

The North Korean Security State:
Examining the North Korean Population through
Michel Foucault's Theories of Discipline and Punishment

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Abstract

This thesis uses ideas found in Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* and related works as a theoretic framework for examining daily life in North Korea to understand what type of disciplinary techniques North Korean citizens are subjected to by the North Korean state. This paper will define several disciplinary strategies discussed by Foucault and then show how these strategies are deployed against the North Korean population through multiple examples. Analysis will demonstrate that these disciplinary strategies prevent political instability and suppress ideas dangerous to the North Korean regime, even while the North Korean regime fails to provide basic services for its population. As a result, the reader will have a better understanding of why the North Korean people seem so disciplined and do not rebel against the North Korean regime in the face of state-made disasters and hardships.

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Chapter 1, Section 1: Background & Introduction

North Korea is a fascinating nation--it appears at once both backwards and perplexing to many observers. It is an industrialized country with a highly educated and skilled population of 22 million people, yet has suffered from horrible famines due to mismanagement and state apathy.¹ At the same time this same state has the audacity to invest significant capital into an enriched uranium program while the domestic economy falters on a yearly basis. It is also a state that has managed to demand the attention of world powers--Washington, Beijing, Tokyo, Moscow, etc--before, during, and well after the Cold War while often acting in a bellicose, belligerent, and unreasonable manner when conducting international affairs. It has bombed airliners, counterfeited foreign currencies, kidnapped dozens of foreign citizens, attempted to assassinate the South Korean president (twice), killed several South Korean cabinet members², launched ballistic missiles over Japan (twice), and used diplomatic status to bootleg liquor and traffic illegal narcotics³, and has recently been linked to sinking a South Korean Navy vessel during an armistice.⁴ In essence, North Korea does not act or appear like the typical state.

As a result, it has long been known that negotiating and interacting with North Korea is not like dealing with any other state because the country is not subject to the same pressures as other countries. Subjecting North Korea to economic sanctions, United Nations' resolutions, and diplomatic rebukes have historically proved to be fruitless. Sanctions work under

¹ Stephan Haggard and Marcus Noland, *Famine in North Korea*, (New York: Columbia University, 2007), 6 - 11.

² Duk-min Yun, "The Limits of Christopher Hill's Magic " *Chosun Ilbo*, October 16, 2008, <http://english.chosun.com/w21data/html/news/200810/200810160023.html>.

³ United States Department of State, *Country Reports on Terrorism*, 2004 edition, (Washington DC: 2005), 90.

⁴ Peter Foster and Malcolm Moore, "North Korea condemned by world powers over torpedo attack", *London: The Telegraph*, December 1, 2010, <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/northkorea/7743830/North-Korea-condemned-by-world-powers-over-torpedo-attack.html>>

the assumption that the sanctioned country will face enough hardship that the leadership of the country will be forced to change due to domestic and internal political pressure. Yet for North Korea, sanctions do not work because the ruling regime is more than willing to let its population suffer rather than change its basic economic or political policies. Indeed, this was one of the noteworthy statements made by North Korean economic scholars Stephan Haggard and Marcus Noland during a detailed study of the 1990s famine.⁵ North Korea has repeatedly shown that economic progress and the welfare of its citizenry are not a regime priority. This is especially true if progress must be made at the cost of changing the core economic and political policies that have represented North Korea's status quo for at least two generations. Change is seen as something that undermines the regime and regime stability is priority number one for the Kim dynasty.⁶

So in looking back what is perhaps most remarkable about North Korea is that after more than fifty years it has largely remained the same. In North Korea there has been little change decade after decade, while the rest of the world has gone through dramatic economic, political, and cultural transformation. This naturally leads one to ask the question: how can the same regime continue to rule North Korea when the population has experienced so little economic progress or when the relative standard of living has remained the same (or regressed?) for nearly five decades? This question is especially noteworthy when North Korea is compared to the rest of eastern Asia and South Korea in particular.⁷ What is it about

⁵ Haggard and Noland, *Famine in North Korea*, entire book.

⁶ Though North Korea is officially the "Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea" the widely accepted truth is that it is not a democracy and the country is not led by a representative government. North Korea is instead led by Kim Jong Il and his inner circle of regime elites. This is why this thesis uses the term "Kim regime", "North Korean regime", "Kim Dynasty" or similar terms instead of the "North Korean government," which is often times no more than a rubber stamp entity, when referencing the ruling organization of North Korean governance.

⁷ Chull Sung Kim, *North Korea under Kim Jong Il: From Consolidation to System Dissonance* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 19 - 26.

North Korea, or the political system found inside of North Korea, that has provided the ruling Kim regime with stability for over fifty years?

The crippled economy, poor standard of living, and general lack of progress have caused many observers to simply wonder, "Why don't the North Korean people just overthrow Kim Jong Il?"

If the North Korean people are so oppressed, if their basic need for food has been so ignored, if their economic progress has been so stagnated for decades, if their very lives have been repeatedly jeopardized deliberately due to state apathy then surely they would rise up, rebel, overthrow the current regime, and replace it with another one. The thinking goes, "Everyone has their limits, right? Surely the North Korean people are approaching their limit."

Perhaps. But many people fail to comprehend why North Korea, a country that is rather dysfunctional and inefficient from a basic economic and governance perspective, has not collapsed. Even political and economic experts are often unable to explain how the North Korean ruling regime has managed to hold onto power after man-made disasters have impacted nearly every spectrum of the population--not just ethnic minorities, certain geographic areas, or otherwise targeted groups, which is often the case in other state-made disasters.⁸ In fact, nearly every year since the mid-1990's famines, it seems like some prominent think-tank or group of experts will claim that North Korea is on the verge of collapse.⁹ Yet, somehow, the North Korean state manages to not collapse and to limp into the next year, with a starving population, struggling economy, and anxious neighboring countries wondering if this is the year where North Korea will finally collapse and their borders will

⁸ Human Rights Watch, *A Matter of Survival*, Volume 18, Number 3, Published 2006, 8.

⁹ Barbara Demick, *Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea*, (New York, New York: Spiegel & Grau (The Random House Publishing Group) 2009), 285-286.

be flooded with hungry North Korean refugees looking for food and shelter.

This paper attempts to provide some insight into this conundrum by demonstrating that the question is not quite as simple as "Why don't the North Korean people do something?" Rather, the appropriate question is "What inhibits the North Korean people from doing something?" which places the appropriate amount of emphasis on the how the North Korean people maintain such *discipline* in the face of adversity generation after generation.

This thesis argues that one reason the North Korean regime has seen stability decade after decade, during disasters and hardships, for over half a century is that the North Korean state and ruling regime uses an array of disciplinary strategies and techniques to create a highly controlled population--a docile population. This means the creation of a North Korean population that lacks the capacity to influence or change the current structure of relationships and balances of power in North Korea enough to threaten the security of the current Kim regime.

With a population under control, ideas that are hostile to the regime, like challenging or criticizing the Kim regime, cannot develop among the population into organized political movements. With such a docile and controlled population there can be no organized political threat to the ruling North Korean dynasty. And it is precisely within this environment, sterilized of all that could threaten the status quo, that the Kim regime has managed to find enduring political stability without successfully raising the standard of living for the North Korean people.

When North Korea is examined through the theoretical lens provided by Michel Foucault's works, particularly *Discipline and*

Punish, many of these disciplinary strategies and techniques used by North Korea to create a controllable and docile population become more visible and their impact more apparent. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault provides a historical narrative of how European states have developed a sophisticated system to discipline, punish, and control the state's population in response to dramatic social, economic, political, and demographic changes seen during the 18th century. Admittedly, North Korea and 18th century Europe have little in common at first glance. However, by taking Foucault's astute analysis of how power operates in liberal and free countries and then applying it to a centralized and totalitarian state, such as North Korea, disciplinary power becomes easier to identify.

Over the course of this thesis we will examine four broad disciplinary strategies used by the North Korean regime to create a docile population. Each argument will provide a brief introduction of the disciplinary strategy and then introduce it in the North Korean context. Within each section there will be several examples of how the disciplinary techniques are applied against the North Korean people and ingrained into their daily life. At the conclusion of each section it will become more and more clear that the deployment of a system of disciplinary techniques makes the North Korean population more and more docile. The four main arguments are laid out in chapter three and can be summarized below.

The first argument focuses on how the North Korean regime strives to control information and discourse. This is done by the regime to ensure that the North Korean people only know and understand what the North Korean regime wants them to know and understand.¹⁰ This allows the North Korean regime to shape the limits and contents of all dialogue and discourse. This, in

¹⁰ Hyok Kang, *This Is Paradise! My North Korean Childhood*, (London: Little, Brown Book Group, 2007), 3 - 7.

turn, allows North Korea to fundamentally shape the reality of its citizenry to match the needs of the regime. This notion draws on the fundamental Foucault concept that knowledge is power and that knowledge leads to power.

While the prior section focuses on the minds and perceptions of the North Korean population the second argument deals with physical spaces and time management. Specifically, the second argument details how North Korean officials are able to keep the population docile by controlling travel and segmenting physical space to track and control the population. This allows them to then prevent unwanted gatherings and the movement of hostile ideas or undesirable people.¹¹ Again the basic rationale of this strategy is explained by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* where Foucault suggests that state authorities can maximize the surveillance of a population and efficiently manage it by keeping it physically organized. Two excellent examples of this by Foucault include 1) the execution of a systematic and block-by-block quarantine of a city during a plague outbreak to prevent further deaths and 2) the strict and rational physical layout of a military camp to assure stringent control of soldiers.

The third argument moves away from physical disciplinary techniques and focuses once again on knowledge and the minds of North Koreans. The third argument explains how North Korean authorities have established norms and a society where value is placed on uniformity. In such a society identity is tied to a strong sense of collectivism. Authorities create a system where the individual is only a valued member of society when they are part of a collective in order to maintain a sense of social cohesion. This strong sense of social cohesion prevents

¹¹ Andrei Lankov, *North of the DMZ: Essays on Daily Life in North Korea*, (London: McFarland & Company, 2007), 174.

individuals from disturbing or challenging the status quo.¹² This strategy can be explained in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* when Foucault discusses how multiple disciplinary techniques were deployed by state authorities in the 18th century to deal with and maintain state order in increasingly large and chaotic populations, particularly in cities. For example, Foucault points out that a change occurred in the military in the 18th century in which the value of a soldier no longer stemmed from his courage in battle or his individual physical prowess. Rather, his value came from his ability to follow orders and be an effective part of a larger military unit.

The last argument shows how the North Korean regime operates an extensive internal security system that creates a sense of permanent surveillance that causes the North Korean people to assume they are being monitored. Eventually the citizens begin to censor themselves, even if they are not being monitored.¹³ This self-censorship is strikingly similar to the ideas found in Jeremy Bentham's *Panopticon* as well as Foucault's commentary on Bentham's Panopticon. North Korea, in essence, demonstrates and validates Foucault and Bentham's speculation that in a panopticon-like environment, the observed population would eventually regulate itself, with or without an observer.

These four broad disciplinary strategies are just a few examples of the way North Korea is able to create a docile population that becomes too paralyzed to overthrow the regime. The Kim regime is most commonly seen as a regime that holds onto political power in through plain coercion and oppression. However, this thesis will demonstrate that while the North Korean regime does use coercive techniques to maintain power it also relies on a crafty and sophisticated deployment of

¹² Chol Yong Sim, "Mass Gymnastics in Korea." *Today Korea*, September 2009, <http://naenara.kp/en/periodic/todaykorea/index.php?contents+4747+2009-09+131+32>.

¹³ Martin Bradley, *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2006), 263.

disciplinary techniques to create a population that is both oppressed and highly disciplined. This blend of overt and subtle techniques is a key reason why the Kim regime has successfully stood the test of time while other dictatorships have come and gone over the past sixty years.

Chapter 1, Section 2:
Thesis Statement

In North Korea the purpose of the state is to ensure regime stability for the Kim family and the ruling elites--even at the cost of the population's economic, health, and general welfare. To accomplish this the North Korean state has gone to great lengths to eliminate all opportunity for political opposition and has taken steps to ensure that ideas which might threaten the regime have no space for development. To this end, many aspects of daily life in North Korea help produce a North Korean population that is controllable and docile. Only with such a population can the regime survive in the face of state-made disasters, economic failure, and famine without having to change or otherwise be held accountable to the North Korean people. Using Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* as a framework for understanding disciplinary techniques, this thesis will demonstrate that daily life in North Korea is filled with various disciplinary techniques that aim to create a docile North Korean population and an atmosphere where ideas dangerous to the Kim regime simply cannot develop.

