s-digital-underground/8414/>

<sup>47</sup> John Park, *North Korea's Leadership Transition: The China Connection*. Lecture conducted from The Korea Society, New York. February 3, 2011. Accessed February 2012. [http://www.koreasociety.org/policy/policy/north\\_koreas\\_leadership\\_transition\\_the\\_china\\_connection.html](http://www.koreasociety.org/policy/policy/north_koreas_leadership_transition_the_china_connection.html)

<sup>48</sup> Robert Collins. *Marked For Life: Songbun North Korea's Classification System* (Washington DC: Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, 2012), 5.

culture, and norms (which show that North Korean elite has powerful control of the public and political and military leadership; thus, change would be decided from the top officials and the Kim family), I propose that the only viable policy towards North Korea is increase foreign transactions with the public and sanctions, especially financial sanctions on the elite. It is correct for the Obama and Lee administration to cancel food shipments and monetary aid after the nuclear test in April 2012, but they must go further. They must tighten economic sanctions towards the Party elite with the international community, find new methods to counter North Korean propaganda and system of terrorization, support information and economic transactions with the North Korean public, and only engage with North Korea if it implements irreversible reform rather than relent into false promises of diplomacy and denuclearization. These methods would loosen government control over the public and pressure the political leadership to consider serious reform. Kang Choi, president of the Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security stated that the United States had significant leverage over North Korea after it froze the Kim family's bank account in Macao's Banco Delta.<sup>49</sup> Although North Korea has been a very complex and difficult challenge for the international community, we must focus on the political leadership, the Kim family, and their methods of public control in order to produce any tangible results. Thus, the proposed policies to financially sanction and pressure the elite to change and loosen government control over the public may not prevent North Korean provocations and nuclear launches in the short-term, but they are the only actions that take in consideration realistic measures to instigate change in the North Korean regime in the long-run.

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<sup>49</sup> Kang Choi. Interview by author at the Seoul-Washington Forum in the Brookings Institute. Washington DC, June 8 2012.

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