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From Soviet Origins to *Chuch'e*:

Marxism-Leninism in the History of North Korean Ideology, 1945-1989

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

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Thomas Stock

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Professor Namhee Lee, Chair

Where lie the origins of North Korean ideology? When, why, and to what extent did North Korea eventually pursue a path of ideological independence from Soviet Marxism-Leninism? Scholars typically answer these interrelated questions by referencing Korea's historical legacies, such as Chosŏn period Confucianism, colonial subjugation, and Kim Il Sung's guerrilla experience. The result is a rather localized understanding of North Korean ideology and its development, according to which North Korean ideology was rooted in native soil and, on the basis of this indigenousness, inevitably developed in contradistinction to Marxism-Leninism. Drawing on Eastern European archival materials and North Korean theoretical journals, the present study challenges our conventional views about North Korean ideology. Throughout the Cold War, North Korea was possessed by a world spirit, a Marxist-Leninist world spirit. Marxism-Leninism was North Korean ideology's Promethean clay. From

adherence to Soviet ideological leadership in the 1940s and 50s, to declarations of ideological independence in the 1960s, to the emergence of *chuch'e* philosophy in the 1970s and 80s, North Korea never severed its ties with the Marxist-Leninist tradition. On the contrary, this tradition constituted the basic and most fundamental raw material from which North Korean ideology was shaped and developed. The evolution of North Korean ideology was not predetermined by Korea's historical legacies. Rather, a convergence of historically immediate domestic and international factors led to the emergence of an independent ideology, an ideology that despite its independence from Soviet ideological suzerainty remained situated within a global Marxist-Leninist intellectual space. Though many scholars have argued otherwise, even *chuch'e* philosophy, the apex of North Korean ideological particularity during the Cold War, was hardly an idealism and instead quite reminiscent of a good old-fashioned Marxist-Leninist materialism.

The dissertation of Thomas Stock is approved.

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INTRODUCTION

Where lie the origins of North Korean ideology? When, why, and to what extent did North Korea eventually pursue a path of ideological independence from Soviet Marxism-Leninism? Scholars typically answer these interrelated questions by referencing Korea's historical legacies, such as Chosŏn period Confucianism, colonial subjugation, and Kim Il Sung's guerrilla experience. The result is a rather localized understanding of North Korean ideology and its development, according to which North Korean ideology was rooted in native soil and, on the basis of this indigenousness, inevitably developed in contradistinction to Marxism-Leninism. Drawing on Eastern European archival materials and North Korean theoretical journals, the present study challenges our conventional views about North Korean ideology. Throughout the Cold War, North Korea was possessed by a world spirit, a Marxist-Leninist world spirit. Marxism-Leninism was North Korean ideology's Promethean clay. From adherence to Soviet ideological leadership in the 1940s and 50s, to declarations of ideological independence in the 1960s, to the emergence of *chuch'e* (*juche*) philosophy in the 1970s and 80s, North Korea never severed its ties with the Marxist-Leninist tradition. On the contrary, this tradition constituted the basic and most fundamental raw material from which North Korean ideology was shaped and developed. The evolution of North Korean ideology was not predetermined by Korea's historical legacies. Rather, a convergence of historically immediate domestic and international factors led to the emergence of an independent ideology, an ideology that despite its independence from Soviet ideological suzerainty remained situated within a global Marxist-Leninist intellectual space.

This is a history of North Korean ideology during the Cold War, a transnational history focusing on North Korean ideology's Marxist-Leninist origins, global Marxist-Leninist interpretational struggles, and North Korea's transformation of existing Marxist-Leninist tenets into new incarnations. With its transnational and Marxist-Leninist orientation, the present study is pioneering. We simply do not have a history that systematically examines the development of North Korean ideology in relation to Marxism-Leninism. Such a history is necessary, however, if one hopes to understand North Korean ideology in its present form. Over the course of the Cold War, North Korean ideology changed gradually, building on what came before. There was no rupture. Instead, the development of North Korean ideology was a process marked by continuity. New ideological formulations constituted sublations of existing ideological material, amalgamations that synthesized this material into novel forms. The result was a gradual redirection and recasting of preexisting Marxist-Leninist premises. Besides temporal continuity, there was also spatial continuity. That is, North Korean ideological positions were familiar and intelligible to communist parties from around the globe. Even once North Korea developed views heterodox in the eyes of many fraternal parties, mutual intelligibility based on a shared Marxist-Leninist tradition did not disappear.

North Korean ideology's development can be better explained by Kim Il Sung's attempts to solidify his power than North Korea's postcolonial desire to free itself from the shackles of a foreign ideology. In 1961, Kim sought independence from Soviet ideological leadership precisely because of the threat it posed to his position. The resultant ideological "heterodoxy," however, was not as heterodox as one might think, since North Korea continued to operate within the framework of the Marxist-Leninist tradition while challenging the ideological leadership of the Soviet Union. Kim wanted to achieve ideological insulation, tying universality

ever closer to his person so that alternative ideological interpretations could no longer endanger his rule. But while insulation continued, such as through the rise of the monolithic ideological system in 1967 and *chuch'e* philosophy in 1972, so did the Marxist-Leninist tradition, even as North Korea began to cover up the Marxist-Leninist origins of certain tenets and claim originality in philosophical matters. Though many scholars have argued otherwise, *chuch'e* philosophy in the 1970s and 80s was hardly an idealism and instead quite reminiscent of a good old-fashioned Marxist-Leninist materialism.

The State of the Literature: Indigenousness and *Chuch'e*-Centrism

Suffice it to say, the current state of the literature largely ignores or minimizes the role of Marxism-Leninism in the history or makeup of North Korean ideology. With the exception of Scalapino and Lee's magnum opus *Communism in Korea*, published in 1972 and representative of traditional Cold War scholarship, we currently lack studies that seriously evaluate Marxism-Leninism in relation to North Korean ideology.[1] Even Scalapino and Lee's work is limited in scope, as it mainly analyzes North Korean ideology from the perspective of the late 1960s. Nevertheless, their analysis does provide a well-reasoned argument for North Korean ideology's placement within the Marxist-Leninist tradition, leading them to the following conclusion: "But the basic theoretical mold into which Marxism-Leninism had been cast by the end of the 1920s (as a result of the merging of Marxian theory with Soviet practice) has not yet been reshaped—at least not by Mao, Kim, or any of the current generation of Soviet leaders."[2] Scalapino and Lee's

[1] Robert A. Scalapino and Chong-Sik Lee, *Communism in Korea* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972). For a wonderfully refreshing analysis of North Korean ideology's relationship to Marxism-Leninism see especially pages 845 to 918.

[2] Ibid., 870.

evaluation contrasts with post-1970s and especially post-Cold War scholarship. Particularly the arguments of Bruce Cumings helped usher in a cultural turn in the study of North Korea. In his writings, Cumings emphasized the primacy of Korean culture over Marxism-Leninism. Korean culture changed Marxism-Leninism more than the other way around. He further implied a binary relationship between these two, referring to Korea's relationship with Marxism-Leninism in terms of an "alienness of the setting to this fundamentally Western set of ideas," which ultimately forced him to conclude that North Korea "took from Marxism-Leninism what it wanted and rejected much the rest."[3] Subsequent scholarship mostly followed this trend.[4] As explored below, scholars began to look at the local, that is, indigenous aspects of North Korean ideology while Marxism-Leninism receded into the background or disappeared altogether.

Charles Armstrong dealt a major blow to Scalapino and Lee's conclusions. Whereas Scalapino and Lee regarded communism in Korea an artificial import delivered by the Soviet Union, Armstrong argued that North Korea "indigenized" Soviet communism starting in 1945. North Korea appropriated the Soviet system to suit its local context, where it grew naturally.[5] Armstrong did not merely limit his "indigenization" thesis to Soviet institutions, however, but suggested its applicability to ideology as well:

> In the area of ideology, for example, one of the most distinctively Korean elements of communism in North Korea was its emphasis on ideas over material conditions. Koreans shared this Marxist heresy with their counterparts in China and Vietnam, but this humanistic and voluntaristic emphasis was even more pronounced in Korea than in the other two East Asian communist revolutions, which may reflect the fact that Korea had long been more orthodox in its Confucianism than Vietnam or China. Korean communists tended to turn Marx on his head, as it were, valorizing human will over socioeconomic structures in a

[3] Bruce Cumings, "Corporatism in North Korea," *The Journal of Korean Studies* 4 (1983 1982): 277.

[4] Developments in North Korean ideology during the 1980s may be partially responsible for this trend, given the grooming of Kim Jong Il as Kim Il Sung's successor and the philosophization of North Korea's *chuch'e sasang*

[5] Charles K. Armstrong, *The North Korean Revolution, 1945-1950* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 3–4.

> manner more reminiscent of traditional Confucianism than classic Marxism-Leninism.[6]

Unfortunately Armstrong's book neglected to explain what constitutes "classic Marxism-Leninism" or offer a timeline for the emergence of this Marxist and Marxist-Leninist heterodoxy. Nonetheless, the implication seems clear: North Korean ideology, from the beginning, contained native elements probably grounded in Korean culture, most importantly Confucianism.

The literature's references to Confucianism are in fact rather ubiquitous and sometimes grandiose. Bruce Cumings, for example, has stated that "North Korea is closer to a Neo-Confucian kingdom than to Stalin's Russia."[7] Like Cumings, Young-Soon Chung attempted draw philosophical comparisons between North Korea's state ideology of *chuch'e sasang* and Neo-Confucianism.[8] Chung viewed North Korean statements such as "the morality of the working class is the highest form of the progressive morality in the history of humankind" as representative of Neo-Confucian philosophy, which Chung believed was eventually adopted into North Korean ideology, to the detriment of Marxism-Leninism.[9] Another scholar, Alzo David-West, even proposed that there occurred an incorporation of Chŏng Yak-yong's Neo-Confucian reform thought into North Korea's state ideology.[10] Thus, when Kim Il Sung began to discuss *chuch'e* in 1955, in the opinion of David-West, Kim intended to say that *sirhak,* a reformist Neo-

[6] Ibid., 4.

[7] Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), 414–17.

[8] Young-Soon Chung, *Chuch'e-Ideen und (Neo)Konfuzianismus in Nordkorea*, vol. 85, Uni Press Hochschulschriften (Hamburg: Lit Verlag, 1996), 117–27.

[9] Ibid., 85:146.

[10] Alzo David-West, "Between Confucianism and Marxism-Leninism: Juche and the Case of Chong Tasan," *Korean Studies Korean Studies* 35, no. 1 (2011): 93–121.

Confucian school of thought during the Chŏson period, "was more important than Soviet Marxism-Leninism."[11]

Studies that stress the indigenousness of North Korean ideology also usually happen to center on *chuch'e*, as reflected in David-West's argument. According to Cumings, "North Korea had many differences from the Soviet model of socialism from the beginning, and was among the first of the postwar socialist states to distance itself from Moscow, beginning in 1955 with Kim's enunciation of the *chuch'e* ideology."[12] Young-Soon Chung similarly thinks that Kim Il Sung declared a new ideology of *chuch'e* in 1955.[13] Although there is no textual evidence to confirm that *chuch'e* constituted an ideology in 1955, statements about the origination of an ideology of independence in North Korea's early years are not uncommon. Some scholars, such as Gi-Wook Shin and Hongkoo Han, even assert that "Kim's ideas on *juche*" preceded liberation and were already held by him during the colonial period.[14] This *chuch'e*-centrism naturally reinforces the argument for the indigenous origins of North Korean ideology. By making *chuch'e* the leitmotif of North Korean ideology's history, and by traveling far into Korea's past in search for its origins, North Korean ideology, from its very inception, seems thoroughly native and firmly rooted in Korean soil. As soon as one sees the term appear in 1955, then, one's argument for indigenous roots is confirmed. While I do not wish to simply dismiss the above

[11] Ibid., 96.

[12] Cumings, "Corporatism in North Korea," 273.

[13] Young-Soon Chung, "The Resurrection of Confucianism in North Korea," *The Review of Korean Studies* 13, no. 3 (2010): 74.

[14] Gi-Wook Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2006), 86.
Hongkoo Han, "Wounded Nationalism: The Minsaengdan Incident and Kim Il Sung in Eastern Manchuria" (University of Washington, 1999), 23–27.

scholars' efforts to better understand North Korean ideology, I do wish to suggest that paying too much attention to *chuch'e* in North Korea's early years is problematic. Given Kim Il Sung's own writings about his guerrilla experiences during the colonial period, according to which he formulated an inchoate *chuch'e sasang* as early as 1930 and steered an independent ideological course, one may unintentionally mirror North Korea's propaganda and myths and reflect the regime's own *chuch'e*-centrism and history-writing.[15] After all, there exists absolutely no contemporary written record to verify Kim's development of a *chuch'e sasang* during the guerrilla struggle in the 1930s. This was a myth that North Korea created long after 1955, rewriting its history in order to reinforce the present ideological orthodoxy and legitimacy of Kim Il Sung.

When studying North Korean ideology, a focus on indigenousness and *chuch'e* does make sense. Perhaps this focus was influenced by the rise of the Asian values debate in the late-1970s and 1980s. Opposing Max Weber, many scholars argued that Confucianism, in various ways, contributed to the East Asian economic miracles.[16] In the case of North Korea, Confucianism supposedly contributed to a leader-centered political system and father-to-son succession.[17] While Confucianism-based claims have grown much less popular in studies of East Asian capitalism, especially due to the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, they remain dominant in the North Korea field. North Korea's refusal to collapse, as well as the present state of its ideology, may be partially responsible. After all, as the socialist world imploded at the end of

[15] Kim Il Sung, *With the Century*, vol. 2 (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1994), 40–54.

[16] See for example: Roderick MacFarquhar, "The Post-Confucian Challenge," *World Press Review*, 1980, 48. And: Seok Choon Lew, Woo-Young Choi, and Hye-Suk Wang, "Confucian Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism in Korea: The Significance of Filial Piety," *Conference Papers - American Sociological Association*, Annual Meeting 2007, 1.

[17] Chung, "The Resurrection of Confucianism in North Korea," 80.

the Cold War, North Korean socialism remained. On this basis, it appeared reasonable to conclude that North Korea was quite unlike the failed socialist systems of Eastern Europe. North Korea's own emphasis on ideology—an ideology which by late 1980s clearly tried to set itself apart from Soviet Marxism-Leninism—made ideology a tempting target of investigation, as it could help uncover the source of North Korea's longevity.

Although searching for native influences in North Korea's historical path is a worthwhile endeavor, it is my contention here that these efforts have been taken too far. The incessant bifurcation between Western thought, whether Marxism or Marxism-Leninism, and North Korean thought creates the false impression of mutual exclusivity. Depictions of North Korean ideology sometimes—however inadvertently—resemble the old depictions of the mystical and exotic Orient, a culture and way of thinking unfamiliar to and almost indecipherable by us, as Bruce Cuming's portrayal of *chuch'e* indicates: "The closer one gets to its [*chuch'e*'s] meaning, the more the meaning recedes. It is the opaque core of Korean national solipsism."[18] The result is a problematic reading of North Korean ideological texts, such as Kim's 1955 speech mentioning *chuch'e*, a reading that relies a lot on relatively distant historical conditions. In a sense, historical conditions become the inescapable determining force of ideological developments. As stated by David-West, "Marxism (German), Marxism-Leninism (Russian), and Maoism (Chinese) were inadequate candidates for postcolonial and post–Korean War national regeneration."[19] Only something suitable to Korea's past could determine North Korea's future path, a view Cumings mirrors as well: "Autarky fit Korea's Hermit Kingdom past, and answered the need for *closure* from the world economy after decades of opening under

[18] Cumings, "Corporatism in North Korea," 289.

[19] David-West, "Between Confucianism and Marxism-Leninism: Juche and the Case of Chong Tasan," 94.

Japanese auspices. What was unusable was dispatched as soon as possible: above all the socialist internationalism including a transnational division of labor that the Soviets wanted and that Korea successfully resisted, beginning in the late 1950s"[20] Reliance on such historical conditionality thus only reinforces the argument for North Korean ideology's indigenousness, rationalizes a reading away of Marxism-Leninism, and oversimplifies the phenomenon of ideological change.

The present study therefore seeks to reconceptualize our understanding of North Korean ideology and its history. Abandoning assumptions and dichotomizations between West and East, orthodoxy and heterodoxy, Soviet Marxism-Leninism and North Korean ideology, I return to square one and systemically examine the role of Marxism-Leninism over the course of North Korea's Cold War development. I do not draw assumptions on the basis of pre-liberation conditions but instead investigate the immediate historical and intellectual environment in which North Korean ideology was expressed. When tackling North Korean ideology this way, a completely new picture emerges. To be sure, this study is not an attempt to return to the old Cold War paradigm according to which North Korea was but a copy of the Soviet system. North Korea's Marxism-Leninism did eventually display uniqueness. Nevertheless, I do not equate uniqueness with indigenousness. In fact, when viewed from within the Marxist-Leninist tradition, one begins to see that North Korean ideology's particularity frequently grew out of attempts to subvert Soviet ideology's universality. Its uniqueness, then, does not imply a dichotomization with Western thought. North Korea negotiated its own ideological positions within an intellectual tradition that knew no national boundaries, though it certainly flourished within those boundaries. Marxism-Leninism was a global phenomenon and the development of

[20] Cumings, "Corporatism in North Korea," 277.

North Korean ideology occurred within a global intellectual space. To discuss the uniqueness or locality of North Korean ideology is to discuss, at the same time, its globality. The history of North Korean ideology is part of a global history. It is not the history of a spiritually cloistered "hermit kingdom."

As the initiated reader may already have noticed, the present study contains similarities as well as differences with the writings of Brian Myers. Since Myers has examined the historical evolution of *chuch'e*, and in many ways has done so quite aptly, we both recognize the unimportance of *chuch'e* in the 1950s and the unoriginality of the philosophy that emerged in the 1970s. Additionally, we both approach pre-liberation conditions with suspicion and instead pay more attention to the immediate interests of historical actors. Thus, Myers often notices parallels between North Korea's ideological positions and Marxism-Leninism. But because his goal is different than mine, he does not provide a systematic and historical account of North Korean ideology's relationship with Marxism-Leninism. Rather, Myers tries to prove that *chuch'e sasang* was and is a fake ideology, mostly intended "to decoy the world's attention away from the *de facto* ideology of radical race-nationalism." In his view, *chuch'e sasang* "has never played a significant role in policy-making or even domestic propaganda."[21] As a result, Myers is unable to detect North Korea's rather serious engagement in Marxist-Leninist interpretational struggles, in the crux of which *chuch'e sasang* was gradually constituted. Indeed, Myers suggests that North Korea adhered to "Soviet orthodoxy" even in the 1970s, a view the present study challenges.[22] Although North Korea certainly had not left the Marxist-Leninist tradition in the 1970s, it began to actively contest Soviet orthodoxy in December of 1961, a fact the Soviets

[21] Brian Myers, *North Korea's Juche Myth* (Busan: Sthele Press, 2015), 3.

[22] Ibid., 144.

were well aware of. Adherence to Marxism-Leninism was not the same thing as adherence to Soviet orthodoxy. This study hence forwards a conceptualization of orthodoxy, heterodoxy, and Marxism-Leninism that can tremendously aid our understanding of North Korean ideology and its evolution.