Chapter 1, Section 3: Thesis Significance

This thesis is significant for several reasons. First, this thesis is significant because it will attempt to address the wide gap between those who produce theoretical political work (the academic community) and those who must deal with security issues from a state-centric perspective (the policy community). As Roland Bleiker¹⁴ states in his book on security and North Korea, "The lack of communication between academics and practitioners is, of course, notorious." Policy-makers and officials concerned with security and stability on the Korean peninsula rarely have time to read extensive academic studies and often find the language and terminology of academia hard to digest. Academics, for their part, generally avoid presenting their views and insights on current security affairs. The result is a communications and knowledge gap between the two circles dealing with what is basically the same topic approached from two different perspectives, both of which *should* be communicating with each other but are not.¹⁵

To narrow the gap this thesis will present valuable analysis and commentary in terms that are intelligible to practitioners, policy-makers, and security officials but arrive at conclusions using analytic techniques discovered in the academic circle. The academic approach is a multidisciplinary inspection of the North Korean topic rather than complete reliance on intelligence estimates, policy-making commentary, and other forms of "state-centric analysis." The academic multidisciplinary approach (which is a great way to view Foucault's work) touches upon anthropology, philosophy,

¹⁴ Roland Bleiker is a professor of international relations at the University of Queensland and also served on the a professor who also served on the Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission in Panmunjom on the DMZ.

¹⁵ Roland Bleiker, *Divided Korea: Toward a Culture of Reconciliation*, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press 2005), xlvi.

psychology, language, linguistics, economics, communications theory, and political theory to provide insights into the North Korean system that otherwise would remain hidden or glossed over.¹⁶

This naturally leads to the second reason why this thesis is important. This thesis topic is significant because it asks the reader to understand North Korea in a new way and to genuinely examine how power and knowledge operate in North Korean society. It rejects the question "Why don't the North Korean people do something and overthrow Kim Jong Il?" Instead, this thesis focuses on "What is it that prevents the North Korean people from overthrowing Kim Jong Il?" and to answer that question requires a critical and multidisciplinary look at how power operates in North Korea to create such a thoroughly disciplined society. This thesis allows us to understand how the Kim regime is able to bring about a form of social discipline even amidst devastating conditions of daily life. This critical examination reveals a North Korean system of disciplinary tools deployed by the Kim regime against the North Korean population to keep them docile and tame.

This thesis will help the reader to develop an improved understanding of the relationship between the North Korean state and the North Korean people, which is not as straightforward as it first appears. This relationship is more sophisticated and complicated than simply a state government oppressing the people through campaigns of terror, public executions, and draconian policies. This thesis is about taking a look at North Korea through an analysis of Foucault's theories on power/knowledge and discipline; and examining North Korea's taming of its own population, which goes beyond the simple news headlines and CNN exposés on North Korean human rights.

¹⁶ Bleiker, *Divided Korea*, xlviii.

To do this, this thesis will focus on relatively basic elements of North Korean society such as the travel permit system and the mutual self-criticism meetings (all explained in detail further below) to demonstrate that these parts of life in North Korea are critical to understanding the network of relationships in North Korea at an individual level. These basic elements of North Korean society allow the North Korean regime to systematically achieve obedience by inserting itself into virtually every aspect of life in North Korean society. Through the course of this thesis it will be seen is that no detail is too small to come to the attention of the North Korean regime if that detail can contribute to the creation of a docile population.

This work is about an earnest examination of North Korean people as political elements within the North Korean political system, something rarely considered or examined. It is about understanding how the conduct of the average North Korean is orchestrated by the North Korean regime via disciplinary techniques and how this orchestration is not always understood or taken into account when people examine North Korea. It is about examining how the "conduct of conduct" is deliberately structured in North Korea by the North Korean regime.¹⁷ It is about looking at North Korea in another light and develop a more sophisticated understanding of how the North Korean state has managed to stay politically stable for the past five decades.

This thesis is then about the control of populations. It is about how a state, specifically North Korea, disciplines its population through crafty and subtle channels of power that do not rely on brute force and terror alone. The purpose of this thesis is to expose, highlight, and analyze these channels of power, which are in plain sight but rarely noticed.

¹⁷ Burchell, Graham and Colin Gordon, Peter Miller, *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 2.

Chapter 2, Section 1:

Literature Review

As separate topics there is a wealth of information and insight when it comes to North Korea and the ideas found in *Discipline and Punish*. However, little, if any, work has been done that combines lessons learned from Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* with political rule as it is designed and deployed in North Korea. Indeed, there are few articles that even mention both Foucault (or his ideas) and North Korea, and all of these articles only mention North Korea in the greater context of South Korea. This is probably because South Korea somewhat resembles the western, liberal European countries of the 18th century, which was the focus of much of Foucault's work. Much like Europe over the 18th century, South Korea experienced dramatic and rapid economic, cultural, and political change that took it from a largely agrarian, class-based society, with a ruling elite class into an industrialized democracy with large urban populations, making it an excellent case study for anyone trying to apply the theories put forth by Foucault. This leaves a Foucault-based analysis of North Korea as a rather unique project and represents relatively unexplored territory because Foucault strayed away from analysis of power as they were manifest in totalitarian societies.

Research for this project covers two general fields of knowledge: 1) North Korea, with a focus on accounts and observations of life in North Korea and 2) the findings and techniques found in *Discipline and Punish* and related theories contributed by Foucault. Four sources in particular stand out and warrant emphasis with regards to literature used for this thesis:

- 1. *Discipline and Punish* by Michel Foucault - Michel**

Foucault (1926-1984) was a French philosopher and professor at The Collège de France. Foucault's overall body of work has been famously hard to describe as his writings and lectures cover nearly all of the liberal arts--psychology, political theory, history, humanities, and the history of science. His academic interests were equally difficult to discern as they dealt with broad concepts such as discourse, power, knowledge, history, economics, the self, and how these items changed over the course of history. Further, his interests also changed over the years. His studies have included writings on mad houses and the insane, clinics and medicine, and the judicial/prison system in *Discipline and Punish*, which is central to this thesis.

One common thread linking much of Foucault's work is the focus on the connections between political, economic, and social changes that took place during the 18th century in Europe and how these changes have impacted the deployment of power and knowledge in liberal societies. His works often point out that while those in liberal societies may be free at first glance, a critical inspection of power, discourse, and knowledge reveals that freedom is still limited by the way power operates.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault asks the fundamental question of why prisons have become the default answer to the problem of the criminal. He then proceeds to trace the history of punishment from pre-18th century through modern times. How is it that "the prison system" came to be the acceptable and given solution for dealing with criminals? Why do we assume that if someone commits a crime that the natural order of things is that the criminal should go to prison to undergo a regime of reform? Why has society never really ask, "Wait a minute, is prison the real solution to the 'problem' of criminals? Wait, what is a criminal in the first place?"

Foucault asks and probes these questions and along the way

he points out the various changes that resulted from the unique nexus of changes in demographics, growth in urban populations, progress in the sciences such as psychology and psychiatry, and changes in government and judicial systems. These changes, according to Foucault's investigation, combined to create the modern prison system as a way to simultaneously house, punish, reform, and document criminals.

For the purposes of North Korea and this thesis, *Discipline and Punish* is useful because it details the various ways, many of which are actually quite subtle, that a state can organize and regiment a population through disciplinary techniques to ensure public order and effective state control that are more cost effective (more economical) than coercive techniques such as executions and public torture spectacles (though North Korea indeed relies on these coercive methods as well). While Foucault dealt almost exclusively with Western liberal societies, it is remarkable how the disciplinary techniques, which he discusses in *Discipline and Punish*, are so noticeable in North Korean society.

2. Panoptic Writings by Jeremy Bentham - Jeremy Bentham (1748 - 1832), an English philosopher, wrote *Panoptic Writings* in the form of several letters sent by Bentham to a colleague with regards to designing a prison. What is unique about *Panoptic Writings* is the use of architecture to increase overall operational efficiency for a prison (or factory, hospital, school, or any building that required supervision). The prison layout is that of a pan-opticon. The pan-opticon is a round building where the prison cells make up the circumference of the circle and the prison officials reside in a tower in the center of the circle. Situated in the center of the circular building the officials are able to see each and every cell at all times while the inmates are unable to see the officials due to one-way

glass. The end result is that the inmates constantly believe they are being watched and must act accordingly, even if the observation tower is actually empty. Thus the inmates may actually come to self-regulate themselves. This phenomenon, as described by both Bentham and Foucault (who was fascinated by this notion of eventual self-regulation) is seen in North Korea.

3. *North of the DMZ* by Andrei Lankov - Andrei Lankov (born in 1963 in Russia) is a historian and expert on both North and South Korea and a professor at South Korea's Kookmin University. His experience with North Korea dates back to his time spent in Pyongyang during a student exchange program between Leningrad State University and Pyongyang's Kim Il-sung University, North Korea's most prestigious academic institution. One of his most prominent works, *North of the DMZ*, provides details on the daily lives of North Koreans but also astute analysis. He also points out the surprising similarities and startling differences between life inside North Korea compared to the rest of the world.

Many of the apparently mundane aspects of North Korean life that Lankov points out have a tremendous effect on the docility of North Korean people when examined through the ideas discussed in *Discipline and Punish*. Travel permit systems, obligatory membership to state organizations, and mandatory community service may seem like trivial state interference to the casual North Korean observer but when all these items are brought together under the lens of Foucault they illustrate the techniques by which the North Korean regime is able to create a docile population.

4. *Strangers and Comrades* by Michael Harrold - Harrold was the first British citizen to live and work in North Korea for the North Korean government itself. During a seven-year tenure at the Pyongyang Foreign Languages Publishing House he worked as

an English editor of texts translated into English by North Korean translators. His memoirs, *Strangers and Comrades*, details his experience in Pyongyang and provides other valuable insights into the every day lives of North Koreans.

Besides these four books there are numerous other sources that have been invaluable to this thesis. Many of these, such as Chol-hwan Kang's *The Aquariums of Pyongyang*, are memoirs written by those with first hand experience in North Korea such as defectors, refugees, and diplomats.

Chapter 2, Section 2: Why Use Foucault?

There are many thinkers who provide stunning analyses and commentaries on totalitarian and authoritative regimes so it is natural to ask why anyone would use Foucault, who was much more interested in European liberal countries, to analyze a regime such as North Korea.

The simple answer is that North Korea and Foucault's work *Discipline and Punish* have a great deal in common and using the latter to analyze the first is logical. While it is true that Foucault's overall body of work was focused on liberal society and North Korea's society is anything but liberal, this thesis focuses mostly on one of Foucault's works, *Discipline and Punish*, rather than his entire body of work. Two topics of primary importance in *Discipline and Punish* are the prison system and the ancient system of punishment/justice delivered by the sovereign ruler. It takes no stretch of imagination to link an authoritative country like North Korea to a prison system or to link the Kim Regime to a sovereign ruler who delivers punishment/justice.

Thus the ideas that are found in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* work surprisingly well when analyzing North Korea. Perhaps this is because compared to most of Foucault's other work, *Discipline and Punish* deals with the notions of knowledge and power operating in a prison oriented around reform and rehabilitation, which is closer to a totalitarian state rather than a liberal democratic one.

This does not mean, however, that other works on dictatorship do not apply to North Korea. A great deal has been written about the North Korean regime and totalitarian regimes in general. For example, Hannah Arendt's capstone work,

Totalitarianism, studies the case of Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia but rings true for North Korea with remarkable clarity. Indeed, in many instances North Korea would make for a better example in Arendt's text than Nazi Germany or Stalinist Russia (Arendt's work, of course, was first published in 1951 before the end of the Korean War so studying North Korea as a totalitarian regime would have been impossible for Arendt).

According to Arendt, totalitarianism in Europe was able to develop because of a unique political situation where the "masses" sought political organization and representation. As Arendt points out, totalitarianism was driven by masses and not by a particular class of people.¹⁸ Masses were those people who were outside of the traditional political structure and represented a majority of the population.¹⁹ The masses were a relatively new classification of people that was created when class-based society collapsed due to the rise of democracy and modernity.

Being ignored by the traditional political apparatus such as political parties and labor unions, the masses were generally unfulfilled and disgruntled people who felt isolate and lonely in the post-class society and were relatively unfamiliar with politics.²⁰

This political inexperience made the masses easy prey to new political propaganda and political ideas. It also made them more ready to ignore or show indifference to political debate. Political debate and rational opposing arguments, according to Arendt, had no impact on these politically marginalized and politically inexperienced segment of society. Instead, this desperate and disgruntled group of people believed that political differences were rooted in deep "natural, social, or

¹⁸ Hannah Arendt, *Totalitarianism - Part Three of the Origins of Totalitarianism*, (New York: Harcourt, Inc 1976), 7.

¹⁹ Arendt, *Totalitarianism*, 10.

²⁰ Arendt, *Totalitarianism*, 13.

psychological sources" beyond individual control and therefore beyond rational debate.²¹ At the same time, this indifference to traditional political interaction made them more ready to accept violence as a legitimate way to accomplish political work instead of compromise and negotiation.

Just prior to the Korean War the Korean peninsula experienced a similar social and political scenario to the one that enabled the rise of Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia. Prior to 1890's the Korean peninsula was an isolated kingdom with a rigid class system and predominately agricultural economy. In fact it was so isolated it was often referred to as the "hermit kingdom." This changed dramatically with the overthrow of the Korean royal family and subsequent colonialization by a growing Imperial Japan, who essentially forced modernity onto the Koreans while also erasing the traditional Korean social structure. With the defeat of the Japanese at the end of the World War II the Korean peninsula was marked by various ideologies and political beliefs while the Koreans themselves struggled to adjust to modernity and the disintegration of the traditional Korean class-based society, creating the perfect conditions for what Arendt would describe as the mass man, which was the fundamental requirement for totalitarianism.

