

**Deconstructing Kimilsungism: A Political and Ideological  
Analysis of the North Korean Regime**

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Thesis submitted to the faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University  
(Virginia Tech) in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts  
In  
Political Science

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June 26, 2009  
Blacksburg, VA

Keywords: North Korea, Kimilsungism, juche, political religion

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that the North Korean model of government is a unique model that is influenced, to varying degrees, by extreme leftist and rightist doctrines, including Marxism-Leninism, Stalinism, Maoism, fascism, and Nazism; and shares at least some similarities with all these established models. Rather than being a mere political model, the North Korean model is a *political religion* that incorporates traits of each of the above-noted models with Korean mythology, Confucianism, extreme militarism, and traditional Korean xenophobia, isolation, and fierce nationalism. The resulting system, identified in this thesis as *Kimilsungism*, combines with North Korea's unique *juche* ideology of national self-reliance and self-actualization to absolutely subordinate the needs of the citizenry to the will of the state. It further serves to deify the founder of North Korea, Kim Il-sung, and his son – and current ruler – Kim Jong-il, via a pervasive propaganda apparatus and cult of personality that has successfully created an alternate reality that the regime can exploit and manipulate as it sees fit.

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# **Chapter One: *Addressing the North Korea Problem Logically***

## *Introduction*

Since 1948, the people of North Korea have been governed by a brutal regime that regulates every facet of their lives from birth to death. This regime, initially established by the Soviet Union but now propped up primarily by international aid and fear of the outside world, has driven the country and its citizenry into economic, political, and social despair.

Entities that are in any way involved in dealings on the Korean peninsula often wonder how best to engage North Korea on various issues. Investors would like to understand the market principles applied to the North Korean economy so that they can make informed decisions about potential investment or marketing opportunities.

International aid and humanitarian organizations strive to understand how they can best serve the people of North Korea, especially those who are starving, sick, or otherwise poorly provided for by a state with a broken infrastructure and an abhorrent human rights record. Political and defense professionals struggle to grasp the complexities of North Korean foreign relations, military capabilities and intentions, and domestic policies, along with how the various components of the regime influence one another.

The base factor in being able to properly address any of the above-noted scenarios is the ability to competently identify the basic form of government that exists in North Korea, and this government's political, economic and social philosophy. Communism obviously differs from constitutional democracy, which differs from fascism, which differs in various aspects from other government models. Clearly identifying the North Korean regime seamlessly with any one model of government is a daunting task. The

regime has labeled itself, at various times, as communist, socialist, and democratic, which are wildly disparate - and inaccurate - descriptors. Scholars and other professionals outside North Korea have identified in the regime influences of Marxism-Leninism, Stalinism, Maoism, Nazism, fascism, and personality cult.

The complexities that arise when dealing with a government that cannot be clearly identified are many and varied. For example, a nation or international body that wishes to economically engage North Korea cannot do so as though its economy was based on a Marxist model because of the rigid socio-economic class structure that permeates North Korean society, and its brutal exploitation of the lowest, or “hostile”, class, which is in direct conflict with the tenets of Marxism. Likewise, industrial production and critical infrastructure are controlled by the state in North Korea, as advocated by Leninism. However, theoretical Leninism endorses the practical application of state-run distribution programs to provide consumer goods to the citizenry – North Korea’s state-controlled distribution system became defunct many years ago, and at the time of this writing has essentially been abandoned as a black market system has emerged to provide goods to the people – for the right price.

This thesis examines the various political, economic, and social facets of the North Korean regime to determine if it can clearly be defined by an existing model of extreme rightist or leftist government, or if North Korea has succeeded in creating its own hybrid form of government to suit its unique political, social, economic, and ideological needs. In doing so, the author provides a history and pre-history of the North Korean state; an overview of the current political, economic, and social conditions in the country; and then details the propaganda and indoctrination methods that perpetuate the

regime's existence. The thesis then compares and contrasts the various facets of the North Korean regime to similar facets of various rightist and leftist government models, and then finally determines/analyzes whether North Korea follows an established government model or has created its own hybrid model of governance.

### *Motivation*

There are two primary motivations behind this thesis. Firstly, to demonstrate that a previously-unidentified model of government exists should be appealing to political science scholars. To demonstrate conclusively that a new model of government exists would allow both scholars and students to compare/contrast the model's characteristics against those exhibited by various national governments and determine whether those governments can be relabeled. This contribution to the field of political science could potentially change how the international community (political mainstream) interacts with several extremist governments around the world.

Secondly, despite its small size and population, low economic gross domestic product, and international "pariah" status, North Korea is in a unique position to drastically and negatively affect regional political stability, military security, and economic success in Northeast Asia. The controlling regime of North Korea has been teetering on the brink of implosion, to varying degrees, since the onset of a famine that began in 1995 and which continues as of this writing.

All of North Korea's regional neighbors – South Korea, China, Japan, Russia, and even the United States – and several international organizations have attempted to engage North Korea in various ways over the past several years as it has become an increasingly unstable nation. China has traditionally been North Korea's closest political and

economic ally, and has overtly attempted to encourage economic reform in North Korea, believing that such reform would inevitably lead to political and social reform such as that experienced in China upon the advent of Deng Xiaoping's reform measures in the late 1970s. Covertly, China has provided massive amounts of various forms of aid to North Korea simply to prevent – or at least postpone – the regime's collapse. Recently, however, China has narrowed the scope of its aid during the various military and political crises that North Korea has brought upon itself, such as the unexpected test detonation of a nuclear weapon in October 2006 and May 2009.

Beijing's belief that Pyongyang could implement China-style economic reform measures suggests that the North Korean government model at least somewhat resembles that of Maoism, and that the methods and totality of social control implemented by the North Korean regime are essentially similar to those of 1970s China. The ethnic and historic ties between these two nations are well known on both sides of the Sino-Korea border, along with the fact that the Kim regime modeled many of its practices after Mao's China. The ability to mobilize large segments of the populace toward a singular purpose, the empowerment of a rural peasantry, and the requirement that government bureaucrats spend part of the year performing manual labor, or "going down among the masses", are just some of the concepts that Kim borrowed from Mao.<sup>1</sup> That being the case, similarities between North Korea's government model and Maoism may allow the Kim regime to pursue economic reform and survive the subsequent demands for political and social reform.

Russia has been much less supportive of North Korea in recent years than it was before the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The Soviet Union established North



Korea as a sovereign nation in 1948, and equipped and trained its military for the war against South Korea that began in 1950. Under Soviet guidance, North Korea initially implemented a government model that was essentially Stalinist in nature, to which it remained at least somewhat faithful until the Sino-Soviet split that began in the late 1950s. The founder of North Korea, Kim Il-sung, was a Soviet-trained anti-Japanese guerilla fighter during World War II, who spent much of the war in exile in the Soviet Maritime Province. It was he who, upon arriving back in Pyongyang after Japan's capitulation, spearheaded the establishment of the Stalinist-influenced Kim regime that runs the country to this day.

As a result of North Korea's departure from Stalinism after the Sino-Soviet split, and certainly since the Soviet collapse, Moscow appears to have essentially washed its hands of anything pertaining to North Korea. In its now-limited dealings with Pyongyang, Russia appears to approach North Korea as more of an ally than a foe, likely because of their intertwined political-military histories. However, Russia has failed in its attempts to influence the Kim regime to dismantle its nuclear weapons program, which illustrates how little influence Moscow now holds over Pyongyang, as well as how little Moscow understands the current political structure in North Korea or the motivations of Kim Jong-il.

South Korea undoubtedly has had the most complex relationship with North Korea since they both became sovereign and ideologically opposed nations in 1948. In essence, the current political differences between the two countries are holdovers from the earliest days of the Cold War, when the Soviet Union occupied the northern half of the Korean peninsula, with the United States in the lower half, to serve as military

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<sup>1</sup> French, Paul. *North Korea: The Paranoid Peninsula*. (London: Zed Books, 2007): 35.

administrators while overseeing the exodus of defeated Japanese forces from the peninsula. Under conservative military dictatorships, and then later as a constitutional republic, South Korea's stance toward its northern neighbor has swung the gamut from thinly-veiled military aggression of conservative leaders to appeasement at any cost and the "sunshine policies" of recent liberal presidents Kim Dae-jung and Ro Moo-hyun.

Since the death of Kim Il-sung in 1994, South Korea has attempted to engage its northern neighbor on issues of defense, reunification, and economic reform opportunities, among others. Yet the two countries continue to face off along the most heavily-fortified border on Earth, racially homogenous and culturally similar, but ideologically opposite. South Korea's failure to fully understand the various facets of the North Korean government, or even to clearly identify the government model, are illustrated by its wide range of engagement options as noted above.

To effectively engage North Korea on humanitarian issues, with the goal of fostering social reform, one must recognize that the brutality and repression imposed by the state are similar to the Stalinist doctrine as a means of social control. All freedoms in North Korea are repressed, including those of speech, assembly, religion, press, and movement. Offending individuals find themselves incarcerated in North Korea's extensive *gulag*, which is based on the Soviet model and holds about 200,000 North Korean citizens at various levels of imprisonment and "political re-education" at any given time.

The term *gulag* is the Russian acronym for *The Chief Administration of Corrective Labor Camps and Colonies*, which was the Soviet government agency responsible for the operation of the state's extensive prison camp system. It is now

synonymous with any prison system that includes work camps and political re-education centers. Although Russia abandoned the Stalinist doctrine in the 1950s, North Korea has expanded on that doctrine's repression and brutality in order to facilitate more pervasive social control.

It is because of the regional military and economic threat which the Kim regime poses that political science scholars must empirically examine the form of governance in place in North Korea. Classifying the model of governance currently in place will potentially provide critical information to the international community as to the most effective ways to solve various problems that the Kim regime poses. In the next section, the author examines the body of literature currently available on North Korea's government model.

### *Literature Review*

Upon examining literature available on North Korea's model of governance, it becomes apparent that many scholars seem certain that the Kim regime has gone to great lengths to distinguish itself from various forms of leftist government models, while other scholars simply do not know what to make of it. Even while noting the efforts of the Kim regime to set itself apart, scholars insist on referring to what North Korea has created as a unique brand of *communism*, seemingly unaware of the fact that what currently exists in North Korea is not necessarily communism, and in fact does not represent any form of a typical leftist government.

In 2000, Cheong Seong-chang wrote an article in *Asian Perspective* titled, "Stalinism and Kimilsungism: A Comparative Analysis of Ideology and Power", which outlined the ties between Soviet-style Stalinist communism and North Korea's brand of

communism. Cheong notes that the political elite in North Korea has been attempting for more than thirty years to erase all traces of Stalinist influence in their political system, but that one must acknowledge Stalinism's critical influence in shaping the North Korean model of government that exists today. Cheong's work notes the commonalities between Stalinism, Maoism, and Kimilsungism, which is the name given to North Korea's brand of communism and is synonymous with that country's unique *juche* ideology. In doing so, Cheong also notes that very sharp contrasts exist between Kimilsungism and Marxism-Leninism, clearly illustrating that the North Korean government model does not adhere to Marxist-Leninist doctrine.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, in *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader: North Korea and the Kim Dynasty*, author Bradley Martin notes that during the industrialization of his country in the 1950s, Kim Il-sung vigorously sought an alternative to the Marxist-Leninist doctrine upon which Soviet society was built, and was in fact seeking a path for North Korea that was quite independent of the Soviet Union and China. Martin states that Kim found that independent path in *juche*, a unique ideology that was developed in the late 1950s by a North Korean propaganda official. In its effort to avoid being labeled as a Soviet or Chinese lackey, North Korea formed *juche*, which advocates total independence from outside influence.<sup>3</sup>

Additionally, John Curtis Perry noted the complexities of the North Korean government model in an article he wrote for *Foreign Policy* magazine in 1990 titled, "Dateline North Korea: A Communist Holdout." Perry states in the first paragraph of the

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<sup>2</sup> Cheong, Seong-chang. "Stalinism and Kimilsungism: A Comparative Analysis of Ideology and Power." *Asian Perspective* 24, no. 1 (2000): 133-161.

<sup>3</sup> Martin, Bradley. *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader: North Korea and the Kim Dynasty*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2006): 111.

article that, “[North Korea’s] leaders have succeeded in suffusing a Stalinist state with authoritarian Confucianism and Korean nationalism. The resulting amalgam is a rock-hard military and self-righteous totalitarianism, xenophobic and Orwellian in character, permeating all aspects of North Korean life...” He later claims that North Korea in the late 1950s pursued its program of rapid industrialization under the banner of Marxism-Leninism, noting its influence on North Korea during that country’s formative years, although Pyongyang has clearly abandoned the utopian tenets of Marxism-Leninism over the past several decades.<sup>4</sup>

While there are no scholars who attempt to place North Korea seamlessly in an existing model of governance, many appear to not know exactly what to make of the “hermit kingdom,” and that is reflected in the literature. In *Rogue Regime: Kim Jong-il and the Looming Threat of North Korea*, author Jasper Becker recognizes the influences of extreme leftist models on the Kim regime, notably Marxism and Stalinism. Conversely, from the opposite end of the political spectrum, he notes that *juche* “was turned into a brand of xenophobic nationalism that resident diplomats [labeled] fascistic.”<sup>5</sup> Becker delicately does not force the Kim regime into any existing model, but insists instead on simply calling it a “dictatorship cult.” The author of this thesis does not find Becker’s description to be inaccurate, but neither does Becker’s description fully and concisely label the Kim regime. Becker himself argues in the same chapter that *juche* is a racist ideology that at least several Soviet Bloc diplomats and observers labeled “Goebblesian”, with some going so far as to refer to Kim Il-sung’s advisers as the

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<sup>4</sup> Perry, John Curtis. “Dateline North Korea: A Communist Holdout.” *Foreign Policy* 80 (Autumn 1990): 172-191.

<sup>5</sup> Becker, Jasper. *Rogue Regime: Kim Jong Il and the Looming Threat of North Korea*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005): 65.

“political Gestapo”.<sup>6</sup> The government model employed in North Korea is a dictatorship, and it is a cult, but Becker clearly illustrates that it is also so much more.