De-Polarizing: The Problem of Marxism-Leninism

Marxism-Leninism represents North Korean ideology's most important source. It is impossible to understand North Korean ideology during the Cold War without it. Yet as shown above, scholars tend to dichotomize the two. When doing so, however, they frequently fail to define what constitutes Marxism-Leninism and treat the concept abstractly. The same applies to claims about Marxism, which is usually boiled down to a materialistic or economic determinism, in contrast to North Korean ideology's idealism. We already observed this distinction in the writings of Charles Armstrong. Han Shik Park, a major figure in the study of *chuch'e sasang*, also views North Korean ideology as an expression of voluntarism, or as he calls it, "human determinism," as opposed to Marx's (and even Mao's) materialism.[23] Read this way, one would not expect to find much talk about materialism and laws of development in North Korean ideological texts from the 1980s. Indeed, given the many references to Confucianism in the literature, one might instead expect quotations from the sages. How strange it is, then, to find a North Korean publication from 2000 in which Kim Jong Il defends dialectical materialism, insisting that "*chuch'e* philosophy takes the worldview of dialectical materialism as its

[23] Han Shik Park, "North Korea's Juche: Its Premises, Promises, and Problems," *Korea and World Affairs* 6, no. 4 (n.d.): 550–51.

premise."[24] What are we to make of this? Does this not suggest that we have frequently mischaracterized or simplified North Korean ideology's status vis-à-vis Marxism-Leninism? Failure to explain the term "Marxism-Leninism," of course, only further contributes to the confusion.

Marxism-Leninism never was a static body of thought. Talking about it as if it were a uniform, unchanging entity generates the false impression of orthodoxy, as opposed to North Korea's heterodoxy. Before summoning Marxism-Leninism as a comparison, one must reflect whether one means the Marxism-Leninism under Stalin, Khrushchev, Brezhnev, or Gorbachev. Actually, those names do not suffice. What about Honecker, Ceausescu, Castro, Mao, and so many others? Each of these names, at varying points in history, professed the epithet "Marxist-Leninist." During the Cold War, Marxism-Leninism was anything but monolithic. Even when it comes to Marxism, one cannot pretend as if multiple interpretations do not exist. What about the early Marx, the structuralist Marx of Althusser, the writings of Engels, the dialectical materialism of Joseph Dietzgen, or the humanist interpretation of E.P. Thompson? An orthodoxy-heterodoxy binary only obfuscates the array of interpretations available to us. Indeed, what constitutes a departure from Marxism-Leninism is not a simple question, given Marxism-Leninism's internal diversity. Coined by Stalin, the term designated the ruling ideology of the Soviet Union and later other socialist states. Behind the term stood a doctrinal corpus, a way of speaking and thinking about the world, as well as years of experience in constructing socialism. In other words, Marxism-Leninism was merely a term that was preceded by its content, which I will henceforth denote as "tradition," an evolving tradition, to be sure. Within the tradition, over

[24] Kim Jong Il, "Chuch'e ch'ŏrhak ŭn tokch'angjŏgin hyŏngmyŏng ch'ŏrhak ida [Chuch'e Philosophy Is an Original Revolutionary Philosophy]," in *Chuch'e ch'ŏrhak e taehayŏ [On Chuch'e Philosophy]* (Pyongyang: Chosŏn Nodongdang Ch'ulp'ansa, 2000), 130.

time, emerged new interpretations, additions based on existing doctrines, and unique local implementations. The result was diversity across space and time. Marxism-Leninism under Gorbachev was substantially different from Marxism-Leninism under Stalin and Khrushchev, even though they were members of the same tradition. Other Marxist-Leninist leaders also proposed their own unique ideological positions. Diversity was the norm, not the exception. North Korea's expression of unique ideological positions, hence, did not necessarily mean a departure from Marxism-Leninism.[25]

The mere discovery of evidence in the writings of Marx that contradict North Korean tenets does not imply heterodoxy vis-à-vis Soviet Marxism-Leninism, nor does it imply heterodoxy vis-à-vis alternative readings of Marx. One should avoid sweeping comparisons that ignore the various possible specificities, for such a practice makes North Korean ideology seem more particular, more heterodox than it really was. A better approach is to draw specific historical comparisons between contemporaneously existing ideologies, as is the case in this study's comparative examination of North Korean and Soviet (and East German) ideology. When looking at North Korean ideology at a specific point in time, what components of Soviet ideology were regarded as orthodox or heterodox and, vice versa, how did Soviet ideology agree and disagree with North Korean ideology? Why did these perceptions change? Plus, when ideological shifts occurred, how did these shifts relate to the preceding state of the ideology? If asking along those lines, one quickly realizes the unsuitability of an orthodoxy-heterodoxy

[25] Arif Dirlik made a similar argument in relation to Mao Zedong Thought. Responding to the prominent view of Mao's voluntarism and Marxist heterodoxy, Dirlik argued that although Marx and Mao clearly have disparate philosophical views in certain areas, if we are merely consumed with the question of orthodoxy, we will be unable to see Mao's "creativity as a Marxist." He also criticized the assumed economic determinism of Marx, maintaining that such an assumption ultimately leads to a view of Mao as heterodox, which in turn results in scholars' quest to uncover the Chinese cultural roots of his thought.
Arif Dirlik, "The Predicament of Marxist Revolutionary Consciousness: Mao Zedong, Antonio Gramsci, and the Reformulation of Marxist Revolutionary Theory," *Modern China* 9, no. 2 (1983): 186.

binary. One begins to see that orthodoxy constituted a contested, relative, and gradually evolving category. As the present study shall consistently demonstrate, ideological disagreements between North Korea and fraternal socialist states represented a dispute within a common intellectual tradition, not a fundamental departure from Marxism-Leninism.

Historical Immediacy, Rationality, and Sublation

As already hinted, this study refuses to rely on pre-liberation historical conditions as an explanation for North Korean ideology's development or contents. To avoid potential biases and prejudiced readings of ideological texts, I instead examine North Korean ideology in its historical immediacy. A history of North Korean ideology cannot simply reference things that occurred long ago but must pay close attention to the historical present in which changes occurred, meaning that it must give due consideration to the immediacy of historical actors' ideas. In some cases, pre-liberation experiences may indeed play an important role, yet this must be determined on a case-by-case basis and ought not become a master narrative. Historical conditions, too, may be important moments in the birth of a certain immediacy, yet historical conditions do not simply translate into the rationality of the present. And while I do not investigate pre-liberation conditions in order to understand North Korean ideology, I do examine the contemporary conditions under which ideological change occurred. That is, I investigate the more immediately present conditions, such as domestic and international political factors, in relation to which North Korean ideology transformed itself.

When looking at the historical immediacy of ideological statements made by historical actors, the present study concurrently investigates rationality at specific points in time. Rationality (*Vernünftigkeit*), here, is a concept derived from Hegel and refers to that which

historical actors considered rational (*vernünftig*). Historical actors do not simply talk as if they were talking only to themselves, but what they say is usually grounded in a shared rationality—i.e., what they say is rational to others who subscribe to the same rationality. If historical actors do not draw on this rationality, if they make arguments not in some way rational to others, their words are powerless. As a result, when Kim Il Sung denounced factional rivals in the 1950s, he did not do so via quotations from Confucian lore but instead utilized the same Marxist-Leninist rationality also subscribed to by his rivals. To realize their subjective desires, if brute force is not an option, historical actors must act rationally. Rationality is not based on individual imagination and arbitrary volition; rationality is social. Individuals, as they are raised into society, conform to it and make it their own, realizing their ends through it.

Much of this Hegelian stuff is also in accordance with Bourdieu's ideas. Thus, we can alternatively think of rationality in terms of "habitus." This study conceptualizes the subject, in this case party elites, as emerging immanently from within its own world, a subject that "feels at home in the world because the world is also in him."[26] The individual is socialized into a particular world, learns to navigate it, and consequently acquires a series of dispositions (i.e., habitus) that give him an immediate knowledge of his environment. Even his deepest subjective desires are inscribed with the logic of this habitus. As a result, "habitus is the basis of an implicit collusion among all the agents who are products of similar conditions and conditionings, and also of a practical experience of each agent finding in the conduct of all his peers the ratification and legitimation ('the done thing') of his own conduct, which, in return, ratifies and, if need be, rectifies, the conduct of the others."[27] In Hegelian terms, the subject finds itself recognized in

[26] Pierre Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000), 141.

[27] Ibid., 145.

and by others precisely because they are all members of the same community. Within this community, the subject is socialized and becomes a subject—he or she is not so at birth. As he grows into his world, the individual learns the rationality of this world, makes it his own, and sees himself through it. It becomes his world, and the world recognizes him in return.

Rationality is inherently presentist and temporal. In the case of North Korean ideology, new formulations built on existing formulations without initiating a radical volte-face. That is, rationality changed itself out of itself. This was a gradual process, a type of sublation (*Aufhebung*) in which old concepts helped generate new concepts. One can therefore detect plenty of continuity in North Korean ideology, from the 1950s all the way through to the 1980s. Of course, rationally, North Korean ideology in the 1950s was not identical to its 1980s counterpart. Nevertheless, many of the old ideological content remained, as this was the material out of which the new ideological formulations were shaped. A nuanced understanding of North Korean ideology's development therefore requires an inquiry into this process of sublation, how immediately accessible ideological raw materials were converted into higher, sublated products. Alternatively, one can think of this sublation in terms of structuring. Previous formulations and the preexisting rationality in general placed structural constraints upon the formulation of new doctrines. In a sense, existing doctrines structured new doctrines.

The Problem of Ideology

This study proposes no theories of ideology. While I do use theoretical concepts such as "sublation" and "rationality," these are about ideas in general and do not suggest a theory of ideology. It might seem strange for a study to revolve around ideology but never discuss ideology in theoretical terms. Yet the very topic of this study demands such an approach. To

provide my own theoretical understanding of ideology runs the risk of generating a confusion between the historical and analytic concept of ideology. The historical concept is simply the concept as it was seen by the historical actors involved, whereas the analytic concept constitutes a scholar's own understanding of what ideology is and how it functions. It is not necessarily wrong to have an analytic concept of ideology, but it becomes a problem when the thing under investigation already includes its own conception of ideology.

Rather than beginning my inquiry with preconceived notions of ideology, I treat ideology as socialist states themselves employed the term, in an effort to avoid a confusion of empirical content with analytical language. I make no claims concerning the thinking of average North Koreans but view ideology merely in terms of the intellectual discourse of the party, whose members themselves referred to this discourse as pertaining to ideology. It behooves us to distinguish North Korea's official ideology from the deeper ethical, social, and cultural issues, even if there might exist a close relationship between them. In socialist states, ideology itself was reified and mobilized in deliberate, open ways. It had little to do with the covert and unconscious process of ideology that Marxists frequently reference. In *The German Ideology*, Marx does not speak too fondly of ideology. To him ideology was essentially a phantasm whose real basis lay in man's life process.[28] He viewed ideology as a negative phenomenon that buttressed all the myths sustaining bourgeois society. Later, the various Marxist-Leninist regimes expanded the concept of ideology to constitute a positive force in the struggle of the proletariat for human liberation. Ideology was no longer exclusive to the bourgeois order but could also exist in a socialist state, with the main difference being that in the former ideology

[28] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "Die deutsche Ideologie [The German Ideology]," in *Karl Marx - Friedrich Engels: Werke*, 3 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1969), 26–27, http://www.mlwerke.de/me/me03/me03_009.htm.

was regressive and its promises illusory, while in the latter ideology was thoroughly progressive. Thus was blurred the distinction between ideology and thinking in general. Ideology, like thinking, was seen as circumscribed by the material relations prevailing in a society. Because these relations were understood to be more progressive in socialist countries, given the dictatorship of the proletariat, ideology carried an equally progressive class character. Wrong ideological views within such a country were consequently often explained as remnants of the old bourgeois order or bourgeois ideological infiltration from the outside. This allowed socialist states to dictate a proper ideology, a correct class-conscious thinking. Indeed, these states were, to put it mildly, obsessed with matters of ideology. Correct ideological outlook implied the correctness of the socialist system. If one's outlook were to diverge from the party line, this would indicate a questioning of the party's authority, the legitimacy of the system, and the necessity of the current historical course—in short, ideology was inexorably entwined with the socialist system as such. This is not my own theory of ideology, but the very rationality openly set up by the ruling forces in socialist countries.

In socialist regimes, ideology possessed a specific purpose that was not at all hidden to the public. Ideology often boiled down to key phrases, slogans, and quotes, all of which were related to the current party orthodoxy. Especially party members were required to internalize these to the best of their ability and capably recite them when necessary. Many of the official ideological tenets sounded quite lofty and noble but had little to do with the reality inside socialist countries. Their intention, rather, was to legitimize one's leadership, garner international support, and counter Western propaganda. Brian Myers does have a point by

calling *chuch'e sasang* a "sham ideology."[29] Like Marxism-Leninism, *chuch'e sasang* was, in part, a tool to acquire approval from abroad. Neither in East Germany nor North Korea, generally speaking, did people truly comprehend the intricacies of their state ideology. Ideology was watered down to be easily digested. By gaining the backing of foreign individuals or groups, such as Angela Davis for East Germany, the regime could validate the correctness and universality of its ideology before of its people, thus demonstrating the correctness of its leadership. This is why many of the ideological tenets in North Korea and other socialist states were so superficial and altruistic—they were meant to capture foreign audiences and reinforce the legitimacy of the leadership at home. Whether North Korean or East German ideology, both had a very real impact, internationally and domestically. Nevertheless, one must not confuse this type of ideology with either one's own representations or the deeper realms of spirit.

It is not possible or plausible to infer from the official ideology the full content of people's minds. The Cuban ambassador incident depicted in Chapter 3, in which North Korean citizens hurled racial slurs toward the Cuban diplomatic corps, represents a wonderful example, since North Korea *officially* opposed racism. And while East Germany also opposed racism, racist or anti-foreign outbursts did occur, such as in 1988, when East German students bullied their North Korean counterparts living in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) because of their status as foreigners, refusing them entry into the dormitory while shouting slogans like "Germany, Germany!"[30] As another example, earlier that year, East German workers expressed xenophobic concerns over the announcement of 2,000 North Koreans who would come to the

[29] Brian Myers, *The Cleanest Race: How North Koreans See Themselves and Why It Matters* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Melville House, 2010), 6.

[30] Ministry for State Security, "Information Concerning an Incident at the Apprentice Dormitory of the VEB VTK," July 5, 1988, 32–33, BStU, MfS, HA II, Nr. 28998.

GDR to receive technical education, stating that the new arrivals might carry diseases such as AIDS.[31] North Korea was not unique in this regard. Incidents such as these therefore do not automatically translate into an accurate comparison between North Korean ideology and the Marxism-Leninism of East Germany or other socialist states. One must realize that one is merely studying official ideology and base all comparisons on this realization. Only then can one, unhindered by any worries about the deeper spiritual processes that might hide behind the façade of state-sponsored ideology, investigate one's true object of inquiry, establish accurate comparisons, and uncover its development in its historical immediacy.

Comparative Perspectives and Source Material

Throughout this study, East Germany will serve as a comparative reference point. The GDR is an excellent counterpoint to use in a study on North Korean intellectual history. As North Korea openly clashed with Soviet orthodoxy in the 1960s, East Germany remained loyal to the Soviet Union and ardently defended Soviet positions. In the 1940s and 50s, too, the East German communists loyally followed Soviet ideological leadership. Since it is often argued that North Korea indigenized the Soviet system, resisted the slavish pursuit of Soviet orthodoxy, and forwarded a uniquely Korean ideology, one would therefore expect plenty of diverging ideological lines between North Korea and East Germany. As the East German comparison shows, however, divergences, if they existed at all, were rather subtle and less extreme than is commonly assumed. This consequently de-particularizes North Korean ideology and reminds us of its relationship to the Marxist-Leninist tradition. Additionally, my own familiarity with East

[31] Ministry for State Security, "Information: Expression of Opinions Regarding the Training of Foreign Personnel in the GDR," April 5, 1988, 31, BStU, MfS, HA II, Nr. 28998.

German ideology and knowledge of the German language enables comparative insights usually unavailable in North Korean Studies. These factors are especially useful in the examination of North Korean ideology in the 1960s, since there exist plenty of East German archival documents that detail ideological conflict with North Korea during this time.

Besides East German archival documents collected by the author in the Federal Archives in Berlin, I also rely on translated archival materials drawn from the Cold War International History Project and the North Korea International Documentation Project at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. Without these resources, this study would have been unable to discuss North Korean ideology's evolution. Soviet, East German, Hungarian, Polish, Albanian, and Chinese contemporary records allow for a reconstruction of the complex international environment, the aims of historical actors, and the various ideological debates that took place behind closed doors. Through these materials, which had been inaccessible to scholars for a long time, it is possible to reevaluate our understanding of North Korean ideology and its transformation.

North Korean materials also constitute an important cornerstone of this study. *Kŭlloja* (the Worker), the theoretical organ of the Workers' Party of Korea, serves as my chief source for detecting the theoretical contents of ideological change. Published monthly, this periodical features detailed articles on North Korea's various ideological positions, revealing the theoretical rationalization of North Korean orthodoxy. One should avoid, as much as possible, reliance on Kim Il Sung's collected or selected works, as these underwent revisions over time and sometimes include forged speeches to make it seem as if the present ideological orthodoxy already existed in previous years. *Kŭlloja* is simply the best possible source when trying to determine how North Korean elites conceptualized their ideology at given points in time.

Political dictionaries are also helpful, given their concretization of ideological concepts, but since they were not published annually, their utility is limited.

Chapter Overview

Chapter 1 begins with an examination of Leninism during Korea's colonial period before moving on to the application of Marxism-Leninism in the northern regime's early days. From 1945 to 1955, North Korea consistently adhered to Soviet orthodoxy. The indigenization of the Soviet system was itself an orthodox practice. Ideologically, no sort of heterodoxy arose, not even in the case of Kim Il Sung's 1955 speeches. To the contrary, Kim tried hard to remain within the boundaries of Soviet orthodoxy, using Marxism-Leninism as a weapon to destroy his enemies.

In Chapter 2, I examine North Korea's reaction to the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Although the congress presented Kim Il Sung with challenges, especially due to Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin's personality cult, this did not result in a break with Soviet ideological leadership. Kim consistently attempted to situate himself within the framework of Soviet orthodoxy. It was only in December 1961 that Kim finally initiated a departure from Soviet ideological leadership with the proclamation of *charyŏk kaengsaeng* (self-reliance).[32] However, the reason for this break was more pragmatic than principled. A variety of factors—especially the danger continued loyalty to Soviet orthodoxy posed to Kim's grip on

[32] In translating *charyŏk kaengsaeng* (lit. "regeneration through one's own strength"), I followed the North Korean convention to translate the term as "self-reliance."

power—ultimately converged to commence an era of ideological independence from the Soviet Union.

North Korea's assertion of ideological independence is closely investigated in Chapter 3. This assertion at the same time involved a contestation of the Soviet Union's ideological leadership role in the world communist movement. Despite this, one should not exaggerate North Korean heterodoxy from 1962 to 1967. East German and other fraternal criticisms of North Korean ideology constituted a Marxist-Leninist interpretational struggle within a common intellectual tradition. It was a conflict over Marxist-Leninist universality. North Korean ideology did not change radically but instead redirected existing concepts to assert its ideological autonomy. North Korea's universalistic conflict was also closely linked to Kim Il Sung's maintenance of power. By tying universality and ideology closer to his person, Kim attempted to achieve ideological insulation, which, due to domestic and international factors, culminated in the declaration of the monolithic ideological system in 1967 and the rise of *chuch'e sasang* as Kim's personal thought.

