



**The *Juche* factor:
North Korea's political ideology
and human rights reform**

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Abstract

At the United Nations' 25th session in February 2014, the commission of inquiry on human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea ("the Commission") issued two reports that documented its findings on human rights abuses in North Korea and presented recommendations to address these atrocities. The Commission stated that the crimes against humanity committed within the state are the direct result of official government policies. Subsequent proposals following this claim stem from the Commission's belief that these offenses will cease upon the implementation of Western democratic governance that will improve the quality of life for the North Korean people. Despite the Commission's well-intended guidance, their appeals fall short as they underappreciate the state's leading ideology, *Juche Sasang*.

The *Juche* factor: North Korea's political ideology and human rights reform

One year after Kim Jong-un became leader of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), Navi Pillay, the United Nation's High Commissioner for Human Rights, called for "an in-depth inquiry into one of the worst - but least understood and reported - human rights situations in the world."¹ Affirming such measures were "not only fully justified, but long overdue,"² Pillay expressed concern that the DPRK's nuclear program had dominated conversations, and eclipsed decades of mistreatment and unsound domestic policies by the Kim regime.³ As a result, the Human Rights Council adopted Resolution 22/13 on March 24, 2013, to address "the persisting deterioration in the human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea," and established the commission of inquiry on human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea ("the Commission") to "investigate the systematic, widespread and grave violations of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea."⁴

The Commission's reports have provided support for the argument that North Korea's leadership has committed crimes against humanity. As a result, the Commission articulated its desire to reform the authority of the Supreme Leader and the Workers' Party of Korea, through the belief that reform of political institutions will dramatically improve the quality of life for the people of North Korea and put an end to state-sponsored crimes against humanity. While the record of atrocities committed by the Kim regime over the last half-century is evidence enough to support the removal of Kim Jong-un and other top political leaders from positions of authority, implementation of this recommendation is not sufficient to make lasting change for those suffering in North Korea.

The Commission's position as a recognized voice of the international community, with the ability to influence actions between the DPRK and other member states of the United Nations, necessitates the revisiting of its reports to take account of North Korea's state ideology. Resolution of the North Korean human rights crisis relies on the acknowledgment of *Juche Sasang's* (*Juche* ideology) presence and authority. By omitting *Juche* from its principal report,⁵ the Commission has produced an incomplete assessment of responsibility for the current condition of human rights, and proposed agencies of reform that are fundamentally at odds with North Korea's sociocultural precepts. As an ideology that promotes self-reliance, vehemently opposes foreign powers, and maintains the current political system, *Juche* requires strategic attention. A study of these measures,

¹ Stephanie Nebehay, "UN's Pillay says may be crimes against humanity in North Korea," *Reuters*, Jan. 14, 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/01/14/us-korea-north-rights-idUSBRE90D0DB20130114>.

² *Ibid.*, Nebehay, "UN's Pillay says may be crimes against humanity in North Korea."

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ United Nations, Human Rights Council resolution 22/13, "Situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea," A/HRC/RES/22/13 (April 9, 2013), <http://undocs.org/A/HRC/RES/22/13>.

⁵ United Nations, Human Rights Council, "Report of the commission of inquiry on human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea," A/HRC/25/63 (Feb. 7, 2014), <http://undocs.org/A/HRC/25/63>.

with respect to the Commission's intent to improve the human rights situation in the DPRK, yields the conclusion that lasting reform needs to include a landscape where *Juche* no longer exists. Furthermore, in considering the democratic political infrastructure of the Republic of Korea and its capability to facilitate long-term change, the end-state solution of a unified Korean peninsula is a worthy goal. The integration of *Juche* in discussions of the DPRK's human rights crisis is essential to realize human rights for the North Korean people.

The reports of the commission of inquiry

Under the directive of Resolution 22/13, the Commission gathered data on human rights abuses in the DPRK to determine the scope and accountability for the offenses. The mandate also requested recommendations to remedy the human rights situation in North Korea. Evidence compiled by the Commission came from firsthand testimonies of 300 defectors from the DPRK. The results of the investigations were compiled into two reports issued in February 2014: A/HRC/25/63, the "Report of the commission of inquiry on human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea," a report of main findings of the Commission ("report of main findings"), and A/HRC/25/CRP.1, the "Report of the detailed findings of the commission of inquiry on human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea," a supplemental report of detailed findings ("report of detailed findings"). Based upon this collective body of information, the Commission concluded that:

Systematic, widespread and gross human rights violations have been, and are being, committed by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, its institutions and officials. In many instances, the violations of human rights found by the Commission constitute crimes against humanity. These are not mere excesses of the state. They are essential components of a political system that has moved far from the ideals on which it claims to be founded.⁶

The reports verified the violations of many personal liberties including freedom of thought, expression, religion, movement, residence, food, right to life, and justice against the North Korean people by the government of the DPRK.

To address these atrocities and bring lasting relief to the people of North Korea, the Commission presented appeals to three audiences: China, the United Nations, and North Korea. To China and the UN, the Commission stressed courses of action in the areas of extending asylum, ceasing practices of *refoulement*, granting access to consular protection, engaging in advocacy initiatives, and the continuation of multi-party talks.⁷

⁶ United Nations, Human Rights Council, "Report of the commission of inquiry," p. 15; United Nations, Human Rights Council, "Report of the detailed findings of the commission of inquiry on human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea," A/HRC/25/CRP.1 (Feb. 7, 2014), p. 356, <http://undocs.org/A/HRC/25/CRP.1>.

