



Authority and Emotions: Kim Jong Il and Religious Imagination in North Korean Literature

Citation

Kim, Sunghye. 2017. Authority and Emotions: Kim Jong Il and Religious Imagination in North Korean Literature. Doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, Graduate School of Arts & Sciences.

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Authority and Emotions: Kim Jong Il and Religious Imagination in North Korean Literature

A dissertation presented

by

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to

The Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the subject of

East Asian Languages and Civilizations

Harvard University

Cambridge, Massachusetts

April 2017

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Abstract

This dissertation explores how Kim Jong Il, the supreme leader of North Korea (Democratic People's Republic of Korea; DPRK) from 1994 to 2011, established his legitimacy based on constructs of his late father, Kim Il Sung's, divine authority at the turn of the twentieth century. Focusing on North Korean historical narratives—produced and circulated under Kim Jong Il's supervision—this study sheds light on the relationships among the idea of divine authority, the functions and purposes of historical narrative, and the people's emotions expressed in North Korea's historical writing.

Previous studies often described this historical writing—or what my dissertation explores as the fictionalized biography of Kim Il Sung, the father, and Kim Jong Il, the son—as propaganda for the authoritarian regime while underestimating the religious quality of the propaganda (and more specifically its roots in Judeo-Christian biblical narrative). Scholars in North Korean studies have ignored the roles played by the North Korean people's imaginations of immortality, encouraged by historical narratives, and their emotions, caused by religious visions, during the great famine and economic difficulties in the 1990s.

The North Korean state's ideological constructions—such as *Kimilsungism*, *Kimjongilism*, and the *Juche* idea of self-reliance—display features commonly associated with religion. Particularly in the 1990s, Kim Jong Il stressed this political religion by urging the people to read and discuss state-sanctioned history. North Korea's leader deployed state-constructed historical prose to consecrate his father as a messiah of the Korean race, justify his own oppressive rule as his dead father's *yuhun* (will), and encourage the people's imagination of *yǒngsaeng* (immortality) as a way to heal their pain and grief suffered as a result of famine. Thus, I argue that the religious imaginations of immortality in North Korean historical writing helped the son Kim Jong Il control people's emotions. He sought to suppress negative feelings (e.g., fear of death) and augment positive emotions (e.g., happiness with everyday life) by operating a propaganda apparatus that produced and circulated hagiographic fictions of his father and himself.

This study also examines the ways in which the state constructs of religious imaginations of immortality and the afterlife in North Korea presented extended working hours; overwork; industrial accidents; and deaths at factories, farms, mines, and construction sites. Despite the massive scale of famine-related deaths and grievous economic hardship in the 1990s, the Kim Jong Il regime managed to guide the people to cope with these tragic environments by transforming labor into meditation. Meditation is a practice or technique designed for self-regulation of the mind. It is practiced not for material gain but for spiritual enlightenment that generates feelings of tranquility, patience, and forgiveness. I propose that labor (work) can be a meditative practice, if it is incorporated into a daily routine. In North Korea, working—along with participating in various meetings and government-required demonstrations—created a temporal scansion that was intended to calm the North Korean people's negative emotional

states, such as anxiety, fear, and depression. I define temporal scansion as a recurrent pattern in people's everyday lives that made them impervious to the shock and pain of frequently-occurring industrial accidents. The rhythmic cycle is a *sine qua non* for meditation. During the great famine, North Korean literature and historical writing attempted to depict workers who were overcoming their fear of death, transcending the self, and constructing their life-death continuums by following a temporal scansion that the regime imposed on their everyday lives. North Korean propaganda alleged that North Koreans could make their political life eternal by sacrificing their biological lives for the nation. Deaths at worksites were elevated to martyrdom and deceased workers were celebrated as martyrs.

In this state-constructed vision and state-mandated program of reading the state-sanctioned history, North Korean people successfully deal with negative feelings, such as anxiety and fear, by keeping their daily routine, transform their whole lives into service to nation and their leaders with the temporal scansion in everyday life, and have immortality because their experiences in the factories, mines, farms, and constructions sites where they worked live on forever in history.

Acknowledgements

I thank the following people: David R. McCann, Sun Joo Kim, Karen L. Thornber, Shin Hyung-ki, Kim Chul, Lee Kyoung-hoon, Jung Hee Mo, Young-Joon Lee, Jamie Jungmin Yoo, Lim Yoo-Kyoung, Jeong Jaeseok, Kang Jiyeon, Ivanna Yi, John Lee, Peter Banseok Kwon, Nuri Kim, Jung Ja Choi, Susan Laurence, Jina Kim, Catherine Glover, Mikyung Kang, EunHee Nah, Hyang Lee, Mia Ackerson, my father Kim Byeongyeon, my mother Kim Jeongja, my sisters Yurim, Sorim, and Hyerim, my son Owen, and above all, my wife Chae Soojung.

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Introduction: Authority, Immortality, and Sublimity in North

Korean Literature

1. Gilgamesh and Kim Jong Il

At the very first light of dawn,

Gilgamesh [was mourning] for his friend (Enkidu).

[...]

He was pulling out his curly [tresses] and letting them fall in a heap,

Tearing off his finery and casting it away, [...*like*] something taboo.¹

- Tablet VIII of *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*

Chang Tuch'il died! Praising him as a pillar of the Hŭich'ŏn machine factory, Father President [Kim Il Sung] favored him. But, Chang Tuch'il, the key figure of the working classes in Chagang Province, strong like a wild buffalo, did not overcome the famine.

Being extremely upset and sad, He [Kim Jong Il] grabbed the edge of his desk. His eyes registered profound anguish.²

- Ri Sinhyŏn, *Kanggye chŏngsin (The Spirit of Kanggye)*

Chang Tuch'il dies of hunger in a fictionalized biography of North Korean dictator Kim Jong Il (1942-2011). Chang, one of the top engineers at the Hŭich'ŏn machine factory in North Korea's Chagang Province, does not survive the great famine. The Soviet bloc was dismantled in the late 1980s and the early 1990s, the US government maintained the economic embargo on North

¹ A. R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts*, Vol. I (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 651 and 657.

² Ri Sinhyŏn, *Kanggye chŏngsin (The Spirit of Kanggye)* (Pyongyang: Munhak yesul ch'ulp'ansa, 2002), 10. All translations are the author's unless otherwise indicated.

Korea it placed during the Korean War,³ and natural disasters—especially great flooding—befell the entire country in the mid-1990s.⁴ Most importantly, on July 8, 1994, the hermitic socialist state lost its founding leader Kim Il Sung; his death supposedly plunged the people into grief and apparently destabilized the regime. Economically and emotionally, North Koreans were in an unprecedented predicament. North Korean writer Ri Sinhyŏn described this national crisis in a novel-like biography of Kim Jong Il, *Kanggye chŏngsin (The Spirit of Kanggye)*, 2002).⁵

Kim Jong Il is in “anguish”; he suffers from the loss of his loyal subject. The man with absolute power in North Korea exhibits his emotions, as Gilgamesh, in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, demonstrates his palpable sadness. The ancient Mesopotamian demigod laments his friend’s death by tearing at his hair and clothes in grief when Enkidu is killed by the gods’ curses. Both in the ancient Near East and modern North Korea, heroes do not conceal their feelings when their loyal subjects die.

³ The United States’ government has yet to lift its economic embargo on North Korea. The U.S. Department of State articulates its economic embargo on North Korea as follows: “The United States imposed a near total economic embargo on North Korea in 1950 when North Korea attacked the South. Over the following years, some U.S. sanctions were eased, but others were imposed. Most recently, in the wake of the DPRK’s cyber-attack targeting Sony Pictures Entertainment, Executive Order 13687 imposed new sanctions against the government of North Korea and the Korean Workers’ Party, effective January 2, 2015. U.S. economic interaction with North Korea remains minimal.” <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2792.htm> (accessed: January 23, 2016).

⁴ Wada Haruki, *Kita Chōsen: Yūgekitai kokka no genzai (North Korea: The Present of Guerrilla State)* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1998), 280-281.

⁵ Ri Sinhyŏn is a member of North Korea’s most prestigious organization of writers, *Sairo munhak ch’angjakdan* (The April 15 Literary Production Unit). Before joining that organization, he gained positive recognition from the North Korean literary world and the regime by publishing several well-written fictions, such as *Yŏlp’ung (Fever, 1977)*, *Ppalgan sugi (Red Memoirs, 1981)*, and *Tang pisŏ ūi pamkil (Party Secretary’s Night Trip, 1985)*. As a member of the April 15 Literary Production Unit, he produced three volumes of the *Pulmyŏl ūi hyangdo (Immortal Leader)* series, a multivolume fictionalized biography of Kim Jong Il. *Chŏnhwan ūi nyŏndaŏ (The Age of Change, 1998)* describes how Kim Jong Il supervised the construction of the Pyongyang Ice Rink, while *Pukpang ūi nunbora (A Blizzard in the North, 2005)* portrays the way he led the people in North Korea’s Chagang Province to survive the food shortage by increasing the production of potatoes. *Kanggye chŏngsin (The Spirit of Kanggye)*, quoted above, is set in the Hūich’ŏn machine factory in Chagang Province during the great famine between 1994 and 1999.

However, one difference is striking: The fear of death never possesses Kim Jong Il, whereas Gilgamesh is devastated by the horrifying fact that he is a mortal being. After Enkidu's death, the ancient hero leaves the civilized world and wanders in the wild wearing animal skins.⁶ Gilgamesh finally meets Utnapishtim, a postdiluvian hero who corresponds to the biblical Noah, to hear the complete story of the Deluge and learn the secret of Utnapishtim's immortality. Despite his long journey and desperate efforts, Gilgamesh does not succeed in obtaining immortality; he acquires an elixir plant, named "plant of heartbeat," by which "man can recapture his vitality," but it is soon stolen by a "snake." Then Gilgamesh "sat down weeping," realizing his fate as a mortal man.⁷

On the contrary, the modern Korean hero neither goes off to the wild nor fails to obtain the secret of immortality. He has no fear. Kim Jong Il was born to and raised by a person who holds the secret of immortality—his father, Kim Il Sung. From the beginning of almost every piece of historical writing and novel in North Korea, it is clear that Kim Jong Il already knows how to live forever. Before anyone else, Kim Jong Il learns the essence by which he can achieve immortality from his father Kim Il Sung, the founding leader of North Korea.

The essence is Kim Il Sung's *sasang* (idea or thought), and it is claimed to be preserved in *ryōksa* (history).⁸ The authority to interpret the *sasang* was given to and monopolized by his son, Kim Jong Il. It was actually the power to produce historical narratives in which Kim Il Sung's

⁶ In Tablet X, Gilgamesh describes his fear of death, which he felt after Enkidu died, to Utnapishtim: "[My friend, whom I love so deeply,] [who with me] went through every danger: [*the doom of mankind* overtook him,] [for six days and seven nights] I wept over him. [I did not give him up for] burial, [until a maggot fell from] his [nostril.] [Then I was afraid.] I grew [fearful] of death, [and so roam the] wild." A. R. George, 693.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 723.

⁸ Kim Jong Il, *Chuch'e munhangnon (On Juche Literature)* (Pyongyang: Chosŏn Rodongdang ch'ulp'ansa, 1992), 1-2.

sasang—the essence of the Korean nation or the content of its national history—approaches its completion.⁹

My dissertation examines the ways in which Kim Jong Il, the supreme leader of North Korea from 1994 to 2011, constructed *ryōksa* (history) to instill *sasang* (thought; idea) in the North Korean people’s minds, particularly after his father Kim Il Sung died in 1994. Kim Jong Il claimed the Korean people could be with his late father—the person who holds the secret of immortality—forever by adhering to *sasang*, the essence of eternal life. He reiterated his idea of *yōngsaeng* (eternal life; immortality) after holding the state funeral for his father in July 1994.¹⁰ This study illustrates how Kim Jong Il the son exalted Kim Il Sung the father as a divine being and established his legitimacy based on constructs of his late father Kim Il Sung’s divine authority at the turn of the twentieth century. To make the readers—North Koreans—recognize

⁹ Kim Jong Il, “Widaehan Kim Il Sung tongji nūn uri ūi inmin kwa minjok ūi maūm soḡe, illyu ūi maūm soḡe yōngsaeng hal kōsida” (Great President Comrade Kim Il Sung Will Live Forever in the Hearts of Our People, Our Nation, and All Humankind: A Speech at the Meetings with the Officials in the Department of Agitation and Propaganda in the Central Committee of the Korean Worker’s Party on September 2 and December 4, 1994), *Uriminzokkiri Internet Archive*, <http://www.uriminzokkiri.com/index.php?ptype=great&subtype=rozak&no=4078> (accessed: February 5, 2017); Kim Jong Il, “Chuch’e ūi sahoe chuūi wiōp ūl ongho kosu hago kkūtckaji wansōnghayō nagaja” (Let Us Advocate, Stick to, and Complete thoroughly the Great Achievement of Juche Socialism) (1994), *Uriminzokkiri Internet Archive*, <http://uriminzokkiri.com/index.php?ptype=rozak&no=719#pos> (accessed: February 5, 2017). Kim Jong Il’s speech about the immortality of his father Kim Il Sung’s *sasang* (idea) is depicted in *Yōngsaeng (Eternal Life)*, a fictionalized biography of Kim Il Sung. Paek Pohūm and Song Sangwōn, *Yōngsaeng (Eternal Life)* (Pyongyang: Munhak yesul chonghap ch’ulp’ansa, 1997), 470-473.

¹⁰ At various meetings with high-ranking officials, Kim Jong Il reiterated his demand that the North Korean people worship his late father Kim Il Sung as the eternal leader of the Democratic Republic of Korea. Kim Jong Il, “Widaehan suryōng Kim Il Sung tongji rŭl uri konghwaguk ūi yōngwōnhan chusōk ūro nop’i mosija” (Let Us Revere Great Leader Comrade Kim Il Sung as the Eternal President of Our Republic: A Speech at the Meetings of the Central Committee on July 11 and 19, 1994), *The DPRK Today*, <http://dprktoday.com/index.php?type=97&s=2&no=167> (accessed: February 5, 2017); “Widaehan Kim Il Sung tongji nūn uri ūi inmin kwa minjok ūi maūm soḡe, illyu ūi maūm soḡe yōngsaeng hal kōsida” (Great President Comrade Kim Il Sung Will Live Forever in the Hearts of Our People, Our Nation, and All Humankind: A Speech at the Meetings with the Officials in the Department of Agitation and Propaganda in the Central Committee of the Korean Worker’s Party on September 2 and December 4, 1994), *Uriminzokkiri Internet Archive*, <http://www.uriminzokkiri.com/index.php?ptype=great&subtype=rozak&no=4078> (accessed: February 5, 2017).

his father as a divine being and prevent them from reacting against him, Kim Jong Il needed to control the people's emotions. Thus, he operated a propaganda apparatus, which produced and circulated historical prose, to suppress negative feelings (e.g., fear of death) and augment positive emotions (e.g., happiness with everyday life). Focusing on North Korean historical narratives that were supervised in their production and circulation by Kim Jong Il, this study sheds light on the relationships among the idea of divine authority, the functions and purposes of narrative, and the people's emotions as expressed in North Korea's historical writing.

2. History, Novel, and Religious Text

The comparison between Kim Jong Il's "history" and *The Epic of Gilgamesh* reveals an apparent paradox. *The Gilgamesh Epic* illustrates how epic was transformed into history, even though we call it "epic." The protagonist is unable to transcend the human condition—mortality—although leitmotifs in Near Eastern mythology, such as a postdiluvian hero, an elixir plant, and a cunning serpent, play important roles in the plot's structure. On the contrary, North Korean history—North Korean historical writing including Ri Sinhyōn's *The Spirit of Kanggye*—displays features commonly associated with religious text, although no mythical being appears in it. The father Kim, *sasang*, and the son Kim replace Utnapishtim, the "plant of heartbeat," and Gilgamesh, respectively. In the case of North Korean historical narratives, the son Kim achieves the quest of Gilgamesh's adventure: immortality.

This study highlights this contradiction in North Korean historical writing. What the North Korean propaganda apparatus and its affiliated writers produced as history are not factual records

of past events and times. They are apparently fictions. Moreover, they share their similarities with religious texts like the Holy Scriptures, because one of their underlying themes is how to achieve immortality. In North Korea, history can be seen as a form of novel or *Bildungsroman* in that it aims to cultivate the readers' emotions with the narrative of fictionalized past events.

From the nineteenth and the early-twentieth centuries in the West and the East, the ideal of the modern novel was the reader's self-cultivation through "sentimental education," which Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880) intended by writing his novel of the same name. Flaubert said in a letter to his friend Marie-Sophie Leroyer de Chantepie (1800-1888) that he wanted to write about the "feelings" of "the men of [his] generation" and show their "passion" and "love" to the young people.¹¹ Just as European *Bildungsroman*—such as Flaubert's *Sentimental Education* (1869)—was designed to cultivate the reader's sensibilities, the purpose of *shōsetsu* (novel) in Japan and *munhak* (literature) in Korea was delineated as fostering emotions by the founding fathers of modern literary theory in Japan and Korea: Tsubouchi Shōyō (1859-1935) and Yi Kwangsu (1892-1950), respectively.¹²

The emotions that the North Korean regime has attempted to augment or suppress through its control of the production and circulation of literary works—or what they call *ryōksa* (history)—are almost identical with those in *Bildungsroman* or *shōsetsu*. The sympathy and passion that modern novels aim to cultivate are also considered important in North Korean literature. Almost every kind of emotion is described in North Korean literary works, because the goal of North Korean literature is also "sentimental education."

¹¹ Gustave Flaubert, *The Letters of Gustave Flaubert 1857-1880*, Vol. 2, ed. and trans. Francis Steegmuller, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 80.

¹² Tsubouchi Shōyō, *Shōsetsu shinzui (The Essence of the Novel)* (Tokyo: Shōgetsudō, 1887); Yi Kwangsu, "Munhak iran hao?" (What is literature?), *Maeil sinbo*, November 11-23, 1916.

However, there is a critical difference between North Korean literature and its counterparts, *Bildungsroman* and *shōsetsu*. Among emotions, the fear of death is the overarching theme in North Korean literature that depicts the country's most important historical events, such as Kim Il Sung's guerilla activities against Japanese colonizers in 1930s, the Korean War (1950-1953), and *konan ūi haenggun* (the Arduous March; the great famine and economic hardships from 1994 to 1998). The harsh conditions of war and famine begot a different kind of novel. It can be called the novel of martyrdom because the protagonist willingly sacrifices his or her life for the nation and the leader, and calmly accepts his or her own death.

Bildungsroman—novel of formation, of initiation, or of education—was a standard form of the novel in modern bourgeois society. That genre portrays a free individual's negotiations with the social norms. As Franco Moretti described, in *Bildungsroman*, "One must internalize" the social norms, and "fuse external compulsion with internal impulses" to the extent that they are no longer distinguishable.¹³

However, in the novel of martyrdom, one is initially inundated with the pain and shock caused by war and famine. There is no room to negotiate with "external compulsion." If the state demands his or her death, he or she would be willing to—actually, could not help but—comply with that order. Thus, unlike in *Bildungsroman*, one's trouble with the social order and his or her anxiety resulting from it are not major problems in the North Korean novel. Instead, the central theme of the North Korean genre of novel is how to cope with the fear of death in order to abide by the state's demands during harsh conditions. For example, Kim Namch'öl, a protagonist in

¹³ Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: the Bildungsroman in European Culture*, new edition, trans. Albert Sbaraglio (London and New York: Verso, 2000), 16.

Song Sangwŏn’s fictionalized biography of Kim Jong Il, *Taking Up Guns and Bayonets* (analyzed in Chapter 4), attempts to offer his life to fulfill the state’s order.

Kim Jong Il deployed his propaganda apparatus—the Department of Agitation and Propaganda (Agitprop)—to produce the North Korean type of novel. Protagonists in North Korean fictionalized history show readers how to transcend their fear of death. They overwhelm the fear with their anger at their enemies, such as Japan and America (the topic of Chapter 5). Starvation is portrayed as an ordeal that leads the characters in novels to death. However, Kim Jong Il’s vision of the nation’s bright future transforms the protagonists’ fear into bliss (illustrated in Chapter 3). Most importantly, fear is changed into a sublime and religious experience (examined in Chapter 4). The protagonists successfully suppress their fear of death and are willing to die as martyrs for the nation and their leader.

3. *Sasang* (Idea) and the “Arts of Existence”

Before exploring the aesthetic transformation of fear and the emotional metamorphoses depicted in North Korean literature (the topics of Chapters 3, 4, and 5), it is necessary to clarify the theoretical basis of North Korean literature in this introductory chapter.¹⁴ The religious features in North Korean culture are evident in Kim Jong Il’s lecture at a meeting of the Central Committee of the Korean Workers’ Party in November, 1994. He claimed that his late father Kim Il Sung has immortality as the father’s *sasang* (idea) would live forever in the North Korean

¹⁴ A further investigation into the theoretical—theological—aspect of North Korean literature will be conducted in Chapter 2.

people's "hearts."¹⁵ The son Kim's lecture prescribed how to write and read historical writing or novels in North Korea. All literary works—particularly, historical writing and novels—were expected to include and describe Kim Il Sung's *sasang* (idea), which was claimed to be the essence of *ryōksa* (history).

It is important to note that Kim Jong Il's key notions of literature, such as *sasang* and *ryōksa*, stem from Hegelianism (Hegel's Aesthetics and his historicism). The term *sasang* is a variant of Hegel's concept of "Absolute Idea," which is almost interchangeable with "World Spirit." In his *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (1820), Hegel argued, "History is the Idea clothing itself with the form of events."¹⁶ The "[Absolute] Idea" is the essence of "History" in Hegelian historicism. Kim Jong Il's *sasang* and *ryōksa* are the same as Hegel's "Idea" and "History." In fact, the North Korean notions are merely North Korean translations of the German concepts, although the North Korean regime claimed they were Kim Il Sung's original ideas. Marxism took an odd turn in North Korea: Marxist materialism returned to its archetype of Hegelian idealism. In other words, the North Korean regime highlighted the spiritual aspect of the Marxist idea by downplaying the importance of material affluence and economic development.¹⁷ Thus, it is useful to investigate the Hegelian roots of Kim Jong Il's thoughts on history and literature to understand the theoretical foundations of North Korea.

¹⁵ Kim Jong Il, "Chuch'e ūi sahoe chuūi wiōp ūl ongho kosu hago kkūtkkaji wansōnghayō nagaja" (Let Us Advocate, Stick to, and Complete thoroughly the Great Achievement of Juche Socialism) [1994], *Uriminzokkiri Internet Archive*, <http://www.uriminzokkiri.com/index.php?ptype=great&subtype=rozak&no=5716> (accessed: February 10, 2017).

¹⁶ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* [1820], § 346, *Marxists Internet Archive*, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/pr/prstate.htm#PR341> (accessed: February 13, 2017).

¹⁷ Kim Jong Il, "Sahoe chuūi ūi sasangchōk kich'o e taehan myōtkaji munje e taehayō" (On Some Problems Concerning the Ideological Foundation of Socialism: A Speech for the Executive Members of the Central Committee of the Korean Workers' Party, May 30, 1990), *Uriminjokkiri Internet Archive*,

When Kim Jong Il began directing the state's Department of Agitation and Propaganda (Agitprop) in 1967, he abolished the Research Center for the History of the Korean Workers' Party and reorganized it as the Research Center for the History of Comrade Kim Il Sung's Revolution. Moreover, he suspended publication of the country's most prestigious academic journal of history, *Ryōksa kwahak (Historical Science)*, and founded various national organizations of writers, artists, and filmmakers to rewrite national history.¹⁸ For example, in 1967, Kim Jong Il organized "Sairo munhak ch'angjakdan" (The April 15 Literary Production Unit), a state-run organization of the highest ranking writers, to publish biographies of his father Kim Il Sung, titled, *Pulmyōl ūi ryōksa (Immortal History)*. Kim Il Sung's biographies were written to be North Korea's national history under his son Kim Jong Il's supervision.

The Juche idea, which is said to have been founded by the father Kim, is the *gehalt* (content) of North Korea's historical narrative over which the son Kim supervised production.¹⁹ National history is considered to be the process in which Kim Il Sung's idea of the Juche Revolution—the North Korean version of anti-capitalism and anti-imperialism—became realized.²⁰ When Kim Il Sung died in 1994, his son Kim Jong Il declared that Kim Il Sung would live forever in that his "*sasang*" would be preserved as the content, essence, or *gehalt* of North

<http://www.uriminzokkiri.com/index.php?ptype=great&subtype=rozak&no=4210#pos> (accessed: March 22, 2017).

¹⁸ Kim Jong Il began to exert power over literature, art, media, and publications in 1967. It is said that, since 1969, he has been called "Dear Comrade Leader" by artists and writers. Yi Chongsök, *Saero ssün hyōndae Pukhan ūi ihae (Understanding Modern North Korea, new edition)* (Seoul: Yōksa pip'yōngsa, 2000), 499.

¹⁹ Kim Jong Il's idea of art and politics resides in Hegelian aesthetics; Kim advocated content-aesthetics (*Inhaltsästhetik*) in opposition to form-aesthetics (*Formalästhetik*). He denounced formalism along with naturalism, in his treatise on literature, *Chuch'e munhangnon (On Juche Literature)*. Kim Jong Il criticized naturalism and formalism for their lack of ideological ground. Moreover, he argued that Korean literature was in peril of being contaminated by Western formalism, which places more emphasis on form than content. Kim Jong Il, *On Juche Literature*, 47-56.

²⁰ Kim Jong Il, *Let Us Advance Under the Banner of Marxism-Leninism and the Juche Idea* (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1983), 8.

Korea's national history.²¹ The son Kim believed that his father's "*sasang*" would become a universal ideology for all humankind if all North Korean people would adhere to it from generation to generation.²²

The "historically realized idea" demonstrated in Kim Jong Il's addresses after his father's death—such as in his lecture at the Central Committee of the Korean Workers' Party in November, 1994—is the primary conception of Hegelian thought. In Hegelianism, there is all but no difference between a logically proved idea and a historically verified being. His notion of "idea" or "*Begriff*" is not logical or epistemological, but is an ontological category. Perhaps Alexandre Kojève gives the most accurate explanation of Hegelian concepts in his *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*.

Everything that is true, the true entity, the True, *das Wahre*, is a real entity, or Being itself, as revealed correctly and completely by coherent discourse having a meaning (*Logos*). And this is what Hegel also calls *Begriff*, concept; a term that means for him [...] not an "abstract notion" detached from the real entity to which it is related, but "conceptually understood reality." [...] "[L]ogical" thought that is supposed to be true, the concept that is supposed to be adequate, merely reveal or describe Being as it *is* or as it *exists*, without

²¹ Kim Jong Il, "Chuch'e ūi sahoe chuŭi wiŏp ūl ongho kosu hago kkŭtkkaji wansŏnghayŏ nagaja" (Let Us Advocate, Stick to, and Complete thoroughly the Great Achievement of Juche Socialism) [1994], *Uriminzokkiri Internet Archive*, <http://www.uriminzokkiri.com/index.php?ptype=great&subtype=rozak&no=5716> (accessed: February 10, 2017).

²² In 1994, North Korea's Agitprop produced a series of films titled, *Great President Comrade Kim Il Sung Will Live Forever*, to commemorate Kim Il Sung: 1. *Great President Comrade Kim Il Sung Will Live Forever in Our People's Heart*; 2. *Great President Comrade Kim Il Sung Will Live Forever in the Heart of All Our Nation*; 3. *Great President Comrade Kim Il Sung Will Live Forever in the Heart of All Humankind*; 4. *Great President Comrade Kim Il Sung Will be with Us Forever*. Kim Jong Il made positive comments about the documentary film series on September 2, and December 4, 1994. Kim Jong Il, "Widaehan Kim Il Sung tongji nŭn uri ūi inmin kwa minjok ūi maŭm soqe, illyu ūi maŭm soqe yŏngsaeng hal kŏsida" (Great President Comrade Kim Il Sung Will Live Forever in the Hearts of Our People, Our Nation, and All Humankind.) [1994], *Uriminzokkiri Internet Archive*, <http://uriminzokkiri.com/index.php?ptype=rozak&no=812#pos> (accessed: February 28, 2016).

adding anything to it, without taking anything from it, without modifying it in any way whatsoever.²³

Whatever is logically true is bound to be real, and thus an adequate idea or *Begriff* is supposed to be realized as a being. The Hegelian idea²⁴ of the true and the real is critical in understanding what *sasang* (idea) means in the North Korean context. Kim Jong Il believed his country would prevail because his father's *sasang* is true.²⁵ From his point of view, it appears that historical writing does not necessarily need to be factual as long as it is true. He produced an astonishing quantity of fictionalized biographies of his father as well as autobiographies that claimed to contain historical truth—his father's *sasang* and his interpretation of it.

Kim Il Sung's idea, or his son Kim Jong Il's interpretation of the Juche idea, performs a function as a deity, in that—the son Kim claimed—the idea exists in perpetuity and the creator and bearer of it (i.e., the father Kim) has immortality. In Kim Jong Il's thought, truth and reality overlap with immortality. Here art, particularly narrative, merits our attention.

Narratives—novels, historical writing, and film—illustrate the afterlife and construct the life-death continuum. Death invokes fear, since the afterlife is beyond our experience and thus fundamentally unknown to living beings. To overcome that fear, immortality should be envisioned. Knowledge about what we cannot experience is essential to control emotions caused

²³ Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit* [1947], ed. Allan Bloom; trans. James H. Nichols, Jr (New York and Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 170.

²⁴ The Hegelian logic of being comprises three parts of dialectic: "(a) the abstract or understandable aspect; (b) the dialectical or negatively rational aspect; (c) the speculative or positively rational aspect." Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, "Logik," in *Encyclopaedia*; quoted in Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 169.

²⁵ Kim Jong Il, "Sahoe chuŭi nŭn kwahak ida (Socialism is a Science)," *Rodong sinmun (The Workers' News Paper)*, November 1, 1994.

by the unknown. In other words, we need knowledge about the afterlife, even if it is superficial. Historical narratives, in which the sequence of events leads an idea to its perfection, facilitate the imagination of eternal life. This genre of writing can be clarified by George Kateb's discussion of the aesthetic view of life. Kateb's concept helps us understand how Kim Jong Il transformed the Hegelian idea of history and idea into a means of controlling people's lives and their emotions.

Kateb thought that a human could live in a moment of the entire process that realizes a great idea. A human can live forever as a component of an ideology. This is an aesthetic view of life and what Kateb called "aestheticism." Aesthetic attitudes and feelings toward life change a narrative into a life. Through aestheticism, the relationship of mimesis is reversed. As Kateb rightly described, aestheticism includes the thought that "a person's life is best lived when it is deliberately lived as a coherent narrative or story." One's life is made into a work of art.²⁶ In this way, narrative is transformed or elevated into what Michel Foucault termed "the arts of existence."

I am referring to what might be called "the arts of existence." What I mean by the phrase are those intentional and voluntary actions by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct but also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an *oeuvre* that carries aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria.²⁷

²⁶ George Kateb, "Aestheticism and Morality: Their Cooperation and Hostility," *Political Theory*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Feb., 2000), 26-28.

²⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1985), 10-11.

During his lifetime, Kim Jong Il urged people to live and die as if in a story about the soldiers of his father Kim Il Sung's anti-Japanese guerilla unit in the 1930s.²⁸ He celebrated the guerilla soldiers' loyalty to the father Kim as the utmost virtue for the people, while he proclaimed his father's thought, idea, or *sasang* of Korea's national liberation from Japanese colonial rule to be the essence, content, or *gehalt* of all the North Korean people's lives in the age of war against *Mi cheguk chu'ui* (American imperialism). In this story, death is no longer the object of terror because it is justified as a way of living forever as an actor in or subject of national liberation. Kim Il Sung and his guerrilla soldiers are the *al-salaf al-salih* (righteous forefathers) of North Korea.²⁹ Just as the Salafists urged the Muslims to emulate the Prophet Muhammad and his earliest followers, Kim Jong Il encouraged the North Korean people to model themselves on his father and the guerilla soldiers. Furthermore, he emphasized the original meanings of his father's *sasang*, by banning free interpretation of it. Socialism took a religious fundamentalist form under Kim Jong Il's rule in North Korea.

Kim Jong Il was a specialist in "the arts of existence" as in Foucault's discussion of a way of transforming a life into an *oeuvre*. He sought to create narrative, set it as a rule of conduct, and establish the rule as the way to eternal life. The stories of soldiers who dedicated their lives to the leader and the party were repeated and produced in quantity under the son Kim's direction. Fear

²⁸ For Kim Il Sung's military achievement as an anti-Japanese guerilla leader during the Japanese occupation of Korea, see Dae-Sook Suh, *Kim Il Sung: the North Korean Leader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), Wada Haruki, *Kim Nichisei to Manshū kōnichi sensō (Kim Il Sung and His War against Japan in Manchuria)* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1992), and Yi Chongsōk, *Saero ssūn hyōndae Pukhan ūi ihae (Understanding Modern North Korea, new edition)* (Seoul: Yōksa pip'yōngsa, 2000).

²⁹ "Our Party's revolutionary revolution that achieved absolute and unconditional unity of all ranks under Great President Comrade Kim Il Sung is our people's pride. We have great paragons: A President who loved the warriors of revolution; and our ancestors of the anti-Japanese revolution who dedicated their destiny to the President and served Him with loyalty. They cause our hearts to beat and be excited." Kim Jong Il, Chuch'e sasang kyoyang esō chegi toenūn myōkkaji munje e taehayō (On the Problems that arise in the Education of Juche Idea, 1986), *Uriminzokkiri Internet Archive*, <http://uriminzokkiri.com/index.php?ptype=rozak&no=814#pos> (accessed: February 27, 2016).

of death is changed into aesthetic values—specifically, sublimity. Life is lived as a story and a person’s life is transformed into a chapter of history. In the story or the history, the North Korean people collectively perfect Kim Il Sung’s idea or *sasang*. This aesthetic turn made by narrative allows *authority* in North Korea to emerge.

Authority originates in the power to produce the narratives that construct the life-death continuum, hinges upon the aestheticism that transforms a narrative into a life, and resides in emotional measures that augment emotions (e.g., fear) to the point of qualitatively changing themselves into aesthetic values (e.g., sublimity). As Alexandre Kojève has demonstrated, authority is the power that “does not encounter opposition from the person or persons towards whom it is directed.” The submission of the patient(s) to the agent is conscious and voluntary, because his, her, or their emotions are controlled by the narrative that authority creates.³⁰

Furthermore, authority is bestowed on the person who can control his or her emotions—most importantly, overcome the fear of death—and propose narratives with which people can live in accordance. In North Korean literature, Kim Jong Il is depicted as a person living life the way all North Korean people should live. He is also claimed as the ultimate author—actually the editorial supervisor—of North Korea’s official historical narratives. Being the actor and the author is the way in which Kim Jong Il seized absolute power in North Korea; he sought to transform life into certain stylistic criteria and monopolize the power of creating narrative to obtain political authority in North Korea.

The North Korean case of authority—the narrative-creating power that changes fear into the sublime and transforms a narrative into a life—would challenge “our Occidental idea of art,”

³⁰ Alexandre Kojève, *The Notion of Authority*, ed. François Terré; trans. Hager Weslati (London and New York: Verso, 2014), 7-13.

“our inert and disinterested idea of art,”³¹ or the Kantian aesthetics that views “the beautiful” as “giv[ing] us pleasure without interest.”³² North Korea’s authoritarian narrative illustrates the reversed relationship between life and art; the art that describes the sublime more than the beautiful; and the close interconnections between power and emotions. These features of North Korean authoritarian narrative will be demonstrated by examining the notions of proximity to and distance from the divine—more specifically, Kim Il Sung’s divine authority.

4. Proximity and Distance

What is at issue in the relationship between sublimity and authority is proximity to the divine. Proximity and distance to the divine are crucial terms that delineate North Korean literature, which is also defined as authoritarian and religious literature. The proximity to the divine invests one with authority, while the distance from it enables one to *aesthetically* experience death. These theses about proximity and distance will be demonstrated by drawing on Alexandre Kojève’s theory of authority and Paul de Man’s discussion of the aesthetic experience of the fear of death.

In Kojève’s theory, the ultimate form of authority is that of the dead father. He argued that death is the source of the highest authority, saying “Man has more Authority after his death than during his lifetime.” The basic reason that the condition or qualification of death invests a person

³¹ Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, trans. Mary Caroline Richards, (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1958), 10-11.

³² Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* [1887] and *Ecce Homo* [1908], ed. Walter Kaufmann; trans. Walter Kaufmann and RJ Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 104. Quoted in Giorgio Agamben, *The Man without Content*, trans. Georgia Albert, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 2.

with the ultimate form of authority is the physical impossibility to react against the dead. This impossibility guarantees a sacred character to the authority of the dead.³³ Kim Jong Il attempted to take advantage of his father's death, which also could have undermined his legitimacy. Under the son Kim's direction, literature was deployed as a means to demonstrate his proximity to his dead father. The living Kim could not be sacred himself, but his proximity to the father, as depicted in North Korean literature, could assure him a divine character.

In the *Gospel of John*, Jesus proves his divine power by restoring Lazarus to life four days after his death. This is one of the most prominent miracles attributed to Jesus, since Jesus proves his power over mortality. When Jesus sees Mary, one of Lazarus' sisters, and the Jews weeping over Lazarus' death, Jesus also weeps.³⁴ Perhaps, the short sentence, "Jesus wept," in *The Gospel of John*, is the most intriguing phrase that presents the emotional ties between Jesus and his followers. But Jesus is different. Jesus has the capacity to resurrect a human being while his followers do not. His proximity to God is the reason Jesus has divine power.

Kim Jong Il does not restore Chang Tuch'il, top engineer of the Hŭich'ŏn Factory, to life in *The Spirit of Kanggye*. As Jesus weeps over his follower's death, Kim Jong Il shares sadness with the people. However, he does not have the supernatural power to return biological life to his subject; Kim Jong Il is a human being, too. Even so, he is depicted as giving "socio-political life" to the dead during the great famine in 1990s.

Indeed, Kim Jong Il placed more emphasis on "socio-political life" than "biological life."³⁵ By giving "socio-political life" to all North Korean people, it was claimed that he restored the

³³ Alexandre Kojève, 14-15.

³⁴ *The Gospel of John*, 11:35. <http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/John-Chapter-11/> (accessed: February 27, 2016).

³⁵ Kim Jong Il, "Sahoe chuŭi nŭn kwahak ida" (Socialism is a Science), Rodong sinmun, November 1.

community of North Korea by his human authority. He owed his human—not divine—authority to his proximity to his dead father.

Comrade Kim Jong Il was deeply lost in thought. But soon, standing up and checking his wrist watch, he called Kwak Musŏn, Chief Personal Assistant, in a hurried tone.

“Where is my car? I am going to visit the President.”

Kwak Musŏn came into the office with a dark gray suit in hand. Declining Kwak’s help, Comrade Kim Jong Il changed his clothes from his Mao jacket to the formal suit himself.

After a while, the sedan He was in ran along Kŭmsŏng Street. It was the first car to be driven on the streets of the capital city on New Year’s Day. The sedan slid into the main gate of Kŭmsusan [Presidential] Palace. He went up the stairs towards the mortuary. Guards, who had stood without motion at the mortuary, saw Him coming to them and hurriedly presented arms. They were the guards who had escorted the President when he was alive.

Then, Comrade Kim Jong Il recalled the last New Year’s Day when He visited the Presidential Palace to give the New Year’s greetings to Father President. He felt like the President would welcome Him not in the mortuary but in the presidential office.³⁶

In Song Sangwŏn’s novel-like biography of Kim Jong Il, *Ch’onggŏm ūl tŭlgo (Taking up Guns and Bayonets)*, Kim Jong Il keeps in close proximity to the divine being, his dead father Kim Il Sung. He has no difficulty in seeing him, unlike Gilgamesh who embarked on an adventure to meet Utnapishtim. The Mesopotamian postdiluvian hero “dwells far away.”³⁷ On the contrary, the father Kim is spatially close to his son. Even after the father Kim died, the son Kim can visit him anytime he wants; the father Kim’s embalmed body is on display in the Kŭmsusan Palace of

³⁶ Song Sangwŏn, *Ch’onggŏm ūl tŭlgo (Taking up Guns and Bayonets)* (Pyongyang: Munhak yesul ch’ulp’ansa, 2002), 44.

³⁷ “In the past Ūta-napišti was (one of) mankind,
but now Ūta-napišti and his woman shall be like us gods!
Ūta-napišti shall dwell far away, at the mouth of the rivers!
They took me and settled me far away, at the mouth of the rivers.”
A. R. George, 717.

the Sun where he had worked as president of North Korea. Now he lies there in a coffin, under glass. The father Kim's palace becomes his mausoleum.

On New Year's Day in 1995, Kim Jong Il visits his dead father.³⁸ But he feels like his father is still alive and working in his office at the Presidential Palace. In the daytime, as is usual at mausoleums of socialist dictators such as Stalin and Mao Zedong, Kim Il Sung's mortuary is crowded with visitors and mourners. But the privilege to see him first on New Year's Day is given to Kim Jong Il, his biological son and legitimate heir.

That proximity granted near-divine authority to Kim Jong Il. But human authority still has the possibility of encountering opposition from persons towards whom it is directed. Therefore, he rendered his father "sacred," and sought to base his rule on his father's divine authority. The "sacred," as defined by Durkheim, is "something set apart or forbidden."³⁹ Thus, it can be said that Utnashitum is a sacred being because he "dwells far away." His sacred capacity of eternal life is also forbidden and thus Gilgamesh remains as a mortal being. However, Kim Il Sung—actually his embalmed body—is near his son's location. The secret of immortality also is allowed for the son Kim.

Kim Jong Il's proximity to the divine determines the features of North Korean literature and its historical writing. *The Epic of Gilgamesh* illustrates the difference between Utnashitum and Gilgamesh; myth and history. Gilgamesh attempted to learn from the mythical figure, but he

³⁸ In 1995, Kim Jong Il abolished the annual event in which the state leader reads the New Year Address on the radio. Song Sangwŏn's biography of Kim Jong Il describes the first day of the year after the father Kim died. Instead of reading the New Year Address as the state leader, the son Kim visits his dead father. In 2013, about one year after Kim Jong Il died, Kim Jong Un, his son and Kim Il Sung's grandson, revived the tradition that existed until 1994.

³⁹ Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Karen E. Fields (New York: Free Press, 1992 [1912]), 44.

failed because he lives not in mythical time but in historical time.⁴⁰ On the contrary, Kim Jong Il revived the religious aspects of mythical writing by rendering his dead father divine, and ultimately sought to transform history into myth.

This mythical and religious characteristic of North Korean literature challenges our common knowledge of literature. We tend to see the history of modern literature as a historical process in which literary space achieves its own autonomy from political domination such as nation and nationalism. Our sense of world literature indicates that literature frees itself from (national) history and politics.⁴¹

But Kim Jong Il created a different kind of literature with his closeness to divine power. He introduced the divine point of view into life and transformed a life into a spectacle. In other words, he sought to create aesthetic distance between the real actor in life and its spectator.

North Korean literature was designed to change people's lives into a spectacle even for its actors—the North Koreans—especially during the great famine in the 1990s. They were expected to be imbued with the dead father's point of view and watch their own lives through the father's perspective. Providing divine perception to the reader was the intended function of literature in North Korea. Even though the readers were far from the father, Kim Jong Il sought to mediate between the divine and the living. Only Kim Jong Il, who was secure in his proximity to his father, was seen as the person who could define how the Father President judged the people and how adequate their behaviors were from the father's point of view.⁴²

⁴⁰ David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), 73-74.

⁴¹ Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. M.B. DeBevoise (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2004), 85-87.

⁴² Yun Kidök, *Suryöng hyöngsang munhak (Literature for President's Image)* (Pyongyang: Munye ch'ulp'ansa, 1991), 491.

Here it is important to note that “life as a spectacle” is a precondition of the sublime experience. The distance between spectacle and spectator enables the latter to psychologically defend the danger of physical extinction. This is the practicality of the sublime as it is for Paul de Man’s Schiller. For Schiller, sublime experience helps us “survive, psychologically, the assault to which [we] are subjected.”⁴³ However, the assault is not real but imagined danger. Paul de Man quotes from Schiller to demonstrate the imagined danger that causes the sublime.

We call practically sublime any entity which makes us aware of our weakness as a natural creature, but which at the same time awakens an entirely different sort of resistance in us, resistance to the terror. This counterforce in no way rescues [us] from the physical existence of the danger, but what is infinitely more, it isolates our physical existence from our personality. It is therefore not a particular and individual material security, but an ideal security, which extends to all possible and imaginable situations, and of which we have to become conscious in the aesthetic contemplation of the sublime. It learns to consider the sensory part of our being, the only part of us that can be in danger, as an exterior natural object that is of no concern to our person, to our moral self.⁴⁴

The sublime experience is the aesthetic measure that a mortal being uses to cope with danger. Concerning aesthetic measures, Paul de Man highlights the nature of “self-preservation” in dangerous situations; “self-preservation” should be “a concrete physical thing and therefore the order of the real.” However, de Man asserts that sublime experience is not practical at all, because, through the aesthetic experience, “self-preservation becomes imagined instead of being really real.”⁴⁵ The person in danger cannot cope with real danger but resists only “the terror.”

⁴³ Paul de Man, *Aesthetic Ideology*, ed. Andrzej Warminski (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 140.

⁴⁴ J. C. F. Schiller, “On the Sublime (Toward the Further Development of Some Kantian Ideas)” [1801], in J. C. F. Schiller, *Essays*, ed. Walter Hinderer and Daniel O. Dahlstrom; trans. Daniel O. Dahlstrom (New York: Continuum, 1993), 35.

⁴⁵ Paul de Man, 144.

Thus, de Man illustrates what the sublime is with the following example: “It’s better not to be on the boat that’s being tossed up and down, it’s better to stand on the shore and see the boat being tossed up and down, if you want to have a sublime experience.”⁴⁶

Kim Jong Il provided the North Korean people a divine perspective and an alternative, religious reality with his narrative-creating power. This allowed North Korean readers of state-sanctioned narratives to imagine they could “stand on the shore and see the boat being tossed up and down.” But the reality of Kim Jong Il’s North Korea was that they were “on the boat that’s being tossed up and down.” They could have aesthetic distance from their own reality by seeing their lives through the father’s viewpoint. But, during the great famine, their proximity to physical extinction was obvious.

5. Beyond National Literature and the Moral Influence Theory

North Korean literature—what the North Korean propaganda apparatus calls history—cannot be fully understood without considering the differences in emotions emphasized in the literary works and its religious nature. But the majority of scholars studying North Korean literature have tended to miss the religious features of their research subject, since the socialism that the North

⁴⁶ Ibid., 142.

Korean regime defined as its political doctrine⁴⁷ has been regarded not as a religion but as secularism that rejects all forms of religious faith and worship.⁴⁸

A few scholars, such as Shin Hyung-ki and Kim Eun-Jung, highlighted the religious aspect of North Korean literature. Still, their studies center only on the moral influences exerted by state-produced historical writing on its readers, the North Korean people. They argued that North Korean literature depicting Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Il, and their loyal subjects is intended to bring moral change to the readers.⁴⁹ However, this dissertation goes further and examines the imaginations of immortality—the key element of North Korean religious culture—and various emotions such as fear, anger, and happiness promoted by the religious vision. This study intends to shed light on the aesthetic transformation—from fear to the sublime—and the emotional

⁴⁷ Kim Jong Il, “Sahoe chuŭi nŭn kwahak ida (Socialism is a Science),” *Rodong sinmun (The Workers’ News Paper)*, November 1, 1994.

⁴⁸ There are some scholars who have studied the liturgic aspects of North Korean politics and culture. For example, Kim Pyŏngno conducted comparative research on the cult of Kim Il Sung’s personality and Christianity. Jung Daeil also took notice of the religious nature of the personality cult in North Korea. However, their studies lacked the textual analysis of North Korean literature and historical writing, which is the purpose of this dissertation. Kim Pyŏngno, *Pukhan sahoe ūi chonggyosŏng: Juche sasang kwa Kidokkyo ūi chonggyo yangsik pigyo (The Religious Side of North Korean Society: A Comparative Research on the Religious Style of Juche Idea and Christianity)* (Seoul: T’ongil yŏn’guwŏn, 2000); Jung Daeil. “Pukhan ūi chonggyo chŏngch’aek yŏngu: Pukhan kukka chonggyo ūi sŏngnip kwajŏng ūl chungsim ūro” (A Study of North Korea’s Religious Policy), *Chonggyo yŏngu (Religious Study)*, Vol. 64 (2011).