Many scholars feel comfortable by simply labeling the Kim regime as *totalitarian*. In many ways, the regime fits the nebulous definition of that term perfectly, so it is surprising to note that Hannah Arendt does not mention North Korea even once in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. She defines totalitarianism, quite succinctly, as “total domination,”<sup>7</sup> an overly simplified definition to which the Kim regime certainly lives up. Oddly enough, the three political models that most influence present-day North Korea – Nazism, Stalinism, and Maoism – provide Arendt with virtually all the material used in her book, and all meet her loose definition of totalitarianism.

After examining much of the available literature on the subject, one does not learn what North Korea is, but only what it is not. It does not appear to be a government model that can be defined by any of the labels currently in use, and the political scholar community does not seem sure of what to make of Kim’s model of governance. It is this confusion that the author will endeavor to clear up by empirically comparing North Korea’s government model to several other models on various points, as outlined in the next section.

### *Methodology*

To effectively determine whether North Korea has adopted an established government model or has created its own unique model, this thesis looks at several categories of governance that are traditional indicators of regime-typology. This thesis will compare and contrast between these various facets of present-day North Korean

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<sup>6</sup> Becker, 66.

<sup>7</sup> Arendt, Hannah. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. (Orlando: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1973): xxv.

government, and their parallels in other models of government. The five main points of comparison/contrast selected for this thesis are:

- Economic model and practices
- Free elections
  - Political pluralism
  - Equal media access for all parties
  - Free political participation
- Type of leadership succession
- Government transparency and accountability
  - Government regularly publishes decisions (transparency)
  - Government responds to needs/desires of populace (accountability)
- Government guarantee and protection of basic rights and freedoms

These five main points were selected because they essentially cover the spectrum of what differentiates one government model from another.

The data examined is largely qualitative, not quantitative. Therefore, the author will provide a qualitative analysis of the tenets of various comparative models of government, and will examine how – or if – these tenets are adhered to on a practical basis. This analysis will be largely historical in nature, as most of the regimes used for comparative purposes faded into oblivion at various points during the twentieth century.

In order to label a given model of government as either rightist or leftist, in this thesis the author uses the model of governance employed in the present-day United States as the center-point. Although political ideology in the United States swings from right to

left depending on popular opinion and the most recent federal election, it remains within the confines of a fairly narrow band that essentially occupies the center/center-right of the political spectrum. In the present-day United States, the “left” of this narrow band is associated with economic interventionism, secular government, progressivism, and redistribution of wealth. The “right” is associated with free-market economy, religious government, conservatism, and economic freedom (the right to work). In the United States, both sides of the narrow band zealously guarantee personal rights and freedoms (the Bill of Rights), although they differ in their interpretations of that document and its underlying concept.

On the first major point of comparison (*economic model and practices*), this thesis will identify the economic model and practices employed by the various models of governance noted above, and will determine whether North Korea’s economic practices are similar or significantly different. In Table 1, located in Chapter 5, each model of governance will be rated as “market”, “corporative”, “command” or “other”. A ranking of “other” may indicate that the economic model is not necessarily centralized or decentralized, or that the economy is not stable or self-sufficient.

On the second major point of comparison (free elections), this thesis will examine whether opposing political parties are doctrinally tolerated, and whether that tolerance is practically applied in national and local politics. The author will assess whether all political parties are granted equal access to media, and whether elections are conducted without fear of political/police intimidation. For purposes of this thesis, free political elections mean that at least two competing political parties run in a given election, that the popular majority vote is recognized by the state and adhered to, and that a voter who



votes against a given political party does not experience political/legal/economic repercussions. In Table 1, each model of governance will be rated as “yes” if competing parties are tolerated and fairly represented, or “no” if such political opposition is not tolerated.

On the third major point of comparison (leadership succession), this thesis will examine the form of leadership succession within a given model of governance. The author will examine the type of succession that is practically applied. In Table 1, each model of governance will be rated as “free election” if the leader is freely elected by popular vote. Other ratings will include “appointment” if a successive leader is installed by a military or political body, “coup” if the leader seized power from his predecessor via military or political maneuvers, and “dynasty” if the successive leader is related to his predecessor.

On the fourth major point of comparison (government transparency and accountability), this thesis will examine whether a given model of governance allows itself to operate transparently and be accountable to its citizenry. The author will assess whether government agencies and offices regularly publish major decisions for public knowledge (transparency), and whether the governments respond to the needs/desires of their citizenries (accountability). In order to be accountable to its citizenry, a given model of government must possess vehicles that allow the needs and desires of the public to reach the decision-maker at the top. Typically, this would consist of a congress/parliament-like body whose members fairly and earnestly represent various segments of that country’s society. In order to be transparent and accountable, a given government model must guarantee at least the basic freedoms of speech, assembly, and

press. A given model that has an encumbered or “state run” press, or does not allow for freedom of speech, would be practically guaranteed to not be transparent through accountability. In Table 1, each model of governance will be rated as “open” if it is transparent and accountable, “somewhat” if there are some obstructions in its operating transparency and accountability, and “closed” if it does not operate transparently and is not accountable.

On the fifth major point of comparison (government guarantee/protection of rights and freedoms), this thesis will examine whether a given model of governance guarantees basic rights and freedoms to its citizenry, and also whether that guarantee is protected and upheld in a practical manner. In the process of assessing whether these freedoms and rights are protected by a political model, the author will note state institutions that may hinder such protections, such as pervasive state ideology or the employment of secret police/surveillance networks. In Table 1, each model of governance will be rated on a scale of 1-5, with 1 indicating that basic rights are strongly protected and guaranteed by the state, and 5 indicating that all basic rights and freedoms have been suspended or revoked by the state. On this scale, a rating of 3 would indicate that some rights are protected while others are not, or that certain segments of the populace enjoy rights and freedoms that are strongly protected, while other segments enjoy no protected rights whatsoever (as was the case in Hitler’s Germany). A rating of 4 indicates that the populace did not enjoy protected rights, although some “freedoms” were granted (such as freedom of speech) so long as expressed opinions portrayed the controlling regime in a favorable light.

### *Summary*

This chapter has provided a basic background on North Korea, challenges faced by those wishing to engage that country at various levels, and the necessity of clearly identifying the mode of governance employed by the regime. Some of the major pieces of literature on the state have been reviewed, and a comprehensive methodology to evaluate various facets of the regime has been formed.

## **Chapter Two: *The Beginning and End of a Functioning State***

Before one can truly grasp the conditions in which North Korea currently finds itself, it is important to understand the history and pre-history of the North Korean state, which will allow one to comprehend the depth of North Korea's xenophobia and isolationism, and place its resistance to external influence in the proper perspective.

The Korean peninsula has long been a strategic foothold in East Asia due to its geographic proximity to China, Japan, and Russia. Throughout its history the Korean peninsula has been fought for or occupied by primarily China and Japan numerous times because of its ideal position for trade and/or war (including possession of warm-water ports), and its abundant natural resources – primarily large mineral deposits in the north and arable land in the south. Koreans on both sides of the border often refer to an ancient saying that describes their peninsula as “a shrimp among whales”.

### *Pre-history of North Korea*

Most written records and archeological evidence indicates that Gojoseon<sup>8</sup> evolved from loosely federated cities and villages into a unified kingdom as early as the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C., with Pyongyang as its capital city. Korean legend holds that Gojoseon was founded in 2333 B.C. by a mythical descendent from heaven, a half-man/half-bear creature named Tangun, who is also the legendary father of the Korean race. The Gojoseon was defeated and subsequently occupied by the Chinese Han dynasty in the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C., and remained at least somewhat under Chinese influence until approximately 313 A.D.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The Korean kingdom.

<sup>9</sup> Seth, Michael. *A Concise History of Korea: From the Neolithic Period Through the Nineteenth Century*. (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006): 98-256.

Gojoseon's defeat ultimately gave rise to what is commonly referred as the Three Kingdoms period, during which the Goguryeo kingdom ruled a significant portion of the Korean peninsula (the northern two-thirds) as well as part of present-day Manchuria. Meanwhile, the Baekje and Silla kingdoms each occupied roughly equal-sized portions of the southernmost part of the peninsula. Goguryeo was by far the most powerful of the three kingdoms, but ultimately fell to the Silla kingdom around 670 A.D. which had allied itself with the Chinese Tang dynasty. This led to the North-South States period, during which a partially unified peninsula under the Silla kingdom had to contend with Balhae, a kingdom that was founded in the Jilin area of Manchuria by a defeated Goguryeo general who led a refugee movement to that area around 700 A.D.<sup>10</sup>

Both Silla and Balhae fell apart at the beginning of the early 10<sup>th</sup> century, and the subsequent Koryo dynasty ruled a unified peninsula until 1392. During the Koryo dynasty, Korea made great cultural, scientific, and industrial advancements, despite the fact that the dynasty was under threat of invasion by Mongolia for much of the 13<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>11</sup>

In 1392, Korean military general Yi Seong-gye established the Chosun dynasty via a military coup. As during the preceding Koryo dynasty, the Chosun witnessed many cultural achievements, including King Sejong the Great's creation of *hangul*<sup>12</sup>, the world's only alphabet that is known to have been scientifically devised in order to simplify the learning process, thereby greatly increasing the literacy rate of the populace. In the 1590s, Japanese forces under the command of Toyotomi Hideyoshi invaded Korea

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<sup>10</sup> Seth, 98-256.

<sup>11</sup> Seth, 98-256.

<sup>12</sup> Hangul remains the only official written language of both North and South Korea, although in North Korea it is called Chosungul.

in an effort to reach the Asian mainland, but were thwarted by Korean military forces. Only thirty years later, the Chosun was invaded – unsuccessfully - by the Manchu, which went on to establish the Qing dynasty in China.<sup>13</sup>

Beginning in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Japan once again took a forceful interest in the Korean peninsula, largely in an effort to use the peninsula as a neutral military buffer by breaking Korea's ties to China. Japan forced Korea to open its ports to trade with the Ganghwa Treaty of 1876, which was written by a Japanese politician and forced upon Korea for signature via military force. This action, along with the assassination of a Korean royal family member by Japan in 1895 and China's defeat in the Sino-Japanese war, forced Korea to isolate itself from China. Additionally, Russia's defeat by Japan during the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-05, fought over Russia's need for warm-water ports in Manchuria and Korea, forced it to abandon its designs on the Korean peninsula, thereby allowing Japan to effectively achieve its goal of isolating Korea from its neighbors.<sup>14</sup>

All these events occurred during the Chosun dynasty, which was overthrown by invading Japanese forces in 1910 after having ruled a unified Korea for over five-hundred years. During the subsequent Japanese occupation of Korea, one of the most brutal in recorded history, Japanese military forces made every attempt to eradicate Korean culture and subjugate the Korean people to Japanese imperialism. Use of the Korean language was strictly forbidden, and all Koreans were forced to read and communicate in Japanese, adopt Japanese names, and be forced laborers for the Japanese military. Korean women were also used as sex slaves for Japanese soldiers, who were encouraged to impregnate

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<sup>13</sup> Seth, 98-256.

<sup>14</sup> Seth, 98-256.

the women in order to de-homogenize, and eventually eradicate, the Korean race. In late summer 1945, Korea was liberated by the Allied forces - primarily the United States, from this brutal occupation under which it had suffered for more than three decades.<sup>15</sup>

#### *The Beginnings of a Sovereign North Korea*

In an effort to ease Korea's transition back to a sovereign nation at the end of World War II, American and Soviet forces agreed to work together in overseeing the removal of Japanese forces and military equipment from the peninsula. A U.S. Army officer who was tasked with facilitating the administration of Korea noted that the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel split the peninsula roughly in half, and so it was determined that the Soviet Union would oversee the Japanese exodus north of the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel, while the United States would oversee the exodus south of that boundary.<sup>16</sup>

Rather than preparing northern Korea for its eventual reunification with southern Korea and subsequent independence, the Soviet Union quickly began to exploit the situation as an opportunity to spread communism to the Korean peninsula. To facilitate the indoctrination, they placed a young Soviet-trained guerilla fighter named Kim Song-ju<sup>17</sup> in charge of a *de facto* "North Korean" government, and told fictitious stories of how this young man had fiercely battled against the Japanese occupiers, often single-handedly killing dozens of Japanese soldiers during a given battle. This became the foundation on which the Kim Il-sung personality cult was built. This cult ultimately developed to portray Kim as a demi-god in the eyes of the North Korean people.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Oberdorfer, Don. *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History*. (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 1-27.

<sup>16</sup> Oberdorfer, 1-27.

<sup>17</sup> Kim Il-sung's birth name. He adopted the name Kim Il-sung as a *nom de guerre* to protect his family and friends.

<sup>18</sup> Martin, 29-46.

Meanwhile, the United States established a pro-western military dictatorship in southern Korea, under the assumption that the capital city of a unified Korea would be Seoul, which was located in the American-controlled south and was at the time the largest city on the peninsula. The Americans and Soviets continued to disagree over their respective purposes and roles as trustees in Korea, and by 1948 the world saw two ideologically opposed governments established on the peninsula – one a communist dictatorship and the other a pro-western military dictatorship.<sup>19</sup>

Tensions continued to develop between the north and south, and border skirmishes occurred with increasing frequency until North Korea, by now declared as a sovereign nation known as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), attacked the newly-established Republic of Korea (ROK), in the early morning hours of June 25, 1950. The war between the Koreas raged for over three years with North Korea receiving support from the Soviet Union and China, and with South Korea being defended by the United Nations Command and its largest national component, the United States. A temporary cease-fire was agreed upon and the fighting ceased on July 27, 1953. The front between the two battling nations ran roughly along the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel, where the peninsula had been administratively divided only eight years before.<sup>20</sup>

Before and during the Korean War, Kim Il-sung worked feverishly to establish an economy that was primarily industrial in nature, although a heavy emphasis was placed on agricultural independence from other countries. Between the end of the Korean War and the mid-1960s, Kim implemented long-term state plans to increase industrial and agricultural production, and by 1967 North Korea was the second-most industrialized

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<sup>19</sup> Oberdorfer, 1-27.



nation in East Asia, second only to Japan. Despite internal limitations posed by the almost total lack of production of consumer goods, North Koreans enjoyed a substantially higher standard of living than their South Korean counterparts. The average North Korean was gainfully employed by the state, and had ready access to education, healthcare, and housing. The country was viewed by many less-developed nations as a viable alternative to western-style capitalism. North Korea outwardly appeared to be the “worker’s paradise” that its propaganda claimed it to be.<sup>21</sup>

### *Juche*

While overseeing the industrialization of his country, Kim Il-sung searched for an alternative to the Marxist-Leninist doctrine that was the base of Soviet society. He was in fact seeking a path for North Korea that was largely independent of the Soviet Union and China. He found this path in *juche*, an ideology that was developed in the late 1950s by a North Korean propaganda official named Hwang Chang-yop. *Juche* advocates that the state and its citizenry should not rely on the outside world for anything. It espouses that North Korea should stimulate its own industrialization, agriculture, intellectual thought, art, and technology, and that it should actively resist foreign intervention of any sort. *Juche* is essentially the cornerstone of North Korea’s isolationist mentality, and it is the tenets of *juche* that are invoked whenever conditions within North Korea become particularly unbearable.<sup>22</sup> Scholars cannot agree on a single solid definition of *juche*, but it is generally recognized that *juche* incorporates the various disparate elements that are often used by outsiders to define present-day North Korea, including isolationism,

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<sup>20</sup> Toland, John. *In Mortal Combat: Korea, 1950-1953*. (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1991), 573-590.