Chapter 4 takes a look at the development of *chuch'e sasang* in the 1970s and 80s. Unlike most of the previous scholarship, I find nothing wholly original in North Korea's creation of a man-centered *chuch'e* philosophy. Rather, I read this ideological change as an effort to further solidify ideological insulation by silencing Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin, ascribing originally Marxist-Leninist doctrines to the creative genius of Kim Il Sung. To make this point, I challenge scholars' depiction of North Korean ideology as an idealism that is contrary to Marxist or Marxist-Leninist materialism. North Korea in fact relied on this materialism to rationalize its ideology and leadership. As an examination of East German ideology reveals, North Korea's *chuch'e* philosophy was firmly grounded in the Marxist-Leninist tradition.

CHAPTER I

THE SOVIET ORIGINS OF NORTH KOREAN IDEOLOGY (1945-55)

North Korean ideology was the offspring of Soviet Marxism-Leninism. Although newer studies have attempted to discover its origins in native soil, the historical evidence overwhelmingly suggests otherwise. For the first decade following liberation, North Korean ideology matched Soviet orthodoxy. Even Kim Il Sung's famed "*chuch'e* speech" in December 1955 features nothing unusual or heterodox. In these early years, North Korea certainly did develop characteristic political and economic features, often termed "indigenization," but this indigenization of the Soviet model did not imply a unique North Korean ideology, nor an independent ideological path. Besides, indigenization constituted a programmatic component of Soviet orthodoxy. Political and economic diversity was commonplace among the fledgling people's democracies after World War II. Ideological diversity, however, was much rarer. In fact, during Stalin's time, Eastern European states displayed more ideological initiative than North Korea, theorizing about alternative paths to socialism that did not follow the Soviet model. Kim Il Sung adhered to Soviet Marxism-Leninism, even as de-Stalinization trends began to threaten his position. He cleverly mobilized Soviet orthodoxy to consolidate his power and remove rivals from influential posts. Overlooked by most scholars, his 1955 speeches utilized the language of de-Stalinization. Rather than declaring ideological independence, Kim firmly planted his feet inside the framework of Soviet Marxism-Leninism, knowing that Soviet orthodoxy was his most potent weapon against factional opposition.

This chapter will begin with a brief review of Leninism in Korea. The Leninist framework ultimately became North Korean orthodoxy in the form of Stalin's Marxism-

Leninism, and Leninism's unification of class and national struggle informs North Korean ideology to this day. After liberation, Kim Il Sung, the Soviets' handpicked future leader of North Korea, loyally adhered to Stalin's wisdom, securing his power and legitimacy. The second section therefore takes a close look at North Korean ideology during Stalin's time and the implications for Kim's grip on power, drawing comparisons with Eastern Europe along the way. In the final section of this chapter, I will critically reexamine Kim Il Sung's 1955 speeches and the academic debate that surrounds them and evidence Kim's continued adherence to Soviet orthodoxy.

As those familiar with the literature may have already noticed, the thrust of this chapter seeks to dispel many of the standard notions about early North Korean ideology. In these first ten years, we cannot observe the emergence of a truly native ideology that was grounded in Korea's historical legacy or Kim Il Sung's historical experiences. In terms of official state ideology, the only discernable historical legacy was Leninism, and North Korea, at this point, did not develop that legacy beyond the boundaries of Soviet orthodoxy. An independent appropriation of Leninism did not occur. During this first decade, Soviet orthodoxy remained the norm. It was on the basis of Soviet orthodoxy that North Korean ideology later committed itself to an independent ideological path. As a result, understanding the Soviet origins of North Korean ideology is a crucial prerequisite to understanding later ideological developments.

The Leninist Legacy

Soviet Marxism-Leninism was not new to Korea in August 1945. From its inception during the colonial period onward, the Korean communist movement shared an intimate relationship with Soviet ideology. Marxism entered Korea through a Leninist filter, a filter that

emphasized the interconnection of class and national struggle, which later became a cornerstone of North Korean ideology and continued to play a crucial role during North Korea's move toward ideological autonomy in the 1960s.

As early as 1918, in the wake of the October Revolution, Koreans helped the Russian communists fight White forces, including the Japanese, in Siberia and the maritime regions.[33] After the failure of the March 1 Movement in 1919, Leninism rapidly expanded its influence inside and outside of Korea. Inspired by Wilson's call for national self-determination, Koreans from all walks of life protested Japanese rule on March 1, 1919, hoping to elicit international support for Korean independence. After the Japanese violently put an end to the uprising, no Western intervention occurred, and Korea's right to national self-determination failed to attain recognition. Seeing the hypocrisy of Western elites and their utilitarian proclamations of national self-determination, many Korean activists and intellectuals began to look elsewhere, to the Soviet Union.

It was in the Soviet Union that Lenin championed what he considered a genuine right to national self-determination, pointing out the charade of Western powers. According to Lenin, the oppression of other nations and their sovereignty was a natural outgrowth of imperialism, making the self-determination of nations not an absolute right, but a right derived from historical conditions that dictated the collapse of capitalism. And the highest stage of capitalism, Lenin said in 1917, was imperialism. He therefore rejected as impossible the existence of a tranquil system of nations respecting sovereignty and equality, insofar as that system remained capitalist, ergo imperialist, in nature. Because he relied on Marx's historical framework, Lenin's

[33] Mikhail Pak, "The Anti-Japanese Korean Independence Movement in Russian Territories: The 1920s and 1930s," *Korea Journal* 30, no. 6 (1990): 37–44. Pak's article, for the most part, contains serious bias, reflecting Soviet orthodoxy at the time.

identification of imperialism with capitalism held significant implications for Russia and the colonies. Imperialism, now identified as capitalism in its final stage, was part of a universal history that would ultimately result in communism. Nations oppressed by imperialism hence were oppressed in a universal way: their oppression constituted a manifestation of universal history, a history ultimately leading to imperialism's downfall. National liberation and national self-determination were therefore equally universal and, unlike imperialism, progressive. National liberation would speed up the inevitable course of history by dealing damaging blows to imperialism, eventually enabling revolution within the imperialist countries as well. In this way, one's national (i.e., particular) struggle was global (i.e., universal) and vice versa. Lenin's quoting of the Austrian Marxist Rudolf Hilferding illustrates this point vividly:

> In the newly opened up countries . . . the capital imported into them intensifies antagonisms and excites against the intruders the constantly growing resistance of the peoples who are awakening to national consciousness; this resistance can easily develop into dangerous measures against foreign capital. The old social relations become completely revolutionized, the agelong agrarian isolation of 'nations without history' is destroyed and they are drawn into the capitalist whirlpool. Capitalism itself gradually provides the subjugated with the means and resources for their emancipation and they set out to achieve the goal which once seemed highest to the European nations: the creation of a united national state as a means to economic and cultural freedom. This movement for national independence threatens European capital in its most valuable and most promising fields of exploitation, and European capital can maintain its domination only by continually increasing its military forces.[34]

Korea was equally drawn into this "capitalist whirlpool." No matter how backward one's nation might be, even if it had not yet achieved bourgeois revolution, a struggle for national liberation would propel one to the forefront of historical progress. Since capitalism was global, in the form

[34] Vladimir I. Lenin, "Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism: A Popular Outline," in *V. I. Lenin: Collected Works*, vol. 22 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974), 297.

of imperialism, oppressed nations were essentially converted into a super-proletariat—national and class struggle merged.[35]

One can easily see how appealing the Leninist framework must have been to many Koreans. It not only confirmed the hypocrisy of national self-determination as advocated by Western powers, but it also provided a facile formula that seemed like a "scientific" explanation detailing the historical necessity of liberation. In the face of the technological and economic prowess of Western powers, to designate Korea, through its fight for independence, as more progressive than imperialism surely stroked the national ego. The 1920s thus saw the rise of the Korean communist movement inside and outside of Korea.[36] While it was a disorganized movement riddled with factionalism, Korean independence was a common theme. For example, the 1921 Manifesto of the Korean Communist Party in Shanghai understood Japanese colonization in terms of a historical process in which national liberation represented the necessary future path. It was not liberation for liberation's sake, but liberation for the sake of history and human liberation in general, hence the manifesto's statement: "Our national emancipation movement is merely a step toward the ultimate purpose of social revolution."[37] These Koreans also felt united in a greater cause than simply their own liberation, a cause that concurrently catapulted them into a vanguard position in the quest for progress, line-in-line with

[35] Some of the most notable works reflecting Lenin's views on imperialism and national self-determination are the following: Lenin, "Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism: A Popular Outline."
Vladimir I. Lenin, "The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination (Theses)," in *V. I. Lenin: Collected Works*, vol. 22 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974), 143–56.
Vladimir I. Lenin, "Preliminary Draft Theses on the National and the Colonial Questions," in *V. I. Lenin: Collected Works*, vol. 31 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974), 144–51.

[36] For a thorough account of the Korean communist movement during the colonial period see: Dae-Sook Suh, *The Korean Communist Movement, 1918-1948* (Princeton (N.J.): Princeton University Press, 1967).

[37] Dae-Sook Suh, *Documents of Korean Communism, 1918-1948.* (Princeton (N.J.): Princeton University Press, 1970), 27.

the Soviets: "Our excitement over the Russian October Revolution is not without justification, because in carrying out the great task of the world revolutionary movement we feel that we are on the same footing with them. Thus, we share the same fate with the working masses of the world."[38] Colonial period documents authored by communists therefore often featured, one way or the other, Lenin's imperialism thesis: ". . . so long as the world bourgeoisie has a reserve power in the colonies in general, and in Asia in particular, so long will it be able to repulse the most desperate attacks of the rebellious proletariat [at home]."[39] In accordance with Lenin's ideas, the achievement of revolution in the advanced capitalist countries first required the liberation of the colonies, once again illustrating the fusion of class and national struggle. Given the ubiquity of such phraseology among Korean communists, it is fair to say that Leninism constituted the intellectual life-blood of the early Korean communist movement.

Korean Marxist intellectuals, too, were heavily influenced by Lenin and Stalin's thought. One might consider such intellectuals rather insignificant, seeing that the communist movement inside Korea met with repeated failures while intellectuals were unable to forge strong connections with the masses. This story of failure is the overriding theme of Suh's *The Korean Communist Movement*, a book suggesting that Kim Il Sung's eventual takeover was not indigenously rooted but simply thanks to the support of the Soviet Union and the mistaken tactics of Korea's domestic communists.[40] To a North Korean reader, on the other hand, the failure of the colonial communist movement might suggest the inevitability and legitimacy of Kim Il Sung as the only person capable of uniting Korea's progressive forces, confirming North

[38] Ibid., 28.

[39] This particular excerpt stems from a 1920 document. Ibid., 55.

[40] Suh, *The Korean Communist Movement, 1918-1948*, 113–14, 253–55, 311–14.

Korea's myths about Kim Il Sung and his guerrilla struggle. Evaluations of the colonial Marxist movement can easily lead to normative conclusions about today's division and, in the process, a fundamental point is missed. Namely, despite the failures, there subsisted a larger Leninist discourse arising in the years after the March 1 Movement, a discourse not even the Japanese could eradicate.

A Leninist discourse is particularly poignant when looking at intellectuals. Indeed, one cannot truly grasp the writings of colonial era Marxist intellectuals without considering the influence of Leninism. Translations of works by Marx, Engels, and Lenin into Korean began in earnest with the effort of the short-lived Irwŏrhoe (January Association), a staunchly Leninist faction, in the mid-1920s. Displaying their Leninist outlook and rationale for translating these works, one of the group's members stated: "Whenever we discuss Marxism today, when capitalism is collapsing and new wars of the imperial era are staged, we always talk about Leninism. . . . If we are to understand Leninism, we must understand Marxism, because Leninism has presented the world situation in a more developed way in accordance with Marxism."[41] To be sure, Korean intellectuals did not necessarily follow Soviet orthodoxy, and Leninism was not the only influence on Marxist intellectuals. Equally important were writings by Japanese authors—who attempted to rationalize colonization—concerning the stagnation found in Korean history.[42] Thus some Korean Marxists, such as Chŏn Sŏk-tam, rejected Stalin's five-stage view of history, according to which all societies pass through primitive communism, slavery, feudalism, capitalism, and finally communism. Instead, they argued that Korea pursued

[41] Jong-rin Park, "Irwolhoe and the Introduction of Marxism into Korea in the 1920s," *Korea Journal* 49, no. 1 (2009): 53.

[42] Owen Miller, "The Idea of Stagnation in Korean Historiography: From Fukuda Tokuzo to the New Right," *Korean Histories* 2, no. 1 (2010): 5.

a unique developmental path.[43] Such arguments, however, did not prevail in post-liberation North Korea, where Soviet orthodoxy reigned supreme. The historical interpretations of Paek Namun, perhaps the most prominent Marxist scholar of the colonial period and an adherent of the Stalinist model, ultimately carried more weight.[44] Paek, too, fought against Japanese historiography and its emphasis on Korea's stagnation. He contended that prior to Japanese colonization, Korea was beginning to enter capitalism, which was subsequently transplanted by Japan. As a result, like Lenin, Paek recognized an inseparable link between class struggle and national struggle, between universal history and Korea's particularity.[45]

Of course, this is not to undermine the creativity of Paek Namun and other Korean Marxists, but one should bear in mind the Leninist discourse that moved behind the scenes and, in the arena of politics, on the main stage. Korean communists during the colonial era, for the most part, adhered to the guidance of the Soviet Union by way of the Communist International (Comintern), even if communication between them was wanting. When the Soviets instructed an alliance between communists and nationalists in the 1920s, in the form of a united front, Korean communists listened. The very idea of such a united front, as Scalapino and Lee have shown in their history of Korean communism, "was one of the most fundamental tenets of Leninism, and was frequently reiterated via Soviet and Comintern channels from 1920 to 1927."[46] United front tactics should also be viewed in light of Lenin's imperialism thesis, according to which the national and class struggle were closely interlinked in colonial nations, consequently requiring a

[43] Ibid., 6–8.

[44] Ibid., 8.

[45] Henry Em, *The Great Enterprise: Sovereignty and Historiography in Modern Korea* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013), 119.

[46] Scalapino and Lee, *Communism in Korea*, 93.

mass-based movement to overthrow the colonizers. So many other notions championed by Korean communists, such as the entrainment of the peasants in the revolutionary struggle, all originated with Leninism.[47] None of this should mean that Koreans simply copied foreign ideas. Some might read Scalapino and Lee's work in the sense that Marxism was artificially imported into Korea, indirectly challenging newer scholarship stressing the creative transformation of Soviet ideas to suit Korean realities.[48] Yet no matter how one wishes to interpret the agency of Korean actors or the legitimacy of the system that emerged in North Korea, the overwhelming dominance of Leninism remains a fact of the colonial period and structured avenues for creativity. It was thus no coincidence that Paek Namun tried hard to depict Japan's monopoly capitalism and colonial exploitation, stressing the need for national liberation, ideas in line with the Comintern. While it is clear that nationalistic desires for liberation existed even without the presence of Leninism, Leninism channeled those desires in specific ways. With the rise of Stalin, his thoughts and interpretations of Leninism increasingly gained clout. By August 15, 1945, Korea's day of liberation, Stalin's image had divine status among communists around the world. Given the nature of liberation and Kim Il Sung's rise to power, it is not surprising that Stalin's Marxism-Leninism ultimately became the source of North Korean ideology.

North Korean Ideology Under Stalin

After World War II, Stalin ruled as the supreme helmsman of the world communist movement, who, through his alleged creative application and further development of Marxism-

[47] Ibid., 105–6.

[48] Charles Armstrong's history of postliberation North Korea is a prime example of the newer scholarship. Armstrong, *The North Korean Revolution, 1945-1950*.

Leninism, guided the Soviet Union and the peoples of the world along the necessary path of history. His person embodied concepts such as peace and friendship, uniting the world's progressive forces into a larger community that ultimately stood under his guidance. This was the ideal vision at the time of Stalin's passing, a vision that Max Zimmering, a well-known East German author, metaphorically recounted in his travelogue about the DPRK:

> There is no longer street than Stalin Avenue. . . . A single street, even though one has to adjust the clock eight times while traveling along it, because it runs straight across almost one hundred and twenty degrees of longitude toward the sun. Toward the sun! One can take this literally but also symbolically—it remains the truth. Korea, how close you are to us, though the globe may try to prove the contrary! Finally I have convinced myself of this, as I traversed the great Avenue of Peace, which carries the name of Stalin.[49]

In other words, Stalin's leadership was not simply global, but harmonized the global with the local, uniting countries such as the GDR and North Korea in common struggle. Whatever challenge faced by an individual people's republic was directly relevant to the overall health of the "peace camp," the term used to describe the mutual solidarity of the people's republics and the Soviet Union before it became the "socialist camp." And precisely this logic rationalized the aid rendered by Eastern Bloc countries during the Korean War (1950-53). The struggle for Korea's "national unity and independence," according to East German propaganda, was at the same time a struggle for the resolution of the German question and the maintenance of world peace, a view that North Korea mirrored.[50] The war in Korea, by defending against what was considered to be imperialist aggression, had become a question of world history, affecting all of the world's progressive forces, suddenly converting Korea's local (i.e., particular) struggle into a

[49] Max Zimmering, *Land der Morgenfrische* (Berlin: Kongress-Verlag, 1956), 7.

[50] Otto Grotewohl (Posthumous), "Overview of the Activities of the Korea-Hilfsausschuß until the Beginning of June 1952," June 9, 1952, 17–25, SAPMO-BArch NY 4090/481.
Otto Grotewohl (Posthumous), "Speech of Minister Chen Li Üh," June 13, 1952, 17–25, SAPMO-BArch NY 4090/481.

world-historical struggle of universal significance. And the person endowing Korea's struggle with universality was Stalin, who instructed that "peace can only be maintained if the peoples of the world take the cause of peace into their own hands and defend it to the utmost," a quote frequently repeated by East Germans and North Koreans alike during the Korean War.[51] In effect, Soviet-aligned states often referred to North Koreans as "heroes" fighting for the national cause and the cause of world peace—both were tightly interlinked and mediated by the "genius" of Stalin, whose guidance converted entire nations into effective historical actors.

An important source of legitimacy for communist leaders in the aftermath of WWII rested in their declarations of loyalty to Stalin and his ideas. At the Congress during which the Worker's Party of North Korea (WPNK), the precursor to the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK), was founded in August 1946, the Korean communists made Stalin "honorary chairman," as if all decisions passed by the Congress, such as the selection of a central committee, were directly sanctioned by Stalin.[52] Kim Il Sung, during the Soviet occupation period (1945-48), was essentially controlled by the Soviets and relied on their authority to gain and maintain power.[53] His political ascendancy, as we now know, constituted an installation, and it was Soviet backing that resulted in his occupation of key posts in government and party. Kim's ideological positions at this time were not derived from his guerrilla experience but from his Soviet advisors. As Andrei Lankov has demonstrated from Soviet archival documents, the Soviets directly supervised and instructed the north Korean leadership, from the writing of speeches to the

[51] Democratic Women's Union of Germany, Bundesvorstand, "Welcome Speech to the Women's Delegation Staying in Senftenberg," June 12, 1951, 70–71, SAPMO-BArch DY 31/1379.

[52] Dae-Sook Suh, *Kim Il Sung: The North Korean Leader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 75–78.