⁴⁹ Shin Hyung-ki stressed the religious aspect of North Korean literature by conducting textual analyses on North Korean novels and poems. Shin Hyung-ki, *Minjok iyagi rŭl nŏmŏsŏ (Beyond the National-ist Narrative)* (Seoul: Samin, 2003). Kim Eun-Jung also investigates the religious features in North Korean literature. Kim Eun Jung, “Chŏngchijŏk yŏnch’ul kwa kiŏk ūi chaegusŏng: maengse wa kinyŏm ūl chungsim ūro” (Political Dramaturgy and Reconstruction of Memories: Focusing on the Oath and Commemoration), *Minjok munhak yŏn’gu* 52 (2013); “Ch’ongsŏ Ranam ūi yŏlp’ung kwa ūnp’yedoen yongmang ūi chŏngch’i” (*The Craze from Ranam, a Volume of The Immortal Leader Series, and the Politics of the Concealed Desire*), *Kukche ōmun* 39 (2007); “Chŏnt’ong kwa kŭndae ūi chaegusŏng ūl t’onghan abŏji ūi chaesangsan yangsang” (Reproducing the Father Figure through Rediscovery of Tradition and Modernity: Focusing on Holding the Bayonet, a Volume of Immortal Guide Series), *Kukche ōmun* 37 (2006).

metamorphoses—pain to happiness, anger to valor, and fear to bliss—that distinguish the North Korean novel from its counterparts, *Bildungsroman* and *shōsetsu*.

A number of South Korean scholars have recently conducted close readings of North Korean literature, despite the infamous legal barrier of *Kukka poanbŏp* (the National Security Law) in South Korea.⁵⁰ Moreover, some scholars outside South Korea have achieved admirable results in the study of North Korean literature.⁵¹ What many of their works still lack is their understanding of the religious nature of North Korean literature. Leading scholars in South Korea, such as Kim Chaeyong, Kim Sŏngsu, and Kim Chonghoe, likewise overlook the religious features in North Korean literature. They impart their knowledge of North Korean literature to the South Korean public in preparation for national reconciliation and unification between North and South Korea.⁵² The main purpose of their studies is to build *minjok munhak* (national literature).

⁵⁰ My study is indebted to some South Korean scholars' efforts to objectively read North Korean literature, for example: Shin Hyung-ki, *Pukhan sosŏl ūi ihae* (*Understanding North Korean Fiction*) (Seoul: Silch'ŏn munhaksa, 1996) and *Iyagidoen yŏksa* (*Narrated History*) (Seoul: Samin, 2005); Shin Hyung-ki and O Sŏngho, *Pukhan munhaksa* (*The History of North Korean Literature*) (Seoul: P'yŏngminsa, 2000); Kim Chaeyong, *Pukhan munhak ūi yŏksajŏk ihae* (*The Historical Understanding of North Korean Literature*) (Seoul: Munhak kwa chisŏngsa, 1994); Kim Yunsik, *Pukhan munhaksaron* (*A Discussion on the History of North Korean Literature*) (Seoul: Munhak sidaesa, 1996); Kwon Young-Min, *Pukhan ūi munhak* (*The Literature of North Korea*) (Seoul: Ŭlyu munhwasa, 1989); Kim Chonghoe, ed., *Pukhan munhak ūi simch'ŭngjŏk ihae* (*An In-depth Understanding of North Korean Literature*) (Seoul: Kukhak charyowŏn, 2012); and Kang Chinho, ed., *Pukhan ūi munhwa chŏngjŏn, ch'ongsŏ 'Pulmyŏl ūi ryŏksa' rŭl ilnŭnda* (*We Read 'Immortal History' Series, a North Korean Cultural Classic*) (Seoul: Somyŏng ch'ulp'an, 2009).

⁵¹ Bryan Myers, *Han Sŏrya and North Korean Literature: the Failure of Socialist Realism in the DPRK* (Ithaca: East Asian Program, Cornell University Press, 1994); Tatiana Gabroussenko, *Soldiers on the Cultural Front: Development in the Early History of North Korean Literature and Literary Policy* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press and Center for Korean Studies, University of Hawai'i, 2010); Sonia Ryang, *Reading North Korean Literature: An Ethnological Inquiry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2012), and Immanuel J. Kim, "North Korean Literature: Margins of Writing Memory, Gender, and Sexuality" (PhD diss., University of California Riverside, 2012).

⁵² Kim Chonghoe, "Nae ka Pukhan munhak ūl yŏn'gu hanŭn iyu" (The Reason I Study North Korean Literature), *Dong-a Ilbo*, August 28, 2012.

Another problem in the previous studies is that some scholars, such as Tatiana Gabroussenko, overestimate Russian influences in North Korean culture, in significant part because the scope of their studies is limited to the state's very early period. It is evident that some Soviet officers—including N.G Lebedev, A.A. Romanenko, and T.F. Shtykov—played a significant role in founding the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and exerted their influence in the fields of propaganda and the arts in this new socialist state.⁵³ It is also true that *Cho-sso munhwa hyōphoe* (the Korean-Soviet Culture Society), a branch of the Soviet All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (VOKS), took the lead in the formation of North Korean culture.⁵⁴ However, North Korean literature since the 1960s cannot be accounted for only through traces of Russian influence because the Kim regime emphasized the Korean national character in literature to secure the country's political and cultural independence from the Soviet Union in the post-Stalin period.⁵⁵

South Korean scholars who chose new approaches to North Korean literature emerged in the twenty-first century. Jeon Young Sun is one of a new generation of scholars in South Korea. He adopts a practical approach by focusing on the function of literature in North Korea.⁵⁶ Jeon

⁵³ Andrei Lankov, *From Stalin to Kim Il Sung: The Formation of North Korea, 1945-1960* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 2-3.

⁵⁴ The Korean-Soviet Culture Society published its flagship journal, *Cho-sso munhwa* (Korean-Soviet Culture). In 1956, it changed its name to *Cho-sso ch'insŏn hyōphoe* (Korean-Soviet Friendship Society). Charles K. Armstrong, *The North Korean Revolution, 1945-1950* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003), 172.

⁵⁵ Kim Jong Il, *Juche munhangnon (On Juche Literature)* (Pyongyang: Chosŏn Rodongdang ch'ulp'ansa, 1992), 29-34

⁵⁶ Jeon Young Sun, *Pukhan ūi munhak kwa yesul (Literature and Art in North Korea)* (Seoul: Yōngnak, 2004) and "Iyagi pangsik ūl t'onghan Pukhan ch'eje chōngdanghwa yōngu: ch'ongsō *Pulmyōl ūi ryōksa wa yōnghwa Chosŏn ūi pyōl ūl chungsim ūro*" (A Study on Literary Features of the Series *The History of Immortality* and Public Persuasion Strategies of the Revolutionary Arts: Focusing on the Film *The Star of Chosun*). *Pukhan yōn'gu hakhoebo*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (2009).

argues that, in North Korea, literature is used as a means of propaganda for the regime.⁵⁷ It seems that he does not concern himself with the nationalist mission: building national literature. Oh Chang-eun is another scholar who rejects the idea of national literature. He suggests that the study of North Korean literature should focus on discovering the North Korean people's voices that are hidden in the literary works.⁵⁸

Shin Hyung-ki also pays little attention to the nationalist mission—building a Korean national literature—although he is one of the first generation of South Korean scholars studying North Korean literature. He sees North Korean literature as a history of legitimation.⁵⁹ The main narrative of his study is that the regime operated its propaganda apparatus to produce history to justify the father Kim Il Sung's rule and the son Kim Jong Il's succession to his father's political leadership. This type of history—a history of legitimation—is so common that it has been found in almost all civilizations.⁶⁰ The role of historical writing has been the certification of the ruler's legitimacy. Shin attempts to grasp that universal pattern of historical prose.

What merits our attention in Shin's scholarly works is that he is the first person who highlighted the religious aspect of North Korean literature. Since 1988, when the ban on North Korean literature was lifted, the study of North Korean literature in South Korea has been

⁵⁷ Pae Sŏngin and Chang Sasŏn also take the practical stance on North Korean literature. Pae Sŏngin, "Kim Jong Il sidae Pukhan munhak ūi tonghyang kwa t'ŭkching" (The Trends and Features in North Korean Literature Kim Jong Il's Rule), *Pukhan yŏngu*, Vol. 7 (2004); Chang Sasŏn, "Pukhan ūi ch'eje suho kŭkpok munhak tamnon yŏngu" (A Study of North Korea's Literary Discourse after the Death of Kim Il Sung), *Kukche hanin munhak yŏn'gu* 8 (2011).

⁵⁸ Oh Chang-eun, "Pukhan munhak ūi michŏk pop'yŏnsŏng kwa chŏngch'ijŏk t'ŭksusŏng" (The Aesthetical Universality and Political Specificity of North Korean Literature), *Pan'gyo ōmun yŏn'gu* 41 (2015).

⁵⁹ Shin Hyung-ki and O Sŏngho, *Pukhan munhaksa (The History of North Korean Literature)* (Seoul: P'yŏngminsa, 2000).

⁶⁰ Michel Foucault, "Society Must Be Defended:" *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976*, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), 65-85.

stimulated by nationalism. The peak of the unification movement in South Korea occurred in the late-1980s. At that time, scholars actively engaged in producing a discourse on national unification, writers attempted to establish cordial relations with the North Korean literary circle, and crowds of students poured into the streets demanding inter-Korean talks. But the zeal for unification gradually cooled down throughout the 1990s.

At the turn of the century, Shin Hyung-ki began reflecting upon the fever of the nationalist movement and the failure of the nationalist approach to North Korean literature. To him, nationalism caused the scholars of literature and writers to overlook moral and political problems, such as aggressive patriotism and excessive loyalty to their own race. To criticize Korean nationalism in the late twentieth century, he explored the relationship among nationalist literature or what he called “national-ist narrative,” morality, and the emotion of *kamŭng* (sympathy).

There has been no warm *inside* which the nation-narrative and the story of *minjung* (people) have described. The humanics of *kamŭng* (sympathy) labels those who are not sympathized (with a moral being) as non-human. North Korean literature thus describes how *todŏkjŏk chonjae* (moral being) awakens others’ sense of morality and encourages their devotion to sincerity. In this orbit of *kamŭng* (sympathy), Kim Il Sung, the moral being, is the center around which everyone should revolve. If one is not grateful for the grace and the favor that this “heavenly” leader has given, one cannot be human. And if someone goes against what is right for humans and what humans should do, he or she should be fixed or eliminated. Fear is actual force; the fear that one can be excluded and removed from this moral (and rather religious) community is the actual force that has maintained the North Korean society.⁶¹

⁶¹ Shin Hyung-ki, *Minjok iyagi rŭl nŏmŏsŏ (Beyond the Nationanl-ist Narrative)* (Seoul: Samin, 2003), 40.

Shin's criticism centers on "national-ist narrative." He holds that nationalist literature is based on emotions such as *kamŭng* (sympathy) and fear of expulsion. In North Korean national-ist narrative, people are expected to sympathize with the leader, a moral being. If not, they should be excommunicated from the nation where they belong. Shin's argument stems from the moral influence (or exemplar) theory of atonement, which is also defined as Christian moralism. That theory originally claimed that the life and death of Jesus Christ brought positive moral change to humankind. It is one of the oldest views of Christian theology, and was elaborated on by the Apostolic Fathers in the first and second centuries AD.⁶² North Korean literature adopted the theological view to describe and build North Korean society as a moral community. Shin grasps the importance of *kamŭng* (sympathy), which can also be translated as "moral influence,"⁶³ and its religious connotation.⁶⁴

However, Shin Hyung-ki overemphasizes the moral aspect of "national-ist narrative," missing its aesthetic features. The life and death of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il should be the moral exemplar for the North Korean people. But, if they follow the way the leaders lived and died, the exemplar would cause the people's fear of death. It is more than moral influence; the fear of death is an aesthetical experience. According to Edmund Burke and Paul de Man, the fear of death can be changed into the sublime, the quality of greatness beyond all possible calculation, measurement, and imitation. To better understand the religious aspect of North Korean literature, we must examine the fear of death—the emotion that one cannot sublimate

⁶² Robert S. Franks, *A History of the Doctrine of the Work of Christ in Its Ecclesiastical Development*, Vol. 1 (London: Hodder and Stoughton), 14, <https://archive.org/stream/historyofdoctrin01franuoft#page/14/mode/2up> (accessed: February 5, 2017).

⁶³ Kim Eun-Jung also borrowed her theoretical basis from the moral influence theory, although she did not mention it.

⁶⁴ The term *kamŭng* originated in a Confucian notion of ganying (cosmic resonance), which is found in *Lúnǔyǔ* (*The Analects*). But what Shin means by the term *kamŭng* is more analogous to "sympathy" in Christian theology.

without religious imaginations of immortality. The meanings of *immortality* and *divine authority*, Kim Jong Il's theoretical and theological constructs, can be clarified only if the aesthetic transformation of fear is examined.

Moreover, the relationships among different emotions are overlooked in the previous studies. North Korean literature often depicts emotional metamorphosis; pain becomes happiness, anger turns into valor, and fear is altered to bliss. This emotional metamorphosis was designed to help the readers—the North Korean people—change their negative feelings into socially and politically acceptable forms. In other words, it aimed to make the people docile and compliant.

This study scrutinizes the fear of death—the aesthetic foundation of North Korean political religion—and emotional metamorphoses—the Kim Jong Il regime's method to secure its political legitimacy—by analyzing North Korean historical writing.

6. Chapters

In the first chapter, I review previous scholarship in North Korean studies and discourses on the notion of authority. I suggest functionalism as the methodology of North Korean studies, through the criticism of moralism in U.S. international politics and South Korean nationalism. Drawing on Michel Foucault's analysis of power, this chapter focuses on the power dynamic of North Korean culture and politics. Simply put, I seek to show how effective Kim Jong Il's rule was, instead of whether the regime was good or evil.

In the second chapter, I examine Kim Jong Il's power—religious authority—of creating narrative by revisiting existing discussions on the notions of authority (e.g., authors Max Weber, Alexandre Kojève, Jacques Lacan, and Giorgio Agamben), *potentia* (e.g., Benedictus de Spinoza, Antonio Negri, and Shin Hyunki), and affect (e.g., Giles Deleuze and Brian Massumi).

The third chapter illustrates how Kim Jong Il reshaped people's emotions through the systematic promotion of happiness. His reform of emotions was enabled by his monopolization of the power to write history. Purging disloyal elites from the party and the government in the late 1960s, Kim established a system in which government-supported writers manufactured stories of the Kim family to consolidate the population's faith in him and distribute optimism for the country's future.

In the fourth chapter, I suggest that the regime transformed fear of death into an encouragement to work. Through an analysis of North Korean stories of “working fast and dying voluntarily,” I show that the regime designed labor as a way of self-enlightenment and redefined death as a qualification to becoming a legitimate member of the nation. Here Kim Jong Il's near-divine authority in establishing “working to death” as a major theme in North Korean art and as a norm for the people's everyday lives mirrors Achille Mbembe's notion of “sovereignty,” which is defined as “the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die.” In other words, Kim Jong Il exercised sovereign power by defining death as the most sublime end to laborers' lives during the great famine and the economic crisis of the 1990s.

The fifth chapter focuses on the way in which North Korean art and literature dealt with negative feelings such as alienation and anger. The Kim regime claimed that North Korean workers overcame alienation from technology by establishing mastery over it. But, such mastery did not exist. By comparing Kim Saryang's war report with Marinetti's *The Futurist Manifesto*, I

show that the Kim regime used a method to promote rage and transform it into power for fighting, working, and revolution. But, I propose that underneath the North Koreans' rage against their enemy—the Americans—and their joy in overcoming alienation we can hear their cries of pain.

Chapter One

Overcoming Abhorrence: Idealism and Functionalism in North

Korean Studies

The sedan in the Kumsusan Palace of the Sun.
When I see it standing in a solemn silence,
I feel like Our General is about to open the car door and step down with a big smile,
just like the day when he came all the way from the front lines.

How far and long has the sedan run?
All over the country, three hundred and sixty five days,
How many people with intense ardor and touching stories
have been reflected in the car window?

- Kwak Myōngch'ōl, In Front of the Sedan¹

Kim Jong Il's sedan is on display in the Kumsusan Palace of the Sun at Pyongyang.² Just like the war plane, cannon, and machine gun in the Japanese Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo, Kim Jong Il's car in the Palace illuminates the close relationship between authoritarianism and modern

¹ Kwak Myōngch'ōl, "Sūngyongch'a ap esō" (In Front of the Sedan), *Chosŏn munhak (North Korean Literature)*, December 2013. All translations are the author's unless otherwise indicated.

² In the Kumsusan Palace of the Sun, there are exhibitions of not only Kim Jong Il's car, but also medals that were conferred on him by his father, Kim Il Sung, and the train and ship that he used. Kim Jong Un, Kim Jong Il's son and the current leader of North Korea, looked around the exhibitions to celebrate his father's birthday on February 16, 2015. "Chosŏn inmin'gun ch'oego saryōnggwan Kim Jong Un tongji kkesō Kwangmyōngsōngjŏl ūl chūmhayō Chosŏn inmin'gun chihwi sōngwōndŭl kwa hamkke Kūmsusan t'aeyang kungjŏn ūl ch'ajūsiyōtta" (Comrade Kim Jong Un, Supreme Commander of the North Korean People's Army Visited the Kumsusan Palace of the Sun along with the Members of the Military Headquarters on the occasion of the Kwangmyōngsōng Day), *Rodong sinmun*, February 16, 2015.

technology, politics and machine. His rule is symbolized and consecrated by a form of modern technology—the car. It seems that his sedan helps makes visible the discrepancy between technology and teleology: the fact that the North Korean style of state socialism is a facet of modernity. The teleological accounts of democracy and capitalism no longer explain the reason Kim’s totalitarian regime is so resilient. The present we are facing indicates that idealism in American foreign policy no longer works to understand and handle North Korea.³

This chapter revisits two trends in North Korean studies: Some Western observers fail to understand North Korea’s political resilience, while others find the reason for the regime’s success in culture and history. The former adhere to the teleological narrative of post-Cold War times, whereas the latter grasp the complexity of the dynamic of power in both international politics and North Korea’s domestic affairs. The major part of this chapter is devoted to the review of two books. Suzy Kim’s *Everyday Life in the North Korean Revolution, 1945-1950* and Charles K. Armstrong’s *Tyranny of the Weak: North Korea and the World, 1950-1992*. Through the reexamination of these previous studies, this chapter sheds light on the importance of “power” in the studies of political cultures, and suggests “functionalism” be used in North Korean studies. By functionalism, I mean a Foucauldian method that focuses more on how power works than on what it means or how it is evaluated. This Foucauldian method would help us be free of the influence of our heritage of social norms, ethical values, belief systems, and political systems. This value-free approach in North Korean studies is a useful way to apprehend

³ By Idealism, I mean American tradition of foreign policy which did not preclude the use of force for the country’s own causes (e.g., punishment for terrorism). This is a contrast to Continental European tradition of geopolitical realism, in that American tradition emphasized morality by downplaying European countries’ practical approach to international relations. For the ideological foundations of American foreign policy, see Walter Russell Mead, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World* (New York: Routledge., 2002), 34-39.

the religious characteristics of North Korean historical writing and the people's emotions expressed in it, which are the subjects of this dissertation, in that our own value system often hinders us from an objective assessment to the other cultures including North Korean political religion.

Before exploring North Korean political religion, historical writing, and literature (in Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5), this preliminary chapter calls attention to the ethical and epistemological problems in American understanding of North Korea—in other words, North Korean studies in the West, particularly in America.

1. Teleological Narrative after the Cold War

Hwang Changyöp (1923-2010), the highest ranking North Korean defector to date, affirmed the imminent fall of Kim Jong Il by adopting Hegelian historicism. In his memoir, *I Saw the Truth of History*, he claims that he jettisoned his social privilege as a member of Kim Jong Il's royal family and defected to the capitalist world because the collapse of the Kim regime is “the truth of history.”⁴

The teleological view on history is pervasive even among American elite.

⁴ Hwang Changyöp, *Na nŭn yŏksa ũi chilli rŭl poatta (I Saw the Truth of History)* (Seoul: Sidae chöngsin, 2006).

As history marches toward markets and democracy, some states have been left by the side of the road. . . These regimes (Kim Jong Il's North Korea and Saddam Hussein's Iraq) are living on borrowed time, so there need be no sense of panic about them.⁵

Condoleezza Rice, George W. Bush's foreign policy advisor for the 2000 presidential election, asserted in 2000 that the end of the North Korean and Iraqi regimes was coming. Her militarist tone and teleological rhetoric are striking: "History marches toward markets and democracy." And yet, another history was on the march at the same time in North Korea.

All anticipation of Kim's authoritarian regime falling appeared to be wrong. The Democratic Republic of Korea was not historically regressive or politically frail. As it turns out, there is no historical necessity or universal rule in regard to the collapse of the socialist regime. Kim Jong Il declared, "Do not expect any change in me," in February 1996. He proudly showed the consistency between speech and action throughout his life. He allowed the introduction of partial economic change, but never adopted a Chinese-style socialist market economy or social reforms like *glasnost* and *perestroika*. Notwithstanding the dismantlement of the Soviet bloc, his regime remained firm. This North Korean case does not fit into a typical post-Cold War narrative.

Kim Jong Il's survival instincts were impressive. While his regime often issued military threats by exhibiting their development of nuclear weapons and long-range missiles to South Korea, Japan, and the United States of America, he was careful not to overdo it. The North Korean government ruined the United States' national missile defense (NMD), pulled out of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), and at the same time reinforced its deterrent power by

⁵ Condoleezza Rice, "Promoting the National Interest," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 79, No. 1 (Jan.-Feb. 2000), 60-61.

equipping itself with nuclear and bio-chemical weapons. Although Western observers often deemed him megalomaniacal and delusional, Kim was in fact a cold-hearted realist. It seems that he understood that war would result in the end of his regime. He used military threats as a means to deter war, not to wage war. During the Cold War, the United States of America developed nuclear weapons in order to deter war with the socialist super power, the Soviet Union. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea did the same after the Cold War. It must have appeared as an unpleasant mimicry to the United States government.

Throughout his lifetime, Kim Jong Il achieved two major strategic successes that allowed his regime to survive the Soviet fall and North Korea's economic devastation from 1994 until his death. First, he devoted North Korea's human and natural resources to developing nuclear weapons, recognizing that chemical or biological weapons would fall short of being "detering" technologies. The First Gulf War may have been a lesson to Kim Jong Il. Lacking nuclear power and having only chemical weapons, Saddam Hussein's regime failed to establish the barrier of deterrence. As Paul Virilio has pointed out, "the Gulf Crisis" in 1991 appeared not to be a conflict between "good" and "evil," but an opposition between "atomic" and "chemical."⁶ The historical lesson for Kim Jong Il was that only those who adapt themselves to the world order dominated by American imperial power or hold nuclear weapons can secure their political sovereignty. Kim Jong Il took the latter path. Consequently, he contrived to secure his regime against the United States and capitalism, despite his country's and its people's affliction with poverty and famine. Second, he integrated the civilian into the military in such a way that a high percentage of the labor force was enlisted into the armed forces. This is called "Songun

⁶ Paul Virilio, *Desert Screen: War at the Speed of Light* [1991], trans. Michael Degener (London and New York: Continuum, 2005), 14-15.

chǒngch'i" (Military-First politics), which puts the military above the civilian. This policy paralyzed the U.S. government's counter-value strategies against the North Korean population, while North Korea's military power with its formidable nuclear weapons and long-range missiles disabled the U.S. forces' counter-force strategies against the DPRK army.

The Kim regime has survived and our common understanding of the historical fate of the socialist state was proven to be wrong. Therefore, it is necessary to adopt a new approach to North Korea given the failure of U.S. North Korean policy and U.S. studies of North Korea based on false predictions about the socialist state.

2. New Trends in North Korean Studies

The problem with North Korean studies, particularly in North America, is that the majority of researchers devote themselves to political agendas such as why and how to disarm North Korea and overthrow the regime. Their studies have been conducted for practical purposes. But the more they are committed to practical issues, the more they lose the practicality of their knowledge. While it is successful in containing war on the Korean peninsula, the U.S. government has not succeeded in reaching its goals, such as regime change, in North Korean policy. Even worse, after the Arab Spring failed, the U.S.'s grand strategy in general has lost ground in both international politics and academia.⁷

⁷ Gray Colin, Professor of Politics and International Relations at the University of Reading, defines "grand strategy" as the "purposeful employment of all instruments of power available to a security community." Gray Colin, *War, Peace and International Relations: An Introduction to Strategic History* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2007), 283. Peter Feaver, Professor of Political Science and Public

Jack Miles, General Editor of *The Norton Anthology of World Religions*, has pointed out that the fiasco of American foreign policy is rooted in a lack of understanding about the cultural traditions of other civilizations, such as Islamic culture, in devising a grand strategy. For Miles, the humanities such as literature, history, philosophy, and arts have long been marginalized from the processes of making U.S. foreign policy.⁸

However, some remarkable academic achievements in North Korean studies have been produced outside of the mainstream “security elite” in the USA, particularly from some scholars in the humanities.⁹ They are Charles K. Armstrong’s *Tyranny of the Weak: North Korea and the World, 1950-1992* (2013), Suzy Kim’s *Everyday Life in the North Korean Revolution, 1945-1950* (2013), Sonia Ryang’s *Reading North Korea: An Ethnological Inquiry* (2012), and Heoik Kwon’s *North Korea: Beyond Charismatic Politics* (2012), among others.

In his recent book on North Korean history, *Tyranny of the Weak*, drawing on a Machiavellian, realist view on politics, Armstrong makes a historical investigation of the reason

Policy at Duke University, elaborates on the term as follows: “Grand strategy [...] refers to the collection of plans and policies that comprise the state’s deliberate effort to harness political, military, diplomatic, and economic tools together to advance that state’s national interest. Grand strategy is the art of reconciling ends and means. It involves purposive action—what leaders think and want. Such action is constrained by factors leaders explicitly recognize (for instance, budget constraints and the limitations inherent in the tools of statecraft) and by those they might only implicitly feel (cultural or cognitive screens that shape worldviews).” Peter Feaver, “What is grand strategy and why do we need it?” *Foreign Policy*, April 8, 2009, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2009/04/08/what-is-grand-strategy-and-why-do-we-need-it/> (accessed: February 29, 2016).

⁸ Jack Miles, “Why Are We Losing in the Middle East? Too Much STEM, Not Enough Humanities,” *The Huffington Post*, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jack-miles/middle-east-stem-humanities_b_7109536.html (accessed: February 29, 2016).

⁹ As Perry Anderson put it, America’s security elite has produced the literature of grand strategy. The security elite “extends across the bureaucracy and the academy to foundations, think-tanks, and media. It forms a group in “the Council on Foreign Relations, the Kennedy School in Harvard, the Woodrow Wilson Center in Princeton, the Nitze School at Johns Hopkins, the Naval War College, Georgetown University,” the Brookings and Carnegie Institutions, “the Departments of State and of Defense,” “the National Security Council and the CIA.” Anderson criticizes that the “security elite” is “confined within the bounds of a professional discipline and peer-review machinery.” Perry Anderson, “Consilium,” *New Left Review*, Vol. 83, September-October, 2013. 113.

the North Korean regime did not collapse even after the Eastern bloc was dismantled. Suzy Kim's *Everyday Life in the North Korean Revolution* sheds light on the socio-cultural changes in the everyday life of North Korea during the socialist revolution (1945-1950) in the *milieu* of the global transformation of the early twentieth century: the advent of socialist states such as the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. These two books criticize the American security elite's scholarly trend that is based on so-called "American crusading moralism" and aims for "capitalist modernity."

Perhaps the two most noteworthy works on North Korea produced by the security elite are Victor Cha's *The Impossible State: North Korea, Past and Future* (2012) and Ralph C. Hasig and Kongdan Oh's *The Hidden People of North Korea: Everyday Life in the Hermit Kingdom* (2012).¹⁰ These American elites who work on foreign affairs urge U.S. policy makers to adopt "information operation," an archetype of "counter-value strategy," for regime change in North Korea. They expect that more information about the capitalist world outside North Korea would enlighten North Koreans about the regime's cruelty and their miserable lives. Therefore, despite devoting a large portion of their works to the historical examination of the socialist state, their conclusions focus on how to send the North Korean people as much information as possible from the U.S. government and non-governmental organizations.

However, historians such as Armstrong and Suzy Kim concentrate on a scholarly approach to North Korea's past and refrain from seeking America's future plan in the region. On the other hand, Heonik Kwon, a sociologist at the University of Cambridge, and Sonia Ryang, an

¹⁰ Victor Cha is a former Director for Asian Affairs in the White House's National Security Council and George W. Bush's top advisor on North Korean affairs. He is currently a professor at Georgetown University. Kongdan Oh was "a nonresident senior fellow at the Brookings Institution and is an Asian specialist at the Institute for Defense Analyses. She is also a member of the Council on Foreign Relations" <http://www.brookings.edu/experts/ohk> (accessed: February 29, 2016).

anthropologist at Rice University, cast light on the country's culture such as its literature, film, architecture, and philosophy. Kwon and Ryang do not attempt to provide political advice to U.S. or U.K. policy makers. Yet, in a roundabout way, all four authors suggest a new approach to North Korean policy for the U.S. and U.K. governments and audiences.

The notion of "power" is the main subject in the works of the non-security elite scholars (Armstrong, Kim, and Kwon) except Sonia Ryang. In other words, they have little interest in "what is right and good" but pay attention to "how it works." But they have subtle nuances. First, Charles K. Armstrong's "power" is a Machiavellian sense of powers such as *imperium* and *potestas*. He criticizes the U.S. foreign policy for depending on *imperium* (military power) and urges the U.S. government to recognize the North Korean regime as a real power in the region. Second, Suzy Kim's notion of power is a Spinozian concept of power which is *potentia* (power or potentiality). She seeks to find people's *potentia* in the early stages of North Korea's socialist revolution before Kim Il Sung paralyzed the people's potentiality by seizing absolute domination over the state. Third, charismatic authority is the notion of power on which Kwon's study draws. His work theoretically depends on a Weberian typology of domination such as legal, traditional, and charismatic dominations and Wada Haruki's terminology, for example, the partisan, the family, and the theater states. Through examination of North Korean culture, he rejects the common understanding by which Western observers see the North Korean people's submission to the regime enforced. Sonia Ryang's book is not about power. Still, it displays a new trend in North Korean studies. Her study gives thoughtful consideration to the notion of human, and, through close reading of North Korean fiction, she attempts to "humanize" North Koreans. She argues that the North Korean people must be different from us and many aspects of their culture are not acceptable. But, she implies that they are still humans like us.

These four scholars pave the way to a new understanding of North Korea, especially its culture and history. These cultural and historical studies, as Jack Miles proposes, would correct the drawbacks of American foreign policy, despite not being explicitly intended as political advice. More importantly, they might widen and deepen our knowledge and understanding of North Korea.

3. “Multiple Modernities” and “Value-Free Social Science”

To trace back to the origin of the new trend in North Korean studies, it is necessary to look at Bruce Cumings, a giant figure in North Korean scholarship. His extensive work on the Korean War, *Origins of the Korean War* (two volumes, published in 1981 and 1990 respectively) changed the landscape of North Korean studies. His main argument—“the Korean War did not begin on June 25, 1950,” “Kim II Sung could not have ‘started’ it”—in the book was refuted.¹¹ Still, outside of the security elite, he established an academic field that focuses on the twentieth-century international relationship between East Asia and the USA; the East and the West. The new trend in the field of North Korean studies originates in his discussion on the multiplicity and the conflict of civilizations. Unlike the American security elite, he saw socialist modernity as not inferior to capitalist modernity.¹²

¹¹ Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (London and New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997), 283. Cumings' argument has been countered by a number of scholars such as Wada Haruki and Pak Myōngnim. Wada Haruki, *Chōsen Sensō (Korean War)* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1995). Pak Myōngnim, *Han'guk chōnjaeng ūi palbal kwa kiwōn (The Outbreak and Origin of the Korean War)* (Seoul: Nanam ch'ulp'an, 1996).

¹² Bruce Cumings, *North Korea: Another Country* (New York: The New Press, 2004).

Cumings' theory of "multiple modernities" heavily influenced Suzy Kim's study of the North Korean revolution. For Suzy Kim, North Korea's socialist revolution in the late 1940s was a part of the world-wide socialist modernity. What is interesting in her book is that she attempts to find the positive aspects of socialist modernity—the creative nature of the revolution. Suzy Kim asserts that the North Korean people's power (*potentia; puissance*) was not suppressed or exploited by Kim Il Sung during the earliest stage of the North Korean revolution (1945-1950). It happened during the times before Kim Il Sung and his cohorts established dictatorship and intensified the cult of his personality. Casting light on numerous changes in everyday life (e.g., the abolishment of traditional hierarchies and the establishment of comradely relationships in local communities), she demonstrates that socialist modernity should be understood as a kind of "multiple modernities" or alternative modernity.

Suzy Kim approaches the topic of modernity from a new point of view. Korean studies in North America have been long dominated by a discussion of "colonial modernity." Her study gives a new insight into the existing scholarship because of her focus on the North Korean people's autonomy in building their modern nation-state. However, it is also obvious that her view can be seen as naïve. The narrative that people's passion for the revolution was distorted by Stalinism, state socialism, and socialist dictatorship was repeatedly produced by European socialists and Trotskyists at the turn of the twenty-first century.¹³ Suzy Kim follows the same historical narrative; she romanticizes the incipient stage of socialist revolution, recalling and reflecting the failure of socialism in the twentieth century.

¹³ For example, British film maker Ken Loach's *Land and Freedom* (1995) shows how young anarchists in the government-backed International Brigades fight for the republican side in the Spanish Civil War, and how their passionate dreams are frustrated by Stalinists.

Additionally, a question posed in her study is whether the “socialist modernity” Suzy Kim attempts to illustrate with the case of the North Korean revolution can really be equivalent to capitalist modernity. Socialism has never changed the capitalist modes of production. It is hardly probable that socialism can be an alternative to capitalism. Moreover, the historicity of the subject in the revolution is in doubt. Drawing on Negri and Hardt’s post-Marxist theory of “multitude,” she finds hope and possibility in revolutionary subjectivity. The subject of the revolution is the people who “bring together diverse interests through direct participation in self-governance.”¹⁴ But this type of human can be understood from the Romanticist point of view on subjectivity—“Man as Creator”—which emphasizes “individual character, will and activity.”¹⁵ It is doubtful that aesthetic subjectivity really emerged in the earliest ages of North Korea.

In addition to Suzy Kim, Charles K. Armstrong is an academic inheritor of Cumings’ North Korean studies. Armstrong attempts to give advice to U.S. policy makers by stressing the importance of *Realpolitik*. Throughout his book, *Tyranny of the Weak*, he maintains his critical stance toward the George W. Bush administration’s foreign policy that relied on *imperium* (military power). Focusing on the function of power in the North Korean policy of the USA, China, and the Soviet Union, Armstrong examines how effectively the Kim regime’s international and domestic policies worked—not how evil the regime’s oppression was over its population.¹⁶ What is interesting in his work is that he revisits Leo Strauss, the forebear of the

¹⁴ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 61. Quoted in Suzy Kim, *Everyday Life in the North Korean Revolution, 1945-1950* (Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, 2013), 249.

¹⁵ Isaiah Berlin, “The Romantic Revolution: A Crisis in the History of Modern Thought,” in *The Sense of Reality: Studies in Ideas and Their History* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996), 182.

¹⁶ Heonik Kwon and Byung-Ho Chung’s *North Korea: Beyond Charismatic Politics* also highlights the functions of North Korean politics rather than moral evaluations of the Kim regime. Unlike the Cumings School, their work is based on Weberian typology, the clear dichotomy between legal domination during the Cold War and charismatic authority in post-Cold War North Korea. Heonik Kwon and Byung-Ho

so-called American neoconservative, in order to criticize the “American crusading moralism,” the ideological basis of the neocon’s foreign policy.¹⁷

Armstrong suggests using Strauss’ “value-free social sciences,” quoting a long paragraph from Strauss’ intellectual conversation with Alexandre Kojève: “Under certain conditions the abolition of tyranny may be out of the question. The best one could hope for is that the tyranny be improved, i.e., that the tyrannical rule be exercised as little inhumanely or irrationally as possible.”¹⁸ Drawing on Strauss’ insight into tyranny, he places more emphasis on function than value in North Korean studies and social science in general. Also, he proposes that the U.S. government nudge the North Korean regime toward a more humane and rational direction.

In short, what concern Armstrong are “moralism” in North Korean studies in the U.S. and the U.S. government’s policy on North Korea and its emotional foundations: American policy makers’ abhorrence of the Kim regime. For Armstrong, not only has moralism distorted North Korean studies, which should be an objective academic field, but also has misled American international politics into irrationality. Thus, he argues for the restoration of pragmatism and realism in U.S. foreign policy. His proposal also implies that the American public, along with their politicians, should be separated from moral prejudice and emotional receptions.

4. Gonzo Journalism and Moralized Politics

Chung, *North Korea: Beyond Charismatic Politics* (Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto, and Plymouth, UK: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, INC., 2012), 2-3.

¹⁷ Charles K. Armstrong, *Tyranny of the Weak: North Korea and the World, 1950-1992* (Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, 2013), 290.

¹⁸ Leo Strauss, *On Tyranny* (New York: Free Press, 1991 [1948]), 187. Quoted in Charles K. Armstrong, 290.

Perhaps the biggest problem for scholars of North Korean studies in the USA is that their fields of study draw too much public attention. Their audiences rang widely from policy makers to common readers. In addition to offering professional advice to the U.S. government, they are expected to impact the public through columns, op-ed articles, talk-shows, and best-sellers.

While this is a favorable environment for North Korea specialists, the popular and governmental demands could damage academic objectivity in North Korean studies.¹⁹ Specialists have tended to be distracted by “fun facts” such as Kim Jong Il’s physical appearance, fashion, and womanizing, to satisfy popular demand. Moreover, they have often simplified diplomatic complexities for the government. As Perry Anderson has pointed out, politicians do not want complicated strategy. “Rulers tolerate no pedants: what advice they receive should be crisp and uncluttered.”²⁰

A number of films (e.g., *Die Another Day* (2002), *Team America: World Police* (2004), and *The Interview* (2014), to name a few) exerted wide influence on creating the public image of North Korea. Some are fictional, while others are satirical. We can hardly criticize them because their purpose is not to present factual accounts or accurate descriptions of reality. But the Western mass media, such as CNN and the BBC, have exposed themselves to gonzo journalism, a form of commentary that usually includes reporters’ emotional reactions without claims of objectivity. For example, on November 30, 2012, Western media reported that North Korean

¹⁹ Lawrence Freedman, former foreign policy adviser to Tony Blair and Professor of War Studies at King's College London, said that the public is more interested in dramatic, violent conflict such as war between countries than diplomatic negotiation and international reconciliation. Lawrence Freedman, *Deterrence* (Cambridge, UK and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2004), 25.

²⁰ Perry Anderson, 113.

state media claimed their archeologists discovered a cave inhabited by unicorns. This nonsensical news was derided in the Western media.

In fact, what the North Korean state media, Chosŏn chungang t'ongsin (the Korean Central News Agency, KCNA), actually reported was different from what CNN, the BBC, and other Western media showed. The KCNA reported that a group of archaeologists found a cave called “kirin kul” on the outskirts of the capital city, Pyongyang, in which “kirin” worship had been conducted by the locals in ancient times. (A “kirin” is a mythical creature known in East Asian countries. It looks like a combination of a deer and a dragon, but is not equivalent to a unicorn.) It is striking that, contrary to the coverage by Western media, the tone of the KCNA’s report stayed calm without exaggeration.

It seems likely that the translators of the report either distorted the meaning of the word, “kirin,” to make the North Korean news ridiculous or they did not know the cultural connotation of the word, “kirin.” Second, the KCNA did not claim that the mythical creature inhabited the cave; archaeologists discovered a historic site called “kirin kul” that is recorded in premodern geographical books such as *Koryŏsa chiriji* and *Tongguk yŏji sŭngnam*.²¹

North Korean archaeology does not seem trustworthy to outsiders. The scholars sometimes do not provide enough archaeological evidence to substantiate their findings. Moreover, archaeology is abused by the regime. Archaeological discoveries often have been exaggerated to boost national pride and it has been claimed that Pyongyang is the center of an ancient civilization to consolidate the Pyongyang regime’s legitimacy. Nevertheless, Western media’s coverage of “kirin kul” was based on malicious distortion or prejudiced misunderstanding. Few

²¹ “Koguryŏ sijo wang ũi kirin kul chae hwagin” (Kirin Cave of Koguryŏ Kingdom’s First King Discovered), *Chosŏn chungang t'ongsin* (*The Korean Central News Agency*), November 29, 2012.

efforts were made to correct the error in translation by North Korean specialists. Or, a slight misunderstanding about the “evil regime” did not seem newsworthy for the Western media.²²

Political leaders and the security elite in the West have been shown to lose their tempers and be even more emotional than the media with the North Korean regime. For example, in his State of the Union Address on January 29, 2002, George W. Bush, then President of the United States of America, used the term “axis of evil” to brand North Korea along with Iran and Iraq, and to define them as enemies of the civilized world.²³ This hostility has been found not just in Republicans but also in Democrats. Anthony Lake, National Security Advisor under U.S. President Bill Clinton from 1993 to 1997, called North Korea, Libya, Cuba, Iran, and Iraq “recalcitrant and outlaw states,” and “backlash states.” Lake classified North Korea as an autocratic state that rejected democracy and violated globally recognized “basic values.”²⁴ Thus, drawing on the dichotomy between good and evil, normal and abnormal, and legal and illegal, American political elites have set triumph over the evil, normalization of the abnormal, and punishment of the outlaw as their goal for U.S. policy on North Korea.

However, unless the U.S. government goes to war against the socialist state, it has no way to oust the regime from power. Therefore, it is necessary for the security elite to devise strategies

²² *The Guardian* corrected its false report of “kirin kul” by quoting Sixian Wang, then Ph.D. candidate of Korean History at Columbia University. Helen Pidd, “Unicorn lair ‘discovery’ blamed partly on mistranslation,” *The Guardian*, December 5, 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/nov/30/unicorn-lair-discovered-north-korea> (accessed: February 29, 2016).

²³ George W. Bush, “State of the Union Address,” January 29, 2002, <http://millercenter.org/president/speeches/speech-4540> (accessed February 29, 2016).

²⁴ Anthony Lake, “Confronting Backlash States,” *Foreign Affairs*, March-April 1994, 45.

to separate the North Korean people from their government and lead the outlaw state to regime change and democracy without war.²⁵

In this *milieu*, Kongdan Oh and Ralph Hassig suggested “information operations” or “information campaigns” as the counter-value strategy on North Korea.²⁶ The basic premise of their suggestion was that, because of the regime’s harsh censorship and control of information, North Koreans do not know the depth of their government’s brutality or the misery in their lives, or the amount of wealth held by capitalist countries. Thus, their advice for the U.S. government and its intelligent agency was to disseminate information about countries other than North Korea—life in South Korea and the USA is more comfortable than in their socialist country—in order to drive the Kim regime out of power.

5. Teleology, Moralism, and Biological Determinism

²⁵ It would be interesting to look at the history of “deterrence” on the Korean peninsula. During the Cold War, the USA’s main target of diplomatic deterrence or coercive diplomacy was the Soviet Union. However, the Reagan administration actually abandoned the policy and succeeded in ending the Cold War. The next two decades witnessed the emergence and peak of “pre-emption theory.” Yet, on the Korean peninsula, the USA’s aggressive policy has not worked, although the two Bush and the Clinton Administrations “adopt[ed] a posture of toughness and inhibited them from making anything like acceptable offers to North Korea.” Leon V. Sigal has pointed out that their hardline policy on North Korea caused “diplomatic deadlock.” Leon V. Sigal, *Disarming Strangers: Nuclear Diplomacy with North Korea* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 13. For “deterrence theory,” “coercive diplomacy,” and “pre-emption theory,” see Tom Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966); Alexander L. George and William E. Simons, eds. *The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994); and Lawrence Freedman, ed. *Strategic Coercion: Concepts and Cases* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

²⁶ Ralph Hassig and Kongdan Oh, *The Hidden People of North Korea: Everyday Life in the Hermit Kingdom* (Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto, and Plymouth, UK: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, INC., 2009), 252.

Is it possible for human beings to receive information regardless of social codes and cultural norms? Is it possible for different groups of humans to react to the same information in an identical way? The biggest problem in the book by Hassig and Oh is that they presume the homogeneity or the universality of human nature.

What is new in Suzy Kim's treatise on North Korea's socialist modernity is that she attempts to deconstruct the determinism that supports the homogeneity of human nature, illustrating examples of "heroic modernism" during North Korea's socialist revolution in the late 1940s. The human Suzy Kim shows during the times immediately after Korea's liberation from Japan (1945) and before the Korean War (1950) is not the "rational man" or "*homo economicus*" (economic man) that American liberalism or neo-liberalism takes for granted. According to Suzy Kim, it is "man as creator" who appeared in very short time from 1945 to 1950 through socialist revolution but was soon eliminated by Kim Il Sung's dictatorship.²⁷

Suzy Kim lists social changes that occurred during North Korea's socialist revolution. First, by calling each other "comrade," people—more accurately, the people's committee in every town—abolished traditional hierarchies based on the caste system and patriarchy. Second, the local committees renovated government buildings used for colonial rule into communal places for relaxation and built numerous schools near the villages' communal wells to eradicate women's illiteracy. Third, communal labor, Suzy Kim asserts, was transformed from a series of divided actions for the sake of "efficiency" to "socially meaningful activity," while, through reciprocal criticism, the North Korean people succeeded in integrating individual happiness and communal welfare. Furthermore, she emphasizes land reform carried out resolutely under Kim Il

²⁷ Suzy Kim, *Everyday Life in the North Korean Revolution, 1945-1950* (Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, 2013), 4.

Sung's lead. She demonstrates that poor peasants transformed themselves into leaders of their local communities through a radical change that cannot be found in other socialist countries such as the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China.

Suzy Kim's criticism of totalitarianism is slightly different from liberalist or neo-liberalist views. For American liberalists, totalitarianism means the social system in which the political exceeds the economic. For example, in *The End of Economic Man: The Origin of Totalitarianism*, Peter Drucker asserts that superstructure (e.g., ideology, politics, and culture) plays a more important role than substructure (e.g., "bread and butter") in totalitarian society.²⁸ For him, totalitarianism suppresses and damages human nature by an overemphasis on superstructure.

It is Sonia Ryang who first introduced Drucker's notion of totalitarianism and the economic man to North Korean studies. In her book, *Reading North Korea: An Ethnological Inquiry*, she characterizes North Korea as a totalitarian state since its regime achieved political dictatorship while it failed economic reform in the 1970s.²⁹ But she develops her criticism beyond Drucker's dichotomy between the political and the economic; she reexamines the notion of "totalitarianism."

Ryang casts doubt on the existence of "economic man." Human beings are not consistently rational agents in the market. For example, the stock market is easily affected by political issues that cause it to fluctuate. There is no clear distinction between the economic and the political in

²⁸ Drucker's book is based on biological determinism. For him, society is "the environment of ... human being," or "ecology." Peter Drucker, *The End of Economic Man: The Origin of Totalitarianism* [1939] (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2011), xii.

²⁹ Sonia Ryang, *Reading North Korea: An Ethnological Inquiry* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard Asian Center, 2012), 200.

reality. She further criticizes Drucker's typologies by attacking the totalitarian aspect of American politics. The War on Terror introduced an oppressive or near-totalitarian system to America. She points out that the American administration of George W. Bush and Dick Cheney reinforced surveillance on religious and ethnic minorities by enacting the Patriot Act. Through a reflective examination of American society, she shows that today's reality is more complicated than when Drucker wrote *The End of Economic Man: The Origin of Totalitarianism* in 1939.³⁰

As an anthropologist, Sonia Ryang has an advantage over the "security elite." For the very reason of being outside the American mainstream elite working on foreign affairs, she is able to keep a critical, objective distance from the object of her study, North Korea. Ryang's advantage becomes more conspicuous, if we compare her treatise with the books by Victor Cha, George W. Bush's top advisor on North Korean affairs, and Kongdan Oh, a member of the Council on Foreign Relations. She is not working for the U.S. government; her impetus comes from her own scholarly interests.

The last part of Victor Cha's *The Impossible State: North Korea, Past and Future* contains his impressions of North Korea. After a four-day visit to Pyongyang, he returned to Seoul by helicopter.

But one thing I am fairly certain of is that when the fateful day comes, the source of this battered country's renewal will be its people. Of many memories seared into my mind from my short stint at the White House was the helicopter ride from the DMZ (Demilitarized Zone) back to Seoul. [...] While my control officer's voice was a distant mumble coming through my headset, I gazed at these ultramodern spires, the bustling traffic, and the energy of Seoul, and could not help but think as a political scientist that the only reason, the only possible explanation, for why this scene did not replicate in the North was because of politics. The North Korea people did not choose to be poor. [...] North

³⁰ Ibid., 202-203.