⁷ United Nations, Human Rights Council, "Report of the commission of inquiry," 18-21.

Additionally, the Commission requested proceedings by the International Criminal Court “in accordance with that court’s jurisdiction.”⁸

Given the Commission’s belief that human rights violations in North Korea are “ingrained into the institutional framework,”⁹ the recommendations began with a call for “profound political and institutional reforms” to strip authority from the Supreme Leader and the Workers’ Party of Korea.¹⁰ An additional 18 entreaties followed, including proposals for judicial and legislative reforms, appeals for ending practices of gender-based discrimination, freedom of religion, freedom of intra- and inter-state travel, and opportunities for educational and professional pursuits.¹¹ The Commission’s petitions also urged North Korea to ratify and act in accordance with several specific international conventions,¹² admit to and redress the violations of human rights within its borders, allow for accountable parties of crimes against humanity to be tried under international criminal law, and immediately accept official persons from the United Nations to assist in implementing the prescribed changes from within the state’s borders.¹³

The Commission’s sentiments reflect the belief that changes to the executive leadership and the implementation of Western-style governance¹⁴ will end human rights abuses in the DPRK. Indeed, accountability for the crimes against humanity in North Korea rests on the government, but the assessment is incomplete without noting the role played by the state’s ideology. *Juche* has been used by all three leaders of North Korea to create the existing crisis and should, at a minimum, be identified as an accessory to the country’s human rights record. While theories of senior-level checks and balances and democratic governance naturally break with North Korea’s authoritarian regime by displacing power from the few and removing the threat of tyranny, the viability of change is unrealistic so long as *Juche* maintains its presence in the state.

Moreover, a democratic government to oversee positive changes in North Korea’s human rights situation may be the desired end-result for North Korea, but the transition toward this goal must be sensitive to social attitudes and cultural values as they can alter anticipated outcomes. The Commission has implied that the people of North Korea will openly embrace the proposed changes, which posits that they share the same framework of values as citizens in democratic states. This assumption is false, yet it is the standard by which the Commission’s recommendations are based. Disregarding *Juche* and its far-reaching authority in North Korean governance and society was a mistake as:

. . . this ideology has generally enjoyed the support of the North Korean people through good times and bad. Even today, with a rival state thriving next door, the regime is able to maintain public stability without a

⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁹ United Nations, Human Rights Council, “Report of the detailed findings of the commission of inquiry,” 358-359.

¹⁰ United Nations, Human Rights Council, “Report of the commission of inquiry,” 16.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

¹² *Ibid.*, 18.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 16. Through the use of “checks and balances” and “democratic oversight,” Western-style governance appears to be the model for the newly proposed political system in North Korea.

ubiquitous police presence or a fortified northern border. Sensationalist American accounts of the “underground railroad” helping North Korean “refugees” make it through China to the free world gloss over the fact that about half of these economic migrants – for that is what most of them are – *voluntarily return* to their homeland. The rest remain fervent admirers of Kim Il Sung if not of his son. Though we must never forget the men, women and children languishing in Yodök and other prison camps, we cannot keep carrying on as if the dictatorship did not enjoy a significant degree of mass support. How significant? Enough to make the regime desperate to hold on to it.¹⁵

The Commission cannot look at the DPRK as a state that will fully accept Western beliefs. To be successful, policy proposals by the international community must demonstrate a conscious awareness that North Korea is a *Juche* country where the official state ideology holds significant power and influence.

Self-Reliance

Juche is commonly defined as a philosophy or ideology of self-reliance. Kim Il-sung’s son and successor, Kim Jong-il, wrote in his book, *On the Juche Idea of Our Party*, “the Juche idea is based on the philosophical principle that man is the master of everything and decides everything.”¹⁶ The humanistic notion of man controlling fate is the core of *Juche* although, given the nature of North Korea’s communist-collectivism, the shared, mutual goal of the masses is one of state survival. The Commission agrees that *Juche* is self-reliance but interprets the ideology as a means for the Kim regime to contain its people:

Juche principles underlie the economic system established by the leadership. *Juche* requires self-sacrifice and hard work. Therefore, *Juche* became another element of control, as self-reliance meant that the state would provide all the needs of the people through the labour of the people, the natural resources of the land and the ingenuity of their efforts but required that the people follow the guidance of the state. Thus, the solution to any shortfall in the needs of the country were to be found in intensified campaigns to increase production through more enthusiastic labour and longer hours. The country would not use trade to address the structural difficulty in producing sufficient food for the population but find unique strategies to overcome it.¹⁷

¹⁵ B.R. Myers, *The Cleanest Race: How North Koreans See Themselves – And Why It Matters* (New York: Melville House, 2010), 16-17.

¹⁶ Jong Il Kim, *On the Juche Idea of Our Party* (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1985), 22, 21.

¹⁷ United Nations, Human Rights Council, “Report of the detailed findings of the commission of inquiry,” 33-34.

This portrayal of *Juche*, as a tool of the regime, demonstrates the Commission's belief that the ideology can detach from society with political change. Its assessment does not acknowledge *Juche*'s influence in nationalism or in self-reliant means to protect the autonomy of the state.