[53] Ibid., 78–79. Scalapino and Lee, *Communism in Korea*, 380.

creation of a constitution.[54] Even after the Soviet army left, Soviet support remained essential for Kim, especially during Stalin's reign. Like other communist leaders during this time, he utilized the image of Stalin and Stalin's approval to fortify his position. Gomułka, the reform-oriented communist leader of Poland, described this phenomenon aptly:

> The cult of personality cannot be confined solely to the person of Stalin. The cult of personality is a certain system which prevailed in the Soviet Union and which was grafted to probably all Communist Parties. . . . The essence of this system consisted in the fact that an individual, hierarchic ladder of cults was created. Each such cult comprised a given area in which it functioned. In the bloc of socialist states it was Stalin who stood at the top of this hierarchic ladder of cults. All those who stood on lower rungs of the ladder bowed their heads before him. Those who bowed their heads were not only the other leaders of the Soviet Union, but all the leaders of Communist and Workers' Parties of the countries of the socialist camp. The latter, that is, the First Secretaries of the Central Committees of the Parties of the various countries who sat on the second rung of the ladder of the cult of personality, in turn donned the robes of infallibility and wisdom. But their cult radiated only on the territory of the countries where they stood at the top of the national cult ladder. This cult could be called only a reflected brilliance, a borrowed light. It shone as the moon does.[55]

Stalin was the ultimate analyst of world history. He filled the role that Lenin and Marx had played decades before, enlightening the masses to the universality of their particular existence and to the steps they must take in order to realize their historically necessary liberation. Although local communists retained the power to analyze their particular national situation, in the end, their analyses needed the blessing of the universality revealed by Stalin. Steering a national course contrary to Stalin's universality was impermissible and might result in the

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[54] Andrei Lankov, *The Real North Korea: Life and Politics in the Failed Stalinist Utopia* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2013), 5–8. This evidence directly contradicts Armstrong's argument that Kim Il Sung was not "the handpicked puppet of Moscow."
Armstrong, *The North Korean Revolution, 1945-1950*, 55.

[55] Qtd. in Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Soviet Bloc, Unity and Conflict* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 65.

ousting of a local communist—as happened to Gomułka—by other local communists who hoped to replace the eclipsed moon.

Despite Stalin's preeminence, the Soviets did not wish to generate the impression that they were ruling over the newly emerging people's democracies or imposing their system, resulting in a united front policy. In the beginning stages, communists were not to rule directly but build broad coalitions with democratic forces, which communists could dominate. Looking at the case of Soviet-occupied Germany, for example, efforts to create a broad youth organization based on united front tactics began as early as 1945 and culminated in the 1946 foundation of the *Freie Deutsche Jugend* (Free German Youth; FDJ) while other youth organizations, even communist ones, were prohibited by the Soviet authorities.[56] That same year, social democrats and communists merged their parties to form the *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschland* (Socialist Unity Party of Germany; SED), which served as East Germany's ruling party up until its collapse. Similarly, in the northern half of Korea, because of Soviet pressure, the Democratic Youth League replaced the Communist Youth League in January 1946 and the WPNK emerged shortly thereafter through an amalgamation of the North Korean Communist Party with the New Democratic Party.[57]

United front policies killed two birds with one stone. For one, they generated legitimacy, since on the surface they seemed democratic and non-communist. Second, they allowed for the control over other parties and alternative political forces that could in the present or future challenge the communists. It was as if covering other parties with an umbrella, only to snap it

[56] Ulrich Mählert and Gerd-Rüdiger Stephan, *Blaue Hemden - Rote Fahnen: Die Geschichte der Freien Deutschen Jugend [Blue Shirts - Red Flags: The History of the Free German Youth]* (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 1996), 13–51.

[57] Scalapino and Lee, *Communism in Korea*, 374–75. Suh, *Kim Il Sung: The North Korean Leader*, 74.

closed over their heads. Communists thereby produced the appearance of speaking in the interests of the entire people, particularly by initiating progressive reforms that few could oppose. A nation-centered, patriotic way of thinking and speaking thus prevailed among communists all over globe, not just among Korean communists. As stated in the inaugural issue of the SED party newspaper: "The Socialist Unity Party of Germany is the truly national party of the German people [*Volk*], because her program serves the present and the future of Germany. She is an independent party, which has struck deep roots in the German working people, steers clear of alien influences, and has set as its highest law the welfare of the own people."[58] North Korean communists, especially in the 70s and 80s, could hardly have phrased it better.

In promulgating reforms and managing domestic affairs, the Soviets, at first, urged moderation and granted local communists extensive leeway. Socialist revolution, i.e., the transition from capitalism to communism, was impermissible before preceding historical stages were dealt with. While the East Germans, in correspondence with their national legacy, called for the completion of the 1848 revolution in the form of an anti-fascist, bourgeois-democratic revolution, in northern Korea communists proposed an anti-imperialist, anti-feudal democratic revolution. This is why, as Charles Armstrong points out as well, a united front policy, as advocated by Kim Il Sung, had defeated a more radical proletarian approach by early 1946.[59] Although Armstrong seems to suggest that this policy stemmed from Kim's own volition and experience, one should note that this was a Soviet policy. To disobey the Soviets would have meant an end to Kim's political career. Besides, to reject a copy of the Soviet system, to focus

[58] Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, "Manifest and das deutsche Volk [Manifest for the German People]," *Neues Deutschland*, April 23, 1946, 1.

[59] Armstrong, *The North Korean Revolution, 1945-1950*, 60.

on the national conditions, and to eschew proletarian dictatorship were commonly accepted notions after WWII, encapsulated in the concept of "people's democracy" (K. *inmin minjujuŭi*; G. *Volksdemokratie*), a notion North Korea, too, employed in its self-depiction.[60]

With the rise of people's democracy, the argument for the creative application of Marxism-Leninism to the local conditions—a crucial concept in the history of North Korean ideology and only too often misinterpreted as a North Korean invention—began to flourish and became an essential rationalization of people's democracy.[61] From the very start of the process often called Sovietization, diversity was the international norm, not the exception, so far that countries such as Bulgaria and Rumania initially retained their monarchies.[62] In charge of the SED's ideological affairs, Anton Ackermann exclaimed in 1946: "All the intellectual wealth from the Soviet Union and other countries which is at our disposal must be self-reliantly processed by us, be treated according to our own judgment, and find application in accordance with the particular German conditions. Thus we are a party that is politically independent and intellectually free."[63] Utilizing the creative application argument, Ackermann further proposed the thesis of a "German way to socialism" along democratic, parliamentary lines.[64] Klement

[60] Brzezinski, *The Soviet Bloc, Unity and Conflict*, 25–27.

[61] Ibid., 29.

[62] Ibid., 31.

[63] Frank Schumann, *Anton Ackermann: Der deutsche Weg zum Sozialismus [Anton Ackermann: The German Path to Socialism]* (Berlin: Das Neue Berlin, 2005), 168.

[64] Peter Grieder, *The East German Leadership, 1946-73: Conflict and Crisis* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1999), 9–11.

Gottwald, head of the Czech communists, along with other Eastern European communists, made similar statements around this time.[65]

While the Soviets were the ones who encouraged such talk, they subsequently became the ones who restricted it. In September 1947, the Communist Information Bureau (Cominform) was founded to better ensure ideological uniformity, and one year later Ackermann was forced to retract his thesis.[66] Although the Soviets still recognized the notion of creative application as valid, they now laid emphasis on the adoption of Soviet experience, Soviet leadership in the world communist movement, and proletarian dictatorship.[67] People's democracy, beyond simply constituting a coalition of democratic forces, signified "a new *form* of the dictatorship of the proletariat" by the end of 1948.[68] This was to formalize and rationalize the communists' seizure of the reins of power and begin to move from the bourgeois-democratic revolution to the socialist revolution. In Soviet thought, the dictatorship of the proletariat required constant strengthening during the construction of socialism, meaning the ever-increasing role of the party, its ideological unity, and the masses' loyalty to the party—a process historians frequently term Stalinization. East Germany's SED hence declared its commitment to this process with the September 1948 decision to construct a "party of the new type" (*Partei neuen Typus*).[69]

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[65] H. Gordon Skilling, "People's Democracy, the Proletarian Dictatorship and the Czechoslovak Path to Socialism," *The American Slavic and East European Review* 10, no. 2 (April 1951): 100–116.

[66] Grieder, *The East German Leadership, 1946-73: Conflict and Crisis*, 16.

[67] Brzezinski, *The Soviet Bloc, Unity and Conflict*, 71, 76.

[68] Ibid., 74.

[69] Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, "Aus dem Leben unserer Partei [On the Life of Our Party]," *Neues Deutschland*, September 17, 1948, 2.

In the case of North Korea, this shift in Soviet policy had no immediate effect. North Korea was already closely following Soviet leadership, and Kim Il Sung, at this point at least, was not talking about a special Korean way to socialism, making unnecessary any change of course or clarification. Articles featured in the WPK's theoretical mouthpiece, *Kŭlloja*, mostly talked about the Soviet experience while saying little about the theoretical implications for Korea's long-term developmental course. Besides the fact that North Korea's development lagged behind that of Eastern European people's democracies, the peninsula remained divided, making socialism an unlikely prospect. *Kŭlloja* articles from this time were therefore inundated with the words *minjujuŭi* (democracy), *chayu* (freedom), *chaju* (autonomy), *tongnip* (independence), *p'yŏnghwa* (peace), and *t'ongil* (unification). It is difficult to find talk about a socialist future and, by extension, the dictatorship of the proletariat. Such references primarily occurred in relation to the USSR.

One can assume that Stalin did not wish the construction of socialism to begin yet in a divided Korea, because he also consistently objected to such a motion in East Germany until his proposal for German reunification was declined by the Allies in March 1952.[70] Prior to this, East Germany's leader, Walter Ulbricht, was nevertheless eager to Stalinize the party in the face of moderate opposition from within, especially by social democrats, which is why he pushed for the party of the new type already in 1948. Ulbricht's attempts to Stalinize the party and move closer to the next historical stage ultimately led to polices that caused a crisis in East Germany, with

[70] Mählert and Stephan, *Blaue Hemden - Rote Fahnen: Die Geschichte der Freien Deutschen Jugend [Blue Shirts - Red Flags: The History of the Free German Youth]*, 59. Included in socialist construction was collectivization of agriculture. As Szalontai mentions as well, East Germany only started collectivization of its agriculture in July 1952.
Balázs Szalontai, *Kim Il Sung in the Khrushchev Era: Soviet-DPRK Relations and the Roots of North Korean Despotism, 1953-1964* (Washington, D.C.; Stanford, Calif.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press ; Stanford University Press, 2005), 28.

streams of people escaping to the West.[71] As a consequence, opposition inside the party became more vocal and the Soviets, shortly after Stalin's death in 1953, commanded the SED to cease the construction of socialism and focus on the creation of a "united, democratic and peace-loving Germany."[72]

Hopes for unification and the desire to win over the South Korean masses also help explain why North Korea hoisted the banner of unification and democracy instead of socialism before the outbreak of the war. With the Korean War, the construction of socialism made even less sense, especially since the WPK experienced considerable drops in membership.[73] According to Marxism-Leninism, a party first had to penetrate deep inside the masses, build a mass base, and maintain constant connection with the masses if it hoped to become a disciplined Marxist-Leninist party of the new type that could provide guidance in the path toward socialism. And the Korean War showed that mass support was wanting, given the absence of a mass insurrection against the South Korean regime as communist forces marched southward and the anti-communist sentiments that arose among the population in areas liberated by UN forces.[74] In November 1951, at the 4th Plenum of the central committee of the WPK, Kim Il Sung hence called for increased admissions into the party from wide segments of society, especially peasants.[75] Scalapino and Lee highlight this as well but miss an essential component of Kim's argument during the plenum, in which he denoted the WPK as a "revolutionary, Marxist-Leninist

[71] Mählert and Stephan, *Blaue Hemden - Rote Fahnen: Die Geschichte der Freien Deutschen Jugend [Blue Shirts - Red Flags: The History of the Free German Youth]*, 60.

[72] Ibid., 68.

[73] Scalapino and Lee, *Communism in Korea*, 408–9.

[74] Ibid., 411.

[75] Ibid., 408–9.

party of the new type [*sae hyŏng ŭi tang*]."[76] Although it seems premature for him to make such a statement, it clearly reveals the Stalinist rationale behind party membership consolidation: to bind the masses closer to the party (i.e., to himself), to inculcate party members homogenously with the party's ideology (i.e., his interpretations), and to generally increase his power. The transformation of the party into a Marxist-Leninist party of the new type meant, in the mind of a leading communist, the cleansing of impure elements and political opponents, since the party was to be the guiding force of the dictatorship of the proletariat, a dictatorship required in order to build socialism, oust class enemies, and prevent a comeback of the bourgeoisie. Not surprisingly, the following two years were marked by a rise in Kim's power and personality cult as he purged rivals and further consolidated his leadership.[77] Given the disastrous war, naturally, disloyalty among party comrades and the people threatened Kim. One should remember, North Korea went into the war as a people's democracy still undergoing bourgeois democratization, without the uniformity and discipline a regime building socialism strived for. While this move was to appeal to the South Korean masses, it also became a burden in the face of military defeat, which Kim Il Sung did not expect. Stalinization surely must have appealed to him in these dark times.

On February 19, 1952, Kim elaborated on the dictatorship of the proletariat in a crucial speech that reverberated widely.[78] Quoting from Stalin's "The Foundations of Leninism," he specifically chose to extract the part discussing the actions required for the maintenance and strengthening of the dictatorship of the proletariat:

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[76] Kim Il Sung, "Tang tanch'e dŭl ŭi chojik saŏp e issŏsŏ myŏt kaji kyŏljŏmdŭl e taehayŏ [On Some Defects in the Organizational Work of Party Organizations]," *Kŭlloja*, no. 72 (November 1951): 6.

[77] Scalapino and Lee, *Communism in Korea*, 436–52.

[78] Ibid., 423.

> a) to break the resistance of the landlords and capitalists who have been overthrown and expropriated by the revolution, to liquidate every attempt on their part to restore the power of capital;
> b) to organise construction in such a way as to rally all the working people around the proletariat, and to carry on this work along the lines of preparing for the elimination, the abolition of classes;
> c) to arm the revolution, to organise the army of the revolution for the struggle against foreign enemies, for the struggle against imperialism.[79]

On this basis, Kim stressed a close connection between the masses and the party as well as the need to prevent reactionary elements, pro-Japanese, pro-Americans, capitalists, and landlords from taking power.[80] He further argued that had the DPRK not already made great strides in the establishment of a strong people's regime prior to the war, all of Korea would be a colony once more.[81] However, Kim did not yet directly call for proletarian dictatorship or socialist construction in Korea. Instead, he described the present stage in terms of democratization, with the caveat that only by protecting what he called the "people's regime" can Koreans head down the path of democracy and socialism.[82] While this was an ambiguous depiction, the implications were clear: in due time, party rule (i.e., his rule) would be strengthened, enemies of the people eliminated, and socialism constructed.

Communist leaders knew very well the benefits of a socialist system. When peasants in the northern half of Korea received the land formerly owned by the landlord class, the communists may have won popular support for the time being, but peasant ownership of the land

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[79] Joseph Stalin, "The Foundations of Leninism," in *J.V. Stalin: Works*, vol. 6 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1953), 113.
Kim Il Sung, "Hyŏn kyedan e issŏsŏ chibang chŏnggwŏn kigwandŭl ŭi immu wa yŏkhal [The Tasks and Role of Local Government Organs in the Present Stage]," *Kŭlloja*, no. 75 (February 1952): 4–5.

[80] Kim Il Sung, "Hyŏn kyedan e issŏsŏ chibang chŏnggwŏn kigwandŭl ŭi immu wa yŏkhal [The Tasks and Role of Local Government Organs in the Present Stage]," 5.

[81] Ibid., 7.

[82] Ibid., 4, 8, 22.

was never meant as a long-term solution and not at all appropriate for the socialist stage. As in the Soviet Union and East Germany, the land was to be eventually collectivized. To change the masses' thoughts away from outdated ideology based on property, one had to transform the economic base.[83] Without regimenting their bodies into organized production, ideological control would remain insufficient. Thus, in the middle of 1953, North Korea launched collectivization.[84] This was done quite carefully at first. The mid-1953 crisis in East Germany that resulted from socialist construction policies, including collectivization, may have induced caution in the North Korean leadership, especially since the Soviets, in early June, issued a resolution condemning the SED's socialist construction program announced in July 1952.[85] Ulbricht's position was threatened as a consequence, and internal party opposition attempted to steer a different course. Although Ulbricht weathered the crisis, purged his rivals, and reinstituted the construction of socialism in July 1953, there remained numerous people who opposed his path and rather wanted to focus on reunification and "a special way to German socialism."[86] But both Ulbricht and Kim Il Sung knew that the path prescribed by Soviet Marxism-Leninism, not parliamentary democracy or any variant thereof, would solidify their regimes. The stage of bourgeois democracy had to end, even if such a transformation would realistically make a peaceful reunification based on a common democratic understanding near impossible, which is why many SED members opposed socialist construction at this point and

[83] Chong-Sik Lee, "Land Reform, Collectivisation and the Peasants in North Korea," *The China Quarterly* 14 (1963): 74.

[84] Ibid., 76.

[85] Benjamin Aldrich-Moodie, trans., "USSR Council of Ministers Order, 'On Measures to Improve the Health of the Political Situation in the GDR,'" June 2, 1953, AP RF, f. 3, op. 64, d. 802, ll. 153-161, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110023.

[86] Grieder, *The East German Leadership, 1946-73: Conflict and Crisis*, 77–89.

feared an aping of the Soviet system. And so, in April 1955, Kim Il Sung started to openly discuss the construction of socialism in the DPRK.[87] To obviate opposition, he made sure to stress his commitment to unification, arguing that the construction of the foundations of socialism in the north is necessary to achieve unification.[88] As he knew all too well and openly admitted, this socialist construction meant a "strengthening of the dictatorship."[89]

While we have already gone beyond the Stalin period, it is essential to grasp some of the core components of Marxism-Leninism under Stalin and how local communists employed these to their advantage. Even with de-Stalinization, notions such as the necessity of proletarian dictatorship did not disappear. In fact, as we will soon observe, ideologically speaking, not much changed, and, when change did occur, it was rather subtle. Understanding this period is also important because the loss of Stalin and the subsequent course taken by Khrushchev opened the door to a rethinking of ideological leadership. Under Stalin, there was no question, except among the Yugoslavian communists, as to whose ideological leadership reigned supreme. Once Stalin decided to limit the extent of creative application, there was little choice but to follow his injunctions. After all, local communists' own rule and cult of personality depended much on

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[87] Kim Il Sung, "Lenin ŭi haksŏl ŭn uri ŭi chich'im ida [Lenin's Theory is Our Guide]," *Kŭlloja*, no. 113 (April 1955): 4–12.

[88] Kim Il Sung, "Modŭn him ŭl choguk ŭi t'ongil tongnip kwa konghwaguk pukpanbu esŏ ŭi sahoejuŭi kŏnsŏl ŭl wihayŏ [All Efforts for Our Fatherland's Unification and Independence and the Construction of Socialism in the Northern Half of Our Republic]," in *Kim Il-sŏng chŏnjip [The Complete Works of Kim Il Sung]*, vol. 18 (Pyongyang: Chosŏn Nodongdang Ch'ulp'ansa, 1997), 5–6. This speech is from April 1955.

[89] Ibid., 16. In April 1955, the Soviets criticized Kim Il Sung's plan to construct socialism in the DPRK as premature and a poor strategy vis-à-vis the South. They instead recommended a united front policy to win over democratic forces in South Korea. According to their estimation, one should not yet "reveal the ultimate aims of the KWP," that is, socialism and proletarian dictatorship.
Gary Goldberg, trans., "Information on the Situation in the DPRK," April 1955, RGANI, Fond 5, Opis 28, Delo 314, listi 34-59, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114590.