Koreans, I thought, are genetically as capable of producing what I saw from that helicopter over Seoul. Politics prevented them from doing so.

It was a moment I will never forget. It made me angry and sad, but it also made me hopeful. Because when the politics are gone, the North Korean people will have their chance. And just like the South, they will make the most of that opportunity in ways that will defy all the naysayers' low expectations. This is a day I hope to see in my lifetime.³¹

Victor Cha sees North Korea as a totalitarian society from Peter Drucker's point of view on totalitarianism—based on the contrast between totalitarian regime and economic man. Cha thinks that North Koreans should be given the opportunity to be wealthy when he sees the “ultramodern spires” and “the bustling traffic” of Seoul. For Cha, people in North and South Korea are “genetically” identical, but “politics” makes the difference between the “battered country” and the rich Capitalist state. Human beings by nature do not choose to be poor; politics prevents human beings from living up to their potential. Thus, Cha's viewpoint on North Korea is based on his binary opposition between “politics” and “human.” He believes that North Koreans would realize their genetic imprint if their political system were changed. From the liberalist point of view, human beings are naturally designed to pursue their private interests, while, when they are stripped of their chances to be rich, they are bound to feel anger at their politics. If North Korean people know that they forfeit their opportunities, their genetic factors will overthrow their anti-natural politics.

For the liberalists like Victor Cha, evil equals North Korea's politics, while good is the people's natural desire to wealthy. Here it is important to note that good and evil are moral categories, and moral judgement based on the dichotomy between good and evil is supposed to

³¹ Victor Cha, *The Impossible State: North Korea, Past and Future* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2012), 462-463.

evoke emotions in accordance with those moral categories. Therefore, Cha feels anger at the North Korean rulers, while he has hope for the North Korean people's future. If we summarize with a categorical line, "nature/morality/emotion," Cha's view would be divided into two opposing lines: politics as "anti-nature/evil/anger" versus human desire to be wealthy as "nature/good/hope."

This dichotomy is narrated as a prophecy about social cataclysm in North Korea. Cha's narrative is that the amoral system against nature is bound to fall. Thus, interestingly, the last chapter of Cha's book is titled "The End is Near." This apocalyptic view is also the basis of Kongdan Oh and Ralph Hassig's book; their last chapter is titled "The End Comes Slowly." As usual in apocalyptic prophecy, the prediction about the North Korean regime's collapse repeatedly turns out to be wrong and the last judgement for the regime is postponed. But their prophecy is the end of North Korea's political system. They devote a large part of their books to North Korean history. However, their studies are not only about North Korea's past. They use apocalypse—the prophecy about the end or the last judgement—to predict the North Korean regime's future.

For them, the future is determined by fate. The archetype of this type of narrative is found in Garrett Hardin's "The Tragedy of the Commons," an essay published in *Science* in 1968. Hardin opines that common property is destined to be ruined by humans' selfish desires. This is "biologically" determined. For example, if a pasture is not privatized but communalized, herdsmen would increase the amount of private property and the number of cattle without consideration of the condition of the commons. Consequently, the more the number of cattle increases, the more the pasture is devastated. For Hardin, the tragedy of the commons is decided as a fate by humans' "greed." This is to say that a human being is originally designed to be

greedy to increase his or her own property, while the commons are destined to be devastated by the human's biologically determined desire for private interests.³²

Thus, Hardin calls the fate of the commons a tragedy. Quoting from Whitehead's discussion on tragedy, he says, "the essence of tragedy is not unhappiness." It is the "inevitableness of destiny" and it can "only be illustrated in terms of human life by incidents which in fact involve unhappiness." The dramatic characteristic of tragedy—"the futility of escape"—is also evident in Hardin's allegory of the commons. He asserts that the devastation of the commons is inevitable by the greed, the biological feature of "the rational man" or "the economic man."³³

In the apocalypse of North Korean history by Victor Cha, Ralph Hassig, and Kongdan Oh—as in Hardin's "tragedy"—humans' fate is inherently and biologically determined because of greed for their own private interests. Thus, the future of human society is also fixed in that direction. In the narratives by Hassig, Oh, and Cha, North Korean people are living during the imminent demise of the regime. They are at the edge of their time.

But the edge of one's time is the time of hope. Humans "rush into the midst (*in medias res*), when they are born; they also die in the midst (*in mediis rebus*)." This is the basic human condition and the reason humans "need fictive concords with origins and ends, such as give meaning to lives."³⁴ If they see the end of a time, the meaning of their lives would be achieved. Thus, the prediction about North Korea in the books by Cha, Oh, and Hassig is full of hope.

³² As Rob Nixon has pointed out, Hardin's view on the commons became the theoretical ground for the neoliberal policy of "privatization." Rob Nixon, "Neoliberalism, Genre, and 'The Tragedy of the Commons,'" *PMLA* Vol. 127, No. 3 (2012), 593.

³³ Garrett Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons," *Science*, Vol. 162, No. 3859 (1968), 1,244.

³⁴ Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (London, Oxford, and New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 7.

However, what will happen to them after the end of their political system? Mary Louise Pratt argues in a book review that we witness “the crisis of futurity” in neoliberalism.³⁵ Imagining the end of foreign society as a spectator may bring us a vicarious satisfaction from the spectacle, which helps us forget our own crisis.

This is not to say that Victor Cha’s anger at the North Korean regime cannot be justified. He is morally right. We cannot attribute his emotions from what he saw in North Korea—such as the people’s miserable living conditions under tyrannical rule—to his prejudice from the cultural differences between the USA and North Korea; capitalism and socialism. There is no doubt that North Korean politics cannot be acceptable. Yet two problems in the American security elite’s view on North Korea should be noted: first is determinism about human nature, and second is a moralist, idealist strategy for North Korea based on biological determinism. To be more specific, the theoretical drawback and the strategic error in Victor Cha’s argument for North Korea are his apocalyptic view—teleological, moralist understanding of history in which good will prevail in its struggle against evil—and his biological determinism leading him to a conclusion that all human beings make the same decision due to their identical natures.

Politics can be transformed by humans. But human nature can also be changed by politics. Perhaps the “economic man” or the “rational man” is not only the subject of capitalist modernity but also its product.

6. Romanticism and Realism

³⁵ Mary Louise Pratt, “Review of *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, by Rob Nixon,” *Interventions* Vol 14, No. 2 (2012), 298.

6.1. Forecast of the Past and Archaeology of the Future

Challenging “determinism about human nature,” Suzy Kim seeks to uncover human types other than the “economic man” through her examination of North Korea’s socialist revolution. For Suzy Kim, the notion of “everyday life” differs from that in studies (e.g., Ralph Hassig and Kongdan Oh’s *The Hidden People of North Korea: Everyday Life in the Hermit Kingdom*) that “take the everyday life as the ‘authentic’ and the ‘real.’” Instead, she sees it as “a site of conjuncture in which different forms of agency are articulated within and through various structural formations.”³⁶

To be more specific, Suzy Kim argues that “radical land reform,” “election for the people’s committee,” and literacy campaigns brought revolutionary changes to everyday life and transformed North Koreans, especially women and peasants who had long been marginalized, into “Man as Creator” by imparting power (*potentia; puissance; potentiality*) to the new agents of the revolution. Her endeavors to rediscover the people’s power from the near-forgotten past can be seen as a solution to what Mary Louis Pratt called “the crisis of futurity.” The object of her study is the past, but the target of her criticism is the present deprived of the future, the conception of a fate in which the “economic man” is confined, or the notion of humans’ biological nature—“avarice,” “greed,” desire to possess—by which he is determined.³⁷

As mentioned earlier, Suzy Kim romanticizes the failed revolution. Still, the idealization of the earliest stages of the revolution has a good impact on her readers by focusing the

³⁶ Suzy Kim, 8.

³⁷ Garrett Hardin, 1,243.

imaginings on the people's potentiality or power in the revolution, and ultimately restoring primal power. In other words, she attempts to give vigor to human potentiality by rewriting history in the ages in which we cannot envision the future beyond our biological nature—greed. This is the newest version of Romanticism in that she seeks to discover humans' creative power and resurrect "Man as Creator." But a problem that is posed in Romanticism is that "creation" also connotes "destruction." The old tradition or the old type of human should be destroyed in order to create a new community or a new type of human. The ultimate sense of "creation" is *creatio ex nihilo* (creation out of nothing). In Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis, the notions of "creation" and "revolution" lead us to the problem of "death drive." The revolution is seen as *creatio ex nihilo* and the death drive comes to the fore at the emergent times.³⁸

Suzy Kim does not ignore the violent and destructive nature of revolutionary changes in everyday life. Yet she focuses on its creative aspect.³⁹ However, it seems to me that the destructive nature is a more fundamental aspect of revolution. Revolution is fundamentally violent because it entails not only social changes but also ontological, psychological, and spiritual destruction of individuals.

It is important to note that labor, which Suzy Kim emphasizes as a creative activity during the revolution, is not only for material production but also for spiritual practices. Labor implies at once self-creation and self-destruction for both the collective and the individual. As the North Korean ideology stems from Marxism, the North Korean notion of labor can be grasped by looking at its German origin.

³⁸ Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992), 213.

³⁹ Suzy Kim, 22.

The spiritual aspect of labor was stressed by German Romanticists in the eighteenth century. Fichte considered labor as “the sacred task of man” since, by doing it, he can “impress his unique, creative personality upon the dead stuff that is nature.” For Fichte, “passive receptivity” such as leisure and contemplation is not “the true nature of man.” His true nature is “activity” and it is driven by his own “untrammelled ‘rational’ will.”⁴⁰

Fichte’s conception of labor gave birth to two different types of work: work as creative activity (Marxist notion) and labor as vocation (Weberian concept). Marx asserted that labor is a man’s struggle against nature, and, through labor, man can establish his mastery over nature.⁴¹ On the other hand, Weber believed that labor should be practiced as if it is the absolute goal itself. For Weber, work is man’s “vocation,” or sacred mission.⁴² Thus, the bourgeois and proletariat heroes in modernity were born through the Romanticist activity of labor. In other words, man was able to transform himself into the hero in modernity by work as creative activity and labor as a vocation.

Labor in modernity became a kind of meditation in that it was a path to self-discipline and the establishment of self-identity. Paradoxically, it became a “meditative activity.” However, meditative activity had long been practiced through history. As Giorgio Agamben has rightly pointed out, in monasteries labor was a way of meditation. While reciting scripture, the cenobites did their chores. By doing so, the cenobites transformed their daily life into a meditation.⁴³ However long its history was, labor as a meditation cannot be explained by the Freudian notion

⁴⁰ Isaiah Berlin, 182-183.

⁴¹ Karl Marx, *Capital* Vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1976), 283.

⁴² Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1948), 58.

⁴³ Giorgio Agamben, *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-Of-Life*, trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 25.

of “pleasure principle,” which is a parallel to “death drive.” Labor is the activity through which man withstands or overcomes pain for self-reform or self-improvement. Labor was collectivized in workplaces such as factories and mines, as was meditation. But pain was not changed into pleasure through collective meditation.

To summarize, labor during the revolution is not only creative activity but also painful work. The pain caused by the destruction of the old self and old society is transformed into passion for creation. This is the psychological basis of *creatio ex nihilo* in Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis. However, this sort of labor is prone to be exploited by the state or the capital. If labor is designed not for material benefit but for the moral, aesthetic passion for destruction and creation, the meaning of labor would be defined by those invested with authority or cultural hegemony. For example, the North Korean regime exploits the people’s labor power by emphasizing not “material rewards” but “chǒngch’i todǒkchǒk chagŭk” (political, moral stimuli),⁴⁴ while South Korean businesses encourage young, contingent workers to work for low incomes by extolling their “yǒlchǒng” (passion).⁴⁵ In both capitalism and socialism, the moral, aesthetic sense of labor has been used for those who seize the cultural hegemony.⁴⁶

In the conclusion of her book, Suzy Kim suggests that the multitude—the Negrian conception of revolutionary subjectivity who defied the regime’s exploitation of aesthetic, moral

⁴⁴ Kim Jong Il, “Chǒngch’i todǒkchǒk chagŭk kwa muljilchǒk chagŭk e taehan olbarŭn rihae rŭl kajil te taehayǒ” (On the correct understanding of politico-moral stimulus and material stimulus, June 14, 1967), in Kim Jong Il, *Kim Jong Il sǒnjip (Kim Jong Il’s Collected Works)* (Pyongyang: Chosǒn Rodongdang ch’ulp’ansa, 2009), 293-304.

⁴⁵ Han Yunhyǒng, Ch’oe T’aesǒp, and Kim Chǒnggŭn, *Yǒlchǒng ūn ǒttǒke nodong i toenŭn ’ga?* (*How is passion transformed into labor?*) (Seoul: Ungjin chisik hausŭ, 2011).

⁴⁶ It seems that Nietzsche’s prophecy has been realized. “From the Future of the worker. – Workers should learn to feel like soldiers. An honorarium, an income, but no pay! No relation between payment and achievement!” Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), #763, p. 399.

labor—emerged in the late 1940s in North Korea. But it does not seem feasible. The multitude is a potential form of human being and thus we can see the new subject in the future. However, it is doubtful that that kind of person “with flexible and fluid boundaries” existed in the past, at the earliest stage of the socialist revolution.⁴⁷ To understand and criticize our present, we need “archaeologies of the future,” not “forecasts of the past.”⁴⁸

6.2. Three Ironies

Machiavellians focus more on the relationship between man and nature than on the fate of man. Charles Armstrong highlights not the Spinozian notion of power (*potentia*) but Machiavellian concepts of power (*imperium* and *potestas*). This is not to say that he does not discuss the ethical issues that engage Suzy Kim. However, they are not his main concern. In this regard, it can be said that Armstrong’s approach to North Korea is opposite to that of Suzy Kim. But he does not criticize Kim’s Romantic and Marxist idea. Despite being methodologically opposite, it seems that their approaches are complementary, because they criticize American civilization in different methods.

Armstrong’s criticism is concentrated on the Bush administration’s moralist, idealist strategy for North Korea.⁴⁹ His study suggests that American foreign policy, especially its policy on North Korea, should be more pragmatic, by counting on ideological fundamentalism, or

⁴⁷ Suzy Kim, 249.

⁴⁸ These phrases are borrowed from Fredric Jameson’s *A Singular Modernity*. “Ontologies of the present demand archaeologies of the future, not forecasts of the past.” Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London and New York: Verso, 2002), 215.

⁴⁹ As mentioned earlier, the problems in Victor Cha’s approach to North Korea are: first, “determinism about human nature,” and second, “his moralist, idealist strategy for North Korea based on biological determinism.” Suzy Kim criticizes the first while Charles K. Armstrong the second.

moralism. Thus, he adopts a genre of narrative different from the apocalypse that Kongdan Oh, Ralph Hassig, and Victor Cha choose for their historiography. It is irony.

His writing—perhaps unwittingly—tends toward the form of satire. Armstrong remains skeptical, whereas the American security elite are usually optimistic.⁵⁰ His skeptical view secures his academic distance from the object of his study and leads him to the genre of narrative which is irony. Armstrong’s historiography presents three ironies. First is the irony of “juche.” The more the North Korean regime emphasized the idea of “juche” (subject in English; sovereignty or mastership depending on the context) to boost national pride, the worse its national economy became. Second is the irony of “economic crisis and political stabilization.” The country became politically stabilized, while it fell economically. Third is the “tyranny of the weak” which is also the book title. The regime was internationally weak, but domestically wielded despotic power. By the first irony, Armstrong satirizes the North Korean regime. Through the second and third, he attempts to satirize the U.S. government—particularly the Bush administration—and its policy on North Korea.

The definite advantage of Armstrong’s narrative is that it does not include prophecy of the future. He does not predict the future of the North Korean regime. Instead, he illustrates how the Kim regime has survived and Kim Jong Il succeeded to his father’s power. What is important to him is not the morality of power but the nature, the vicissitudes, and the function of power.

His functionalist approach is also found in his article, “Ideological Introversion and Regime Survival: North Korea’s ‘Our-Style Socialism.’” In it, he asserts that the Kim regime’s

⁵⁰ My typology of historical narrative is based on Hayden White’s categorization of historical “trope.” Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 54-55.

survival strategy is so unique and is the only case in which a socialist government survived only with ideological measures and military reinforcement during economic crisis.⁵¹ The current situation in North Korea cannot be explained with the general pattern of Cold War history and teleology.

Armstrong devotes a large part of his book to the first irony, the irony of “juche.” He points out that Kim Il Sung took the lead in starting the war. Even at the earliest stage, North Koreans were autonomous and independent. As shown in his first book, *The North Korean Revolution, 1945-1950* (2003), he demonstrates that the North Korean state was founded and developed by North Koreans’ active, autonomous efforts rather than under the influence of foreign superpowers such as the Soviet Union. However, the activeness of the people and the autonomy of the regime ended in disastrous economic downfall in the 1990s. The notion of “juche” first appeared in the mid-1950s when the North Korean economy grew astonishingly. At the same time in the Soviet Union, the cult of Stalin’s personality was criticized by Nikita Khrushchev’s monumental speech, “On the Personality Cult and its Consequences” at the 20th Party Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union on February 25, 1956. Meanwhile, the Kim regime maintained its Stalinist style of despotism and kept its autonomy from foreign attempts for intervention. However, for Armstrong, the North Korean regime’s political victory resulted in its economic failure. Although Kim Il Sung succeeded in making friendly relationships with “non-aligned” countries and thus enhancing the country’s prestige, the partial globalization excluding the establishment of diplomatic ties with the USA could not resolve

⁵¹ Charles K. Armstrong, “Ideological Introversion and Regime Survival: North Korea’s ‘Our-Style Socialism.’” Martin K. Dimitrov ed. *Why Communism Did Not Collapse: Understanding Authoritarian Regime Resilience in Asia and Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 118-119.

North Korea's economic problems. In other words, national prestige and political stability are in inverse proportion to economic prosperity.

However, strangely, the economic malfunction had almost no impact on domestic politics. The regime never faced a political crisis in spite of the economic predicament. This is the second irony, the irony of "economic crisis and political stabilization."

The third is the irony of "the weak." Drawing from the "Melian dialogue" in Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*, he illustrates how to understand the relationship between the strong and the weak in international politics. The people of Melos, kin to the Spartans, refused to pay tribute to Athens. Then Athens dispatched an army of 3,000 men to Melos and executed all the adult men captured by its army. The Athenians scolded the Melians for their lack of realism. Likewise, throughout history, it has been proven that the weak should yield to the strong or be conquered. However, Armstrong says that North Korea is an exception to this general pattern of history. North Korea has secured its political sovereignty although it has been on bad terms with the USA. This is the irony of the weak by which Armstrong describes the history of North Korea.

The reason Armstrong introduces the anecdote of Melos from *History of the Peloponnesian War* is to warn the U.S. government of the possible fall of its imperial hegemony. Even though Athens colonized Melos, its arrogance resulted in its defeat in the Peloponnesian War and the end of the Athenian hegemony. Thus, Thucydides highlights the Spartans' virtue, *sophrosyne* (moderation, discretion, and prudence), which is juxtaposed with the Athenians' recklessness.⁵² For Armstrong, the USA during its War on Terror resembles Athens during the

⁵² Lowell Edmunds, "Thucydides' Ethics as Reflected in the Description of Stasis," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* Vol. 79 (1979), 75.

Peloponnesian War. What the two hegemonic powers had in common is that they were arrogant, reckless, and belligerent. Armstrong urges the U.S. government to have the Spartan's virtue, *sophrosyne*, in its policy on North Korea.

The American Neoconservatives and the Bush administration made their foreign affairs decisions based on "American crusading moralism." But for Armstrong, their foreign policy has turned out to be a failure. Thus, he stresses realism or Realpolitik, which has long been marginalized from American foreign policy. He suggests that the U.S. government focus on what it is able to do rather than what is morally right.

And yet, his advice is still a strategy, not a theory. Strategy, unlike theory, depends on the situation. If the political environment is changed, the strategy should also be altered. In other words, the moralism that Armstrong criticizes can be a better policy than realism at certain times. The source of the USA's global hegemony is not only its military and economic power but also its democracy that sometimes appears as a form of humanism or moralism. Moralism can be useful for North Korean policy; the U.S. government cannot abandon its moralist policy by which it presses the North Korea regime into accepting democracy.

In this study, I propose that we overcome our own emotions (such as abhorrence) toward North Korea to understand the people's emotions expressed in North Korean historical writing, by suggesting functionalism—a method free of the influence of any values that are not purely epistemic—in studying North Korea as a solution for moralism or emotional judgement. The studies of power such as Armstrong's *Tyranny of the Weak* and Suzy Kim's *Everyday Life in the North Korean Revolution* remind us of the importance of the notion of "power" in North Korean

studies. “How does it work?” The new trend of North Korean studies—including this study—poses that question.

Chapter Two

Authority and Affect: Kim Jong Il's Narrative-Creating Power and North Korea's Authoritarian Culture

The power of creating narrative that Kim Jong Il attempted to secure is the primary point of this study. Narrative was used as a means of consecrating his father Kim Il Sung as a messiah of the Korean race and justifying his own oppressive rule as the messiah's order. Narrative—particularly, historical writing—was an instrument that invested the father Kim with divine character and certified the son Kim's legitimacy. This chapter will explore the North Korean ideas of power, emotion, and narrative by casting light on their theoretical connotation and their roots in Judeo-Christian biblical narrative and Hegelian historicism.

Previous studies, such as Suk-Young Kim's *Illusive Utopia: Theater, Film, and Everyday Performance in North Korea* (2010), have underlined the Confucian tradition in North Korean culture and its patriarchal aspect.¹ Those studies tended to consider North Korean authoritarian culture as irrelevant to the Western modern civilization in which capitalism and democracy have flourished. But this study reveals the similarities between North Korean culture and its Western counterpart by investigating the ideological and theoretical traces of the Western ideas of authority, affect, and narrative in North Korean literature and Kim Jong Il's theoretical writing. North Korean leading thinkers such as Hwang Changyŏp developed their thought under the

¹ Suk-Young Kim, *Illusive Utopia: Theater, Film, and Everyday Performance in North Korea* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010).

heavy influence of Hegelianism.² Theoretical books attributed to Kim Jong Il [e.g., *On Juche Literature* (1992) and *On the Art of Cinema* (1972)] were also written in the Continental European intellectual tradition. This chapter will demonstrate the philosophical traces of the Hegelianism (and its forebear Judeo-Christianity) in North Korean ideology of historical narrative.

1. *Potentia, Affectus, and Auctoritas*

With narrative-creating power, Kim Jong Il was able to establish himself as the protagonist of North Korea's historical narrative and the epitome of the life that people should live. The implications of the power of narrative-creation will be clear only after investigating the relationships among *potentia* (power or potentiality), *affectus* (affect or emotion), and *auctoritas* (authority). Thus, the first object of this chapter is the examination of those important notions to clarify the philosophical, theological, and psychological foundations of Kim Jong Il's authority—his power to produce narrative—in North Korea.

In political science and cultural studies, four types of power have been subjects of investigation: *potentia*, *potestas*, *imperium*, and *auctoritas*. These four notions overlap with

² Hwang Changyöp claimed that he coined the notion of *juche*, the central concept of the North Korean *Juche* idea of self-reliance by himself. But the notion of *juche* was a translation of the Japanese term, *shutai*, and was already discussed by the so-called “*Bungakukai (Literary World) Group*,” the Kyoto School, and the “Japanese Romantics” in the early 1940s. Hwang studied in the Soviet Union in his twenties. It seems that he was influenced by Hegelian-Marxism in his Moscow era and later reintroduced the Hegelian notion of subject by translating it *juche*. For Hwang Changyöp's early life, see Hwang Changyöp, *Na nŭn yöksa ũi chilli rŭl poatta (I Saw the Truth of History)* (Seoul: Sidae chöngsin, 2006). For the discussion about *shutai* in wartime Japan, see Richard Calichman, ed. and trans. *Overcoming Modernity: Cultural Identity in Wartime Japan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

narrative-creating power. The examinations of the Spinozian sense of *potentia* and the Kojèvian notion of *auctoritas*, among others, in particular cast light on the nature of Kim Jong Il's politico-cultural power, and more generally the essential properties of authoritarian culture.

“*Fiat ars, pereat mundus*” (Let art be created, let the world perish) quotes Walter Benjamin from a Futurist slogan in the epilogue of “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” He suggests that Fascism renders politics aesthetic by means of war in which the aesthetic pleasure of destruction is promoted. For example, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti admired the pleasure of destroying the world. Fascinated by war, in which a mass encounter with death occurs, Marinetti saw the aesthetic moment when the world is destroyed and art is created. Benjamin sarcastically calls this Fascist notion of art—life that is perfected into a work of art through death—“the consummation of ‘*l’art pour l’art*’ (art for art’s sake).”³

The autotelic art of Fascism will be more clearly understood if we consider emotion together with *potentia* and *auctoritas*.

1.1. *Potentia agendi* and *Affectus*

Potestas, *imperium*, and *auctoritas*— three concepts of power—pose fundamental problems in political theory: the nature of sovereignty, the legitimacy of the state, and the purpose and limits of political power. But if *potentia* (power) is introduced into discussions of power, it will serve as both political and aesthetic theories. In particular, it is important to investigate the meaning of *potentia* by looking at authoritarianism and its political and aesthetic mechanisms.

³ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 242.

In Spinozian theory, *potentia* is related to *affectus* (emotion or affect).⁴ Benedict de Spinoza defines *affectus* as “the affections of the body by which the body’s *potentia agendi* (power of acting) is increased or diminished, aided or restrained” in *The Ethics* (1677).⁵ To put it another way, *affectus* (emotion or affect) is a specific kind of affection that can augment or lessen the body’s *potentia agendi* (power of activity). *Affectus* links the body with the world—or nature—because the second causes the affections of the first.

What is at issue is that there are multiple ways to feel. Deleuzians (e.g., Brian Massumi) argue that affect is not a particular, single emotion but “the co-presence” of potential emotions. Some emotions are manifested, while others lurk. Human being, whose body is connected with others and the world, has the capacities to select one emotion over another. He or she has “freedom” to choose ways to feel. Furthermore, this kind of freedom includes selecting ways to be felt. As in affect, the subjects of feeling are also plural and gregarious, and their bodies are socially connected. Affect is generated not individually but socially.

Thus, the liberal projects for social transformation, or emancipation of the working classes, build on socially produced emotions (i.e., affect) that they define as “the bodily capacities of affecting and being affected.”⁶ Since the 1990s, many theorists on the political left, such as Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, have been concerned with “affective labor” rather than physical labor. Affect, the bodily capacities, is their true frontline, as in Barbara Kruger’s 1989

⁴ In this study, I use the two terms of “emotion” and “affect” interchangeably in order to maintain distance from Deleuzian affect theory that imparts an excessive meaning to the notion of “affect.”

⁵ Benedictus de Spinoza, *A Spinoza Reader: The Ethics and Other Works* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1994), 154.

⁶ Brian Massumi defines “affect” as “the bodily capacities of affecting or being affected.” Brian Massumi, *Politics of Affect* (Cambridge, UK and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2015), 5-6.

designed print, “Your body is a battleground.” Affect has been considered as a new capacity for revolution.

However, it is important to note that affect exists as potentiality. The mode of its existence as potentiality complicates the problem of “affect.” The emotions cannot be absent, but there is no way that all of them can be expressed. Affect has the possibilities of not affecting or being affected, as *potentia agendi* (power of activity) remains as potentiality of “not” acting. It is not actual but only potential; it has at once the potentiality of presence and the possibility of privation.⁷

Affect theory seeks to answer the questions of how to maximize the freedom of selecting the ways of affecting or being affected and to transform the people’s *potentia agendi* into actual political power. But freedom can be minimized, while potentiality possibly remains inactive.

The possibility of privation brings us to the problem of authority. There is no doubt the person who is invested with authority or who seeks to build his or her own authority wants to exploit chances to manipulate affect. In its ideal condition, the agent of *auctoritas* (authority) has capacities to increase or diminish the *potentia agenda* (power of acting) of the patient—the subject who undergoes the agent’s action—in the way in which the agent controls the *affectus* (affect or emotion) of the patient.

Kim Jong Il attempted to be the agent of authority in North Korea. To that end, he created a fictionalized, imagined, and virtualized world by his narrative-creating power. In other words, Kim Jong Il sought to establish authority by the way in which he—the ultimate author of North

⁷ The coexistence of presence and privation in potentiality is the essence of *dynamis* (*potentia* in Latin; potentiality in English) in contrast to that of *energeia* (*actualitas*; actuality), according to Aristotle’s *De anima* (*On the Soul*). Giorgio Agamben, “On Potentiality,” in *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, ed. and trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 177-184.

Korea's historical narrative—manipulated people's affect or emotion by his narrative-creating power.

1.2. Authority and Narrative-Creating Power

Auctoritas or authority—different from other types of power such as *potestas* and *imperium*—is found in the narrative that Kim created. By means of his “narrative-creating power” Kim Jong Il attempted to establish his own authority in North Korea. Narrative can manipulate the people's emotions and, only on the basis of emotional control, the people could yield voluntary and conscious submission to power with almost no feelings of insubordination.

The patient's voluntary submission with manipulated emotions defines the nature of authority. According to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, “authority” is “power to enforce obedience or compliance, or a party possessing it.”⁸ However, authority, in its proper and absolute sense, does not need any enforcement to make its patients obey its agent. Their volition is controlled. Thus, the agent does not encounter the patients' reactions. More precisely, it is not affected by any action from the person or the persons towards whom it is directed. It is established on the basis of a very peculiar relationship. Seemingly, the patient does not make any change in the relationship, while only the agent—the being invested with authority—informs it. This is the definition of “authority” by Alexandre Kojève.

⁸ “Authority,” *The Oxford English Dictionary*, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/13349?redirectedFrom=authority#eid> (accessed January 15, 2016).

Authority is the *possibility* that an agent has of *acting* on others (or another) without these others *reacting* against him, despite being *capable* to do so.⁹

The patient is physically capable of reacting against the agent. But he or she remains as patient because his or her submission is “spontaneous”;¹⁰ the relationship between the agent and the patient is emotionally determined without either party’s logical consideration. As a result, they do not share power. But they still have something to share: emotion. For example, in times of war, the military commander who is invested with authority should share his or her hatred of the enemy with his or her soldiers in a bid to tighten discipline in the army, boost morale, and ultimately win the war. The sharing of emotion is the ground on which authority comes into existence.

In the case of North Korea, Kim Jong Il’s creation of narrative was a fully *authoritarian* act. It was an act of conducting to his subjects’ willful submission and sharing of emotion among the North Korean population. It seems that the Kojévian notion of *authority* is the most accurate term to define that kind of power Kim Jong Il sought to take.

2. Authority, Legitimacy, and Ennobled Emotions

A common misunderstanding of the relationship between authority and emotion is found in Max Weber’s works of politics, such as “Politics as a Vocation” and *Economy and Society*. Weber

⁹ Alexandre Kojève, *The Notion of Authority*, ed. François Terré, trans. Hager Weslati (London and New York: Verso, 2014), 9.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

rightly linked the question of authority with that of legitimacy. As he put it, “the belief in legitimacy” is the most fundamental “basis for a given domination.” But a conceptual mistake was made when he considered “the belief in legitimacy” as separable from other elements such as “custom,” “personal advantage,” and “affectual or ideal motives of solidarity.”¹¹ This misunderstanding induced Weber to believe that legitimacy can be established on purely rational grounds. However, reason alone cannot engender “belief in legitimacy” without emotional justification.

It is important to investigate how and why Weber had the wrong idea about the interconnections between authority and emotion. An examination of Weber’s misconception will lead to an understanding of the nature of North Korean authority that Kim Jong Il attempted to found and realizing the proximity between the Weberian idea and Kim Jong Il’s thinking in terms of the authority-emotion relationship. Contrary to Weber’s argument about modern politics, authority cannot be recongnized by its subject without emotional justification.

In fact, Weber’s entire theory of politics is more complex than his typology of authority; he admitted the importance of emotions in politics in a roundabout way. Two points are worth noting. First, Weber believed that emotions should be ennobled. This is different from being rationalized. But Weber’s Protestant asceticism blurs the boundaries between the ennoblement and rationalization of emotion. Second, the ennoblement of feeling is the qualification not for the citizen but for the political elite. His narrative is a story of heroism in which a political leader risks his nobility and dignity for the sake of a cause. In other words, it is about the hero’s

¹¹ Max Weber, “The Types of Legitimate Domination,” in *Economy and Society* [1922], eds. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, trans. Ephraim Fischhoff, et al. (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1978), 213.

passionate devotion to a cause and his strong sense of “objective responsibility” in the political arena that is liable to people’s selfish desires and capricious emotions.

Weber classified authority into three categories: “legal authority,” “traditional authority,” and “charismatic authority.” Among the three, he chose “legal authority” as the most advisable form of power because he believed it is based on rationality. In this case, Weber argued, obedience is yielded to “the legally established impersonal order.” This is in contrast to two other types of authority, which are based on “personal” or emotional ties with the person assuming the authority. In the case of “traditional authority,” obedience is exercised in a form of “personal loyalty” to “the person of the chief who occupies the traditionally sanctioned position of authority.” In the case of charismatic authority, authority is based on the followers’ “personal trust” in the charismatically qualified leader’s revelation or his heroism.¹² In Weber’s thoughts, legal authority—the most desirable type—can rest upon an impersonal, unemotional, and purely rational relationship.

There is no doubt that Weber’s notion of “legal authority” is a product of an important mode of narration in modernity: “the story (or myth) of progress.”¹³ In other words, the term “legal authority” is coined on the basis of a story or myth, and achieved merely in popular imagination or what Charles Taylor termed our “modern social imaginaries.” Charles Taylor illustrated the myth of progress by an example: history as “the slow growth of a human capacity, reason, fighting against error and superstition.” Taylor suggested two “nodal points” towards modernity in the myth of progress. The first point was reached when Western civilization realized “right moral order, the interlocking relations of mutual benefit” among people or

¹² Ibid., 215-216.

¹³ Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), 176.

between the political leaders and the people. The second was attained when it achieved “adequate self-control.”¹⁴ In modernity, authority can be justified by “mutual benefit” and buttressed by “self-control.” There is all but no room for unconditional submission and personal or emotional ties in this ideal form of rule or its myth.

However, even legal authority does not appear as a result of eliminating emotions (e.g., fervor, resentment, and exaltation) that can preclude the rationalization of rule or developing impersonal relationships that enable “right moral order.” All types of authority are partly or entirely reinforced by people’s emotions or their emotional justifications of their obedience to the rule. In terms of their relationships with emotion, the gap between “legal authority” and “charismatic authority” or “traditional authority” is astonishingly thin.

It is well-known that Weber was very critical of parliamentary democracy. In such a system, Weber argued, obtaining and maintaining power relies entirely on “exploitation of mass emotionality” and people’s motives for following the rule are all but self-interested and “predominantly base.”¹⁵ He saw political struggle as undignified, unproductive, and fruitless. But Weber also believed a political leader should endure and overcome his or her revulsion at political conflict. His concern was not the virtue of the citizen but the *virtu* or character of the political leader.¹⁶ In other words, the protagonist in Weber’s story of “self-control,” which is one of two nodal points in the modernity-narrative, is not the people but the political elite.

Therefore, a significant contradiction is found in Weber’s two distinctive ideas on politics. He urges the political elite to be a “soldier for a cause” in his lecture at Munich, “Politics as a

¹⁴ Ibid., 175-176.

¹⁵ Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation” [1919], in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. and trans. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 113.

¹⁶ Dana Villa, *Socratic Citizenship* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press), 218.

Vocation,” whereas he keeps a dispassionate tone about politics in his book, *Economy and Society*.¹⁷ It might be said that the difference resides in their purposes: one is a lecture to future politicians, while the other is a written work for the purpose of *Wissenschaft* (science). However, the contradiction also comes from his religious—or aesthetic—stance on politics. The motif of the political elite’s quasi-military devotion—“soldier for a cause”—in his writing turns the theory of authority into the story of a hero with strong willpower.

Society is full of profane emotions and Philistine desires. People are overwhelmed by all kinds of negative feelings such as “envy” and “*ressentiment*” in making their decisions regarding public affairs. Thus, to be a political leader means mortification, penance, and an ordeal to withstand his or her disgust for the masses, overcome anxiety over “soul-destroying,”¹⁸ and finally lead the people in the right direction.

The ennoblement of a political leader’s emotion in Weberian thought poses another problem: the problem of right.¹⁹ What makes the political leader (in the Weberian sense) anxious? Why should he or she endure his or her revulsion? How is the leading politician, who soldiers on for his cause, able to overcome his or her *angst*? These questions can be answered only after examining the interconnections among right, authority, and power.

¹⁷ The contradiction in Weber’s political theory could also be understood as his dual project for *Bildung* (self-formation) and *Wissenschaft* (science). Harvey Goldman, *Politics, Death, and Devil: Self and the Power in Max Weber and Thomas Mann* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 25-50.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 214.

¹⁹ I draw on the term “right” in its Kojévian sense. Kojève examines the French concept of “*droit*” which means both “right” and “law” in *Outline of a Phenomenology of Right*. He uses the notion of “*droit*” in both senses depending on the context. By “right,” I mean “*droit*” in accordance with the Kojévian terminology. Alexandre Kojève, *Outline of a Phenomenology of Right* [1943], ed. Bryan-Paul Frost, trans. Bryan-Paul Frost and Robert Howse (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, INC., 2000).

3. The Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge

The notion of right is crucial in understanding the concept of authority. A comparative examination of the two concepts also reveals both similarities and differences between the Western idea of authority, which Weber founded, and North Korean authority, which Kim Jong Il sought to establish.

The terms of authority and right are interrelated and well contrasted. The division originated in Judeo-Christian culture, and influenced the political culture in not only the West but also in North Korea.²⁰ The relationship between the two notions corresponds to that between the two trees of Paradise—the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge—in Jewish mysticism. Different commands and different prohibitions are imposed upon the two different worlds: the Garden of Eden and the world of mortal beings. The *summum* of authority resides in Paradise, while right is the objective that is essential to obtain power in our secular world. But a certain point in time blurs the opposition between the two worlds. When the Messiah comes down from Paradise to our world, messianic law—the law of Paradise—becomes operative. Only then, the ultimate sense of authority—divine authority—makes its appearance. The Messiah is the agent or the new ruler who is invested with divine authority. Because of his advent, we human beings become the patients who voluntarily and consciously give up our rights (to react).

²⁰ Pyongyang was called “the Jerusalem of Korea” during the Japanese Occupation of Korea and before the socialist revolution in North Korea. The city was the center of Christianity, especially Presbyterianism. Moreover, Kim Il Sung’s family were well-known as Presbyterians. Kim Il Sung himself attended Christian mission school before he joined socialist nationalist groups. In short, the Judeo-Christian culture was pervasive even in the northern part of the Korean peninsula. However, this is not to say that North Korea’s state ideology was solely influenced by the so-called Abrahamic religions. But it is obvious that Judeo-Christian culture has a profound effect on modern Korea.

In *Genesis*, Eden is the reverse of the secular world; in our world, we are not forbidden to eat from the Tree of Knowledge—Adam and Eve did so and thus were expelled from the Garden of Eden—while in Eden, God never threatens Adam and Eve with the Tree of Life. “The Lord God” warns, “You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.” But Adam and Eve transgress his order surreptitiously by eating from the Tree of Knowledge, which will cause their death. The result of this mythical event is that God’s authority over humans in Eden is denied, while mortality becomes the most basic condition of all humanity. Authority has secured humans’ immortality, but it is withheld by humans themselves due to their desire for “wisdom.” In other words, humanity “becomes like God” at the expense of their immortality and by reacting against God’s authority.

Although human beings are not allowed to eat from the Tree of Life or live forever in the earthly world, they now know good and evil like their creator. They obtain juridical right, while they are alienated from divine authority. The expulsion from the Garden of Eden is the initial separation between two regions: the sacred and the profane,²¹ immortality and knowledge, or divine authority and right. Following is Alexandre Kojève’s account of the difference between authority and right in terms of the realization of reaction.

In the case of Authority, the ‘reaction’ (or opposition) never exceeds the sphere of pure possibility (it is never actualised): its realisation destroys Authority. With Right, by contrast, the ‘reaction’ can be actualised without thereby destroying Right: all that is needed is for this ‘reaction’ to be directed against a person other than the one who has the

²¹ “The Tree of Life represents the pure and original power of the sacred, beyond all contamination by evil and death. Yet since the fall of Adam, the world has been ruled no longer the Tree of Life but by the mystery of the second tree, which includes both good and evil. As a consequence, the world is now divided into two separate regions: the sacred and the profane, the pure and the impure, the licit and the forbidden.” Giorgio Agamben, “The Messiah and the Sovereign,” in *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, ed. and trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 163.

Right. ([...] the violent ‘reaction’ of the debtor need only be directed against a judge, a bailiff, a police officer, and so on.)²²

According to the biblical account, by eating from the Tree of Knowledge, humans destroy God’s authority in the Garden of Eden and start the struggles for right in the earthly world. To exercise one’s right against another, he or she needs a third party such as a judge, a bailiff, or a police officer. Third parties play the roles of judge and law enforcement in the absence of the God. The Weberian type of authority—particularly legal authority—emerges in the forms of these third parties. In other words, building legal authority hinges upon the way in which society creates the third parties. However, in the Weberian narrative of politics, struggles to be the third parties engender the leading politician’s *angst* and disgust. His or her emotions are essentially caused by the difference between divine and human authorities.

There is no vision for the return of the Messiah, or no hope for restoration of the *summum*—the ultimate form or the summit—of authority by him, in Weber’s secularist account of political struggles. It is basically possible for the political leader to establish his or her own authority. But it can be overturned at any time, unlike divine authority against which there is no way to react. Kojève pointed out that, in the case of human authoritarian action, reaction is necessarily possible, while in the case of divine action, reaction is absolutely impossible.²³ The possibility makes human authority unstable, and this causes the *angst* of the person seeking authority. And yet, despite political struggles being futile and debasing, a politician is destined to pursue establishing authority as his or her goal through political actions.

²² Alexandre Kojève, 9-10.

²³ *Ibid.*, 12.

To indicate the politician's destiny, Weber revives the Calvinist conception of *Beruf* (calling) in his "vocation" lectures such as "Politics as a Vocation." From the Weberian point of view, through accomplishing their calling, politicians practice their divine mission in the world of the profane. Weber's political thought posits the revival of the Tree of Life in the secular world.

4. *Samyǒng* (Calling) and *Sungmyǒng* (Destiny)

The resurrection of the Tree of Life, the source of eternal life—in other words, the foundation of divine authority that is in charge of life—is also Kim Jong Il's main task after the death of his father. Since the 1990s, North Korean literature strove to show Kim Jong Il's "calling" to be the North Korean leader and his "ennobled emotions" towards his "divine" mission. Ironically, the death of his father gave him an opportunity to establish "divine" authority. By establishing "divine" authority, Kim Jong Il sought to overcome Weberian *angst*, which is engendered by the futility of "human" authority.

The authority of a dead father is the *summum* or the ultimate sense of authority. The person invested with authority has more authority after his death than during his lifetime. As Kojève put it, a will has more authority than the order given by a person still alive.

The reason this is so is that it is physically impossible to react against the dead. In that sense, they have Authority by definition. But this impossibility of reacting assures the

Authority of the dead a divine (sacred) character: the exercise of Authority by the dead does not entail any risk to them, hence both the strength and weakness of this authority.²⁴

The paradoxical nature of “divine” authority is found in the primordial trauma of the murder of the father. Freud suggests the murder of the father as the foundation of authority by giving the example of the killing of Moses in his treatise, *Moses and Monotheism* (1939). Before publishing the book, he examined the murder of the father in the drama of Oedipus to reveal the exclusive and primary relationship to the mother in *Totem and Taboo* (1913). Jacques Lacan develops Freud’s conception of “murder of father” in the drama of Oedipus and the killing of Moses into the notion of “Name-of-the-Father.” Lacan attributes the advent of *the third party as authority* to the establishment of the Name-of-the-Father.²⁵ After the murder of the father, the dead father (the Name-of-the-Father) takes the pivotal role in morality and legality.²⁶ Lacan argues that the Name-of-the-Father—even after the murder of the father—helps a man overcome his primary relationship to his mother and leads him to the cultural, social, and legal world, which Lacan calls “the symbolic order.” Lacan investigates the moral aspect of the third party, while Koève investigates its legal facet. Both indicate the same phenomenon, since human authority stands on the Name-of-the-Father—the outcome of the primordial murder of the father.

The murder of the father is a recurrent theme in establishing and stabilizing human authority to avoid the reaction against itself. Kim Jong Il blamed the people’s inability to lighten Kim Il Sung’s burden for his father’s death in 1994, while North Korean literature dramatizes the

²⁴ Ibid., 14-15.

²⁵ Jacques Lacan, “On a Question Preliminary to any Possible Treatment of Psychosis,” in *Ecrits: A Selection* [1966], trans. Alan Sheridan (Abingdon: Routledge, 2001), 218.

²⁶ Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), 142-143.

historical event as the origin of people's sin or their sense of guilt. Like the murder of Moses and the destruction of God's authority in Eden, the sudden death of Kim Il Sung was re-enacted for the foundation of moral and legal authority in North Korea's Kim Jong Il era (1994-2011).

Yǒngsaeng (Eternal Life) (1997), one of the most important works after the death of Kim Il Sung, enumerates the father Kim's deeds during the last weeks of his life.²⁷ By so doing, the novel-like biography of Kim Il Sung highlights the clear contrast between the President's hard work for the people's welfare, passionate devotion to the cause of national reunification, and sincere commitment to the country; and government officials' inertia and the people's ignorance. In North Korean narrative art—such as the novel, historical writing, and film—people and bureaucrats commit a sin by failing to lighten the leader's burden.

However, Kim Jong Il was exceptional. He was a messiah figure. Under Kim Jong Il's rule (1994-2011), North Korean literature described Kim Jong Il's hard work without rest as an atonement for the people's sins, and defined it as his *sungmyǒng* or *unmyǒng* (destiny) and *samyǒng* (calling). These three words are almost interchangeable, but *samyǒng* (calling) is rarely used for the father Kim. "Calling" is attached to people, bureaucrats, military persons, and the son Kim. After the father Kim's death, the term "calling" was used frequently in North Korea during the twenty-first century. The "calling" appeared as a form of pledge to realize the father Kim's will. For example, on November 3, 2011, North Korea's official propaganda website posted an anecdote about Kim Jong Il's devotion to his *samyǒng*, titled "Choguk t'ongil ūn na ūi

²⁷ Song Sangwǒn and Paek Pohŭm, *Yǒngsaeng (Eternal Life)* (Pyongyang: Munhak yesul chonghap ch'ulp'ansa, 1997), 285, 286.

samyŏng imnida” (National Unification is My Calling). In this anecdote, the son Kim vows to accomplish national unification and declares that it is his calling because it is his father’s will.²⁸

Unmyŏng is the most popular and general notion, *inter alia*, to indicate a way of life determined by “divine” order. From his early years, Kim Jong Il often emphasized the notion of destiny. It is obvious that Hegelian historicism heavily influenced Kim Jong Il and North Korea’s Agitprop. Kim Jong Il’s idea of historical progress is a derivative of Hegel’s dialectic between master and slave. It might be said that it is more directly derived from Marx’s opposition between bourgeois and proletariat. However, Kim Jong Il was quite reactionary from the Marxist point of view; he was not so much Marxist materialist as Hegelian idealist in that he attached importance to the immortality of thought.

This is the great age of Juche. The Juche age is the new historical era when the popular masses have emerged as masters of the world and are shaping their own destiny independently and creatively. The popular masses are struggling for Chajusong under the banner of the immortal Juche idea. This is the irresistible trend of our times. . . In our country today the Juche idea has been splendidly implemented in all areas of the revolution and construction under the intelligent guidance of the leader.²⁹

Kim Jong Il, in his first theoretical treatise, *Yŏnghwa yesullon (On the Art of Cinema, 1973)*, highlights people’s *unmyŏng* (destiny) as “masters of the world.” He claims that people are destined to “struggl[e] for Chajusong.”³⁰

²⁸ “Choguk t’ongil ūn na ūi samyŏng imnida” (National Unification is My Calling) *Urimijokkiri*, November 3, 2011. <http://www.uriminzokkiri.com/index.php?ptype=gisa1&no=43636> (accessed: February 14, 2016).

²⁹ Kim Jong Il, *On the Art of Cinema* (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1989), 1.