Juche is the battle cry for Korean reunification. North Koreans have been working towards the national cause of *minju kiji nosŏn* (reunification development strategy) for decades.¹⁸ As foreign powers were responsible for the temporary division in 1945 and the permanent division under the Truman Doctrine in 1947, North Koreans trust only themselves in the matter of reunifying Korea. The directive from Kim Il-sung on achieving "peaceful reunification of our country" involves achieving successful socialist construction in the north and encouraging the south to follow suit.¹⁹ Despite the loss of its allies, the depletion of its economy, the growth of its neighbor to the south, the death of the Great Leader, two political successions, and continued international pressure for reform in multiple spheres, the people of North Korea have not wavered in their commitment to the *minju kiji nosŏn* and view it as their duty to fulfill the work Kim Il-sung was not able to complete in his lifetime.

As part of the *minju kiji nosŏn*, *Juche* is the defender against non-Korean influence and a rallying point for the North Korean people to remember their abilities. As early as 1955, Kim Il-sung used the expression "our own" in his speech, "On Eliminating Dogmatism and Formalism and Establishing *Juche* in Ideological Work."²⁰ For over 50 years, the concept of "our own" has empowered every North Korean in what they see as their responsibility to "fight and defeat the US imperialists in Korea by our own strength,"²¹ to "secur[e] conditions for our own free activities,"²² and join the revolution to "not only improve our own lot but also save our country."²³ The rhetoric of the *Juche* concept of "our own" is as extreme as it views reliance upon other nations as disastrous to the state, but it is an observable stance in North Korea's political interactions with the international community.

Reestablishing Korean pride was of critical importance at the end of World War II. Between 1955 and 1960, North Korea's government promoted the building of national culture by creating policies to favor Korean art, literature, and language,²⁴ a significant endeavor as these traditional practices were prohibited by law during the 35 years of Japanese occupation. These everyday activities were encouraged through the *Juche* idea of "our own" and showed the North Korean people they were capable of taking control of their lives, making decisions for their nation, and maintaining their dignity in the process. To a people hard-hit by the blows of foreign intervention, political and cultural division,

¹⁸ Gwang-Oon Kim, "The Making of the *Juche* State in Postcolonial North Korea," in *Origins of North Korea's Juche*, ed. Jae-Jung Suh (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014), 76.

¹⁹ Il Sung Kim, *Works* (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1982), 9:406-407.

²⁰ Il Sung Kim, *Works*, 395-417.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 409.

²² *Ibid.*, 411.

²³ *Ibid.*, 416.

²⁴ Jae-Jung Suh, "Making Sense of North Korea: *Juche* as an Institution," in *Origins of North Korea's Juche*, ed. Jae-Jung Suh (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014), 16.

and the loss of the Korean War, *Juche* inspired the people of a struggling nation. In the quest to achieve reliability and security, North Koreans have continued to emphasize the importance of relying on their own capabilities.

The ideas of “our own” and national capability expand into three distinct pillars of *Juche*. In a speech delivered to the Supreme People’s Assembly on Dec. 16, 1967, titled “Let Us Defend the Revolutionary Spirit of Independence, Self-Reliance, and Self-Defense More Thoroughly in All Fields of State Activities,” Kim Il-sung articulated the political principles of *Juche* as *chaju*, *charip*, and *chawi*, or political independence, self-sustenance, and self-defense.²⁵ Moreover, he stated the purposes of the ideology to be:

. . . to consolidate the political independence of the country, build up more solidly the foundations of an independent national economy capable of insuring the complete unification, independence, and prosperity of our nation and increasing the country’s defense capabilities, so as to safeguard the security of the fatherland reliably by our own force. . . .²⁶

Although the casual interpretations of the political tenets are clear in their mission to carry out *Juche*, the underlying principles of these pillars are North Korean reliability and security through capability. If the people of North Korea are indeed the masters of their own fate, and an outside power commands their course, then they and their state become subservient to others, just as they were before modern statehood.

Resistance against foreign powers

The Commission has narrowly interpreted North Korea’s “general resistance to foreign influences” as *Juche* support for the Kim regime’s power.²⁷ The report of detailed findings made one mention of *Juche*’s characterization as “extreme nationalism,”²⁸ but in not elaborating on this idea, both reports have continued the bias of a singular narrative that links the state ideology to the political infrastructure of the DPRK and little else. By slighting the notion of popular support for *Juche*, the Commission neglected an opportunity to explore the foundation of North Korean cognition and the degree to which the state’s history of foreign interference has encouraged a binary worldview.

During the 1955-1960 period of cultural revival, North Koreans embraced nationalist historiography and the ancient legend of the mythological father of the *Choson* people, Dangun Wanggeom. The *Choson* were one of the three tribes that came together when Korea unified in the 7th-century. Koreans believe their homogeneous population has kept his bloodline pure. *Tanil song*, the singularity of race and ethnicity, is prized by North Korean citizens; in their eyes they are the world’s “cleanest race,” a stalwart people who live by the *Juche* idea of “our own” through their unadulterated continuation

²⁵ Yuk-Sa Li, ed., *Juche! The Speeches and Writings of Kim Il Sung* (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1971), 149-206.

²⁶ Li, *Juche!*, 156.