Stalin's cult. Without the sunshine of Stalin, would the moon eclipse, be replaced by a new sun emerging from the Soviet Union, or become its own sun? Not just Stalin's death, but especially Khrushchev's denunciation of the former dictator in 1956 once again gave rise to the creative application argument. How far could local communists go in designing their own path? And what were the implications for Soviet ideological leadership in the world communist movement? While North Korea missed the first wave of the creative application debate that raged in post-war Europe, it became fully immersed in the second.

1955: The Academic Debate Surrounding Kim Il Sung's December Speech

The depiction I have provided thus far does not grant any real originality to North Korean ideology. In these early years, Eastern European states displayed more ideological creativity than North Korea, as can be seen by the "special German way to socialism" debate. Scholars typically fail to mention this fact and instead highlight, like Charles Armstrong, North Korea's indigenization of the Soviet system. While this indigenization is certainly true, it should not be exaggerated or extended to the realm of ideology. As previously stated, indigenization and diversity were international norms in the fledgling socialist world and encouraged by the Soviets. Furthermore, in the North Korean case, unique local applications did not mean a unique North Korean state ideology contrary to Soviet orthodoxy. But many would argue that from 1955 on, one can no longer talk about an imitation of Soviet Marxism-Leninism, for it was in that year that Kim Il Sung began to discuss *chuch'e*.

Most scholars agree that 1955 was a turning point in the history of North Korean ideology. In his speech on December 28, 1955, Kim Il Sung challenged those who "merely copy and memorize foreign things", arguing as follows: "We are not engaged in any other country's

revolution, but solely in the Korean revolution. This, the Korean revolution, determines the essence of *Juche* in the ideological work of our Party."[90] He further maintained that the DPRK should not simply imitate Soviet foreign policy.[91] Instead of copying Soviet experiences, party members should apply Marxism-Leninism "in a creative way to suit the specific conditions and national characteristics of our country." Failure to do so, he said, amounts to dogmatism.[92] Not surprisingly, scholars frequently stress the speech's nationalism, particularly given Kim's call to study Korean history:

> To make revolution in Korea we must know Korean history and geography as well as the customs of the Korean people. Only then is it possible to educate our people in a way that suits them and to inspire in them an ardent love for their native place and their motherland. It is of paramount importance to study and widely publicize among the working people the history of our country and of our people's struggle.[93]

Due to Kim's stress on the Korean revolution and the creative application of Marxism-Leninism, Charles Armstrong argues that the speech "marked in retrospect the beginning of North Korea's divergence from the Moscow-dominated international socialist community, a declaration of independence from Soviet control and influence."[94] Armstrong thereby directly challenges

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[90] Kim Il Sung, "On Eliminating Dogmatism and Formalism and Establishing Juche in Ideological Work: Speech to Party Propaganda and Agitation Workers, December 28, 1955," in *Kim Il Sung Works*, vol. 9 (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1982), 395–96. The Korean version of the speech reads more like, "We are not conducting another country's revolution but precisely our revolution. It is this, the Korean revolution, that is the subject [*chuch'e*] of party ideological work."
Kim Il Sung, "Sasang saŏp esŏ kyojojuŭi wa hyŏngsikchuŭi rŭl t'oech'ihago chuch'e rŭl hwangniphalte taehayŏ [On Eliminating Dogmatism and Formalism and Establishing the Subject in Ideological Work]," in *Kim Il-sŏng chŏnjip [The Complete Works of Kim Il Sung]*, vol. 18 (Pyongyang: Chosŏn Nodongdang Ch'ulp'ansa, 1997), 378.
Also compare with Myers' similar rendering: Brian Myers, "The Watershed That Wasn't: Re-Evaluating Kim Il Sung's 'Juche Speech' of 1955," *Acta Koreana* 9, no. 1 (2006): 97.

[91] Kim Il Sung, "On Eliminating Dogmatism and Formalism and Establishing Juche in Ideological Work," 401–2.

[92] Ibid., 404.

[93] Ibid., 396.

[94] Charles K. Armstrong, *Tyranny of the Weak: North Korea and the World, 1950-1992* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 90.

Scalapino and Lee's perspective, according to which this was less an attempt to gain independence vis-à-vis the Soviet Union than it was a move to oust internal opposition inside the party.[95] One author, Alzo David-West, goes even further than Armstrong, calling the speech "anti-Soviet," aimed to promote *sirhak*, a reformist Neo-Confucian school of thought, over Marxism-Leninism.[96]

There is one notable exception to the usual depictions of Kim's December Speech. Brian Myers contends that the speech was not a break with the past. He correctly points out the fact that Kim Il Sung, from the very beginning, had always emphasized national themes, which were not contradictory to statements affirming the Soviet model. Nor was there anything new about Kim's appeal to study Korea's history and cultural legacy.[97] Furthermore, already in April of the same year, Kim kept talking about the creative application argument.[98] When Kim mentioned *chuch'e* in his December Speech, he was essentially discussing the creative application of Marxism-Leninism, specifically in relation to ideological work. Myers recognizes this and also recognizes that the main thrust of the speech was against dogmatism and formalism, not *chuch'e*.[99] Before 1955, *chuch'e* chiefly meant "subject," as in the subject of history (i.e., man). Even colonial era Marxists like Paek Namun employed the concept in this way.[100] With Kim Il Sung's 1955 December Speech, *chuch'e* became tied up with the creative application theorem

[95] Ibid., 92. Nevertheless, Scalapino and Lee do see nationalism in the speech. Scalapino and Lee, *Communism in Korea*, 502–3.

[96] David-West, "Between Confucianism and Marxism-Leninism: Juche and the Case of Chong Tasan," 93, 96.

[97] Myers, "The Watershed That Wasn't: Re-Evaluating Kim Il Sung's 'Juche Speech' of 1955," 92.

[98] Ibid., 93.

[99] Ibid., 94.

[100] For a good summary of the history of the term, see: Myers, *North Korea's Juche Myth*, 10–14.

advocated by Soviet Marxism-Leninism.[101] The subject (i.e., *chuch'e*) of ideological work was the Korean revolution, not the Soviet revolution, meaning that Koreans should not ape the Soviet application of Marxism-Leninism, lest they commit dogmatism and formalism.[102] Since these types of argument were made throughout the bloc, Myers does not find it particularly nationalist or, at least, not any more nationalist than East German apparatchiki following Soviet recommendations by waving the banner of German "national consciousness."[103]

David-West has contested Myers' reading of the December Speech. Contrasting Kim's statements with Lenin's aversion toward nationalism, he holds that the speech was "a watershed" because it signified Kim Il Sung's resistance to de-Stalinization and a reassertion of "politically unreformed nationalist Stalinist program of *socialism in one country*."[104] Indeed, Myers sidelines the problem of de-Stalinization, weakening his argument, since one could claim that Kim was attempting to take a path away from the Soviet Union. I disagree with David-West, however. In the following pages, I will provide new insights to the existing debate surrounding the December Speech based on a more thorough understanding of de-Stalinization and the language involved.

De-Stalinization trends began to surface shortly after Stalin's death, emphasizing the creative application of Marxism-Leninism. If we recall, the creative application argument was prominent from 1945 until the autumn of 1947, when Stalin curbed creative approaches and exalted the Soviet experience above all. Although the creative application argument was not

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[101] Nevertheless, *chuch'e*, to this day, possesses the secondary meaning of "(historical) subject."

[102] Myers, "The Watershed That Wasn't: Re-Evaluating Kim Il Sung's 'Juche Speech' of 1955," 97.

[103] Ibid., 101–3.

[104] Alzo David-West, "Marxism, Stalinism, and the Juche Speech of 1955: On the Theoretical de-Stalinization of North Korea," *The Review of Korean Studies* 10, no. 3 (2007): 148.

renounced, it certainly became more limited in scope, given the ideological control Stalin wanted to achieve. This started to change after Stalin's passing in March 1953. According to Zbigniew Brzezinski, this necessarily developed out of the Stalinist system itself. During Stalin's reign, ideology directly corresponded with the person of Stalin, that is, he was the embodiment of orthodoxy, and his authority ensured ideological unity throughout the bloc. In this way, ideology and universality coalesced in Stalin's figure. After his death, since ideological unity could no longer be guaranteed by his authority, ideology itself became the means by which the Soviet Union sought to claim universality and achieve ideological unity. And to ensure other ruling parties' voluntary pursuit of Soviet ideological leadership, "the ideological framework linking the Communist states had to be made more elastic to permit greater variation in domestic policies within the context of over-all unity."[105] Increased leeway in domestic affairs would also guarantee regime stability, so Khrushchev thought.[106] In other words, indigenized (i.e., domestic) communism and de-Stalinization went hand in hand.

In 1955, Kim Il Sung was busily consolidating his power. Although facing an economic crisis due to agricultural failure, his speeches given in April nonetheless dealt with the creation of a party that would be able to lead the construction of socialism.[107] As previously discussed, these two interrelated programs—the establishment of a Marxist-Leninist party of the new type and the building of socialism—were highly desirable to communist leaders attempting to solidify their reigns. How strange it is, then, for Stalinization to be in full swing at a time when de-

[105] Brzezinski, *The Soviet Bloc, Unity and Conflict*, 155.

[106] Jonathan C. Valdez, *Internationalism and the Ideology of Soviet Influence in Eastern Europe* (Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 40.

[107] Chong-Sik Lee, *The Korean Workers' Party: A Short History* (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, 1978), 90.

Stalinization was striking deep roots in the Soviet Union. Kim Il Sung was keenly aware of Soviet reform trends. Members of his own party were learning about Soviet reforms, and, behind closed doors, fraternal diplomats criticized Kim's growing cult.[108] The Soviets also disapproved of Kim's failures in the economic realm and ultimately pushed him to make necessary adjustments.[109] Balazs Szalontai notes, however, that no de-Stalinization occurred in the political realm. Quite the opposite, Kim ousted more opponents.[110] Does this make Kim's moves in 1955 anti-Soviet?

One should bear in mind the academic nature of the term "Stalinization" and not exaggerate de-Stalinization measures. In and of itself, Khrushchev and other Soviet reformists found nothing wrong with the party of the new type. East Germany, for instance, adhered to this notion up until its collapse. Indeed, Khrushchev's reform program was more of a conceptual redirection than revolution. A quick glance at Eastern European party conferences from the early 1950s, before Stalin's death, reveals that most of Khrushchev's reform concepts were already in circulation. At East Germany's 3rd Party Congress in 1950, for example, we find mention of peaceful coexistence (K. *p'yŏnghwajŏk kongjon*; G. *friedliche Koexistenz*), inner-party democracy (K. *tangnae minjujuŭi*; G. *innerparteiliche Demokratie*), collective leadership (K. *chipch'ejŏk chido*; G. *kollektive Führung*), and a general attack against bureaucratism (K. *kwallyojuŭi*; G. *Bürokratismus*)—all of which later became core reform concepts.[111]

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[108] Gary Goldberg, trans., "Report from I. Kurdyukov to V.M. Molotov," May 11, 1955, AVPRF F. 0102, Op. 11, P. 65, Delo 45, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115702.

[109] Szalontai, *Kim Il Sung in the Khrushchev Era*, 73–74.

[110] Ibid., 74.

[111] Socialist Unity Party of Germany, "Stenographic Record of the Third Party Congress of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, July 20-24, 1950," July 1950, SAPMO-BArch DY 30/IV 1/III/1.

Bureaucratism referred to the dictatorial and aloof administration of the masses. The term's meaning did not change with Khrushchev, only its direction. In February 1956, Khrushchev finally identified bureaucratism with the reign of Stalin, but during Stalin's lifetime this identification was not the case.[112] To the contrary, Stalin's leadership was anti-bureaucratic, or as Wilhelm Pieck exclaimed: "We all recognize the Stalinist thesis that leaders do not just teach but should also learn from the masses."[113] There was nothing typically Asian, Maoist, or North Korean about this notion. It was used in the various people's democracies prior to and after Stalin's death.[114] In North Korea, as in China, this anti-bureaucratic notion was known as the mass line (K. *kunjung rosŏn*).[115]

Other concepts, too, underwent a redirection shortly after Stalin's death. In July 1953, the CC (central committee) of the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) convened at an important plenum to deal with the fallen Beria. Although not directly criticizing Stalin, the plenum condemned the violation of collective leadership in previous years as evidenced by the rare occurrence of party congresses and plenums. Relatedly, the plenum stated, "the role of the individual in history" was not apprehended in proper Marxist-Leninist terms. Instead, a "personality cult" (K. *kaein sungbae*, G. *Personenkult*) replaced the party's role as the "true leading power," resulting in a reduction of the masses' creativity. Incorrect education further

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[112] Nikita Khrushchev, "The Crimes of the Stalin Era: Special Report to the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union," *The New Leader*, 1956, 5, 57–58.

[113] Socialist Unity Party of Germany, "Stenographic Record of the Third Party Congress of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, July 20-24, 1950," 113.

[114] Scalapino and Lee also made this point. Scalapino and Lee, *Communism in Korea*, 457–58.

[115] The North Koreans used the expression "to go *into* [*sok ŭro*] the masses." This idea was quite Leninist as well. In one case, Kim Il Sung quoted from Lenin's "What Is to Be Done?" a phrase about *going among* the masses, which the North Koreans translated more in terms of *going into* the masses. In any event, the meaning is the same. Kim Il Sung, "Tang tanch'e dŭl ŭi chojik saŏp e issŏsŏ myŏt kaji kyŏljŏmdŭl e taehayŏ [On Some Defects in the Organizational Work of Party Organizations]," 4.

hurt the masses. They studied Marxism-Leninism "dogmatically" through rote memorization of quotes rather than "grasping the creative character of Marxism-Leninism."[116] Again, none of this was wholly new, but in light of internal power shifts and the experience of Stalin's terror, a redirection occurred, one which privileged the party over its top leader. This, too, however, is not to be exaggerated. In 1954, power was increasingly centralized in the person of Khrushchev.[117] For most of the people's democracies, as noted by Brzezinski, "Political concessions, such as the introduction of collective leadership, were essentially procedural and, unlike the USSR, did not involve a substantive change in the East European power picture."[118] Like North Korea, these regimes made economic concessions without corresponding political changes. And because collective leadership was a concept sanctimoniously celebrated before and after de-Stalinization, communist leaders did not necessarily have to jump through hoops in order to justify their continued rule, seeing the lip service given to the concept in previous years.[119]

Then why do we find Soviet and other fraternal criticisms regarding North Korea's lack of collective leadership in archival documents from 1955?[120] The mainspring of these criticisms was the economic crisis facing the DPRK. Naturally, the Soviets looked to the top policy-makers for blame, and there they found chiefly Kim Il Sung. They noticed the fact that he failed

[116] Office of Walter Ulbricht at the CC of the SED, "Resolution of the Plenum of the CPSU CC Concerning the Criminal and Anti-Party and Anti-State Activities of Beria," July 7, 1953, 1–17, SAPMO-BArch DY 30/3534.

[117] Brzezinski, *The Soviet Bloc, Unity and Conflict*, 168.

[118] Ibid., 159.

[119] Scholars of North Korea tend to exaggerate the novelty of de-Stalinization in order to evidence an emerging ideological split. Lankov, for example, describes collective leadership as a "post-Stalinist" notion. Andrei Lankov, *Crisis in North Korea: The Failure of De-Stalinization, 1956* (Honolulu, Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 71.

[120] Szalontai provides a good overview of these criticisms. Szalontai, *Kim Il Sung in the Khrushchev Era*, 70–75.

to introduce the cosmetic political changes that occurred in other people's democracies, still holding many key posts at once. It is fair to say that the political recalcitrance of the top leader was more severe in North Korea than Eastern Europe. When too much power was concentrated in one individual, the Soviets knew, the likelihood of mistakes grew and, if they occurred, they were amplified. A Stalin-like Kim Il Sung could not receive honest advice from the people around him, since they were either too afraid to speak up or simply believed silent obedience served their careers best.[121] To the Soviets, who did not wish to see a repetition of the 1953 Berlin uprising, collective leadership, even in a limited fashion, seemed like the obvious panacea. Yet no such uprising occurred and Kim, shortly after visiting Moscow in May and June 1955, did implement economic measures to relieve the situation, allowing the Soviets to turn a critical blind eye, at least for the moment.

Besides, Kim Il Sung did not oppose Soviet ideological orthodoxy. Unnoticed by so many scholars, rather than outright rejecting de-Stalinization trends, Kim used the language of de-Stalinization—which was not anything novel to begin with—to his advantage in consolidating the party and purging his rivals. His speeches in April particularly focused on the problem of bureaucratism. Not coincidentally, the Soviets had previously declared the WPK guilty of bureaucratism:

> It needs to be noted that the political and *organizational work* of the Worker's Party is at a low level, both inside the Party and among the masses. A *bureaucratic* attitude and abuse of authority predominate in the *work style* of Party and government bodies. The issues of *collective leadership*, the

[121] Gary Goldberg, trans., "Memo About the Situation in the DPRK," January 17, 1955, AVPRF F. 0102 Op. 11 P. 65 D. 45, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115798. Gary Goldberg, trans., "Report from V. Molotov and M. Suslov," January 17, 1955, AVPRF F. 0102 Op. 11 P. 65 D. 45, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115797.

> development of *Party democracy, criticism and self-criticism* are being poorly implemented in practical activity.[122] (emphasis mine)

In his speech "On Eliminating Bureaucratism," held on April 1, Kim demanded a closer connection between party and masses. He blamed lower-ranking party functionaries for failure to establish such a connection as a result of their commandeering attitude. In other words, they were guilty of bureaucratism.[123] While Kim acknowledged a bureaucratic work style in the party, inhibiting organizational work among the masses, he deflected blame away from the top leadership, stating that party policy was correct but improperly grasped and executed by functionaries, who were insufficiently steeped in Marxist-Leninist theory and negatively affected by the ideological remnants of feudalism, bourgeois thought, and Japanese rule.[124] The Soviets attributed the cause of such bureaucratism largely to the personality cult and lack of collective leadership. In their view, the commandeering started at the top and then moved downward. Preempting this charge, Kim highlighted the need to "strengthen collective leadership" and protect against the subjective authority of any single individual. "Bureaucrats," Kim stated, "are subjectivists."[125] Thus, "by strengthening collective leadership" on all levels, it is possible to

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[122] Goldberg, "Memo About the Situation in the DPRK."

[123] Kim Il Sung, "Kwallyojuŭi rŭl t'oech'ihalte taehayŏ [On Eliminating Bureaucratism]," in *Kim Il-sŏng chŏnjip [The Complete Works of Kim Il Sung]*, vol. 18 (Pyongyang: Chosŏn Nodongdang Ch'ulp'ansa, 1997), 41–43, 46.

[124] Kim also blamed remnants of capitalist economy. Ibid., 42–46, 49, 53.
Kim's strategy, however, was not unique to North Korea. As Stalin himself stated at the 15th Party Congress of the CPSU, the struggle against bureaucratism ends where it threatens to destroy proletarian power: "One must know the limits. To carry the struggle against bureaucratism inside the state apparatus so far that the state apparatus becomes completely impossible, so far that it is discredited, so far that one attempts to destroy the state apparatus—means to go against Leninism."
Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, "Die Verbesserung der Arbeit des Staatsapparates zur Erfüllung der Wirtschafts- und Verwaltungsaufgaben [The Improvement of the Work of the State Apparatus for the Fulfillment of Economic and Administrative Tasks]," *Neues Deutschland*, November 3, 1955, 4.

[125] Subjectivism meant one was clinging to one-sided, preconceived judgments and not acting in accordance with objective reality.