One key to totalitarianism was the mass leader and the central attribute of the mass leader was "unending infallibility." The mass leader was not a superhuman or a super genius, according to Arendt. Rather, the mass leader was infallible because they could correctly interpret the forces and flows of history, which were bound to become true on a long enough time line--any defeats, set backs, or failures are only temporary.²² North Korea's mass leader was Kim Il Sung and Kim's

²¹ Arendt, *Totalitarianism*, 10.

²² Arendt, *Totalitarianism*, 47.

defining feature, according to North Korean-based history, was his peerless leadership and vision. Accordingly, any setbacks experienced under Kim Il Sung's leadership in North Korea would be portrayed as temporary and that eventually Kim Il Sung's vision and leadership would prove to be without equal over time.

This notion of infallibility therefore synchronizes with totalitarian propaganda, which is based on the notion that only the future can reveal the benefits of the current regime and that the current circumstances and situation is irrelevant. Thus, through propaganda, the mass leader acts as a prophet to provide hope for the masses about a better future and to quell their current discomfort that results from having no political representation or social structure.²³ North Korean propaganda is full of such statements that focus on the bright future ahead. The creation of a 'strong and powerful state' in the future appears to be the current theme of North Korean propaganda, which continually encourages people to grind away today for a better future tomorrow that is guaranteed to come.

In order for mass movements to be truly successful, however, they need an ideological base (for Nazi Germany it was anti-semitism). An ideological base provides the masses with a social structure to replace the void left by the fall of class-based society.²⁴ For North Korea the ideological base is Juche, the notion of self-sufficiency and self-reliance to accomplish any task at hand. The Juche ideology not only serves as an ideological base but also provides hope and purpose for the mass man.

Continuing the narrative of totalitarian governments, Arendt notes that one reason the Nazis were so successful is that they created Nazi social organizations that already mirrored social organization and structures in non-Nazi society

²³ Arendt, *Totalitarianism*, 48.

²⁴ Arendt, *Totalitarianism*, 54.

so that when the Nazi's came to power they replaced the labor unions, teacher's organizations, or farmers organizations with their own Nazi-sponsored ones.²⁵ Again, the similarity with North Korea is striking as one of the corner-stones of North Korean society is labor and trade unions under the control of the Kim regime.

Another sharp observation made by Arendt was that the secret police in totalitarian regimes seek to make their victims not exist.²⁶ Not to simply remove them but to remove all trace of them from history and memory. The real horror of concentration camps is that they force their victims into oblivion, as if they had never existed. Their memory vanishes rather than being remembered even as someone who died.²⁷ This topic, which is essentially editing history so that a victim ceases to exist, is carried out remarkable well in North Korea as we shall see.

In sum, what we see in Arendt's work is an excellent study of totalitarianism that could easily switch out Nazi Germany with North Korea or Hitler with Kim Il Sung. Arendt narrates the birth conditions of totalitarianism and its defining characteristics to give us clear insight into totalitarianism as a political organism. This is interesting and enlightening with regards to understanding the North Korean regime from a macro-level but it does not address North Korea in the same manner that serious deployment of Foucault's ideas would.

With Foucault's reasoning, we have the opposite starting point. Instead of looking at totalitarianism and North Korean from a macro view of the masses (Arendt), we are able to study North Korea and totalitarianism from a micro view and learn how an individual in North Korean society is "disciplined and

²⁵ Arendt, *Totalitarianism*, 63.

²⁶ Arendt, *Totalitarianism*, 133.

²⁷ Arendt, *Totalitarianism*, 141.

punished" to form an obedient North Korean. It will soon become apparent that Foucault's ideas complement and enlighten Arendt's work on totalitarian regimes. Perhaps the best example of this complementary relationship between Arendt's macro view and Foucault's micro view is the following quote from Arendt:

"Totalitarianism strives not toward despotic rule over men, but toward a system in which men are superfluous. Total power can be achieved and safeguarded only in a world of conditioned reflexes, of *marionettes* without slightest trace of spontaneity."²⁸

Essentially, in this statement, what Arendt is stating is that totalitarian regimes seek to create a population that is severely *disciplined*--so *disciplined* that they exhibit no spontaneity. With Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* in hand we will have the proper tools to investigate just how such a population of marionettes can be created. In terms of this thesis our case study will be North Korea and the marionettes will be the North Korean people.

²⁸ Arendt, *Totalitarianism*, 155.

Chapter 3, Section 1: Controlling Knowledge & Discourse

This section demonstrates that North Korea strictly and effectively controls knowledge and discourse in North Korea to shape the every-day reality of the North Korean citizenry so that they are more easily molded into a docile population.

1. The importance of knowledge and discourse. For Foucault, knowledge and power are inseparable. Those who have knowledge, especially specialized knowledge, also have power. Foucault used psychiatrists and physicians as key examples of people who have specialized knowledge and can therefore wield power which the layperson finds hard to challenge. Psychiatrists and physicians, as an illustration, have the *power* to issue medical prescriptions and recommend therapies because they have the specialized *knowledge*. Discourse, another key term, is related to knowledge. Discourse describes anything communicated about a given body of knowledge. This means discourse also includes what can or cannot be communicated, who can or cannot communicate, what is committed to memory and what is forgotten or erased, or what is kept from past discourses. For Foucault, knowledge, along with the discourses of knowledge, are key to shaping people's perception of reality.

For example, in *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault states that the *discourse* of "madness" was created by psychologists, social workers, psychiatrist, and others with *specialized knowledge*. What this really means is that these psychologists, social works, psychiatrists *created* the modern understanding of what it means to be "mad." The very important side effect of knowing "who is mad" is that the same people can now speak with *authority/power* on "who is normal" as well. Before all this, no one was every "mad" because the concept of being mad simply did

not exist.²⁹

2. Knowledge and discourse in North Korea. Unsurprisingly, North Korea exerts tremendous control over knowledge and discourse in order to create a population that is manageable and docile.³⁰ To this end, North Korea is a state where the regime controls nearly all aspects of what can be knowable. They set the boundaries on discourse and have created a system that allows the regime to bend the direction of discourse to any agenda. This represents a tremendous source of power for the North Korean regime that is sometimes mentioned but very rarely seriously analyzed by North Korea watchers.

This control is near total and absolute when compared to any other country in the world today.³¹ The state system is set in a way that allows for the control of how information is distributed by controlling who can distribute it, what information is distributed (and what is not), and what is contained in the information itself. In fact, the power of the North Korean regime is directly linked to the ability to control information. North Koreans often know little about what happens in their own country, let alone the outside world, unless the North Korean regime wishes to transmit it.³² Below are several examples that illustrate this point:

Example 1: History. North Korea has the unique ability to modify, erase, and change the past and the present on a near complete scale. In libraries works older than five years old are not readily accessible and are usually held in off-limits sections, this includes magazines and newspapers. This allows the North Korean authorities to remove certain portions of "history" or even go back and literally re-write and then re-

²⁹ Lydi Fillingham, *Foucault for Beginners*, (Danbury, Connecticut: For Beginners LLC. 1993), 101.

³⁰ Burchell, Gordon, and Miller, *The Foucault Effect*, 59 - 60.

³¹ Vincent Brossel, "Journalism in the service of a totalitarian dictatorship," *Reporters Without Borders*, October 2004, 2.

³² Ralph Hassig and Kongdan Oh, *The Hidden People of North Korea*, (Maryland, United States: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc), 134.

publish a modified history.³³ By controlling access to history, authorities always have to opportunity to go back and revise history again and again. For example, if a high-ranking figure has fallen out of favor with the North Korean regime not only could that person be physically disposed of, but all references to them in prior newspapers, journals, news reels, etc, are also be edited and reissued so that history shows they *never existed*. Or worse, information can be republished in a matter that illustrates they were counter-revolutionary.

The exact opposite, a glorification campaign, can be accomplished by re-writing history to place an individual in a positive light and to confer political legitimacy to that person. This is true for people who are alive (such as one of Kim Jong Il's sons or daughters) or for someone who is already dead (Kim Jong Il's deceased mother or his father).

Indeed, history, according to North Korea, has some interesting twists that run contrary to what most scholars believe happened on the Korean peninsula. According to North Korean historical records, North Korea did not start the Korean War. Rather it was the imperialist United States and South Korea who started the Korean War by launching a surprise attack against North Korea. As North Korean history goes, the surprise attack was rebuffed and North Korea launched an immediate counter-attack that pushed South Korea forces back nearly 300 kilometers to the southern tip of the peninsula.³⁴ Of course, the general consensus outside of North Korea is that while armed skirmishes between North and South Korea happened before the outbreak of the Korean war, it was the Northern side that launched a full-scale invasion featuring armored vehicles and heavy infantry. South Korea, at the start of the war, had a

³³ Lankov, *North of the DMZ*, 241 - 244.

³⁴ Christian Kracht, Evan Munz, and Lukas Nikol, *The Ministry of Truth: Kim Jong-Il's North Korea*, (Los Angeles: Feral House, 2007), 10 - 11.

relatively small military with very few armored vehicles. To this day in North Korea the Korean war is referred to as the Fatherland Liberation War and celebrated as a great victory rather than a stalemate. This can be done because North Korea portrays the Fatherland Liberation War as an act of aggression committed by the South rather than a failed conflict to forcibly reunite the Korean peninsula under Kim Il Sung and liberate Koreans in the South from the "yoke of the Americans."³⁵

Another example along similar lines is that in North Korea the common perception is that South Korea is full of diseased, criminal, poverty-stricken, and oppressed people who suffer under the domination of the United States. The reality is that the average South Korean enjoys an incomparably higher standard of living compared to their Northern counterpart.

Another manipulation of history implemented by the North Korean regime through their control of historical discourse deals with Kim Il Sung. North Korean historical sources would have one believe that Kim Il Sung and his heroic band of guerrillas single handedly removed Japanese forces from the Korean peninsula during World War II.³⁶ Even though historians outside of North Korea generally acknowledge that Kim Il Sung was a genuine Korean patriot and anti-Japanese guerrilla, most scholars agree that his impact on removing Japanese colonial forces from the Korean peninsula was minimal at best. In fact, Kim Il Sung was actually forced to flee from Korea to Russia towards the end of World War II due to repeated military failures at the hands of Imperial Japanese occupation forces. Not surprisingly, observers note that in North Korea's version of history, the role of China and Russia in defeating Japan is rarely, rarely mentioned and never emphasized.

Perhaps the most interesting historical twist in North

³⁵ Bleiker, *Divided Korea*, 9.

³⁶ Kyok Kang, *This is Paradise!*, 190 - 191.

Korea deals with the current ruler of North Korea, Kim Jong Il. As per North Korean history, Kim Jong Il was born at the base of Mount Baekdu.³⁷ The overwhelming evidence points to Kim Jong Il actually being born in Russia after his father's unsuccessful career as a revolutionary guerrilla fighter in Korea.³⁸ Thus, it is safe to say in North Korea the emphasis on history is focused less on historical facts and more on how history can generate a sense of citizenship, identity, and promote ideology, as per the desires of the North Korean regime.³⁹ This of course is not unique to just North Korea, but the scale and thoroughness of the revision is certainly without a modern day rival.

Example 2: Archaeology. Like history, archaeology is under state control and archaeological findings are often used to reshape history toward a specific agenda driven by the state. In North Korean archaeology, historical Korean dynasties located in modern South Korea are de-emphasized while dynasties and kingdoms in the present day North Korea are often over-glorified. This portrays North Korea as the historical and cultural center of gravity for all the Korean people throughout history and indirectly confirms that the North Korean government is naturally the legitimate government of the Korean race.⁴⁰

Another good example includes the alleged archaeological 'discovery' and reconstruction of the tomb of *Tan'gun*. *Tan'gun*, according to Korean legend, was the mythical father of the Korean race. North Korean archaeologist claimed in 1993 to have discovered his tomb (rather conveniently) located close to Pyongyang, North Korea. The tomb, complete with the 5000-year-old skeletal remains of both Tan-gun and his wife at the time of discovery, was then refurbished. The refurbishment, however,

³⁷ Mount Baekdu, which literally means white head, is the tallest mountain in the Koreas (North and South) at over 9,000 feet. Baekdu has a highly symbolic meaning for the Korean people and, according to Korean traditional folklore, is the sacred and mystical mountain from which the Korean race descended from.

³⁸ *Kim Jong Il: A Brief History*, (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1998).

³⁹ Bleiker, *Divided Korea*, 11.