²⁷ United Nations, Human Rights Council, “Report of the detailed findings of the commission of inquiry,” 99.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.

of Dangun Wanggeom's bloodline, however factual or fabled it may be. Although the myth is shared by the North and South, the connection made by North Koreans is observable as they address themselves as *Choson*, whereas South Koreans use the word *Hanguk*. Both *Choson* and *Hanguk* translate to "Korean," yet the word used by the North demonstrates the importance they place on the purity and superiority of their ancient lineage.

As the world's "cleanest race," North Koreans are suspicious to and hostile of the international community, as they believe their superiority precludes them from being bound by the dictates of foreign powers. Their conviction is supported by the *Juche* idea of "our own," not only through its foundation for North Korea's belief of self-reliance, but because it juxtaposes the North Korean people with foreigners to strengthen North Korea's singular identity. In conjunction with Korea's long history of invasive foreign influence, these attitudes have established *Juche* as a survival mechanism to minimize perceived threats to the well-being and survival of the state.

The end of World War II dismantled the Japanese empire through the edict of the Cairo Declaration of 1943, recognizing the prewar status of territories seized from China and island nations in the Pacific occupied by the Japanese.²⁹ In regard to Korea, the declaration stated, "in due course Korea shall become free and independent,"³⁰ making it the only named state not restored to the status it held prior to Japanese annexation. The denial of Korean sovereignty became a compound issue with the misleading translation of the Cairo Declaration, as recorded in a report by H. Merrell Benninghoff, political advisor to LTG John R. Hodge, to Secretary of State James F. Byrnes in September 1945:

. . . it was recently discovered that from the beginning the Korean translation of the term "in due course" in the Cairo Declaration has been the equivalent of "in a few days" or "very soon" [. . .] Hence the Koreans did not understand why they were not given complete independence soon after the arrival of American troops. . . .³¹

The Cairo Declaration's deceptive nature and denial of political autonomy provided the base upon which *Juche* became established: as long as foreign powers continued to use the peninsula to serve their own agendas at the expense of Korean self-determination, the Korean state would face compromise by which it may one day not be able to recover. *Juche* maintains that the preservation and survival of the Korean state depends on minimizing foreign interference.³²

²⁹ The Cairo Declaration, Nov. 26, 1943, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Foreign Relations of the United States, Diplomatic Papers, The Conferences at Cairo and Tehran, 1943 (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1961), 448-449, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/122101>.

³⁰ The Cairo Declaration.

³¹ Jongsoo James Lee, *The Partition of Korea after World War II* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 57.

³² Li, *Juche!*, 157-8; Jong Il Kim, *Accomplishing Juche Revolutionary Cause* (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1990), 47. Both Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il speculated that dependence on foreign governments would lead to the failure of the socialist revolution in the DPRK.

In its 2,000 years of recorded history, the Korean Peninsula has experienced 900 invasions and five periods of foreign occupation by the Chinese, Mongols, Japanese, Americans, and Soviets.³³ During the most recent period of Japanese administration on the peninsula, many Korean nationals were taken to Japan and mistreated: over 770,000 were taken to labor camps, between 100,000-200,000 women were mobilized into slavery or forced to become “comfort women,” and at least 10,000 Koreans were killed in the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.³⁴ From this history, North Koreans view all non-North Koreans as potential threats to their state. The United States holds preeminence as the biggest offender to the DPRK and is routinely vituperated in state-sponsored communications. Disdain toward the US is rooted in three historic instances: the 1905 Taft–Katsura Agreement, which allowed Japan to occupy and annex the Korean Peninsula in 1910; division of the Korean Peninsula in 1945; and US-led intervention in the Korean War, which prevented the North from reunifying the peninsula.³⁵ While other states were party to these events, the US is the target of continued hostility because of its current military presence in the South, which is seen as aggressive and a deterrent to reunification. According to Don Oberdorfer, “US imperialism” is defined by the 1970 edition of North Korea’s *Dictionary of Political Terminologies* “as the work of the ‘most barbarously piratical invader and head of all other imperialistic countries.’”³⁶ North Korea’s propaganda machine continually attacks the US and encourages belligerence through statements such as “the Yankees are condemned as an inherently evil race that can never change, a race with which Koreans must *forever* be on hostile terms.”³⁷

Contempt toward foreign powers, especially the United States, is multigenerational and achieved through the state’s compulsory education system. In referencing defector testimony, the Commission attested to *Juche* being taught to school-aged children and party members, but it uncritically concluded the ideology to be one of intolerance and nonacceptance, which hinders the people’s rights of choice and personal beliefs.³⁸ The reports overlooked the influence *Juche* has in perpetuating a hostile identity characterized by anti-Americanism, national supremacy, and military readiness against a clearly identified foe. From a young age, children are taught in school to “speak of Yankees as having ‘muzzles,’ ‘snouts’ and ‘paws’; as ‘croaking’ instead of dying,”³⁹ in an effort to dehumanize Americans. In addition to the indoctrination of Kim Il-sung and his revolutionary achievements, education in North Korea is heavy in martial character. Children’s song lyrics describe becoming soldiers or living bombs for the revolution. North Korean students participate in mandatory military training exercises in high school and are required to enroll in the course titled, “Military Activity for Beginners.”⁴⁰ For

³³ Don Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 3.

³⁴ Bruce Cumings, *Korea’s Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997), 89, 177-183.

³⁵ Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, 5, 8-11; Li, *Juche!*, 163.

³⁶ Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, 94.

³⁷ B.R. Myers, *The Cleanest Race*, 135.