³⁰ It is still controversial whether *Yŏnghwa yesullon (On the Art of Cinema)* was published in 1973. A South Korean scholar Oh Chang-eun pointed out that the oldest edition of the book discovered so far was printed at 1984. It is very doubtful that Kim Jong Il’s first treatise, *On the Art of Cinema*, was published

Even in its English translation, the North Korean publisher does not translate the Korean word “Chajusong,” which mystifies its meaning. But Chajusong corresponds to independence or freedom in English, and almost corresponds to Isaiah Berlin’s notion of “positive liberty.”³¹ This is to say that the Korean word means the individual’s freedom from any possible slavery and his or her consciousness as a master. However, this particular kind of freedom is determined by North Korea’s state ideology, the Juche idea, which “has been splendidly implemented in all areas of the revolution and construction under the intelligent guidance of” Kim Il Sung. Thus, the North Korean notion of Chajusong is not a genuine sense of “positive liberty” but actually connotes voluntary and conscious obedience to the leader’s authority.

Sungmyǒng can also be translated as destiny and is perfectly interchangeable with *unmyǒng*. But it can also denote “calling” in some cases. Following is part of a fictionalized biography of Kim Jong Il, *Ch’onggǒm ŭl tŭlgo (Taking Up Guns and Bayonets)*. In North Korea’s best writer, Song Sangwǒn,’s novel, Kim Jong Il is described as being given a divine calling as the leader of North Korea. Because of his vocation, he works hard with almost no sleep.

“I want to stay late in the night to work. But everybody [in the building] waits until the light in my office is turned off. I tell them to go back home in a firm tone, but they plead with me not to work late in the night and to take care of my health. So, speaking of me, I

in 1973, as the North Korean regime claimed. Oh Chang-eun, “North Korean Method of Writing Literature: the Foundation and Development of the ‘Seed’ Theory,” in Dankook dae pusŏl Hanguk munhwa kisul yǒnguso (Institute for Korean Culture and Technology at Dankook University). *Chuch’e ūi hwanyǒng: Pukhan munye iron e taehan pip’anchǒk ihae (The Illusions of Juche: A Critical Understanding of North Korean Art and Literary Theory)*, (Kwangmyǒng: Tosŏ ch’ulp’an Kyǒngjin, 2011), 22.

³¹ Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty” [1958], in Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969).

am the only man whose right to decide when to work and rest, the legal right that everybody in my country enjoys, is curtailed.”

The interpreter translated what Comrade Kim Jong Il said. Then, Yazov was much moved to the extent that his body got hotter at a breathless pace as if he exposed himself to hot air.

In honorific forms and a quiet voice, Yazov spoke to Him.

“That is called the President’s *sungmyǒng* (destiny) by the writers in your country.”

[...]

Comrade Kim Jong Il’s driving skill was astonishing. Almost not looking ahead but frequently looking back at Yazov in the backseat, He was driving safely and confidently.³²

Kim Jong Il is a skillful driver in *Taking Up Guns and Bayonets*. His driving gives astonishment to the narrator and Yazov, the last Marshal of the Soviet Union and a disciple of Kim Jong Il’s *sasang* (thought). More astonishing to them is Kim Jong Il’s *sungmyǒng* (destiny), which forces him to give up his “right to decide when to work and rest.” He has no private life. All his life including his familial matters belongs to the state and public affairs. This communality of life defines the peculiar status of human authority that Kim Jong Il attempted to obtain: authority with no right.

This is a distinctive feature of the North Korean version of authority, which deviates from the personality cults found in socialist states such as China under Mao Zedong and the Soviet Union under Stalin or Brezhnev. Those dictators did not dare build dynasties by bequeathing political power to their biological descendants; the oligarchies must not have allowed them to do so. However, the North Korean ruling elites were significantly homogeneous, as a result of

³² Song Sangwǒn, *Ch’onggǒm ūl tūlgo (Taking Up Guns and Bayonets)* (Pyongyang: Munhak yesul ch’ulp’ansa, 2002), 163.

incessant purges since the 1950s,³³ that they endorsed Kim Jong Il's accession to state leadership. Indeed, by the time the father Kim began to carry out his succession plan in the 1970s, he encountered little opposition from the ruling elite.³⁴

Moreover, it also would look unique if we compare the North Korean kind of authority with its Weberian version. In Weber's thought, the Reformation rendered Western civilization individualistic and there is a strict division between the public and the private. Even if leading politicians perform their calling, it is still their personal faith. In Weberian political thought, Chancellor Merkel does not have to share her calling with the German people, nor President Obama with American citizens, even though they can publicize their belief in their vocations.

On the contrary, the North Korean regime urges its people to share their *unmyōng* (destiny), *sungmyōng* (destiny), and *samyōng* (calling) with their political leaders. It seems likely that Kim Jong Il's ultimate goal in his theoretical endeavor was to transform the entire population of North Korea into a united ethno-religious community. Unlike other newly-independent countries in Asia and Africa, Kim Jong Il's North Korea stood not only on nationalism but also on near-religious authority. This is comparable only to the Salafi regimes or

³³ Wada Haruki, *Kim Il Sung and His War against Japan in Manchuria*, 362-383; Andrei Lankov, *From Stalin to Kim Il Sung: The Formation of North Korea 1945-1960* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 77-109.

³⁴ At the eighth full session of the fifth Central Committee of the Working Party of Korea (WPK) in February, 1974, Kim Jong Il was appointed as a member of the Politburo and recognized as the heir apparent to his father, Kim Il Sung. From that time to 1977, he was called the "tang chungang" (party center) by the North Korean media outlets. Yi Chongsök, *Saero ssün hyōndae Pukhan ūi ihae* (*Understanding Modern North Korea*, new edition) (Seoul: Yōksa pip'yōngsa, 2000), 501-502. North Korean writer, Song Sangwōn, describes how excited O Chinu, the father Kim's right-hand man and Marshall of the North Korean People's Army, was on the day the son Kim was recognized as the father's heir, as follows: "The Politburo's meeting in 1974 was of prime importance in the history of our Party. That day, O Chinu startled his family by shouting for joy, 'Hooray! We did it!' At home, he had never spoken of anything happening in the office. But that day was exceptional. Truly exceptional was his joy." Song Sangwōn, *Ch'onggōm ūl tūlgo* (*Taking up Guns and Bayonets*), 121-122.

Islamist groups in the Middle East such as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Muslim Brotherhood, and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, which impose not secular law but *sharia* upon their populations or seek to establish the Islamic legal system derived from the religious precepts of Islam, particularly the *Quran* and the Hadith. The North Korean regime, just like religious fundamentalists in the Middle East, stands on divine authority, the dead father's authority.

5. The Function of “Yuhun” (“Will” or “Dying Injunctions”)

After Kim Il Sung died, his decisions became more irreversible. Kim Jong Il made them absolute rules and imparted a divine character to them. Usually, the succession of power destabilizes the regime. However, Kim Jong Il was a clever ruler who made himself almost invisible in the way he refrained from being seen in public. His rule was declared *yuhun chŏngch'i* (legacy politics); the country was proclaimed to be run by the dead leader Kim Il Sung's will rather than the living ruler Kim Jong Il's domination. In the absence of his image in the media, Kim Jong Il effectively controlled people's discontent in the famine-stricken country. He rarely met popular defiance because his rule was based on his father's divine authority. Theoretically, there was no way to react against the dead father's authority.

Then [Comrade Kim Jong Il] received a call from Sim Ch'ŏlbŏm at the construction site of the Kumgansan Hydroelectric Power Plant. As a general at the Politburo advised him, Sim reported the heroic conduct by hundreds of soldiers who were trapped underground but kept digging with thin air to carry out their task to drive the tunnel. Sim said nobody was able to stop them from going forward.

After Sim's report, Comrade Kim Jong Il asked back:

“So? You want me to issue an order to stop them?”

Then, Sim answered:

“Yes, Sir! I ask you to stop...”

Sim slurred the end of his sentence, because he could hear Comrade Kim Jong Il emitting a groan. Sim Ch'ölböm could sense His pain wholeheartedly, and felt like he had made a useless request.

[...]

Comrade Kim Jong Il was conscious that the military and the people had not only politico-moral superiority but also economic potential enough to protect the country's basic interests. There was no doubt that His trust in the military and the people helped Him to be patient and composed.

Comrade Kim Jong Il believed that we people, along with future historians, would understand Him after some years passed and we who tightened our belts would recall that day with smiles in the near future. So He said to Sim Ch'ölböm with a firm resolution,

“Order #0026 is the order to go forward. This is expected to be achieved greatly and issued by *sidae* (the time in English; *Zeit* in German as in *Zeitgeist*). This is Father President's *yuhun* (will, injunction, or instruction). Nobody can cancel or disobey the order. Neither Supreme Commander nor soldiers!”

There appeared sublime light on his face after He finished speaking.³⁵

In *Ch'onggöm ül tülgo (Taking Up Guns and Bayonets)*, General Sim Ch'ölböm, who is in charge of the construction site of a hydroelectric power plant, asks Kim Jong Il to stop the ditch diggers from going forward. They are trapped in the underground ditch, as its mouth has fallen down. But they do not follow General Sim's order to stop. Regardless of whether they are rescued, the workers continue to dig the underground ditch with their pickaxes and shovels. When he hears from General Sim, Kim Jong Il looks aloof. But the narrator claims the son Kim is in distress. He is worried about the workers' doomed fate; if he does not order them to stop,

³⁵ Song Sangwön, *Ch'onggöm ül tülgo (Taking Up Guns and Bayonets)* (Pyongyang: Munhak yesul ch'ulp'ansa, 2002),

they will be suffocated deep underground. However, he does not have the right to stop them from digging, because it is his father's *yuhun* (will or dying injunctions) that they continue. The dead father Kim Il Sung's authority justifies the ditch diggers' voluntary and conscious submission to the living son's order.

Another factor that conduces to the workers' enthusiasm for fulfilling "yuhun" is the existence of "future historians," the possible audience of their heroic act. They are aware of "history"—how they will be remembered and praised for their deeds in the state's historical record.

One interesting feature in North Korean literature during Kim Jong Il's era was that literary works described the workers and the soldiers as being filmed, and Kim Jong Il as watching the filmed report. He is watching over them, and they will be seen in the films by mass audiences including their descendants. Labor, military drills, and even everyday life are filmed and thus transformed into spectacles.

Yuhun—the dead father's will—determines the present, and the moments when people are working and soldiers are performing their duties immediately become history. This historical imagination transforms the past, the present, and the future; the beginning, the middle, and the end of time. In other words, time takes a form of narrative. Readers imagine that they look at their lives as if they see the past from a vantage point of the present. They feel like they know what happened and what will occur. This specific kind of knowledge shores up human authority in a way that the creator of the narrative obtains the readers' spontaneous submission despite the possibility of their physical capacity for reaction.

6. Dispossessed of *Potentia*, Narrative-Creating Power, and *Affectus*

Kim Jong Il formed national organizations of writers, film makers, and artists; at the same time, he deprived academia and artistic circles of their autonomy in the late 1960s. He purged a large number of writers and artists when he was appointed to the Head of the Literature and Art section affiliated in the state's Department of Agitation and Propaganda (Agitprop) by his father Kim Il Sung in 1967 (discussed in Chapter 3). It is believed that he relentlessly ousted his uncle Kim Yŏngju and his followers who were heavily affected by de-Stalinization, political reform launched at the 20th Party Congress (February 1956) by Nikita Khrushchev, First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from 1953 to 1964, that condemned the Josef Stalin's era of the cult of personality.³⁶ Kim Jong Il obsessively opposed the reformists' attempts to emasculate his father Kim Il Sung's despotic rule by his monopoly of the power to produce and circulate historical narrative—in other words, by operating the state's propaganda apparatus.³⁷

In so doing, Kim Jong Il sought to dispossess *potentia agendi* (power of action), narrative-creating power, and *affectus* (affect)—more accurately, he attempted to render the potentialities inactive. He ruled over the line between the narratives that were allowed and those that were prohibited. Moreover, he forced the people to emulate protagonists in the narratives, such as the soldiers in his father's anti-Japanese guerilla unit. In March, 1974, he proclaimed an official slogan, “Saengsan to haksŭp to saenghwal to hangil yugyŏkdae pangsik ũro” (Let Us Work, Study, and Live in the way of the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Unit). He attempted to reform

³⁶ Polly Jones, ed. *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization: Negotiating the Cultural and Social Change in the Khrushchev Era* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 2.

³⁷ Yi Chongsŏk, *Saero ssŭn hyŏndae Pukhan ũi ihae (The New Edition of Understanding Modern North Korea)* (Seoul: Yŏksa pip'yŏngsa, 2002), 52.

everyday life on the basis of his father's guerrilla warfare. As Shin Hyung-ki, a South Korean scholar of North Korean literature, has pointed out, reform in everyday life was conducted in a way that Kim Jong Il suppressed the people's *potentia* to produce narrative.³⁸

Without narrative-creating power, life became confined in *unmyǒng* (destiny), *sungmyǒng* (destiny) and *samyǒng* (calling). People gradually lost their potentiality to create alternative narratives and the possibility to react against Kim Jong Il's authority. After his father's death, Kim Jong Il exploited his opportunity to establish the dead father's authority—divine authority—which the people have almost no ability to defy. Thus, he ruled his country by refraining from appearing in the media and, instead, relying on his father's *yuhun* (will). People still had emotions, but it seems that they forfeited their potentiality to express them with their own narratives. North Korean political religion based itself on the deprivation of the people's narrative-creating power.

³⁸ Shin Hyung-ki, "Iyagi ūi yǒngnǔng kwa Kim Il Sung" (The *Potentia* to Create Narrative and Kim Il Sung), *Hyǒndae munhak ūi yǒngu* (*The Studies of Modern Literature*) Vol. 41 (2010), 289-323.

Chapter Three

Faith and False Dreams: Positive Thinking and the History of Legitimation in North Korea

“My dear comrades! My dear brothers and sisters! Today we greet the New Year 1994 full of *sinsim* (faith) and *rakkwan* (optimism) after the year 1993 in which we shined with our heroic struggles and great achievements.”

— Kim Il Sung, “The New Year Address,” January 1, 1994¹

“Onward for *ch’oehu sŭngni* (the final victory)!”

“We have kindled a fire of uplift to transform *konan ũi haenggun* (the Arduous March) into *ragwŏn ũi haenggun* (the Parade to Paradise).”

— Kim Jong Il, “The New Year Address,” January 1, 1999²

North Koreans are a positive people.³ At least in state propaganda, they all appear to be self-confident and happy. Their emotional well-being is said to come from *faith* in their leaders—Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Il, and Kim Jong Un—and *optimism* for the future. Their leaders declared it so. Strangely enough, it has worked out that way.

¹ Kim Il Sung, “Sinnyŏnsa” (The New Year Address), *Rodong sinmun* (*The Workers’ Newspaper*), January 1, 1994. All translations are the author’s unless otherwise indicated.

² Kim Jong Il, “Olhae rŭl kangsŏng taeguk kŏnsŏl ũi widaehan chŏnhwan ũi hae ro pinnaeija” (Let Us Shine This Year as a Great Year of Changeover to Build A Strong and Prosperous State), *Chosŏn Chungang T’ongsin* (*Korean Central News Agency*), January 1, 1999.

³ This sentence is borrowed from Barbara Ehrenreich’s *Bright-Sided*. Her book starts with a sentence, “Americans are a ‘positive’ people.” Barbara Ehrenreich, *Bright-Sided: How the Relentless Promotion of Positive Thinking Has Undermined America* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2009), 1.

The North Korean regime has handled economic crises not through social reform but by careful control of its people's emotions. This is "the secret" of the Kim regime's survival during the post-Cold War era. If one remains positive, one can be free. But, in the realm of happiness there are the oppressed: those with negative feelings. *Rakkwan* (optimism) and positive emotions such as *haengbok* (happiness) are promoted, while negative feelings like discontent with the regime are discouraged.

Under certain restrictions, people are allowed to express their rancor. But it may be directed only against *wõnssu* (enemies) such as the Americans and the Japanese, whereas the North Korean leaders must be protected from all negative feelings. This is the emotional reform that the Kim regime has promoted. By this method, the North Korean regime has attempted to reshape human beings.

On January 1, 1994, Kim Il Sung (1912-1994), the founding leader of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, delivered "The New Year Address," saying that he and the North Korean people were bursting with *sinsim* (faith) and *rakkwan* (optimism) in greeting the New Year of 1994. But, as it turns out, the historical events that year shook and hurt the North Korean people's faith in their leaders—Kim Il Sung and his son Kim Jong Il (1942-2011)—and their optimism for the future. The year 1994 was not only the year Kim Il Sung died, it was also the first year of North Korea's economic crisis and great famine called *konan ũi haenggun* (the Arduous March). Until then, North Korea was a success story as a Third World, nonaligned country that retained its independence from both the United States of America and even the

socialist super power, the Soviet Union.⁴ However, when the Soviet bloc was dismantled, it became apparent that the North Korean economy had rested almost solely upon its socialist allies. When North Korea's trade with its favorable allies diminished while the prolonged embargo by the U.S. was not withdrawn, the North Korean economy was in a predicament. Even worse, the socialist state was victim to natural disasters—particularly floods. Then the state apparatuses began malfunctioning; the one-time hero of the Third World failed to secure enough food for its people resulting in starvation and large-scale mortality affecting every corner of the country. It seemed likely that North Korea would meet the same fate (i.e., regime change) as other socialist countries in Eastern Europe.

However, on January 1, 1999, Kim Il Sung' son, Kim Jong Il, gave “The New Year Address” full of hope. The overall tone of his address was positive just as his father's speech five years earlier. Not only did Kim Jong Il keep a tight grip on political power after the four-year famine, he also attempted to present new ideas for the future—*ch'oehu sŭngni* (final victory) and *ragwŏn* (paradise). He was optimistic and retained a faith in his orientation. His message was about history—more accurately, the ultimate end of history. Kim Jong Il had taken the lead in writing, compiling, and publishing official history—fictionalized biographies of Kim Il Sung—in North Korea, since he had organized “*sairo munhak ch'angjaktan* (The April 15 Literary Production Unit) in 1967” “in order to produce works of literature and art representing” his father's life and achievements.⁵

⁴ Charles K. Armstrong, *The Tyranny of the Weak: North Korea and the World, 1950-1992* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2013), 168-207.

⁵ Kim Jong Il, “On Establishing the April 15 Literary Production Unit: a Talk to Senior Officials of the Propaganda and Agitation Department of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea, June 20, 1967,” in *Kim Jong Il: Selected Works* (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1992), 237.

History was his weapon: It was a means of establishing “the monolithic ideological system of the Party”⁶ and the entire society, and a way of establishing his legitimacy and enabling his succession to his father’s power. Kim Jong Il had the power to write history, define which historical view was right or wrong, impart meaning to the present as a part of history, and predict the future as a corollary to the course of history. He had authority over censorship as *pisŏ* (Secretary) of *sŏnjŏnsŏndongbu* (the Department of Agitation and Propaganda: Agitprop; literally, the Propaganda and Agitation Department). His power was not limited to what was to be stopped and prohibited, but included what was to be promoted and created. By both these negative and positive forms of power, he attempted to restrict the scope of historical imagination. Through this power over history, he declared that the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) would prevail and the country was becoming a “paradise” on earth. Kim Jong Il was portrayed not as a failed ruler, but as a postdiluvian hero. In the world that North Korean official history created, he was depicted as rebuilding the country after the great flood of 1994.

In terms of its efficiency, Kim Jong Il’s rule over history appeared to work effectively. Kim Jong Il owed his successes to *sinsim* (faith) and *rakkwan* (optimism), which he had inherited from his father and promoted through writing and making the North Korean people read history. In the case of North Korea, monopolized power over history and the people’s emotional well-being are closely linked together.

Through historical writings, Kim Jong Il and his ideologues celebrated “Pyongyang” as “the new Rome,” the new Eternal City, and the center of a new civilization. It was created in the image of Kim Jong Il as a pious, virtuous, and courageous leader or Wise Man, and made his

⁶ Ibid., 232.

loyal subjects the models of the new human. Kim Jong Il's primary method in building a new civilization and reforming humankind is *the theorization of strategy*: He theorized his father's military strategy—guerilla tactic that stresses the speed of military action—into a norm for everyday life, advice for social success, a way to be happy, and a science for human reform. If we summarize Kim Jong Il's slogan, it could be “Live like Kim Il Sung's guerrilla warriors and you will accomplish what you want, be happy, and reform yourself.” But, is it possible for history to be a theory of well-being or a science of human reform?

Self-help books and psychotherapy can provide specific strategies to live better or feel better. Originators of those strategies sometimes claim they are theories. For example, Martin E. P. Seligman believes himself to be practicing science. He argues that his “positive psychology” can make people happier and feel that their lives are more meaningful. This leading figure of American psychology claims that his “well-being theory” is “believable because of the underlying science.”⁷ He presents five measurable elements—“positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement (PERMA)” —to validate his theory.⁸ His attempt seems successful.⁹

The North Korean science of well-being is based on causal explanations, while Seligman's theory rides on “measurable” indicators. Kim Jong Il used narrative instead of statistical data in

⁷ Martin E. P. Seligman, *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-Being* (New York, London, Toronto, and Sydney: Free Press, 2011), 1.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 24. Jeremy Bentham is the first person who attempted to measure happiness and the founding father of the “science of happiness.” William Davies, *The Happiness Industry: How the Government and Big Business Sold Us Well-Being* (London and New York: Verso, 2015), 13-27.

⁹ Martin E. P. Seligman has a long history of attempts to construct measurable indicators for spiritual values. In 2004, Seligman, together with Christopher Peterson, attempted to present a measure of humanist ideals of virtue by the method of “Character Strengths and Virtues (CSV),” which is empirical and claimed to be scientific. Christopher Peterson and Martin E. P. Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues: a Handbook and Classification* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

his monumental article, “*Sahoe chuŭi nŭn kwahak ida*” (Socialism is Science), and called his project of *ingan kaejo* (human reform) science.¹⁰ His notion of *kwahak* (science) stems from the conventional formula accentuated during the Renaissance, “*Scire est per causas cognoscere*” (Science is knowledge through causes).¹¹ For Kim Jong Il and North Korean writers, history is science and historical writings should suggest a theory of how to live and feel. To summarize, the North Korean science of human reform—Kim Jong Il’s theorization of Kim Il Sung’s military strategy and the state’s effort to manufacture history—can be seen as the North Korean version of the culture of self-help and positive thinking.

1. The Functions of History

Kim Jong Il concentrated on what he could do—manufacture history.¹² He knew that he did not have power to control the economy, which was riding on the world market. It seemed obvious that there would be very little that he could do unless the U.S. embargo of North Korea was lifted. Still, he was adept at wielding his power over history. In other words, he understood why the power to write history was so important to monopolize his political power in North Korea

¹⁰ Kim Jong Il, “*Sahoe chuŭi nŭn kwahak ida*” (Socialism is Science), *Rodong sinmun* (*The Workers’ Newspaper*), November 1, 1994.

¹¹ Donald R. Kelley, *Faces of History: Historical Inquiry from Herodotus to Herder* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 191.

¹² This is not much different from Charles Armstrong’s observation on North Korea’s method of regime survival. He argued that the main tactic for surviving the Kim family regime during economic devastation was to fall back on ‘ideology.’ I add one more observation to Armstrong’s: ideology assumes the form of narrative. It is necessary for the regime to refine historical writing to establish and fortify ideology. Charles K. Armstrong, “Ideological Introversion and Regime Survival: North Korea’s Our-Style Socialism,” Martin K. Dimitrov, ed., *Why Communism Did Not Collapse: Understanding Authoritarian Regime Resilience in Asia and Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 118-119.

and secure his regime from popular unrest. From 1972 to 2007, the April 15 Literary Production Unit under Kim Jong Il's leadership produced thirty-three volumes of Kim Il Sung's biography, and continues to publish new volumes today.¹³ Moreover, the Unit began writing the biographies of Kim Jong Il in 1992.¹⁴ The number of Kim Jong Il's biographies now exceeds fifteen. The two Kims' biographies have been published under the titles of *Pulmyŏl ūi ryŏksa (Immortal History)* and *Pulmyŏl ūi hyangdo (Immortal Leader)*—the former for the father Kim and the latter for the son Kim. These fictionalized biographies of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il display how history is nationalized, monopolized, personalized, and exploited by political leaders.

Under Kim Jong Il's rule, history performed multiple functions. First, North Korean historiography was a history of sovereignty. Kim Jong Il bureaucratized and fully controlled the writers and artists who created literature and art, or artistic forms of history, which played a critical role in legitimizing his father's rule and his succession. Second, North Korean historiography is richly laden with religious overtones and describes Kim Jong Il not only as Kim Il Sung's legitimate heir, but also as a saint who practices the worship of his father. To be more specific, the two Kim's relationship has been accentuated and moralized in artistic forms of history—including film, novels, poetry, theater, and music—since the great famine. Especially after Kim Il Sung's death in 1994, it appears that the senior Kim was deemed the junior Kim's celestial alter ego, or authentic, ideal self. Their biographies turn into hagiographies.

¹³ Kang Chinho, "Ch'ongsŏ ranŭn kŏdae sŏsa hogŭn hŏwiŭisik" (Immortal History: Metanarrative or False Consciousness), Kang Chinho, ed., *Pukhan ūi munhwa chŏngjŏn, Ch'ongsŏ "Pulmyŏl ūi ryŏksa" rŭl ignŭnda (Reading "Immortal History," the Canon of North Korean Culture)* (Seoul: Somyŏng ch'ulp'an, 2009), 24-25.

¹⁴ The first book published under the *Pulmyŏl ūi hyangdo (Immortal Leader)* series is Kwŏn Chŏng'ung's *P'urŭn hanŭl (Blue Sky)* (1992). Ri Chongnyŏl's *Yeji (Wisdom)* was originally published in 1990 and became part of the *Immortal Leader* series when its second edition was published.

Hagiography typically starts with, or presupposes, the protagonist's revelation, which provides him or her with a vision of utopia and the Last Judgement. As in the stories of revelations, the North Korean historiography of Kim Jong Il involves an apocalyptic view of time and space. What is at stake in this narrative genre is not social reform but self-enlightenment or self-improvement: It would be better to wait than take action for social reform if the end of the world is near. The Last Judgement is above human beings' capability and responsibility. To borrow Seligman's notion, because the Last Judgement is not influenced by what human beings think and expect, it is "nonreflexive reality."¹⁵ Even if the end comes, human beings do not know when it will come, nor are we able to change its timing. What is at issue in this kind of narrative is to reform the self, not to change "nonreflexive reality."

In this regard, Thomas Heffernan's insight into "sacred biographies" in the mediaeval Christian world may apply to the North Korean story of self-help. That is to say, North Korean hagiography provides its society with "models of behavior" that were "worthy of emulation," similar to "sacred biographies" of saints and martyrs in mediaeval Europe.¹⁶ There is almost no room for political discourse on social reform like *regime change* in these sacred texts.

This genre of writing is intended to give its audience the "meaning" of life and redefine what "happiness" is, on a spiritual—rather than material—basis. Although state propaganda and Kim Jong Il himself emphasized the meaning of collective life, the meaning itself is achieved at the level of the individual. If the social system has lost its futurity and has no chance of development, the self or the individual becomes subject to reform.¹⁷ Through self-reform, self-

¹⁵ Martin E. P. Seligman, 234-237.

¹⁶ Thomas J. Heffernan, *Sacred Biographies: Saints and Their Biographers in the Middle Ages* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 6.

¹⁷ William Davies, 9-10.

improvement, or self-help, the unhappiness and unrest rampant in the society can be subdued and transformed into merely one individual's misery, something for which that person alone is responsible.¹⁸

This kind of history, which emphasizes the spiritual achievement of a state, a social group, or an individual, aims for *faith*, *hope*, and *dreams* rather than *knowledge*. By studying this sort of history, its reader is expected to acquire the former in preference to the latter. Its rationale is that one should take “something that might happen or not happen” as “something that should happen.” *Faith* is such a magic word: If you believe, your dreams will come true. This faith saves individuals from the malaise and emptiness of the everyday, and helps them set higher goals that transcend the lower, material, and secular life. Yet, to look at the darker side, this type of history may transform an individual or a group of people into a form desirable for, useful to, and obedient to a certain rule, norm, or political and cultural value. It is basically intended for psychological reshaping.

2. The Dodo Bird Verdict

It is also important to note that this mental control is a function that religion has long performed. There is nothing new and surprising in this kind of writing; it is the same old story. Since Marx called religion “the opium of the people,”¹⁹ the role of religion as the means of psychological

¹⁸ “If success is solely the result of one’s own efforts, then the responsibility for any failure must necessarily be individual shortcoming or weaknesses.” Micki McGee, *Self-Help, Inc.: Makeover Culture in American Life* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 13.

¹⁹ Karl Marx, “Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right (1843),” David McLellan ed., *Karl Marx: Selected Writings* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 72.

manipulation has drawn attention from various thinkers and scholars—for example, Margaret T. Singer, an outspoken critic of new religious movements (NRMs). The same can be said about the history of *faith*, *hope*, and *dreams*. They are opium, but they are good, even therapeutic, in use. They are medicine that converts pain to anathema, pleasure, or a boost to working harder. This “opium” works not only for *manipulation*, but also *treatment*.

This viewpoint may be far from being the worn-out accusations of “brainwashing,”²⁰ “thought reform,”²¹ and “illusionary happiness,”²² which were coined or emphasized by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Margaret T. Singer, and Karl Marx respectively. It is not obvious that the agents of psychological reshaping (i.e., religious leaders and historiographers) have evil and obnoxious intent. They may believe that they are doing right and devoting themselves to a good cause. Furthermore, the manipulation-cum-treatment could be beneficial to believers and readers.

Mental instability and negative feelings can be relieved by any treatment, by any means, under one specific condition: Both parties—therapist and patient, writer and reader, or leader and

²⁰ The term “brainwashing” was coined by American journalist Edward Hunter in his book *Brain-washing in Red China: the Calculated Destruction of Men’s Minds* (1951) as a propaganda device to explain why American war prisoners converted to communism. Hunter worked for the Office of Strategic Services, the forerunner of the Central Intelligence Agency, during World War II. Dick Anthony, an American forensic psychologist who wrote a number of articles on brainwashing, said that Hunter was an undercover propaganda specialist employed by the CIA when the journalist published his book on communist brainwashing. Dick Anthony, “Pseudoscience and Minority Religions: An Evaluation of the Brainwashing Theories of Jean-Marie Abgrall,” *Social Justice Research* Vol. 12, no. 4 (1999), 424-425. Tim Weiner, “Mind Game: Remembering Brainwashing,” *The New York Times*, July 6, 2008.

²¹ Margaret T. Singer listed these terms used to identify “thought reform”: “thought struggle” by Mao Zedong (1929), “brainwashing” by Hunter (1951), “debility, dependency, and dread (DDD syndrome)” by Farber, Harlow, and West (1957), “coercive persuasion” by Schein (1961), “systematic manipulation of psychological and social influence” by Singer herself (1982), “coordinated programs of coercive influence and behavioral control” by Ofshe and Singer (1986), and “exploitative persuasion” by Singer and Addis (1992). Margaret T. Singer, *Cults in Our Midst: the Hidden Menace in Our Everyday Lives* (San Francisco, Calif.: Joessey-Bass, 1995), 53.

²² Karl Marx, 72.

follower—involved in the manipulation-cum-treatment should have *faith*. This is called “the Dodo bird effect.” The term was coined in 1936 by Saul Rosenzweig, an American psychologist and therapist.²³ Quoting the Dodo’s verdict, “Everybody has won, and all must have prizes,” from Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), Rosenzweig said that all therapies are equally effective, however they originated and whatever they draw from. He attributed their successes not to their theories, but to the personality of the therapist and the relationship between him or her and his or her patient, saying the “therapeutic result achieved cannot uncritically be used as a test of [the] theory advanced.”²⁴ Gary Greenberg, an editor for *Harper’s Magazine* and a psychotherapist, clarifies the meaning of Rosenzweig’s argument as follows:

The single factor that makes a difference in outcome is *faith*: the patient must believe in the therapist, and the therapist must believe in his orientation. For therapy to work, both parties must have *faith*, sometime *against all reason*, that their expedition will succeed. (Emphasis added)²⁵

If both parties have faith, whatever they do will work as a treatment. It is not clear that Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il knew the magical effect of faith—the Dodo bird effect—but it is obvious that they were very skillful technicians in its use.²⁶ Surprisingly, it was somewhat easy for the

²³ Saul Rosenzweig, “Some Implicit Common Factors in Diverse Methods of Psychotherapy,” *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (1936), 412-415.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 412.

²⁵ Gary Greenberg, “The War on Unhappiness: Goodbye Freud, Hello Positive Thinking,” *Harper’s Magazine*, Sep. 2010, 29.

²⁶ Heonik Kwon and Byung-Ho Chung drew their attention to Kim Il Sung’s ability to create “an aura of captivating charismatic power” in their analysis on North Korea’s political culture. They said, “North Korea had a highly skillful political leader who knew how to build an aura of captivating charismatic power.” Heonik Kwon and Byung-Ho Chung, *North Korea: Beyond Charismatic Politics* (Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto, and Plymouth, UK: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, INC., 2012), 1.

father Kim to establish faith in him among North Korean elites and common people. It seems that they had the “will to believe.”

Just after liberation from Japan, North Korean elites started to form *inmin wiwŏnhoe* (People’s committees) and organize the central government and its local branches. Fortunately for Kim Il Sung, two powerful factions, the Soviet group and Chinese Ya’nan sect—in addition to Kim Il Sung’s clique formed during his anti-Japanese guerrilla activities in the 1930s—supported him.²⁷ Only a few months after the liberation,²⁸ North Korean political leaders started calling Kim Il Sung *widaehan chidoja* (great leader) and sometimes chanted, “Long live General Kim Il Sung!” at various formal functions.²⁹ Subsequently, Han Sŏrya (1900-?), a leading figure in socialist literary circles, published Kim Il Sung’s biography, *Yŏngung Kim Il Sung changgun (Hero: General Kim Il Sung)*, and Cho Kich’ŏn (1913-1951), a former Soviet military officer, wrote an epic poem, *Paektusan (Paektu Mountain)*, dedicated to Kim in 1946. In May 1946, Kim Ch’angman (1907-?), then-head of the Propaganda Department and a member of the Yan’an faction, claimed that Kim Il Sung was the Stalin or the Mao Zedong of North Korea, saying, “it is critical to elect Comrade Il Sung as the supreme leader before founding the provisional government of the democratic Korea.”³⁰

²⁷ Wada Haruki, *Kita Chōsen gendaishi (Modern History of North Korea)* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 2012), 29-30.

²⁸ Kim Il Sung is said to have been elected as secretary-in-chief of Chosŏn Kongsandang Puk Chosŏn pun’guk (the Korean Communist Party—North Korea Bureau, KCP-NKB) by the Third Enlarged Executive Committee Meeting of the KCP-NKB, December 17-18, 1945. Charles K. Armstrong, *The North Korean Revolution, 1945-1950* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003), 59.

²⁹ Yi Chongsŏk, *Saero ssŭn hyŏndae Pukhan ūi ihae (The New Edition of Understanding Modern North Korea)* (Seoul: Yŏksa pip’yŏngsa, 2002), 411.

³⁰ *Tang ūi chŏngch’i nosŏn kŭp tang saŏp ch’onggyŏl kwa kyŏlchŏng (Party’s Political Line, and the Conclusion and the Decision for the Party’s Undertakings)* (Pyongyang: Chŏngnosa ch’up’anbu, 1946), 67-68. Kim Ch’angman’s insistent is also quoted in Sŏ Tongman, *Pukchosŏn sahoe chuŭi ch’eje sŏngnipsa, 1945-1961 (History of the Formation of North Korean Socialism, 1945-1961)* (Seoul: Sŏnin, 2005), 167.

Kim Il Sung had political rivals: Pak Hŏnyŏng (1900-1955) and Mujŏng (1905-1952), among others. Local nationalists who had engaged in labor and peasant movements on the Korean Peninsula during the colonial period were a bit different from socialist elites from the Soviet Union and China. They did not give unanimous support to Kim Il Sung for first few months after the liberation. Some called Pak Hŏnyŏng *suryŏng* (president, leader, or head), while others treated Kim Il Sung and Mujŏng as equals.³¹ However, once Kim Il Sung was chosen as leader in late 1945, they showed their absolute loyalty to him. Thus, all reforms after the liberation, such as ‘the land reform of March 1946’ were exercised under the name and lead of Kim Il Sung.³²

Even at the very beginning of the North Korean state, its political elites were absorbed in giving Kim absolute power and promoting faith in him among the population. They acted as if they had long been eager for faith in their leader, Kim Il Sung. The cult of Kim Il Sung’s personality was very spontaneous and volitional. It seems that their voluntary cult of Kim Il Sung’s personality was a way of healing the Korean people’s collective trauma during the harsh years of the Pacific War (1941-1945) and the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) under Japanese rule. Otherwise, it can be said that it was an attempt to supplant *tennō* (the Emperor of Japan) with a new charismatic leader by following the Soviet example—Stalinism. If neither is correct, North Koreans’ voluntary cult of Kim Il Sung’s personality may be a vestige from the authoritarian tendency in Confucianism.³³ Whatever it was, the personality cult seemed to play a

³¹ Sŏ Tongman, 125.

³² Wada Haruki, *Kita Chōsen: Yūgekитай kokka no genzai (North Korea: The Present of the Guerilla State)*, (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1998), 68-74.

³³ Wada Haruki has rightly pointed out that North Korea’s political culture is “zasshatekina bunkateki kongōbutsu” (a hybridized mixture of cultures). *Ibid.*, 134.

role as a treatment. The North Korean elites believed it to be that way, and the cult worked anyway.

3. *Damnatio Memoriae* and the Domination of *Mu* and *Mun*

The culture of faith caused political conflict among the North Korean elites because Kim Il Sung did not intend to share power with his fervent supporters. He did not want to transfer his despotic ruling power—and the population’s faith that he had exclusively enjoyed—to anyone but his offspring. That is to say, he wanted to establish a dynasty by turning over state leadership to his own biological son, Kim Jong Il.

Power circulates. “Power is exercised through networks.”³⁴ This is the nature of power, as Michel Foucault pointed out. What is at issue here is the form of the power-network—how far power is shared—since it determines the type of rule: monarchy, oligarchy, or democracy; *tŏkch’i* (rule of virtue) or *pŏpch’i* (rule of law). By at least the mid-1970s, Kim Il Sung had finished constructing the form of the power-network that he preferred and founding a new dynasty. The two Kims shared power, and power-circulation was closed to any but the father and the son.

Kim Il Sung’s initial step to building the new dynasty was to place the responsibility of knowledge production on Kim Jong Il. While Kim Il Sung seized control of the military, Kim Jong Il exercised power over the production and circulation of knowledge. In the late 1960s, Kim

³⁴ Michel Foucault, “*Society Must Be Defended:*” *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976*, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), 29.

Jong Il held the power to categorize what knowledge—especially historical knowledge—was right or wrong and what kind of artistic representation of history was correct or incorrect. Knowledge production was built on his father's military activities in the 1930s. Kim Jong Il theorized his father's military strategy, *hangil yukyŏktaesik pangbŏp* (the anti-Japanese guerilla's way), which is said to have been created by Kim Il Sung during his command of an anti-Japanese guerilla unit in the 1930s. With this theorized strategy, Kim Jong Il legitimized his succession and seized the cultural, ideological, and political hegemony in North Korea.

The legitimacy of the father Kim was secured by the historical fact that he was the leader of an anti-Japanese guerilla unit. He was the only Korean military figure who succeeded in attacking the Korean Peninsula during the Japanese Occupation of Korea. No one else dared take the offensive against the Japanese government agencies located on the fully controlled Korean Peninsula until the last day of Japanese colonial rule.³⁵ Ipso facto, he emerged as the leader of North Korea after its liberation from Japan in 1945. However, the son Kim lacked the opportunity to establish, confirm, and enact his legitimacy with distinguished military service as his father had done. In the 1960s and 1970s, the era of peace, he had to find a field in which he could achieve success and certify his legitimacy. Thus, he devoted his attention to history, ideology, culture, and the arts, which had been considered the realm of *mun* (문; 文; wen in Chinese; cultural, literary, and civil) in East Asia. In other words, he converted the absence of an opportunity to make war into the theoretical practices of his regime. From 1967 to the late 1970s,

³⁵ Dae-Sook Suh, *Korean Communist Movement, 1918-1948* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967) and *Kim Il Sung: the North Korean leader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 34-36; Wada Haruki, *Kimu Iruson (Kin Nichisei) to Manshū kōnichi sensō (Kim Il Sung and His War against Japan in Manchuria)* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1992), 183-197; Yi Chongsŏk, 399-403.

Kim Jong Il was a *mun* type of ruler, while his father still controlled the realm of *mu* (무; 武; wu in Chinese; military).

Father Kim's trust in his son and son Kim's faith in his father were more than ordinary. Kim Il Sung did not follow the examples of Joseph Stalin (1878-1953) or Mao Zedong (1893-1976) regarding succession, while Kim Jong Il was not like Andrei Zhdanov (1896-1948), Lin Biao (1907-1971), or Wang Hongwen (1935-1992). Kim Jong Il was healthy and young unlike Zhdanov; had mutual trust with the man in absolute power unlike Lin Biao; and was the leader's biological son unlike Wang Hongwen. The father and son became the two heads of political sovereignty when Kim Jong Il directed a spate of purges in Agitprop and took over responsibility of the nation's art and literature in 1967.

In 1962, Han Sörya, who wrote the first biography of Kim Il Sung and played an important role in establishing Kim Il Sung's personality cult, fell prey to a purge maneuvered by Kim Ch'angman, the top official of Agitprop and another designer of Kim Il Sung's personality cult. Kim Ch'angman himself had been purged for unknown reasons in 1965. That expulsion was designed by Kim Yöngju (b. 1920), Kim Il Sung's younger brother.³⁶ But, in 1967, Kim Jong Il stripped his uncle Kim Yöngju of political leverage with Kim Il Sung's connivance, by removing Yöngju's followers.³⁷ The purged individuals were forced to be forgotten through systematic

³⁶ Yi Chongsök, 52.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 498.

mutilation or erasure of their records and images.³⁸ This North Korean version of *damnatio memoriae* (damnation of memory) was enabled by the newly-established absolute power.³⁹

After purging Kim Yŏngju's faction, Kim Jong Il started to rewrite history by publishing *Immortal History*, fictionalized biography of Kim Il Sung, that celebrates the father Kim's life and achievement. Historical discourse and the practice of recounting history emerged as "the rituals of power"—both the justification for and the reinforcement of power. Michel Foucault called this type of history "discourse of sovereignty," "Roman style history," and the practice of antiquity the Middle Ages.⁴⁰

4. Negotiation and Power Network

Foucault's typology is based on French comparative philologist Georges Dumézil's analyses of Indo-European mythologies.⁴¹ Dumézil said that political sovereignty has two heads in Indo-European mythologies: *rex sacrorum* and *flamen dialis*; *rājanya* (or *kṣatriya*, member of the

³⁸ Some of the purged were reinstated only after they became no real threat to the regime. For example, Han Sŏrya's name reappeared on the roster of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) in 1969. Bryan Myers conjectured that Han died sometime between 1969 and 1970. Han was fully reinstated in the mid-1980s and is said to be buried in the Revolutionary Martyrs' Cemetery at Pyongyang. Pak Chongwŏn and Ryu Man, *Chosŏn munhak kaegwan (General Overview of Korean Literature)* (Pyongyang: Sahoe kawhak ch'ulp'ansa, 1986); Robert A. Scalapino and Chong-sik Lee, *Communism in Korea Vol. 2* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972); Bryan Myers, *Han Sŏrya and North Korean Literature: the Failure of Socialist Realism in the DPRK* (Ithaca: Cornell University East Asian Program, 1994), 150.

³⁹ *Damnatio memoriae* is a punishment that Roman Emperors could order "against deposed *principes*, other condemned members of the imperial house, or private individuals who had conspired against the reigning emperor." Eric R. Varner, *Mutilation and Transformation: Damnatio Memoriae and Roman Imperial Portraiture* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2004), 2.

⁴⁰ Michel Foucault, 65-85.

⁴¹ Georges Dumézil, *Mitra-Varuna: An Essay on Two Indo-European Representations of Sovereignty*, trans. Derek Coltman (New York: Zone Books, 1988).

warrior caste) and *brāhmaṇa* (member of the priestly caste); Varuna and Mitra; to follow Deleuze and Guattari's interpretation, "magician-king and jurist-priest;" "the despot and the legislator; and the binder and the organizer."⁴² Dumézil believed that these dichotomies appear only in Indo-European culture.⁴³

But such a two-headed-sovereignty has existed in other civilizations. For example, there were two branches of bureaucracy and aristocracy during the Chosŏn dynasty on the Korean Peninsula: *muban* (military officials) and *munban* (civil officials).⁴⁴ This Korean version of dichotomy in political sovereignty was not a mythological representation as in Dumézil's analyses. Still, it shows how the state apparatuses operated, how the ruling classes were formed, and how political sovereignty was exercised. Consequently, the division between *mu* and *mun* is the same kind of symbiosis that Dumézil illustrated in the examples of Indo-European mythologies.

⁴² Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 351.

⁴³ The only coupling that Dumézil found in East Asian culture is that of yin and yang, which is a metaphysical pair of male-female and thus different from the symbiosis of "magician-king" and "jurist-priest" in political sovereignty. Georges Dumézil, *Ibid.*, 175-178. The binary order, which is not exactly the same as in Indo-European mythologies, also is found in Semitic mythology. There were two major gods during the Neo-Babylonian Empire (late 7th century to 539 BC): Marduk, god of water, vegetation, judgment, and magic; and Nabu, god of wisdom and writing. Marduk is Nabu's father and the supreme god of the Babylonian pantheon. But Babylonian kings, such as Nebuchadnezzar II and Nabonidus, received "the Septre of the Land" from a priest of Nabu at their coronation ceremonies. Caroline Waerzeggers, "The Pious King: Royal Patronage of Temples," edits. Karen Radner and Eleanor Robson, *The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 732-733.

⁴⁴ These two groups consisted of *yangban* [the two files of officials (civil and military)], the ruling classes of the Chosŏn dynasty, James B. Palais, *Confucian Statecraft and Korean Institutions: Yu Hyŏngwŏn and the Late Chosŏn Dynasty* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996), 34.

Cultural legitimation of power ensued from military takeover of a polity, a city, or a region. This cultural process appeared as a form of “negotiation”⁴⁵ between multiple, heterogeneous forces: the conqueror and the conquered; military power and the aristocratic literati; the Norman king and the Saxon aristocracy during James I’s reign (1567-1625) and thereafter; the Persian and the Medes in the Achaemenid Empire (550 BC-330 BC); the Abbasid rulers and the Barmakid family during the third Islamic Caliphate (750-1258); and Yi Sŏnggye (1335-1408), a military hero of the 14th century-Korean Peninsula, and the Confucian literati in the time of the founding Chosŏn Dynasty (1392).

These processes are not different from what Michel Foucault described by the more dramatic terms of “race war” and “race struggle,” although he contrasted the latter with the cultural legitimation of power, or history of sovereignty. Foucault wanted to demonstrate the temporality of modernity, and thus overstated the significance of historical discourse “from the seventeenth century to the early nineteenth century and then twentieth centuries.”⁴⁶ However, it is doubtful that there was such a discontinuity between the sixteenth century and the seventeenth century.

In fact, what Dumézil’s text represents is not only an equilibrium between the two different entities but also their struggle. It is not far from being Foucault’s model of “history of struggle.” It seems likely that the symmetry is also the result of “war” or “struggle.” While “war,” “struggle,” or “negotiation” is the process of power-circulation, the justification of power represents a particular stage of the circulation. These two kinds of history—the history of

⁴⁵ David R. McCann saw “the struggles over authority and power” reflected in pre-modern Korean literary texts as “negotiation.” David McCann, *Early Korean Literature: Selections and Introductions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 99-161.

⁴⁶ Michel Foucault, 84.

struggle and that of sovereignty—cannot be separated. Moreover, either one can be seen anytime. The former appeared before the seventeenth century and the latter emerged in modern times. It would be fair to say that the break made in the seventeenth century, if any, was a local phenomenon occurring only in Western Europe. Still, Foucault proved his point that there are the division of history and fluctuations between the two kinds. His only fault was that he misconceived “where” and “when.”