⁴⁰ Lankov, *North of the DMZ*, 43 - 45.

was a crafty blend of ancient Korean architecture mixed with modern architecture complete with inscriptions about Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il. Thus, the tomb provides a symbolic and direct linkage created between the current Kim Regime and the founder of the Korean race.⁴¹ The North Korean regime, like many other governments, has enhanced its political legitimacy through archaeological discoveries that link the glories of the past with the current rulers--in this case the legendary founder of the Korean race. With no contradictory voices in the discourse of even archaeology to challenge the authenticity of the discovery, the dubious claim goes unchallenged.⁴²

Example 3: The arts and media. Like many totalitarian regimes, North Korean control of discourse also covers the arts (to include literature, film, and music) and the media (to include newspapers, journals, and television). The arts in North Korea are always directed to bolster the legitimacy of the Kim regime, contribute to the Kim cult, or serve to politically indoctrinate North Korean citizens in some manner. Artists are *required* to join North Korea's Korean Artists Federation or a subordinate artisan guild where they are given monthly salaries and production quotas by the state rather than freedom to pursue their own professional desires.⁴³ The public and private media environment then becomes immersed in political and ideologically driven works comprised of propaganda banners and ideologically driven movies and music. All of which create a communist-inspired culture that lends legitimacy and support to the Kim regime.⁴⁴

In the discourse of art there is no voice but the North Korean official voice. Personal art, conceptual art, and solo exhibitions are not allowed while only certain art themes are

⁴¹ Jane Portal, *Art Under Control in North Korea*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2005), 106 - 108.

⁴² Lankov, *North of the DMZ*, 81.

⁴³ Portal, *Art Under Control In North Korea*, 126.

⁴⁴ Ralph Hassig and Kongdan Oh, *The Hidden People of North Korea*, 133.

permitted, which sometimes allegedly come directly from Kim Jong Il himself!⁴⁵ All art then is state-directed with a planned political message and serves the purpose of ideological indoctrination or ideological reinforcement. Independent artists, outside of state control, do not exist. As a result North Koreans do not get exposure to art in any other form other than that which serves the political agenda of the North Korean regime. In essence, there is no competition or market for artistic perspectives and voices that do not support the state. In fact, Kim Jong Il himself explains the purpose of art in North Korea quite well, "revolutionary art and literature are extremely effective means for inspiring people to work for the tasks of revolution."⁴⁶

The regime uses the media in the same way, for political indoctrination. Further, by default, all sources of media are state-run. Meanwhile journalists and media employees are often Korean Worker's Party members and therefore part of the privileged class, which ensures they have a vested interest in preserving the status quo.⁴⁷ The state actually sets the agenda for what issues can be talked about and what the consensus position is. All news and media reporters are given topics to report on by the Korean Worker's Party up to one month in advance. The journalists write up the stories and submit them for an internal and external review to make sure the news story is politically healthy before any publication.⁴⁸

Further there is "alarmingly little about North Korea" itself in the North Korean media. All official documents are considered sensitive by default and not subject to public review or otherwise accessible by the average North Korean.

⁴⁵ Jong Il Kim, *The Cinema and Directing*, (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1987) and Kim, Jong Il, *Life and Literature*, (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1986).

⁴⁶ Barbara Demic, *Nothing to Envy*, 14.

⁴⁷ Brossel, "Journalism in the service of a totalitarian dictatorship," 3 - 4.

⁴⁸ Ralph Hassig and Kongdan Oh, *The Hidden People of North Korea*, 137.

Information on disaster, crime, or anything negative is rarely discussed by North Korean media.⁴⁹ This deprives North Koreans of the ability to judge their standard of living, the competency of government officials, or the fallibility of the Kim regime.⁵⁰

Example 4: Communications. Along a similar vein, radios, cell phones, the Internet, and just about any other form of communication is strictly limited and controlled in North Korea. Indeed, controlling communication technologies and channels is one of the ways North Korea secures its monopoly on discourse. North Korea-produced radios, for example, are all set to receive only certain frequencies on which the state-run organs broadcast wholesome political news and revolutionary music under state direction.⁵¹ Any other radio not made in North Korea is considered contraband unless it has been taken to the appropriate security officials who then disable the free tuning function, set it to North Korean-run radio stations, and then place security seals on radio to prevent further tampering. Security officials then conduct periodic reviews at houses to assure that none of the seals have been tampered with.⁵² Thus, North Korea may be one of the few locations where the state enjoys a nearly competition-free environment when it comes to radio waves, mitigating the effectiveness of hostile information and anti-regime programs such as Radio Free Asia. In North Korea it is not enough to simply censor the printing press. North Korea appoints the writers, owns the publishers, dictates the articles, and controls the printing press (and paper!).

Televisions undergo the same scrutiny as radios. Each television, produced inside or outside of North Korea, is required to be registered with the Electric Wave Inspection

⁴⁹ Ralph Hassig and Kongdan Oh, *The Hidden People of North Korea*, 136.

⁵⁰ Ralph Hassig and Kongdan Oh, *The Hidden People of North Korea*, 133.

⁵¹ Brossel, "Journalism in the service of a totalitarian dictatorship," 7.

⁵² Michael Harrold, *Comrades and Strangers: Behind the Closed Doors of North Korea*, (West Sussex: England: John Wiley and Sons, 2004), 62.

Bureau. The officials from Electric Wave Inspection Bureau then disable any free-tuning ability of the television and set the tuning to only receive the handful of television stations run the North Korean state. This, of course, ensures that the population receives ideologically nutritious television programming and prevents North Korean citizens from stumbling across dangerous television broadcasts from China or, even worse, South Korea.⁵³ Therefore it should not be a surprise that it is considered a serious criminal offense to listen to foreign radio broadcasts or songs, watch foreign television broadcasts, view foreign tapes, or even read foreign printed material.⁵⁴

Cell phones, which function even in the most chaotic non-states such as Somalia, are quite limited in North Korea. They are, of course, subject to monitoring and investigation by the state security services. Further, only residents of Pyongyang, who are the most privileged and trusted of North Korea's general population, are allowed to use them.⁵⁵ Still, security and control are paramount and at one point in 2004 North Korea actually shut down the entire cell phone network due to security concerns.⁵⁶

The Internet, obviously, is inaccessible for the vast majority of North Koreans, since North Koreans do not have personal computers.⁵⁷ Even those students attending prestigious universities do not have access to the Internet for research purposes. What is available, however, is a intranet between North Korean university-controlled computer networks completely separated from the global Internet that features a (censored)

⁵³ Barbara Demic, *Nothing to Envy*, 192.

⁵⁴ Ralph Hassig and Kongdan Oh, *The Hidden People of North Korea*, 158.

⁵⁵ Sung Jin Lee, "Pyongyangites Taking to Mobile Phones," *Daily NK online*. August 17, 2009, <http://www.dailynk.com/english/read.php?cataId=nk01500&num=5303>.

⁵⁶ Colin Campbell, "World Brief: NORTH KOREA: CELLPHONES BANNED" *New York Times*, June 4, 2004. <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/06/04/international/04brie.html?ex=1229403600&en=77a790f3962befal&ei=5070>

⁵⁷ Tom Zeller Jr, "Link by Link: the Internet Black Hole that is North Korea," *New York Times*, October 23, 2006. <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9E0CEEDF173FF930A15753C1A9609C8B63&n=Top%2FReference%2FTimes%20Topics%2FPeople%2FKim%20Jong%20Il>

encyclopedia and (censored) academic resources.⁵⁸

Communication via land line telephone system and paper-based letters is also limited. Telephones are generally limited to large offices and factories and the only real public phone would be in the neighborhood post office. At this point it is a foregone conclusion that all phones in North Korea are subject to monitoring by the various internal security organizations. Hand-written letters are subject to the same monitoring and are also slow and unreliable because train operators often burn the mail to keep warm during the harsh North Korean winters; plus hand-written letters can also be surprisingly expensive because letter-quality paper is generally considered a luxury item in North Korea.⁵⁹

3. Section summary. In review, North Korean authorities do not have to compete with foreign entities in North Korea when it comes to trying to communicate, influence, and indoctrinate their own people--North Korea has a complete communications and discourse monopoly. North Korean authorities are also able to control what information from the outside flows into North Korea. News about the economic progress, standard of living, and personal freedoms of the rest of the world, especially South Korea, are effectively blocked. Filling in this information gap is a highly revisionist history and an media apparatus that have the single objective of legitimizing the North Korean regime. Indeed, North Korea's complete monopoly on information has been pivotal in the creation of a disciplined society by utterly controlling the boundaries of knowledge and thereby limiting the range of discourse to create a docile population.

With such a system in place, people in North Korea do not always know that their standard of living is so low compared to the rest of the world because they have no reliable information

⁵⁸ Barbara Demic, *Nothing to Envy*, 277.

⁵⁹ Barbara Demic, *Nothing to Envy*, 79.

about the outside world to compare their own lives against. They believe that the rest of the world is also poor or even poorer and that South Korea, in particular, is worse off and under the complete hegemony of an exploitative United States. Thus many North Koreans never arrive at a point where they need to question the regime's state policies and therefore see no reason to challenge the regime.⁶⁰ Those who are in a position to know more about the outside world, such as diplomats, are drawn from the North Korean elites, who have a vested interest in maintaining the current North Korean system.

⁶⁰ Barbara Demic, *Nothing to Envy*, 12.

Chapter 3, Section 2: Controlling Space & Time

This section highlights North Korea's effective use of spatial and temporal disciplinary techniques to create a docile North Korean population.

1. Spatial and temporal importance. Foucault states that architecture and the deliberate design of physical spaces can be used to organize, govern, and create accountability.⁶¹ Excellent examples include the physical design of a prison, military camp, or even the urban planning of a city space.⁶² A city suffering from the plague could survive if the city was transformed from a crowded and chaotic location to an organized space that would be subjected to an effective, systematic quarantine overseen by government officials. A military camp, along similar lines, can be created and laid out in a specific manner so that it is easily managed. In such a military camp every soldier and officer has a space within the barracks and a set of duties to execute within the camp.⁶³

For Foucault one of the important aspects of spatial and temporal organization is that it creates accountability for the state. In a highly organized place each individual should be at their assigned *place* at the assigned *time* and both could be easily verified. If an individual is not at their assigned place (such as a prison cell or classroom chair) at their assigned time then it would trigger certain alarms and consequences. This is what Foucault meant by accountability. This helped to maximize order and minimize chaos, which resulted in greater oversight with less people, which was an important

⁶¹ Key Term: Accountability - for the purpose of this thesis accountability means the ability for the North Korean regime to track and account of their own population. A system where people are tracked offers high accountability whereas people simply roaming freely would yield no accountability.

⁶² Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 141 - 144.

⁶³ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 172.

part of governance in the 18th century as people moved from rural areas to densely populated cities.

2. Spatial and temporal techniques in North Korea. Much like a prison or military camp, North Korea also creates organization and accountability through physical control and spatial partitioning.⁶⁴ The North Korean system subjects its population to strict regulations on travel and movement to assure order and accountability and to minimize chaos and disorder.⁶⁵ The political effect is obvious, the greater the state control the less room there is for ideas and discourses dangerous to the regime. Further, by building time tables and enforcing schedules the North Korean system is able to ensure that the population is kept occupied under several overlapping layers of inspection by various state and regime officials as well as under the oversight of fellow peers.

Example 1: Food, clothing, shelter, work, and the centralized economy. One of the ways the Kim regime dictates the distribution of its population is through the control and access of food, clothing, shelter, and work. North Korea's centralized economy not only serves to give the state all economic power but also has the very important side effect of ensuring that the North Korean people remain disciplined. North Korea's command economy is unique: to purchase goods via the centralized system requires money and coupons--without the coupons the money has no purchasing power. Housing, likewise, is state-allocated and assigned rather than purchased or sold on a market. Coupons and housing are distributed, usually according to one's work unit, and thus people are tied to their jobs and their houses by the need to acquire the money and coupons used to purchase food and basic consumer goods such as

⁶⁴ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 141 - 144, 172.

⁶⁵ Michael Harrold, *Comrades and Strangers*, 207.

soap, clothing, and detergent.⁶⁶ Completing the system of control, North Korea assigns each citizen a job and residence with general disregard to each citizen's personal desires or talents.

Essentially this means the economy is a physical (and social) control mechanism. North Koreans who might pose a potential danger to the state are given houses and jobs where they can cause the least amount of trouble and are easiest to observe, such as a mine in a remote mountainous area. If an individual refuses to participate in the North Korean regime's controlled society then there is no physical space for that individual since they cannot acquire goods or shelter. Thus all individuals must live according to the terms dictated by the state in order to receive clothing, food, shelter, or other basic goods needed to live.⁶⁷

Example 2: The travel permit system. Another unique way North Korea controls its population is through the use of a travel permit system. As bizarre as it sounds to those who live in the West, in North Korea all residents require state permission to travel long distances within North Korea. In fact, even crossing a single county line requires an approved permit. The impact of the travel permit system is that it allows the North Korean government to track who is traveling where, at what time, for what reasons, and under who's authority. Travel permits must often be cleared by multiple organizations such as the local police, Korean Worker's Party officials, work supervisors, and even the state security agencies.⁶⁸

People traveling overnight across county borders are also required to register and check in with the local "People's

⁶⁶ Barbara Demic, *Nothing to Envy*, 167.

⁶⁷ Ralph Hassig and Kongdan Oh, *The Hidden People of North Korea*, 14.

⁶⁸ Lankov, *North of the DMZ*, 180-184.

Group”⁶⁹ as well as the local authorities. This means that all people traveling across county lines in North Korea are documented and tracked by North Korean authorities at some level on any given day. This helps the North Korean government establish accountability for their entire population.⁷⁰ This, in turn, eliminates the chaos and confusion normally seen in a state where the local population is free to move within the state as they please. This means that in North Korea just about any individual can be tracked on any given night by someone in the government. This also allows for the regime to prevent the movement of un-savory people and their ideas. Travel to another country, by default, is out of the question except for those on state business.