"eliminate bureaucratism." "Together with this," Kim went on, it is necessary to enhance "inner-party democracy" as well as "criticism and self-criticism."[126] All this was typical reformist language. One cannot stress enough the omnipresence of anti-bureaucratic arguments among communist leaders during this time. East German party newspapers from 1953-56 are littered with such discussions, attacking bureaucratism, demanding criticism and self-criticism, and blaming remnants of bourgeois ideology.[127] Kim was astute to coopt this language while directing blame away from his person, for this made an attack against him more difficult and supplied him with legitimate weapons to cleanse opposition. As Szalontai shows, even the Hungarians positively evaluated the 1955 purges "as steps toward collective leadership."[128] Kim's strategy seemed to be working.

Kim Il Sung employed the same strategy in his now-famous December speech. In what later became the renewed concept of peaceful coexistence, the Soviets during this time were tending toward an easing of tensions with the United States. Pak Yŏng-bin, a politburo member of the WPK, apparently came under the influence of this Soviet policy as Kim Il Sung's attack during his speech indicates:

> Pak Yong Bin [Pak Yŏng-bin], on returning from the Soviet Union, said that as the Soviet Union was following the line of easing international tension, we should also drop our slogan against U.S. imperialism. Such an assertion has nothing to do with revolutionary initiative. It would dull our people's revolutionary vigilance. The U.S. imperialists scorched our land, slaughtered our innocent

[126] Kim Il Sung, "Kwallyojuŭi rŭl t'oech'ihalte taehayŏ [On Eliminating Bureaucratism]," 54. This was not the only April speech in which Kim talked about collective leadership and inner-party democracy. See for example: Kim Il Sung, "Modŭn him ŭl choguk ŭi t'ongil tongnip kwa konghwaguk pukpanbu esŏ ŭi sahoejuŭi kŏnsŏl ŭl wihayŏ [All Efforts for Our Fatherland's Unification and Independence and the Construction of Socialism in the Northern Half of Our Republic]," 16.

[127] For example see: Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, "Die Verbesserung der Arbeit des Staatsapparates zur Erfüllung der Wirtschafts- und Verwaltungsaufgaben [The Improvement of the Work of the State Apparatus for the Fulfillment of Economic and Administrative Tasks]," 4.

[128] Szalontai, *Kim Il Sung in the Khrushchev Era*, 81.

> people, and are still occupying the southern half of our country. They are our sworn enemy, aren't they? It is utterly ridiculous to think that our people's struggle against the U.S. imperialists conflicts with the efforts of the Soviet people to ease international tension. Our people's condemnation of and struggle against the US imperialists' policy of aggression against Korea are not in contradiction with, but conducive to the struggle of the peoples of the world to lessen international tension and defend peace. At the same time, the struggle to ease tension on the part of the peace-loving people the world over, including the Soviet people, creates more favourable conditions for the anti-imperialist struggle of our people.[129]

Scholars typically interpret this as indicative of Kim's anti-Soviet tendencies. The historical evidence, however, suggests otherwise. Peaceful coexistence was officially reinterpreted at the 20th Congress of the CPSU in February 1956, where Khrushchev made the concept part and parcel of his analysis of the current epoch and therefore binding to other parties as well (see next chapter). At this point, peaceful coexistence still retained its old meaning. Before the 20th Congress, peaceful coexistence only referred to general principles of interstate relations with *non-hostile* countries, especially postcolonial ones. In the mid-1950s, the Chinese Communists assigned special importance to the concept and were particularly supportive of it as can be seen on hand of peaceful coexistence's enshrinement in the 1954 China-India Agreement and the 1955 Bandung Conference. As a result, Kim's statement was not anti-Soviet by any stretch of the imagination. Events in Hungary confirm this as well. In April 1955, Rákosi, a Stalinist, ousted the reform-minded Imre Nagy, an action the Soviets supported. Among other charges drafted with Soviet help, Nagy was found guilty of "overestimating the easing of tensions in international affairs."[130] Besides, copying Soviet policies without any adjustment was frowned upon as a violation of the creative application principle. As previously stated, the creative

[129] Kim Il Sung, "On Eliminating Dogmatism and Formalism and Establishing Juche in Ideological Work," 401–2.

[130] Qtd. in Brzezinski, *The Soviet Bloc, Unity and Conflict*, 218.

application argument, which Kim utilized in the course of the speech, was orthodox. On July 16, 1955, Khrushchev himself said as follows: "The historical experience of the Soviet Union and of the People's Democracies shows that, given unity in the chief fundamental matter of ensuring the victory of socialism, various ways and means may be used in different countries to solve the specific problems of socialist construction, depending on the historical and national features."[131] Indeed, although the creative application argument represented a useful tool for reformist communists, it was just as good a tool for conservatives in rationalizing their non-reformist course—the creative application argument, in and by itself, contained no heterodoxy.

Dogmatism, the main topic of Kim's December speech, was also de-Stalinization language. Reformers used the term to attack those who refused de-Stalinization.[132] As in the case of other de-Stalinization concepts, this concept, too, was nothing new, utilized by communists before and after Stalin's death. Stalin himself emphasized the dangers of dogmatism in his 1950 work "Marxism and Problems of Linguistics," which communists frequently cited in the early 1950s:

> Marxism is the science of the laws governing the development of nature and society, the science of the revolution of the oppressed and exploited masses, the science of the victory of socialism in all countries, the science of building communist society. As a science, Marxism cannot stand still, it develops and is perfected. In its development, Marxism cannot but be enriched by new experience, new knowledge—consequently some of its formulas and conclusions cannot but change in the course of time, cannot but be replaced by new formulas and conclusions, corresponding to the new historical tasks. Marxism does not recognize invariable conclusions and formulas, obligatory for all epochs and periods. Marxism is the enemy of all dogmatism.[133]

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[131] Qtd. in Ibid., 172.

[132] Leszek Kolakowski and P. S. Falla, *Main Currents of Marxism: Its Rise, Growth, and Dissolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 1153.

[133] Joseph Stalin, "Marxism and Problems of Linguistics" (Stalin Reference Archive (marxists.org) 2000, 1950), https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1950/jun/20.htm.

Since dogmatism meant copying formulas or experiences without regard for the unique circumstances in one's country, without adjustment to the changing times, it represented the antithesis of the creative application of Marxism-Leninism. It is conceivable that Kim's rivals considered assaulting his decisions using those terms. After all, one could easily have argued that Kim's determination to construct socialism and collectivize agriculture stemmed from a dogmatic copying of the Soviet model, which is perhaps why during the speech he pointed out that the DPRK's speed of collectivization matched the particular historical conditions of the country.[134] Plus, given his adulation of all things Soviet in earlier years, the accusation of dogmatism would not have been too farfetched.

The nationalist overtones of the speech, too, did not defy Soviet orthodoxy. Dogmatism further implied a disregard for one's own nation, such as ignoring the progressive elements in one's national history and heritage. East Germany's SED, for example, condemned as "dogmatism" when students of theater ignored the "national cultural heritage" and simply copied the methods of the Soviet artist Konstantin Stanislavski.[135] Mirroring such an argument, Kim Il Sung criticized the lack of attention scholars gave to Korean history and culture.[136] A comparison with East German positions from around the same time is enlightening. In March 1954, the GDR Ministry of Culture decreed as follows: "The main goal of German cultural politics lies in the cultivation of our national culture's immortal historical heritage."[137] East

[134] Kim Il Sung, "Sasang saŏp esŏ kyojojuŭi wa hyŏngsikchuŭi rŭl t'oech'ihago chuch'e rŭl hwangniphalte taehayŏ [On Eliminating Dogmatism and Formalism and Establishing the Subject in Ideological Work]," 384–85.

[135] Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, "Theorie und Praxis gehören zusammen [Theory and Practice Belong Together]," *Neues Deutschland*, July 10, 1954, 4.

[136] Szalontai provides an example of Hungarian criticism concerning the lack of nativism in Korean art in 1954. This further indicates Kim's orthodoxy. Szalontai, *Kim Il Sung in the Khrushchev Era*, 79.

[137] Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, "Programmerklärung des Ministeriums für Kultur der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik zur Verteidigung der Einheit der deutschen Kultur [Programmatic

German propaganda appropriated bourgeois authors like Goethe and Schiller, casting them in the framework of historical materialism: "The life and work of Schiller is marked by a struggle against the fragmentation of Germany, by the struggle against feudal oppression and for the formation of a nation-state based on freedom and democracy." The SED further claimed to have inherited the humanistic and progressive traditions of such authors: "The German working class, led by the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, realizes the best patriotic and humanistic ideas of the German freedom-poet Friedrich Schiller."[138] This did not imply that the SED's real ideology was Schillerism, just as Kim's exhortation to study Korean works did not imply some type of Confucianism. Marxist-Leninist parties, in order to generate a true national history, needed to frame that history in terms of historical materialism. Since the bourgeois stage immediately preceded the socialist transitional stage, praises for certain elements in bourgeois authors' thinking, especially those that seemed anti-feudal or primitively socialist, was not unusual.

Kim's advocacy of "socialist patriotism" (K. *sahoejuŭijŏk aegukchuŭi*; G. *sozialistischer Patriotismus*) in the speech was also not unusual. According to the speech:

> Internationalism and patriotism are inseparably linked with each other. You must realize that the love Korean Communists bear for their country does not conflict with the internationalism of the working class but fully conforms with [*sic*] it. Loving Korea is just as good as loving the Soviet Union and the socialist camp and, likewise, loving the Soviet Union and the socialist camp is just as good as loving Korea.[139]

Declaration of the GDR's Ministry of Culture Concerning the Defense of the Unity of German Culture]," *Neues Deutschland,* March 25, 1954, 4.

[138] Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, "Über die Aufgaben der Partei im Schiller-Jahr [Concerning the Tasks of the Party During the Schiller-Year]," *Neues Deutschland,* April 2, 1955.

[139] Kim Il Sung, "On Eliminating Dogmatism and Formalism and Establishing Juche in Ideological Work," 404–5.

This statement is easy to misinterpret if unfamiliar with Marxism-Leninism. Hongkoo Han suggests the statement's spirit goes back to Kim's guerrilla struggle.[140] Similarly, Dae-Sook Suh reads socialist patriotism as a mere display of nationalism and seems to think it is a uniquely North Korean concept.[141] Gi-Wook Shin traces the concept to Mao Zedong and his thoughts about the national liberation struggle but fails to see the Soviet origins. He further contends that socialist patriotism, in the North Korean context, simply meant ethnic nationalism.[142] While an ethnic nationalism may have been prevalent in North Korea, for the purposes of intellectual history it is misleading to characterize a concept as something which it never professed itself to be. By imposing one's own interpretation, one effectively severs the concept from its intellectual space. Socialist patriotism, in fact, was a global Marxist-Leninist concept.[143] The East Germans, too, advocated the concept up until the GDR's collapse:

> Today, under the new conditions, the patriotism of the working class, inseparable from proletarian internationalism, has become an extraordinarily effective and mighty weapon. . . . The Internationalism of the working class is, as previously stated, an expression of the common interests of workers from all countries in their struggle against a common enemy, capitalism. It is an expression of their common goal, which consists of the elimination of the exploitation of man by man, an expression of their common ideology, the ideology of friendship and brotherly solidarity of peoples.[144]

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[140] Hongkoo Han, "Colonial Origins of Juche: The Minsaengdan Incident of the 1930s and the Birth of the North Korea-China Relationship," in *Origins of North Korea's Juche: Colonialism, War, and Development*, ed. Jae-Jung Suh (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2013), 56.

[141] Suh, *Kim Il Sung: The North Korean Leader*, 304, 309–10.

[142] Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy*, 83–84, 88.

[143] For whatever reason, Scalapino and Lee appear to recognize this whereas subsequent authors usually do not. Scalapino and Lee, *Communism in Korea*, 502.

[144] Friedrich Günther and J. A. Arbatow, *Grundlagen des Marxismus-Leninismus: Lehrbuch* (Berlin: Dietz, 1960), 514–15.

According to Marxism-Leninism, patriotism advances internationalism because by building socialism in one's country, one moves history forward, thereby advancing the world revolution—patriotism was implicitly international.[145] It was frequently termed "socialist" patriotism because of its class nature and to distinguish it from bourgeois nationalism. Communists supposedly did not hate entire peoples, as a bourgeois nationalist would, but only the class enemy. Socialist patriotism was socialist because it meant love for the nation—or as the East Germans stated, "love for the homeland [*Heimat*], love for the fatherland [*Vaterland*]"—and the socialism built within it.[146] Hence, on this count as well, Kim Il Sung said nothing novel in 1955.

The significance of Kim's 1955 December speech lies not in nationalism. Although the speech certainly contained what we might consider nationalism, albeit a very Soviet-oriented nationalism, this is not what gave the speech its power. It was Kim's adherence to Soviet orthodoxy, not his departure from it, that infused his words with force. He displayed an astonishing aptitude for manipulating Marxist-Leninist rhetoric to serve his needs. As in April, Kim shrewdly attacked his enemies with the concepts they probably hoped to use against him. Thus he even attacked Pak Ch'ang-ok for having used too much of the hyperbolic language so typical of Stalinism. Kim specifically targeted frequent use of terms/prefixes signifying "all/fully" (*ch'ong*), "great" (*tae, widaehada*), and "most" (*ch'oe*). Indeed, North Korean authors often referred to Lenin and Stalin as "great" (*widaehan*). When Kim declared the immediate termination of this habit, those in attendance surely must have been aware of the

[145] De-Stalinization did not declare Stalin's "socialism in one country" heterodox. To the contrary, the concept grew stronger as a result of Khrushchev's encouragement of domesticism.

[146] Waltraud Böhme et al., *Kleines politisches Wörterbuch [Small Political Dictionary]* (Berlin, 1989), 744.

irony.[147] Like other communist leaders, he utilized the not-so-new language of de-Stalinization to achieve Stalinist goals. Kim knew that de-Stalinization arguments were his opponents' strongest weapon. What better way to win a battle than to turn your enemy's weapon against him?

In the final analysis, we cannot yet talk about an independent ideological path at the end of 1955. Although we can certainly detect signs of political independence, as seen by North Korea's refusal to free masses of political prisoners like most of the Eastern European regimes, this did not translate into an ideological independence, at least not yet.[148] Kim adhered to Soviet orthodoxy. Even if at times adherence was superficial, it was adherence nonetheless. Marxism-Leninism could be spun many ways, as Eastern European Stalinists knew as well. Communist leaders, to stay in power, needed to be experts in this art. One did not need theoretical expertise or a high education in order to use Marxism-Leninism. It was a body of tenets, slogans, and formulas one could easily acquire without ever reading a single page of Marx. Independently reading Marx might in fact prove dangerous, since it could lead to conclusions heterodox by Soviet standards. At this point, ideological creativity could not guarantee one's position in the party. It would merely serve as a *casus belli* to those who strove for that position.

[147] Kim Il Sung, "Sasang saŏp esŏ kyojojuŭi wa hyŏngsikchuŭi rŭl t'oech'ihago chuch'e rŭl hwangniphalte taehayŏ [On Eliminating Dogmatism and Formalism and Establishing the Subject in Ideological Work]," 390–91.

[148] The comparison concerning the freeing of political prisoners was pointed out by Szalontai.
Szalontai, *Kim Il Sung in the Khrushchev Era*, 80.

CHAPTER II

THE PROBLEM OF SOVIET IDEOLOGICAL LEADERSHIP (1956-61)

An official break from Soviet orthodoxy did not occur in 1955 nor the following year. Not even North Korea's reaction to the 20th Congress of the CPSU involved such a break. In fact, it was only in December 1961 that North Korea finally decided to openly contest Soviet orthodoxy. While it seems quite late, up until then, North Korea, even if at times superficially, adhered to Soviet orthodoxy. Unfortunately, because most previous studies exaggerate the heterodoxy of earlier ideological developments, especially Kim Il Sung's speech from December 1955, they fail to appreciate or recognize the watershed that occurred in 1961/62. The present chapter overlaps with the studies of Andrei Lankov and Balazs Szalontai, who relied on many of the same archival materials used here.[149] Though at times unavoidable, I tried as much as possible not to needlessly repeat what they have already covered in great detail and instead focus on the hitherto neglected or misread ideological side of historical developments. Hence, in contrast to those studies, this chapter aims to provide a thorough and nuanced account of North Korean ideology's relationship with Soviet Marxism-Leninism from 1956 to 1961, reconceptualizing the notion and periodization of an ideological break.

How do we determine what does and does not constitute a break? Of course this can quickly descend into a subjective judgment based on an arbitrary reading of North Korean and Soviet ideology. It is indeed easy to detect heterodoxy if one is actively looking for it, potentially leading to an anachronistic or atemporal analysis of North Korean ideological statements. For example, it is anachronistic to consider heterodox Kim Il Sung's criticism of Pak

[149] See: Lankov, *Crisis in North Korea*. And: Szalontai, *Kim Il Sung in the Khrushchev Era*.

Yŏng-bin's call to reduce North Korea's militancy vis-à-vis the United States as explained in the previous chapter. Neither Kim Il Sung nor the Soviets at this point believed North Korea was breaking with or challenging Soviet orthodoxy. To obviate mistaken evaluations, it behooves us to examine what historical actors themselves said, whether or not they even thought of orthodoxy or heterodoxy and to what degree. Owing to our access to archival materials from former socialist states, this has become a feasible endeavor. It is now more possible than ever to judge North Korean ideology in its historical immediacy. The boundary between orthodoxy and heterodoxy was actually quite fluid, changing with the historical situation and the aspirations of individual historical actors. As this chapter will demonstrate, *perceived* adherence and non-adherence to Soviet ideological leadership determined the judgment about orthodoxy or heterodoxy. Because in December 1961 Kim Il Sung chose to break free from Soviet leadership, it becomes possible to talk about heterodoxy, though, as the next chapter reveals, even this heterodoxy ought not be overestimated.

Why did a challenge to Soviet ideological leadership occur so late? To be sure, ideological frictions and incongruencies between North Korea and the USSR surfaced before 1961, but they do not warrant the designation of a break, since Kim Il Sung did not yet directly challenge Soviet ideological leadership in the world communist movement. Instead, despite brewing ideological disagreements, Kim Il Sung attempted to fit North Korean ideology within the framework of Soviet ideological leadership. In the end, a convergence of factors led to the rejection of Soviet suzerainty in ideological matters. Arguably the most important factor was the threat Kim's continued loyalty to the Soviets posed to his regime by 1961 as a consequence of the Sino-Soviet split and its ideological polarization, which began to curtail North Korea's policy flexibility while simultaneously raising the standards that determined orthodoxy vis-à-vis Soviet

Marxism-Leninism. As a result, Kim Il Sung resolved to declare independence from Soviet ideological leadership, following a path of ideological insulation that combined Marxist-Leninist universality with his personal ideological leadership.