To summarize, power is to be diffused through networks and shared by multiple agents. Yet a single entity’s—a person’s, a family’s, or a clique’s—monopoly of power could emerge in a certain period of time, and historical narrative could play a role in glorifying the sole owner of that power. History or historical narrative has fluctuated between the two types of historical discourses in accordance with the power-relationship and power-circulation. On the fourth day of his lectures, “Society Must Be Defended,” at the Collège de France on January 28, 1976, Foucault posed an interesting question: “What if Rome once more conquered the revolution?”⁴⁷

Kim Jong Il gave the answer—the return of “Rome”—under the shadow of his father. Kim Jong Il’s rule emerged as the combination of *mu* and *mun*, and he himself appears as three types of man—the embodiment of North Korean civilization:

- a. The Man in *yeji* (Wisdom)
- b. *Tōk* (the Virtue) incarnate
- c. *Ryōngjang* (the General excellent in the military)

⁴⁷ Ibid., 84.

5. *Yeji* (wisdom; Sophia) and the Wise Man

The reason people admired Comrade Kim Jong Il was because of his extraordinary *yeji* (예지; 叡智; wisdom; Sophia; σοφία) and his *tabangmyŏnchŏgin chaenŭng* (talents for many different fields).

He was already an eminent thinker who published many important works, a scholar distinguished in social science, a great artist and a capable engineer.⁴⁸

Kim Jong Il is said to have been a polymath. It is claimed that he was well versed in such various fields as philosophy, social science, art, and engineering, according to a biography of Kim Jong Il published in 1984. North Korean ideologues began to state in the early 1980s that Kim Jong Il was a genius who excelled in “many different fields.” He was a Leonardo da Vinci sort of man, the Benjamin Franklin of North Korea. In other words, he was an intellectual leader who was good at the entire sphere of *mun* (culture and civil affairs), while his talent for *mu* (the military) was yet to be emphasized in the early 1980s. Rulers have commonly claimed to be polymaths, from King Šulgi (or Shulgi: r. circa 2094-2047 BC) in the Ur III period (circa 2112-2004 BC), who was said to have been able to read and write, and was very good at mathematics and music;⁴⁹ through Alexander the Great and “the enlightened despots of the eighteenth century,” to the Soviet leader Joseph Stalin. As Ethan Pollock, a specialist in Soviet culture, has pointed out,

⁴⁸ T’ak Chin, Kim Kangil, and Pak Hongje, *Kim Jong Il Chidoja che 1-bu* (*Kim Jong Il, the Leader*, Vol. 1) (Tokyo: Tongbangsa, 1984), 365.

⁴⁹ Nicole Brisch, “Changing Images of Kingship in Sumerian Literature,” edits. Karen Radner and Eleanor Robson, *Ibid.*, 706-724.

rulers have sought to certify their legitimacy “by placing their rule within a broader intellectual context.”⁵⁰ The Kim regime adopted this strategy of legitimation.

It is interesting to note here that North Korean ideologues used the term *yeji* as an attribute for Kim Jong Il. *Yeji* (예지; 叡智) is equivalent to *eichi* (英知; 叡智; 叡知) in Japanese and wisdom in English. The word *yeji*—*ruì zhī* in Mandarin Chinese—is found in a Chinese classic, *Kongzi Jiayu* (*The School Sayings of Confucius*), published in the third century. But it carried more philosophical and religious nuances in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries when Japanese scholars recycled the old term to translate the Greek-oriented word *Sophia* (σοφία). The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “Sophia” as “wisdom, knowledge,” or “the Divine Wisdom.” “Sophia” has a philosophical and religious connotation from its etymology and usage, which is also the case with *yeji*. Korean speakers usually use *chisik* (지식) for knowledge and *chihye* (지혜) for wisdom. But *yeji* is less commonly used.⁵¹ This philosophical use of *yeji* came into the North Korean lexicon to describe Kim Jong Il’s cultural, intellectual, and civilized leadership.⁵²

We can make three observations about the word *yeji*. First, the ruler in *yeji* could be the North Korean version of the “philosopher-king” that was suggested by Plato as the ideal ruler. The word “philosophy” consists of “philo- (loving)” and “-sophia (wisdom; knowledge).” One

⁵⁰ Ethan Pollock, *Stalin and the Soviet Science Wars* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), 13.

⁵¹ *Yeji* has another meaning: foreknowledge, foresight, and prescience. This has an etymology different from *yeji*, which means wisdom. The former came from a classical Chinese word, ‘豫知,’ whose modern Chinese form is ‘预知,’ and Japanese kanji form is ‘予知.’ North Koreans do not use the Chinese character. Thus, there is no way to distinguish between the first *yeji* (叡智) and the second *yeji* (豫知) and North Korean speakers sometime use this second meaning along with the first without a distinction between the two. North Korean ideologues use the phrase, “*kunsajök* (military) *yeji*,” to extol Kim Il Sung’s prescience in military affairs. In this case, *yeji* means foreknowledge, foresight, and prescience.

⁵² The word *yeji* is now used to describe not only Kim Jong Il’s wisdom but also Kim Il Sung’s military resourcefulness and Kim Jong Un’s genius.

can assume that Kim Jong Il's rule was proclaimed to be that of a philosopher when the term *yeji* (wisdom; Sophia) was colligated with him. Second, it can be said that the Man in *yeji* corresponds to "the Wisdom of the Father, the second Person of the Trinity" in Christianity.⁵³ There are frequent uses of Christian terminology such as *samwi ilch'e* (the Trinity) and *yöngsaeng* (eternal life) in Kim Jong Il's speeches and writings. In 1986, Kim Jong Il began to accentuate "the Trinity of President, the party, and the people." Here "President" refers to his father and "the party" to himself, who was in full control of the party and was once called "tang chungang" (party center). He said, through "the Trinity," people are able to be transformed into "one socio-political organism of eternal life."⁵⁴ In 1992, he stipulated the Trinity as one of the most important missions for writers, saying "What is important in representing the socio-political organism is to embody the principle of *samwi ilch'e* (the Trinity) of *Suryöng* (President), *tang* (the party), and *taejung* (the people)."⁵⁵ In this triad of eternal life, Kim Jong Il, the Man in *yeji*, played the role of "the Wisdom of the Father."

Third, it is nearly certain that North Korean ideology was formed under the heavy influence of Hegelian thoughts. Kim Jong Il is praised for his encyclopedic knowledge, his "*tabangmyönochögin chaenüng*" (talents for many different fields). He is well-nigh omniscient. Kim Jong Il is depicted as "the Wise Man," "the Man in absolute Knowledge," as in Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit*. Kim Jong Il became the most authoritative philosopher in 1974

⁵³ Wada Haruki, *Kita Chösen: Yügekитай kokka no genzai*, 150-152; Chöng Taeil (Daeil Jung), "Pukhan üi chonggyo chöngch'aek yöngu: Pukhan kukka chonggyo üi söngnip kwajöng ül chungsim üro" (A Study of North Korea's Religious Policy), *Chonggyo yöngu (Religious Study)*, Vol. 64 (2011), 137-164. Wada Haruki, *Kimu Iruson (Kin Nichisei) to Manshü kōnichi sensō (Kim Il Sung and His War against Japan in Manchuria)*, 25-26; Yi Chongsök, *Ibid.*, 397.

⁵⁴ Kim Jong Il, "Chuch'e sasang kyoyang esö chegi toenün myötkaji munje e taehayö" (On a Few Problems Arising in the education of the Juche Idea), *Kim Jong Il sönjip (Kim Jong Il's Selected Works)* Vol. 8 (Pyongyang: Chosön Rodongdang ch'ulp'ansa, 2009).

⁵⁵ Kim Jong Il, *Juche munhangnon (On Juche Literature)* (Pyongyang: Chosön Rodongdang ch'ulp'ansa, 1992), 120.

when he founded the state ideology, Kimilsungism (Kim-Il-Sung-ism), named after Kim Il Sung and celebrating the father Kim's achievements. He became the most influential theorist when he published a series of *non* (논; 論; discourse or discussion) such as *Yŏnghwa yesullon* (*On the Art of Cinema*) (published in 1989, but claimed to be originally written in 1973), *Muyong yesullon* (*On the Art of Dance* (1990)), *Kŏnch'uk yesullon* (*On the Art of Architecture* (1992)), *Ŭmak yesullon* (*On the Art of Music* (1992)), *Misullon* (*On the Fine Arts*), and *Juche munhangnon* (*On Juche Literature* (1992)). He was claimed to be the most intelligent genius by North Korean propaganda.

These three attributes of Kim Jong Il—being the philosopher-king, the Wisdom of the Father, and the Man in absolute Knowledge—culminate in his fourth quality as a leader; he should be described as pious, virtuous, and morally perfect. Alexandre Kojève's interpretation of Hegel's notion of "the Wise Man" gives the key to understanding Kim Jong Il in this way.

The Hegelian notion of "the Wise Man" has three definitions: he is perfectly self-conscious, satisfied by what he is, and morally perfect. He has absolute Knowledge and thus is perfectly self-conscious.⁵⁶ Because of his absoluteness and perfection, he wants to change nothing in himself. Moreover, as Alexandre Kojève has pointed out, because of his flawlessness, he can "serve as the model for all men, the final end and motive of their actions being conformity to this model."⁵⁷ Kim Jong Il's biography, the historical writing centered on him, can thus be read as the literature of emulation—in other words, self-improvement literature. I will return to

⁵⁶ Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. James H. Nichols, Jr. (New York and London: Basic Books, 1969), 75-80.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 79.

the problem of self-improvement literature, but first I will elaborate on the question of “the Wise Man.”

The Wise Man is morally perfect by definition. But Alexandre Kojève posed the problem of the universality and singularity of morality. He said that there can be “several irreducible existential types”—in other words, “several essentially different moralities.” Only if it is universally valid, could the concept of moral perfection be meaningful. This is to say that moral pluralism makes it impossible for a singular morality to be universal. This causes another problem in the notion of the Wise Man; if his moral perfection is not universally recognized, his satisfaction should not be objective. Thus, Kojève said, “the concept of ‘perfection’ is strictly identical to that of ‘subjective satisfaction’.” Here—as in psychotherapy according to the Dodo bird verdict—what is important is faith. Faith in oneself may be the only way to be perfect. One only has to believe oneself is perfect to be perfect.⁵⁸

But it is almost impossible for ordinary humans to be perfect. Thus, they are urged to do as the Man in *yeji* tells them in order to come closer to perfection. In a biography of Kim Jong Il published after Kim Il Sung died, the father Kim says:

“Just do as Comrade Kim Jong Il tells you.”⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Ibid., 79.

⁵⁹ Chŏng Kijong, *Ryŏksa ũi taeha (The Great River of History)* (Pyongyang: Munhak yesul chonghap ch’ulp’ansa, 1998), 382.

Kim Jong Il is perfectly self-conscious and morally perfect. ‘If you obey his order, follow his teachings, and, believe in him, you will be almost perfect like him.’ This rationale of one’s self-perfection conforms to the reasoning of one’s satisfaction with the socio-political system.

On February 19, 1996, Kim Jong Il asserted, “*Na ege kũ öttön pyõnhwa rül paraji mara*” (Do not expect any change in me). The story says that Kim Jong Il watched a mass game titled, “We will safeguard the Red Flag by following our General,” performed by a group of young people from downtown Pyongyang. In Scene 3 of the mass game, he saw the slogan, “Do not expect any change in me,” on the backdrop. Impressed and encouraged by the slogan, he reconfirmed that he would hold fast to socialism and not accept economic reform (i.e., Chinese-style “reform and opening up,” or Gorbachev’s *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* (restricting; reforms)).⁶⁰ The Man in *yeji* believed in his orientation and was satisfied with what he was. Therefore, he declared he was perfect and would not change anything in himself.

The most significant example of how the word *yeji* was used and understood in North Korea is Ri Chongnyõl (b. 1934)’s fictionalized biography of Kim Jong Il, *Yeji (Wisdom)*. This renowned writer, a Kim Il Sung Award laureate and member of the April 15 Literary Production Unit, depicted how Kim Jong Il brought about the cinematic revolution by supervising the filmmaking of *Kkot p’anũn ch’õnyõ (The Flower Girl)* (1972) in his biography published in 1990.

I was amazed when I thought of Him (Kim Jong Il), who, having gigantic leadership, brought about the cinematic revolution and shepherded us. What is the source of his *ch’õnjaejõgin yeji* (wisdom of genius), despite he is still young? Is it his natural gift? His encyclopedic knowledge? Not only those! His *yeji* (wisdom) endlessly, measurelessly, and

⁶⁰ *Rodong sinmun (The Workers’ Newspaper)*, March 1996.

vehemently spurts from his sincerity—his matchless and ardent loyalty—to Suryŏng (President; Kim Il Sung), his self-consciousness as the President’s heir who has to realize the President’s vision, and his sun-like ardor with a full sense of mission.⁶¹

This is the last part of Ri Chongnyŏl’s *Yeji*. After the film, *Kkot p’anŭn ch’ŏnyŏ* (*The Flower Girl*), received much praise from critics at an international film festival, Ro Yŏngmu, a filmmaker and one of the protagonists in the fictionalized biography, *Yeji*, dwells upon the reason the film became a huge success. Looking at Kim Jong Il in admiration, he ascribes its success to the leader’s “wisdom.” Then he asks: From where did Kim Jong Il’s wisdom originate? Kim Jong Il’s wisdom must be a “natural gift” that arises from his “encyclopedic knowledge.” But Ro Yŏngmu discovers that the most important source of Kim Jong Il’s wisdom is the young leader’s filial piety and loyalty to his father. Here North Korean historiography reverts back to the old Confucian values, *ch’ung* (忠; 忠; loyalty; *zhong* in Chinese) and *hyo* (孝; 孝; filial piety; *xiao* in Chinese). It can be said that the emphasis on loyalty and filial piety in North Korean history is a vestige of Confucianism. But the function tells more than the origin does. In other words, the recycling of the old values must be understood in terms of power. The North Korean regime exploited the old notions to consolidate the power structure beneficial to the regime. When power circulated almost solely between the father and the son, the theater of state power became a family drama. The relationship between father and son became intertwined with the one between the leader and his people. At that point, the old values of *ch’ung* (loyalty) and *hyo* (filial piety) were reintroduced and reemphasized by the state’s propaganda apparatus.

⁶¹ Ri Chongnyŏl, *Yeji (Wisdom)* (Pyongyang: Munhak yesul ch’ulp’ansa, 1990), 538.

6. The Return of Rome and the Rule of Virtue

Historical writings represented multiple powers in the first twenty years of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). The power-network consisted of various members of heterogeneous origins. Some emphasized the tradition of *sirhak* (practical learning), which was a trend in Korean Confucianism in the late Chosŏn period, while others celebrated KAPF (Korea Artista Proleta Federacio in Esperanto; Korean Artists' Proletarian Federation), a writers' organization during the Japanese occupation of Korea. Almost all North Korean ideologues glorified the historical fact that the Soviet Union, not Kim Il Sung, liberated the Northern part of the Korean Peninsula from Japanese colonial rule.⁶²

But the non-Kim factions who had defied Kim Il Sung's monarchical authority and refused to revise their historical views according to Kim's preference were ousted from power one by one: former underground activists led by Pak Hŏnyŏng and Hŏ Kai, a Russian-Korean politician, in 1953; Pak Ch'angok, Deputy Prime Minister and leader of the Soviet faction who had maneuvered Hŏ Kai's expulsion, in 1956; Ch'oe Ch'angik and several members of the Ya'nan camp, in 1956; Kim Tubong (1889-?), leader of the Ya'nan camp, in 1958; Han Sŏrya and some leading figures in North Korean literary and art circles such as An Mak, Ch'oe Sŭnghŭi, Sŏ Manil, and Im Sŏn'gyu, in 1962; Kim Ch'angman in 1965 as mentioned above; Pak Kŭmch'ŏl, Yi Hyosun, and Hŏ Sŏksŏn—former indigenous communist activists in Kapsan county, Korea, in the 1930s, also known as the Kapsan faction—in 1967.

⁶² Kwahagwŏn ŏnŏ munhwa yŏn'guso munhak yŏn'gusil (Office of Literature Study at the National Institute of Science), *Chosŏn Rodongdang ūi munye chŏngch'aek kwa haebang hu munhak (The WPK's Policy on Literature and Literature after the Liberation)* (Pyongyang: Kwahagwŏn ch'ulp'ansa, 1961), 2.

It comes as no surprise that the study of North Korea is an exercise in making lengthy rosters of exiles, the purged, and the executed. Who were executed? Who were sent to rehabilitation camps? And who were allowed to live? Scholars in the field of North Korean studies should pay constant attention to political massacres that were rampant in the history of the dynasty and are a feature of North Korean politics. The political massacre is the way *Immortal History*—the North Korean version of the history of sovereignty—came into being.

The great purge in 1967 was designed and executed by Kim Jong Il himself.⁶³ At a meeting in the Agitprop, he said:

Instead of giving prominence to the glorious traditions of revolutionary literature and art created by the great leader during the anti-Japanese revolutionary struggle, the anti-Party, counter-revolutionary elements and their followers have actually provoked unsound elements into talking nonsense about the need to revive the “traditions of the ‘KAPF (Korean Artists’ Proletarian Federation)’”. In questions of the national cultural heritage, too, they tended towards a restorationism and national nihilism which contradict the line and principle of the Party.⁶⁴

In 1967, Pyongyang suffered a flood that was described as the worst in a century and remembered as similar to the massive flooding in 1994. The year 1967 was crucial in Kim Il Sung’s plan for the succession and Kim Jong Il’s ambition to succeed his father. It was when Kim Jong Il’s rose to power as the *de facto* heir to Kim Il Sung, while 1994 was the year when Kim Jong Il became the *de jure* leader of the DPRK.

⁶³ Yi Chongsök, 498.

⁶⁴ Kim Jong Il, “On Establishing the April 15 Literary Production Unit: a talk to senior officials of the Propaganda and Agitation Department of the Central Committee of the Workers’ Party of Korea, June 20, 1967,” *Kim Jong Il: Selected Works* (Pyongyang: The Central Committee of the Workers’ Party of Korea, 1992), 233.

Hwang Changyŏp (1923-2010), North Korea's highest-ranking defector to date, said that innumerable elites were purged after Kim Il Sung's "5.25 *kyosi*" (Teaching on May 25) at—or in the aftermath of—the Fifteenth Plenary Meeting of the WPK's Fourth Central Committee in May, 1967.⁶⁵ Hwang said he was estranged from Kim Il Sung during and after the political convulsion. In the deluge at Pyongyang, he had no choice but to accept his fate thinking he was doomed to be expelled from Pyongyang. But, on December 31, 1968, he received a message from Kim Jong Il. It was an invitation to the New Year Party hosted by Kim Il Sung. It seems that Hwang Changyŏp came into Kim Jong Il's favor for a period of time. Kim Jong Il recommended Hwang to be president of Kim Il Sung University in 1965.⁶⁶ During the great purge, Kim Jong Il was the Hermes between Kim Il Sung and Hwang Changyŏp. It seems likely that Kim Jong Il acted as a mediator between his father and the scholar who was affiliated with no faction. Alternately, it is fair to say that the young Kim played Noah's role in the deluge of the purge. He reinstated or promoted pliable *apparatchiks*, and Hwang was one of those fortunate enough to board Kim Jong Il's ark.

However, that boarding ticket was not given to everyone. Kim Jong Il showed no mercy for the perfidious subjects who were reluctant to pledge allegiance to his father, those who attempted to write histories that deviated from Kim Il Sung's "immortal history." At a meeting with senior officials of the Agitprop on June 20, 1967, Kim Jong Il appeared to polish off the remnants of non-Kim factions by attacking "*pokko chuŭi*" (restorationism) and "*minjok hŏmu chuŭi*" (national nihilism). On the one hand, "restorationism" refers to an academic trend that

⁶⁵ According to Wada Haruki's book on the history of North Korea, the Fifteenth Plenary Meeting of the WPK's Fourth Central Committee was held from May 4 to 8 in 1967. Wada Haruki, *Kita Chō sen: Yūgekitaï kokka no genazi*, 125.

⁶⁶ Hwang Changyŏp, *Na nŭn yŏksa ūi chilli rŭl poatta: Hwang Chang 'yŏp hoegorok (I Saw the Truth of History: Hwang Chang 'yŏp's Memoir)* (Seoul: Hanul, 1999), 151-163.

celebrates everything in the past—for example, Chǒng Yagyong (1762-1836) and the Practical School in the eighteenth century Chosŏn dynasty, and the KAPF in the 1930s. To be more specific, Pak Kŭmch’ŏl, an admirer of Chǒng Yagyong, was the person who Kim Jong Il accused of “restorationism.” On the other hand, “national nihilism” indicates a tendency to reject anything in the past.⁶⁷ The son Kim blamed more fundamentalist socialists, who might be more loyal to the Soviet authority in Moscow than the Kim regime in Pyongyang, for “national nihilism.” Making a clean sweep of disloyal subjects, Kim Jong Il revised history—especially that of art and literature—by “giving prominence to the glorious traditions of revolutionary literature and art created by the great leader” Kim Il Sung.

In the same year, the journal *Ryŏksa kwahak (History-Science)*, which had led the North Korean academic world, ceased publication. This journal had published many important articles about the history of Korean socialism—not only about Kim Il Sung’s guerrilla activities but also the labor movement under Japanese rule and indigenous communists’ efforts to organize the Korean Communist Party. Moreover, the journal contained some monumental works on sirhak (Practical School).⁶⁸ But, in 1967, the journal was suspended. Then the power of knowledge production—the right to write history—came into Kim Jong Il’s hands. Instead of publishing the academic journal, Kim Jong Il organized “the April 15 Literary Production Unit,” and urged the writers’ organization to create his father’s biography, *Pulmyŏl ūi ryŏksa (The Immortal History)*. Furthermore, he began to meddle in other forms of art to control historical imagination. Kim

⁶⁷ Kim Tongch’un, *Han’guk sahoe kwahak ūi saeroun mosaek (A New Consideration of Korean Social Science)* (Seoul: Ch’angjak kwa pip’yŏngsa, 1997), 66.

⁶⁸ To Chinsun, “Pukhan ūi yŏksa haksulji *Rŏksa kwahak ch’ongmokch’a*” (The Entire List of *Scientific Historical Research*, a North Korean Academic Journal), *Yŏksa pip’yŏng*, Vol. 5 (1988).

Jong Il founded Paektusan ch'angjaktan (the Paektusan Production Unit) in 1967⁶⁹ and P'ibada kagŭktan (the Sea of Blood Opera Troupe) in 1971.⁷⁰

Then, North Korean ideologues began to claim that Pyongyang was the new Rome, stating, “Although it has been said until now that all roads lead to Rome, it should be said that all roads in the world lead to Pyongyang from now on.”⁷¹ The mun type of ruler, the young Kim, established the new Rome and became the Numa Pompilius (r. 715-673 BC)—the second king of Rome who settled Rome’s political and religious institutions—of North Korea. Petrarch asked, “What else, then, is all history, if not the praise of Rome?”⁷² And then Foucault asked, “Is there anything more to history than the call for revolution and the fear of revolution?” and “What if Rome once more conquered the revolution?”⁷³ Finally, the North Korean regime declared there was nothing more to history than the praise of Pyongyang, at least in North Korea.

At the peak of Kim Jong Il’s rule, the new Rome was depicted as follows:

⁶⁹ Filmmaking is fully controlled by the government in North Korea. The major film studio is Chosŏn yesul yŏnghwa ch'waryŏngso [North Korean Feature Film Studio]. It has a dozen subsidiary “ch'angjaktan [production units],” such as Paektusan ch'angjaktan (Paektusan Production Unit), Poch'ŏnbo ch'angjaktan (Poch'ŏnbo Production Unit), Wangjaesan ch'angjaktan (Wangjaesan Production Unit), Taehongdan ch'angjaktan (Taehongdan Production Unit), all of which are named after historical sites related to Kim Il Sung. *Tijit'ŏl Pukhan paekkwa sajŏn (Digital (Online) Encyclopedia of North Korea)* (<http://www.kplibrary.com/nkterm/read.aspx?num=807>) and Hyangjin Lee, *Contemporary Korean Cinema: Identity, Culture, Politics* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2000), 40-41.

⁷⁰ Kim Jong Il’s biography published in 1984 claims that, “the bases for producing literary and artistic works”—including the Paektusan Production Unit, the April 15 Literary Production Unit, the Sea of Blood Opera Troupe, the Mansudae Troupe, and the Mansudae Art Studio—were founded, thanks to Kim Jong Il’s “chŏkkŭkchŏk hwaltong” (positive and active efforts). T’ak Chin, Kim Kangil, and Pak Hongje, 198.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 238.

⁷² “Quid est enim aliud omnis historia quam Romana laus.” Quoted in Theodore E. Mommsen, “Petrarch’s Conception of the ‘Dark Ages’,” in *Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, ed. Eugene F. Rice (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1959), 122.

⁷³ Foucault, 83-84.

‘Alas! Because of the decay of virtue, the ancient Roman Empire collapsed.’ Dmitry Yazov read the phrase in his diary, which he wrote in his mind.

But he was convinced that North Korea would never collapse. It is because Comrade Kim Jong Il, the embodiment of virtue, was taking the lead of the country.⁷⁴

Dmitry Yazov (b. 1924), the last Marshall of the Soviet Union, is portrayed as Kim Jong Il’s disciple in Song Sangwŏn (b. 1940)’s *Ch’onggŏm ūl tŭlgo* (*Taking up Guns and Bayonets*) (2002), one of Kim Jong Il’s fictionalized biographies *Pulmyŏl ūi hyangdo* (*The Immortal Leader*), which is set in the late 1990s. After the Soviet Union collapsed, Yazov struggles with depression, reaches a breaking point, and attempts to commit suicide. But he fails, and then flies to Pyongyang. Yazov’s trip to Pyongyang is described as his spiritual journey toward Kim Jong Il’s vision of socialism.

On his first day in Pyongyang, Yazov asks Kim Jong Il what he believes in, whom he trusts, and why the North Korean leader is not shaken at all by the dissolution of the Eastern bloc. Kim Jong Il answers: “You will get the answers for yourself.”⁷⁵ Witnessing Kim Jong Il’s deeds and being taught the historical truth—‘The socialist Korea will prevail’—by him, Yazov exclaims, “North Korea [will] never collapse” “because Kim Jong Il, the embodiment of virtue, [is taking] the lead of the country.” Comparing the DPRK with Rome, he learns that the last socialist state on the Korean Peninsula represents the first of a new civilization. The difference between the two civilizations is that North Korean civilization is, and will be, ruled by virtue while Rome’s virtue eventually lapsed.

⁷⁴ Song Sangwŏn, *Ch’onggŏm ūl tŭlgo* (*Taking up Guns and Bayonets*) (Pyongyang: Munhak yesul ch’ulp’ansa, 2002), 199.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

We do not even have to think of the historicity of Dmitry Yazov's diary, because it "*maũm sok e ssõnõõttõn*" (had been written in his mind). From a North Korean socialist point of view, the historical truth does not necessarily conform to what really happened. As mentioned above, historical writings were transformed into epic story-telling when Kim Jong Il took over the power and the right to write history. Historical writing does not have to present what happened but should be concerned with what should have happened, what is right.⁷⁶ This kind of historical view is the legacy of Socialist Realism and Revolutionary Romanticism. In Song Sangwõn's *Taking up Guns and Bayonets*, Kim Jong Il's *tõk* (virtue) is said to be given as evidence of the North Korean prosperity and victory which is near.

Tõkch'i (rule of virtue) is celebrated as an epochal feature of Kim Jong Il's reign. The coinage of the term *tõkch'i* (rule of virtue) can be traced back to the late fourth century BC. The Chinese classic, *Zuo Zhuan*, defines it as an ideal form of rule—as opposed to legalism, domination of law. Confucius also speaks highly of the rule of virtue in *The Analects*.⁷⁷ But, in Confucianism, the rule of virtue does not mean a king's oppressive domination over his subjects. It is the exact opposite of despotic rule. A king should comply with moral obligations and listen carefully to his subjects' remonstrance.⁷⁸ In other words, in the Confucian world, subjects did not always have to obey their king. In fact, the kings of Chosõn—a dynasty founded on the Confucian ideology—were checked by the bureaucracy and the aristocracy. Moreover, kings

⁷⁶ The history of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il is considered to be too "sublime" to be narrated by factual explanation. Their sacred lives are supra-factual. Shin Hyung-ki (Sin Hyõnggi), *Minjok iyagi rũl nõmõsõ* (*Beyond Nation-Narrative*) (Seoul: Samin, 2003), 27.

⁷⁷ Hanguk kukhak chinhũngwõn (Korean Studies Advancement Center), "Tõkch'i chuũi" (The Idea of the rule of virtue), *Yugyo paekkwa sajõn* (*The Encyclopedia of Confucianism*), http://www.ugyo.net/et/dict/dict_view.jsp?sActnMode=dict_actn&DICT_CODE=D001090&sFrstCode= (accessed: February 1, 2016)

⁷⁸ James B. Palais, "A Search for Korean Uniqueness," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 55, No. 2 (Dec. 1995), 421-422.

were obliged to attend a royal lecture more than three times each day, and in many cases learned Confucian classics from aristocrat teachers. This illustrates that the hierarchal statuses of the king and the subject could be reversed on the basis of their knowledge of Confucian philosophy. In addition, there were institutional devices to restrict sovereign power. For example, the institutions of remonstrance such as *Sahŏnbu*, *Saganwŏn* and *Hongmun'gwan* had the right to object to the king's decisions and force him to stop. Thus, James B. Palais saw the Chosŏn kings—the self-proclaimed *tŏkch'i* rulers—as *primus inter pares*.

But North Korean *tŏkch'i* emerged from the process in which Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il took the lead in philosophical and moral discourses, expelled disloyal subjects, and held absolute power. The rule of virtue, the political ideal, appeared as a form of power structure, just as the rule of law did. The difference between the North Korean version of the rule of virtue and the rule of law is how far the power was concentrated or shared. The rule of law is about the “how” of the distribution of power; contracts and negotiation among different agents of power gives birth to laws. On the contrary, the North Korean version of the rule of virtue was born when the right to write history was monopolized by the Kims and the personality cult was intensified by the state.

The Kim Jong Il era is remembered as the time when discussion within the party and the government disappeared. Hwang Changyŏp said that Kim Jong Il abolished free discussion in the Politburo after Kim Il Sung died and the son Kim succeeded to his father's political leadership.⁷⁹ In other words, Kim Jong Il made arbitrary decisions within the party and the government after

⁷⁹ Yi Chongsŏk, 261-262.

ascending “the throne.” He had nothing to fear; no one in North Korea dared to remonstrate with him. This type of governing is the North Korean version of the rule of virtue.

‘Oh! North Korea, the country of virtue, will prevail.’ Yazov exclaimed inwardly. Yazov, of course, knew that the invincibility of socialist Korea led by Comrade Kim Jong Il stemmed not only from virtue. However, Comrade Kim Jong Il’s virtue was so great and noble that he could not think anything else at that moment.

Comrade Kim Jong Il led the way without a word to give Yazov time to think.⁸⁰

Yazov, Kim Jong Il’s disciple, cannot think of anything but the young North Korean leader’s virtue, which is “so great” and “noble.” But this biography presents something other than virtue as the source of North Korea’s invincibility. Yazov walks in awe of Kim Jong Il. His mentor, the young Kim, gives the former Soviet Marshall time to find out the source of North Korea’s invincibility—in addition to Kim Jong Il’s virtue—for himself. But the old Russian disciple cannot figure it out. Just then, Kim Jong Il tells Yazov the story of Yi Sōnggye (1335-1408), founder of the Chosŏn dynasty. That story tells of an entity—*mu* (the military)—that the Man in *yeji* and *tōk* had to fear and thus take into himself.

It seems obvious that the author, Song Sangwŏn, may have known little about Latin, and thus hardly anything about the connotation of the word *virtus*. In ancient Rome, *virtus*—the original Latin word for “virtue”—appeared to be established as a result of one’s brave deeds that brought *gloria* (glory). In the Roman context, one’s *virtus* was achieved through his military achievement. Thus, in the strict sense of the word, *tōk* is deeply intertwined with *mu*. These two

⁸⁰ Song Sangwŏn, 205.

notions cannot be thought of separately.⁸¹ Although the North Korean writer distinguishes *tōk* from *mu* by saying the latter is “something else,” the North Korean sense of virtue happens to be exactly the same as that of *virtus*.

7. Men from Mars and the *Mu* Type of Leader

One day, Yi Sōnggye was asked a question by crown prince Yi Panggwa, “Is it true that you were given the mandate of heaven to be king?”

“No.” Yi Sōnggye answered. “It is not heaven but my soldiery who crowned me as king.”

Yi Sōnggye was an evil man. But he told the lesson taught by history. The truth of history is that the fate of a country hinges on who seizes military power.⁸²

Yi Sōnggye, founder of the Chosŏn dynasty (1392-1910), is depicted as evil. North Korean historiography describes him as a usurper and his dynasty as a feudal kingdom that oppressed and exploited the working classes. But Yi Sōnggye is said to know the cause of the country’s fortune and vicissitude. So Kim Jong Il teaches Dmitry Yazov the same lesson that Yi Sōnggye gave to his son.

Kim Jong Il was a historian. He was enthusiastic about reinterpreting the meaning and significance of historical events in accordance with *Kimisungism* (*Kim-Il-Sung-ism*). For Kim Jong Il, the time of his father’s anti-Japanese guerilla activities is the zero-point of history. The

⁸¹ In East Asia, “virtue” was not directly related to military feats. Zisi (c. 481-402 BC) defined three constituents of “virtue” (“*dé*” in Chinese; “*tōk*” in Korean) were “wisdom,” “benevolence,” and “bravery” in *Zhōng yōng* (*The Doctrine of the Mean*). But, even in Zisi’s terminology—distinguishable with the Latin usage of *virtus*—military achievement is not a *sine qua non* of “bravery.”

⁸² Song Sangwŏn, 206.

posterity of North Korea should emulate Kim Il Sung by living in the way its founder, the guerrilla leader, lived. Also, he was of the opinion that history should be written in pursuit of political and moral correctness. He believed that history should be a philosophy taught by examples. But, at the same time, he thought that history should be a science proven through causes. It is said that, when he was eighteen years old, he stressed that history should be a science.

According to a Kim Jong Il biography, in a freshman class at Kim Il Sung University in late October 1960, two months after he entered college, Kim Jong Il caused a sensation among historians by proposing a new interpretation of the unification of the Three Kingdoms—Silla (c. 57 BC-935 AD), Paekche (c. 18 BC-660 AD), and Koguryŏ (c. 37 BC-667 AD). The unification was accomplished by the Silla kingdom in the late seventh century and was considered to be the first in Korean history. But Kim Jong Il denounced the Silla rulers as Koreans’ “first ancestors of *sadae chuŭi* (serving the great) who depended on foreign power to resolve the nation’s internal problems.” Forming a military alliance with the Chinese Tang dynasty (618-907), the Silla kingdom annexed its rival Paekche kingdom and helped the Chinese empire subjugate the Koguryŏ kingdom. The Silla kingdom’s annexation of the Paekche and Southern part of the Koguryŏ kingdoms, said the freshman college student, was not a true “national” unification, because Silla leaders drew “foreign” military power into the Korean nation’s internal conflict.⁸³

Kim Jong Il claimed that the history of the unification of the Three Kingdoms had been extorted by men “serving the great.” South Korean historians who were contaminated by the ideology of serving the great concealed “the crime” that the Silla rulers had committed, as the

⁸³ T’ak Chin et al., 80-87.

South Korean bourgeois were attempting to justify their inability to resolve the national conflict with their own military might. In his view, national security relied on the possession of valor and the use of military power rather than transnational negotiation or international diplomacy. In other words, the warrior's spirit of self-reliance and his love of the nation are the determinants of a nation's—or a civilization's—fate.

Then Kim Jong Il declared at the last moment of his presentation in the freshman class, “History is the most strictly impartial and fairest science.”⁸⁴ In the sixteenth century, Italian humanists such as Giovanni Pontano, Francesco Robortello, and Francesco Patrizi polished the style and narrative of historical writing, drawing on “truth and scientific causal explanation.” The formula “*scire est per causas cognoscere*” (science is knowledge through causes) became their motto. Kim Jong Il attempted his own version of humanist revival in the sixties.

In *Taking Up Guns and Bayonets*, Kim Jong Il makes two points concerning how to treat military power. First, as shown in Yi Sönggye's anecdote, the leader should hold absolute control over the military. Second, the army should be composed of loyal subjects who are not corrupted by rapacious desire for possessions. In short, what was at stake for Kim Jong Il were the greatness of the military and loyalty to its leader. These are the same lessons one can obtain from Edward Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-89). Gibbon believed that the main causes of the collapse of the Roman Empire were the moral decay of the Praetorian Guard and the increment of non-Roman soldiers in the imperial army.⁸⁵ Since

⁸⁴ Ibid., 83.

⁸⁵ Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Vol. 1 (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1907), 1-16, 119-123.

Caligula (r. 37-41) was assassinated by the guard, the fate of the Empire had been the hands of its soldiery.⁸⁶

About 900 years after Rome was sacked by the Vandals (the second sack of Rome in 455), Petrarch recalled the Golden Age of the Eternal City in *Epistolae metricae*. He lamented, “Genius, virtue, and glory now have gone, leaving chance and sloth to rule.” Petrarch, unlike Edward Gibbon, believed that the Golden Age, or “*felicium aevum*” (a more fortunate age), would come again.⁸⁷

At the twilight of the twentieth century, Dmitry Yazov sees “genius, virtue, and glory” return in Pyongyang, which is the current Eternal City. In the last part of the novel, he meets Bob Dole, the unsuccessful American Presidential candidate, in Moscow. There, Yazov witnesses the leader of genius (Kim Jong Il), the city of virtue (Pyongyang), and the military of glory (the North Korean People’s Army).

Showing a faint smile to him (Bob Dole)—but actually scoffing at him—Yazov said that there was no *sasang* (thought) or *üiji* (will) in America’s nuclear technology, missiles, and military weapons about which America boasted. On the contrary, he continued, the North Korean People’s Army has thought and will. Just then, he cornered Bob Dole—it looked like he charged at Dole—and yelled, “Their gun is *pulgün ch’ongtae* (red gun; lit. red gunstock)!”⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Severus Alexander (r. 222-235) is a good example of how the military played a critical role in imperial affairs. The last Roman Emperor of the Severan dynasty may have been a benevolent ruler who initiated social, economic, and juridical reforms. But he was assassinated by his own guard because he was unpopular with the military. He was considered to be a disgraced ruler by his soldiery, because he preferred diplomatic methods over military actions to resolve the conflict with the Sassanid Empire and the Germanic tribes. Brian Campbell, *War and Society in Imperial Rome, 31 BC-AD 284* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 119-120. Michael Grant, *The Severans: the Changed Roman Empire* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 37-38.

⁸⁷ Petrarch, *Epistolae metricae*, 3·33; Quoted in Donald R. Kelley, 130-131.

⁸⁸ Song Sangwön, 380.

Yazov's testimony paralyzes Bob Dole; Senator Dole suffers a stroke from shock. The American politician had believed that North Korea would follow the Soviet Union and collapse soon. During the age of Deterrence, the U.S. government preferred a counter-value strategy to a counter-forces approach. The Soviet Army equipped itself with nuclear weapons, and thus war was not an available option for the U.S. government.⁸⁹ Therefore, the main strategy of the U.S. authorities was to attack the enemy's values and shape public opinion in accordance with American interests. This is often called a "war of ideas." It seems that this U.S. strategy currently focuses on Muslim populations around the world.⁹⁰ But, during the Cold War, its main target was the public in socialist countries. It is believed that the counter-value strategy caused long-term damage to socialist states and the war of ideas contributed to the dissolution of the Soviet bloc.

From the North Korean ideologue's viewpoint, the U.S. peace-time strategy against civilians impaired the morality and discipline of the military, too—not to mention the public. The counter-value strategy was dreaded as much as the counter-forces approach. Their fear of the former appears to be opposite in their writings; Bob Dole, an American politician, is paralyzed by his fear of the North Korean military, which is highly disciplined and morally perfect. North Korean soldiers are men of glory. Kim Jong Il declared it thus on April 25, 1992.

"Yŏngungchŏk Chosŏn inmin'gun changbyŏngdŭl ege yŏnggwang i issŭra!" (Glory be to the heroic soldiers and officers of the North Korean People's Army!)⁹¹

⁸⁹ Lawrence Freedman, *Deterrence* (Cambridge, UK and Malden, MA: Polity, 2004)

⁹⁰ William Rosenau, "Waging the 'War of Ideas'," *The Rand Corporation*, <http://www.rand.org/pubs/reprints/RP1218.html> (accessed Sep. 01, 2015).

⁹¹ Ri Chongnyŏl, *Pyongyang ūn sŏnŏn handa* (*The Pyongyang Manifesto*) (Pyongyang: Munhak yesul chonghap ch'ulp'ansa, 1997), 535.

The son Kim held three important positions when he was the heir apparent to Kim Il Sung; *sōnjōn pisō* (the Secretary of Agitprop), *chojik pisō* (the Secretary of the Organizational Department), and *ch'oego saryōnggwan* (Supreme Commander). He was appointed to the first two offices in the early 1970s. The title of the military institution was given to Kim Jong Il relatively late. To attain such a military title and honor was the last task that Kim Jong Il had to complete in order to be his father's successor.

It seems likely that Kim Jong Il started to preside over military affairs in the late 1970s.⁹² In December 1991, he received the official title of “Supreme Commander.” And then he made the historic declaration, “Glory be to the heroic soldiers and officers of the North Korean People's Army!” at the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of the North Korean People's Army. Since the late 1960s, he had been *the Man in yeji* and *tōk* or *the mun type of ruler*. But, around the time his father passed away, he began to be called *changgunnim* (General), which had been his father's appellation, and celebrated as *the mu type of leader*.⁹³ Kim Jong Il's *yeji* and *tōk* were praised and emphasized in two fictionalized biographies—Ri Chongnyōl's *Yeji (Wisdom)* (1990) and Kwōn Chōngung's *P'urūn hanūl (Blue Sky)* (1992)—published before Kim Il Sung died in 1994. However, after the son Kim ascended the throne in 1994, *The Immortal Leader* series—for example, Ri Chongnyōl's *Pyongyang ūn sōnōn handa (The Pyongyang Manifesto)* (1997), Chōng Kijong (b. 1945)'s *Ryōksa ūi taeha (The Great River of History)* (1998), and Song

⁹² Yi Chongsōk, 528. However, a biography of Kim Jong Il claims that Kim Jong Il started having absolute control over the military around 1972. Chōng Kijong, *Ryōksa ūi taeha (The Great River of History)* (Pyongyang: Munhak yesul chonghap ch'ulp'ansa, 1998), 474.

⁹³ Song Sangwōn, 31.

Sangwŏn *Ch'onggŏm ŭl tŭlgo* (*Taking Up Guns and Swords*) (2002) that were set in the 1990s—underlined Kim Jong Il's competence in the military.

Furthermore, in the 1990s, Pyongyang under Kim Jong Il's military leadership was claimed to be the center of the world, “the Eternal City” of a new civilization. Ri Chongnyŏl, author of *Yeji* (*Wisdom*), attributes North Korea's military power to Kim Jong Il's leadership in *The Pyongyang Manifesto*. He declares that Pyongyang has replaced Moscow as the capital of socialism.

‘Millions of soldiers, nuclear missiles, and the unbeatable strategic air forces... Why? Why would we (Russians) lose our country without any attempt to shoot a *gun*? How could two thousand five hundred million people sink into the pit of despair?’

‘Traitors, prostitutes, beggars, mafia...’

Lidia Kuznetsova burst out crying, beside herself.

[. . .]

Lidia Kuznetsova gave applause to a long column of (North Korean) missile vehicles with ineffable joy. . .

After the finale of the military parade, Comrade Kim Jong Il stepped forward and waved at special guests (including Lidia Kuznetsova). . .

In the middle of the rapturous crowds, Lidia Kuznetsova did not even cry “Hail,” choked up with joy and bliss. She only looked up at Him folding her hands on her chest.

‘Ah, Comrade Kim Jong Il!’⁹⁴

Lidia Kuznetsova, a Russian woman who misses the glorious past of the Soviet Union, lives in despair. Her husband fell victim to the corrupt Russian bureaucracy, her ninety-two-year-old grandfather, a revered Bolshevik, was found frozen to death on the streets of Moscow in the

⁹⁴ Ri Chongnyŏl, *Pyongyang ŭn sŏnŏn handa* (*The Pyongyang Manifesto*), 542-545.

turmoil of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, and her only daughter left home for “Chanel, Christian Dior” and “Nina Ricci”—she is a “prostitute.”⁹⁵

One day, Lidia Kuznetsova receives an invitation from her friend at Pyongyang and attends the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of the North Korean People’s Army. There she finds a new hope—a reformed human and a revived dream of socialism—in Kim Jong Il and North Korea. Watching the splendid military parade, she cries, “Why would we (Russians) lose our country without any attempt to” use a gun? Moscow is now filled with “beggars” and “prostitutes,” and ruled by “traitors” and “the mafia.” However, when she sees the highly advanced military technology and well-disciplined soldiers in a parade at the anniversary, her despair turns into “ineffable joy” and utmost bliss. Looking up at Kim Jong Il, Lidia Kuznetsova reaffirms that the birth of a new human and the advent of a new civilization are based on the glory of military might.

8. Theorized Strategy and the Sharing of Emotion

It seems absurd that Kim Jong Il is praised as a military genius because he never proved his ability in actual battle. Indeed, some Western experts on North Korea anticipated that Kim Jong Il might not have been supported by the military after his father’s death, as he had no military experience.⁹⁶ Yet, contrary to their expectations, the top officers of the North Korean military swore fealty to Kim Jong Il, notwithstanding his father’s absence. In fairness, he did have

⁹⁵ Ibid., 264, 266.

⁹⁶ Ralph Hassig and Kongdan Oh, *The Hidden People of North Korea: Everyday Life in the Hermit Kingdom* (Lanham, Maryland and Plymouth, UK: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, INC., 2009), 26.

considerable experience in the office of national defense. In other words, he had built a solid military career since the late 1970s. The only impediment for him to be called a military genius is the fact that he could not wage a war—he could not create any achievements in actual battle or real war. Unlike the ancient Roman Empire or the United States of America, his small country had little capacity to institute war. The Korean War (1950-1953) may have been the only exception.

But the problem is that the military and the public can crave war. North Korean literature often illustrates that there were demands for war from the military and even among the people in North Korea during the Arduous March.⁹⁷ To ease their drive toward war, the Kim regime created virtual wars. There are two techniques to substitute imagined combat for real war. First, diplomacy is described as war. Second, the places of everyday life, such as workplaces, are declared to be battlefields.

The lengthy, pending processes of diplomacy can easily bore the public. For example, as Lawrence Freedman, who was a foreign policy adviser to Tony Blair, pointed out, there have been very few films about “deterrence,” while a large number of movies have dealt with “nuclear war.”⁹⁸ This is to say that, only when war is an available option, international politics can be seen as theater that can excite the public.⁹⁹

North Korean propaganda describes diplomacy as warfare. Bill Clinton appointed Robert Gallucci to start negotiations in response to North Korea’s threat to withdraw from the Nuclear

⁹⁷ Ri Sinhyŏn, *Kanggye chŏngsin (The Spirit of Kanggye)* (Pyongyang: Munhak yesul ch’ulp’ansa, 2002); Chŏng Kijong, *Ryŏksa ūi taeha (The Great River of History)* (Pyongyang: Munhak yesul chonghap ch’ulp’ansa, 1998).

⁹⁸ Lawrence Freedman, 25.

⁹⁹ Perry Anderson, “Consilium,” *New Left Review*, Vol. 83, Sep. Oct. 2013, 114.

Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1993. Chŏng Kijong—a Kim Il Sung Award laureate, member of the April 15 Literary Production Unit, and so-called “kunbok ibŭn chakka” (writer in military uniform)¹⁰⁰—wrote about the historical fact as follows:

The United States of America has succumbed. The war is over. Dear General (Kim Jong Il) has coerced America into submission and stopped the war.¹⁰¹

The boring theater of diplomacy turns into the exiting drama of war. This dramatized diplomacy seems to entertain people and soldiers. But in using the technique to excite the public or even the military with diplomacy, an important rule must be followed: the government should not change the line between good and evil (‘We—and our friends—are good. They are evil.’). The government’s attempt to make diplomatic relations and friendly ties with a state once considered evil can confuse the military and augment public discontent. Such an action can be easily deemed dishonorable, shameful, and immoral.

Kim Jong Il and North Korean ideologues never changed the moral line. They never violated the clear dichotomy of Zhdanovism: socialism versus imperialism. The United States of America has always been depicted as evil, even when the North Korean regime became involved with it in negotiations. The line between good and evil is an important matter of emotion. If the line is blurred, negative feelings like hate can grow inside the nation, aimed especially at the government.

¹⁰⁰ Chŏng Kijong, 502.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 486.