Example 3: Identification cards. Everyone in North Korea has an identification card. While an identification card for every person in a state is certainly not unique to North Korea, what is unique is that the identification card often displays a great deal of information about the carrier and not all identification cards are created.⁷¹ In fact since the identification cards carry so much information it actually comes in the form of a booklet so it is probably more comparable to a passport.⁷²

Identification cards often detail what the carrier can or cannot be doing, where they are allowed to go, and can imply their importance. Certain identification cards allow for people to travel unrestricted, though these are probably distributed to only the most important persons in the North Korean regime.

⁶⁹ Key Term: “People’s Groups,” - Known as imminbang in Korean, are essentially neighbourhood groups. Each “people’s group” consists of between 30 - 50 families who live in the same quarter, building, or neighbourhood. The purpose of the “people’s group” is to carry out routine neighbourhood duties such as trash disposal, clean up, account for visitors, provide reports to the authorities, keep the neighbourhood in order, and regulate the distribution of state rations and consumer good. Each “people’s group” is headed by an imminbangjang, who is usually a middle-aged house wife. All North Koreans belong to an “people’s group.”

⁷⁰ Lankov, *North of the DMZ*, 180-184.

⁷¹ Barbara Demic, *Nothing to Envy*, 167.

⁷² Barbara Demic, *Nothing to Envy*, 167.

Residents of Pyongyang, who are favored by the North Korean regime, have their own type of identification card that grants them access to Pyongyang. Pyongyang, by default, cannot be visited by any non-resident without the proper paper work. Indeed, securing the paperwork to visit Pyongyang is generally seen as a once-in-a-lifetime reward for good behavior. Likewise, the larger cities such as Hamhung and Nampo are generally not open to just any North Korean. Other cards will allow the carrier onto a military base or near sensitive military sites, though it is likely these are quite rare as well. Still other cards detail who can travel across what borders. For example, truck drivers have permits that allow them to travel across county lines but only if they are driving their truck and they are on state business, otherwise they are subject to the same restrictions as everyone else.⁷³

The vast majority of North Koreans, however, just have regular identification cards that have no privileges and the booklets simply contain all their personal information and nothing else. These cards, in conjunction with the various checkpoints run by the state across the entire country, ensure that the North Korean regime maintains control on the movement of people within North Korea. At a checkpoint a North Korean is usually forced to display their identification to provide their identity and residency, and then their travel paperwork to make sure that their travel is legitimate.⁷⁴

Example 4: Means of transportation. Another aspect related to movement and the travel permit system to consider is transportation itself. Generally speaking, in the modern world, and especially in countries with developed economies, transportation options abound whenever someone wishes to travel. The world is more connected via commercial air planes, charter

⁷³ Lankov, *North of the DMZ*, 179.

⁷⁴ Lankov, *North of the DMZ*, 179.

ships, public trains, public and private buses, and privately owned vehicles. No travel permit is required for domestic travel and one needs only a passport and maybe a visa for international travel. In North Korea, however, the only real option for transportation is via the state-run transportation system, which is subject to security checks. Given that North Korea has less than 800 kilometers of paved roads but a railway network that is over 5000 kilometers, traveling beyond the local area is usually limited to travel by train.⁷⁵ To even attain a train ticket in North Korea one must present the appropriate travel permit. Then, once on board the train, all passengers are required to present their tickets, travel permits, and identification cards during random inspections by North Korean officials.⁷⁶

Cars, which might offer some freedom of movement and privacy, are very rare in North Korea. Owning a car in North Korea is largely illegal--since everything belongs to the state--and furthermore it is quite expensive to maintain so only the elites in North Korea have regular access to the state-owned fleet of vehicles for private use.⁷⁷ Though exact figures are not known some estimate that there is less than one car per thousand people.⁷⁸ Even individuals who are fortunate enough to have access to a car or motorized vehicle are often subject to random security checkpoints along the road where North Korean officials check for "reactionaries" and "spies." The result is that the ability for a North Korean to travel is severely limited, highly regulated, and easily tracked by North Korean authorities. Not only does this process discourage the travel of people who might be hostile but it also helps prevent the

⁷⁵ United States, CIA World Factbook.

⁷⁶ Michael Harrold, *Comrades and Strangers*, 25.

⁷⁷ Barbara Demic, *Nothing to Envy*, 11.

⁷⁸ Martin Bradley, "In Kim's North Korea, Cars Are Scarce Symbols of Power, Wealth," *Bloomberg*, July 9, 2007, <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601080&sid=a31VJVRxcJ1Y#>.

easy spread of ideas that might be objectionable to the regime.

Example 5: Visitor registration system. Whenever a North Korean person travels they are required to register their presence with the local North Korean authorities and the head of the local "People's Groups." This is especially true when an individual crosses a county or province border in North Korea. During this registration process the average North Korean must again present their travel permit paperwork and identification as part of the registration process.⁷⁹ To encourage all citizens to abide by these regulations North Korean residences are routinely checked in the middle of the night by North Korean security authorities and representatives of the "People's Groups" to make sure that there are no unregistered guests--frequently to the dismay of illicit lovers. In the West these mid-night visits would surely be considered invasions of privacy and would cause a public outrage but in North Korea they are seen as a natural part of daily life--albeit an inconvenient one. The visitor registration system and night-time inspections, conducted in each neighborhood, directly impact the ability of the North Korean people to move freely over great distances without the regime noticing. In fact, it makes it just about impossible. In turn, this helps prevent unwanted gatherings or travel that the regime might deem suspicious. Again, the end result being no space for dangerous ideas to develop.

Example 6: Off limits areas. In North Korea, vast sections of the country are off limits, especially to certain types of people. Of course, this is not a new idea. Even the most free countries have certain areas that are off limits such as sensitive military sites and certain government buildings. However, in North Korea the idea is taken further. Much, much

⁷⁹ Barbara Demic, *Nothing to Envy*, 53.

further. For example, the capital city Pyongyang, as discussed earlier, is completely off limits by default. In North Korea, entire groups of people who are deemed hostile to the regime are effectively banned from not only Pyongyang but also from any major North Korean city as well as banned from the border areas near China, Russia, and South Korea. On the flip side, most North Koreans are not allowed in the northern and central mountainous areas since these areas host the largest prison camps.⁸⁰

Example 7: Daily schedules and state-planned routines. The North Korean way of life also involves rigid schedules and timetables that help the North Korean regime account for the location and presence of their population. In North Korea people spend a considerable amount of time in the presence of others. While this is not unusual for an East Asian country, since East Asian countries tend to have very communal societies, North Korea is severe. Indeed, in North Korea, virtually everyone eats together, studies together, trains together, and works together. This not only eliminates a sense of personal/individual time but also keeps everyone in the public eye and observed by one other as well as North Korean officials.

This includes not only time spent at work but time spent at self-criticism meetings, political indoctrination meetings, political studies, and significant amounts of time performing public services such as neighborhood clean up, communal spring rice planting, communal fall harvest, civil construction works⁸¹, auxiliary military service⁸², and preparing for large scale public events.

The daily routine also provides a good example of how scheduling is used by the regime to ensure that each person is

⁸⁰ Lankov, *North of the DMZ*, 179.

⁸¹ Tae Hong Kim, "University Urges Summer Mobilization" *Daily NK*, August 13, 2009., <http://www.dailynk.com/english/read.php?cataId=nk01500&num=5292>.

⁸² Lankov, *North of the DMZ*, 33 - 35.

at their assigned location doing their assigned job. Each day generally consists of political study, work, post-work political study or indoctrination, public service, and rest. An average day is as follows: the day starts around 6 a.m. with state broadcasts on neighborhood speaker systems followed by a commute to work on public transportation or by foot. Work starts around 8 a.m. but is generally preceded by a quick (mandatory) session where workers read the state newspapers and discuss the editorials and articles as a means of indoctrination. People break for lunch and a nap sometime after noon.

Work ends in the evening and people go to attend other state functions based on a schedule.⁸³ Monday may be an after-work meeting of the factory work unit to write political essays ; Wednesdays may require one's attendance at the local "People's Group" to conduct mutual self criticism sessions; Thursdays may involved meetings at the local trade union or women's federation to conduct further political indoctrination; Fridays may require meeting with one's neighbors to conduct neighborhood clean up and maintenance and so forth.⁸⁴

It is not uncommon for people to return from home for the day past 8 PM at which point they take care of domestic house duties and get ready for work the next day. Even women with children are generally expected to work, with the state providing child care at the factory or office where the women work.⁸⁵ The obvious impact is that the North Korean people are kept very busy and under the eyes of the state through multiple and overlapping organizations. There is relatively little free time to cause trouble for the North Korean regime with both parents working full time, the children under the care of the state-run schools or state-run child care services, and the

⁸³ Jane Portal, *Art Under Control*, 73 - 74.

⁸⁴ Barbara Demic, *Nothing to Envy*, 43.

⁸⁵ Jane Portal, *Art Under Control*, 73 - 74.

further expectation to spend several hours a week on ideological training and indoctrination. North Korea has, essentially, planned and organized the lives of its people down to their daily routine, providing them with a rigid schedule and structure. The right to pursue their own life according to their individual desires is often an alien idea. They are, essentially, the marionettes necessary for a totalitarian regime as described by Arendt.

3. Section summary. So what does this all mean? For the North Korean regime it means that a docile population has been created through disciplinary techniques based on physical/spatial and temporal control. The North Korean system can track the location and movement of its population to a very high degree of precision and accuracy through permits, internal checkpoints, and the check-in process when traveling. This enables authorities to control the population by segmenting and segregating certain portions of the North Korean people. It also prevents the easy or unauthorized movement of ideas through word-of-mouth and prevents even small gatherings from happening outside of the public eye.⁸⁶ The rigid daily schedules and mandatory duties also prevent the average North Korean from having free time to ferment dissent against the regime in private. The effect, simply put, is that the highly organized life of North Koreans keeps them busy, occupied, and most importantly, among their peers in a public setting under the watchful eye of North Korean officials.⁸⁷ In sum, North Korea has "developed the most painstaking systems to keep track of its citizens."⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 144.

⁸⁷ Michael Harrold, *Comrades and Strangers*, 251.

⁸⁸ Barbara Demic, *Nothing to Envy*, 167.

Chapter 3, Section 3: A Uniform & Cohesive Society

This third chapter brings attention to North Korea's ability to create a docile population by emphasizing a collective and cohesive society where assimilation is the norm, uniformity is a virtue, and individualism is discouraged so that the status quo, which is favorable to the regime, is maintained.

1. Importance of cohesion and uniformity. Foucault points out that one of the results of the 18th century is the rise of systems in which the individual is only as valuable as that individual's given role in a larger group. Foucault discusses making multiple elements (such as class pupils) act as a single body to accomplish an objective rather than as a group of individuals.⁸⁹ Thus, the value of a soldier inside a unit is not based on the soldier's individual skill as a soldier but rather his contribution to the overall effectiveness of the unit by his ability to listen and carry out orders. Thus his value and identity become founded on his uniformity and cohesion to the system rather than his individual battlefield prowess or personal courage. During the 18th century, according to Foucault, the same paradigm is carried into factories, academies, and so forth as a way for authorities to manage the increasing population and chaotic growth of urban areas. This creates a nexus between uniformity, cohesion, identity, and value. Cogs are only effective and valued when they are part of a wheel, the saying might go.

2. Social cohesion and uniformity in North Korea. Even before the rise of the current North Korean regime the Korean culture was heavily influenced by Confucian values, which placed an emphasis on community values. This fundamental part of the

⁸⁹ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 123, 149.

Korean identity has been reinforced by the North Korean regime to strengthen its own stability. Instead of individualism, North Koreans have a collective lifestyle.⁹⁰ In North Korea the regime has created a system where the value of each person is tied to the successes and failures of the group instead of based on individual talents and accomplishments. By creating a strong sense of community and cohesion, North Korea encourages everyone to become an obedient member of the Kim regime and discourages the spread of radical, unorthodox ideas, which might threaten the regime.⁹¹ Below are several striking examples.

Example 1: Physically acting as a group. North Korea targets the physical bodies of its citizens for regimented exercise in order to create docile bodies, which leads to docile minds. As Foucault states, one of the aspects of discipline is the idea that the body can be the target of instruction.⁹² Not only can you dictate how to use a hammer, for example, but you can also dictate how the arm and hand should work with the hammer. You can then test, examine, rank, and eventually judge someone based on how they use the hammer.⁹³ Thus, one's value can be determined based on their role within a larger system rather than who they are as an individual outside of the system.

North Korean society is a vivid example of this. The regimentation and uniformity of North Koreans is obvious, particularly when they are in large groups. When people vote at any level, from the Korean Worker's Party congress down to electing high school student government, they do so in complete unanimity and with complete predictability.⁹⁴ Spontaneity is not approved. In 2009 Kim Jong Il was "re-elected" as leader of the North Korean government. While his election was a foregone

⁹⁰ Ralph Hassig and Kongdan Oh, *The Hidden People of North Korea*, 2.

⁹¹ Ralph Hassig and Kongdan Oh, *The Hidden People of North Korea*, 1.

⁹² Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 136 - 138.