The Impact of the 20th CPSU Congress

On February 25, 1956, during the 20th Congress of the CPSU, Khrushchev held his infamous Secret Speech, otherwise entitled "On the Personality Cult and Its Consequences." He denounced the cult of Stalin and the exaggeration of the individual leader's role in the making of history. The party, he argued, ought to return to the purity of Lenin's model and adhere to the collective leadership of the party's central committee (CC). This meant a pursuit of party rules, such as the regular convening of party plenums and congresses and free consultation among central committee members without fear of reprisals by the first secretary (or chairman, as he was referred to in some parties). Those cadres who refused to follow the central committee, including its members, should be reeducated rather than killed. For Khrushchev, party unity was still the goal, but a goal that could only be achieved through the reeducation of dissenters, self-criticism, inner-party democracy, and democratic centralism. Terrorizing party members would only exacerbate the disunity of the party and cause the masses to lose faith in its leadership. Indeed, Khrushchev thought the personality cult, due to its promotion of bureaucratism, had led to a rift with the masses. Stalin imperiously dictated to those below him, neither knowing the concrete situation nor conducting inspection tours to verify it. This behavior trickled downward, causing bureaucratism at all levels of government and party. The outcome was the party's divorce from the masses, whose creative powers were stifled by incorrect methods of leadership and by the fact that all the people's achievements were ascribed to Stalin. While the masses

constitute "the creator of history," Khrushchev stated, it is the party, not a heroic individual, who plays "the decisive role" in revolution.[150]

Khrushchev's speech contained tremendous implications for other communist leaders. Not only had they previously adulated Stalin but many of them nurtured their own personality cults. This may not have seemed like a big issue, since, after all, it was an internal Soviet problem. However, the Soviets expected communist leaders to praise and implement in their own work those decisions of the 20th Congress that dealt with the universality of Marxism-Leninism and the analysis of the current epoch. It was a tradition rationalized by the CPSU's age, experience, and vanguard position in the world communist movement. And since the Soviets considered Leninist party norms fundamental to the eternal truth of Marxism-Leninism, and since other parties were required to learn from the Soviet experience, a discussion of the personality cult was mandatory. Besides, Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin constituted an attempt to fortify his ideological authority. It was now up to other parties to display their loyalty to the world's foremost communist. Having habitualized subservience to Soviet ideological leadership, communist leaders therefore voiced their support for the 20th Congress and tried to find a way to broach its contents without threatening their grip on power.

For Kim Il Sung, the CPSU Congress could not have come at a worse time. He had only recently attacked prominent Soviet Koreans and was attempting to curb this group's ability to denounce him by means of Soviet reform trends.[151] Kim was clearly paying close attention to

[150] Khrushchev, "The Crimes of the Stalin Era: Special Report to the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union."

[151] In the historiography, it is common to distinguish between the Soviet and Yan'an factions. Soviet Koreans were individuals brought up in the Soviet Union during the colonial period, and Yan'an Koreans sided with Mao in the Chinese Civil War and spent time in the Chinese communists' Yan'an base. I have to thank James F. Person for pointing out to me that the supposed members of these factions did not necessarily think of themselves as belonging to either a Soviet or a Yan'an faction. It appears that these designations arose in an effort by Kim Il Sung to better

the proceedings of the congress, which opened on February 14, because on February 18, one week prior to the Secret Speech, he assembled important central committee members and informed them about the DPRK media's incorrect coverage of the role of the individual. He complained about the overblown portrayals of his figure, commanding that such errors be corrected.[152] Kim's move appears to have been a direct reaction to the 20th Congress, since Khrushchev's report a few days earlier had criticized the personality cult as "alien to the spirit of Marxism-Leninism," although not yet directly linking Stalin to the personality cult.[153] Nevertheless, in the North Korean press, speeches by Soviet statesmen during the congress were censored with regard to the personality cult.[154] As revealed by Pak Ch'ang-ok, one of the leading Soviet Koreans, in a conversation with the Soviet ambassador to the DPRK on March 12, although top party members were busily reviewing the speeches held at the 20th Congress and actively discussing the personality cult, Kim demanded silence on the issue in relation to problems within the WPK—only he was to bring up the topic.[155]

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eliminate his rivals. After all, Marxism-Leninism condemned the existence of factions, as can be seen in the Soviet case of the *Mensheviki*.

[152] Gary Goldberg, trans., "Record of a Conversation between Soviet Embassy Counsellor S. Filatov and DPRK Vice Premier Pak Ui-Wan," February 21, 1956, RGANI Fond 5, Opis 28, Delo 412, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/120772.

[153] Nikita Khrushchev, *Report of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union to the 20th Party Congress* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1956), 122.

[154] Gary Goldberg, trans., "Record of a Conversation with DPRK Minister of Construction Kim Seung-Hwa by Soviet Embassy Counsellor in the DPRK S. N. Filatov, 5 March 1956," March 5, 1956, RGANI Fond 5, Opis 28, Delo 412, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/120797.

[155] James F. Person, trans., "Memorandum of Conversation with the DPRK Vice Premier of the Cabinet of Ministers and Member of the KWP CC Presidium, Pak Chang-Ok," March 12, 1956, RGANI Fond 5, Opis 28, Delo 410, Listy 73- 85, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111637.

An official discussion of the personality cult and its relationship to the WPK ensued at the 3rd Congress of the WPK in late April. In his report, Kim Il Sung affirmed the universality and significance of the CPSU's recent analyses. Applying the personality cult issue to the WPK, Kim said that a personality cult had indeed existed, but it was the cult of the previously purged "factionalists," such as Pak Hŏn-yŏng. Being obsessed with individuals, Kim claimed, these factionalists attempted to divide the party, proclaiming loyalty to factional individuals instead of adhering to the collective leadership of the party.[156] Kim thus shifted the personality cult onto past factionalists rather than address his own style of rule in the present, coopting the language of de-Stalinization like he had done the year before. In what might seem paradoxical, he used the personality cult issue in order to argue for the necessity of party unity, that is, to follow the collective leadership of the party, not factional individuals. He was able to do this because collective leadership, in reality, meant his leadership adhered to by the collective of the party. To a Marxist-Leninist, this did make sense, since the Leninist principle of democratic centralism dictated unanimity once the majority had collectively reached a consensus. The collective ultimately stood above the individual. Of course, Kim Il Sung and any astute communist leader knew that if an individual could control the majority of this collective, his person would essentially be equated with the collective. In the history of communism, the boundary between collective leadership and plain dictatorship was rarely a boundary at all.

The Soviets, however, were not too pleased with Kim's report. Leonid Brezhnev, in attendance at the WPK Congress, stated that "the reports and speeches were not permeated with

[156] Gary Goldberg, trans., "Record of a Speech Delivered by Kim Il Sung at the Third Congress of the Korean Workers' Party," April 23, 1956, GARF, Fond 5446, Opis 98, Delo 721, Listy 229-250, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/120185.

the spirit of the 20th CPSU Congress."[157] This "spirit" was a euphemism for the ideological authority of the Soviet Union. Brezhnev pointed out the ubiquity of Kim Il Sung's personality cult, from portraits to historical distortions. The WPK's denial of ongoing violations of collective leadership, he contended, "hints of its [the WPK's] superiority to the CPSU."[158] For the WPK to say that besides the incident with the factionalists it had always adhered to collective leadership and successfully eliminated the personality cult implied a more mature and more Marxist-Leninist party than the CPSU, since the CPSU was currently dealing with the elimination of the personality cult and the establishment of collective leadership. Kim miscalculated.[159] He believed that he could write off the personality cult as an internal problem of the CPSU. Because conditions within the WPK were different, it was unnecessary to copy the CPSU, he thought, as long as the WPK upheld the universal principle of collective leadership and related concepts pertaining to Soviet orthodoxy. After all, he effectively employed this strategy in the previous year. As before, Kim did not actually seek to impugn Soviet ideological leadership. But his strategy from 1955 could not work the same way as after February 1956, because the CPSU congress forwarded official evaluations concerning the universality of Marxist-Leninist principles and shortcomings in their actualization. The CPSU had declared the personality cult alien to Marxism-Leninism. Hence, although it depended on one's point of

[157] Gary Goldberg, trans., "Record of the Third Congress of the Korean Workers' Party by L.I. Brezhnev," April 30, 1956, GARF, Fond 5446, Opis 98, Delo 721, Listy 221-228, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/120183.

[158] Ibid.

[159] There is some evidence to suggest that Kim Il Sung did not quite grasp the full gravity of the 20th Congress. In September, Kim told the Soviets that when the 3rd Congress was held, the WPK CC did not yet fully comprehend the implications of the 20th Congress. Of course, this statement needs to be taken with a grain of salt, since Kim was trying to excuse his mistakes. Gary Goldberg, trans., "Telegram from A. Mikoyan to the CPSU Central Committee," September 23, 1956, GARF, Fond 5446, Opis 98c, Delo 718, Listy 3-6, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/120189.

view, failure to properly discuss and implement the CPSU's evaluations in one's own party work *could* be interpreted as defiance of Soviet ideological leadership.

Within the upper echelons of the WPK hierarchy, many were equally critical of Kim Il Sung's move. Yi Sang-cho, DPRK ambassador to the USSR, harshly criticized Kim's personality cult and conduct during the 3rd Congress in conversations with Soviet officials, asking them to set Kim straight.[160] He expressed similar opinions to central committee members and was criticized by followers of Kim for "desiring to mechanically apply the decisions of the CPSU Twentieth Congress to the KWP [KWP = WPK]."[161] Those who were on Kim Il Sung's side utilized the creative application argument as a rationalization for his course. Again, this argument was orthodox by Soviet standards, especially since Khrushchev, during the 20th Congress, affirmed different paths to socialism, calling for a "creative Marxism."[162] However, creative application became heterodox when directed against Soviet ideological leadership or if perceived as such—creativity did not apply in those cases. WPK members opposing Kim Il Sung therefore highlighted the supposedly anti-Soviet nature of Kim Il Sung's course and use of the creative application argument. North Korea's Deputy Prime Minister Ch'oe Ch'ang-ik, for example, told the Soviet ambassador to the DPRK, Vladimir Ivanov, that the 3rd Congress "had not been permeated by the spirit of the CPSU Twentieth Congress" and that the WPK currently

[160] Gary Goldberg, trans., "Report by N. T. Fedorenko on a Meeting with DPRK Ambassador to the USSR Ri Sang-Jo," May 30, 1956, RGANI, Fond 5, Opis 28, Delo 412, Listy 190-196, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111641.

[161] Gary Goldberg, trans., "Memorandum of Conversation with Gi Seok-Bok," May 31, 1956, RGANI, Fond 5, Opis 28, Delo 410, Listy 222-223, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111643.

[162] Khrushchev, *Report of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union to the 20th Party Congress*, 43–44.

minimized all things Soviet, even in the writing of history.[163] Indeed, although no heterodox ideological tenets were created, North Korea had recently been rewriting its history by overstating the role of Kim Il Sung and his guerrilla forces during the colonial period and the liberation of Korea. For those who opposed Kim, this constituted yet another piece of evidence they could mobilize to prove anti-Sovietism. At the time, anti-Sovietism was a powerful indictment. In the minds of Kim's rivals, if it were to stick, the Soviets might act against Kim or support someone else.

A conspiracy led by Yan'an Koreans was underway as Kim Il Sung, in June and July 1956, headed a delegation to the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe to request material aid.[164] Archival documents suggest that during his stay in the USSR the Soviets did recommend actions be taken to better address collective leadership problems inside the WPK.[165] Following Kim's return, a party plenum was convened at the end of August, which the conspirators hoped to use as a staging ground for a frontal assault on Kim's rule. Yan'an Korean Yun Kong-hŭm, supported by Ch'oe Ch'ang-ik and a few other malcontents, prepared a harsh speech for the plenum. Yun accused Kim Il Sung of violating collective leadership and related Leninist party norms. All dissent was silenced, he complained, while the personality cult shone above all. As a result, he contended, "genuine unity in the Party ranks" was absent—factionalism was the order of the day. Like Kim, Yun advocated party unity, drawing on the same Marxist-Leninist logic.

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[163] Gary Goldberg, trans., "Memorandum of Conversation with Choe Chang-Ik," June 8, 1956, RGANI, Fond 5, Opis 28, Delo 410, Listy 210-214, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114132.

[164] For a detailed account of events leading up to the conspiracy see: Lankov, *Crisis in North Korea*, 73–92.

[165] Sergey Radchenko, trans., "Cable from Cde. Mikoyan from Beijing Concerning the 8th CCP Congress and Conversations with the Chinese Comrades," September 16, 1956, State Archive of the Russian Federation, fond 5446, opis 98c, delo 717, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/121976.

He further clarified that the 20th Congress provided "a deep Marxist-Leninist analysis of the contemporary international revolutionary movement" and ought to serve as the WPK's guide. Interestingly, he did not deny the need for a creative application of the 20th Congress' decisions. His argument was that not even a creative application had taken place. In other words, Yun was trying hard to prove Kim Il Sung and his allies' anti-Sovietism, claiming that they constituted a small clique "betraying Marxism-Leninism" and splitting the party.[166]

During Kim Il Sung's report to the August plenum, he reviewed the results of the recent tour and tried to preempt the arguments of his opponents. Like Yun, he acknowledged the international significance of the 20th Congress and its "deep Marxist-Leninist analysis" of the world communist movement. According to Kim, the CPSU "gave a deeply substantiated Marxist-Leninist explanation of a number of pressing theoretical and political issues of modern times, in particular the subjective and objective causes and conditions which gave rise to the cult of personality." The 20th Congress' evaluation of the personality cult, he continued, "serves as a great lesson and example for the Marxist-Leninist Parties of all the countries of the world," including the WPK. He declared that after the 20th Congress, the WPK also dealt with the personality cult and put forth all effort to eliminate the problem, editing history textbooks accordingly. Not even this was enough, Kim argued, and the WPK should continue to learn from the CPSU, eliminate all traces of the personality cult, and further establish collective leadership. Once again, he distanced his leadership from the personality cult, providing no real self-criticism. Still, in contrast to the 3rd WPK Congress, he admitted that the personality cult

[166] Gary Goldberg, trans., "Draft of a Statement by Yun Gong-Heum at the CC Plenum of the Korean Workers' Party in August 1956," August 30, 1956, GARF, Fond 5446, Opis 98, Delo 721, Listy 191-211, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/120175.

had not yet disappeared in the WPK. He openly stated that the WPK remained "young" and had much to learn, thus avoiding the error of his previous formulation.[167]

Kim's report is illustrative of a person who made considerable effort to substantiate his loyalty to Soviet ideological leadership without endangering his rule. His arguments were similar to those of Yun, using the same concepts and logic, but mobilizing them toward different ends. Kim and his opponents were engaged in a debate within a shared intellectual tradition, Marxism-Leninism. The fact that Kim used the same language as Yun evidences the importance of Marxism-Leninism in leadership rationalization and in the waging of factional struggles. Both even called for an end to dogmatism and a creative application of Soviet Marxism-Leninism. Whereas Yun meant party members should learn more from the Soviet Union and cease the mechanical copying of Stalin's leadership style, Kim meant one should learn from but not ape the *current* Soviet leadership's party work. Both arguments made Marxist-Leninist sense and neither disagreed with the Marxist-Leninist nature of the other's argument. Kim also thought the WPK should learn from the Soviet Union and Yun, too, believed in a creative application rather than an aping of Soviet experience. The core of the disagreement rested in the aim of Marxist-Leninist arguments, one trying to solidify the current regime, the other trying to reform it.

The factional struggles of 1955 and 1956 were not simply struggles between nationalists and internationalists. They were fundamentally Marxist-Leninist struggles. Scalapino and Lee assert that in 1955 nationalism became an "intra-party weapon."[168] Other scholars similarly emphasize Kim Il Sung's nationalism in these conflicts. But this is only true insofar as

[167] Gary Goldberg, trans., "Speech by Kim Il Sung at the August Korean Workers' Party Central Committee Plenum," August 30, 1956, GARF, Fond 5446, Opis 98, Delo 721, Listy 69-103, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/120166.

[168] Scalapino and Lee, *Communism in Korea*, 499–504.

nationalism and Marxism-Leninism were not mutually exclusive. It does not suggest a replacement of Marxism-Leninism with nationalism. Nationalism, yes, but a nationalism mediated by Marxism-Leninism. Nationalism and internationalism, nationalism and Marxism-Leninism were not polar opposites. To make a nationalist claim without a mediation by Marxism-Leninism would have constituted a claim devoid of reason and immediately exposed to attack the person making the claim. Hence, Kim consciously framed his arguments within the boundaries of Marxism-Leninism, being careful not to step outside of Soviet orthodoxy. This infused his words with force, not just vis-à-vis WPK members but also in relation to the Soviets. The power of Marxist-Leninist arguments is confirmed by Kim loyalists' attempts to silence these arguments during August plenum. Kim Il Sung interrupted Yun's speech while Kim's allies hurled invectives toward him, labeling Yun's accusations as lies. Kim's allies, in their speeches, reiterated the correctness of the party's Marxist-Leninist path.[169] The opposition's attack failed as the large majority of central committee members supported Kim Il Sung. Yun and others found themselves expelled from the party, thenceforth to be known collectively as the "anti-party group."

The Soviets' initial reaction to the purges was rather passive. Fortunately for Kim, the Soviets focused on the domestic implications of his moves. Ambassador Ivanov evaluated the conflict during the August plenum as "a domestic process" that was "not stimulated by any outside factors, Soviet or Chinese."[170] Facing a reluctant Soviet leadership, the victims of the

[169] James F. Person, trans., "Memorandum of Conversation with Pak Ui-Wan," September 6, 1956, RGANI, Fond 5, Opis 28, Delo 410, Listy 327-332, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114138.

[170] James F. Person, trans., "Memorandum of Conversation with the Ambassador of the Peoples Republic of China to the DPRK Qiao Xiaoguang," September 4, 1956, RGANI, Fond 5, Opis 28, Delo 410, Listy 322-325, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113373.

purge toiled to elicit a Soviet and Chinese intervention. Yun and his fellow conspirators went so far as to suggest to the Chinese a removal of Kim Il Sung, calling him a traitor to the revolution. Even worse, they suggested criticizing his mistakes during the Korean War, including his disastrous decision to invade the South.[171] If such a criticism would occur, it would publicize the fact that it was he, not the South or the Americans, who had started the war. Yi Sang-cho, too, actively lobbied the Soviets and Chinese to intervene in the DPRK. Visiting the CPSU CC department dealing with fraternal parties, Yi tried to make his case but was reminded of the WPK's sovereignty and the CPSU's position of non-interference.[172] While the Soviets and Chinese were clearly reluctant to intervene, the lobbying of the purge victims painted a picture of party disunity and a potential domestic crisis. One can only imagine, for example, the impact an indictment of Kim Il Sung as the aggressor during the Korean War would have had. Not only would such a publicization result in a domestic and inter-Korean legitimacy crisis but also cause damage to the international reputation of all communist regimes. Party disunity and severe repressive measures such as executions would similarly hurt the image of the DPRK and the world communist movement.

In a conversation between Anastas Mikoyan, one of the USSR's highest-ranking statesmen, and Mao Zedong on September 18, both expressed fear of a WPK collapse. This fear stemmed from Kim's repressive methods, complaints by his rivals, and lack of information concerning the internal situation in the DPRK. Mikoyan and Mao stressed that they did not

[171] Gary Goldberg, trans., "Letter from Seo Hwi, Yun Gong-Heum, Li Pil-Gyu, and Kim Gwan to the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee," September 5, 1956, GARF, Fond 5446, Opis 98, Delo 721, Listy 170-190, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/120173.

[172] Gary Goldberg, trans., "Memorandum of a Conversation with DPRK Ambassador to the USSR Ri Sang-Jo," September 10, 1956, RGANI, Delo 5, Opis 28, Delo 410, Listy 230- 232, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114146.

intend to topple Kim but make him realize that the party was on the verge of collapse. Mao thus stated: "We need to tell Kim Il Sung: your method of knocking [people] down cannot go on, it will only sharpen the contradictions within the party. Today you may have knocked them down, but maybe tomorrow they will still overthrow you." In Mao's view, a large portion of WPK CC was unhappy with the situation and desired an intervention. Mikoyan drew direct parallels to the recent crisis in Hungary, where the 20th Congress had a particularly devastating effect for the country's Stalinist ruler, Rákosi. Social discontent increased while the party was internally split, causing the Soviets, led by Mikoyan, to intervene and recommend that Rákosi—who faced much more opposition than Kim—resign, lest the party disintegrate completely and lose its last iota of legitimacy. Mikoyan and Mao knew that opposition against a leading Stalinist could easily descend into opposition against communist rule. And thus Mikoyan believed he had saved communist rule in Hungary by ensuring party unity, something he could also do for North Korea.[173] Little did he know that the Hungarian situation was about to escalate. Thinking their evaluation of the WPK correct, Mikoyan and Mao drew up plans for an intervention.