Paul Virilio argued that the sharing of emotion is what defines war and war requires no time. During the Gulf War, Virilio said that time of decision had been “dramatically shortened” “with automated destruction and nuclear weapons.” In the new form of warfare, he saw an absence of politics, by saying, “No politics is possible at the scale of the speed of light.” “Time for reflection” is what enables politics. But, during war there is no time for reflection or to share power. Thus, war precludes democracy, which is defined as “the sharing of power.”¹⁰²

When Kim Jong Il held power over knowledge production, he reformed everyday life into the conduct of war. He coined and introduced the notion of *Soktojŏn* (Speed-Battle or Speed-War) in 1969. In 1973, he launched *Samdae hyŏngmyŏng sojo undong* (Three Revolutions of Thought, Technology, and Culture Team Campaign) under the slogan, “Let us push ahead with Three Revolutions in the way of a Speed-Battle.” In this campaign, the central party dispatched a *sojo* (team) to production sites in order to supervise the workplace, help local workers reform their lifestyles, and participate in work to augment production. *Sojo* can be said to be the SWAT (Special Weapon and Tactics team) of the North Korean economy. The following year, he announced “Let us reform production, study, and life in the Anti-Japanese Guerilla’s way” and embarked upon the “Seventy-Day Battle,” a national campaign that gave all factories, mines, and farms seventy days to complete the production task that the party assigned.¹⁰³

The model for these reforms was Kim Il Sung’s guerilla activities. Kim Jong Il generalized his father’s hit-and-run tactic as a theory that should be applied to almost all practices. Memory is isolated from its historical context, and strategy is separated from its specific conditions. In

¹⁰² Paul Virilio, *Desert Screen: War at the Speed of Light* (1991), trans. Michael Degener (London and New York: Continuum, 2005), 32-33.

¹⁰³ Wada Haruki, *Kita Chōsen: Yūgekitai kokka no genzai (North Korea: the present of the guerilla state)*, 234-237; Yi Chongsök, 504-506.

other words, while Kim Il Sung's personal memory of anti-Japanese guerilla activities was celebrated as both national history and prophecy about the nation's future,¹⁰⁴ his military strategy in the battlefields in Manchuria was praised as a universal theory of how to live.¹⁰⁵

Kim Jong Il, at the Sixth Convention of the WPK in October 1980, started "Sumŭn yŏngung ŭi mobŏm ttara paeugi undong" (The Campaign of Following and Learning the Exemplary of Unsung Heroes). After that, North Korean literature began to describe ordinary people as the exemplars of social, moral success.¹⁰⁶ In the 1970s and the early 1980s, the North Korean economy began heading for a downfall. It was ironic that North Korea's economic downturn started while North Korea's Third World diplomacy reached its zenith. Its success in international politics practically indicated its economic failure.¹⁰⁷ Just then, when there was no vision for economic development, Kim Jong Il went to war on negative feelings; extolling reform of self, emotions, and everyday life. It was actually a campaign for self-improvement.

In short, Kim Jong Il made two unconventional kinds of war: a diplomatic war against the United States of America and battles in everyday life. Through these two wars, Kim Jong Il attempted to share emotions with the public and the military—1. Hatred for enemies 2. *Sinsim*

¹⁰⁴ As Paolo Virno, Italian philosopher, put it, memory can be 'historical' only because of "faculty that distinguishes individual existence." "The particular content (for example, the social or political content) of memories" stops "memory" from being "historical." Paolo Virno, *Déjà Vu and the End of History* (1999), trans. David Broder (London and New York: Verso, 2015), 4.

¹⁰⁵ It is important to note that strategy is not universal; if it is theorized, it is no longer a strategy. As Gayatri Spivak has pointed out, strategy is generated by "a constant (de)constructive criticism of the theoretical." Thus, it can be said that a theorized strategy is an oxymoron. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (1993) (New York: Routledge, 2009), 3.

¹⁰⁶ Shin Hyung-ki (Sin Hyŏnggi) and O Sŏnggho, *Pukhan munhaksa (History of North Korean Literature)* (Seoul: P'yŏngminsa, 2000), 319-320.

¹⁰⁷ I have argued elsewhere that "irony" is the trope that Charles Armstrong uses in his historical accounts of North Korea. Sunghee Kim, "Tu kaji him kaenyŏm kwa Miguk ŭi Pukhanhak" (Two Concepts of Power: Machiavellianism and Spinozism in North Korean Studies), *SAI*, Vol. 18, May 2015. 311-341 (written in Korean). For the irony of North Korean history, see Charles Armstrong, *Tyranny of the Weak: North Korea and the World, 1950-1992* (2013), 168-242.

(faith) in the leader and *rakkwan* (optimism) for the future—and monopolize power. His Roman style of history is at once the consequence of the monopolization of power and the crucial means of the sharing of emotion.

9. A False Dream

North Korean state-constructed history is based on *faith*, *dreams*, and *hope*. It aims for spiritual uplift or mind-cure. In terms of knowledge, North Korean historical writings do not always conform to factual accounts. For example, there is too much exaggeration, extortion, and consecration in Kim Jong Il's biography, *Pulmyŏl ūi hyangdo* (*Immortal Leader*). However, civilization is supposed to be born from faith, dreams, and hope, rather than from knowledge. The Dodo bird effect works in building civilization. Believe and have a dream, and one will “achieve” one's “country.”¹⁰⁸

But dreams can be false by nature. But even if they are false, dreams work positively. Kim Jong Il's dream of a new civilization ought to be false. The history about him and his country is full of lies. His vision of *ingan kaejo* (human reform), the North Korean version of self-improvement, should be a deception that disarms the people's collective defiance. However, falseness is the way a new civilization is begotten and humans are reformed.

¹⁰⁸ This is Richard Rorty's message at the end of “The William E. Massey Sr. Lectures in the History of American Civilization in 1997.” Criticizing the *history for knowledge* produced by cultural leftists such as Michel Foucault and those European pedants' inability to renovate civilization, Richard Rorty boasted of the American style of *history for dreams and hope*. Richard Rorty, *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1998), 106-107.

In Virgil's *Aeneid*, Aeneas—the son of the Trojan prince Anchises and ancestor of Romulus and Remus—descends into the underworld where he meets his dead father and witnesses the past and the future of himself and his country, Rome. After receiving a revelation of Rome's future, he leaves Hades. At the edge of the underworld, Aeneas sees two Gates of Sleep. One is the Gate of Horn and the other is the Ivory Gate. The first “offers easy passage to all true shades;” through the Ivory Gate, “the dead send false dreams up toward the sky.” There Anchises lets his son Aeneas go by the Gate of False Dreams.

There are twin Gates of Sleep.
One, they say, is called the Gate of Horn
and it offers easy passage to all true shades.
The other glistens with ivory, radiant, flawless,
but through it the dead send false dreams up toward the sky.
And here Anchises, his vision told in full, escorts
his son and Sibyl both and shows them out now
through the Ivory Gate.¹⁰⁹

Kim Il Sung sent his son through the Gate of False Dreams. Kim Jong Il bade farewell to his father at the Ivory Gate and then ruled North Korea for sixteen years (1994-2011). For history to be “immortal,” countless people died of starvation during his rule.

¹⁰⁹ Virgil, *The Aeneid*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Viking, 2006), 212.

Chapter Four

Prosody of Labor and Narrative of “Working to Die:” North

Korean Literature under Kim Jong Il’s Rule (1994-2011)

1. Fear of Death

In this chapter, I will argue that the rhythm of labor and speed of life have characterized North Korean culture and politics, especially since *konan ūi haenggun* (the Arduous March), the great famine, and the economic crisis, from 1994 to 1998. Moreover, I will illustrate that the Kim Jong Il regime utilized the people’s fear of death to invest his own authority with divine character. The fear of death is the main subject of this chapter.

During the great famine in 1990s, the North Korean regime attempted to redefine death as a qualification to be a legitimate member of the nation, and life as a path to the ultimate destination of death. To that end, the regime has accentuated labor as a way of self-cultivation, self-improvement, self-enlightenment, or self-destruction—a practice of profound spiritual reflection or a meditation. The meditation leads one to overcome the fear of death and transcend the self and helps one construct the life-death continuum.¹ In other words, “working to die” is celebrated as the noblest way to be born again and live beyond reality and the present.

¹ The meditation to help construct the life-death continuum can also be explained by the Hegelian dialect of the Master and the Slave. Kojève’s account of the relationship between “work” and “death” is that the Slave’s “work” provides him “the new objective conditions” that allows him to overcome “fear of death” and be free. Kojève said, “Only the Slave can transform the World that forms him and fixes him in slavery and create a World that he has formed in which he will be free. And the Slave achieves this only through forced and terrified work carried out in the Master’s service. To be sure, this work by itself does

This type of labor—or this kind of death—has at once aesthetic, ethical, and ontological connotations. Repetitive and boring labor in factories, farms, and mines is aestheticized as dramatic battles; injuries and death from industrial accidents in those work venues are moralized as martyrdom. “Work fast and die voluntarily” is the underlying theme in North Korean literature during and after the Arduous March.

It is worth noting that labor is employed as a way of salvation. Foucault argued that “government of the state no longer has to concern itself with the salvation of its subjects”² in the modern age; or, to borrow Charles Taylor’s term, “secularism” as such is dominant in our “social imaginary.”³ But the North Korean government is deeply involved in the people’s salvation by designing labor as the path to redemption. This type of rule cannot be seen as premodern, because to define why and how one dies is a way sovereignty—regardless of whether it is modern or premodern—is exercised. As Achille Mbembe put it, sovereignty is exerted by “the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die.”⁴ Still, in regard to labor, the difference between North Korea and the capitalist world is significant.

In a capitalist society, labor is considered to be a commodity—workers can sell their labor-power for capital. This is the problem that Karl Marx tackled in part two of *Capital* (1867).⁵

not free him. But in transforming the World by this work, the Slave transforms himself, too, and thus creates the new objective conditions that permit him to take up once more the liberating Fight for recognition that he refused in the beginning for fear of death.” Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. James H. Nichols, Jr. (New York and London: Basic Books, 1969), 29-30.

² Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2008), 4.

³ For the term “social imaginary,” see Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2004), 23-30.

⁴ Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” trans., Libby Meintjes, *Public Culture*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 2003, 11.

⁵ Karl Marx defined the term labor-power as the assemblage of the “mental and physical capabilities existing in the physical form, the living personality, of a human being, capabilities which he sets in

Marx pointed out that the commodification and the objectification of labor-power results in an unequal relationship between labor and capital with the latter's exploitation of the former. In the twentieth century, socialist states like the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea nationalized labor-power to solve that problem (i.e., the commodification and the objectification of labor-power). However, the nationalization of labor posed another problem: The state had to provide its subjects with a reason to work as well as a way to live and to die. This is the burdensome task that libertarian-capitalist states abandoned. The commodification of labor in capitalist societies connotes that workers independently choose their work, where to live, how to die, et cetera.⁶ The capitalist state leaves metaphysical and spiritual matters to its subjects, or to religions and the market. Individuals are supposed to be independent and self-sufficient not only in the market by means of their labor-power, but also in the spiritual sphere where they are sometimes aided by religions. On the contrary, socialist states sought to assume the responsibility of spiritual matters—to govern the soul—by empowering the Department of Agitation and Propaganda (Agitprop), the government organ of cultural policy. Literature and art performed the functions of religion in socialist states; writers and artists were extolled as “the engineers of the [human] soul,” as Joseph Stalin and Deng Xiaoping said.⁷

motion whenever he produces a use-values of any kind.” Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume One, trans. Ben Fowkes (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976), 270.

⁶ This is what Martha Albertson Fineman called the “autonomy myth.” She pointed out that “individual autonomy and self-sufficiency” are the core myths of American society. For “autonomy myth,” see Martha Albertson Fineman, *The Autonomy Myth: The Theory of Dependency* (New York: The New Press, 2005).

⁷ Deng Xiaoping praised writers and artists as “the engineers of the human soul,” in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution. Deng Xiaoping, “Speech greeting the 4th Congress of Chinese writers and artists (October 30, 1979), *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping*, Vol. II (1975-1982) (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1984). Even before Deng, Stalin had described writers as “the engineers of the soul” at Maxim Gorky's house in 1932. Cynthia Ruder, *Making History for Stalin: The Story of the Belomor Canal* (Gainesville, Tallahassee, Tampa, Boca Raton, Pensacola, Orlando, Miami, and Jacksonville: University Press of Florida, 1998), 44.

And yet, what is peculiar in North Korea during and after the Arduous March is that the Kim regime deployed labor as a way of dying and celebrated death as the most sublime end of the laborer's life. How can we define this systematic—or suicidal and voluntary—death? An Australian philosopher, Rosi Braidotti, categorized death in two ways: “socially distributed and organized ways of dying” and “internally produced and self-run ways of dying.” The former includes “violence, diseases, poverty; accidents; wars and catastrophes,” while the latter “suicide, burn-out, depression and other psychosomatic pathologies.”⁸ Kim Jong Il's strategy to control the country and its people was to integrate those two ways to die into one; death was at once socially organized and internally produced. Even accidental death was depicted as a willing action. This idea of voluntary death crystalized into a narrative of “working to die.” Some perform labor while they starve. Others continue to work despite encountering a harmful accident. They all are depicted as willing to risk their lives to keep working and finally complete their mission.

The North Korean government has striven to represent this kind of labor as an artistic performance. To that end, writers—“the engineers of the soul”—were assigned to aesthetic tasks. Here the rhythm of labor deserves deliberation. The Kim regime transformed literature into the prosody of labor. Joseph Goebbels has argued, “Propaganda must be made directly by words and images, not by writing.” Paul Virilio explained the meaning of Goebbels's phrase as, “Reading implies time for reflection, a slowing down that destroys the mass's dynamic efficiency.”⁹ However, the accelerated rhythm of labor reforms the conductor's conscience, and thus alters writing and reading into a kind of work song. The North Korean regime has urged the people to

⁸ Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge, UK and Malden, MA: The Polity, 2013), 130-131.

⁹ Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics: An Essay on Dromology*, trans. Mark Polizzotti (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2006), 31.

internalize the rhythm—it has cast a spell of working to die on the workers—by way of not only spectacle but also writing and reading. Literature, in addition to visual or performance art, plays a role in this purpose. Labor is an audio-visual performance. Humans’ collective working makes a grandiose sound and a great spectacle. In North Korea—“a theater state”—literature is the script for the performance.¹⁰ Therefore, at least in theory, writing along with images and sounds can override the time and space for reflection. There is no other space or time, because labor in everyday life is overwhelmed by that specific rhythm.

Thus, it can be said that labor not only contributes to production, but also plays roles as both artistic performance (e.g., working for the sublime end of life) and spiritual practice (e.g., meditation and salvation). These aesthetic and moral aspects of labor, which are entwined with its economic nature, have been long overlooked in North Korean studies and even the study of totalitarianism in general. In this chapter, I shed light on those three aspects of labor by looking at the fictionalized biographies of Kim Jong Il, such as Song Sangwŏn’s *Ch’onggŏm ūl tŭlgo* (*Taking up the Guns and Bayonets*) (2002) and Paek Pohŭm’s *Ranam ūi yŏlp’ung* (*The Craze from Ranam*) (2004), and Kim Jong Il’s own writings on labor.

2. *Songun* (Military-First) Revolution

¹⁰ Heonik Kwon and Byung-Ho Chung see North Korea as a “theater state,” quoting the term from Clifford Geertz’s study of the nineteenth-century’s Balinese Negara, Heonik Kwon and Byung-Ho Chung, *North Korea: Beyond Charismatic Politics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012). But Wada Haruki is the first scholar who used this notion of “theater state” to describe North Korea. Wada Haruki, *Kita Chōsen: Yūgekitai kokka no genzai* (*North Korea: The Present of the Guerilla State*), (Tokyo: Iwanami shōten, 1998), 158-161.

Looking around at military officers, he (Kim Jong Il) said,

“We frequently visited military camps at that time. But, from now on, I will meet the soldiers even more often. Over fifty percent of my on-the-spot-guidance will be conducted at the military bases. Although it is too early to make an official announcement on my new idea, I have contemplated on the political notion of *sŏn’gun huro* (Military-First and Labor-Second). And according to this new idea, I have visited military camps and met people.”

The military commanders opened their eyes wide with astonishment. Military-First and Labor-Second! This was a very original notion that they had never seen in any books or any classic of political ideas. The military commanders were all surprised and exited that Comrade Kim Jong Il was building up the experience and knowledge for the Military-First policy.

However, Comrade Kim Jong Il continued to speak quietly, with a placid expression.¹¹

North Korean writer Paek Pohŭm’s fictionalized biography of Kim Jong Il (1942-2011), *Ranam ũi yŏlp’ung* (*The Craze From Ranam*) (2004), describes the moment Kim disclosed the idea of “*sŏn’gun huro* (선군후로; 先軍後勞; Military-First and Labor-Second)” one autumn day in 1994.¹² He announces that he will launch the new policy of giving primacy to the military over labor. His military commanders are all surprised and exited by his declaration of the new revolutionary idea. But Kim Jong Il, being almost omniscient, remains placid because he knows how shocking and revolutionary his idea is to them and thus anticipates how they will react. This is the very first stage of the Songun (Military-First) Revolution, which is claimed to be a paradigm shift from the traditional sense of socialism that is theoretically based on Marx’s political economics, to the Military-First Idea that puts the armed forces before the labor workers. It can be said that this paradigm shift signifies the emergence of a new mode of

¹¹ Paek Pohŭm, *Ranam ũi yŏlp’ung* (*The Craze from Ranam*) (Pyongyang: Munhak yesul ch’ulp’ansa, 2004), 210.

¹² North Korean media has claimed that Kim Jong Il officially declared the idea of Songun politics on January 1, 1995 at Taboksol Guard Post. *Rodong sinmun* (*The Workers’ Newspaper*), November 18, 2001. But Paek’s biography of Kim Jong Il attests that Kim Jong Il presented his Songun idea to the high-ranking generals one day in *ma-gaül ch’öl* (late autumn) in 1994. Paek Pohŭm, *Ibid.*, 211.

production, the subordination of labor not to capital but to the military. However, the word “production” seems incorrect here because during the economic crisis of the 1990s, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) had great difficulty producing “value”—more accurately “use-value”—by “the labor process” from the economic point of view.¹³ What really happened in 1990s’ North Korea is the conversion of labor into a spiritual practice—the state’s efforts to transform labor into a meditation. Through the conversion, the process of labor was able to produce a kind of spiritual value—if any—which conduces not only to the individual’s mental enlightenment but also to social stability. To borrow the Foucauldian term, “governmentality,” labor became a way of “governing the soul,” “governing the self,” and even “governing others.”¹⁴

However, it seems that this spiritual value does not include an economic sense. Rather, it has religious, ontological overtones. Indeed, Kim Jong Il’s tactic to rule the DPRK is to impose “a temporal scansion” on everyday life, just as the “cenoby” did on its “cenobites” in mediaeval Europe.¹⁵ In accordance with the rhythm, everyday life is transformed into a ritual.¹⁶ And, by so

¹³ In Marx’s terminology, “the labor process” is “purposeful activity aimed at the production of use-values.” I deliberately use the terms “the labor process” and “value” or “use-value” to juxtapose Kim Jong Il’s notion of Military-First and Labor-Second with Marx’s idea of labor. Karl Marx, *Ibid.*, 290.

¹⁴ Thomas Remke accurately stated the key point of the Foucauldian notion of “governmentality”: “Foucault defines government as conduct, or, more precisely, as “the conduct of conduct” and thus as a term which ranges from “governing the self” to “governing others.” All in all, in his history of governmentality Foucault endeavors to show how the modern sovereign state and the modern autonomous individual co-determine each other’s emergence.” Thomas Remke, “‘The Birth of Bio-Politics’: Michel Foucault’s Lecture at the Collège de France on Neo-Liberal Governmentality,” *Economy and Society*, Vol. 30, No. 2, May 2001, 191.

¹⁵ “The cenobite is . . . first of all a total hourly scansion of existence, in which every moment has its corresponding Office or duty [*ufficio*], either of prayer and reading or manual labor. . . . The novelty of cenoby is that, by taking literally the Pauline prescription of unceasing prayer, it transforms the whole life into an Office by way of temporal scansion.” Giorgio Agamben, *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-Of-Life*, trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013), 21-22.

¹⁶ Turning to Marcel Mauss’s study of the arctic Eskimo, Sonia Ryang terms the DPRK as “a perpetual ritual state.” Sonia Ryang, *Reading North Korea: An Ethnological Inquiry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2012), 23.

doing, the people in the DPRK are urged to be a part of a great cycle in a cosmos which the state has built, imagined, and narrated. North Korean people follow the daily routines that the state designates and assigns, by working and sometimes participating in various meetings and government-inspired demonstrations. Through the temporal scansion, they are expected to experience spiritual development and edify themselves. Rhythm gives being to a thing.

First, it is necessary to examine why Kim Jong Il gave primacy to the military over labor during *konan ũi haenggun* (the Arduous March) and how the consecration of labor is related to its militarization. As argued above, labor was heavily sanctified in the 1990s and the first decade of the twenty-first century. But here the militarization of labor is a precondition of its consecration. In the age of “*sŏn ’gun huro*”—since 1995—labor has never been overlooked. Instead, it has been completely militarized. Labor workers have become warriors, while workplaces have been considered to be battlefields. In other words, the scansion of daily life has been changed into the rhythm of gunshots, artillery fire, and military marches.

The militarization and consecration of labor is also found in early North Korean written materials since the foundation of the socialist state. Moreover, the militarization of the economy has become intensified in industrial and agricultural sects since 1974 when Kim Jong Il initiated *Soktojŏn* (Speed-Battle or Speed Campaign) at the eighth full session of the fifth Central Committee of the Workers’ Party of Korea (WPK). At factories, mines, and farms, workers had to accelerate production; this was depicted as if they were fiercely attacking enemies on the battlefield. Just as soldiers on the battlefield are supposed to be ready to die, soldier-workers in workplaces transformed into battlefields were expected to give their lives. Thus, it can be said

that Nietzsche's prediction has been proved right, at least in North Korea: "The workers should learn to feel like soldiers."¹⁷

However, the North Korean militarization of labor during Kim Jong Il's reign went even further: "The workers should learn to feel like bombs and bullets." What is distinctive in the Songun (Military-First) age is that the concept of "working to die"—as in a North Korean song quoted in Song Sangwŏn's *Taking up Guns and Bayonets*, "working to billow as smoke," and "working to be burned to ashes"—has become dominant over the notion of "working to live" on the "battlefields" of "production." Accordingly, the disposability of the body was maximized in this narrative of "working to die."

"Production," "use-value," and economic prosperity were depicted as less important for labor workers at that time. Rather, the concepts of *yukt'an* (human bomb or human bullet) and *chap'ok* (suicide attack) became praised as virtues for them. Workers should be ready to be thrown to enemies and used as weapons. North Korean soldier-workers are described not only as combat troops but also as bullets and bombs that have the "intention" and "consciousness" of exploding and burning. They are ultimately transformed into willful weapons. This is a critical difference between the Arduous March and its previous period in terms of the militarization of labor. Kim Jong Il's regime reinforced the ownership of bodies for use as weapons.

To that end, North Korean media and literature have highlighted the rhythm of weapons and have urged workers to internalize it. This whole process of internalization can be called a meditation; the soldier-workers repeat the daily processes of labor while they chant pro-

¹⁷ "From the future of the worker. — Workers should learn to feel like soldiers. An honorarium, an income, but no pay! No relation between payment and achievement!" Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will To Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale; edit. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), #763; p. 399.

government slogans, recite Kim Il Sung or Kim Jong Il's words, and sing paeans to the Kim family. By doing so, the workers gain a sense of serenity and peace in their souls and transcend the fear of physical pain and death. This religious and spiritual aspect of labor marks North Korean culture and politics under Kim Jong Il's rule.

3. Requiem for the Living and the Sound of Conscience

Kim Namch'öl's story is an exemplary case of the "working to die" narrative. Namch'öl is a fictional North Korean soldier who is assigned to do tunneling work. He is one of the protagonists in Song Sangwön (b. 1940)'s *Ch'onggöm ūl tūlgo (Taking up Guns and Bayonets)* (2002), a fictionalized biography of Kim Jong Il. His rank is "chōnsa," which literally means warrior but he is actually a private.¹⁸ He is an epitome of the North Korean soldier-worker.

In the story, Namch'öl's division has been dispatched to the site where the Kūmgangsan Hydroelectric Power Plant will be built.¹⁹ As a soldier of the division, Namch'öl is ordered to dig through a mountain with a sledgehammer or a pickaxe to make a tunnel that will be used as a waterway. But when he hears that "Official Order #0026" is given to the division, he is

¹⁸ Song Sangwön, *Ch'onggöm ūl tūlgo (Taking up Guns and Bayonets)* (Pyongyang: Munhak yesul ch'ulp'ansa, 2002), 70, 189, 212.

¹⁹ The construction of Kūmgangsan Hydroelectric Power Plant—later renamed as Anbyōn ch'ōngnyōn palchōnso (Anbyōn Youth Hydroelectric Power Plant) to commemorate the young soldiers who participated in its construction—began in 1986 following Kim Il Sung's Official Order "Chayōn kaejo saōp ūi ilhwan ūro kangsuryang i manūn Kangwōndo iltae e suryōk palchōnso rūl kōnsōlhal kōt e taehayō," "Anbyōn ch'ōngnyōn palchōnso," *Tijit'öl Pukhan taebaekkwā*: (<http://www.kplibrary.com/nkterm/read.aspx?num=590>)

devastated. The Official Order by Kim Jong Il is to move forward the deadline to complete the grand-scale dam, which means Namch'öl's job becomes more labor-intensive.

However, there was a soldier who was reluctant to carry out the unprecedented decision (the Order to move up the deadline). Carrying a bucket on his side, Private (Warrior) Kim Namch'öl lay down on a waste bank.²⁰

This is the part of the biography in which Kim Namch'öl is first introduced. He has worked in the tunnel and knows how hard it is to do the tunneling work. By his estimate, and in reality, it will take ten years to finish the construction of the tunnel. But the order is that they should complete the tunneling work in only one year. The order is beyond possible reality. Therefore, he turns pale with fright and dispiritedly falls down on “a waste bank.” Even when he returns to work, he is mentally exhausted.

‘OK! The pit’s mouth comes into sight! There, I can breathe in fresh air, as I dump out the rocks. But after the short break, I should come back into this tunnel. Tomorrow must be the same as today.’ He continued to think. ‘What about my dream? I would not be able to achieve my blissful dream of being a marine and distinguishing myself in war beyond the ocean. My military career must be over in this pit.’²¹

“Digging up,” “dumping out,” “taking a short break,” and “digging up” again: the tedious rhythm of the labor leaves Namch'öl in despair. He senses that he would be confined in “the pit” until the last day of his military service, which would be the same as “today.” Then he recalls his

²⁰ Song Sangwön, 70.

²¹ Ibid., 73.

“dream of being a marine” and distinguishing himself in war. He has reasons to want to be a combat soldier. He is from a prestigious military family. His father Kim Tonghwan is a navy *taejwa* (Colonel), who composes a paean to Kim Jong Il. Colonel Kim’s song for “General” Kim Jong Il is as follows:

If I burn myself for you, I will billow as red smoke.
If I burn myself for you, I will be burned to red ashes.
Oh, General! I will be a human bomb for you!²²

This paean foreshadows its composer’s fate. Colonel Kim Tonghwan, in the latter part of the biography, killed his ten subordinates and committed suicide rather than surrender to the South Korean army when his submarine was accidentally carried into South Korean territory. This is based on a real event, the Kangnŭng Submarine Infiltration Incident in 1996. According to an American source, the Director of the Maritime Department, Colonel Kim Tongwŏn, killed eleven North Koreans including himself—or was killed along with his subordinates by someone else—when his submarine was found by the South Korean army.

It seems likely that Kim Tonghwan in the fictionalized biography, *Taking up Guns and Bayonets*, models the real person, Kim Tongwŏn.²³ But it is not certain that Colonel Kim Tongwŏn’s son worked at the construction site of the Kŭmgansan Hydroelectric Power Plant in 1996. Suffice it to say here that the writer, Song Sangwŏn, attempted to connect Kim Tongwŏn,

²² *Ibid.*, 45.

²³ Harry P. Dies, Jr., “North Korean Special Operations Forces: 1996 Kangnung submarine infiltration,” *Military Intelligence Professional Bulletin*, Oct-Dec 2004, 30, 32: (http://fas.org/irp/agency/army/mipb/2004_04.pdf)

who committed suicide to remain loyal to Kim Jong Il, to the soldier-workers—both those who survived and those who were killed at the construction site—in order to create a genealogy of loyal warriors and shift the narrative from military operations to construction.

In *Taking up Guns and Bayonets*, Kim Tonghwan—the fictionalized character of Kim Tongwŏn—and his company perform the paean before Kim Jong Il. Listening to the song, “General” Kim Jong Il is deeply moved and becomes more confident of the North Korean military’s fidelity. Thus, convinced that his loyal army will obey and carry out all his orders, he announces the unrealistic directive to finish the construction of the dam in one year. However, the young soldiers turn out to be less loyal than the old officers and veterans. Colonel Kim’s son, Namch’ŏl, returns to Pyongyang on vacation and attempts to transfer his post from the construction site to a combat unit. But the Colonel is furious that his son wants to avoid his mission and escape from his place of duty assigned by the Supreme Commander Kim Jong Il. For Colonel Kim, the construction site is another front line and he orders Namch’ŏl to return to his unit. But, in a sense it is too late, because Private Kim encounters his own death near the place of duty.

Then a sound came from somewhere. It sounded like a song, a crying, or a murmuring. Namch’ŏl realized that it was a part of *ppaljjisan ch’udoga* (a requiem for fallen Korean guerillas during the Japanese Occupation of Korea), and believed that it came from the bottom of his heart and resonated in his mind. But the sound was coming from elsewhere.

There were three burial mounds on a patch of dried grass on a hill. A boy placed a branch from a green pine tree on the graves and stood before them.

[. . .]

“Who died?”

“Namch’ŏl.”

The boy answered.

“Who?”

Namch’öl didn’t hear and asked again.

“Namch’öl is buried here.”

The boy spoke the name of the deceased.²⁴

Namch’öl hears a requiem on the way back to his place of duty. Standing before graves, a boy sings an elegy, which was originally sung for fallen anti-Japanese guerillas during the Japanese Occupation of Korea. At first, it sounds like “a crying or a murmuring.” But Namch’öl realizes that somebody has been killed and buried on a hill at the entrance to the construction site. Thus, he asks the singing boy about who is dead. Then the boy’s answer is quite shocking: Namch’öl himself is buried in the grave.

But, in fact, it is the boy’s father who died. The tunnel in which the construction corps worked has caved in and a company commander, the boy’s father, has been killed. However, the head officer of the construction site lies to the boy’s family to gain time. He needs time to restore the deceased’s body which has been severely damaged under the rocks. The only thing the head officer can give the bereaved family is the victim’s body restored to almost the same state as when he was alive. Thus, the head officer delays handing the body to the bereaved until the recovery work is done, telling a lie that Namch’öl has been killed. Therefore, the boy is singing the requiem for Namch’öl. But before talking to the boy, Namch’öl already thought the requiem came “from the bottom of his heart” and resonates “with his mind.” He has “*choe üisik*” (a guilty conscience).²⁵

²⁴ Song Sangwön, 99.

²⁵ Ibid., 102.

Even after the truth is revealed at the funeral, the boy refuses to accept reality, saying, “No, this is not my father. This is Namch’öl. My mom told me so!”²⁶ If he had been at work with his company, Namch’öl would have been crushed to death under the rocks along with his company commander. He repents for being absent from work, despising himself for being a survivor of his company. Finally, Namch’öl comes to “consider himself to be a dead man.”²⁷

4. *Ryangsim* (Conscience) and *Ŭiji* (Will or Determination)

In the latter part of the biography, Namch’öl is reformed into a diligent, pious, and self-sacrificing man. This is because he preserves *ryangsim* (conscience) in his mind and regains *Ŭiji* (determination or will) through an act of penance, which is labor. First, his conscience enables him to repent of his wrong-doing and of regarding himself as a dead man. His inner voice pronounces a death sentence on himself. Second, his fault is attributed to lack of will or determination. In other words, it is because of his weak will that he could not withstand the hard labor and ran away from the tunnel in which he should have died with his company’s soldiers. The second half of the biography, thus, focuses on how he is reformed and how he achieves his purpose that was given to him by the state.

Therefore, it is necessary to examine these two keywords—*ryangsim* (conscience) and *Ŭiji* (determination or will)—to understand the meaning of Namch’öl’s story. These two notions are interrelated, reminding us of a Hasidic proverb, “Be the master of your will and the slave of your

²⁶ Ibid., 102.

²⁷ Ibid., 102.

conscience.”²⁸ Human action is at once invigorated by one’s will and checked by one’s conscience. In the case of North Korea, this psychological system is embedded in the labor process; by working—or by the rhythm of labor—people develop their willpower and expand their consciences.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, conscience means “an inner feeling or voice viewed as acting as guide to the rightness or wrongness of one’s behavior.”²⁹ But, an American philosopher, Larry May, has defined it as “a capacity which leads to socially beneficial consequences in those who develop it.”³⁰ Thus, conscience can be categorized as not only individual morality, but also as a capacity of judgment that enables a person to follow social norms and allows him or her to be on good terms with others. This social, collective sense of the term conscience is not a modern revision at all. For example, Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius (121-180) in *Meditations* related conscience to “unselfish action,” emphasizing the harmonious relationship between the self and the Universe.³¹ The notion of conscience encompasses two poles of ethics: “an inner feeling or voice” to help determine what is right or wrong, and “a capacity” that enables a person to follow social norms and form good relationships with others.

Given the philosophical usages of conscience in the West, the definition of the North Korean word, *ryangsim*, seems similar to Western ethics. An anonymous editor of a North Korean literary magazine *Chosŏn munhak* (*North Korean Literature*) has recently introduced nine proverbs about *ryangsim*. It is interesting that the editor quotes most of them from foreign

²⁸ “Sŏnggu, sokdam: Ryangsim (Proverbs: Conscience),” *Chosŏn munhak* (*North Korean Literature*), Vol. 8, 2014.

²⁹ *Oxford Online English Dictionary*;
(http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/conscience)

³⁰ Larry May, “On Conscience,” *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 20, No. 1, January 1983. 57.

³¹ Marcus Aurelius. *Meditations*, trans. Gregory Hays (New York: Modern Library, 2002), 70.

writings and proverbs—for instance, “*Ryangsim ūn ch’ŏn saram ūi chŭng’in kwa matmŏgnŭnda*” (Conscience is as good as a thousand witnesses: an Italian proverb), “*Ryangsim ūn uri rŭl kamsi hanŭn kyŏngjong ida*” (Conscience is the inner voice that warns us that someone might be looking: by H.L. Mencken), and “*Ch’oego ūi chaep’an ūn ryansim ūi p’an’gyŏl*” (There is a higher court than courts of justice and that is the court of conscience. It supersedes all other courts: by Mahatma Gandhi).³² The North Korean word *ryangsim* has almost the same meaning as the English term conscience. They are interchangeable.

And yet, there may be a small difference between *ryangsim* and conscience. A North Korean *Dictionary of Philosophy* published by *Sahoe kwahak ch’ulp’ansa* (Social Science Publishing House) defines *ryangsim* (conscience) as “*hyŏngmyŏngjŏk ryangsim*” (revolutionary conscience) and “*aegukchŏk ryangsim*” (nationalist conscience), which have been stimulated by the North Korean people’s struggle for national liberation and the working classes’ efforts to realize the revolution. This dictionary asserts that only “*kŭllo taejung*” (working people) can have “*ryangsim*.”³³ Still, it would be obvious that *ryangsim* is almost an exact translation of the word conscience despite its class and nationalist distinctions, if we look at two fundamental characteristics of *ryangsim*. First, *ryangsim*—however revolutionary or nationalist—can also be obtained through moral cultivation and self-discipline, as in the Stoic sense of conscience. Second, this can be satisfied by one’s sense of responsibility about his or her behaviors in relation to society or other community members, as found in Larry May’s writing on conscience.

As leader of the Department of Agitation and Propaganda since the late 1960s, Kim Jong Il revised almost all important notions in North Korean art and philosophy in such a way that

³² “*Sŏnggu, sokdam: Ryangsim* (Proverbs: Conscience),” *Chosŏn munhak* (North Korean Literature), Vol. 8, 2014.

³³ *Chŏrhak sajŏn* (*Dictionary of Philosophy*) (Pyongyang: Sahoe kwahak ch’ulp’ansa, 1970), 179.

fidelity to his father, Kim Il Sung, was emphasized and praised as the highest virtue.³⁴ Kim Jong Il even modified the concept of *ryangsim*. He accentuated “*ch’angjakjök ryangsim*” (the conscience for creation) in a speech in 1992 to evaluate the serialized film, *Minjok kwa unmyöng* (*Nation and Destiny*), calling “artists and writers” the mouthpiece for “*ryangsim*” of “*sidae*” (the age) and “*inmin taejung*” (the popular masses).

Writers and artists should make *chunbi* (preparations) for being upright and innocent persons who have *tangchök ryangsim* (conscience inspired with the party spirit). This conscience sprouts from their loyalty to the party and *suryöng* (President Kim Il Sung). They should repay the party and Suryöng, who have grown and recognized themselves, with loyalty, and consider it their duty and honor. Their conscience should be concretely represented in their writing and art. Writers and artists are the mouthpiece for the conscience of the age and the popular masses. . . In order to have *ch’angjakjök ryangsim* (conscience for creation), they need *suyang* (to cultivate their mind) in a humanistic way.³⁵

He employs a unique notion of “*tangchök ryangsim*” (conscience inspired by the party spirit), claiming that this kind of conscience “sprouts from their loyalty to the party” and his father Kim Il Sung.³⁶ It seems that “the party” indicates Kim Jong Il himself, who was once called “*tang*

³⁴ Kim Jong Il took the initiative in dismissing Kim Toman, who had been reluctant to establish Kim Il Sung’s cult of personality, as the Secretary of the Agitprop at the Fifteenth Plenary Session of the Fourth Central Committee of the Workers’ Party of Korea (WPK) in 1967. Yi Chongsök, *Saero ssün hyöndae Pukhan üi ihae* (*An Understanding of Modern North Korea: A New Edition*) (Seoul: Yöksa pip’yöngsa, 2000), 498-499. Kim Toman was put in a rehabilitation camp for political offenders. “Pukhan sasangböm 10 man 5 ch’ön myöng suyong” (One Hundred Thousand Political Offenders in North Korean Rehabilitation Camps), *Tong’a ilbo* (*Dong-a Ilbo*), 1982-04-12.

³⁵ Kim Jong Il, “Tabujak yönghwa Minjok kwa unmyöng üi ch’angjak söngkwa e t’odaehayö munhak yesul könsöl esö saeroun chönhwan ül irük’ija (1992)” (Let us cause a paradigm shift in building literature and art based on the success of the serialized film, *Nation and Destiny*), *Kim Jong Il sönjip* (*Kim Jong Il’s Selected Works*) Vol. 8. (Pyongyang: Chosön Rodongdang ch’ulp’ansa, 2009).

³⁶ It seems that Kim Il Sung was pleased with Kim Jong-Il’s filial thinking on “*ryangsim*.” The father Kim quoted the son Kim’s sentence and spoke highly of it in his autobiography, *Segi wa töburö* (*With the Century*) (1998); “Comrade Kim Jong-Il’s remark that loyalty to the leader must be maintained as one’s faith, conscience, morality, and everyday concern is an aphorism.” Kim Il Sung, *Segi wa töburö* (*With the Century*) (Pyongyang: Chosön Rodongdang ch’ulp’ansa, 1998). The English translation is from the Official Website of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (<http://www.korea-dpr.com/lib/202.pdf>).

chung'ang' (party center). For the writers and artists who are loyal to his father and himself, Kim Jong Il highlights "*chunbi*" (mak[ing] preparation) and "*suyang*" (cultivat[ing] [one's] mind). But what did Kim Jong Il mean by "*chunbi*" or "*suyang*?" What preparations do the writers and the artists need to make? And how can they cultivate their minds?

5. Labor and Communal Life

The answers are labor and communal life. Writers should live and work together with the people. Even in the late 1960s, Kim Jong Il had already urged prospective writers and artists to "lead a sound organizational life" and "perform a great deal of physical labor for society." On October 8, 1968, at a talk to graduates from the Department of Korean Language and Literature of Kim Il Sung University, he stated that North Korean society required "healthy people who are ideologically and mentally sound and steeled physically."³⁷ He attested that communal life and labor ensure the future writers' and artists' mental and physical health. These processes of *chunbi* (preparation) and *suyang* (self-cultivation) became institutionalized and systematized, as Kim Jong Il exercised leadership in the field of North Korean art and literature.

Following is an example of how Kim Jong Il institutionalized those processes. A renowned Korean-American journalist, Cho Kwangdong (b. 1945), a former President of Chicago Radio Korea, interviewed North Korean writers Rim Chongsang (b. 1933) and Nam Taehyön (b. 1947),

³⁷ Kim Jong Il, "Tang e kküt öpsi ch'ungjikhhan munye chönsa ro chunbi haja: Kim Il Sung chonghap taehak Chosön ömunhakbu choröpsanegdül kwa han tamhwa (1992)" (Let us prepare ourselves to be soldiers unfailingly faithful to the party in the field of art and literature), *Kim Jong Il sönjip (Kim Jong Il: Selected Works)* Vol. 13 (Pyongyang: Chosön Rodongdang ch'ulp'ansa, 2009), The quoted translation is from the Official Website of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (<http://www.korea-dpr.com>.)

when he visited Pyongyang in 1991. Hearing that writers in North Korea receive special treatment including high salaries from the state, Cho expresses concern about the writers' being a privileged class. Rim, differing with Cho, says, "You cannot see the writers in Pyongyang (the capital city of the DPRK), because they go onsite to work with factory workers, farmers, and fishermen. Because of living together with the common people in factories, farms, and fishing villages, they cannot be a privileged class."³⁸ Nam added, "The writers are not a privileged class, but a revolutionary class. I worked in the Hwanghae Steel Mill for three years to write *Ch'ongch'un songga (A Hymn of Youth)*."³⁹

This interview clearly illustrates how the North Korean writers cultivated their minds and prepared to write. Labor and the communal life are the ways of "*suyang*" (cultivation of mind) and "*chunbi*" (preparation).⁴⁰ This is applicable not only to writers, but also to people of almost every social spectrum. Moreover, this practice can be traced back as far as North Korea's colonial period.

North Korean writer Ri (or Yi) Kiyŏng (1895-1984)'s works, such as *Taeji ūi adŭl (A Son of The Soil)* (1939) and *Tuman kang (Tuman River)* (1962), illustrate the concepts of *suyang* and

³⁸ Cho Kwangdong, *Tasi ssŭnŭn Pukhan pangmun'gi: Tŏdi kado saram saenggak hajiyo (A Rewritten Essay on Travel to North Korea: We Consider Humans, Although We Go Slow)* (Seoul: (Chu) Uri ilt'ŏ kihoek, 1996), 157.

³⁹ *Ch'ongch'un songga (A Hymn of Youth)* is a bestseller famous in both North and South Korea. Its first edition was published by *Munye ch'ulp'ansa* (Literature Publishing House) in 1987 and the second by *Munhak yesul chonghap ch'ulp'ansa* (United Publishing House of Literature) 1994. The latter publishers printed forty thousand copies. This novel was also published in South Korea by a South Korea publisher *Kongdongch'e ch'ulp'ansa* (Community Publishing House) in 1988. Kim Sŏngsu, "Nam Taehyŏn ron: Nam Taehyŏn, Korŭa munhak t'onghap ūi sigŭmsŏk" (On Nam Taehyŏn: A Foundation for the Unification of Korean Literature), *Ihwa yŏja taehakkyo t'ong'ilhak yŏn'guwŏn* (Ewha Institute of Unification Studies) ed., *Pukhan munhak ūi chihyŏngdo (Cartography of North Korean Literature)* Vol. 1 (Seoul: Ewha Womans University Press, 2008), 288. Nam Taehyŏn claimed seventy or eighty thousand copies had been sold before 1991. Cho Kwangdong, *Ibid.*, 158.

⁴⁰ In Kim Jong Il's speech of 1992, "*suyang*" particularly refers to the process by which writers develop the capacity to withstand and embrace harsh criticism of their works from their audience, peer writers, and most importantly the party and the leader. Kim Jong Il, *Ibid.*

chunbi. Ri Kiyŏng is a highly-revered writer both in South and North Korea. Especially in the North, he is considered to be one of the most loyal writers who sincerely served Suryŏng (President) Kim Il Sung. Unlike many other renowned writers, such as Han Sŏrya (1900-1976) and Rim (or Im) Hwa (1908-1953), who were purged or executed by the Kim regime, he survived the political struggles of the 1950s and 1960s and contributed to the formation of state literature which is deployed as propaganda. Kim Il Sung is said to have favored Ri Kiyŏng since North Korea's liberation from Japan in 1945 and supported him in many ways.⁴¹ According to a prominent North Korean literary critic, Pak Ch'unt'aek, Kim Il Sung sided with Ri Kiyŏng in a controversy over the third volume of *Tuman River* in 1963. When Ri died in 1984, Kim "conferred a benefit" of being buried at "a hill for the eternal life," Patriotic Martyrs' Cemetery in Pyongyang. Later, Kim Jong Il praised Ri Kiyŏng as a soil-loving writer who worked and lived with farmers.⁴² In the South, Ri is seen as a monumental figure of "*P'ŭro munhak*" (Proletarian Literature). His novel *Kohyang (Hometown)* (1934) reached the peak of Korean socialist/realist literature—not exactly in the Soviet sense of Socialist-Realism—under Japanese rule (1910-1945). His lifelong theme is *rodong* (labor) and its relationship with willpower. The following sentences illustrate how *rodong* is related to "meditation" or "governing the self."

Despite the cold weather, he (Hwang Kŏno) went up the mountain (Mt. Changgun). And there he offered *mukto* (a silent prayer) for over one hour, putting a frozen bowl of clean water in front of a rock. He asked the sacred spirit to be able to go to school in spite of his poverty. He kept praying every day in that way for one hundred days. However, he later said that he was not able to see the White-Haired-Old-Man (the sacred spirit) in his dream even on the last night of the one-hundred-day prayer. He said that his *ch'isŏng* (prayer)

⁴¹ "Öböi Suryŏng-nim kwa chakka Ri Kiyŏng" (Father President and Writer Ri Kiyŏng), *T'ong'il munhak (Reunification Literature)*, Vol. 2, 2006.

⁴² Pak Ch'unt'aek, "Uri nŭn yŏngwŏnhan changgunnim ũi tonghaengja: han öpsi ũnhyeroun p'um sok esö (2)" (We are General's Fellow Travelers Forever: In His Infinitely Merciful Bosom (2)), *Chosŏn munhak (North Korean Literature)*, Vol. 8, 2006.

must have been useless and fruitless whenever he met someone who attempted to pray on the mountain. But what was strange, he said, was that his body was not frozen on such cold nights and that the spot he sat on melted and his feet and hands were warm even on top of the mountain. He often reported that man's *yŏlsŏng* (enthusiasm) was so great and that this was the only thing he learned after *ch'isŏng* (the prayer).⁴³

In the novel, *A Son of the Soil*, the protagonist, Hwang Kŏno, offers “*mukto*” (silent prayer) or “*ch'isŏng*” (prayer) on top of a mountain. He is born and raised in an impoverished peasant family who are not able to pay his educational expenses. Nonetheless, he dreams of going to school. Then, he goes up the mountain and prays every day to see “a sacred spirit”—represented by an old man with long white hair in white clothes—in his dream. The common belief says that the old man will realize the prayer's wish. However, it turns out to be “useless and fruitless.” But, he becomes enlightened with the truth of willpower; “the man's *yŏlsŏng* (enthusiasm) was so great” that he is “not frozen” during one hundred “cold night[s],” the spot where he sits “melts,” and “his feet and hands” are “warm even on top of the mountain.” The individual conduct of “*ch'isŏng*” (prayer) still has a positive meaning; the spiritual practice strengthens willpower, enables self-control, and generates fortitude and patience even in adversity and hardship.

Ssidong came back late in the night and slept between other workers in a large room of the dormitory. When he first came to the coal mine, he felt uneasy and sad in the unfamiliar surroundings. But now he had become accustomed to it. Moreover, the communal life, which he had never experienced before, awoke him to class consciousness and potentiated in the power of unity and a sense of defiance toward the ruling classes.

⁴³ Yi (or Ri) Kiyŏng, *Taeji ūi adŭl (A Son of The Soil)*, originally published on *Chosŏn ilbo (The Chosun Ilbo)*, 1939-11-01, Yi Chuhyŏng, eds., *Han'guk kŭndae changp'yŏn sosŏl taegye* Vol. 14 (Seoul: T'aehaksa, 1997), 23-24.