⁹³ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 136 - 138.

⁹⁴ Ralph Hassig and Kongdan Oh, *The Hidden People of North Korea*, 4.

conclusion since he was the only name on the ballot, it should be noted that according to state media 99.98% of the population turned out to vote for him, which points to evidence that North Koreans do indeed act in unison as instructed by the regime.⁹⁵ Even if this were not true, it would still illustrate the emphasis the North Korean regime places on social cohesion and uniformity.

North Korea's various public performances, such as the Arirang Festival and Mass Games, are reportedly awesome to witness because all of the performers, which can number in the thousands, move in complete sync.⁹⁶ Further examples include the carefully rehearsed large-scale military parades where thousands of soldiers goose-step in complete uniformity; amazingly well choreographed mass gymnastics displays featuring hundreds of school-aged students; and well orchestrated public celebrations featuring hundreds of thousands of people lined up in perfect order to wish the Dear Leader Kim Jong Il a happy birthday (again in perfect unison). Such demonstrations require exercise, repetition, examination, and then judgment.⁹⁷ Most of all, these large scale events require a sense of cohesion and uniformity in order to be successfully executed.

Further, mobilizing thousands of people over the course of weeks for practice keeps the population busy and presents to the North Korean people an image of a strong government in control of its people.⁹⁸ This emphasis on the creation of a malleable body helps to train and prepare the North Korean population (starting in early childhood) to become part of the greater collective and to act uniformly rather than to be independent.⁹⁹ It also exposes the North Korean population to repeated

⁹⁵ "Kim wins re-election with 99.9% of the vote," *New York Times*, March 9, 2009., <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/09/world/asia/09iht-north.1.20696199.html>.

⁹⁶ "Mass Games in North Korea," *CNN Insight*, Host Mann, Jonathan, October 4, 2005.

⁹⁷ Michael Harrold, *Comrades and Strangers*, 275.

⁹⁸ Jonathan Watts, "Welcome to the Strangest Show on Earth," *The Guardian*, October 1, 2005, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2005/oct/01/northkorea>.

⁹⁹ Michael Harrold, *Comrades and Strangers*, 36-37.

situations where unity and conformity is seen as virtuous and correct from a very early age.

In sum, the North Korean regime makes sure that citizens are recognized not for their individual abilities but for their ability to contribute to a greater system and therefore reward and encourage collectivism. These rituals and events also help train North Koreans to act as part of the collective and to accept the system in which they live in, thereby preventing the growth and spread of unorthodox ideas, especially the ones the North Korean regime might be threatened by.

Example 2: Mandatory membership to state organizations.

Like any other country North Korea has various trade organizations, craft associations, labor unions, and guilds. What makes North Korean organizations and associations different from many countries is that these organizations are a tool of the regime used to control the population. Anyone who lives in North Korea is, by default, a member of one of these organizations--membership is not optional and is not a choice, it is mandatory.¹⁰⁰ Further, all of these organizations are sponsored by the state which means that each and every one of these organizations is directed by the North Korean regime.

Being a part of various state-run organizations starts at a very early age, with childhood membership to the North Korea's Korean Children's Union.¹⁰¹ This allows for the regime to indoctrinate the young and impressionable North Korean children through another means outside of the state run childcare and school. It also provides a sense of belonging and value through the use of rituals for indoctrination (oaths sworn, exercises, and uniforms).

Eventually all children graduate to the Kim Il Sung Socialist Youth League, which they will be a member of until

¹⁰⁰ Lankov, *North of the DMZ*, 202.

¹⁰¹ Lankov, *North of the DMZ*, 201 - 204.

they turn about thirty. Mandatory membership to the Youth League also comes complete with a military-style uniform and military activities. Members are broken into "battalions" and given basic military training on how to shoot weapons, throw hand grenades, dig trenches, survive in the wilderness, and treat basic wounds.¹⁰² After graduating high school any North Koreans male who is not politically connected enough to attend a university, which is most of the population, serves in the Korean People's Army for ten years. This decade of mandatory service in the Korean People's Army allows for an additional decade of indoctrination by the regime and exposes the North Korean people to additional disciplinary measures and further crafts a deep sense of uniformity.¹⁰³ After the ten year service is up men separate from the Korean People's Army and are then assigned jobs and houses by the state and carry on with their life as relatively obedient and disciplined civilians.¹⁰⁴

Once they are assigned a job they will join another North Korean state-sponsored organization linked to their job. All farmers are part of the Farmer's Union. All artisans are part of the Artisans Guild. Even house-wives without normal daytime jobs are required to join Socialist Women's Federation and the local neighborhood "People's Group".¹⁰⁵ These organizations establish value for the person not as an individual but as a member of a larger organization. Unsurprisingly, in the North Korean context, these trade organizations are mostly a supplemental channel for North Korean officials and authorities to control and monitor the population as well as provide the regime with another way to indoctrinate their citizens. They do little, if anything, to represent the interests of their members like a traditional trade association or worker's union. So what

¹⁰² Lankov, *North of the DMZ*, 203.

¹⁰³ Ralph Hassig and Kongdan Oh, *The Hidden People of North Korea*, 107.

¹⁰⁴ Ralph Hassig and Kongdan Oh, *The Hidden People of North Korea*, 97.

¹⁰⁵ Barbara Demic, *Nothing to Envy*, 43.

is seen in the end is the use of state organizations as a tool to indoctrinate and regulate the behavior of the North Korean people to assure their docility.¹⁰⁶

Example 3: Uniform appearance. Another excellent and visible way in which the North Korean regime attempts to create a uniform and cohesive society is through clothing and appearance. North Korea is the land of uniforms. Uniforms are everywhere. School children, mine workers, factory workers, police, party officials, and shop keepers all wear uniforms--in fact, just about everyone wears a uniform in North Korea.¹⁰⁷ While uniforms are not abnormal for even Western societies, visitors to North Korea often remark that uniforms are prevalent even for those would normally not wear them such as college students. Further, these uniforms are expected to be worn not just during business hours but also throughout the course of the day. For example, college students in Pyongyang are expected to wear their uniforms even when they are traveling and away from Pyongyang during breaks between semesters.¹⁰⁸

The practical effect is that uniforms emphasize social cohesion within the group wearing the uniforms and can also erode individualism.¹⁰⁹ After all, uniforms by their very definition, provide uniformity. Uniforms also create accountability by identifying where the person should be or where they should not be. A school child, for example, should not be found on a military base while a worker wearing a railroad uniform probably should not be on a college campus.

Rules and regulations alone are not enough so members of the Socialist Youth League often patrol the streets to enforce rules, regulations, and social norms in public to ensure everyone is appropriately dressed when not in their uniform.

¹⁰⁶ Ralph Hassig and Kongdan Oh, *The Hidden People of North Korea*, 98.

¹⁰⁷ Lankov, *North of the DMZ*, 111 - 115.

¹⁰⁸ Barbara Demic, *Nothing to Envy*, 59.

¹⁰⁹ Lankov, *North of the DMZ*, 111 - 115.

People should always wear Kim Il Sung badges near their heart, no North Korean should ever wear clothing with the Roman alphabet, blue jeans are also not to be worn, provocative hairstyles are highly discourage, and, of course, women should not ride bicycles since this is unbecoming.¹¹⁰

Example 4: Collective culture and military spirit. Aside from clothing, North Korea is also a society that routinely employs military terminology and organization structure rather than a civilian one to ensure their people are docile. As Foucault points out, the military is an institution that already embodies organization and power structures that would make it readily subjected to disciplinary techniques discussed in *Discipline and Punish*.¹¹¹ Thus, the North Koreans find it advantageous to run civilian society as if it were a military one to ensure North Koreans are disciplined.

In North Korea it is common sight to see "Shock Detachments," which are simply groups of young men not qualified enough for college (or even the military) and are forced to do common labor on an ad hoc basis for the state--building memorials to Kim Il Sung, manually constructing roads, or helping on agricultural cooperatives. These Shock Detachments are organized into "brigades," live in "barracks," get very basic military training, and even have a rank structure, though they are a civilian organization.

When at work many North Koreans engage in what is known as a "high-speed battle" where they surge their efforts to do whatever it is they happen to be doing. Those taking part in a "high-speed battles" are encouraged by revolutionary music played on mobile loud speakers and organized spectators who wave revolutionary banners to applaud the manual work. These "high-speed battles" are seen throughout North Korea--mines,

¹¹⁰ Barbara Demic, *Nothing to Envy*, 53.

¹¹¹ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 164.

factories, and farms being a common place to see these battles. Mine workers are another good example of military terminology employed upon the North Korean civilian work force since most mine work groups are broken down into "companies" and "battalions."¹¹²

Even children in grade school through college are not exempt from this military discipline. College students, unsurprisingly, line up each morning into "battalion formation" for roll call before marching in step to class as though they were in the military.¹¹³ Even elementary school children will line up and march to school in military formation.¹¹⁴ Further, when grade school children turn twelve the state requires that they form into "battalions" to conduct agricultural work in on the state cooperatives.¹¹⁵

Another important note is the mandatory military service for North Koreans. While compulsory military service is not new, North Korea has one of the world's largest militaries but not one of the world's largest population. Some estimate that nearly 20% of the male population is serving in the military at any given time since, as noted above, men are required to serve for ten years after high school unless they attain waivers to go to college.¹¹⁶ This time in the military services allows for further indoctrination of the population with military/communal values that emphasize uniformity and unit cohesion.

The net effect is that by using military terminology, organization, and structure in North Korean civil society, North Korea is able to create a society where value is linked to the individuals ability to carry out orders as a small part of a larger unit and where orders are followed upon command and

¹¹² Lankov, *North of the DMZ*, 111.

¹¹³ Barbara Demic, *Nothing to Envy*, 85.

¹¹⁴ Ralph Hassig and Kongdan Oh, *The Hidden People of North Korea*, 5.

¹¹⁵ Barbara Demic, *Nothing to Envy*, 48.

¹¹⁶ Barbara Demic, *Nothing to Envy*, 43.

without question; these in turn creates a docile society. It is said that "the regimented life of the civilian population" is "not much different... from the daily life of a soldier."¹¹⁷

In this system, each individual's value and worth is linked to their place in a greater structure. It is a society that employs military terminology and organization upon non-military life to ensure that North Koreans are imbued with the notion that conformity and uniformity is a virtue and the ability to carry out orders as directed is esteemed.¹¹⁸ This is just what the North Korean regime wants since they are one issuing the orders.

Example 5: Mutual self-criticism meetings. Another effective way the North Korean system ensures social cohesion is through the communist tradition of self-criticism meetings. These are meetings held periodically where people gather as a group, usually organized around factory work groups, farming groups, neighborhood "People's Group," or women's organizations, and admit their sins and transgressions. The confessed sins and transgressions focus mostly on how they have not worked hard enough for the socialist revolutionary or have not heeded the guidance of Kim Il Sung with enough passion.¹¹⁹ The interesting twist on the North Korean version of self-criticism meetings is that after everyone admits their wrongs everyone is then *force to criticize each other*. While this is mostly pre-arranged so that everyone saves face, things do not always go as planned and transgressions (real or not) are discovered and transgressors are dealt with by the authorities, sometimes with severe consequences.

These meetings are seen by participants as potentially dangerous to everyone. They also encourage paranoia, potential infighting, and prevent the formation of trusting relationships

¹¹⁷ Ralph Hassig and Kongdan Oh, *The Hidden People of North Korea*, 108.

¹¹⁸ Lankov, *North of the DMZ*, 241.

¹¹⁹ Chull Sung Kim, *North Korea Under Kim Jong Il: From Consolidation to System Dissonance*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 74-75.

in the group.¹²⁰ Ironically, these meetings also ensure a sense of uniformity to the status quo by making sure that ideas which might be unorthodox are either never communicated or are immediately suppressed and punished.¹²¹ A result is a population that has a strong sense of cohesion and uniformity but without any actual personal loyalties for each other.¹²²

An additional way that social cohesion and stability is assured is by the use of collective punishment.¹²³ If one person commits a significant crime, such as defecting to South Korea, they do so with the understanding that their entire family will likely be sent to prison for life.¹²⁴

Example 6: The *Songbun* classification system. *Songbun* is a rigid classification system based on the political credentials of a person and his/her family in North Korea.¹²⁵ Everyone in North Korea is categorized into these *Songbun* classes, creating a sense of uniformity among peers of the same *Songbun*. A person's *Songbun* determines just about everything in North Korea and sets the limits on the quality of life someone can experience. People from a family with bad *Songbun* can never go to college or join the Korean Worker's Party, and are forced to eke out a meager living, regardless of their actual skills, talents, or beliefs. Those with good *Songbun* enjoy a life of privilege, including the chance to go to college, enjoy a relatively comfortable job, and find considerably less resistance on their path to join the Korean Worker's Party, even if they are utterly incompetent.¹²⁶ The *Songbun* system has three general classes: hostile, neutral, and friendly. Each category then has further subcategories with a total of more than fifty

¹²⁰ Bradley, *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader*, 283.

¹²¹ Lankov, *North of the DMZ*, 33 - 35

¹²² Michael Harrold, *Comrades and Strangers*, 390.