<sup>21</sup> Martin, 120-135.

<sup>22</sup> Martin, 120-135.

xenophobia, personality cult, racism, self-actualization, ethnocentrism, glorification of the state and ruling family, fierce patriotism, and jingoism. Simply put, *juche* is a political religion in which the two Kims have become Christ-like.

### *Independence and Prosperity*

It was in the late 1960s that hairline cracks began to form in the façade of prosperity and self-reliance that North Korea had erected for the world to see. Earlier that decade, the Soviet Union and China suffered from an ideological split that left the two great communist powers at odds. The Soviet Union, which had been providing various types of support to North Korea, chilled its relationship toward that country, mistakenly believing that Kim Il-sung leaned more toward Chinese rather than Soviet Communist ideology. This left North Korea to rely on the less-advanced China for industrial and agricultural support. The end result of this change in support, along with over-expenditures on its military and other external factors such as the 1974 energy crisis, had a drastic and negative impact on the North Korean economy.<sup>23</sup>

Kim Il-sung, despite his overt endorsement of *juche* ideology, began to acquire debt by borrowing money from other countries, which it intended to repay by selling some of its large mineral deposits. As the 1970s progressed, the monetary value of minerals such as iron ore decreased, and North Korea found that it could not repay its growing debt and continue to provide the same high level of benefits to its populace that had made it the darling of the Soviet Union and an idol for third-world nations throughout the previous two decades.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Cumings, Bruce. *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005), 227.

<sup>24</sup> Cumings, 227.

Faced with the tough choice of keeping his citizenry content by continuing to provide benefits, or maintaining his good standing among other world leaders by repaying his debts, Kim chose to default on his loans. An immediate and noticeable result was that North Korea's industrial output began to plummet, as other nations decided to discontinue their economic dealings with Kim. *Juche*, already at the center of so many of North Korea's problems, had another unforeseen impact. Due to the ideology's rejection of capitalist influence, North Korea found itself unable to keep up with an increasingly technologically advanced South Korea, which had already abandoned industries that created heavy pollution in favor of the production of cleaner, cheaper, and in-demand technologies such as transistors. North Korea also found in the late 1980s that its military, equipped and trained to Soviet standards, was still larger than that of South Korea's, but could not realistically be expected to defeat the South's technologically advanced, better-equipped and financed military that was modeled after the U.S. military.<sup>25</sup>

Through all this, Kim continued to espouse the tenets of ideological devotion to his form of communism and the rejection of all things capitalist, which was necessary to maintain absolute control of the populace that was beginning to suffer from worsening living conditions.

### *Summary*

This chapter has provided a pre-history of the modern North Korean state, a detailed historical overview of the beginnings of a sovereign North Korea, its rise as a "worker's paradise", and its subsequent downfall as a result of ideology and isolationism. This perspective is vital for one to examine how North Korea's model of governance

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<sup>25</sup> Cumings, 87-103.

came to be and how it continues to affect life within its borders and its relations with regional neighbors.

## Chapter Three: *Inside a Failed State*

Kim Il-sung died in 1994, and was succeeded by his favored son, Kim Jong-il, who had previously been appointed as the head of the Organization and Guidance Bureau, the government agency responsible for propaganda. Kim Jong-il is *de facto* head of North Korea, since his father was declared the nation's President "for all time". Under Kim Jong-il, North Korea has fared even worse than during his father's rule. A large-scale famine swept through the country beginning in 1995, which was largely caused by North Korea's financial inability to purchase consumables from other nations, and was grossly exacerbated by the destruction of agricultural goods by floods in the summers of 1996 and 1997. Another root cause of the famine was military expenditures, as the regime continued to invest approximately thirty percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) in its military – one of the largest standing armies in the world, with 1.2 million citizens on active duty.<sup>26</sup>

### *Mass Starvation*

The famine, the struggle through which Kim Jong-il named "The Arduous March", was declared to have ended in 2005, although basic living conditions in the country have continued to worsen. International humanitarian and aid organizations have estimated that as many as three million people, or one-seventh of the population, died during the famine as a result of deprivation of basic sustenance.<sup>27</sup>

North Korea's infrastructure has continued to crumble while the regime continues to emphasize military capability above all else. There are two primary reasons for this

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<sup>26</sup> Cumings, 74.

<sup>27</sup> Breen, Michael. *Kim Jong-il: North Korea's Dear Leader*. (Singapore: John Wiley and Sons, 2004), 91-124.

*songun* (military first) policy. Firstly, Kim Jong-il's base of power lies with the military. While he has all but completely ignored every facet of economic and industrial development on the civilian side, he has gone to great lengths to endear himself to the military. Secondly, and more practically, the North Korean regime is paranoid of being attacked preemptively by South Korea or the United States. By providing the military with weapons, uniforms, and a basic level of sustenance, he can be reasonably assured that no foreign country will attack North Korea so long as its massive military is ready for war. This assurance, in turn, protects him and his regime from being overthrown by external forces.<sup>28</sup>

As a result of its crumbling infrastructure and exorbitant military expenditures, North Korea subsists today primarily on what can be considered international extortion. It is a failed state that relies largely on aid from other countries and humanitarian organizations to feed its starving populace. As of 2003, over thirty percent of the country's population subsisted primarily on food aid provided by South Korea, China, Japan, the United States, and the European Union. Although North Korea claims that "The Arduous March" ended in 2005, the World Food Program reported in 2005 and 2006 that North Korea was teetering on the edge of famine. Despite these conditions, Kim Jong-il invoked the "self-reliant" tenets of *juche* and ordered that all international aid to North Korea be suspended by December 2005, and humanitarian aid workers were ordered to vacate the country by the end of that month.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Breen, 91-124.

### *The Three-Tiered Caste System*

The majority of the North Korean citizens who died of starvation during “The Arduous March” reside in the northeastern part of the country. This disproportion of poverty is largely a result of the rigid three-tiered class system that was created and is enforced by the state. The three tiers refer to the levels of loyalty and patriotism that a given person should reasonably be expected to express toward Kim Jong-il and the regime. These assumed levels of loyalty and patriotism date back to the Japanese occupation of Korea, although a citizen may be relegated to a lower class at any time for infractions of the law or perceived sleights against the regime.<sup>30</sup>

The top tier of the class system comprises the families of individuals who served alongside Kim Il-sung when he was an anti-Japanese guerilla fighter during the Japanese occupation. Approximately ten percent of the North Korean population falls in this category. The middle tier is composed of families with no available records of “patriotism”, but against which there is also no derogatory information or reason to question their loyalty. About sixty percent of the North Korean population falls in this middle tier. Finally, the bottom tier is labeled as the “hostile” class. These are individuals who are assessed as being a direct threat to the stability of the regime, and are very often individuals or families of individuals who have spoken out against the regime. Criminals are also relegated to the hostile class, as are individuals who are perceived as displaying capitalist tendencies, or who seek awareness of the outside world by tuning into South Korean or Chinese radio/television broadcasts or attempt to gain access to

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<sup>29</sup> Haggard, Stephan and Marcus Noland. *Hunger and Human Rights: The Politics of Famine in North Korea*. (Washington DC: U.S. Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, 2005).

<sup>30</sup> Ramirez, Luis. “North Korea's Upper Class Flourishes in Sharp Contrast to Reports of Impoverished Working Class”. *Voice of America*. Washington DC, 2005.

other foreign media. Not only is the offending individual banished to the hostile class and imprisoned, but so is the individual's entire family. The hostile class consists of about thirty percent of the population.<sup>31</sup>

These tiers are not just social classes, but socio-economic classes. While no economic census figures are available for North Korea, one can roughly estimate the number of members of each class based on the total population of the country. In a country of twenty-two million, the top tier is the upper economic class – roughly two million people, the middle tier is the middle economic class – roughly thirteen million people, and the hostile class is the bottom economic class – roughly seven million people. Members of the lower economic class, perceived as being a threat to the regime, are not allowed to live in or near Pyongyang, and so its members are often “banished” to the countryside, typically Hoeryong or North Hamgyong Province in the northeastern part of the country. Northeastern North Korea is an isolated, desolate place, with harsh weather, little arable land or natural resources, and mountainous terrain that is difficult to navigate. In the past, the regime openly prevented international aid and aid workers from providing assistance to the population in the northeastern part of the country.<sup>32</sup>

#### *The Penalty for Sedition*

Any infraction of North Korea's Orwellian rule structure, labeled as sedition by the regime, typically results in the offending individual, along with his immediate and extended family, being sent to one of several “political re-education” camps. The majority of the camps that comprise this system, modeled after the Russian gulag, are located in the inhospitable northeastern provinces. Approximately 200,000 citizens are

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<sup>31</sup> Ramirez.

<sup>32</sup> Ramirez.



imprisoned in various levels of the North Korean gulag system at any given time. The level of imprisonment for a given citizen depends on that person's class and the severity of the criminal act of which s/he was accused. Individuals who are in the most loyal political class may spend only a couple of years in a "minimum security" camp that is truly geared toward political re-education, whereas someone in the hostile class may spend several decades living in unimaginably brutal conditions for the "crime" of owning a cell phone or watching a bootleg copy of a South Korean soap opera.<sup>33</sup>

Kang Chol-hwan, who was sent to the infamous Yodok camp when he was nine years old because his grandfather voiced his disapproval with the economic conditions in North Korea, was released ten years later and defected to Seoul shortly after his release. In his book, *The Aquariums of Pyongyang*, he described Yodok as a place that was designed to kill its inhabitants by severe malnourishment, hard labor, and exposure to disease and harsh winters. Torture was common, including one method in which the victim was forced to drink several gallons of water. A board was then placed across the victim's abdomen and pressed down upon to force the water out. This usually resulted in ruptured organs and severe internal bleeding that would kill the victim over the course of a few days. Women and girls were often raped by the guards, and were then killed if they became pregnant. Executions by hanging, stoning, or firing squad were common punishments for infractions such as stealing food.<sup>34</sup>

As for food in the camps, there is simply never enough. For performing hard labor for eighteen hours per day, the average prisoner receives a meager two-hundred grams of rice per day – about a handful. There is no vegetation available to eat, because

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<sup>33</sup> Kang, Chol-hwan. *The Aquariums of Pyongyang: Ten Years in the North Korean Gulag*. (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 35-62.

every blade of grass and leaf has already been picked and eaten; even the trees are stripped of bark up to the height that the average person can reach. The prisoners subsist on their meager rice rations, insects, and any vegetation they find.<sup>35</sup>

The gulag hangs over the head of every North Korean as a constant reminder of what can happen to them and their families if they challenge the regime's pervasive social control. With approximately 200,000 citizens imprisoned at any given time, virtually every North Korean knows someone who has had a relative, neighbor, friend, or colleague taken from his house in the middle of the night with no forewarning, often to never be seen or heard from again.<sup>36</sup>

### *Summary*

Daily life in North Korea is harsh, even brutal, to a degree to which the majority of the world cannot even imagine. The sole cause of this repressive existence is the Kim family's need to create an alternate reality in which the country's citizens do not have the need to question the government's practices, for there is not outside reference point to which the government can be compared and contrasted. Understanding the regime's logic behind repressing its citizenry allows one to begin to grasp why the North Korean model of governance is set up the way it is.

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<sup>34</sup> Kang, 1-238.

<sup>35</sup> Kang, 1-238.

<sup>36</sup> Breen, 125-142.

## **Chapter Four: *Rise of the Great Leader***

Colonization, class struggle, nationalism, and the Cold War have each played a role in creating the modern North Korean state, but no single entity has had as much influence as Kim Il-sung. The primary question that is always presented by anyone studying North Korea is: how did a person born into poverty in an insignificant family rise to create a nation whose pervasive doctrine is based on his personal politics, populated with more than twenty-million citizens who literally believe him to be a god? And, how does it continue now, more than a decade after his death? In short, how did he pull it off?

### *Young Kim*

Born into poverty as Kim Song-ju on April 15, 1912, only two years into the Japanese occupation, Kim was instilled with a strong sense of Korean nationalism and ethnic pride from an early age by his Christian family. Independence from Japan was a goal most desired by all Koreans, and Kim's father and uncles regularly attended both Christian and nationalist functions that landed them in jail with some frequency.<sup>37</sup>

Kim was introduced to communism as a young pupil attending the Yuwen Middle School in Jilin, China, after his family had been displaced by the Japanese military from their ancestral home in the Mangyongdae region of Pyongyang. Kim quickly embraced communism as a tool to end class struggle in his country, a concept that was not lost on him since he spent his entire childhood in crushing poverty; however, patriotism was Kim's top priority. He fell in with anti-Japanese guerillas of Korean ethnicity who had been forced into exile in Manchuria, although he quickly found that these groups did not

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<sup>37</sup> Becker, 45.

work with one another to achieve their common goal, and in fact spent most of their time and meager resources squabbling among themselves. That being the case, Kim joined an organized guerilla movement that was guided by the Chinese Communist Party, and by 1941 had become one of the highest-ranking Korean members within the movement's command structure due to his abundant natural charisma and leadership qualities.<sup>38</sup>

These factors led to Kim being recognized by Soviet army generals as a potential leader in the government of a communist Korean nation. By the early 1940s, Kim had become rather well known to Japanese occupation forces because of his guerilla activities, and was forced to flee to the Soviet Union for protection. At this point he was commissioned into the Soviet army and held the rank of Captain in the 88<sup>th</sup> Special Independent Sniper Brigade, a unit that was charged with reconnaissance in Manchuria and Korea. Kim commanded a battalion of two-hundred men, all of them ethnic Korean or Chinese, although he is believed to have led that unit on only one reconnaissance mission outside Soviet territory.<sup>39</sup>

It was the American bombing of Nagasaki and Hiroshima that ultimately led to Japan's capitulation and withdrawal from Korea and Manchuria, and Kim's unit was disbanded almost immediately afterward. Quite different from the hero's welcome that Kim officially received when he returned to Korean soil, he arrived in the northern Korean port of Wonsan in September 1945 aboard a Soviet naval vessel and wearing the uniform of a Soviet military officer. It was not until the following month that the Soviet authorities in northern Korea staged a rally in Pyongyang, during which Kim was officially welcomed back to his homeland by a Korean crowd chanting, "Long live

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<sup>38</sup> Becker, 45.