³⁸ United Nations, Human Rights Council, “Report of the detailed findings of the commission of inquiry,” 68.

³⁹ B.R. Myers, *The Cleanest Race*, 135-136.

students who grow up around widespread propaganda posters of “bright-eyed little generals, sailors, or female army nurses,”⁴¹ military service to the state and drawing arms against the United States are matters of course.

Support of the leadership

Juche is a declaration of North Korean independence and Kim Il-sung is the facilitator of liberation. Shortly after North Korea received statehood in 1948, Soviet forces withdrew in large numbers and Pyongyang began to distance itself from the political strong-arm of its primary benefactor. The pinnacle of this endeavor was the ratification of North Korea’s new constitution. Replacing the state’s original constitution which was modeled after the Soviet Union’s 1939 “Stalin Constitution,”⁴² North Korea’s 1972 Constitution states that *Juche* is “a creative application of Marxism-Leninism to the conditions of our country.”⁴³ Revision of the constitution in 1992 included the DPRK’s *Juche* platforms of independence and the reunification of the Korean state, calling North Korea “a *Juche* country”⁴⁴ and “an independent socialist state representing the interests of all the Korean people,”⁴⁵ to include those south of the DMZ.

The absence of foreign powers within the DPRK is viewed as a realization of *chaju* (political independence).⁴⁶ When the DPRK was established in September 1948, it had been nearly half a century since Koreans had lived in a free state, and the autonomy gained under the leadership of Kim Il-sung was a monumental achievement which earned him demigod status. In addition to establishing liberation and *chaju* north of the DMZ, Kim Il-sung instilled pride in the North Korean people through *Juche* identity. For his work in the early years of the country, the people of North Korea refer to Kim Il-sung as their *Oboi Suryong* (Parent Leader) or *Aboji Suryong* (Father Leader),⁴⁷ titles not shared with either of his successors, Kim Jong-il or Kim Jong-un.

The Commission misconstrued the relationship between Kim Il-sung and the North Korean people as purely Confucian, justified by the “Mandate of Heaven” and the precept of “the right to rule granted to ancient Korean rulers by the gods.”⁴⁸ In

⁴⁰ Dong-ho Han et al., *White Paper on Human Rights in North Korea 2014* (Seoul: Korea Institute for National Unification, 2014), 454.

⁴¹ J.E. Hoare and Susan Pares, *North Korea in the 21st Century* (Kent, United Kingdom: Global Oriental, 2005), 7.

⁴² William B. Simons, ed. *The Constitutions of the Communist World* (Alphen aan den Rijn, The Netherlands: Sijthoff & Noordhoff International Publishers B.V., 1980), 230.

⁴³ Simons, *The Constitutions of the Communist World*, 232. See the 1972 Socialist Constitution of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Article 4.

⁴⁴ *Socialist Constitution of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea* (Pyongyang, DPRK: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1993).

⁴⁵ Simons, *The Constitutions of the Communist World*, 232.

⁴⁶ Bradley K. Martin, *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader: North Korea and the Kim Dynasty* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2006), 463. Testimony of a North Korean defector: “What you call ‘freedom’ in the capitalist countries cannot be found in North Korea, but they do enjoy sovereignty and independence. Just look: There are no foreign troops in North Korea.”

⁴⁷ B.R. Myers, *The Cleanest Race*, 105.

⁴⁸ United Nations, Human Rights Council, “Report of the commission of inquiry,” 27.

characterizing the North Korean people as naïve followers of the Kim regime who have blindly ascribed truth to the Mandate of Heaven, the Commission ignored the likelihood of any secular, rational admiration for the leader who brought freedom to a nation. Moreover, the Commission also overlooked the level of honor given to Kim Il-sung over that of his successors and the impact he had on the state during his political life; if the Mandate of Heaven were the sole foundation upon which the Kim regime existed, each ruler would be equally esteemed.

The experiences that make up the shared history of the first generation of North Koreans exert a strong appeal on the people and contribute to the veneration of Kim Il-sung. For subsequent generations who were born after these events occurred, similar relationships have been created and maintained through the use of the Kim regime's cult of personality:

Many in the West, of course, continue to doubt that the North Koreans really believe in their personality cult. This skepticism derived in part from recollections of the double lives led in the old East Bloc, where the average educated citizen feigned fervent support for his county's leader in formal settings only to joke about him behind closed doors. But this only goes to show how little the East Bloc and North Korea ever had in common, for the masses' adoration of Kim Il Sung has always been very real. Even among the few North Koreans who have left the country and stayed out, a heartfelt admiration for the Great Leader is mainstream.⁴⁹

The power of the personality cult seems to be lost on many 21st-century Westerners who view it as an institution of false loyalty or behavior coerced by a menacing dictator. To onlookers, it is inconceivable that people hold genuine regard for the progenitor of a regime responsible for numerous crimes against humanity. For North Koreans, the personality cult is a conviction, a reminder of the life and teachings of Kim Il-sung, and an establishment to guide people to act in accordance with *Juche*.

The Commission's detailed findings stated that *Juche's* directive to North Koreans is to "develop the potential of the nation through its own resources and human creativity *as guided by the Supreme Leader*."⁵⁰ Kim Il-sung's influence is immense, not only for his recognition as the state's liberator, but also for the notable span of time he sat as the head of state.⁵¹ During the half-century of his political lifetime, Kim Il-sung marketed *Juche* in a way that made it attractive to first-generation North Koreans, packaging the ideology as a response to their shared experiences and as a solution to avoid repeating the past. Even after his death in 1994, Kim Il-sung's influence continues

⁴⁹ B.R. Myers, *The Cleanest Race*, 109.