¹²³ Sung Jin Lee, "Toughen the Guilt-by-association to Prevent the Defection of the Entire Family," *Daily NK*, June 30, 2008, <http://www.dailynk.com/english/read.php?cataId=nk01500&num=3778>.

¹²⁴ *Inside North Korea*, National Geographic Channel, DVD: 2006.

¹²⁵ United States Library of Congress, Federal Research Division, *Country Study: North Korea*.

¹²⁶ Jane Portal, *Art Under Control*, 73 - 74.

subcategories!¹²⁷

What is interesting is that North Korea made a conscious effort early on to conduct a "political census" to gather specialized information on every single individual and place them accordingly into the *Songbun* system.¹²⁸ This political census, which was conducted under the guise of various research projects such as "the understanding people project," involved as many as eight background checks per individual and took into account the background of their immediate and extended family.¹²⁹ What it created was a highly detailed political classification of the entire population.

The *Songbun* system allows for the North Korean regime to effectively direct its resources toward controlling and monitoring the more dangerous/hostile elements of its population in a more efficient manner.¹³⁰ Additionally, the *Songbun* system assures that those without a wholesome and appropriate background, by North Korean regime standards, will never advance far enough in life to be involved in the political process and amass power. The *Songbun* system assures that the "hostile" people are completely marginalized, "neutral" people are kept under a close eye, and the "friendly" people are co-opted by the regime so that they do what they can to protect the status quo.¹³¹

In a sense, the *Songbun* system itself is a form of collective punishment (or reward). Anyone with bad *Songbun*, by default, is punished for their entire life simply because they are part of that caste, so to speak. *Songbun* is also hereditary, which amounts to collective punishment over generations. A father with bad *Songbun* will likely never see his children go to college or join the Korean Worker's Party. A

¹²⁷ David Hawk, *The Hidden Gulag: Exposing North Korea's Prison Camps*, U.S. Committee for Human rights in North Korea, Published 2003, 27.

¹²⁸ Lankov, *North of the DMZ*, 71.

¹²⁹ Barbara Demic, *Nothing to Envy*, 26.

¹³⁰ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1972 - 1977*, (New York: Random House, 1980), 153.

¹³¹ David Hawk, *The Hidden Gulag*, 27.

father with good *Songbun* can rest assured that his children and grandchildren will live a relatively comfortable life (by north Korean standards) as long as they do what is expected of the regime. Further, the *Songbun* system allows the regime to focus their security efforts against the most "hostile" members of the North Korean population. Again, this fosters the idea that there is no individual, there is only the group.

3. Section summary. To sum up this section, The North Korean system emphasizes uniformity and social cohesion and discourages individualism in order to prevent the spread of ideas that might challenge the regime's legitimacy.¹³² Though it has been touched upon earlier, one of the cornerstones of the North Korean system is to create a sense of uniformity, cohesion, and collective within the population. The system also discourages personal independence, downplays individual value, and discourages anything that might disturb the status quo. As one North Korean scholar remarks, "The Kim regime has imposed uniformity by employing an arsenal of social control measures" which assures the durability of the regime itself.¹³³

¹³² Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 164 - 167

¹³³ Ralph Hassig and Kongdan Oh, *The Hidden People of North Korea*, 5.

Chapter 3, Section 4: Self Censorship & Panoptic Surveillance

This final section argues that one of the most important ways North Korea creates a docile population is by operating an extensive surveillance and internal security system that appears panoptic, which ultimately causes many North Koreans to censor their own thoughts.

1. Importance of the Panoptic system. The panopticon was a building designed by Bentham. It is an architectural design with two components that allowed for a very efficient deployment of power, according to Bentham and Foucault. The first architectural component is the observation tower, which is at the center of the panopticon. It is a tower made of one-way glass and houses the observer, who might be a teacher, prison warden, doctor, or factory manager. This is where the person who wishes to monitor resides. The second architectural component consists of cells that form a ring around the observation tower. In the cells sit those who need to be observed—school pupils, soldiers, prisoners, hospital patients, etc. The idea, according to Bentham, was that the observer could watch, judge, monitor, and communicate with those in the outer cells at all times and those in the outer cells would never be able to know if they were being monitored or not. For Foucault and Bentham the panoptic, or the idea it represented, was interesting for at least two reasons:

First, it allowed for an economic deployment of power where a few individuals, perhaps only one, could monitor, judge, or watch the larger population in the cells, regardless of who was in the cells. A model of monitoring and management of large populations by much smaller populations was important and valued as society and government tried to cope with the dramatic

demographic growth in the 18th century that taxed the ability of school teachers to monitor pupils, officers to manage soldiers, and city officials to monitor citizens, and for the government to monitor its population.

The second reason the panoptic system is significant is that the deployment of power can be taken one step further: after time, what arises in the panopticon is a situation where the observed people in the cells begin to assume that they are being monitored at all times by the observation tower and therefore begin to modify their own actions under this assumption. Whether there is someone in the observation tower or not becomes immaterial. This, to Foucault, was an extremely economic deployment of power. This particular deployment of power was the diametric opposite of coercive power, which relied on force and was the standard deployment of power before the 18th century when it came to government systems. This deployment of power seen in the panopticon was invisible and any conflict associated with it took place in the mind of the subjects being monitored rather than physically between authorities and those being monitored--the observed had the potential to become their own observers.¹³⁴ Thus, they were enchained by their own thoughts and by their own will rather than forcibly enchained by a ruling sovereign or authority.

2. The Panoptic system in North Korea. Though not through the use of strict architectural design, the North Korean system of governance does operate a panoptic system. Through a variety of means North Korean officials are able to monitor the North Korean population for signs of trouble. Whether it is the factory manager, the local Korean Worker's Party official, the internal security services, or the leaders of the various socialist organizations that everyone is made to join, there is

¹³⁴ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 195 - 214.

always a sense that someone is watching--probably because someone always is watching. For North Koreans it is as if they were in the panopticon cells staring at the one-way glass of the panopticon observation tower. Thus, the importance of the "panoptic" system in North Korea is not necessarily the architecture or the strict model of one observer monitoring many North Koreans. Rather, the importance is that North Koreans are constantly being observed by many different observers to create a sense that they are always being observed. This sense forces North Koreans to modify their behavior at all times and eventually trains them to censor their own actions without any actual coercion.

North Korean officials at all levels and positions spend considerable time and effort to monitor the overall conduct of the North Korean population looking for "unreliable elements" and "counter revolutionaries."¹³⁵ Further, the system appears to be so pervasive to the North Korean population that North Koreans actually begin to censor their own thoughts and behavior under the assumption they are being monitored. Examples of this are discussed below:

Example 1: Internal security. North Korea operates an internal security service and state police. The internal security service acts to protect the state against threats. However, in North Korea the internal security apparatus is geared not only toward external threats but, like many dictatorships, also heavily focused on monitoring and controlling the domestic population. Though this is not unique by any means the North Korean security state is still quite robust when compared to other totalitarian regimes. The North Korean regime is thought to have at least three security agencies: the Ministry for the Protection of State Security, the

¹³⁵ Lankov, *North of the DMZ*, 171.

Ministry of Public Security, and the Security Command.¹³⁶ Each of these agencies communicate directly with Kim Jong Il and do not coordinate with each other, and therefore compete against each other and overlap each other. While this duplication of effort may be economically inefficient from a governance point of view it assures that there is tremendous overlap when it comes to internal security, which is good for the regime.¹³⁷ This overlap also assures that North Korea is saturated with internal security agents.

Internal security agents from both the Ministry for the Protection of State Security and the Ministry of Public Security, for example, bug rooms, conduct wiretaps, intercept mail, and conduct physical security on a very robust scale.¹³⁸ Defectors from the Ministry for the Protection of State Security have also claimed that they generally construct vast, vast informer networks so that there is at least one informer for every fifty people.¹³⁹

This informer ratio increases even more in more "difficult" or sensitive areas.¹⁴⁰ Colleges and universities, recognized early on by the North Korean regime as a focal point of political instability and revolutions for many other regimes, is another such area. In Kim Il-Sung University, for example, "one out of every five" students was an agent or informer for the Ministry for the Protection of State Security.¹⁴¹ This statement is backed up by a North Korean defector who attended another prominent college in Pyongyang for engineering, who said that the general rule was anytime there was a group of four students, at least one would be an undercover informant for a security service.¹⁴²

¹³⁶ Ralph Hassig and Kongdan Oh, *The Hidden People of North Korea*, 42.

¹³⁷ Ralph Hassig and Kongdan Oh, *The Hidden People of North Korea*, 42.

¹³⁸ Martin Bradley, *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader*, 263.

¹³⁹ Lankov, *North of the DMZ*, 172.

¹⁴⁰ Lankov, *North of the DMZ*, 172.

¹⁴¹ Bradley, *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader*, 263.

¹⁴² Barbara Demic, *Nothing to Envy*, 197.

This also distinguishes the "undercover" informants from those who were essentially known informants working for the security services as a natural part of their job. For example, the local head of each "People's Group," by default, reports to all the national security agencies, local police, and local Korean Worker's Party officials as one of basic their duties.¹⁴³ The same would also be expected for bureaucrats, managers, and work unit supervisors, who consider such activities as a natural part of their daily job.

Supervisors and officials, as part of their managerial duties, often keep dossiers and files on their subordinates and keep them under surveillance and scrutiny on behalf of the state security apparatus. Those with bad *Songbun* were expected to be monitored as a matter of course, regardless of their actual behavior—even if it was impeccable.¹⁴⁴

Indeed, in North Korea informers and security agents are everywhere. Defectors and refugees, even from the privileged class of North Korea, note that the informant network creates a sense of distrust and prohibits deep, loyal relationships. One cannot even trust a lover when it comes to issues of the state: friends denounced friends, neighbors denounced neighbors.¹⁴⁵ This type of activity is further glorified through indoctrination and the media. Newspaper articles featured stories of children who denounced their own parents and families; such children are celebrated and labeled as revolutionary heroes.¹⁴⁶ As one North Korean defector remarked after fleeing North Korea, "spying on one's countrymen is something of a national pastime."¹⁴⁷

Example 2: North Korean organizations. As discussed above, in North Korea everyone is a part of at least one state-run

¹⁴³ Barbara Demic, *Nothing to Envy*, 71.

¹⁴⁴ Barbara Demic, *Nothing to Envy*, 217.

¹⁴⁵ Barbara Demic, *Nothing to Envy*, 10.

¹⁴⁶ Barbara Demic, *Nothing to Envy*, 53.

¹⁴⁷ Barbara Demic, *Nothing to Envy*, 53.

organization. This is usually a worker's union or trade craft association of some sort. These organizations, which make no disguise that they are a direct apparatus of the North Korean state, serve as another means for the North Korean officials to routinely monitor and keep tabs on members as well as propagate North Korean policy and ideas.

Example 3: Frequent and random inspection. North Korea is indeed the kingdom of inspections. There are night-time inspections of houses, military checkpoints and inspections on roads, and inspections on public transportation. While not absolutely iron-clad, these inspections create multiple overlapping layers of scrutiny and inspection. They effectively contribute to the sense that the long, lawful arm of the North Korean government is always present--because it probably is.

Example 4: Mutual self-criticism meetings. Noted earlier, North Korea has a system of mandatory mutual self-criticism meetings that is not only limited to providing self-criticism but also criticizing others. Though the ritual is mostly planned ahead of times, serious transgressions are occasionally uncovered with disastrous consequences. Serious transgressions are reported to the Ministry for the Protection of State Security and the Ministry of Public Security. As such, these meetings are constantly seen as a threat to everyone who participates, which is the entire population. These meetings allow North Korean officials, whether they are from the Korean Worker's Party or state security apparatus, to know and monitor the overall conduct of the local population and to address any deviation from the normal.¹⁴⁸

3. Section summary. Such a system is effectively a panoptic system since the presence of state observation is constant but not always declared. With North Koreans spending

¹⁴⁸ Sung Jin Lee, "New Round of Inspections Underway," *Daily NK*, October 24, 2008, <http://www.dailynk.com/english/read.php?cataId=nk01500&num=4210>.

such a considerable amount of time under the eye of their fellow peers it is likely that they are constantly being observed by the state security apparatus and informants. Ultimately, this sense of constant observation is efficient because the North Korean population becomes paranoid and starts to censor itself.¹⁴⁹ As one North Korean refugee states, he was "forced to *discipline* himself not to think too much" in order to survive--making live in North Korea a virtual panopticon.

¹⁴⁹ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 201.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

To the casual observer the North Korean regime's deployment of power may appear blunt and simple: conduct public executions to display power and create fear, curtail political freedoms, deprive the people of information, and segregate large portions of the population to political prison camps. However, the truth is that the Kim dynasty has operated a much more sophisticated deployment of power to create a docile population and to assure the regime enjoys stability over time. This sophisticated deployment of power may be one of the reasons why the totalitarian North Korean regime is still around while other dictatorships have come and gone over the past fifty years. Indeed, this is precisely the point of this thesis: the subtle disciplinary techniques used by the North Korean regime against the North Korean people on a daily basis has helped to keep the North Korean people docile, under control, and have prevented political instability for the regime.