<sup>39</sup> Becker, 48.

General Kim Il-sung!” Soviet perception management, which became the basis upon which Kim’s legacy was built, was already in effect.<sup>40</sup>

In December of that year, Kim was appointed by the Soviet Union as the leader of the North Korean branch of the Korean Communist Party. Within a couple months, Moscow made a choice as to which communist leader in Korea would assume the top position in North Korea as a “Soviet-allied” territory. There were three primary choices, each of whom possessed at least some of the appropriate credentials to lead a Soviet-sponsored communist movement in Korea: one was the head of a communist party that enjoyed an uncomfortably close alliance with China; another was based in American-occupied Seoul; and the third was Kim Il-sung, who was conveniently located in Pyongyang and had a strong nationalist history.<sup>41</sup>

On February 8, 1946, Kim was appointed as chairman of the Korean Interim People’s Committee, making him the top political leader north of the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel. He remained in this position until his death nearly five decades later

### *The Great Leader*

Almost immediately upon his appointment, Kim nationalized the major industries in North Korea and initiated a sweeping land reform in an effort to “communize” the nation. Individuals who had spent their entire lives as poor tenant farmers suddenly found themselves in possession of several acres of land, which quickly and strongly endeared him to the lowest socio-economic class. Conversely, many educated and wealthy Koreans who quickly found themselves with nothing decided to flee south, which created a vacuum in the North Korean government that Kim filled with a

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<sup>40</sup> Becker, 48.

<sup>41</sup> Becker, 51.

combination of Soviet economists, administrators, and politicians; and barely-literate guerilla fighters who had served alongside Kim during his anti-Japanese partisan years.<sup>42</sup>

As the country continued to grow and move forward, Kim found himself resentful of being viewed as a Soviet lackey, and thus desired to create an ideology that was quite distinct from either Soviet (Stalinist) or Chinese (Maoist) political ideology. Capitalizing on historic Korean nationalism and xenophobia as the result of being a “shrimp crushed among a battle of whales”, Kim endeavored to create an ideology that would espouse the virtues of independence from external influence and would emphasize the superiority of all things Korean: industry, art, culture, and even ethnicity.

Kim found his opportunity for independence in the Sino-Soviet split, which initially allowed him to more closely ally himself with China while shunning Nikita Khrushchev’s reform measures (de-Stalinization). Kim’s calculated efforts to distance himself from Soviet dominance were eventually made public when press statements began to appear in which he openly criticized Moscow’s political doctrine and foreign policy practices, while defending Beijing’s (ideological) anti-revisionist stance.<sup>43</sup>

The immediate result of Kim’s distancing efforts was that Moscow suspended all military and economic aid to North Korea, thereby forcing Kim to turn to Beijing for assistance that it could not feasibly offer. The lack of provided aid, along with China’s domestic turmoil brought on by the Cultural Revolution, strengthened Kim’s resolve to achieve and maintain complete independence from both Moscow and Beijing, thereby increasing the credibility of his *juche* ideology.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Becker, 53.

<sup>43</sup> Becker, 66.

<sup>44</sup> Becker, 66.

In order to maintain strict adherence to his personal ideology, Kim needed to maintain virtually complete social control. He completed the first step, isolating the populace from the outside world, by severing ties with the state's two largest allies. Along with the absence of personal freedoms and basic rights, Kim continued to expand the cult of personality that had originally been facilitated by falsified Soviet documents and military records of his "heroism".

As of this writing, the cult of personality and social control established by Kim and perpetuated by his son comprises nothing less than an *alternate reality* for the North Korean people. Kim Il-sung's photo is displayed above the national flag at events, and the song *The March of Marshal Kim Il-sung* is played before the state's national anthem. Virtually every song, poem, play, book, and essay written in North Korea glorifies Kim, and he and his son even have species of flowers named after them – *kimilsungia* and *kimjongilia*, respectively. Portraits of the two Kims hang on at least one wall *in every room in North Korea*, from the largest auditoriums and theaters to the smallest private dwellings, and are routinely dusted with cloths that are reserved for only that task.<sup>45</sup>

Outside, the Kims' faces can be found on many buildings, and statues of them – particularly Kim Il-sung – exist in every city, town, and village, and dot the countryside. Their philosophical teachings are found everywhere, including carvings in Korea's legendary Mt. Paektu, where the Korean race is said to have begun. The elder Kim's birthday, April 15, is the People's National Holiday – the biggest holiday in North Korea, akin to Christmas in the western world. The date of Kim's birth in 1912 also marks the beginning of the *juche* calendar – the current year in North Korea is 97, not 2009.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Breen, 6.

<sup>46</sup> Breen, 6.

This cult of personality has far exceeded the limits of providing legitimacy to a political system; it has managed to deify the Kims into figures of worship. In North Korea, love of nation (patriotism) and love for the leader are inseparable; Kim Il-sung is the personification of Korean nationalism and the North Korean nation, and he embodies the hope for a better future in which the entire peninsula will be reunited under Kim's rule.

*The Mind Factory*

In order to ensure that all North Koreans are properly and thoroughly indoctrinated into this alternate reality, state control begins at birth. As in every other room in North Korea, pictures of the Kims hang in the labor and delivery rooms of all the hospitals, so children literally begin their lives with the Kims watching over them. After maternity leave has ended – typically several weeks in duration – the infants enter into the state education program, beginning with daycare centers that care for the children for approximately fifteen hours per day, which serves to weaken the bond among family members while strengthening the bond between the individual and the state system.<sup>47</sup>

At the age of five, children enter the compulsory education system, and even at such a young age their curriculum consists of both traditional education subjects and the study of Kim Il-sung's (propagandized) childhood, revolutionary activities, and philosophy. During their pre-teen years, children may join the Socialist Working Youth League, which teaches the mechanisms of state organization and further espouses the histories and teachings of the Kims. This organization also prepares children for the

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<sup>47</sup> Ko, Yong-hwan. *Pyongyang: The Twenty-Fifth Hour*. (Seoul: Choson Ilbosa, 2000), 103-108.



process of attaining membership in the Korean Worker's Party, the pinnacle of the average North Korean citizen's life achievements.<sup>48</sup>

Upon completion of compulsory education, and secondary education if applicable, each citizen is assigned to a work unit according to the needs of the state, where the ideological indoctrination is maintained. Ko Yong-hwan, a North Korean diplomat who defected to Seoul in the 1990s, notes that a typical work day begins early in the morning with a group *self-criticism* of mistakes made in one's family and social life, at work, while endeavoring to learn and understand Kim's teachings. Each member of the group shares his/her self-criticisms, and other members of the group are permitted to comment.<sup>49</sup>

After the criticism session, the work unit reviews previous efforts to accomplish goals and orders issued by the Kims, and then receives new orders if applicable. After lunch, the work unit spends several hours learning about North Korea's "revolutionary history", *juche*, and party doctrine. Once the study time has ended, the work unit is required to attend a lecture, the focus of which changes regularly. Ko recalls attending one lecture, the subject of which was, "Comrade Dear Leader is a future world leader who is revered by people throughout the world". Upon completion of the lecture, the work unit watches a "revolutionary" movie that glorifies the Kims and serves to reinforce political indoctrination.<sup>50</sup>

At this point, the work day has ended, and the individual returns home. If s/he has children, s/he will collect them from the daycare center where they have spent the past fifteen hours being indoctrinated into the system, just as the parent was as a child.

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<sup>48</sup> Ko, 124-153.

<sup>49</sup> Ko, 124-153.

This is the calculated method that the Kim regime has used for the past six decades to create an alternate reality within its domain to attain and maintain absolute, unwavering loyalty from its citizenry.

*Summary*

This chapter has addressed the very base of *juche* ideology, which is the deification of the two Kims in the hearts and minds of the North Korean people, as well as the people's subjugation to the will of the Kims and the state, which are essentially the same thing. It is upon the propagandized version of the elder Kim's revolutionary activities against the Japanese imperialists that all this rests.

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<sup>50</sup> Ko, 192-207.

## **Chapter Five: *A Little of This, A Little of That***

Before one can determine whether North Korea adheres to an existing model of government, one must examine the various facets of the types of governance against which the Kim regime is to be compared and contrasted. Outside experts who have studied North Korea have claimed to identify elements of Marxism-Leninism, Stalinism, Maoism, Nazism, and fascism, so these particular models are best suited for comparison and contrast to the North Korean model.

### *Leftist Models*

The leftist models of government examined for the purposes of this thesis share several traits. Generally, they glorify the members and professions of the proletariat – the common man – and their propaganda claims that the state empowers the common man and emphasizes his contribution to society. Along the line of glorifying the worker, emphasis is theoretically placed on *needs of the many* vice *needs of the few*, strong family, labor rights, and recreation.

Propaganda is used to varying degrees by leftist models, but the general trend appears to be that the strength of the propagandized message – as well as its pervasiveness – increase in accordance with how far a given model can be placed from centrist government models on the political spectrum.

### *Marxism-Leninism*

The primary tenets of communism are socially and economically focused. Communism as it is understood today is based primarily on Marxist theory, and in fact was identified by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels as the “higher phase” of the Marxist theory of socio-economic development. According to Marx and Engels, a society

achieved communism once the concept of property ownership had been abolished *and* the remnants of socio-economic classes no longer existed in that society. The precedent phase that a society must pass through, according to Marx and Engels, was *socialism*. Socialism was also labeled by Marx and Engels as the “first phase”, during which the concept of property ownership had been abolished, but in which the remnants of socio-economic classes could still be found. The process of evolving from capitalism, to socialism, and communism, the most equitable and therefore most desirable type of society in Marx’s belief, could not begin until a revolution by the proletariat against the bourgeoisie had successfully occurred.

Marx espoused, as do all various leftist ideologies and government models, a strong disdain for labor exploitation, and in fact endorsed Marxism not as an ideology to be implemented by a political state, but as a theory to be practiced across political boundaries.<sup>51</sup> That being said, Marx despised liberal democracy, a system that he felt was monopolized by capitalists to maintain control over the proletariat.

#### *Economic Model*

Marxism-Leninism in the early twentieth century defined the proletariat as mostly poor, urban factory workers who toiled under dangerous working conditions for low wages, which benefited the factory owners and other members of the bourgeoisie. It defined the bourgeoisie as the economic middle and upper classes - capitalist factory owners, landlords, and merchants – who financially benefited from the exploitation of the proletariat.

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<sup>51</sup> Gaddis, John Lewis. *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 54-84.

Practically applied, as it was in the Soviet Union beginning in 1917 by Vladimir Ilich Lenin, Marxism-Leninism called for the abolishment of private property as part of communization process, in which everyone “owned” an equal share of the state’s property. State property included not only acquired private property, but also all commercial and industrial facilities, production capabilities, seaports, railroads, etc.

Practical Marxism-Leninism requires a planned economy vice a market economy, the reason being that the former is guided by economic planners who dictate the type and amount of various goods that need to be produced by the state for both its citizenry and the state’s industrial needs. For example, Lenin’s economic planners may have recognized the need to produce so many radios and pairs of shoes for citizens in need of those items, but may also have noted a need for so many tons of steel to produce new weapons, railroad tracks, or buildings. All these items would be managed by the state, but would, in theory, be equally owned by each citizen of the state.

Because of the market requirements of practical Marxism-Leninism, this author has graded its economic model as “command” in Table 1.

Table 1: Comparative Analysis

	Economic Model	Free Elections	Succession	Government Transparency/ Accountability	Government Protection of Basic Rights
Marxism-Leninism	Command	No	Coup	No	3
Stalinism	Command	No	Coup	No	4
Maoism	Command	No	Coup	No	4
Fascism	Corporative	No	Coup	No	3
National Socialism	Corporative	No	Appointment	No	3
Kimilsungism	Other	No	Dynasty	No	5

### *Free Elections*

Political communism as it is defined today was first realized when the Bolshevik party, led by Lenin, successfully overthrew the Provisional Government of Russia in October 1917, leading to the establishment of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). Grounded in Marxist theory, Lenin set about to establish a post-revolutionary political state in which the proletariat would no longer be exploited by the bourgeoisie, and in which private ownership of property would be abolished – theoretically serving to further prevent class exploitation in the pursuit of wealth, status, and material goods.<sup>52</sup>

Theoretical Marxism endorses a system of soviet republics, in which state power is held by councils of employees. Under Lenin, a hierarchy of councils theoretically existed within the CPSU, with a Supreme Council at the top of the hierarchy. The Supreme Council wielded the power to reform the government and amend the Constitution.

In reality, the Supreme Council acted as a “rubber stamp” which Lenin used to “temporarily” suspend political factionalism within the party during his rule. Marxism-Leninism is in fact a one-party system and so does not allow for unencumbered free elections in which opposing political parties can participate. Because of this lack of free elections per criteria noted in Chapter 1, this author has graded Marxism-Leninism as “no” under the *free elections* variable in Table 1.

### *Leadership Succession*

Marxism advocates *direct democracy*, whereby citizens who wish to participate can make laws, amend the constitution, elect and remove officials from office by popular

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<sup>52</sup> Harding, Neil. *The State in Socialist Society*. (Oxford: St. Anthony’s College, 1984), 86-94.

vote. A successor would be selected from among a self-nominated group of individuals based also on popular vote.