This is the ideologically correct consciousness for the working classes! Ssidong became skilled as a miner and familiar with his work from day to day.

[. . .]

Having a worried look, Ogi stared her husband (Ssidong) up and down and asked.

Ogi: “Isn’t it tough to work in a coal mine?”

Ssidong: “No. I’m OK. I am used to the work.”

He answered, clenching his fist and showing off his bouncing and strong muscles. Ogi was inwardly pleased, looking at his healthy body.

Ssidong: “[. . .] I have opened my eyes under the piles of coal”⁴⁴

The solitary practice of “*ch’isǒng*” (prayer) in *A Son of the Soil* (1939) evolves into the collective conduct of “*rodong*” (labor) in *Tuman River* (1962). It can be said that this collective labor is what Kim Jong Il meant by *chunbi* (preparation) and *suyang* (the cultivation of mind), and the way *ryangsim* (conscience) and *ũji* (will or determination) can be developed. Ssidong becomes aware that his body and soul grow stronger through labor and communal life. Interesting enough, he improves in health, albeit the harsh living conditions. He works until late at night and sleeps in a jammed dormitory room. Yet he is so healthy that he can “show off his bouncing and strong muscles.” His wife is “inwardly pleased, looking at his healthy body.” Still, there is another fact that makes her happy. His spirit too is stronger and healthier. Ri Kiyǒng’s novel attributes the cause to communal life. Living together with other workers awakens him to class consciousness so he tells his wife that he has opened his eyes in the dark mine.

To borrow Agamben’s terms, Ri Kiyǒng’s novels illustrate how labor and communal life transforms “bare life/*zoē*” to “qualified life/*bios*.”⁴⁵ In other words, communal action—

⁴⁴ Ri Kiyǒng, *Tuman kang* (*Tuman River*) che 3 pu sang, *Ri Kiyǒng sǒnjip* (*Ri Kiyǒng: Selected Works*) (Pyongyang: Chosǒn munhak yesul ch’ong tongmaeng ch’ulp’ansa, 1963), 386-387.

⁴⁵ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 12-13.

collective labor—is the *sine qua non* for qualified life. I am tempted to say that it plays a role as a collective meditation in the qualification. In *Tuman River*, Ssidong is both physically and mentally qualified through collective meditation. This spirituality of collective labor is worth examining in more detail to understand the very nature of the form-of-life under Kim Jong Il’s rule.

6. Labor as a Meditation

Meditation is a spiritual practice for self-control, self-cultivation, or “governing the self.” The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it as “the action or practice of profound spiritual or religious reflection or contemplation,” which includes “a variety of private devotional exercises consisting of the continuous application of the mind to the contemplation of a particular religious text, truth, mystery, or object.”⁴⁶ Thus, meditation can be considered to be a religious or spiritual practice.

Labor, including office work and manual labor in the modern age, performs a function as a spiritual practice to train one’s mind and suppress one’s negative feelings. In other words, doing work is a manner of both individual and communal meditation. Meditation can be a solitary action. But if it is practiced in the form of labor—however individual or cooperative the labor is—it will contribute to building a sober and rational community.

This well-designed mode of social control and self-regulation was not an invention in modern times. As Giorgio Agamben has pointed out, monasteries in mediaeval Europe devised

⁴⁶ *Oxford English Dictionary* (<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/115756?redirectedFrom=meditation#eid>)

manual labor as a way of meditation. Citing *The Institutes* by John Cassian—also known as John the Ascetic—Agamben argued that manual labor was not separated from meditation; more accurately, it was not separated from the recitation of Scriptures.⁴⁷

However, the entire genealogy of work ethics is beyond the scope of this study. It is enough to see Max Weber's study of the Capitalist spirit, or Protestant ethic, to understand how labor is intertwined with spiritual, religious cultivation. Just as Nietzsche said that there is no relationship between payment and achievement,⁴⁸ Weber argued that wages cannot correspond to labor. This is somewhat distinct from—but not directly opposite to—Karl Max's discussion on labor in which he attempts to clarify how "labor process" contributes to "production" of "use-value," and thus highlights fair shares for workers.⁴⁹ Weber, like Nietzsche, believes that spiritual impetus is more important than material stimulation in the labor process. According to him, material gain is the outcome of labor but should not be its end. He cites an example of "traditionalism," which is contrasted with "capitalism," as a standard of the work ethic. Weber says that, when the "modern employer" adopts "a system of piece-rates" for "speeding-up harvesting," he faces the problem of the laborer's work ethic. The system is designed for "the increase in results and intensity of the work." But the traditional worker reacts to the increase "not by increasing, but by decreasing the amount of his work"—by increasing his leisure time.⁵⁰ The rhythm and the speed of his life are different from those of the worker having a Capitalist

⁴⁷ Giorgio Agamben, *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-Of-Life*, Translated by Adam Kotsko (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2013), 25.

⁴⁸ "From the future of the worker.—Workers should learn to feel like soldiers. An honorarium, an income, but no pay! No relation between payment and achievement." Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), #763; p. 399.

⁴⁹ Karl Max, *Capital* Vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1976), 283-306.

⁵⁰ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (London: George Allen & Unwin LTD., 1948), 58-61.

spirit. Thus, Weber contrasts the Capitalist—Protestant—concept of labor with the traditionalist attitude to work.

Labour must [. . .] be performed as if it were an absolute end in itself, a calling. But such an attitude is by no means a product of nature. It cannot be evoked by low wages or high ones alone, but can only be the product of a long arduous process of education.⁵¹

Weberian labor is characterized by a certain kind of rhythm. High wages or “a system of piece-rates” cannot accelerate the speed of work. Instead, the quick and steady pace of the labor is ensured by “a long arduous process of education.” As a result, it is considered to be and performed as a sacred “calling.” However, this sacred labor cannot be a subject of doubt, because it is forbidden. According to the Durkheimian definition, “sacred” means something “set apart and forbidden.”⁵² Once something becomes sacred, it is forbidden to doubt and challenge it. Hence, sacred labor cannot be an object of contemplation or suspicion, but should be regarded as an ultimate end.

Marx has also shed light on the spiritual aspect of labor by emphasizing the willful purpose of the process. He defines the laborer as the willful conductor of production, distinguishing “the worst architect” to “the best of bees.” He says that the former “builds the cell in his mind,” while the latter is not conscious of his purpose.⁵³ Here is the difference between Weber and Marx: contrary to Weber, Marx does not absolutize labor. Rather, he differentiates purposeful labor

⁵¹ Ibid., 62.

⁵² Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Karen E. Fields (New York: Free Press, 1995), 44.

⁵³ Karl Marx, Ibid., 284.

from mindless work. For Marx, labor is not an absolute end, but can be categorized according to whether or not the worker has purpose.

Still, the Weberian way of thinking is a more efficient mental system. In Weberianism, the conductor does not need to agonize over the purpose for which he or she is working. Setting aside that metaphysical question, the worker can focus on more empirical matters like the investment of “time”—as in Benjamin Franklin’s writing, “Remember, that *time* is money,” which Weber quotes in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905).⁵⁴ Needless to say, the Weberian worker can make more expedient and effective contributions to building and governing a state than can the Marxist philosopher-laborer. To put it another way, it is not easy to apply the Marxist idea to a state’s labor policy that should be carried out efficaciously, and sometimes forcefully.

Marx had never participated in building or administering a socialist state, as Kim Jong Il pointed out in his talk with the Senior Officials of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea on November 14, 1992. Although he said that Marx should be respected, Kim Jong Il tried to clarify the limits of Marx’s thought at the talk in 1992. He argued that Marx’s theories reflect only “pre-monopoly capitalism and imperialism,” suggesting that the Juche idea—North Korea’s official ideology—should replace classical Marxism to overcome the latter’s historical limitations.⁵⁵ As a result, especially in terms of labor, Kim Jong Il’s thought—the Juche

⁵⁴ Max Weber, *Ibid.*, 48.

⁵⁵ Kim Jong Il, “Sahoe chuŭi nŭn uri inmin ŭi saengmyŏng ida: Chosŏn Rodongdang chung’ang wiwŏnhoe ch’aegim wiwŏndŭl kwa han tamhwa (1992-11-14) [Socialism is the life of our people: Talk with the Senior Officials of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea (1992-11-14)],” the English translation is from the Official Webpage of the DPRK. <http://www.korea-dpr.com/lib/558.pdf>.

idea—has evolved or mutated far from Marxism into state socialism, by which the state monopolizes “labor-power” along with “the means of production.”

The traditional understanding of state socialism is the state’s monopoly of “the means of production.”⁵⁶ However, historical or existing socialist countries like North Korea have used human labor-power as if it is the physical and non-human means for production. The state owns not only “the means of production” but also the labor-power. In other words, willful purpose—the critical attribute of “the worst architect,” which is distinguished from “the best bee”—is generated and owned by the state, while labor-power, not in theory but in reality, is degraded into the “means of production.” This is a huge paradox: the Juche idea buttresses the notion of state-owned labor-power, while it originates in the Marxist concept of autonomous and purposeful labor.

Marx extols human dignity vis-à-vis “the materials of nature” in his description of labor: the interaction between man and nature.

Labour is, first of all, a process between man and nature, a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature. He confronts the materials of nature as a force of nature. He sets in motion the natural forces which belong to his own body, his arms, legs, head and hands, in order to appropriate the materials of nature in a form adapted to his own needs. Through this movement he acts upon external nature and changes it, and in this way he simultaneously changes his own nature. He develops the potentialities slumbering within nature, and subjects the play of its forces to his own sovereign power.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ For example, Benjamin R. Tucker (1854-1939), editor and publisher of the American individualist anarchist journal, *Liberty*, defined “state socialism” as the state’s monopoly of “all industrial and commercial interests, all productive and distributive agencies.” Benjamin R. Tucker, “State Socialism and Anarchism: How far they agree and wherein they differ (1886).” (<http://www.panarchy.org/tucker/state.socialism.html>.)

⁵⁷ Karl Marx, 283.

Marx argues that labor is a movement through which man transforms the materials of nature and even his own nature. Through labor, he adds, man is able to place nature and its changes under his rule. Kim Jong Il has extracted the core principle of the Juche idea from Marx's ontological understanding of labor.

It had already been known that the world consists of material and changes and develops as a result of the motion of material. The Juche idea gives a new world outlook by answering the questions of who is the master that dominates nature and society and where is the force that transforms them. That the world is dominated and reshaped by man is a new viewpoint on the world in relation to man.⁵⁸

Kim Jong Il's thinking on man's mastership of the world is not his original idea at all, although Kim Jong Il attests that the Juche idea sheds an epoch-making light on the relationship between man and nature and man and society. He highlights three elements—not only man and nature, but also society—that compose the world and history. But this is similar to what Marx and Engels portrayed in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848), which asserts that the fall of the bourgeoisie and “the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable.”⁵⁹ Yet Kim's thought is not an exact replica of the Marxian idea. There cannot be aimless work in a socialist state from the Juche point of view, whereas workers can reject involuntary labor in Marxian logic. North Korean socialism excludes the possibility of the passive proletariat, since they are the masters of

⁵⁸ Kim Jong Il, *On Juche Idea: Treatise Sent to the National Seminar on the Juche Idea Held to Mark the 70th Birthday of the Great Leader Comrade Kim Il Sung, March 31, 1982* (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1982), 12.

⁵⁹ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, trans. Frederick Engels (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr and Company, 1906), 32.

production in the state. The subject of Marx's study is capitalism in which labor can be involuntary and should be commoditized. Kim Jong Il's theory of labor is based on the distinction between capitalism and socialism. Socialism itself is the purpose of labor. This is to say that the construction of a socialist country through labor is essential to the proletariat revolution. If a worker is deliberately absent from work, he or she should be considered to be reactionary or anti-revolutionary. In other words, Kim Jong Il prohibits doubts about and challenges against labor itself or its purpose, labelling sabotage or refusal of labor as a counterrevolutionary behavior. Interestingly, Kim's idea of labor is rather similar to the Weberian concept because both sanctify labor.

This is not to say that the Juche idea has been influenced by Weberianism. There are differences between the two in terms of the idea of labor. Kim Jong Il consecrates the purpose of labor, whereas Weber sanctifies labor itself. For Kim, labor should be performed for the sake of building a socialist economy, the completion of the revolution, and, most of all, the party and the leader who defines its aims. In this way, the party and the leader—Kim Jong Il and Kim Il Sung—become sacred. They become the objects of workers' unconditional loyalty. In this regard, Kim Jong Il said in 1967:

It is important to teach the workers to love labor. The workers are the masters of production. But it is not the case that they take such a Communist attitude by nature. We must strengthen education about labor so that all the people in our country regard labor as that which is most sacred and most honorable and consider that they devote all their power and knowledge to their work for their *choguk* (father country) and *inmin* (people), for their *sahoe* (society) and *chiptan* (commune), as *sunggohan ūimu* (the noblest or the most sublime duty).⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Kim Jong Il, "Chongch'i todökjök chagük kwa muljiljök chagük e taehan olbarün ihae rül kajil ttae taehayö: Chosön Rodongdang chung'ang wiwönhoe kwahak kyoyukpu ilgundül kwa han tamhwa (1967-

The main argument of this lecture given on June 13, 1967, is that the moral-political impetus is more important than the material-pecuniary stimulation in order to make people “love labor.” This does not mean, Kim Jong Il said, he refused the strategic use of “material” reward. Instead, he claimed that North Korea underwent the transition from Socialism to Communism. Kim argued that the vestiges of Capitalism and Imperialism in the Socialist economy diverted the workers’ attention from building the Communist society, and thus the state could strategically please their pecuniary interest. However, the key point of his address was that the spiritual impetus to labor is more critical and more essential, and so the state should teach and enlighten people to the end that they love to work.

Here again, Kim underlined the relationship between labor and communal life. The will, which is trained through labor, is entwined with the conscience, which is nurtured by communal life. Workers should “regard labor as that which is most sacred and most honorable.” There is “no relation between payment and achievement,” as in Nietzsche’s *Will to Power*. Labor itself should be considered as “an absolute end,” as Weber also claims in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Kim absolutized labor by attaching sanctity to its purpose. In so doing, labor is sublimated to a sacred practice for the sake of “*choguk*” (father country), “*inmin*” (people), “*sahoe*” (society) and “*chiptan*” (commune). This “most sublime duty” is exactly what the warrior Kim Namch’öl’s voice within tells him, in Kim Jong Il’s biography, *Taking up Guns and Bayonets*.

06-13)” (On a Correct Understanding of Political-Moral Impetus and Material Stimulation: a Lecture to the Members of Science Education Department in the Central Committee of Workers’ Party of Korea (1967-06-13)), in Kim Jong Il, *Kim Jong Il sŏnjip*, Vol 1. (Pyongyang: Chosŏn Rodongdang ch’ulp’ansa, 1992), 221.

On April 18, 1978, the North Korean socialist state promulgated *Sahoejuŭi rodongpŏp* (Socialist Labor Law). In it, the DPRK stipulates the concept of “labor” as “a sacred duty.”⁶¹ By so doing, it prohibits doubts about and evasions of the worker’s sacred vocation. In this way, labor— physical conduct—is transformed into a religious and spiritual practice, and “loving to work” is celebrated as the people’s virtue.

7. “Dying to Self,” “Body without Organ,” and “Theater of Cruelty”

Sanctified are the purpose of labor, the leader who defines it, and the labor itself. And finally, the conductor of labor, the worker, becomes sacred. But before he is made sacred, the worker is excommunicated or experiences the fear of excommunication in North Korean literature under Kim Jong Il’s rule. O Yŏngbŏm in *Ryŏksa ŭi taeha* (*The Great River of History*) (1998), Ryu Sumyŏng in *P’yŏngyang ŭn sŏnŏnhanda* (*A Declaration from Pyongyang*) (1997), Ch’ae Sunbong in *Kyesŭngja* (*The Successors*) (2002), Ro Yŏngmu in *Yeji* (*Wisdom*) (1990; 1995), and many other protagonists in North Korean literature undergo the horror of excommunication or are ostracized within the organizations to which they are affiliated. Namch’ŏl in *Taking up Guns and Bayonets* is one such cursed hero. After meeting the boy singing a requiem for him and hearing the voice within, Namch’ŏl is seized with a hallucination of his excommunication.

Namch’ŏl closed his eyes. Then the people he pictured in his mind started to ascend to a noble and beautiful world to which he did not dare get near, and they soon disappeared.

⁶¹ *Chosŏn Minjujuŭi Inmin Konghwaguk sahoejuŭi rodongpŏp* (*The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea: Socialist Labor Law*) (Pyongyang: Chosŏn Rodongdang ch’ulp’ansa, 1978).

That world left Namch'öl and flew farther and farther away. It was strange. The farther it flew away, the more he missed it.

He sighed deeply. He thought that the world would not accept or embrace him anymore. He had lost his previous right to work and he was stripped of the right to die, because he had already died.⁶²

Namch'öl considered himself to be already dead; not biologically extinct but at the end of his social life: excommunicated. This is a recurring subject, a motif, in North Korean literature. A protagonist makes a mistake and is expelled from his community or punished to such an extent that he feels ostracized. However, Kim Jong Il gives him another chance to redeem himself: Kim sends him a new social life. In Namch'öl's story, this new life is expressed as “the right to work” and “die.” As in the stereotypical North Korean novel, the right to work and die is conferred on Namch'öl when he meets Kim Jong Il. The meeting with Kim Jong Il is a prerogative that is given to a very limited number of soldiers. Thus, the supervisor of the tunneling work urges him to share his glorious and honorable experience with other soldier-workers. Namch'öl—now, a newborn worker—delivers an address—more accurately, he gives his testimony in front of ten thousand soldier-workers.

“Comrades! *Chagi rül pōrisipsio!* (Die to self!) And try to emulate him! Be a General Kim Jong Il-type soldier! Then, only then, you can put the slogan, ‘Repay his trust with our loyalty,’ in practice.”

Experiencing *pisanghan chōngsinchōk angyang* (unusual mental elevation), he could not see the ten thousand in the audience or hear the sounds of hand clapping they were making.

Namch'öl held the microphone more tightly and cried out enthusiastically:

“Yes, verily! Only the Juche type blood must run in our bodies. Even if it is given by your parents, wrong blood must not be mixed. Never happen! If any of you allows that to

⁶² Song Sangwōn, 103.

happen, he will become *nayakhan chonjae* (a weak being), *pŏrim pannŭn chonjae* (a forsaken being) excommunicated from *ilsim tongch'e ūi taeo* (the ranks of one flesh).⁶³

This is the North Korean version of *The Gospel of John*. In *The John's Gospel*, Jesus tells Nicodemus, “You must be born again.”⁶⁴ As Shin Hyung-ki, a South Korean scholar of North Korean literature, has pointed out, “the loss of the self is the precondition of the rebirth,” and this universal motif is what North Korean literature has striven to narrate.⁶⁵ In other words, the concept of “dying to self” has been a main theme in the North Korean version of “confession.” Destruction and creation of the body—death and birth of life—forms a great cycle that the leader defines and controls.

It is very tempting to say that Christianity influenced the North Korean practice of self-destruction. However, there are some philosophical aspects to consider that relate the North Korean version of “dying to self” to Christianity, since this kind of narrative is so pervasive even

⁶³ Song Sangwŏn, 214.

⁶⁴ The idea of “dying to self” is found throughout the New Testament. For example, *The Gospel of John* illustrates the dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus as follows: “Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.” *Gospel of John 3:3-7* in *King James Bible Online* (<http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/John-Chapter-3/>).

⁶⁵ Taking Kim Pohaeng (b. 1935)'s *Nyŏdangwŏn* (*A Woman Party Member*) (1982) as an example, Shin shows how North Korean writers portray the voluntary action of erasing the self—entrusting the self to the leader Kim Il Sung—as a virtuous (ethical) and beautiful (aesthetic) commitment. Yongnyŏ, the protagonist of the novel, loses her daughter Myŏnghŭi. She is killed by reactionary spies. After ten years pass, Yongnyŏ meets Kim Il Sung. Then, in utmost bliss, she cries out, “General (Kim Il Sung)! You have given me the title of nyŏdangwŏn (woman party member), which is more precious than all I've lost.” Shin Hyung-ki compares this novel to the *Book of Job* and Yongnyŏ to Job, because the former, just like the latter, describes how human suffering is sublimated to the belief in the superior being—God or leader. Shin Hyung-ki, “Kasang ūi inkyŏk, todŏk ūi kwangki” (Imaginary Personality and Moral Madness), *Minjok iyagi rŭl nŏmŏsŏ* (*Beyond Nation-Narrative*) (Seoul: Samin, 2003), 69; Kim Pohaeng, *Nyŏdangwŏn* (*A Woman Party Member*) (Pyongyang: Munye ch'ulp'ansa, 1982), 488. Quoted in Shin, *Ibid.*, 68.

in other religious traditions. Some might recall the Chinese Chan (Zen) monk Huineng (638-713)'s question on "original face" from Namch'öl's testimony. Huineng, the sixth and last Patriarch of Chinese Chan Buddhism, told a person who sought enlightenment from the revered monk, "What did your face look like before your parents were born?" North Korean art and literature make a great effort to portray the faces of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il. They become the original faces for all North Koreans by erasing people's individual faces. In *Taking up Guns and Bayonets*, Namch'öl urges his audiences to return to the "original face" which is more crucial for their life than the "blood" that their parents have given them. Huineng's term "original face" implies "dying to self."

Thus, it can be said that Zen Buddhism, Christianity, and the North Korean practice of "dying to self" may have something in common. This similarity is also found in Deleuzian thought on "body without organ (BwO)." But if the Deleuzian concept is introduced to the terminology of self-destruction and "returning to the original face," it would be obvious how distinctive the North Korean or the Christian narrative of "dying to self" is from Huineng's teachings. Concerning this difference, it is helpful to turn to South Korean philosopher Yi Chin'gyöng's examination of "body without organ." The South Korean philosopher juxtaposed Huineng's anecdote to "body without organ" as termed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. To be more specific, Yi deployed Huineng's teaching of "original face" to clarify the meaning of the Deleuzian term "body without organ" as the early, premature stage of life—such as eggs—that still preserves possibility, potentiality, and power (*potentia; puissance*).⁶⁶ This somewhat esoteric notion can also be understood as "desire" for "one's own annihilation," and "the power to

⁶⁶ Yi Chin'gyöng, *Nomadijūm: Ch'ön ūi kowön ūl nōmnadūnūn yukwaehan ch'ōrhakjōk yumok 1* (*Nomadism: a Joyful Philosophical Nomadism Moving through a Thousand Plateaus*, Vol. 1) (Seoul: Humanist, 2002), 436-437.

annihilate.”⁶⁷ Yi Chin’gyōng shed light on the possible lineage from Huineng’s “original face” to the Deleuzian “body without organ.” However, this concept of “body without organ” and returning to the “original face” is opposed to the notion of “dying to self.” Namch’ōl dedicates all the power (*potentia; puissance*), which has been generated by the practice of self-destruction, to the Leader Kim Jong Il, by suggesting that the audience should resemble “General Kim Jong Il.” The “General Kim Jong Il-type” body is what Deleuze and Guattari meant by “organization of the organs called the organism,” which they term “the enemy” of “the body without organ.” The two French thinkers pointed out God’s monopoly on organs, saying that God “cannot bear the body without organ, because He pursues it and rips it apart so He can be first, and have the organism be first.”⁶⁸ In the Christian and the North Korean narrative of “dying to self,” all power is monopolized by the absolute being—God or leader—and the organs are inoculated into an “organism.”

BwO (Body without Organ). Yes, the face has a great future, but only if it is destroyed, dismantled. On the road to the asignifying and asubjective.⁶⁹

In another chapter of *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari examine the term “faciality” and relate it to the notion of “BwO.” “The face” which “has a great future” is what Huineng meant by “original face.” This earliest form-of-life can be anything in the future. On the contrary, the North Korean narrative of “dying to self” destroys the future. The present is already the future and the end of “the road to the asignifying and asubjective.” There already is Kim Jong

⁶⁷ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 164-165.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 158-159.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 171.

Il's face. In Kim Namch'öl's testimony, the soldiers are told to transform themselves into "organs" and form the "organization of the organs called the organism." They all are signified by Kim Jong Il and expected to undergo a metamorphosis into an organ under Kim Jong Il's face.

Here it is important to note that, in North Korean literature, the notion of "dying to self" is intertwined with the narrative of "working to die." In this cosmos of *Juche*, human beings must exhaust their lives by working in order to be born again. They are the arms and the feet under Kim Jong Il's face, and labor is those organs' "calling." But amputation and inosculation must be described as a purification and consecration. The North Korean version of "Theater of Cruelty" requires "blood," and this cruelty is "identified with a kind of severe moral purity which is not afraid to pay life the price it must be paid."⁷⁰

"Warrior/Private" Kim Namch'öl appeals to the audience for self-purification, suggesting only *Juche* type blood run in their bodies. Only after purifying their bodies with the blood of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il, Namch'öl says, the soldier-workers are able to be a part of "*ilsim tongch'e üi taeo*" (the ranks of one flesh).

The process of purification changes a life into a part of a great being's body—sublimates it into Kim Jong Il (and Kim Il Sung)'s blood, bone, flesh, and cells. But the irony is that this sanctification degrades the human body into a disposable form and human labor into a suicidal practice. To protect a life, blood can be shed, bone can be broken, flesh can be cut, and cells can be lost. To protect *sunoebu* (the leaders), life, body, and labor can be treated in such a way. The BoW's future is converted into the organism's present; the organs are destined to work to die.

⁷⁰ Antonin Artaud, "The Theater of Cruelty (Second Manifesto)," *The Theater and Its Double*, trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1958), 124.

This form-of-life is almost the same as what Giorgio Agamben means by “*homo sacer*, sacred man, who may be killed and not yet sacrificed.”⁷¹ But the difference is the North Korean sacred man, unlike *homo sacer* as bare life, is deemed not a bare life but a qualified life. This qualification appears as education and enlightenment, which are conducted through labor and communal life. Just as, to borrow Max Weber’s phrase, labor must “be performed as if it were an absolute end in itself, a calling,” death must “be performed as it were an absolute end in itself, a calling” in the narrative of the North Korean *homo sacer*. Here the speed of life, or the life-span, matters. Just as the Weberian notion of labor connotes a heightened working speed, the North Korean concept of death connotes an accelerated speed of life and death. This acceleration is enabled by making death a voluntary action. Even death by accident, disease, poverty, and war should be described as a self-directed and willing action.

As mentioned earlier, the Kim regime created and celebrated a unique type of death, integrating “socially distributed and organized ways of dying” and “internally produced and self-run ways of dying.” Thus suicidal, forced, and, at the same time, accidental death was praised as the noblest and the most heroic finale of a life in North Korean literature during and after the Arduous March. For the country, for the people, and for the leader, soldier-workers are portrayed as *chap’ok hada* (exploding themselves), expending their lives. This is the main plot that North Korea literature reiterated in the wake of the Songun (Military-First) Revolution (1994 or 1995), and this is the way the Kim regime reformed the North Korean mentality and interiority.

The North Korean official idea of Military-First places labor workers in the conditions of war. Even if a worker is killed from an industrial accident, he or she should be considered to be

⁷¹ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 12.

killed in action. This is qualified death for bare life/*zoē*. Once one dies to self, one is stripped of the right to live. One must be born again, as Jesus says to Nicodemus in *The Gospel of John*. One is not a normal being, but an exceptional being. But this exceptionality becomes a basic condition of life during the Songun era. This seemingly “qualified” but actually “bare life” should accomplish the purpose of one’s life by accelerating the speed of life—in other words, dying willingly. The collective bare lives turn into an organism under Kim Jong Il’s face.

8. Labor as Artistic Performance

By constructing the life-death continuum, the Kim Jong Il regime sought to create a rhythm of labor and a sense of the afterlife. Kim Namch’öl and his company return to the tunnel and strive to carry out their orders by the deadline. Before long, the tunnel collapses again and hundreds of soldier-workers are confined in it. But they are never disturbed by the accident; they keep on working anyway. The harder they work, the thinner the air becomes. Yet, not caring about their doomed fate, the survivors of the accidental collapse, regroup the digging units, and renew the work. It is depicted as an orchestra concert.

The soldiers were singing . . . and putting arms around each other’s shoulders.

Nopi ollyöra pulgŭn kippal ŭl (Raise the Red Flag high)

Kũ mit esõ kutge maengse hae (Within its shade we make a solemn vow)⁷²

“[. . .] Dear Supreme Commander is watching over us. Follow me and push ahead!”

Then, somebody cried out.

“Let us fight to the death for dear Supreme Commander!”

“Fight! Fight!”

“Desperately safeguard the Leader! Desperately safeguard the Leader!”

The soldiers divided into groups of two and rushed to each side of the underground tunnel. Pulling chisels out of a rock drill, they started to strike the rocks with sledge hammers. The groups numbered fifty. Holding on fast to the rock face, which is on almost a ninety-degree slope, each group wielded their hammers as if they were acrobats.

Keeping the strong tune and beat of the song, they, in a body, smashed the chisels. The tunnel shrilly resonated with the sound of the fifty men’s hammering, as if it exploded powerfully. The thunderous roar of pounding the tunnel kept the vigorous rhythm of the song and sounded like a large-scale orchestral piece of music in which different instruments, all full of energy along with wisdom and courage, were in harmony with each other under one integrated theme. It could be called symphony “hammer,” which stimulated the soldiers to double and even triple their working speed.⁷³

Many terms refer to the mental state that the Kim Jong Il regime strove to promote among the North Korean population through literature: the will to power, *thanatos* (*Θάνατος*), the death drive, the drive toward self-destruction, or simply the drive. The drive “beyond pleasure principle” is represented in the description of Kim Namch’õl and his company’s heroic “digging” in the tunnel. The drive is opposed to what Spinoza meant by *conatus*, the force of resisting against destruction or “the desire for self-preservation.”⁷⁴ South Korean philosopher Yi Chin’gyõng contrasted *conatus* with the purpose of yoga, which is a physical and spiritual

⁷² The corresponding parts of the English version of the song *Red Flag* is: “Then raise the scarlet standard high. Within its shade we’ll live and die.” This song was originally written by Irish socialist Jim Connell (1852-1929).

⁷³ Song Sangwõn, *Ibid.*, 292-293.

⁷⁴ Henry E. Allison, *Benedict de Spinoza: An Introduction* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1975), 124.

practice aiming to transform body and mind. Yi said that yogis practice the bodily discipline in order to transcend and overcome *conatus*. By transforming—for example, bending and twisting—the body, the yogi pushes his or her spiritual and somatic limits.⁷⁵ This is the same as the spiritual and corporeal reform that Kim Namchöl and his digging company accomplish by “Holding on fast to the rock face which is on almost a ninety-degree slope.”

What enables this self-transcendence is the rhythm of labor. The workers play symphony “hammer,” or music of self-destruction, by smashing rocks with sledge hammers. The symphony “hammer” excites the soldier-workers and pushes them to such an extent that they “double and even triple their working speed.” The fast tempo of labor causes a sort of physical transformation, deformation, or reform. But it can be also said that the tempo is the effect of the workers’ mind-reform. Their *ryangsim* (conscience) and *ũiji* (will or determination) are totally changed by the rhythm of labor; their *ryangsim* is watched over by Kim Jong Il and their *ũiji* is focused on overcoming the limits of human capability.

This is the North Korean version of the theater of cruelty. By accelerating the tempo of sound, the speed of image, and the scansion of everyday life, this kind of theater—or labor run by the death drive—shakes the body and the spirit of the worker. This artistic performance amputates the individual bodies and inosculates the torn bodies into a new type of “working” organism called “*ilsimdongch’e*” (the ranks of one body). Individual lives do not matter. They reach *nirvana*—freedom from the sufferings of famine, natural disaster, and deaths-in-the-family, which North Korean people experienced during the Arduous March—and ultimate salvation by belonging to the great cosmos of Juche.

⁷⁵ Yi Chin’gyöng, *Ibid.*, 436.

9. “The Reservoir of Death”

In 2005, a Pyongyang-born South Korean journalist, Han Yǒngjin, interviewed a North Korean defector who used the fake name, Im Yǒngsu, to conceal his identity. According to the interview, Im Yǒngsu worked as a ditch-digger in Kosǒng Prefecture in Kangwǒn Province, North Korea from 2002 to 2004, to construct the Kumgangsan Hydroelectric Power Plant, which was later renamed the Anbyǒn Youth Hydroelectric Power Plant. This is the setting of *Taking up Guns and Bayonets*. Thus, Im’s interview provided more detailed information about what happened at the construction site. According to his statement as a witness, Kosǒng Prefecture turned into a city of the dead, a *necropolis*, due to the excessive labor imposed on the workers and the too-tight construction schedule.

A mountain in front of my military base was covered by a great number of tombs. Thirty thousand workers were buried there. Their military unit was affiliated with 615 Supervision Bureau, which was responsible for building the Anbyǒn Youth Hydroelectric Plant. My fellow soldiers and I worked as ditch-diggers in the unit. We called the Imnam Dam “*chugǔm ūi ǒnje* (the Reservoir of Death)” and the ditch “*chugǔm ūi kul* (the Tunnel of Death).”⁷⁶

This reveals the sequel to the biography, *Ch’onggǒm ūl tǔlgo* (*Taking up Guns and Bayonets*). In Song Sangwǒn’s biography of Kim Jong Il, Kim Namch’ǒl’s unit was finally rescued and most

⁷⁶ “Kǔmgangsan palchǒnso kǒnsǒl kunin 3 man myǒng chugǒtta (Thirty Thousand Soldiers Killed for the Construction of Kumgangsan Hydroelectric Plant),” *Daily NK*, 2006-02-08.

of them survived. However, the factual account was more horrendous than the fictionalized history. Im Yōngu attested that thirty thousand workers were buried at the mountain in front of his military base while building the Kumgangsan Hydroelectric Power Plant until 2004. Although not quoted above, ninety-five out of one hundred soldiers in Im's unit were killed, severely injured, or moved out due to malnutrition. They were consumed for the construction of the power plant. Only five remained healthy during their tour of duty.

Private Kim survives in *Taking up Guns and Bayonets* while, according to a defector's interview, thirty thousand workers were killed at the construction site. Yet, it makes no difference whether one lives or dies in the narrative of "working to die." What is important is whether the workers complete their mission. This chapter has examined how the North Korean people can be persuaded to believe this idea and how they can give up *conatus*, the desire to live. In sum, the Kim Jong Il regime attempted to devise labor as a means of self-destruction and urged the people to accelerate their life-spans by working to death. Thus, labor was at once an artistic performance, collective meditation, and productive activity, during and after the Arduous March. Aesthetics, ethics, ontology, and economics were all involved in the communal practice—the suicidal action—of working. The drive—the death drive—that lends an impetus to this particular kind of labor is what Song Sangwŏn's biography of Kim Jong Il and other North Korean literary works produced in the *Songun* (Military-First) era describe as the psychological foundation of North Korean soldier-workers' sensibility.

Chapter Five

Passionate Machines and *Deus ex Machina*: The Dialectic among Body, Spirit, and Technology in North Korean Literature

President (Kim Il Sung) said with a thoughtful voice,

“Comrade Kim Jong Il has worked day and night without rest for past several days. Today, I called him early in the morning and learned he stayed up all night at the office of the General Headquarters. You comrades should think about it! How can a man’s body withstand such hard work, unless it were made of iron? [...] To take care of his health is to protect our revolution.”¹

Kim Jong Il’s body was not made of iron, as his father, Kim Il Sung says in a fictionalized biography of the junior Kim. When his heart stopped in 2011, no surgeon could repair or replace it. He did not overcome his biological, somatic limits, because he was merely a human being. However, during the great famine in the 1990s, the Kim regime exhorted or forced its people to work like machines and transcend their biological conditions with spiritual energy.

This chapter will examine the way the Kim Jong Il regime transformed the people’s emotions—for example, from anger to courage in the face of danger (especially in battle and worksite)—to keep them docile and compliant by focusing on the relationships among body, spirit, and technology in North Korean narrative history and literature, as well as in Kim Jong Il’s

¹ Chŏng Kijong, *Ryŏksa ūi taeha (The Great River of History)* (Pyongyang: Munhak yesul chonghap ch’ulp’ansa, 1998), 382-383. All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

writings. This emotional metamorphosis was one of Kim Jong Il's primary strategies that enabled him to survive the collapse of the Communist bloc in the late twentieth century.

This strategy crystallized into Military-First policy. In 1995, Kim Jong Il (1942-2011) promulgated a new state ideology, called the “*Songun*” (Sŏn’gun; Military-First) idea. This new idea or policy was intended to suppress the people’s negative feelings such as discontent with the regime and the sense of alienation by imposing strict military rule on the civilians.

The purpose of this chapter is twofold. First, I will explore the notion of “*Songun*,” focusing on the way in which the Kim regime treated people’s lives and bodies during “the Arduous March,” the economic crisis and the great famine in the late 1990s. Second, this chapter will illustrate how Kim Jong Il and North Korean writers created a dialectic between military technology and the spirit on the basis of his idea of Military-First and strategy of emotional metamorphosis in the 1990s. These two terms, “spirit” and “military technology,” form the focus of this chapter. “Spirit” as a concept was emphasized during “the Arduous March” and afterward. In Korean, spirit is “*chŏngsin*,” “*yŏnghon*,” or “*maŭm*,” and is often used as a more concrete image of “*simjang*,” or heart. Military technology was pursued by the Democratic Peoples’ Republic of Korea (DPRK) even during the great famine and the economic crisis. It is one of the most important factors in the American policy on North Korea, and it has concerned the Western world since the 1990s. I will argue that Kim Jong Il sought to mediate between modern technology and spirit—and machine and heart—through theoretical works, historical narrative, and literature.² In other words, through the production of history, literature,

² This idea of the dialectic between heart and machine can be traced back to the notions of *tongdo sŏgi* (동도서기; 東道西器: Eastern ethics and Western utilities) in nineteenth-century Chosŏn Korea; *zhongti xiyong* (中体西用: to learn the technology and culture of Western countries while focusing on traditional studies and systems) in China; *wakon yōsai* (和魂洋才: Japanese spirit with Western learning) in Japan;

and theoretical writing, Kim Jong Il himself created the dialectic between technology and spirit in North Korea's Military-First era, from 1994 until his death.

One aim in thus connecting the spirit with military technology was to fend off alienation, although the question of how successful this strategy was still remains to be answered. Theoretically, the North Korean dialectic of technology and spirit has its roots in Hegelian-Marxist ideas. Marx argued that the worker is estranged by his own products in a capitalist society.³ Machines are both the tools and the products of the workers, and thus the proletariat is alienated by modern technology in the capitalist society. Kim Jong Il's solution for this alienation was "enchantment." He attempted to impart "*chǒngsin*" (spirit or soul) to modern technology—especially military technology, such as guns, tanks, submarines, and missiles. His propaganda claimed that workers would thus not be estranged by their machines because they were imbued with "spirit." The "spirit" was effectively shared between the leader and the people, with technology as the medium transferring "spirit" from Kim Jong Il to the workers. Through this spirit, the workers' alienation from technology was overcome, and thus, in this dialectic, worker and technology are synthesized into "spirit." But where is the worker's body in this system? There seems to be no place for it in the dialectic. It has been dialectically overcome, or even worse it has been expunged in consequence of the dialectic.

and Sakuma Shōzan (1811-1864)'s *tōyō dōtoku, seiyō gakugei* (東洋道德西洋学芸: Eastern ethics, Western technical learning).

³ Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844," trans. Martin Mulligan, *Marxist Internet Archive*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/labour.htm> (accessed Oct. 3, 2015).

As Alexandre Kojève has pointed out, thesis and antithesis are both preserved as a result of the dialectical *aufhebung* (sublation).⁴ In the dialectic of humans and technology—the Marxist-Hegelian way of overcoming alienation from technology—these two entities are thus preserved in synthesis. And here the Cartesian dichotomy of body and soul comes in. René Descartes saw the body as a machine and the heart as a kind of power source that causes the movement of the body.⁵ In North Korean literature, the worker’s body is described as a machine operated by the spiritual power of the heart. Even in starvation, the worker keeps working, using purely spiritual energy. The end result of this concept is horrific. The human body was mechanized and ultimately objectified—to the point of being removed from the picture altogether—in the North Korean dialectic of spirit and machine. Nutritional needs and biological requirements were almost omitted from the discussion. Simply put, what was missing in Kim Jong Il’s dialectic was the dignity and vulnerability of human body. From this lack came the birth of the passionate machine. This chapter will shed light on the irony of this machine’s emotions.

1. A True *Deus ex Machina*

Late at night. A car was about to enter South P’yŏngan Province. The car had driven through mountain paths in the northwestern region for many hours. A long time had passed since the light inside the car had been turned off. Dear Comrade Kim Jong Il was looking

⁴ “‘To overcome dialectically’ means to overcome while preserving what is overcome.” Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. James H. Nichols, Jr. (New York and London: Basic Books, 1969), 15.

⁵ René Descartes, “Description of the Human Body,” trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge, UK, New York, and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 315.

out the car window, leaning back against the seat. Outside the car, headlights surged like waves, while inside official papers were piled high on the backseat.⁶

Kim Jong Il scarcely sleeps. Paek Namnyong's fictionalized biography of Kim Jong Il, *Tonghae ch'ŏlli* (*A Vast Stretch of East Coast*) (1996), which is set in 1975, describes Kim Jong Il's vigilance and diligence.⁷ During the night described above, Kim Jong Il is awake in a moving car. He started ruling North Korea in the late 1960s in order to aid his father, Kim Il Sung (1912-1994). But, in the novelistic biography, he soon encounters the people's moral laxity and the nation-wide economic problems. He has read the official papers submitted to him by party and administration officers, and now he is "looking out of the car window," meditating on the future of his country. How can North Korea finish the Six-Year Plan, surmount its economic crisis, improve the people's work ethic, and reform their everyday life? By reading the official documents, he might learn how the North Korean people react to and endure the shortage of resources. However, his knowledge does not depend solely on the papers. He makes great efforts to meet rank-and-file workers, non-party members, and local farmers; he gives careful attention to the voices of those in the lower stations of life and thus gains a deep insight into how to improve those people's lives. This is why his car drives to every corner of the country: the

⁶ Paek Namnyong, *Tonghae ch'ŏlli* (*A Vast Stretch of East Coast*) (Pyongyang: P'yŏngyang ch'ulp'ansa, 1996), 1.

⁷ Paek Namnyong (b. 1949) is a member of the April 15 Literary Production Unit, the most prestigious organization of North Korean writers. He graduated from Kim Il Sung University and joined the April 15 Literary Production Unit in 1987. He published three volumes of *Immortal Leader* series, the state-sanctioned biography of Kim Jong Il: *Tonghae ch'ŏlli* (*A Vast Stretch of East Coast*, 1996), *Kyesŭngja* (*Successors*, 2002), and *Pom ūi sŏgok* (*Prelude to Spring*, 2008). His novel *Pŏt* (*Friend*) was translated into French and published under the title of *Des Amis* by the French publisher Actes Sud in 2011. Paek Namnyong, *Kyesŭngja* (*Successors*) (Pyongyang: Munhak yesul ch'ulp'ansa, 2002), 433; Chŏn Sŭnghun, "Puk chakka Paek Namnyong sosŏl *Pŏt* Pul sŏ pŏnyŏk ch'ulgan hwaje" (North Korean Writer Paek Namnyong's Novel, *Friend*, Translated and Published in France), *Donga* (*Tonga*) *ilbo*, September 22, 2011, <http://news.donga.com/3/all/20110922/40503197/1>, (accessed October 3, 2015).

constantly running car renders him omnipresent. He can go everywhere on wheels and be with his people at all times. But his omnipresence prevents him from having private life. His whole life is devoted to the Korean nation, its people, and Kim Il Sung—his father, the embodiment of socialism, national liberation, and the struggle against imperialism.⁸

“The leader awake in a running car” is an image constantly reiterated in North Korean literature in an attempt to describe and, more precisely, deify Kim Jong Il. Through these images, Kim Jong Il attained the crucial attributes of vigilance, omnipresence, mobility, and speed. This self-sacrificing, pious, and diligent leader embodied the attributes of the country—for example, its communality and spiritual totality—and made the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) distinguishable from, and superior to, outside countries, including the United States of America (USA).

Kim Jong Il was a true *deus ex machina* (god from the machine) in North Korean literature. This Latin phrase originated in a Greek phrase, *apo michanis theos* or *ἀπὸ μηχανῆς θεός*, used by Aristotle to refer to a plot device by which a seemingly doomed character is saved or an unsolvable problem is resolved. This notion originally does not indicate real machine but a character with supernatural or divine powers—for example, in the *Medea*, the *deus ex machina* is not “Medea’s chariot” but Aegeus.⁹

⁸ In Kim Jong Il’s life described in North Korean literature, there is no clear distinction between private life and public life. This is the ideological and theoretical basis for his status as the sole owner or the embodiment of the North Korea’s sovereignty. The inseparability of private and public life is one of the major features of the person holding *auctoritas*—the sovereign—in Giorgio Agamben’s discussion on “state of exception.” Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 74-88.

⁹ Aristotle, *The Poetics of Aristotle*, trans. D. S. Margoliouth (London, New York, and Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton, 1911), 187.

Modern technology is in some sense a means to become god-like, since it has enabled human beings to control nature. For this reason, North Korean literature mystifies mechanical technology, suggesting that it exercises a kind of supernatural power, and links it to the North Korean leader Kim Jong Il.

As shown above, in Paek Namnyong's fictionalized biography of Kim Jong Il, the pious, diligent leader uses technology correctly and properly. In other words, his *auctoritas* (authority) or charismatic power is exercised by his machines. North Korean writers have striven to depict him as a master of technology. Riding in his car, Kim Jong Il suddenly appears and solves the problems of the people. By phone, he gives precious advices to bureaucrats at a loss about what to do.¹⁰ By presenting his gun, Kim Jong Il shows generals how to boost the morale of the military. Social, economic, and political problems are abruptly resolved by Kim Jong Il and his machines, through which he governs the state, communicates with the people, and rules the military. Technology is thus a crucial attribute of his leadership. He is literally "a god from the machine."

In North Korean literature, Kim Jong Il reclaims human beings' mastery over technology. It is not the first time this optimistic view of technology has been promulgated in literature: one can also find it in early avant-garde movements such as Soviet Constructivism and Italian Futurism.¹¹ And it is important to note that these European and Russian artists emphasized spirit and soul in their celebration of modern technology. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876-1944) in

¹⁰ Many North Korean literary works describe Kim Jong Il's "hyŏnji chido" (on-the-spot guidance). But Kim is also depicted as giving direction to civil officials and military officers by phone.

¹¹ The Soviet Constructivists attempted to forge a comradesly relationship with "the things" they produced. For example, Aleksandr Rodchenko said, "Our things in our hands must be equals, comrades," in 1925. For the Soviet Constructivist viewpoint on human products such as technology, see Christina Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions: The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2008).

The Futurist Manifesto (1909) extolled the power of spirit, passion, and emotion in the modern technological age:

Look at us! We are not out of breath, our hearts are not in the least tired. For they are nourished by fire, hatred and speed! Does this surprise you? It is because you do not even remember being alive! Standing on the world's summit, we launch once more our challenge to the stars!¹²

The new humans—now declared as the new gods—in Marinetti's manifesto for Futurism are depicted as machines. Their mechanized bodies are refueled by passion symbolized by “fire” and emotions like “hatred.” These reformed humans—their bodies transformed by the “speed” of technology—declare themselves to be new gods who mount their “challenge to the stars.”

Marinetti's Futurist Manifesto was an exemplary case of the self-intoxication common in the early- and mid-twentieth century, especially in times of war. Ironically, Marinetti's heart, unlike those he described in his manifesto, was ultimately exhausted: he died of cardiac arrest in 1944 while collecting poems celebrating the wartime achievements of the Italian navy.

2. “War is Beautiful.”

You American gangs in the fighter planes!

You might be able to cover the sky. But you must not be able to pierce our bodies with your blasting machine guns or to burn ours with your gasoline barrels. We are fighting for our country and people.

You American pirates in the warships!

¹² James Joll, *Three Intellectuals in Politics* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1961), 184.

You might be able to bomb hills. But you must not be able to smash our position even with the thundering bombardment. We are fighting for freedom and the survival of the people.

You Al Capone's offspring!

You, a pack of wild dogs, might be able to make a landing. But you must not be able to seize our homeland, even with your tremendous firepower. We are fighting for peace and honor.

Ah! Fire our corps' cannons!

Have our machine guns sing!

Tanks! You stamp on the enemies' chests!

Motorcycles! You run like clouds!

Comrades! Charge!

Tending our scale-like wounds, we are going down the mountain as though a giant's doing so!