But make no mistake: North Korea still relies upon overt coercion and sovereign power to punish the population, which is why their human rights record is "appalling."¹⁵⁰ In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault describes this means of projecting power as the "old way of punishing." This old way, according to Foucault, was slowly being abandoned in the 18th century by European states with a new disciplinary approach that was more cost effective and economically efficient.¹⁵¹

Naturally, North Korea has many things in common with the old regimes of punishment mentioned in *Discipline and Punish*. According to Foucault, the old European monarchies detained

¹⁵⁰ Kelly Olsen, "U.S. Envoy: North Korean Human Rights 'Appalling,'" *Huffington Post*, January 11, 2010, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/01/11/us-north-korea-human-rights-appalling_n_418098.html.

¹⁵¹ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 34 - 72 and Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 155.

individuals for torture as not only their trial but also their punishment. In North Korea torture and executions are not uncommon at all, and while this is not abnormal for a dictatorship, North Korea goes further by often condemning the criminal's entire family (sometimes up to three generations) to a political prison camp as part of the punishment of one individual.¹⁵²

As another example, Foucault notes the old European monarchies would make public spectacles of executions to display the authority of the monarchy, which is exactly what we find in modern North Korea. A public execution in North Korea follows a ritual that is designed to exhibit the power of the Kim regime to all the population: the execution is announced and even publicized by posters for several days so that everyone can prepare to attend. On the day of the execution the condemned person is dressed in a special gray outfit. They are tied to a post in two spots: the chest and the legs. The execution itself is a three part performance. First, the executioners shoot the ropes at the chest so the body slumps forward. Second, the executioners shoot the head. Third, the executioners shoot the ropes around legs so the body falls forward into an open bag.¹⁵³

Thus, what we find is that in North Korea there exist two mechanisms for controlling the North Korean people and assuring the political stability of the regime. The first is the very unsubtle use of overt coercive power through executions, torture, physical harm, and imprisonment. This is hardly a secret and this is what North Korea is often associated with in the media. Therefore, this is also the window through which many people understand the political relationship between the Kim regime and the North Korean people.

¹⁵² David Hawk, *The Hidden Gulag*, 24 and Sung Jin Lee, "Prisoner Families Forcibly Sent to the Countryside" *Daily NK*, October 24, 2008, <http://www.dailynk.com/english/read.php?cataId=nk01500&num=4206>.

¹⁵³ Hyok Kang, *This Is Paradise!*, 10 - 14.

But there is a second mechanism for controlling the North Korean people. It is subtle and therefore harder to find and analyze. This second mechanism is the vast array of disciplinary techniques imposed upon the North Korean population on a daily basis to keep them docile and create an environment where ideas dangerous to the North Korean regime simply cannot grow. By using Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* as a framework for understanding these North Korean disciplinary techniques we discover that North Korea does not always deploy power like a blunt instrument. Rather in North Korea what we find is coercive punishment coupled with disciplinary mechanisms to create a system of control that is very effective, comprehensive, and powerful. This system ensures that the North Korean people are meek, docile, and disciplined. This, in turn, provides stability for the North Korean regime.

We have gone over four examples of these subtle disciplinary techniques. The first was the North Korean regime's tight control on discourse, information, and communication. This allows the regime to shape the reality of North Korean citizens by controlling their perceptions. The second was the North's physical and temporal control of its citizens to keep them occupied, monitored, and tracked at all times. This allows the North Korean regime to prevent unwanted gathering and unwanted movement of people (and their ideas) while also keeping them occupied. The third was the creation of a highly cohesive society where the status quo and uniformity are valued, while individualism and spontaneity are discouraged and punished. This helps to ensure the status quo remains, which is favorable to the current North Korean regime. The last example was the creation of a panoptic environment where every North Korean citizen believes, probably rightly so, that they are being monitored at all times and therefore begin to censor

their thoughts and are unable to form trusting relationships with other North Koreans. This causes North Korean citizens to self-modify their own behavior without the regime having to actually use coercive measures.

In conclusion, all the techniques discussed above produce a submissive and controlled population. While the coercive forms of punishment and draconian rule are what most people associate with North Korea, it is just as important to note that North Korea operates a much more pervasive and ubiquitous disciplinary system in tandem with coercive power to assure political stability.

This disciplinary system is subtle and harder to detect because of the way it operates. And this is a critical point. As Foucault states, in actual operation all disciplinary techniques must be seen as a matter of course and completely natural.¹⁵⁴ This is clearly seen in North Korean society. Disciplinary techniques are pervasive, part of every day life, and seen as completely *natural and un-arbitrary*. If you want to go to the next county then you must apply for a travel permit. Why? That is *naturally* the way things are (in North Korea)! Before you daughter eats her meals at elementary school she must bow and thank the portraits of Kim Jong Il and Kim Il Sung. Why? That's just how things are *suppose* to be done (here in North Korea)! You must wear your uniform to work and even when you're not at work. Why? That's the way it *should* be (here in North Korea)!

The composition of all these disciplinary techniques also creates a system that targets everyone at all times as opposed to a system that is centralized and top-down. In the current North Korean system the entire population becomes docile and controlled. Unorthodox and rebellious ideas are stifled

¹⁵⁴ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 104.

everywhere and at all times. As one defector states, "the level of repression in North Korea was so great that no organized resistance could take root."¹⁵⁵

Perhaps the most telling illustration about North Korea's system of control is that North Korean refugees struggle to adjust to life outside of the North Korean system because of all the choices they have to face in a non-North Korean system. The choices that are made by individuals outside of North Korea on a daily basis overwhelm North Koreans even though most non-North Koreans do not give them much thought. For North Koreans the notion that a person can decide what to wear in the morning, what time to wake up, what jobs to apply for, where to live, when to travel, how to travel, how to spend their money, and even how to wear their hair are all overwhelming--even terrifying.

After all, these North Koreans have spent their entire life being told where they will work, what they will study, when they will work, what time they will wake up, what they will wear, and where they will live.¹⁵⁶ That is the level of control and discipline the Kim regime applies upon the North Korean people. Outside of the North Korean system, North Korean defectors and refugees struggle with these choices. To put it another way, Arendt would probably point out that these North Korean defectors and refugees are essentially struggling to cope with life after being a marionette.

The most obvious follow-up question then becomes: so then how sustainable is such a disciplinary system? The system is not perfect. If the propaganda and indoctrination mechanisms were completely effective then the North Korean regime would not need such a robust internal security apparatus. If the mechanisms for social control were completely effective then

¹⁵⁵ Barbara Demic, *Nothing to Envy*, 197.

¹⁵⁶ Barbara Demic, *Nothing to Envy*, 283

there would be no need for a *Songbun* system. Indeed, one of the ironies of the North Korean disciplinary process is that the *Songbun* system labels an entire segment of the population hostile and then proceeds to treat them as hostile. This, in turn, almost guarantees that that they *will act hostile* to the North Korean regime when and if they are even given a chance. This hostility then justifies the need for a North Korean *Songbun* and disciplinary system, making the circle complete.¹⁵⁷

On a long enough time line such a system is bound to fail. This is because the greater North Korean system (to include the disciplinary system, economic system, cultural system, etc) is premised on the idea that the environment in North Korea will remain the same or change very, very slowly in a manner controlled by the North Korean regime. The challenge for the regime is that the system outside of North Korea has and continues to change at a much faster pace than the internal systems. The result is that North Korea has striven to insulate itself from this external change and, until recently, apparently did an excellent job.

However, there is growing evidence that the outside world is slowly but surely starting to permeate and infiltrate into North Korea. The catastrophic famines of the 1990's pushed many North Koreans, not just those in the lower classes, to cross the North Korea/China border (without first obtaining the necessary travel permits!) to search and forage for food. With the internal food situation so bad and the North Korean people so desperate to provide food for their families, many local authorities accepted bribes or simply looked the other way as unprecedented numbers of people crossed over into China to seek daily necessities. In fact, many North Korean officials were probably too worried about securing food for their own families

¹⁵⁷ Ralph Hassig and Kongdan Oh, *The Hidden People of North Korea*, 5.

to worry about the illicit cross border traffic.¹⁵⁸ The result was at least a temporary breakdown in North Korean control over the movement of their own population.

More importantly, those who fled to China seeking food were, almost surely, exposed to an information environment not completely monopolized and controlled by North Korean authorities. Many North Koreans realized that the poorest Chinese farmers on the borders of North Korea lived better than the average North Korean and that those in South Korea were rich compared to the Chinese. Indeed, one defector, a North Korean medical doctor, explained that after she crossed the Yalu river into China, she went to a farm and stole a bowl of food scraps that was left for the farmer's dog because she was so hungry. Shockingly, she discovered that the dog food bowl contained scraps of meat--something the average North Korean eats only a few times a year on special occasions. She then had the epiphany that poor Chinese farmers' dogs eat better than North Korean doctors.¹⁵⁹ Stories such as this were probably not unique and probably did a great deal to undermine the North Korean regime's propaganda and legitimacy.

This is not the only breakdown in the North Korean information blockade. As absurd and simplistic as it may sound, consumer electronics may be another serious threat to the North Korean regime's information barrier. As the Chinese become more economically affluent they are replacing their old consumer electronics (VCRs, portable tape and CD players, and vacuum-tube television) for newer toys (DVD players, flat-screen TVs, and MP3 players). The ancillary result of this growing Chinese middle class is the growing availability of cheap, albeit used, portable consumer goods on the market in China--which is the largest trading partner of North Korea. The end result is that

¹⁵⁸ Lankov, *North of the DMZ*, 309-315.

¹⁵⁹ Barbara Demic, *Nothing to Envy*, 220.

the North Korean black and gray markets are being flooded with cheap consumer electronics, for the first time ever.¹⁶⁰

At the same time outside media is being increasingly smuggled into the country through the same trade channels.¹⁶¹ Dramas, music, and movies are making it into North Korea, South Korean media being particularly popular. Many North Korean refugees in South Korea claimed to have been exposed to South Korean media while in North Korea, something that was probably not true a decade ago and certainly two decades ago.¹⁶² At first glance it appears that at least some North Koreans dismissed the affluent lifestyle portrayed in South Korean dramas as an exaggeration by the South Korean entertainment industry. However, the same North Koreans also realized that some things in the dramas had to be true, such as the skyscraper skyline of Seoul and the constant traffic jams due to high number of cars in South Korea. This realization caused them to doubt North Korea's portrayal of South Korea as a country full of disease and poverty. Questioning the legitimacy of the regime in the face of such an enormous lie was the next logical step of many North Koreans who eventually fled.

Perhaps the best trend that indicates the North Korean disciplinary system is starting to fail is the growing number of North Koreans who are fleeing their country. While the total number of North Korean defectors is not accurately known, the number of those who have settled in South Korea recently eclipsed 20,000 with 10,000 having arrived in the past three years alone!¹⁶³ One of the reasons cited is the massive influx of South Korea media into North Korea. So if the disciplinary techniques used by the North Korean regime represent a

¹⁶⁰ Lankov, *North of the DMZ*, 309-315.

¹⁶¹ Lankov, *North of the DMZ*, 313.

¹⁶² Lankov, *North of the DMZ*, 309-315.

¹⁶³ "No paradise, but better than hell," *The Economist*, November 18, 2010, accessed on December 1, 2010, <http://www.economist.com/node/17528822>.

fundamental building block for the North Korean regime's stability what does it mean if the disciplinary system is becoming less effective? Indeed, what happens when many North Korean marionettes are starting to show signs of spontaneity?

This spontaneity speaks to the greater issue of how North Koreans identify themselves, which is generally not discussed by North Korean experts. Do people in North Korea consider their identity to be tied to being ethnic Korean, being a North Korean, being a communist revolutionary, being an individual, being part of a family, a mix of the above, or something else entirely different? Surely the North Korean regime wishes to create a system in which individual North Koreans do not see themselves as individuals with an individual political identity. Rather, the North Korean system strives to create an environment in which each member of North Korea identifies themselves as a single segment of a greater North Korean entity and sees their identity in terms of being an obedient member of the Kim regime--as a marionette of the Kim regime. The North Korean system, by emphasizing uniformity and conformity, also impresses upon the people that other forms of identification are invalid because the North Korean regime demands total and undivided loyalty from everyone--thus a child is praised by the state when he betrays his own parents to the North Korean security apparatus.

This system of values is not completely unique to North Korea and draws heavily upon traditional Confucian values that existed in Korean society before the creation of the North Korean state. The Kim regime has simply emphasized certain aspects of this philosophical foundation in order to create additional political legitimacy. Thus, the actual role of Confucian values when it comes to understanding how North Koreans identify themselves has yet to be fully discussed. How

North Koreans identify themselves and how the North Korean regime has attempted to influenced and manipulated this identification process is surely important to understanding and speculating on the Kim regime's stability. If North Korea-watchers wish to better understand North Korea as a state then understanding the relationship between the regime and the North Korean people must be considered.

And this thesis really is only the beginning. With a more sophisticated understanding of how the Kim regime rules North Korea and maintains political power the questions surrounding the survivability and the future of the Kim regime take on more perspectives. There are more variables to discuss and more factors to consider. The equation of North Korean regime stability, as examined by others, then becomes more complex and richer. The conventional model of how a totalitarian regime falls from power may not apply to North Korea because this thesis has proved that the relationships between the North Korean people and the ruling Kim regime are not conventional.

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