As noted above, Lenin held absolute power within the CPSU by “temporarily” suspending political factionalism and by removing key threats to his grip on power. Lenin died while in office, and his successor was decided as the result of a political power struggle between Joseph Stalin and Leon Trotsky. Stalin’s victory was ultimately due to his ability to consolidate power within the party and the fact that he was initially favored over Trotsky by Lenin. This bias against Trotsky probably began in 1903, when Trotsky sided with the *Mensheviks*, who favored a gradual conversion to socialism (a *bourgeois* socialist revolution), whereas Lenin argued that the revolution should be swift and come about as a result of the proletariat teaming with the rural peasantry.<sup>53</sup>

It is because of the armed conflict and overthrow of the Provisional Government of Russia, and Lenin’s subsequent attainment of power during 1917 Russian Revolution, that this author grades practically-applied Marxism-Leninism as “coup” under the *leadership succession* variable in Table 1. It should be noted, however, that not all Marxist-Leninist states adopted that political doctrine via coups. Several of the states that formed the USSR used Leninism as a method to declare independence from World War I German domination. Belarus, for example, fell under Bolshevik control after Germany’s capitulation at the end of World War I. The resultant Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic ultimately went on to become a founding member of the USSR in 1922.

#### *Transparency and Accountability*

Lenin’s government, as is the case with the majority of far/extreme rightist or leftist political models, did not make itself transparent and was not held accountable in

any way to what Lenin referred to as the base of the Soviet societal pyramid. Some major government decisions were published in state-run media outlets such as *Pravda*, but such vehicles were simply mouthpieces for the government and were therefore heavily censored. Additionally, the citizenry's desires was not taken into account prior to major political, economic, or military decisions, at least partly due to the fact that no vehicle existed to make the populace heard by Soviet leadership. The political structure under Lenin was intentionally designed to prevent such accountability to the citizenry.<sup>54</sup>

This lack of transparency through accountability, aside from no government protection of freedom of speech, made it impossible for the average Soviet citizen to voice a negative opinion of Lenin's political, economic, or social policies. Such a lack of accountability to the citizenry was just one of the mechanisms that Lenin employed to ensure that the CPSU remained firmly in control of the state.

It is because of this lack of transparency via accountability that this author has graded Marxism-Leninism as "no" in Table 1.

#### *Rights and Freedoms*

It should be noted that many Russians, including larges swathes of the proletariat, were critical of Lenin's leftist revolution at the outset. Due to increasing civil unrest, labor strikes, and assassination attempts on his life, Lenin ordered the creation of a secret police network that was charged with maintaining order and suppressing political and social dissent against the CPSU. Concurrently, media outlets (primarily newspapers), virtually all of which fell under state control, were heavily censored, and other basic rights such as freedom of speech, association, movement, and legal due process were

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<sup>53</sup> Harding, 106.



essentially suspended since anyone labeled as a Bolshevik, capitalist, or counter-revolutionary fell under the immediate threat of torture, death, or imprisonment.<sup>55</sup>

It is because of these rights violations that this author grades Marxism-Leninism as a “3” for government protection of basic rights and freedoms on a scale of 1-5, since the rights of all were not revoked, but neither were they guaranteed and protected by the state.

### *Stalinism*

Stalinism is an extreme leftist model of government that is purportedly grounded in the tenets of socialism. It is named after its creator, self-described Marxist-Leninist Josef Stalin, who implemented this form of government in the Soviet Union during the years of his rule – 1924 to 1953. Stalinism was an oppressive form of government that incorporated measures such as suppressing political opposition and a cult of personality.<sup>56</sup>

Stalinism was heavily influenced by the publication of *Socialism in One Country*, a thesis by leftist revolutionary Nikolai Bukharin, which proposed that the Soviet Union must strengthen itself from within in order to continue the socialist revolution after the defeat of proletariat uprisings in several European countries in the years immediately following World War I. Bukharin’s primary assertion in *Socialism in One Country* was that socialism could exist in the relative vacuum of a single state, and did not necessarily need to simultaneously exist across political boundaries as Marx had theorized.

Bukharin’s assertion was bolstered by the continued existence and perceived success of

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<sup>54</sup> Brooks, J. and G. Chernyavskiy. *Lenin and the Making of the Soviet State*. (Boston: Bedford St. Martin’s, 2007), 114-191.

<sup>55</sup> Brooks, 114-191.

<sup>56</sup> Reichman, Henry. “Reconsidering Stalinism”. *Theory and Society*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Jan., 1988), 57-89.

Soviet socialism under Stalin after Lenin's death and the failure of other leftist revolutions throughout Europe.<sup>57</sup>

In order to strengthen the Soviet Union from within, as Bukharin had deemed necessary in his thesis, Stalin embraced "state communism", in which the socialist doctrine was refined to apply to only one political state in which the apex of the political-economic pyramid would be able to implement and enforce social, economic, and political control as was necessary. Strengthening the state from within, as Stalin interpreted it, required that state management be even more centralized than under Leninism.

#### *Economic Model*

The economic model followed by Stalinism is essentially the same as under Marxism-Leninism, with one notable difference. During his tenure, Stalin enabled rapid industrialization – partly as a means to self-sufficiency and of attempting to surpass western capitalist development, and collectivization of all personal property in an attempt to centralize and regulate food production and to prevent the lower classes from becoming empowered via land ownership.<sup>58</sup> During the thirty years of his rule, Stalin succeeded in bringing Soviet industry and technology from something that was largely agrarian in nature to being nearly on par with the United States, which was at the time the most industrialized and technologically advanced nation in the world. He did so in part by centralizing economic planning and production much more so than had Lenin, and by collectivizing farms.

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<sup>57</sup> Reichman, 57-89.

<sup>58</sup> Reichman, 57-89.

The technological and industrial advances were notable, but the upheaval experienced in the farming sector greatly disrupted food production. This disruption was a contributing factor in widespread famine throughout the Soviet Union, such as the Great Famine of 1932-3, during which an estimated six million people – mostly rural peasants – starved to death.<sup>59</sup>

Despite Soviet technological and industrial advances during Stalin's rule, his basic economic model was simply a more extreme (centralized) version of Lenin's, and so this author grades Stalinism as a "command" economy in Table 1.

#### *Free Elections*

Stalinism, as is the case with Marxism-Leninism, is a one-party system and so does not allow for unencumbered free elections in which competing political parties can participate. During Stalin's rule, the only political party that was represented in the government was the CPSU. Local elections consisted of candidates that represented the CPSU. Candidates were carefully selected by the party beforehand, meaning that "elections" were heavily staged by the state. This allowed the CPSU to maintain a stranglehold on power within the Soviet Union, and ultimately resulted in party and state becoming one intertwined entity, in which the state's apparatus was simply a vehicle to realize the political desires of the party.<sup>60</sup> Because of this lack of free elections per the criteria noted in Chapter 1, this author has graded Stalinism as "no" under the *free elections* variable in Table 1.

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<sup>59</sup> Davies, R.W. and S.G. Wheatcroft. *The Years of Hunger: Soviet Agriculture, 1931-1933* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 401.

### *Leadership Succession*

As previously noted, Stalin attained power upon Lenin's death, but only as the result of a power struggle between himself and Leon Trotsky. Lenin had dealt with resistance to his firm grip on power, and had relied on Stalin to garner support for him. Stalin used these same networks and connections upon Lenin's death to become the Chairman of the CPSU, the apex of the Soviet social-managerial pyramid. Upon his succession to that position, Stalin swiftly moved to eliminate the threat of insurrection, partly by centralizing the government and economy even more so than Lenin had. Under Stalin's form of socialism, as with Lenin's, there was no plan for succession after he had occupied his position for a set amount of time, nor was there even an obvious plan for succession upon his death.<sup>61</sup>

Because of his political maneuverings during Lenin's rule – and just after his death, including silencing his primary political threats (including Lenin during his semi-retirement) and ultimately exiling Trotsky from the Soviet Union, Stalin's ascent to power meets the definition of a political coup d'état. The political differences between Stalin and Trotsky culminated in 1927 when the former had the latter expelled from the CPSU for his advocating of “permanent revolution” vice Stalin's “socialism in one country”. Trotsky's expulsion from the CPSU, and his subsequent exile in Mexico, left Stalin with unencumbered rule of both the party and the state.<sup>62</sup> Therefore, this author grades Stalinism as “coup” under the succession variable in Table 1.

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<sup>60</sup> Reichman, 57-89.

<sup>61</sup> Davies, 202-273.

### *Transparency and Accountability*

Under Stalin's rule, there was no improvement in government transparency through accountability. In fact, what little transparency may have existed under Lenin all but evaporated during his successor's rule, as Stalin further centralized the government, clamped down on political dissent, and greatly expanded the *gulag* system and the network of secret police that permeated Soviet society at all levels. If it was impossible to hold Lenin's government accountable to the people, it was simply unthinkable to attempt to do so under Stalin's rule.

It is because of this lack of transparency via accountability that this author grades Stalinism as "no" under the government transparency/accountability variable in Table 1.

### *Rights and Freedoms*

As already noted, Stalinism is a more centralized and repressive form of Leninism and has little in common with the Marxist principles in which Stalin claimed to ardently believe. Soviet Stalinism advocates a heavily militarized society, pervasive state ideology, cult of personality, and extensive use of propaganda and secret police in order to maintain strict control over the citizenry, prevent social unrest, and silence political dissent. To further control the citizenry, Stalinism does not allow for basic rights and freedoms such as speech, association, or media, and the threat of torture or imprisonment in the *gulag* remains ever-present due to the lack of an equitable legal system.<sup>63</sup>

It is because of these civil rights violations that this author grades Stalinism as a "4" for government protection of basic rights and freedoms on a scale of 1-5, since the

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<sup>62</sup> Davies, 202-273.

<sup>63</sup> Reichman, 57-89.

rights of most citizens were revoked, and those few who enjoyed some guarantee of basic rights understood that such freedoms were not necessarily protected by the state.

### *Maoism*

Similar to Stalin's "refinement" of Marxism, Mao Zedong implemented an altered version of the socialist model in the newly-established People's Republic of China upon his victory over the Kuomintang<sup>64</sup> in October 1949. Unlike Stalin, Mao faced the challenges of centralizing the government *and* unifying the country upon his military victory over Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek.<sup>65</sup> To quell political dissent and consolidate power in mainland China, Mao sought out and executed all his political opposition during the first several years of his rule. He also established a Stalinist *gulag* in order to reinforce social control, and initiated a pervasive "self-criticism" program that was designed to ferret out political resistance and capitalists.<sup>66</sup>

Mao eventually succeeded in unifying the country under what he referred to as a "centralized democracy". All the various social classes were represented in Mao's government, in which the citizens elected representatives to local assemblies that in turn elected representatives to higher-level assemblies to which they were directly subordinate and expected to maintain strict obedience.<sup>67</sup>

Another unique aspect of Maoism was that it combined the country's judicial, executive, and legislative structures into a singular element, the political-military doctrine, with one overarching ideology. This element was controlled by the Central People's Government Council, a sixty-three person assembly of which Mao was the

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<sup>64</sup> Taiwan-based Chinese nationalist party.

<sup>65</sup> Various separate states comprised China in 1949, and Taiwan continued to refer to itself as the Republic of China under the Kuomintang nationalists.

<sup>66</sup> Gaddis, 54-84.

chairman. As a singular element, military doctrine could thus be used to advance or reinforce political doctrine. Such a political-military doctrine, when combined with mass mobilization of the rural peasantry, enabled regime leadership to mobilize entire swathes of the populace to achieve a specific goal, and provided the state with a civilian militia that would fight for the regime using unconventional means should the need arise. On that point, Maoist doctrine stresses the constant threat posed by various internal and external forces, including political enemies and rivals, military threats, and capitalism. Under Maoism, the Chinese people were bombarded with propaganda about the evils of decadence, self-centeredness, corruption, and the perils of a lack of ideological devotion to the Maoist social-political system.<sup>68</sup>

#### *Economic Model*

In many regards, Maoism is largely similar to Stalinism, the latter having heavily influenced the former, with one key difference: Maoism initially called for the development of rural areas rather than the preferential treatment of cities and other industrialized areas, and in fact the proletariat in Maoist China was defined as the poor rural peasantry. Such an approach made sense in China at that time, as the majority of the population was an illiterate rural peasantry, and Mao believed that the empowerment and mobilization of this segment of the populace would endear this base layer of the societal pyramid to the apex, thus making the entire social-political structure more stable.<sup>69</sup>

To this end, the government enacted the Agrarian Reform Law in 1950 with the goal of ending land ownership. The owners of farms and the tools used to operate those

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<sup>67</sup> Gaddis, 54-84.

<sup>68</sup> Spence, Jonathan. *The Search for Modern China*. (London: Hutchinson Press, 1990), 517-18.

farms were directed to share ownership of their possessions equally with the peasants who worked on the land. Within a few years, the Chinese government enacted a policy of gradual collectivization, and by 1956 approximately 800,000 farms were operated as cooperative communities.<sup>70</sup> By 1956, however, Mao had begun to place an increasing emphasis on industrial development, based largely on Stalin's Soviet model. Mao initiated a series of five-year plans to expand China's industrial capabilities, eventually taking resources away from agricultural development. The result of this disparity was that Chinese agricultural output plummeted, and by 1961 an estimated fourteen million people – primarily rural peasantry – had starved to death.<sup>71</sup>

Due to Maoism's overall similarities to Stalinist economic practices, including the emplacement of a centralized, planned economy, this author grades the Maoist economic model as "command" in Table 1.

### *Free Elections*

As is the case with both Leninism and Stalinism, Mao's China did not allow for truly free, unencumbered elections. Under Maoism, the state was controlled by the Communist Party of China, and the state's apparatus was exploited to bring the party's political vision to fruition. During the *Hundred Flowers Movement* (1956-7), Mao allowed varied political representation in the People's Congress, believing that such political representation was healthy for the socialist movement in China. This token representation benefited several minor political parties, including the Kuomintang that Mao had fought for control of a unified China several years previously.

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<sup>69</sup> Spence, 344-45.

<sup>70</sup> Spence, 344-45.

<sup>71</sup> Spence, 583.



The unexpected backlash was that millions began to openly speak out against Mao's policies to such an extent that he quickly brought an end to the movement and to varied political representation. Intellectuals, non-communists, and bureaucrats were routed out and executed by the thousands, and the Communist Party of China was once again granted unfettered control of the state. This total control of China's political apparatus remained in effect until Mao's death in 1976. Because of the total lack of an encumbered election process and lack of political pluralism, this author grades Maoism as "no" under the *free elections* variable in Table 1.