⁵⁰ United Nations, Human Rights Council, "Report of the detailed findings of the commission of inquiry," 33. Emphasis added.

⁵¹ Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, 16. "As a national leader, Kim surpassed all others of his time in longevity. When he died in July 1994 at age 82, he had outlived Joseph Stalin by four decades and Mao Tse-tung by almost two decades, and he had remained in power throughout the terms of office of six South Korean presidents, nine US presidents, and 21 Japanese prime ministers."

as the North Korean people ascribe trust to his edicts and believe the *Aboji Suryong*'s successors are guiding the state in its socialist revolution according to the Supreme Leader's original *Juche* vision.

While the public's trust in Kim helped institute *Juche* in the early years of the state, the Kim regime employs fear to minimize the threat of, and to withstand, those who fall out of faith with *Juche*. The May 30th Resolution of 1957,⁵² designed to assess the perceived loyalty of every adult in the DPRK, initiated the *songbun* (social class) system and imprisonment of citizens in prison camps. A person's *songbun*, established through personal culpability as well as *yeon-jwa-je* (guilt by association),⁵³ places that individual in one of three main classes and 51 sub-classes.⁵⁴ Approximately 27 percent of the national population are identified in the base-level Hostile Class and considered "national enemies, impure elements and reactionaries."⁵⁵ Punishment for those identified as a threat to the state leads to the state's prison camp system where an individual can be sentenced to a *jipkyeolso* (collection center), *kyohwaso* (re-education camp), or *kwanliso* (re-education through labor camp, or gulag) – places very few people survive. While the DPRK's class system directly impacts the lives of the North Korean people through opportunities in education and employment, medical access, and receiving rations,⁵⁶ assignment to higher classes is not a guarantee of survival. The 2013 execution of Jang Song-taek, Kim Jong-un's uncle and Vice Chairman of the National Defense Commission of North Korea and Core Class member, reinforces the leadership's continued use of lethal force to demonstrate its dominance and combat the possibility of political opposition.

Considerations

The Commission's reports are powerful measures of the international community's recognition of the North Korean government's failure to maintain and protect the basic rights of its citizens. With such acknowledgment comes a responsibility to bring relief to those who are suffering. In an authoritarian state such as North Korea, where there is no doubt the internal condition of the country is the direct outcome of decisions and policies of the government, it is simple to conclude that changes in political infrastructure and judicial action against responsible parties are the principal solutions. Effective and lasting change, however, requires more.

⁵² United Nations, Human Rights Council, "Report of the detailed findings of the commission of inquiry," 29. Adopted on May 30, 1957, this order is also known as the Standing Committee of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea's resolution, "On the Transformation of the Struggle with Counter-Revolutionary Elements into an All-people All-Party movement."

⁵³ Han et al., *White Paper on Human Rights in North Korea 2014*, 227, 259. *Yeon-jwa-je* impresses guilt upon one's immediate family and three generations of horizontal and vertical relationships. This strategy serves as a monitoring mechanism within family units to ensure the group will not suffer punishment for the actions of one.

⁵⁴ The three main classifications are the Core, Basic, and Hostile classes.

⁵⁵ Han et al., *White Paper on Human Rights in North Korea 2014*, 258.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 258-259.

To complete the recommendations made by the Commission, *Juche* must be considered. While intelligence and hard information are vital to developing measures for guiding policy creation, sociocultural dynamics cannot be disregarded. Initiatives in other parts of the world have proven the importance of cultural understanding in host-nations when foreign powers remove government systems and create new political infrastructure.⁵⁷ The noble intention of bringing relief to a population does not eliminate the necessity of winning hearts and minds within a framework that is understood by the people being helped. Awareness of *Juche* can assist in creating policies that fit the perceptual constructs of the North Korean people who will be the beneficiaries of reform, while discounting the ideology will impede progress through incomplete assessments of the task at hand, incompatibility of policy with people, and increasing the likelihood of resistance.

Policymakers need to integrate the knowledge of *Juche*'s control as an instrument of state governance in their plans for reform. The Commission is correct in its charge that through misusing its autonomy the North Korean leadership is responsible for famine, hunger and malnutrition,⁵⁸ and other humanitarian issues to include discrimination, torture, and a corrupt judiciary.⁵⁹ What the Commission fails to acknowledge is that the ideology is equally, if not more, accountable as the regime for these atrocities, as under the *Juche* principles of self-reliance, *chaju*, *charip*, and *chawi* the North Korean government has amassed one of the most devastating human rights abuse records in modern Asia.