Casting light all over the world, we are acting like Zeus going down Mount Olympus!

Raising the Flag of the Star and the Three Stripes and singing a paean to our Great Leader, we are marching forward to the sea.

The sea comes in sight. The Kōje Island is seen.

Right there the South Sea is!

Kim Saryang, September 17, 1950¹³

Kim Saryang (1914-1950?) serves as a similar example of a new god, the reformed human, who met his end during war. His war report, *Pada ka poinda* (*The Sea Comes in Sight*, 1950), shows the way in which he saw modern technology and man's mastery of it. Kim Saryang's life is like that of Marinetti in many respects. Even the twists of his fate resemble those of the Italian Futurist. But the fate of Kim Saryang's war report demonstrates another aspect of modern artists' attempt to conquer technology: their challenge was often reinterpreted and redefined by the state.

¹³ Kim Saryang, *Kim Saryang chakp'umjip* (*Kim Saryang's Works*), ed. Ri Myōngho (Pyongyang: Munye ch'ulp'ansa, 1987), 312-313.

Kim Saryang's "challenge to the stars," his declaration of mastery over technology, was claimed as an oath to Kim Il Sung and the North Korean state after he was killed during the Korean War (1950-1953).

Kim Saryang was suffering from heart disease when he was driven to the north by the U.S. army in 1950, the first year of the Korean War. He was a war correspondent assigned to the North Korean People's Army and a propagandist belonging to the national organization of the arts.¹⁴ He wrote war reports for the first some months of the war. But his ailing heart eventually stopped him from continuing this career. When Douglas MacArthur's soldiers and marines made a successful landing at Incheon (Inch'ŏn) on September 15, 1950, Kim Saryang was not able to follow the North Korean troops retreating to the North; instead he straggled behind to Wonju (Wŏnju), a city approximately ninety miles east of Seoul, and died there. However, North Korean scholar Pang Ch'ŏllim dramatized his death—changed the cause of Kim's death—and specified 1951 as the date of his death in January, 1994. *Rodong sinmun (The Workers' Newspaper)*, one of the state-run media outlets of North Korea, officialized Pang's claim on July 7, 2013.¹⁵

¹⁴ According to the preface of *Kim Saryang's Works*, he was appointed the head of "*Puk Chosŏn yesul ch'ongryŏnmaeng kukje munhwa kuk*" (the International Culture Division in the North Korean Federation of the Arts) and the chairman of "*P'yŏngnamdo yesul ryŏngmaeng wiwŏnhoe*" (the Art Union in South P'yŏng'an Province) sometime during the postcolonial and prewar period (1946-1950). Chang Hyŏngjun, "Chakka Kim Saryang kwa kŭ ūi munhak" (Kim Saryang and His Literary Works), *Kim Saryang chakp'unjip (Kim Saryang's Works)*, 11-12.

¹⁵ Pang Ch'ŏllim, "Chakka Kim Saryang kwa kŭ ūi ch'angjak" (Writer Kim Saryang and His Works), *Ch'ŏllima*, January 1994, 141-142, quoted in Yu Imha, "Kim Saryang: Ch'ilhyŏn'gŭmnon" (Kim Saryang: on *A Seven Stringed Harp*), edit. Ihwa yŏja taehakkyo T'ong'ilhak yŏn'guwŏn, *Pukhan munhak ūi chihyŏngdo (Cartography of North Korean Literature)* (Seoul: Ihwa yŏja taehakkyo ch'ulp'anbu, 2008), 20.

The last six years of Kim Saryang's life were full of passion, adventure, and devotion.¹⁶ He was the first Korean writer—and the only Korean writer during the Japanese occupation of Korea (1910-1945)—who was nominated for the Akutagawa Prize, Japan's most prestigious award for literature. In 1940, only one year before the Imperial Japan carried out its bombing raid on Pearl Harbor, Kim Saryang advanced to the last round for the Prize. Even though he did not win, he came into the spotlight for many reasons. First, he was not Japanese but rather a Korean native. Second, despite his racial background, he had graduated from Tokyo Imperial University, the best university in Japan, and, more importantly, he exhibited excellent Japanese writing skills. Third, his work addressed controversial topics like the discrimination against Koreans in Japan and the identity confusion of half-Korean and half-Japanese children. Being from a marginalized ethnic group, a disadvantaged gender, or an exploited class often gives intellectuals a chance to restore the voices of these groups. Kim Saryang had such a chance. His future looked bright.

Then, however, this Korean graduate from Tokyo University and Akutagawa nominee made an unexpected decision: in the spring of 1945 he defected to inner China, the base for the anti-Japanese military activities of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and joined the “Chosŏn ũiyonggun” (Korean military units) affiliated with the CCP.

His decisive action was not well regarded even after Korea's liberation from Japan. He went to the front as a war correspondent for the anti-Japanese troops and spent three months there. When he came back to the liberated Seoul, he was just one of many; the new capital city was crowded with people who had participated in Korean independence organizations. Rather

¹⁶ An Usik's biography of Kim Saryang is the most reliable account of Kim Saryang's life, despite his strong bias toward nationalism. An Usik, *Hyōden Kim Saryō (A Biography of Kim Saryang)* (Tokyo: Sōfūkan, 1983).

than being celebrated for his bravery, he was blamed for his Japanese writing. In a round-table talk in 1946, Han Sōrya (1900-1976), a renowned socialist writer and soon-to-be leading figure of North Korean literary circles, argued that those who had abandoned the Korean language and written in Japanese should admit their faults and reflect on themselves.¹⁷ Thus, when the civil war broke out in 1950, Kim Saryang again went to the war front to make up for his “fault,” writing in Japanese.¹⁸ His “heart was not in the least tired,” and he proved it by rushing to the battlefield.

The poem quoted above is the last part of his war report, *Pada ka poinda* (*The Sea Comes in Sight*). In the first half of the poem, Kim describes the overwhelming technological power of the U.S. army. The American forces have “fighter planes” that enable them to cover the sky, “warships” that can demolish the hills, and “tremendous firepower” that lets make a landing. But their true character is ignoble: Kim describes them as “gangs,” “pirates,” “Al Capone’s offspring,” and “a pack of wild dogs.” They are attempting to steal “the country,” “freedom,” and “peace” from the Korean people with their exceeding military power. Kim Saryang declares that, without a noble cause, the Americans will not be able to defeat the North Korean army, smash its military bases, or seize its homeland. By contrast, North Korean soldiers are fighting

¹⁷ “Munhakja ūi chagi pip’an (Literary Writers’ Self-Criticism),” *Inmin yesul* (*The People Arts*), October 1946, quoted from Shin Hyung-ki (Sin Hyōnggi) ed., *Haebang sam-nyōn pip’yōng munhak* (*Literary Criticism and Literature for Three Years after the Liberation from Japan*) (Seoul: Segye, 1988), 81-82.

¹⁸ Multilingual writing was considered to be an act of betrayal in the post-colonial period. However, all those who blamed Kim Saryang for his Japanese writing at the round-table talk in 1946, had collaborated with Japanese colonial rule when Kim joined the anti-Japanese forces in China. As the South Korean scholar Kim Chul has rightly pointed out, their hypocrisy appeared in their adherence to the national language and their obliviousness to their acts of collaboration with Japan. Kim Chul (Kim Ch’öl), *Singminji rül ankosō* (*Toward a New Understanding of the Japanese Colonial Period*; lit. *Embracing the Colony*) (Seoul: Yōngnak, 2009), 110.

for the great causes of “freedom” and “peace;” they possess the *zeitgeist* of a once colonized people’s liberation from an imperial power.

In truth, not only great causes but also technology enabled the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea’s victory over the United States. Kim Saryang shared the technological utopianism of Italian Futurism and Soviet Constructivism. Fascinated by cannons, machine guns, tanks, and motorcycles, he still believed in humans’ intellectual capability and volitional subjectivity as they operated these machines. What was at stake for him were the questions of who owned the technology and who controlled the machines. Intellectualism, emotionalism, and voluntarism go together in Kim Saryang’s writings. However, it is important to note that intelligence, sensibility, and volition were also subject to the state, the party, and the “Great Leader” in his writings.

In his war report, Kim Saryang depicts soldiers wielding weapons as god-like figures, comparing them to Zeus and giants. Their mastery of their machines can be seen as their conquest of what the Hungarian philosopher Georg Lukács called “the second nature.” Hegelian philosophy transformed conceptions of the relationship between nature and human in the twentieth century in both the West and the East. Lukács was one of those who considered humans’ mastery of nature and technology as a historical necessity, drawing upon the Hegelian framework. He called technology “the second nature.”¹⁹ According to Lukács, technology is socially and historically produced by humans, and yet they do not recognize their subjectivity in their relationship with their own product; as a result, they are subordinated and even controlled by it. He termed this phenomenon “the second nature,” equating modern people subjected to

¹⁹ Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature* (1920), trans. Anna Bostock, (Cambridge, MA and London, England: The MIT Press, 1971), 63-64.

technology with primitive humans subjected to natural disasters. The Marxist notion of “productive force” offers an alternative to Lukács’ concept, but for the most part, in the twentieth century, Marxist thinkers like Lukács focused on humans’ subjectivity vis-à-vis inorganic nature, in the form of technology. Such theorists as Walter Benjamin expanded the meaning of technology to include “the entire world of matter.”²⁰

Kim Saryang’s celebration of military technology can be understood in this vein. War, according to Kim, is a chance to reaffirm humans’ mastery of technology. For him, war was “beautiful,” just as it was in Marinetti’s manifesto on the Ethiopian colonial war: “War is beautiful because it establishes man’s dominion over the subjugated machinery by means of gas masks, terrifying megaphones, flame throwers, and small tanks.”²¹ Kim Saryang likens the soldiers of his newly founded socialist country to gods. He returns to the time of the Genesis. “In the beginning...there was light.”²² This time, however, those who say, “Let there be light,” are Kim Saryang and his fellow soldiers. He describes them as the new deities “casting light all over the world.”

Yet even in Kim’s poem the soldiers are deprived of their mastery when they raise their national flag and “sing a paean to” their “Great Leader.” It may be right to say with Marinetti that war “establishes man’s dominion over the subjugated machinery.” But war also subjugates man to the absolute authority of a leader. This is the contradiction of war: on the one hand, it

²⁰ Susan Buck-Morss pointed out the Hegelian influence in Lukács’ notion of “second nature.” She said, “The concept of ‘second nature,’ although intentionally a Marxist category, was understood by Lukács within a strongly Hegelian philosophical frame.” Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA and London, England: The MIT Press, 1999), 70.

²¹ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, Hannah Arendt, ed., (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), 241.

²² “Genesis,” *King James Bible Online*, <http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/Genesis-Chapter-1/> (accessed January. 13, 2017).

offers an opportunity to confirm man's mastery of technology; on the other hand, it requires a high level of discipline and obedience, a strict hierarchy, and an efficient command system.

3. The Location of the Arts

There is another way than war to overcome humanity's alienation from technology. It can be found in Charles Baudelaire's 1863 essay, "The Painter of Modern Life." Baudelaire expressed a desire at this time, the beginning of the period of what we call modern literature, to mediate between "the eternal and the modern," between "the magico-spiritual and the technological." He described "a desire to spiritualize, or rather, to aestheticize, the modern and the technological."²³ In "The Painter of Modern Life," Baudelaire defines modernity as ephemeral, contingent, empty. The arts, he continues, should "distill the eternal from the transitory" and supplement modernity with "the eternal and the immutable."²⁴

Kim Saryang, however, thought that this mediation between the eternal and the modern must come about not through art alone but through art combined with war. Thus he rushed into the battlefield and sang a "paean" to the leader of war, Kim Il Sung. The preface of the North Korean edition of *Kim Saryang's Works* (1987), written by the North Korean literary critic Chang Hyōngjun, pinpoints the time he met with Kim Il Sung as the moment he became a well-disciplined soldier of art:

²³ R. L. Rutsky, *High Technē: Art and Technology from the Machine Aesthetic to the Posthuman* (Minneapolis, MN and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 66.

²⁴ Charles Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life," *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans., Jonathan Mayne, (London: Phaidon Press, 1964), 13. Also quoted in R. L. Rutsky, 27.

An event that deserves special mention in Kim Saryang's life is that he was honored to meet the Great President (Kim Il Sung) on November 2, 1945. The Great President favored Kim Saryang with an opportunity to meet him, complimenting the writer on his keeping conscience and fidelity even under the Japanese colonizer's suppression. And, in a calm and orderly way, he taught Kim Saryang the importance of the writers' role and task that they should play in building the new country.²⁵

Chang Hyŏngjun depicts the important "event that deserves special mention," which is the moment Kim Saryang met Kim Il Sung. As the usual descriptions of the meeting with "the Great President," the North Korean leader exudes an aura of mysterious power in Chang's account. First and foremost, he is a teacher. "In a calm and orderly way," he teaches "the importance of the writers' role" in his political plan. Writers, according to the "Great Leader," should play the role of intercessor between the leader and the people "in building the new country."

If we look at Joseph Goebbels' remarks on art in *Triumph of the Will*, what "the importance of the writers' role" means within a totalitarian regime will become clearer:

The shining flame of our enthusiasm...alone gives light and warmth to the creative art of modern political propaganda. Rising from the depths of the people, this art must always descend back to it and find its power there. Power based on guns may be a good thing; it is, however, better and more gratifying to win the heart of a people and to keep it.²⁶

"The heart of a people," in Goebbels' words, refers to feeling, emotion, spirit, a capacity for sympathy, and the center of personality. Thus the "triumph" in the film's title indicates the will's

²⁵ Chang Hyŏngjun, "Chakka Kim Saryang kwa kŭ ūi munhak" (Kim Saryang and His Literary Works), 11.

²⁶ R. L. Rutsky, 68-69.

dominance over the people's feelings and emotions, and the will in this case belongs exclusively to the state and its leader.

For most artists, art belongs to the realm of feeling. The writing of fiction often stems from a desire to nourish emotion and arouse passion. Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880) explained why he wrote *A Sentimental Education* (1869) as follows: "I want to write the moral history of the men of my generation—or, more accurately, the history of their feelings. It's a book about love, about passion; but passion such as can exist nowadays—that is to say, inactive."²⁷ Flaubert's statement is reminiscent of a theory about novel writing by a Japanese writer, Tsubouchi Shōyō (1859-1935). In his *magnum opus*, *The Essence of Novel* (1885), Tsubouchi Shōyō wrote that a novel should describe *ninjyō* (人情), which means human feeling.²⁸

In the totalitarian view of literature, however, as in Chang Hyōngjun's description of Kim Saryang's meeting with Kim Il Sung, artistic feeling should be nourished, utilized, and controlled by the leader's will. If one imagines a symbolic triangle of brain, heart, and arms, the leader in this case would be the brain, in charge of rationality and volition; the artist would be the heart, which rules the realm of feeling and mediates between the brain and the arms; and the arms would be the people, guided by the leader through the medium of the artists.²⁹

In North Korea, this triangle was given an additional twist because the leader himself wanted to be an artist too. This is why Kim Il Sung appointed his oldest son, Kim Jong Il, as the *de facto* head of the Agitprop (the Department of Agitation and Propaganda) in the late 1960s,

²⁷ Gustave Flaubert, *The Letters of Gustave Flaubert 1857-1880*, Vol. 2, ed. and trans. Francis Steegmuller, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 78.

²⁸ Tsubouchi Shōyō, *Shōsetsu shinzui (The Essence of the Novel)* (Tokyo: Shōgetsudō, 1887).

²⁹ The North Korean triangle of "brain," "heart," and "legs and arms" was first mentioned in Wada Haruki's discussion on North Korea's political culture. Wada Haruki, *Kita Chōsen: yūgekitai kokka no genzai (North Korea: The Present of the Guerrilla State)* (Tokyo: Iwanami shōten, 1998), 152.

before designating him as the heir apparent. Kim Il Sung wanted his heir to be a specialist of the arts, and thus Kim Jong Il was depicted to the people as a creative thinker, a serious theorist of film, and an artist of genius. In Ri Chongnyŏl's novel *Yeji (Wisdom, 1990)*, for example, he praises Kim Jong Il as a cultural leader who guides North Korean film directors in making "a great work of cinematic art," *The Flower Girl (1972)*.

4. "Give Them Your Heart!"

Kim Jong Il's art should be considered a form of statecraft. Thus, in Kim Munch'ang's novel, *Yŏlmang (Aspirations, 1999)*, Kim Jong Il argues that politics is the art of giving heart to the people.

General (Kim Jong Il) laughed delightedly again.

"OK, you're doing right! You are already embracing them with your whole *kasŭm* (heart). Frankly, I was worried that you would maybe talk about the problems of electricity and the shortage of steel materials, as others are grumbling. But now I am relieved. You must be going to adjust differences and cooperate with the head of the cast steel section, the manager, and the old machine-designer. You watch! You are already holding the key. You have only to open their *simjang* (hearts) with the key. Comrade Secretary, give them your heart! If you give them your heart, you will be able to heat any iron and thaw any ice mountain."³⁰

³⁰ Kim Munch'ang, *Yŏlmang (Aspirations)* (Pyongyang: Munhak yesul chonghap ch'ulp'ansa, 1999), 62-63.

This novel, written one year after North Korea declared the end of “the Arduous March,” purports to tell the story of how the state and its people overcome the great famine and the economic crisis. In this novel, Kim Jong Il attaches great significance to “*simjang*” (heart) and “*kasŭm*” (heart). He urges Chŏn Yŏngbŏm, the protagonist, the Party Secretary of a steel plant, to give his staff Chŏn’s “*simjang*” (heart) as the only way to escape from the economic crisis.

To put it another way, given the shortages of energy and materials, Kim Jong Il accentuates “heart,” emotion, or spirit, as the one thing that can set the steel plant in motion. Kim stokes the defunct furnaces with “heart;” he replaces—or orders the Party Secretary to replace—the malfunctioning reality with an imaginary emotion, filling it with “*ttŭgŏun kasŭm*” (the heated heart).³¹ He activates the factory and accelerates the society surrounding it with spirit.

Kim Jong Il’s artistry was celebrated as a skill embracing many different realms. It is important to note that, in the 1990s, Kim Jong Il began to be celebrated not just as a military hero but as an ingenious military “artist.” In Chŏng Kijong’s biography of Kim Jong Il, *Ryŏksa ũi taeha* (*The Great River of History*, 1998), President Bill Clinton and the U.S. military leaders are daunted and paralyzed by watching a video of North Korea’s military drill:³²

³¹ In Cartesian idea, “heat” is the main cause of the formation of the “heart.” Descartes argued: “The heat acts in the same way as it does in new wine when it ferments, or in hay which is stored before it is dry: it causes a number of particles to gather together in some part of the space containing them, and then makes them expand and press upon other surrounding particles. This is how the heart begins to form.” René Descartes, “Description of the Human Body,” 322.

³² Born in Kŭmya, South Hamgyŏng Province, North Korea in 1945, Chŏng Kijong served in the military for twenty-five years before joining the April 15 Production Unit. He is a Kim Jong Il Prize laureate and the first winner of the Chŏngilbong (Kim Jong Il Peak) Award for Literature. Yi Sŭngnyŏn, “Puk Chŏngilbong munhaksang chejŏng, ch’ŏtbŏnjjae susangja nŭn Chŏng Kijong” (“North Korea Awarded the First Chŏngilbong Prize for Literature to Chŏng Kijong”), *Tongil News*, <http://www.tongilnews.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=102153> (accessed October 7, 2015).

Last night, Clinton saw the North Korean army's military drill in an audio-visual material gained through the satellite communication, while hearing the military officials and the Joint Chiefs of Staff giving an explanation of the drill, in the Operation Report Room of the U.S. Department of Defense. The experts in the room said that it displayed terrifying power that made them shudder in horror. Moreover, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who had insisted on advancing the date of the surprise attack on the nuclear facilities in Yŏngbyŏn, North Korea, blanched like a dead man and said in a hollow voice:

“This is unbelievable. Mister President! The density of firepower and the accuracy of hitting are really phenomenal and astonishing.”

Even though the military technology and strategy were out of Clinton's field, Clinton was also able to sense something from it. That was the vibrant rhythms (himch'an ridŭm) that the North Korean army's live-fire artillery exercise was emitting like a fire shower. He was a saxophone player and so had a profound knowledge of music. Common people ignorant of music catch only superficial sounds and sketchy melodies. But musicians are able to capture the sound and the beat of each individual instrument and, most of all, the rhythms that they all harmoniously generate. Clinton was a musician. Thus, he was able to capture the rhythms of the fire artillery exercise. How important the rhythm is! It defines the particularity of that music: to be more specific, the speed and the characteristics of it.

Clinton heard the strong rhythms that defined the feature of the drill. In other words, he sensed its powerful energy and its thunder-like, decisive character. The rhythms made a show of the North Korean Supreme Commander's resources, bravery, and volition—Clinton realized who his opponent was.

Clausewitz said in *On War* (1832) that, if someone made his or her enemy astonished, he or she would already win the half of the battle. Look at North Korea. North Korea was galvanizing and frightening the USA and the world, as though it were shaking them by an earthquake and flashing like a thunder.³³

This is a North Korean version of “Shock and Awe.” Suggesting the concept of “Rapid Dominance,” the original, American “Shock and Awe” strategy aimed at “destroying the adversary's will to resist” by the “superiority of American military power.”³⁴ North Korean

³³ Chŏng Kijong, *Ryŏksa ũi taeha (The Great River of History)* (Pyongyang: Munhak yesul chonghap ch'ulp'ansa, 1998), 466.

³⁴ Harlan K. Ullman and James P. Wade, *Shock and Awe: Achieving Rapid Dominance*, prepared by Defense Group Inc. for the National Defense University, http://www.dodccrp.org/files/Ullman_Shock.pdf, x.

literature mimics the U.S. strategy for the post-Cold War era; the rapid cadence emitted by Kim Jong Il's military machine destroys the will of the White House and the Pentagon to fight.

What especially shocks Clinton in this passage is “*himch'an ridŭm*” (the vibrant rhythms) of the live-fire artillery exercise. As a musician, he can sense the awe-inspiring rhythms and tremendous speed of the North Korean army's live-fire artillery exercise, and he is terrified as a result. Kim Jong Il is also depicted as a musician, but, unlike Clinton, he is able to play on his weapons as musical instruments; he is an artist in military technology and strategy.

How did Kim Jong Il become a military artist of genius? The answer is that he is Kim Il Sung's son. Kim Jong Il claimed to have inherited his insight into the military strategy, his technological skill, and “*Songun chŏngsin*” (the spirit of military-first) from his grandfather and father. The first essay in *Kim Jong Il's Complete Collection* (2012), describes the day Kim Jong Il received two pistols from his father Kim Il Sung:

Today, Father General (Kim Il Sung) gave me pistols at the operation center of the Supreme Command. [...]

Father General looked back upon the time my grandfather (Kim Hyŏngjik, 1894-1926) passed away. Then grandfather bequeathed two pistols to my father, leaving a will that our stolen country should be taken back.

It is with the two bequeathed pistols that Father General launched the military movement for liberation and organized the anti-Japanese militia. Later, he finally accomplished our nation's liberation. Today witnesses that those two pistols have been increased to millions of *ch'onggŏm* (guns and bayonets) which are defeating the American imperialist invaders. [...]

As I have sworn today, I will complete the great task of Father General's revolution with the guns I am tightly grasping. This is my firm determination.

I will not forget today Father General handed the pistols down to me and gave precious advice on how to complete the revolution in my generation.³⁵

Believe it or not, according to the first volume of his complete works, Kim Jong Il gave a lecture to the members of the Supreme Command of the North Korean army on July 10, 1952, when he was only ten years old. In that lecture, Kim Jong Il confirmed his determination that he would “complete the great task of Father General’s revolution.” This would be realized by the guns he was tightly grasping, he declared.

Since the early 1990s, Kim Jong Il has been described as a gunman and the gun has been upheld as the authentic spirit of North Korea. At the same time, the rhetoric of “*ichioku gyokusai*,” or “the total suicidal death of one hundred million,” a slogan in Japan during the last few years of World War II, was revived in the North Korean literature. In the 1990s, Kim Jong Il began celebrating Kim Hyök, Ch’a Kwangsu, and Han Yöng’ae, who fought against the Japanese military police as members of Kim Il Sung’s guerilla unit and readily gave their lives to protect Kim Il Sung. In 1996, Kim Jong Il paid tribute to O Chunghöp and the Seventh Regiment, who made a suicidal attack on the Japanese army in order to protect the safety of the escaping Kim Il Sung. On January 1, 1996, Kim Jong Il gave a speech about the regiment:

The Seventh Regiment’s “*kyölsa ongwi chöngsin*” (spirit of do-or-die safeguarding) can be defined as the noblest “*ch’unghyo chöngsin*” (spirit of loyalty and filial piety), based on the unconditional reverence for their leader, as “*yukt’an chöngsin*” (the spirit of suicidal attack or the human bullet), for the Safety of the Headquarters, and as “*söngsae chöngsin*” (the

³⁵ Kim Jong Il, “Ch’ong ül t’üröjwigo hyöngmyöng ül kküt kkaji hayöya handa” (“With tightly holding guns, we should accomplish our revolution: A lecture for the members of the Supreme Command of the Korean People’s Army on July 10, 1952”), *Kim Jong Il chönjip* (*Kim Jong Il’s Complete Collection*) (Pyongyang: Chosön Rodongdang ch’ulp’ansa, 2012), 1-3.

fortress spirit) and “*pangp’ae chǒngsin*” (the shield spirit), in their standing in the gap when the enemy’s bullets are flying to the leader.³⁶

Kim Jong Il repeats the word of “*chǒngsin*” (spirit or soul) five times in this short paragraph, and each is modified by different nouns: “*kyōlsa ongwī*” (do-or-die safeguarding), “*ch’unghyo*” (loyalty and filial piety), “*yukt’an*” (suicidal attack or human bullet), “*sōngsae*” (fortress), and “*pangp’ae*” (shield). These manifestations of spirit indicate the best ways to serve the leader Kim Jong Il and to defend him against all kinds of threat and harm. In North Korea, the people are expected to transform into bullets, fortresses, and shields, to remain loyal and filial, in order to safeguard their leader. And the only way to do all of these things at once is to merge into Kim Jong Il’s militaristic “spirit.”

During “The Arduous March,” almost everyone in North Korea had to embrace the spirit represented by Kim Jong Il’s pistols; they had to turn into fortresses, shields, and, most of all, “*yukt’an*” (human bullets or human bombs). Paek Pohūm’s biography of Kim Jong Il, *Ranam ūi yōlp’ung* (*The Craze from Ranam*, 2004), shows that this “spirit of the human bullet”—the idea that humans constitute a power to be expended even at the cost of their lives—applied even at industrial sites:

9 AM. Finally, Kang Ch’unghyōn raised a blue flag, blowing a whistle. At the same time, ten engineers together gave a shout of concentration and raised the hammer with the lever. Then the three-ton hammer in a cast went up, and a crane lifted a huge lump of red-hot metal from a furnace and put it in the cast. [...]

Whirring, the hammer hit the lump of red-hot metal very hard. [...]

³⁶ Quoted in Kim Ch’anggyōng, *Suryōng kyōlsa ongwī e kwanhan sasang* (*The Idea of Safeguarding the President at the Risk of Our Life*) (Pyongyang: Sahoe kwahak ch’ulp’ansa, 2003), 5.

Sweat like thick bean soup was pouring down the engineers' faces. It looked as if blue flames were blazing in their eyes.

The flames were the flares of love and rage from hearts pumping with boiling blood. The love of the father country! The rage against Imperialist America! The workers overcame their miserable conditions, in which they barely had managed to feed themselves with one or two bowls of corn gruel a day for the last few months. Despite their weakened bodies, they fought with desperate courage. If one did not see that scene with his own eyes, he could not imagine how fierce the battle was.

The engineers hit the lump of metal 220 times for 9 minutes and 30 seconds, with a three-ton hammer. That was all done with human power.

The half-meter-thick metal lump was flattened to a 40-millimeter-thick steel sheet.

That was an astonishing miracle and huge success. But after the fierce battle, the engineers were all completely exhausted. So, without any scream of victory, they all collapsed on the damp concrete floor.³⁷

In this novelistic biography, the Ranam Industrial Company urgently needs a steel sheet to sell to a foreign trader. Since the factory is not supplied with electricity, the Chief Engineer uses manpower instead and succeeds in creating the sheet, though the men all collapse and one is killed in the “fierce battle.” Emotions are powerful enough to transform human bodies into bullets. “The love of father country” and “the rage against Imperialist America” boil the workers' blood and make their hearts beat. The workers have been ill-provisioned for months, but their workplace is still full of “miracles” and “success.” Forget the “weakened bodies.” Their bodies are now human bullets with which Kim Jong Il can load his pistol any time.

5. Meal Coupons

³⁷ Paek Pohŭm, *Ranam ũi yŏlp'ung* (*The Craze from Ranam*) (Pyongyang: Munhak yesul ch'ulp'ansa, 2004), 317.

On June 25, 2013, the North Korean government conferred the title of “*konghwaguk yǒng’ung*” (Hero of the Republic) upon Kim Saryang, revising the record of his death as follows:

On June 23, 1951, one of those days when the sound of the punitive forces’ shooting guns did not cease in the Chiri Mountains, the enemies besieged a thatched hut and shouted at some members of the People’s Guerrilla Unit in it to surrender, by firing guns at them like mad. The guerrillas responded with a frenzy of shooting, refusing submission. Then the enemies shot a flamethrower on the hut. After a while, two injured soldiers, slightly burned, walked out of the hut, helping each other. The marines of the puppet government (the South Korean marines) rushed to them like killer bees and pointed their guns at those two soldiers. Right then, those two warriors’ last heroic cry was heard: “Long live General Kim Il Sung,” and “Long live the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.” Soon after, a huge grenade explosion vibrated the mountain ranges.³⁸

Thus this North Korean, government-run newspaper, *Rodong sinmun*, claimed that Kim Saryang made a suicidal attack against South Korean marines on June 23, 1951. A Hero of the Republic cannot die of heart disease. His heart cannot be sick. Rather, his heart should be shot as a bullet or thrown as a grenade to the enemies.

In *Songun sidae* (the era of the Military-First), Kim Jong Il weaponized the heart with the artistic-military instruments—the pistols—that had been bequeathed to him by his father, Kim Il Sung. His pistols, as symbols, are compounds of military technology and the Koreans’ spirit. As bullets for pistols, people’s hearts should be, in the words of Marinetti, “nourished by fire, hatred, and speed.” But I suggest that these concepts are not sufficient nourishment for hearts. In the Arduous March, material resources were also required to sustain the hearts of the people.

³⁸ “Kim Il Sung changgun manse rŭl purŭmyŏ chap’okhan chonggun chakka: Konghwaguk yǒng’ung Kim Saryang e taehan iyagi” (“A War Correspondent Who Committed Suicide Bombing with Shouting ‘Long Live General Kim Il Sung’: A Story of Kim Saryang upon Whom Has Been Conferred a Title of ‘the Hero of the Republic’”), *Rodong sinmun* (*The Workers’ Newspaper*), July 7, 2013.

Thus, to describe North Korea during the Arduous March, one could say that the people's hearts were nourished by fire, hatred, speed, and *meal coupons*.

The term “meal coupon” appears in a striking scene from *The Craze from Ranam*. One of the protagonists in Paek Pohŭm's fictionalized biography raises a meal coupon high when he receives it from Kim Jong Il. After the engineers win their fierce battle—succeeding in making a steel sheet by manpower alone—they eat their hearts out over the casualties. But when Kim Jong Il learns about the astonishing miracle at Ranam, he is deeply moved by the people's efforts to overcome the economic crisis and, as a reward, grants Ranam's people some food. Kim Jong Il's benevolence—or, to put it another way, his brutal control of the food supply—creates an emotional scene: his gift gives rise to the first day in months that the factory's engineers and the workers receive meal coupons, and their joy highlights the fact that human hearts cannot survive on rage and patriotism alone; though Kim Jong Il rarely admitted it, human hearts are fueled by vulnerable human bodies:

Chief Engineer Ch'oe Kangch'ŏl strode toward Manager O Sŏng'o, as if he were doing a close-order drill, to receive a meal coupon.

[...] However, the Manager stood without any word, handing the meal coupon to the Chief Engineer. Ch'oe Kangch'ŏl also watched the Manager without saying anything. It looked as if their eyes were sparking fires in the silence. They had a non-verbal communication with their heated “*simjang*” (hearts). Chu Hyŏngmin, the Party Secretary, was touched at that scene. He felt his “*kasŭm*” (heart) beating. The silence was rather like a resounding shout beating everyone's “*kasŭm*” (heart) and a plea for all employees' participation in the battle.

The Chief Engineer stood without a word for almost one minute, and abruptly turned back to the workers' line for going to work. Then he raised his right hand high, grabbing the meal coupon. He marched as though he shouted, “Drive ahead! Follow me!” Just then, a drum was beaten. “Boom, boom.”³⁹

³⁹ Paek Pohŭm, *Ibid.*, 332-333.

In Cartesian dualism, the body enables the soul to have feelings and passions, and the soul makes the body move.⁴⁰ For the soul to have feelings and passions, the body must be supplied with food and nutrition. However, during the great famine, the North Korean regime twisted the Cartesian dichotomy by disconnecting the soul from the body and replacing the body with the leader's will. Only the leader's will, transmitted through the nation's art and literature, could cause the soul to have feelings and passions. Hence, the body was depicted as overcome in North Korean literature, mastered by Kim Jong Il's will. He was not able to supply food, energy, and material resources to his people and factories, but he sought instead to heat the people's hearts with his will alone. Thus, in North Korean literature, feelings and passions are described as generated by Kim Jong Il's command.

Despite all his efforts, however, the soul cannot be freed from its captivity in the human body. In *The Craze from Ranam*, the drum is beaten by the party authorities, but Kim Jong Il's desire to overcome the body—to surmount the famine through sheer willpower and turn his people into living weapons—is not enough to free the people from the needs of their bodies. In the end, meal coupons are what cause the people's hearts to beat and be heated. Those vouchers—rather than the leader's willpower—guarantee the workers' accomplishment of their mission and their willingness to fulfill Kim Jong Il's vision of spirit-driven military technology.

Even under the regime's strict control of their biological conditions—their bodies which cause their souls to have feelings and passions—during the Arduous March, the people emitted their cries of pain and hunger.

⁴⁰ Robert Stoothoff, "Translator's preface in *The Passion of the Soul*," René Descartes, *Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 325.

Conclusion

This exploration of the notion of authority, North Korean historical writing, and the people's emotions expressed in the state-constructed historical prose has made three interrelated observations. First, Kim Jong Il monopolized the power of creating narrative by depriving academia and artistic circles of their autonomy in the late 1960s. He operated a propaganda apparatus—Department of Agitation and Propaganda (Agitprop)—to produce and circulate the state-constructed historical prose to celebrate and idealize his father Kim Il Sung and himself. Second, by a monopoly on the narrative-creating power, he sought to establish a religious authority in a way that he consecrated his father as a messiah of the Korean race, justified his own oppressive rule as his dead father's will, and promoted the people's imagination of immortality as a way to heal their pain and grief suffered as a result of the great famine in 1990s. Third, Kim Jong Il attempted to reform North Korean people's emotions by relying on this religious authority and his monopoly on the production of historical narrative. Negative feelings (e.g., fear of death and discontent with the regime) were suppressed, while positive emotions (e.g., happiness with everyday life) were encouraged.

As a final remark, this dissertation highlights the mutual misunderstanding between North Korean ruling elite and the Western observers including American security elite. This dissertation has explored the religious quality of North Korean historical writing that is also found in the Western culture. In many aspects, North Korean culture exhibits characteristics commonly associated with its Western counterpart.¹ For example, as shown in Chapter 3, the

¹ In the same vein, Cheehyung Kim argued that all problems, such as state oppression, poverty, and economic inequality, North Korean holds are “universal problems of our contemporary world.”

American and the North Korean civilizations have thrived on their faith in their own founding ideas, religions, or visions of the futurity that their leaders have presented. However, their immoderate faith has been an obstacle to correctly understanding the other cultures. For this reason, this study is intended to urge the outside observers to learn a lesson from the North Korean case of that excessive faith.

Following is an example of how North Koreans misunderstand the outside world. This North Korean novel gives a distorted picture of American politics.

Bill Clinton said, “They (Japanese) know little about North Korea. That’s why they are scared. One is to have fear of what one doesn’t know.”

“Wrong!” Then Hillary cut in. “OK, I want to talk because the discussion on politics at dinner spoiled my appetite.”

She rushed out and returned with a pamphlet in her hand.

“I happened to find interesting information from a booklet published by the organization of Operational Research in the UK Ministry of Defense. This gives us a rare glimpse of what enables North Koreans to exercise such influence over the world.”

She opened a dog-eared page and then started reading.

[...]

Hillary closed the booklet.

“As you just heard, they were a small number of (North Korean) military instructors. They didn’t bring new missiles, cannons, or tanks there. But the (Zimbabwean) Fifth Brigade trained by them (North Koreans) was stronger than dozens of military units combined. Today, Zimbabwe is politically one of the most stable countries in South Central Africa.”

The Gores took it seriously. But Bill Clinton shrugged it off. What he needed was faith and bravery, not contemplation that made him weary. So he spoke quickly while attempting to show his dignity, just like the times he came to a decision at a usual meeting in the White House.

Cheehyung Kim, “The Furnace is Breathing: Work and the Everyday Life in North Korea, 1953-1961.” PhD diss., Columbia University (2010). 333-334.

“Let’s stop talking about North Korea.”²

- Chŏng Kijong, *Ryŏksa ūi taeha (The Grand River of History)*

North Korean writer, Chŏng Kijong, describes Hilary Clinton as a stereotype of “hyŏnmo yangch’ŏ” (wise mother and good wife).³ The First Lady knows little about politics, but does her best in assisting her husband. She is so smart that she can sense—with no deep knowledge—the North Koreans’ mysterious power by which they exercise a great influence over the world. Thus, she tries to urge her husband to abandon the U.S.’s hardline policy toward their dangerous enemy. Al and Tipper Gore sympathize with the First Lady’s cautious approach. However, President Clinton is too dull to understand the information Hilary gives him. In fact, he is intimidated by the North Korean regime’s bold move during the nuclear crisis from 1993 to 1994.⁴ He does not want to know more about North Korea because that knowledge makes him more astonished and frightened. Therefore, he says, “Let’s stop talking about North Korea.” North Korean writers depicted the outside world and Western political leaders as they wanted to see them and on the basis of their own value systems.

One of main narratives produced and circulated by the North Korean regime is that Capitalist countries, in particular the U.S.A. and South Korea, are unable to manage North Korea because their ruling elite have almost no understanding of the small socialist state and its people. They are astonished when they learn of the difference and greatness of the North Koreans.

² Chŏng Kijong, *Ryŏksa ūi taeha (The Grand River of History)* (Pyongyang: Munhak yesul chonghap ch’ulp’ansa, 1998), 226-227.

³ The term “hyŏnmo yangch’ŏ” (현모양처[賢母良妻]; wise mother and good wife; “ryōsai kenbo” [良妻賢母] in Japanese) represents the ideal for womanhood in East Asia, particularly in the late-nineteenth and the early-twentieth centuries.

⁴ In March 1993, North Korea threatened to withdraw from the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).

Interestingly, the American security elite also believed that North Koreans are ignorant of conditions outside the socialist country. The U.S. “anti-value strategy” focuses on “information operations”—in specific, “psychological operations”⁵—that are actions taken to affect the North Korean people’s value system. For example, Kongdan Oh and Ralph Hassig proposed that “humanitarian aid be offered to the North Korean government contingent on its acceptance of strict foreign monitoring (by Korean-speaking aid workers) and clear labeling of the aid’s origin.”⁶ The authors believed that, if the North Korean people know their food originates not from their government but from foreign countries, the people’s discontent with the regime will increase. Their plan for regime change is designed to affect the North Korean people’s emotions.

This study began by criticizing the two parties’ lack of understanding of each other’s value systems (Chapter 1). North Korean writers declare that their country scares its enemies—such as the U.S.A.—with its leader’s valor and the people’s unconditional loyalty to him; the American security elite believes that the U.S.A. is able to change the North Korean regime with its “counter-value strategy.” But, while this study sheds light on the cacophonies in North Korean narratives, it suggests functionalism in North Korean studies. By functionalism, I mean a methodology focusing on the way in which power works in building a value system. The study of power leads us to understand the cultural differences between North Korea and the capitalist world. However, what is really revealed is the cultural proximity between us in the capitalist world and them in North Korea. Authoritarian culture has existed in our past and present; it has

⁵ “Psychological operations” is a major subcategory of “information operations (IO)” along with “computer network operations,” “military deception,” and “operations security.” Blane R. Clark, “Information Operations as a Deterrent to Armed Conflict,” *Military Review*, May-June 2010, 98.

⁶ Ralph Hassig and Kongdan Oh, *The Hidden People of North Korea: Everyday Life in the Hermit Kingdom* (Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto, and Plymouth, UK: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, INC., 2009), 252.

deep roots in Judeo-Christian culture and we saw the U.S. government exert excessive authority over its citizens during the War on Terror.

Still, North Korean authoritarianism is distinguishable because of its emphasis on the state leaders' "immortality." Kim Jong Il declared that his father would live forever as a form of "sasang" (idea or thought) and "sasang" will be preserved in the narratives produced under his direction. Kim Jong Il used the metaphor of a "seed" to clarify this feature of "sasang."

In his early years, Kim Jong Il asserted that all artistic works should have "chongja" (seeds).⁷

If a writer is to produce a good piece of work, he must first select the right seed, which is the core of a literary work.

If we compare a written work to a living organism the question arises: What is the core of life with which the organism is imbued and where is it located? In order to build the organic structure of a literary piece, it is necessary to have a clear vision of the fundamental principle which permeates all the elements of an artistic image and welds them into an integral whole.⁸

⁷ There are a significant number of studies that discussed the North Korean "seed" theory. A recent study by Oh Chang-Eun merits attention, since that revealed new findings about the North Korean notion of "seed." Oh Chang-Eun suggested that the notion of "chongja" (seed) was possibly coined by Choe Haksu, one of the leading writers in North Korea and a Kim Il Sung Prize laureate (1982). The term, "ssiat" (seed), first appeared in Choe's writing in 1972, one year before Kim Jong Il's book, *On the Art of Cinema*—the notion of chongja (seed) was first mentioned by Kim Jong Il—purported to be published. Oh Chang-eun, "Pukhan ūi munye ch'angjak pangbōpnon: chongja iron ūi hyōngsōng kwa palchōn (Methodology of Creative Writing in North Korea: The Birth and Development of the Seed Theory), in Dankook dae pusōl Hanguk munhwa kisul yōnguso (Institute for Korean Culture and Technology at Dankook University), *Chuch'e ūi hwanyōng: Pukhan munye iron e taehan pip'anchōk ihae (The Illusions of Juche: A Critical Understanding of North Korean Art and Literary Theory)* (Kwangmyōng: Tosō ch'ulp'an Kyōngjin, 2011), 21-23.

⁸ Kim Jong Il, *On the Art of the Cinema* [1972] (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1989), 13.

Kim Jong Il's theory of art is based on vitalism. He alleged that all works of art must develop from the "right seed." The seed determines the form and the content of the work; it is at once the *entelechy* (vital force that transforms sheer "matter" into a living organism) and *gehalt* ("content" with a heavy connotation of "essence") of all artistic works, in particular, narrative. In other words, artistic works are likened to trees that grow from the "seed."

What is at issue is the creator of the seed. Kim Jong Il claimed that the seed should be chosen "in accordance with Party policy" and the Party's "monolithic ideology," which is the "Juche idea."⁹ The Juche idea was claimed to have been founded by the father Kim through his experiences fighting against Japan and America, and building the socialist state, while the Party policy was formulated under the son Kim's lead. Thus, it is obvious that Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il were the creators of the "seed." A related thought is that the father Kim's "*sasang*" is rejuvenated whenever the "seed" is grown into the "tree" of narrative.

This corresponds to the Tree of Life in *Genesis*. People can obtain immortality by emulating the father Kim and his followers who are depicted in the narratives. All of them can live forever if they live as they are taught in the story. In other words, the self is made into a work of art, as in a Latin aphorism, "*Ars longa, vita brevis*" (Art is long, life is short). I called this unique attitude toward life and narrative "aestheticism" in the Introduction of this study, and argued that it resides in the aesthetic metamorphosis of emotions, in particular the change from fear of death to sublimity. To render life aesthetic, emotions should be increased or diminished. Thus, this study has illustrated how happiness, fear, and rancor were manipulated by the North Korean regime and lives were transformed into narrative.

⁹ Ibid., 18.

However, these are only part of the story; North Korean people as readers of the narrative were not completely controlled by Kim Jong Il's authoritarian literature. Negative emotions were uncontrollably expressed. We can find examples of this in North Korean defectors' testimonies. Yet, the North Koreans continued to read the literary works. More importantly, their emotions were manipulated in the ways that the regime intended. My last question is: Why North Koreans read?

This is evocative of Mukulika Banerjee's question, "Why India votes?" in her treatise on India's democratic elections. By conducting both qualitative and quantitative research, she found a contradiction: "India's poorest and most [marginalized] citizens vote in high numbers," whereas "elected governments don't seem to be making their lives any better."¹⁰ Her answer was that voting gave the Indian voters a sense that they were participating in the state event to build democratic governments. Democracy works as religion.¹¹ Giles Fraser, a priest of the Church of England, adds to Banerjee's finding, arguing that voting is a ritual. In the wake of the British Labour Party's unexpected defeat in the 2015 general election, he deplored the fact that the most vulnerable people, such as contingent workers and immigrants, were underrepresented in the election despite the high percentage of their participation. Then he compared democracy with religion, as follows:

Church-speak for this is: belonging precedes believing. The idea is that people tend to join churches not because of any specific belief but as a marker of belonging. And the rituals of

¹⁰ Mukulika Banerjee, *Why India Votes?* (New Delhi and Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 169.

¹¹ Robert Bellah called democracy as "our civil religion." Robert Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus, Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, Winter 1967, Vol. 96, No. 1, pp. 1-21. http://www.robertbellah.com/articles_5.htm (accessed: March 7, 2017).

the church are more an expression of this belonging than they are an ideological statement of faith.¹²

“Belonging precedes believing.” This idea can explain why North Koreans read. They might not believe in the narratives that the North Korean regime produced, but they still read state-sanctioned literature, because reading gives them a sense of belonging.

Kim Ryen-hi, a North Korean defector, said at a press interview in 2015, “South Koreans don’t understand North Korea,” an opinion that also can be found in North Korean novels such as Chŏng Kijong’s *Ryŏksa ũi taeha* (*The Grand River of History*) quoted above. In 2016, she said she was shocked by the huge number of homeless people loitering around Seoul, asserting that no one was homeless in Pyongyang. She did not understand why so many people were unable to find where they belonged. Perhaps she considered herself to be one of them, because she pleaded with the South Korean government to return her to Pyongyang where her family still lived.¹³

The Kim regime has provided North Koreans with not only narrative but also with life. The people have lived their lives as narratives that the regime produced. Also, communities including families have been founded on those narratives. As of January 2017, Kim Ryen-hi still seeks to return to the Pyongyang built on those stories.¹⁴

¹² Giles Fraser, “Democracy is a Religion That Has Failed the Poor,” *The Guardian*, May 8, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2015/may/08/democracy-a-religion-that-has-failed-the-poor> (accessed: March 31, 2016).

¹³ Choe Sang-Hun, “A North Korean Defector’s Regret,” *The New York Times*, August 15, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/16/world/asia/kim-ryen-hi-north-korean-defector-regret.html> (accessed: March 28, 2016); Yun Sŏnghyo, “Pyŏngyang simin Kim Ryŏnhŭi, Namhan ũn Pukhan chal morŭnda” (Kim Ryen-hi, a Pyongyang citizen, said, “South Koreans Don’t Know about North Korea), *Oh My News*, March 5, 2016, http://www.ohmynews.com/NWS_Web/View/at_pg.aspx?CNTN_CD=A0002187489 (accessed: March 28, 2016).

¹⁴ “T’albukja Kim Ryen-hi: ‘Hohwaroun sam paraji ana: Kajok kwa salgo sippŏ’” (North Korean Defector Kim Ryen-hi: “I Don’t Want to Live in Luxury. I Want to Live with My Family.”), *Oh My News*, January 13, 2017,

As we see in the example of Kim Ryen-hi, giving a sense of belonging must be the most important function of North Korean literature. If a narrative produced by the North Korean authoritarian regime gives the North Koreans a sense of belonging, then we could say that it works positively for them. Still, I am relieved that I do not belong there.

http://www.ohmynews.com/NWS_Web/View/at_pg.aspx?CNTN_CD=A0002279200 (accessed: March 7, 2017).

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