### *Leadership Succession*

Mao rose to the top post in the People's Republic of China as the culmination of nearly two decades of both civil war and war against Japan. China's war against Japan ended with the latter's capitulation in 1945, at which point Chinese nationalists and communists were already embroiled in conflict. Nationalists, under command of Chiang Kai-shek, battled against Mao's People's Liberation Army for control of a unified China. Mao's communist forces routed Chiang's nationalists from the mainland in early 1949, the latter then fleeing to Taiwan where they had maintained a firm foothold since the end of World War II. Now in control of all of mainland China as a result of his military victory, Mao established the People's Republic of China under the banner of "revised socialism".<sup>72</sup>

Unlike in the Soviet Union under both Lenin and Stalin, Mao established a formal plan for succession upon his own death or incapacitation. He designated Lin Biao, a Chinese military general who ultimately rose to the number two position behind Mao within the party, as his successor, and the Chinese constitution was even amended to

reflect this designation. Lin had risen to prominence largely because of his defense of Mao and his policies as the Great Proletariat Cultural Revolution began to spin out of control.<sup>73</sup>

Despite their having worked well together to maintain Mao's power during the purges of the Cultural Revolution, their close alliance began to fall apart shortly thereafter. Lin held a firm grip on power over the People's Army, which had become increasingly instrumental in allowing the political party to maintain control. Lin, perhaps fearing his arrest for threatening a military coup, died in a plane crash while trying to flee China, and Mao remained firmly in power until his death in 1976.<sup>74</sup>

It is because of Mao's victory over the Kuomintang and his attainment of power via military means that Maoism is rated as "coup" under the *leadership succession* variable in Table 1.

#### *Transparency and Accountability*

Unlike Leninism and Stalinism, there was a brief period during Mao's rule when dissenting political opinions were tolerated – even encouraged. Premier Zhou Enlai had been encouraging Chinese intellectuals and various other non-communists to return to mainland China and voice their opinions of the state's various social and economic policies. Few were willing to do so openly, and so Enlai increased the scale of his effort during a People's Congress meeting in 1956; this larger effort would ultimately be known as the *Hundred Flowers Movement*. This campaign lasted for approximately one year,

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<sup>72</sup> Spence, 526-7.

<sup>73</sup> Spence, 613-4.

<sup>74</sup> Spence, 616.

the intent being that the government would become stronger and more balanced if it made itself transparent to the citizenry via accountability to the same.<sup>75</sup>

Mao personally took control of the project from Enlai in the summer of 1956, and even allowed a token representation of minor political parties, including the Kuomintang, in the People's Congress. Mao believed that open political discourse would reveal his socialist government model to be the most efficient and desirable method for Chinese governance. He offered slightly modified guidance several months later when he expressed his desire to hear criticism that was "constructive" rather than "hateful and destructive".<sup>76</sup>

Mao was not prepared for the rebellion against his rule once the movement began in earnest. By July 1957, millions of intellectuals, anti-communists, and students had taken to the streets in virtually open defiance of Mao's governance. Their calls for further transparency and demands for government accountability soon forced Mao to end the movement, which soon developed into what would later be known as the *Anti-Rightist Movement*. This movement, essentially the quashing of the *Hundred Flowers Movement*, saw over a half-million intellectuals, students, artists, political dissidents, and other "anti-leftists" imprisoned, tortured, or executed.<sup>77</sup>

It is because of Mao's attempt to filter political feedback, and ultimately his endeavor to end the Hundred Flowers Movement via violent means, that this author grades Maoism as "no" under the *government transparency/accountability* variable in Table 1.

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<sup>75</sup> Spence, 539–43.

<sup>76</sup> Spence, 539–43.

### *Rights and Freedoms*

In an effort to maintain social control, Maoism introduced the concept of the *Socialist Man*. Along with the aforementioned self-criticism sessions, *Socialist Man* was encouraged to put the well-being of the state ahead of his own or that of his family, and was required to carefully observe and scrutinize the words and actions of his fellow citizens for hints of political dissatisfaction or capitalist tendencies. *Socialist Man* was the precursor of the pervasive surveillance network that pervades North Korean society today down to the household level.<sup>78</sup> The practical implementation of *Socialist Man* greatly restricted freedom of speech, free expression, and assembly, as anyone who spoke out against Mao's policies was quickly arrested and either imprisoned or executed without due process. The only exception to this rule was the brief period of the *Hundred Flowers Movement*, resulting in the *Anti-Rightist Movement* during which virtually all basic freedoms and rights were once again revoked, this time permanently.<sup>79</sup> It is because of Mao's oppressive methods of social control that this author grades Maoism as a "4" under the *government protection of basic rights* variable in Table 1.

#### *Rightist Models*

Despite its claim as being a leftist government, implying that it adheres at least somewhat to the person-focused tenets of socialism, some of North Korea's more notable attributes appear to be extremely rightist in nature. The most notable difference between the two ends of the spectrum is that leftist government models theoretically emphasize the rights of the many over the rights of the few, while rightist models endorse the rights of the few – the bourgeoisie – over the rights of the many.

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<sup>77</sup> Spence, 539-43.

<sup>78</sup> Spence, 592-3.

## *Fascism*

Fascism developed in Europe as a direct and opposite reaction to the proletarian revolutions that led Stalin to pursue “socialism in one nation”.<sup>80</sup> In Italy, the middle and upper classes, labeled as the *bourgeoisie* in leftist politics, bristled at the attempts of the lower classes to take their factories, properties, and wealth, and so sided with *fasci di combattimento*<sup>81</sup>, rightist groups of World War I veterans who battled against elements of the new socialist movement such as labor unions. The class hatred that fomented in Italy as a result of social unrest between 1919 and 1922 resulted in a tenfold increase in the number of fascists, socio-economic middle- and upper-class citizens who controlled the majority of Italy’s political, economic, and military infrastructures.<sup>82</sup> The control that fascists exercised over the state’s functions and their vast access to political and economic leaders made them a vastly more powerful entity than the organized leftist political parties and labor unions who opposed them.

As a political ideology, fascism is characterized by nationalism and, subsequently, imperialism. Fascist states are conservative (anti-liberal) and statist, meaning that the state is the supreme ruling unit to which everything and everyone within its domain is subordinated. Fascist regimes are heavily militarized, and often rely on ethnic or racial heritage as a means to justify their actions. Fascist Italy, for example, glorified its ancient Roman ancestry as a justification for its militant expansionism throughout the

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<sup>79</sup> Spence, 572.

<sup>80</sup> The title of Bukharin’s thesis that so heavily influenced Stalinism, as noted earlier in this chapter.

<sup>81</sup> Groups of combatants.

<sup>82</sup> Gentile, Emilio. “The Problem of the Party in Italian Fascism”. *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (Apr., 1984), pp. 251-274.

Mediterranean and northern Africa beginning with its conquest and colonization of Ethiopia in 1936.<sup>83</sup>

### *Economic Model*

In an attempt to prove that fascism was superior to leftist ideologies with regard to economic development, the Italian Fascist party under Mussolini implemented the concept of the *corporative state economy*. Quite unlike communist economic management in which everyone theoretically owned an equal share of production capabilities that were “managed” by the state, corporatism endorsed structured employer-employee groups, one of which would hold a monopoly on each of the many industrial and commercial sectors. All these structured groups would together be responsible for the management and development of the state economy, with guidance being provided by concerned state ministries. Such an arrangement denatured traditional market practices and abolished entrepreneurship, which actually made it a “third option” against both communism and free-market practices.<sup>84</sup>

This third option allowed Mussolini to rid Italy of inefficient state-owned production capabilities, while at the same time forging an alliance between wealthy industrialists, laborers, and the state. Italy did suffer from a lack of key industrial resources, but attempted to rectify that shortcoming via a *strategic colonization* program by which countries with the necessary resources would be occupied by the fascist Italian state.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Richman, Sheldon. "Fascism." *The Concise Encyclopedia of Economics*, 2008. Library of Economics and Liberty. 25 March 2009.

<sup>84</sup> Richman.

<sup>85</sup> Baker, David. "The Political Economy of Fascism: Myth or Reality, or Myth and Reality?" *New Political Economy*, Vol 11, Issue 2, (June 2006), 227-250.

Additionally, a common desire among fascist governments, as was certainly noted in Mussolini's Italy, is the desire to establish a mature autarkic economy which is wholly self-sufficient. Such an economy was not successfully established in either Italy or Germany while under fascist rule.

Because of Mussolini's efforts to establish a corporative state economy in fascist Italy, this author grades fascism's economic model as "corporative" in Table 1.

#### *Free Elections / Leadership Succession*

Mussolini was appointed as Prime Minister of Italy by King Vittorio Emanuele III in October 1922, but only as a result of the *March on Rome*, during which Mussolini's *National Fascist Party* ousted the sitting Prime Minister, Luigi Facta. Facilitating the political coup, King Vittorio refused to politically back Facta, resulting in Mussolini's appointment.<sup>86</sup>

The first few years of Mussolini's rule were marked by the existence of a right-leaning coalition government, and in fact his Fascist Party held only a minority role; however, Mussolini's goal was the establishment of a totalitarian regime with himself at the top. Passage of the Acerbo Law in June 1923 accelerated that process by granting two-thirds of the parliamentary seats to the political party (or group of parties) that had received twenty-five percent of the popular vote. Mussolini's Fascist party, ostensibly teamed with some minor liberal parties, received nearly seventy percent of the vote in April 1924 – largely by violence and intimidation – and therefore controlled both the Executive and Legislative offices in Italy.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Delzel, Charles. *Mediterranean Fascism 1919-1945*. (New York: Harper Rowe, 1970), 149.

<sup>87</sup> Bosworth, R.J.B. *Mussolini*. (London: Hodder, 2000), 87.

The violence continued for at least two months after the election, when Italian socialist Giacomo Matteotti spoke out in Parliament against the recent voter intimidation and election fraud, and moved to have the recent election annulled. Shortly afterward, Matteotti was abducted and murdered by five men associated with the Mussolini's Fascist party. Three of the men were later arrested, tried, and convicted; however, their convictions were overturned shortly thereafter by King Vittorio.<sup>88</sup>

Mussolini's government suffered a great backlash as a result of the murderers' association with the Fascist party; many representatives of the liberal and socialist parties retired their chairs in Parliament in hopes of forcing King Vittorio to remove Mussolini from office. Mussolini's position, however, was actually strengthened by this move because both King Vittorio and the Senate openly supported him.<sup>89</sup>

Between 1925 and 1927, Mussolini took calculated measures to remove virtually all the state's checks and balances against his position and power. In 1928, he took the final step by dismantling Parliament and outlawing elections. He replaced Parliament with a *Grand Council of Fascism* that was formed via a single list of candidates. Theoretically, only the Grand Council of Fascism had the authority to remove Mussolini from his position, but he had the authority to call the Council into session and he determined their agenda beforehand.<sup>90</sup>

It is because of Mussolini's political coup against sitting Prime Minister Luigi Facta that this author grades fascism as a "coup" under the *leadership succession* variable in Table 1. It is because of his disruption of early elections for his party's benefit, and his

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<sup>88</sup> Delzel, 35.

<sup>89</sup> Delzel, 81.

<sup>90</sup> Bosworth, 133.



eventual suspension of Parliament and the electoral process, that this author grades fascism as a “no” under the *free elections* variable in Table 1.

### *Transparency and Accountability*

Some of the various mechanisms to make governments transparent via accountability to the citizenry were disabled or dismantled almost immediately upon Mussolini’s rise to the position of Prime Minister, and virtually all such mechanisms were disabled within the first five years of his rule. Mussolini’s efforts to disable Parliament’s checks and balances came about during the general election of 1924 when his Fascist party swayed the results in his favor via physical violence and voter intimidation, as noted above. The result was a Parliament controlled by Mussolini’s party, ensuring that he could push legislation through that would allow him to accelerate the process of creating a totalitarian state.<sup>91</sup>

As mentioned above, Mussolini succeeded in dismantling Parliament in 1928, thereby denying the populace a vehicle to make their concerns heard by the state’s leadership. He also outlawed elections, which prevented the populace from effecting a change in the government should they become displeased with current state leadership.

Parliament was replaced with a *Grand Council of Fascism*, but that was an unelected body that technically provided a check against Mussolini’s power, but in reality answered to him since he could call them to session and set the agenda. The cumulative effect of these changes was that the average citizen had absolutely no way to hold state leadership accountable for its decisions or actions, and government operations were no longer transparent to the citizenry.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Delzel, 221.

<sup>92</sup> Bosworth, 221.

Because of Mussolini's swift dismantlement of Parliament and his establishment of an unelected Council that he ran, this author grades fascism as "no" under the *government transparency/accountability* variable in Table 1.

### *Rights and Freedoms*

Generally speaking, fascist states do not encourage ethnic, social, economic, or religious differences between various segments of their populations, and so attempt to eradicate conflicting economic classes, social differences, clashing religions, and ethnic tensions. The goal of such an endeavor is to ensure everyone is subjugated to, and only to, the state and party. That being said, fascist states often employ a policy of racism to remove less desirable or "weaker" races and ethnicities from their populations in order to strengthen the dominant race.

To this end, some rights and freedoms are granted, to varying degrees, to citizens based on their racial heritage and political allegiances. In Mussolini's Italy, no one was granted the right to vote after Mussolini outlawed elections in 1928, but citizens who were committed to the fascist movement were well represented by the various government bodies. Typically, those who were committed to the fascist movement were those who benefited from such a revolution. Jews, gypsies, homosexuals, and intellectuals generally found themselves bearing the brunt of fascist doctrine, and their basic rights were not protected by the state.<sup>93</sup>

The two conflicting systems of basic rights doctrine meant that committed fascists – typically ethnically pure Italians – were granted some form of legal due process, and basic rights such as speech and assembly, so long as their speech or assembly openly supported Mussolini's doctrine. That being said, racism not as popular in Italy as in

Germany, and in fact Mussolini did not adopt a policy of anti-Semitism until the late 1930s. This was done largely under pressure from Adolf Hitler, and was unpopular both throughout Italy and within the Italian Fascist party.

It is because of fascism's protection of basic rights for some, but not others, that this author grades it as a "3" under the *government protection of basic rights* variable in Table 1.

### *Nazism*

Formally known as *national socialism*<sup>94</sup>, Nazism is a government model that was conceptualized and implemented by Adolf Hitler, who won the popular vote to become Chancellor (later Fuehrer) of Germany between 1933 and 1945. Nazism is generally viewed as an extreme form of fascism that is founded largely on an extreme ideology of racism/racial superiority and anti-Semitism.