Furthermore, it must be acknowledged that *Juche* is the culture of North Korea as it guides perceptions, shapes the national character, and serves as a model of identity. While individual character is shaped by groups such as *songbun* or family clan, the singularity of the DPRK has enabled the state to create a dominant identity. It is reasonable to assume that foreign-mandated deviations from the ideology are likely to be met with resistance, as at least two generations have lived in isolation north of the 38th parallel and have no firsthand experience of life away from *Juche*-inspired biases. As they currently stand, the recommendations of the Commission are incompatible with the state's sociocultural attitudes of opposition to foreign powers, self-reliance, and an obligation to the maintenance of sovereignty. The prejudice of North Korea's binary worldview has established a record of unwillingness to cooperate with its international neighbors through its disregard for international covenants and peacekeeping

⁵⁷ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Counterinsurgency*, JP 3-24 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2013), I-3. Drawing from the outcome of the US counterinsurgency strategy (COIN) in Iraq and Afghanistan, policies on removing pariah leaders and implementing Western-style democratic governance to protect civilians are inadequate without acknowledgment of the host nation's sociocultural factors. While counterinsurgency is by no means a recommendation for achieving human rights reform in the DPRK at this time, the lessons learned from COIN in Iraq and Afghanistan are applicable: cultural understanding matters.

⁵⁸ United Nations, Human Rights Council, "Report of the detailed findings of the commission of inquiry," 115, 146-208.

⁵⁹ United Nations, Human Rights Council, "Report of the detailed findings of the commission of inquiry," 45-318.

agreements.⁶⁰ Expectations of a different response from the DPRK to the Commission and its proposals, no matter how well intended, are unrealistic.

With these concerns in mind, it is apparent that the Commission has mistakenly overlooked the predominant position of *Juche* in North Korea. Despite appalling human rights conditions and the overall deterioration within the state, *Juche* continues to be esteemed by the North Korean masses. According to Victor Cha:

Many defectors [. . .] still identify themselves as North Korean (33 percent) rather than as Korean or South Korean, and still have affection for the notional idea of North Korea though they may have animosity toward the government. Indeed, many defectors still express fondness for Kim Il-sung, which says something about the residual strength of the *juche* ideology even as they deplore the conditions that forced their escape and express anger at corrupt lower-level bureaucrats.⁶¹

If such sentiments exist among individuals who have had the experience of living outside the DPRK, it is likely that for those who have never had an opportunity to live in any other environment will have even stronger loyalty to the ideology.

The common denominator to North Korea's horrific record is *Juche*. As the Commission situated guilt for North Korea's human rights crisis within the existing political organization and made proposals for its complete reform, the state's ideology should also be under inquiry for its shared responsibility of abuse in the state. Moreover, given the Commission's desired goals to end human rights abuses and provide the people of North Korea with a system of governance that is able to maintain this objective, the necessity of eradicating *Juche* becomes more apparent as the Commission's aims are only possible when ideology is no longer an element of competition.

Undermining *Juche* demands employing an understanding of the ideology's sociocultural influences. For instance, the ideology's ideas of "our own" and innate superiority express a strength for domestically orchestrated enterprises. If the recommendations of the Commission are implemented as they stand, the North Korean people will not have ownership of reform efforts and the sustainability of reform measures are likely to suffer. The North Korean people need to challenge *Juche*, which can be made possible through an awareness⁶² of the corrupt leadership, the lie of *Juche*,

⁶⁰ North Korea withdrew from the Military Armistice Commission 1994, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in 2003, and several human rights related agreements. Additionally, the Armistice which ended the Korean War has been declared invalid by North Korea on several occasions.

⁶¹ Victor Cha, *The Impossible State* (New York: Harper Collins, 2012), 210.

⁶² Ted Robert Gurr, "Psychological Factors in Civil Violence," *World Politics* 20, no. 2 (1968): 250, 253, 254; Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel: Fortieth Anniversary Edition* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2010), 13. Gurr's civil violence model applies the frustration-aggression theory to the study of civil violence and rebellion, theorizing that civil violence is the result of the awareness of "relative deprivation among substantial members of individuals in a society." Relative deprivation (or discontent or frustration), is the "perception of discrepancy between their *value expectations* [what people believe they are entitled] and their environment's apparent *value capabilities* [what social means makes available to the individual]." A perceived discrepancy only exists when one becomes aware of the conflict between the two. In the case

and the horrible impact both have on the condition of their state.⁶³ Citizen action is an essential element of sound policy as it is the people who will receive the proposed changes and are ultimately responsible for their success or failure in implementation. By unraveling their trust in, and minimizing their fear of the existing establishment, the North Korean people will be more amenable to the assistance they request from the international community.

The state's control of information is *Juche's* greatest tool and the way by which the DPRK has maintained a consistency of beliefs since 1948.⁶⁴ Combatting a lifetime of indoctrination involves consistent messaging aimed at supplanting the oppressive influence of the ideology. US and ROK-based activists and nongovernmental organizations currently engage in this through radio broadcasting, leaflet dropping across the DMZ, and smuggling contraband media items into the country. Their effectiveness is measured through defectors who ask the international community to continue feeding information into North Korea on the regime, state policies, international conflicts between North Korea and its neighbors, and other information that can counter the effects of the propaganda machine and state-run media outlets.⁶⁵ While the results of these efforts are positive and an increasing number of North Korean people are receiving access to these outside materials, the reach of these groups remains limited.⁶⁶ More North Koreans need access to this information, and strategic endeavors should be expanded to

of North Korea, where individuals do not link their condition to the actions of their government, the international community should consider ways to bring awareness to the North Korean people of the disconnect between the state's value capabilities and their human rights value expectations.

⁶³ Martin, *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader*, 404. Testimony of a North Korean defector to author Bradley K. Martin: "Basically the mental processes of North Koreans aren't so complex [...] They do acknowledge they are poor. Even those who don't have exchanges of information with relatives in Japan and China recognize they lead poor lives. Maybe 80 percent imagine that South Koreans live better. But their mentality is separated between lifestyle and politics. They don't connect the two and blame the government for their poverty."