Many of the factors that contributed to the rise of European fascism, such as the increasing momentum of leftist ideologies and a global economic depression, also laid the groundwork for the rise of Nazism. Another factor that contributed to the Nazism's appeal to the German citizenry included resentment and shame from its country's capitulation in World War I and the resultant Treaty of Versailles, which many citizens felt "emasculated" their country. Rightists within the country blamed Germany's capitulation and subsequent economic woes on German Jews by accusing them of sabotaging Germany's war efforts from within, which subsequently led many nationalist

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<sup>93</sup> Bosworth, 65-81.

<sup>94</sup> The term "national socialism" is derived from the first two words of the Nazi party's title: *National Sozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter Partei* (translation: National Socialist German Workers' Party).

Germans to question the loyalties of Jews and other nationalities that lived within their borders.<sup>95</sup>

Nazism, as it was implemented in Germany, called for a powerful, centralized government that would facilitate a militarized state capable of defending its citizens against the spread of communism and “parasitic races” such as Jews, Gypsies, Slavs, and homosexuals. On that note, Nazism endorsed an expansionist doctrine, under which Germany reserved the right to occupy territory that belonged to communist states or states whose citizenries were believed to be racially inferior to the Nordic/Germanic races. To effectively maintain a centralized expansionist government, Nazi Germany required its citizenry to dedicate itself to nationalist doctrine by subjugating itself to the political, economic, and social requirements of the state.<sup>96</sup>

#### *Economic Model*

As for domestic economic policies, Nazism’s were centered around corporatism, just as fascism’s was, and called for rapid rearmament of the state and the elimination of unemployment – the former largely having resulted in the latter as Germany prepared itself for war by opening factories that produced military hardware such as aircraft, tanks, sea craft, small arms, and ammunition. State rearmament, along with increased production of goods for the middle and lower classes, was conducted by a handful of German corporations, each of which typically monopolized a given industry. For example, Messerschmidt AG was an aircraft manufacturing company that was

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<sup>95</sup> Fritzsche, Peter. *Germans Into Nazis*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 149.

<sup>96</sup> Fritzsche, 34-71.

responsible for building fighter aircraft for the Luftwaffe, while Krupp AG specialized in steel production and weaponry manufacturing.<sup>97</sup>

From a theoretical perspective, Nazism is against both capitalism and communism – as is fascism with its “third way” economic program – and Germany pursued an autarkic economy because of its belief that its economic woes during the Great Depression were the result of an orchestrated effort by international commerce entities that were run by Jews.<sup>98</sup> Hitler believed, and his propaganda espoused, that Jews were adept at creating rifts between German states – although he did not state why he believed this. Hitler also stated that the Jews were capitalists who financially benefited by exploiting German laborers – a concept that was an affront to Nazism’s left-leaning socialist views of labor/class exploitation.<sup>99</sup>

As with Mussolini’s Italy, Germany did not succeed in establishing a mature autarkic economy. But it is for its desire to do so, along with its efforts to create a corporative state economy, that this author grades Nazism as “corporative” under the *economic model* variable in Table 1.

#### *Free Elections / Leadership Succession*

There are some similarities between Mussolini and Hitler, particularly in how they each came to power in their respective states. Hitler was able to take advantage of poor economic conditions in Germany when the Great Depression began there in earnest in 1930. That, coupled with many Germans’ anger and shame at having had their state “emasculated” by the Treaty of Versailles, created an undercurrent of nationalist fervor throughout the German state.

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<sup>97</sup> Arendt, 62-90.

<sup>98</sup> Fritzsche, 113.

In order to rise to power at the head of his fledgling Nazi party, Hitler exploited the fact that Germany had many political parties vying for control, none of which represented a true majority of the German populace at any given time. The German Chancellor at the time, Herman Bruening, was a member of the Roman Catholic Center Party, whose party enjoyed only a minority representation within the Reichstag, forcing him to enact legislation via President Paul von Hindenberg's emergency powers. Forcing premature elections in late 1930, the Nazi party unexpectedly won nearly twenty percent of the popular election and gained 110 seats in the Reichstag, suddenly making it the second largest party in the country.<sup>100</sup>

Hitler's popularity among laborers and farmers who had been hard-hit by the Depression and Bruening failed economic policies convinced him to run for President against Hindenberg in 1932. Although he lost that election, he had established himself as a viable alternative to "politics as usual" in Germany.

Upon his reelection, Hindenberg pushed Bruening to move German policies in a more right-leaning direction, which ultimately resulted in Bruening's resignation in 1932, upon which the President appointed conservative Franz von Papen as Chancellor. Papen almost immediately called for new elections, and the Nazi party won its biggest victory yet, winning 230 seats in the Reichstag. Throughout 1932, however, the German government continued to govern ineptly as conditions worsened in the country. Finally, in January 1933, Hitler was appointed Chancellor at the behest of Papen and many of Germany's leading businessmen.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Bealey, Frank. *Elements of Political Science*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 202.

<sup>100</sup> Fritzsche, 90-114

<sup>101</sup> Bullock, A. *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1962), 48.

As Chancellor, Hitler's party used its resources to prevent other parties from gaining a majority in the Reichstag, which Hitler used as a reason when he requested Hindenberg to again dissolve the Reichstag. Parliamentary elections were scheduled for March 1933, but the Reichstag was set on fire in late February. Hitler blamed the fire on communists, and used that as an excuse to suspend basic civil rights so his government could imprison and/or execute known and suspected communists throughout Germany. Elections were conducted on March 6, and the Nazi party relied on heavy propaganda, anti-communist hysteria, and violence to win nearly fifty percent of the popular vote.<sup>102</sup>

On the day the newly elected Reichstag met for the first time, Hitler confronted them with the Enabling Act, which would have transferred legislative powers to the executive office for a predetermined period of time. The Nazi party held half the seats in the Reichstag, but the bill needed a two-thirds majority to pass. The bill successfully passed the Reichstag because of the Nazi party's alliance with the Center party.

Holding both executive and legislative powers, Hitler banned socialist and communist political parties, and forced all others to dissolve, including the Center party. By July of that year, Hitler decreed that the Nazi party was the only legal political party in Germany. His power increased significantly the following year, when President Hindenberg passed away. Hitler issued a decree that made the office of the Presidency dormant, and transferred those powers to himself, thereby making him Commander in Chief of Germany's armed forces.<sup>103</sup>

It is because of Hitler's appointment as Chancellor, despite the intense political pressure placed upon President Hindenberg by Hitler's political allies, that this author

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<sup>102</sup> Bullock, 232-297.

<sup>103</sup> Bullock, 232-297.

grades Nazism as “appointment” under the *succession* variable in Table 1. It is because of his disruption of early elections for his party’s benefit via violence and anti-communist hysteria, and his swift dissolution of the Reichstag and the electoral process shortly after his appointment, that this author grades Nazism as a “no” under the *free elections* variable in Table 1.

### *Transparency and Accountability*

As was the case in fascist Italy, many of the various mechanisms that existed to hold the government accountable to its citizenry were dismantled almost immediately upon Hitler’s rise to power in Germany. The swift dissolution of all political parties with the exception of his own ensured that segments of the populace who did not strictly adhere to national socialist doctrine could not make their voices heard or effect change in the government because they would not be represented in Berlin.

Additionally, the death of President Hindenberg in 1934 allowed Hitler to declare the Presidency dormant, thereby effectively removing the largest check against his power; election of a centrist or left-leaning President would almost certainly have resulted in Hitler being replaced by a like-minded Chancellor. The presence of any President, even a rightist/authoritarian one as Hindenberg had been, presented a check against Hitler’s power, as the Chancellor answered directly to the Presidency.

These actions quickly and successfully put Hitler’s government in a position where it was not accountable to the citizenry, and was therefore not transparent in its operations; however, he enjoyed immense public support largely because of heavy propaganda that portrayed him as Germany’s “savior” from the Depression, the Versailles Treaty, Jewish exploitation, and communism. In that vein, his government



was not transparent or accountable, although it gave every impression of addressing the people's needs and desires.<sup>104</sup>

It is because of Hitler's suspension of the Presidency, dissolution of opposing political parties, and usurpation of the Reichstag's legislative powers that this author grades Nazism as "no" under the *government transparency/accountability* variable in Table 1.

### *Rights and Freedoms*

Germany's population may have recognized that civil rights and personal freedoms were protected by the state to some degree as long as the citizen was in good standing with the political apparatus, and was racially pure. Freedoms of speech and expression were largely protected as long as the speech and expression agreed with the party's ideology. Dissent of any sort was absolutely not tolerated, and a pervasive secret police network enforced that standard. The right of legal due process was also protected for citizens who were racially pure and ideologically sound. None of these rights was guaranteed to "enemies" of the party, such as communists, homosexuals, Jews, gypsies, and the mentally/physically disabled. For these unfortunate citizens, freedom of movement and the right of legal due process were suspended to such an extent that eleven million members of these groups were incarcerated in concentration camps and systemically exterminated in the belief that their removal from society would further strengthen the German state.<sup>105</sup>

Although Hitler's personal politics formed the basis of Nazism to the extent that the two were largely interchangeable, there was no discernable cult of personality

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<sup>104</sup> Bullock, 232-297.

<sup>105</sup> This concept is known as *social Darwinism*.

surrounding him during his rule. In most extreme leftist societies, a cult of personality surrounding the leader or founder takes the place of organized religion, which is generally forbidden. On the opposite end of the political spectrum, Nazism endorsed limited freedom of religion, so long as the religion was a German-compatible form of Christianity or paganism. Nazism disdained non-Christian religions, and even within the confines of Christianity, it did not tolerate the practice of Catholicism, which, like Judaism, was viewed as a cultural “parasite” that could not be confined to the borders of a particular political state. Rather, many Nazis practiced Protestantism or conservative Lutheranism, a Christian religion that began in Germany during the Reformation by German citizen Martin Luther, whose rabidly anti-Semitic writings such as *On the Jews and Their Lies* were used as justification by the Nazis to conduct a holocaust. Aside from Protestantism and Lutheranism, many Nazis were obsessed with the occult and Nordic pagan worship. Some Nazis were members of the Thule Society, which glorified the Aryan race through mythological study and occult ritual.<sup>106</sup>

It is because of Nazism’s protection and guarantee of basic rights and freedoms for some, but not others, that this author grades it as “3” under the *government protection of basic rights* variable in Table 1.

### *Kimilsungism*

The form of government implemented in North Korea was conceptualized by Kim Il-sung and continued by his son as the result of dynastic succession. Although it is considered by many scholars to be a traditional communist regime, Kimilsungism exhibits many extreme-rightist tenets such as ethno-centrism, xenophobia, and a comprehensive state-run program for the calculated extermination of undesirable persons.

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<sup>106</sup> Fritzsche, 124.

Of all the government models examined for the purposes of this thesis, Kimilsungism is the only one that still exists as of this writing, and is the only one to have survived a leadership succession. Kimilsungism, like all the other models examined in this thesis, calls for a powerful, centralized government in order to sustain its extremely militarized state. It does not necessarily endorse an expansionist doctrine, although it does see itself as the only legitimate government on the Korean peninsula, and its ultimate goal is to control the entire peninsula under a Pyongyang-based non-democratic government.

To effectively maintain this extremely centralized government and militarized society, North Korea subjugates its people absolutely to the will of the state, and keeps them completely closed off from the rest of the world. This is accomplished partly via censorship, a pervasive secret police network and cult of personality, suspension of all civil rights, and a brutal gulag system.

#### *Economic Model*

North Korea has implemented a unique economic model in that it endorses a command economy, as do the other leftist government models examined in this thesis; however, it has simultaneously attempted to build a mature autarkic economy, as did the rightist government models examined above. Efforts to implement a command economy are a remnant of Kimilsungism's leftist roots and its ideological alignment with either Moscow, or Beijing through the 1950s, while subsequent right-leaning attempts to maintain an autarky are a result of the creation of North Korea's unique *juche* ideology.

Realizing too late that his country did not control the necessary resources to build a mature autarky, Kim Il-sung acquire billions of dollars in loans from mainly communist

creditors and found himself defaulting on much of the debt. By 2001, North Korea was believed to be approximately \$10 billion in debt to various creditors around the world, a sum that has likely increased since then. Further complicating North Korea's economic woes, aside from gross financial mismanagement, has been a series of floods and other natural disasters that have destroyed much of the country's agricultural output and industrial apparatus. Additionally, the government's "military first" policy requires the regime to pour approximately thirty-percent of the nation's gross domestic product into the Korean People's Army, one of the largest standing armies in the world.<sup>107</sup>

In recent years, the Kim regime has made efforts to rebuild the nation's economy by adopting some fledgling capitalist endeavors such as the creation of special economic zones in North Korea, in which South Korea or China (so far) may invest. This concept essentially allows a foreign country to build an industrial zone in North Korea that it can use to build products for its own export, while benefitting from cheap North Korean labor. In return, North Korea receives a monetary injection into its economy and garners employment for thousands of its citizens. Practically, however, the plan has not worked as it should, due mainly to North Korea's xenophobia and ideological concerns with regard to their citizens being exposed to citizens from other countries.<sup>108</sup>

The ultimate end-product of North Korea's efforts to create an autarkic control economy, in light of financial mismanagement, natural disasters, and lack of natural resources is a *failed economy* that cannot provide even basic needs for its people. It is because of these issues that this author grades Kimilsungism's economic model as "other" in Table 1.

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<sup>107</sup> Martin, 481-602.

<sup>108</sup> Martin, 481-602.

### *Free Elections*

At no point in its history has North Korea conducted free, unencumbered elections that allowed its citizenry to elect officials to office. Kimilsungism does conduct elections every five years, but this is merely an effort to present some semblance of democratic legitimacy to the outside world. Kim Il-sung, the nation's "eternal President" according to North Korea's latest constitution, was installed by the Soviet Union – as noted above, and maintained absolute power until his death in July 1994. His favored son then assumed, and continues to hold, power; he is currently in the process of deciding which of his three sons he will transfer power to upon his death or incapacitation.

Lesser positions in North Korea are occupied by "elected" officials, such as in the Supreme People's Assembly (North Korea's version of a parliament or congress), and "people's assemblies" at the municipal and county levels. The candidates for these positions are selected beforehand by the Korean Worker's Party and the ballots for each position list only one unopposed candidate.

That being said, not all candidates represent the KWP. North Korea is, practically speaking, a single-party state, but two minor parties do exist: the Chondoist Chongu Party and the Korean Social Democratic Party. Both these parties are wholly controlled by the KWP and conduct no independent political activities.<sup>109</sup>

It is because of North Korea's lack of true political pluralism and unencumbered elections that this author grades Kimilsungism as a "no" under the *free elections* variable in Table 1.

### *Leadership Succession*

Kimilsungism endorses a dynastic style of leadership succession, something that is virtually unheard of outside of monarchies. Kim Il-sung passed power to his son; likewise, Kim Jong-il has been in the process of evaluating his three sons over the past several years to determine which of them shall take power upon his own death or incapacitation.

The issue of dynastic succession separates Kimilsungism from all the other government models addressed in this thesis. This dynastic succession puts *juche* in direct conflict with all the leftist models that are influenced by Marxism and officially deride the concept of certain individuals being above or outside the system, and is viewed by leftist doctrine as being *bourgeois*. Likewise, leaders of rightist models such as Hitler and Mussolini are typically either appointed by someone with the authority to do so, or voted into power via popular election.

This particular facet of the North Korean government model is typically identified with *absolute monarchies*; however, the Kim family does not carry royal titles associated with monarchies, nor does there exist in North Korea an upper class or religious element that could serve to place practical limits on Kim's power.

It is because of the conflict between the method of succession practiced in North Korea versus in other extreme rightist and leftist government models, and because of the power struggle – including veto power – between the military and political elements of the North Korean regime, that this author grades Kimilsungism as “dynasty” under the *leadership succession* variable in Table 1.

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<sup>109</sup> Martin, 607-662.

### *Government Transparency / Accountability*

Unlike some of the other government models examined in this thesis, under which mechanisms of checks and balances were eventually disabled or dismantled, Kimilsungism was created with a total lack of such mechanisms from the very beginning. Under Kimilsungism, there is no mechanism to hold the government accountable to its citizenry. Kim Jong-il maintains complete and absolute authority, and may modify or suspend the constitution, deploy the military, or bend the judicial and legislative bodies to his will at any time. The absence of any political parties independent of the KWP partly ensures that no voices of dissent against the regime are heard, but such an act is considered an act of sedition anyway, and is punishable by execution. Given the fear instilled in the population by the possibility of capital punishment, it is virtually irrelevant that there is no mechanism for people to note dissatisfaction with state policy or recent decisions, or by which they can make their needs or desires known to the government.<sup>110</sup>

At the national level, there is absolutely no mechanism that maintains a check against Kim's power. The Supreme People's Assembly is little more than a "rubber stamp" that provides a semblance of democratic process to the citizenry and the rest of the world, and Kim can modify the agenda, call the Assembly to session, or disband the organization at any time. The Chief of the SPA Presidium is a figurehead who owes his absolute loyalty to Kim, under threat of being removed from power and imprisoned in North Korea's gulag.

There do exist a few media outlets, including newspapers, television, and radio stations. All these outlets, however, are strictly controlled and censored by the state, and

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<sup>110</sup> Jeon, Jei-guk. "North Korean Leadership: Kim Jong-il's Balancing Act in the Ruling Circle". *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 21, No. 5 (Oct., 2000), 761-779.

regularly publish misinformation and disinformation that amounts to little more than state propaganda. They are, in effect, mouthpieces for the Kim regime – another tool by which he can maintain control of the populace.<sup>111</sup>

It is because of the lack of checks against Kim’s power, and the absence of free media and opposing political parties that this author grades Kimilsungism as “no” under the *government transparency/accountability* variable in Table 1.

### *Government Protection of Basic Rights*

The regime that runs the country controls every aspect of its people’s lives, every moment from birth until death. There is absolutely no freedom of speech or expression in North Korea. This is to prevent citizens from learning about life in the outside world, and to prevent discussions of the misery of daily life. The regime distributes all radios and televisions, which are preset to official North Korean stations while at the factory. Citizens living in border areas are able to pick up South Korean or Chinese stations if they modify their radios or televisions, but the penalty for such an act is typically a lengthy prison term in one of North Korea’s infamous political prisons.<sup>112</sup>

Freedom of religion is also not a concept known to the average North Korean citizen. In fact, religion itself is almost completely alien to them, as they are deeply entrenched in the personality cult of the Kim family. Citizens are taught from the youngest ages that Kim Jong-il was born on Mt. Paektu, which is a sacred mountain to the Korean people. When he was born, the clouds separated and a double rainbow appeared in the sky. Birds began singing in human voices, and animals gathered around to view the future leader of North Korea. The average North Korean, who has no

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<sup>111</sup> Jeon, 761-779.

<sup>112</sup> Kang, 183-225.



exposure to the outside world, and who has never learned anything different, believes this propaganda and tends to view Kim Jong-il as a living deity. Therefore, the concept of a supernatural god would be lost on them and would call Kim's godlike status into question.<sup>113</sup>

Freedom of movement is a concept that is known only to the top socio-economic tier, which resides almost exclusively in Pyongyang. Even to these most trusted individuals, movement is restricted by the fact that vehicles and fuel are provided by the regime. For everyone else, special permits are required before one travels outside his province, and a clear and compelling reason must be given before travel will be approved. Regime officials are present on trains and at bus stations, and they also conduct random vehicle and permit inspections at checkpoints, or using police patrols. It is virtually impossible to acquire permission to travel toward the South Korean or Chinese borders, as the possibility of defection is always present.<sup>114</sup>

It is because the brutal lack of even the most basic civil rights for any members of the populace, no matter their socio-economic status or political standing, that this author grades Kimilsungism as "5" under the *protection of basic rights* variable in Table 1.

### *Summary*

This chapter has examined the various facets of five models of governance, each of which appear to have had at least a nominal influence on the Kim regime. Rather than being simply a communist or Stalinist model, Kimilsungism is clearly a blend of facets from both the extreme left *and* the extreme right ends of the political spectrum. The result is a failed state in which the economy and food distribution operations have

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<sup>113</sup> Breen, 111-124.

<sup>114</sup> Breen, 125-142.

collapsed, leadership succession is decided by a single person and is handed down through a single family, and the citizenry live a brutal existence in which there is absolutely no guarantee of basic rights or freedoms.

## **Chapter Six: *Kimilsungism as a Political Religion***

When examining Kimilsungism and the current desperate state in which the regime finds itself, one can draw parallels with any of the political models noted above, but can just as quickly dismiss any of them as not being the mold in which Kimilsungism was cast. One can immediately dismiss Marxism as having any more than a nominal influence on the modern North Korean state. While North Korea does pay lip service to the concepts of socio-economic equality and incorporates anti-capitalist rhetoric into its state propaganda, North Korea's rigidly-enforced class system puts Kimilsungism in direct conflict with the tenets of Marxism, which sought to prevent the exploitation of the laboring class by the bourgeoisie. Kimilsungism espouses the dangers of class exploitation, as do all leftist governments, but the treatment of the "hostile" class at the hands of the regime is class exploitation at its most vicious. This exploitation continues to prevent North Korea from initiating any sort of economic plan that reflects Marx's idea of an advanced economy that foregoes the capitalist tendency to build its success upon the backs of the proletariat.

Many parallels can be drawn between Kimilsungism and Maoism. Like Maoist China, North Korea does not maintain separate military and political structures. The Ministry of the People's Armed Forces (military) and the Korean Worker's Party (political) fall under the same superstructure known as the Supreme People's Assembly; the military and political elements are simply "committees" that are subordinated to the Assembly. The Assembly itself is composed of appointed representatives of the political elite, but they are appointed and consequently controlled by the apex of the social-political pyramid, Kim Jong-il. Common to the military and political "committees" and

all the other various branches of North Korean government is *juche*, which dictates military strategy, political doctrine, economic development, foreign relations, and social behavior.<sup>115</sup>

Parallels can be drawn between Leninism and Kimilsungism in that both ideologies endorse state control of critical infrastructure and industrial production. All such entities in North Korea are wholly owned and controlled by the regime in Pyongyang. Likewise, distribution programs that control the procurement of consumer goods and food are a central theme of Kimilsungism, although unlike theoretical Leninism, the practical application of distribution programs in North Korea is now a broken process in which only the upper class is provided for, while the “hostile” class is forbidden from receiving any state-distributed goods. Additionally, the middle class that received rationed goods has begun selling these items on the local black markets, which is in itself a fledgling form of capitalism that directly conflicts with Leninism.<sup>116</sup>

Life in North Korea does have many parallels with Stalinism as regards brutality and repression. Both systems advocate the denial of personal freedoms and human rights, employ extensive secret police networks, disseminate propaganda to the populace while at the same time controlling the citizenry’s access to non-state-approved media, and incorporate cults of personality to further subjugate the populace to the state. But North Korea clearly does not adhere to a strictly Stalinist model of government. One of the most glaring differences between Stalinism and Kimilsungism lies in their socio-economic theories and practices. While ruling the Soviet Union, Stalin sought to establish unilateral economic relationships between Russia and each of the states within

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<sup>115</sup> Jeon, 761-779.

<sup>116</sup> Carlin, Robert and Joel Wit. *North Korean Economic Reform: Politics, Economics, and*

the Soviet sphere of influence, while at the same time making a concerted effort to prevent any of these states from entering into similar relationships with one another. Theoretically, such a practice would naturally result in Moscow being the pinnacle of economic power within the Soviet Union, but the actual result was that it critically hindered Soviet industrialization and left Soviet socialism in the precarious position of lacking popular support.<sup>117</sup>

Kim Il-sung's model of government, meanwhile, relied absolutely on popular support in order to keep the country moving toward the goal of a modern, industrialized state. Indeed, Kim did enjoy the popular support of virtually every North Korean citizen, even those who lived in exile in Japan and elsewhere around the world. This was accomplished largely by the deification of the Kim family, another difference between Stalinism and Kimilsungism. Stalin was feared and respected because of his regime's brutality and the abundant propaganda that was disseminated to the citizenry, but Kim Il-sung was literally worshipped as a god, thanks at least somewhat to the natural tendency of Koreans to isolate themselves from the outside world and instead focus inward. Another significant factor in the deification of Kim was the brilliant propaganda of Hwang Chang-yop<sup>118</sup>, who expanded North Korea's propaganda program to foment a personality cult centered on the belief that its leader possessed supernatural abilities and was a direct descendant of the mythical father of the Korean race.

When comparing Kimilsungism to the above noted government models, one can see the influences that each has had on forming what North Korea is today. It incorporates the Marxist propaganda that derides capitalist exploitation of the laboring

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*Security*. (New York: Routledge Asian Studies, 2006).

<sup>117</sup> Gaddis, 189-220.

class, the Leninist tenets of centralized government and state-controlled industrial production and distribution of goods, the Stalinist repression of personal freedoms and the brutality of a secret police network and vast prison system, the ethno-centrism of a fascist state, and a Nazi system for the calculated extermination of socially undesirable persons. Finally, Kimilsungism incorporates the Maoist emphasis on the mobilization of the rural peasantry as a foundation of society that provides for the population and also acts as an unconventional military force.

Given the parallels between North Korean and Stalinist social control, one is therefore tempted to declare that the Kim regime most closely fits the model of classic totalitarianism, as it exercises absolute control over all private and public activities via state control of all commerce and industry, an extensive network of secret police and surveillance, and pervasive use of propaganda. However, many scholars believe that a key indicator of totalitarianism is the presence of a monolithic government in which all decisions are made by only one entity. A multitude of research exists which indicates that North Korea may not be the monolithic structure that it appears to be from the outside. Many lines of communication exist between the military, political, economic, and social elements of the North Korean regime, and some entities exercise a form of veto power over others in various situations. Additionally, the “military first” policy that was enacted by Kim Jong-il in 1998 has led to somewhat of a power struggle between the Korean People’s Army and the Korean Worker’s Party, which sees itself as the legitimate regime management subordinate to Kim Jong-il.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> The aforementioned creator of *juche*.

<sup>119</sup> Becker, 262.

Additionally, the term *totalitarianism* is unsatisfying as a government model. Extreme rightist and leftist regimes throughout the twentieth century were labeled as totalitarian, despite wide variations in their economic policies, personal and civil rights, political structures, and leadership succession. The Kim regime can be labeled as totalitarian, but so can Hitler's Germany, Mussolini's Italy, Mao's China, Stalin's Russia, Niyazov's Turkmenistan, and others as well, despite the fact that they all occupy disparate positions on the political spectrum.

There are many factors that have led to the creation of this government model that is particular to North Korea. Firstly, North Korea's natural disdain for all things foreign because of its complicated history has led to a cultural xenophobia that allows the Kim regime to easily isolate the populace from the rest of the world. North Korea's geography also greatly aids Kim's isolationist policy. As a peninsula, it shares its northern border with China and Russia, both of whom heavily influenced Kimilsungism but now try to distance itself from the pariah state to the greatest extent possible. On its southern border is South Korea, to which the Kim regime is diametrically opposed.

North Korea sees its southern neighbor and ethnic brother as its largest enemy, believing that South Korea is constantly acting in concert with the United States to bring about the downfall of the Kim regime. At the same time, North Korea sees its southern neighbor as a friend in need, illustrating in its propaganda the belief that Seoul is the capital of a puppet regime propped up by a U.S. military occupation.

Along these lines, an issue that is unique to Kimilsungism is *national reunification*. Although it fluctuates between viewing Seoul as an enemy and friend, it is clear that North Korea considers itself to be merely half of a broken ethnic Korean nation.

Much of the militarized mobilization of North Korean society has been accomplished by propagandizing the belief that the peninsula was divided not by Kim Il-sung's political desires, but by American political and military interference south of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel at the end of World War II. The ardent desire to reunify a broken ethnic nation is particular to Kimilsungism, and speaks to this government model's extreme ethnocentrism.

The propagation of a fiercely rigid socio-economic caste system is not particular to Kimilsungism, but in Kim's North Korea, that caste system is used not just to control the citizenry, but to systemically exterminate segments of the populace that the regime deems as undesirable. This is done by banishing the lowest class from desirable living areas, and by denying them access to food rations, daily necessities, and medical care.

These facets of life in North Korea, when combined with jingoism, extreme nationalism, dynastic succession, and true deification of its rulers by a pervasive cult of personality are some of the characteristics of this unique model of governance called Kimilsungism.



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