⁶⁴ Reporters Without Borders for Freedom of Information, "Press Freedom Index 2015," Reporters Without Borders for Freedom of Information, <http://index.rsf.org/#/> (Accessed June 24, 2015); United Nations, Human Rights Council, "Report of the detailed findings of the commission of inquiry," 73. While its constitution provides for the freedoms of speech and press, their uses are severely restricted. The Press Freedom Index of 2015 by Reporters Without Borders, an organization which advocates for freedom of information, ranked North Korea 179 out of 180 with only Eritrea's government being more oppressive to media freedom. The North Korean government allows radio and television sets, but they are supplied to the public and pre-tuned to government stations that are permitted by law. An estimated 5 percent of the population has legal access to a computer which uses the government controlled intranet system for electronic communication.

⁶⁵ United Nations, Human Rights Council, "Report of the detailed findings of the commission of inquiry," 56. A substantial number of defectors have stated that listening to illegal radio broadcasts from foreign sources encouraged them to leave the DPRK. According to the Commission's report of detailed findings, "several of these Seoul-based radio stations, some funded by the USA, are run by former DPRK nationals and provide listeners with not only news from outside the DPRK but also news regarding the DPRK and the government's activities not normally broadcast internally."

⁶⁶ Voice of the Martyrs, "Radio Broadcasts," Voice of the Martyrs, <http://vomkorea.kr/ministries/radio-broadcasts/> (Accessed Oct. 12, 2015). According to South Korean based Voice of the Martyrs, approximately 2 million people, out of North Korea's population of 25 million, listen to their illegal radio broadcasts. At 8 percent of the DPRK population, many more need to be reached to have a measurable effect on the whole of the state.

reach North Korean citizens who have the potential to interact with non-North Koreans, such as those working at Kaesong Industrial Complex.

The reports of the Commission stress their commitment to ending human rights abuses through instituting a new political system in North Korea, but following through with these proposals may not achieve this goal. *Juche* drew on generations of history and emotions to secure its implementation during the state's early years; the international community, unfortunately, is at a disadvantage as it needs to counter decades of indoctrination and isolation. Fully erasing *Juche* from the North Korean landscape is an undertaking that may require an entire generation that has not lived under its subjugation. The process of readying a fragile people, struggling to transition from a lifetime of *Juche* to new democracy, demands time that the human rights crisis may not be able to offer. Additionally, to transition a government for a people not yet prepared to take its ownership risks corruption and falling into old ways, which for North Korea means the return to *Juche*-led governance and the creation of a situation that is worse than that the nation currently faces.

An end-goal worth pursuing is a one-state solution under the governance of the Republic of Korea (ROK). Reunification of the peninsula would provide the people of North Korea with an immediate structure of protective governance, remove the threat of “*Juche*-corrupted” leadership in any newly created government, and bring stability to Northeast Asia. Fears of social and economic challenges brought on by reunification are very real for the ROK, but with appropriate planning between South Korea's Ministry of Unification, the UN, and South Korea's allies and neighbors, the anticipated burden can have a systematic response.

Kim Il-sung understood the people when he created *Juche Sasang*. Likewise, the international community must utilize full knowledge of data and sociocultural factors when forming policies for assistance and establishing a foundation for lasting change in North Korea. Through sympathizing for the over 60 years of empty trust, debilitating fear, and humanitarian catastrophe which resulted from the practice of *Juche*, the Commission needs to recognize the necessity of removing the root of North Korea's human rights problem. Once this is achieved, democratic practices from reunification with South Korea can provide the desired structure of government to the North Korean people, and facilitate positive and lasting change.

The West's failure to be culturally sensitive in the post-WWII era⁶⁷ has resulted in the problems North Korea faces today. With human lives in the balance and a volatile leader with nuclear capabilities, policymakers must understand *Juche* to form a complete picture of what they are facing as they try to achieve a safe and sustainable future for the

⁶⁷ Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, 6; Lee, *The Partition of Korea after World War II*, 47. “On August 10, 1945 two young officers – Dean Rusk and Charles Bonesteel – were assigned to define an American occupation zone. Working on extremely short notice and completely unprepared, they used a National Geographic map to decide on the 38th parallel. They chose it because it divided the country approximately in half but would leave the capital Seoul under American control. No experts on Korea were consulted.” Furthermore, the United States sent leaders “ignorant of Korean history of Korean national sensibilities” to lead the American occupying government.

people of North Korea. In underappreciating the role of *Juche Sasang* in state and society, the Commission risks repeating past mistakes, a history the people of North Korean cannot afford to repeat.

APPENDIX A

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APPENDIX B

About the Author

Ms. Angelica M. Stephens is a graduate of Georgetown University's Master of Arts in Liberal Studies program where she concentrated in International Affairs. Her Master's Thesis, titled "North Korea: On The Path to Revolution?" studies changing attitudes amongst North Koreans due to continued human rights violations and state mismanagement, and provides a basis for recommendations for new policies by the US and other key countries to help the North Korean people bring about political change for their state. Ms. Stephens has a BA from George Mason University in Government and International Politics with a concentration in Political Theory and Law, and a background in politics and non-profit organizations. A native of Northern Virginia, Ms. Stephens is an Army spouse currently residing at Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio, Texas.