It appears the decision to intervene did not stem from a suspected anti-Sovietism of Kim Il Sung. Although the Soviets certainly recognized Kim's ideological errors, they did not read the purge as anti-Soviet or as challenging the ideological leadership of the Soviet Union. Instead, they worried about the WPK's unity and the DPRK's stability. To be sure, Kim Il Sung expressed concern that the Soviets would erroneously assume his actions were anti-Soviet, that is, nationalist.[174] Yet according to archival materials, the Soviets did not seem overly concerned

[173] Sergey Radchenko and Jeffrey Wang, trans., "Conversation Records between Chairman Mao Zedong and the Soviet Communist Party Delegation, 18 September 1956," September 18, 1956, Chinese Communist Party Central Archives, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117838.

[174] Gary Goldberg, trans., "Telegram from the USSR Ambassador to the DPRK Ivanov Addressed to Mikoyan and Shepilov, 'August Plenum of the Korean Workers' Party Central Committee'," September 15, 1956, GARF, Fond

about a potential anti-Soviet nationalism, though they were fully aware of certain nationalistic tendencies. Moreover, incidentally, Kim also worried about party unity. As expressed by Ivanov, seeing the unrest in Poland and the Polish leadership's wide dissemination of the personality cult issue, Kim thought the personality cult "ought to be eliminated gradually, without involving the entire Party in this matter." According to Ivanov, Moscow advised Kim that party unity would be strengthened if Kim admitted his own mistakes, because his opponents would then reconcile themselves satisfied. He therefore lamented Kim's failure to heed Moscow's recommendations.[175] Although Kim and Moscow had divergent ideas about how to achieve party unity, their aim was the same.

North Korea was not the only people's democracy attempting to suppress the debate surrounding the personality cult. East Germany's Ulbricht made similar attempts. When the issue of his own cult arose, Ulbricht shifted attention away from his person. An April 29 SED party newspaper article entitled "The Leninist Unity of Our Party," while admitting the need to combat the personality cult, assessed the issue as "no longer a question of remarkable importance," since the SED had dealt with the problem in the past. The fight against the personality cult, the article reads, should "not debase the love, respect, and adoration [*Verehrung*] that the leaders of the workers [*Arbeiterführer*] enjoy with us." Eliminating the personality cult did not mean that "one no longer needs to listen to the leaders [*Führer*]." Although the article was still more conciliatory and open than Kim Il Sung in admitting mistakes, many formulations sounded almost identical to their North Korean counterparts. The

5446, Opis 98, Delo 721, Listy 153-164, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/120170.

[175] Ibid.

article even stated that in regard to the personality cult debate "incorrect are those party members who . . . conclude that we should in the same way, i.e., in a cookie-cutter mechanical sense, conduct a copying of the measures taken by fraternal parties onto our conditions."[176] These were the kind of methods used to divert attention away from Ulbricht's personality cult.[177] Like Kim Il Sung, he faced internal party opposition over the same issue and, like Kim Il Sung, he attempted to consolidate his power in the name of party unity.[178]

On September 19, Peng Dehuai and Mikoyan kicked off the Sino-Soviet intervention in a meeting with Kim Il Sung. They assured him of their friendly intentions, stressing the need for party unity, and advised to undo the August purge at a special plenum. Kim was hesitant and only reluctantly agreed. The next day Kim convened an assembly of the Presidium, where he announced that the purge be reevaluated at a new plenum.[179] In conversations with the Soviets leading up to the plenum, Kim assumed a submissive posture, admitting, for example, the WPK's dearth of experience and resultant imitation of the CPSU's Stalin cult.[180] Adopting the measures recommended by Peng and Mikoyan, a resolution was issued at a WPK plenum on

[176] Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, "Die leninistische Geschlossenheit unserer Partei [The Leninist Unity of Our Party]," *Neues Deutschland*, April 29, 1956, 3.

[177] Another article from August 1 even claimed the personality cult "was by no means the main question" at the 20th Congress.

Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, "Über die Arbeit der SED nach dem XX. Parteitag der KPdSU und die bisherige Durchführung der Beschlüsse der 3. Parteikonferenz [On the Work of the SED After the 20th CPSU Congress and the Execution of the Decisions of the 3rd Party Conference Up to This Point]," *Neues Deutschland*, August 1, 1956, 4.

[178] Grieder, *The East German Leadership, 1946-73: Conflict and Crisis*, 115–32.

[179] Gary Goldberg, trans., "Telegram from A. Mikoyan to the CPSU Central Committee," September 21, 1956, GARF, Fond 5446, Opis 98c, Delo 718, Listy 12-16, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/120194.

[180] Goldberg, "Telegram from A. Mikoyan to the CPSU Central Committee," September 23, 1956.

September 23. According to the resolution, Yun Kong-hŭm, Ch'oe Ch'ang-ik, and others, while guilty, had received too severe a punishment. A cementing of the "ideological unity in the Party," the resolution suggested, required clemency, reeducation, open debate, and elimination of bureaucratic methods.[181]

Yet plenum discussions, attended by Peng and Mikoyan, in no way suggested a volte-face, despite the rehabilitation of purge victims. Almost all in attendance supported Kim Il Sung, merely calling for a few corrections. Like the resolution, plenum speeches condemned the factionalism of the previously purged party members while simultaneously calling for leniency and reeducation in the name of party unity. Some of the speakers even condemned Yun and others' self-serving use of the personality cult issue and the resultant damage inflicted upon the party. One of them exclaimed: "The factionalists in our Party are against Kim Il Sung being at the head of the Party, they want to tear him away from the people so that the people do not love the leaders." Pak Hun-il was the only exception, for he strongly criticized the recent work of the party and Kim's close allies. His criticisms, however, were overwhelmingly rejected by other attendees.[182] Whether through intimidation or sincere consensus, the WPK CC seemed unified around Kim Il Sung.

Since the Soviets primarily cared about a stable North Korea and a unified party, and since Kim Il Sung adhered to Soviet ideological leadership, they did not force him to conduct a thorough criticism of his personality cult, perhaps sharing Kim Il Sung's fear that such an action

[181] Gary Goldberg, trans., "Resolution of the Plenum of the Korean Workers' Party," September 23, 1956, GARF, Fond 5446, Opis 98, Delo 721, Listy 44-45, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/120163.

[182] Gary Goldberg, trans., "Minutes of the KWP CC Plenum Held on 23 September 1956," September 23, 1956, GARF, Fond 5446, Opis 98, Delo 721, Listy 31-43, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/120162.

could precipitate a regime crisis. Not surprisingly, Yi Sang-cho, still in Moscow, composed a letter lambasting the plenum's failure to sufficiently address Kim's personality cult and the various historical distortions surrounding it. He noted that Kim's power had not been diluted by the plenum while his allies continued to retain their positions. Yi was clearly frustrated, not just by the actions of the WPK leadership but also by the laxness of the Soviets and Chinese. In an effort to convince the two giants to further pressure Kim Il Sung, he claimed that Kim had only a "small number of supporters."[183] But as the plenum had clearly shown, Kim enjoyed considerable support. By December, the Soviets analyzed positively the situation in the DPRK, in no small part due to the contrasting turmoil that had raged in Hungary from October to November. They took note of the fact that unlike in other communist-led states the North Korean intelligentsia and general population were rather passive and not as critical of party policies.[184] Despite South Korean attempts to subvert North Korea by encouraging the people to follow in the footsteps of the Hungarian revolutionaries, North Koreans remained mostly loyal to the regime.[185] Kim undoubtedly felt vindicated by the events in Hungary. In April 1957, Kim Il Sung told the new Soviet ambassador Alexander Puzanov that the WPK was fortunate to have

[183] Gary Goldberg, trans., "Letter from Ri Sang-Jo to the Central Committee of the Korean Workers Party," October 5, 1956, RGANI, Fond 5, Opis 28, Delo 410, Listy 233-295, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114152.

[184] Maya Latynski, trans., "Notes from a Conversation between the 1st Secretary of the PRL Embassy in the DPRK and Comrade Samsonov, 1st Secretary of the Embassy of the USSR on 20.XII.1956," December 24, 1956, Polish Foreign Ministry Archive, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110547. Gary Goldberg, trans., "Communist Party of the Soviet Union Central Committee Report on the Situation in the Korean Workers' Party and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea," December 28, 1956, RGANI, Fond 5, Opis 28, Delo 486, Listi 1-17, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114165.
Nevertheless, as Lankov points out, intellectual dissatisfaction resulting from de-Stalinization was a concern for the regime, which is one reason why Kim Il Sung did not favor a wide discussion of the personality cult. Armstrong further notes that discontent did exist among students and even the general population. See: Lankov, *Crisis in North Korea*, 146. And: Armstrong, *Tyranny of the Weak*, 100–101.

[185] Goldberg, "Communist Party of the Soviet Union Central Committee Report on the Situation in the Korean Workers' Party and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea."

exposed the "anti-party group" prior to the "counterrevolution" in Hungary, since otherwise the "factionalists" might have used the Hungarian case as a rallying banner to subvert the regime. He further expressed that he had indeed been correct to deal with the issue of the personality cult in a careful, measured manner.[186] Kim thus supported the USSR's military intervention in Hungary, and the Soviets, for their part, came to see the denunciation of the "anti-party group" as a positive phenomenon and appreciated the WPK's unity around Kim.[187]

As 1956 drew to a close, Kim Il Sung had successfully dealt with the brunt of the 20th CPSU Congress. Yet this accomplishment did not involve an ideological reversal. Ideologically, North Korea remained in Soviet territory. Because in 1956 Kim chose to stay in line with Soviet ideological leadership, he had no choice but to rely on Soviet orthodoxy when waging factional battles. Both Kim and his opposition utilized arguments grounded in the Soviet version of Marxism-Leninism. The creative application argument, reinvigorated and supported by Khrushchev, constituted an important pillar of these debates. However, Kim Il Sung walked a fine line whenever he mobilized the creative application argument. While the argument was orthodox, the aim toward which it was mobilized could be interpreted as heterodox, depending on the specific situation, particularly if it challenged the ideological authority of the Soviet Union. Something might be orthodox one day but heterodox the next. Hence the Soviets, after Hungary, suddenly became rather accepting of Kim's creative approach to dealing with the

[186] Gary Goldberg, trans., "Journal of Soviet Ambassador to the DPRK A.M. Puzanov for 9 April 1957," April 9, 1957, AVPRF F. 0102, Op. 13, P. 72, Delo 5, Listy 1-15, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115599.

[187] Gary Goldberg, trans., "Journal of Soviet Ambassador to the DPRK A.M. Puzanov for 16 February 1958," February 16, 1958, AVPRF F. 0102, Op. 14, Delo 6, Listy 32-60, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115963.

personality cult in the DPRK.[188] They even commended the WPK's elimination of "dogmatism in ideological work and the practice of mechanically borrowing everything Soviet to [*sic*] Korean practice," the precise argument Kim Il Sung had made in December 1955.[189] Nevertheless, resulting from his experiences in 1956 and subsequent events, especially the Sino-Soviet conflict, Kim gradually realized Soviet ideological leadership would only continue to threaten his rule.

When and Why North Korea Finally Rejected Soviet Ideological Leadership

North Korea's rejection of Soviet ideological leadership was not predestined. Only through a convergence of factors did Kim Il Sung proclaim *charyŏk kaengsaeng* (self-reliance) in December 1961 and thereby usher in a new period in the history of North Korean ideology. Although North Korea forwarded its own unique domestic ideological positions already in the years leading up to this watershed, Kim deliberately attempted to remain within the framework of Soviet orthodoxy, which, due to reasons detailed here, became increasingly difficult to do.

While Khrushchev promoted the creative application of Marxism-Leninism among the people's democracies, he also circumscribed the limits of this creativity. By the end of 1956, according to Brzezinski, "ideological and institutional diversity thus came to characterize the once monolithic Soviet bloc."[190] Nevertheless, no creativity was permitted in regard to whatever

[188] Maya Latynski, trans., "Notes from a Conversation between the 1st Secretary of the PRL Embassy in the DPRK with the Counselor of the Embassy of the USSR, Comrade. Makarov on 27.VIII.1957," August 29, 1957, Polish Foreign Ministry Archive, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110631.

[189] Goldberg, "Communist Party of the Soviet Union Central Committee Report on the Situation in the Korean Workers' Party and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea."

[190] Brzezinski, *The Soviet Bloc, Unity and Conflict*, 263.

altered the universality of Marxism-Leninism as interpreted by the CPSU. One could creatively apply that universality but not contest or change it. When a CPSU congress occurred, it issued statements concerning the universality of Marxist-Leninist tenets in relation to the world situation. Thus, the 20th Congress forwarded a new analysis of the current epoch, and only the CPSU, as the most experienced communist party and foremost ideological leader, was supposed to analyze the current epoch on a global scale. Because this analysis was of a universal nature, discussing the current stage of world history and the historically mandated tasks of communist parties from around the globe, Khrushchev was not inclined to tolerate any deviation. According to the new analysis forwarded at the 20th Congress, peaceful coexistence meant peaceful economic competition with the capitalist world. Although peaceful coexistence, before the 20th Congress, only referred to general principles of interstate relations with non-hostile countries, especially postcolonial ones, it now became a concept integral to the characterization of the current epoch, thus mandatory for each party to follow.[191] Imperialism was no longer seen as the dominant force in the world, as socialism had become a powerful global system. Peaceful economic competition would in the end prove socialism's superiority and only further solidify the necessary course of history. In order to accomplish this inevitability, peace would have to be maintained and a nuclear war avoided at all costs. While imperialism would fight for its life through the initiation of desperate aggressive acts, if socialist states worked to prevent war, imperialism would die and the necessary course of history unfold itself. Emphasis was thus placed on economic development, cooperation, and coordination (through an international division of labor) between socialist states, as epitomized by Comecon (Council for Mutual

[191] The concept of peaceful coexistence had already existed in Lenin's and in Stalin's time, the difference being that it did not possess such an enormous theoretical significance then.

Economic Assistance).[192] Any true proletarian internationalist concerned about the well-being of the world revolution was to follow this line. Hence, because it contested the Soviet leadership role in the world communist movement, Khrushchev considered heterodox any denial of peaceful coexistence's necessity—creativity did not apply. Although Khrushchev allowed for a creative application of the universal Marxist-Leninist principle of peaceful coexistence to suit a country's domestic circumstances, it was within his purview to determine whether or not a particular domestic line contravened the universality of Marxism-Leninism.

The North Korean leadership, including Kim Il Sung, was not intrinsically inimical to peaceful coexistence and the entailing promotion of an economic division of labor among socialist states. In 1956, the main ideological conflict instead revolved around the personality cult. Kim accepted the Soviet analysis of the current epoch, peaceful coexistence, and, following his tour of Eastern Europe, an international division of labor.[193] Having completed the Three-Year Plan (1953-1955/56), North Korea commenced the first Five-Year Plan in 1957. While the Third Congress of the WPK did suggest a tendency toward economic independence, the new plan ultimately focused on a more targeted economic development strategy in accordance with the advice of the Soviets and the economic capabilities of other socialist states.[194]

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[192] Khrushchev, *Report of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union to the 20th Party Congress*, 8–42. Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, "Die wachsende Kraft des sozialistischen Lagers [The Growing Strength of the Socialist Camp]," *Neues Deutschland*, May 5, 1956, 5.

[193] Kim stated as follows during the August Plenum: "When drafting the five-year economic plan we should take serious note of the fact that economic ties and cooperation between the socialist countries are strengthening. We need to develop industrial sectors on the basis of the international division of labor in the socialist camp in which the extremely favorable natural and economic conditions of our country can be used and decline those which are unsustainable and for which there is no great need. At the same time as this we should draft a plan to strengthen economic ties with these countries in terms of expanding the sources of the accumulation of foreign currency and use it more rationally." Goldberg, "Speech by Kim Il Sung at the August Korean Workers' Party Central Committee Plenum."

[194] Latynski, "Notes from a Conversation between the 1st Secretary of the PRL Embassy in the DPRK with the Counselor of the Embassy of the USSR, Comrade. Makarov on 27.VIII.1957." Maya Latynski, trans., "Notes from a Conversation between the 1st Secretary of the PRL Embassy in the DPRK and Comrade Makarov, Counselor of

One should also not exaggerate the heterodoxy of autarky. Indeed, autarky was already present in the thought of Lenin and Stalin. Economic independence, self-reliance, and self-sufficiency were therefore not necessarily heterodox.[195] As early as 1920, Lenin drew attention to imperialist powers' economic exploitation of seemingly sovereign states, suggesting that political independence is meaningless without economic self-determination, a principle that Kim Il Sung frequently mirrored in the 1960s.[196] Under Stalin, the USSR experienced a phase of autarky in the 1930s and his notion of "socialism in one country" implied the existence of a national economy as an autonomous unit in need of protection. Economic independence was also important for the people's democracies. For example, during Stalin's time, East Germans frequently talked about self-reliance and constructing the economy "by one's own strength."[197] In the context of the propaganda war against West Germany, it was important to demonstrate the GDR's economic independence and the benefits such independence brought to the well-being of the masses by being free from the crises of interdependent capitalist economies.[198] The North Koreans, too, had been talking about relying on "one's own strength" (*charyŏk*) for a long time,

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the Embassy of the USSR on 11.III.1957," November 3, 1957, Polish Foreign Ministry Archive, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111390.

[195] I am loath to draw hard-and-fast distinctions between terms such as autarky, economic independence, and self-reliance. Since North Korea had not yet developed a specific ideological platform of economic self-reliance, I am discussing the notion of economic independence in a broad way.

[196] Lenin, "Preliminary Draft Theses on the National and the Colonial Questions," 150.

[197] The German expression for "by one's own strength" was "*aus eigener Kraft*," which is how the East Germans also translated North Korea's *charyŏk kaengsaeng*. See: Socialist Unity Party of Germany, "Stenographic Record of the Third Party Congress of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, July 20-24, 1950," 5, 8, 88.

[198] Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, "Der falsche Weg [The Wrong Path]," *Neues Deutschland*, July 9, 1949, 4.
Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, "Nur aus eigener Kraft [Only by Our Own Strength]," *Neues Deutschland*, September 6, 1949, 2.
Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, "Nationale Selbständigkeit bedeutet Hebung des Lebensstandards [National Self-Reliance Means a Raising of the Standard of Living]," *Neues Deutschland*, October 7, 1949, 5.

even during the Korean War, stressing the incorrectness of dependence on foreign aid.[199] In Marxist-Leninist propaganda, it was considered essential to emphasize mastership of one's own national revolution, in the hopes of raising the creative zeal of the masses. Hence, despite Khrushchev's call for an international division of labor, the notion that a socialist nation should be the master of its economy and develop trade relations on the basis of its own national interest remained valid in principle. After all, one of Khrushchev's criticisms of Stalin was his chauvinist approach to foreign relations.[200] Khrushchev strongly reaffirmed the people's democracies' economic independence in an official Soviet government declaration on October 30, 1956: "The Soviet government is prepared to discuss together with the governments of other socialist states measures ensuring further development and strengthening of economic ties among the socialist countries in order to remove any possibility of violation of the principles of national sovereignty, mutual benefit and equality in economic relations." The declaration additionally offered to socialist states the removal of Soviet advisers as a further step toward the solidification of self-determination in economic affairs.[201] Indeed, as expressed by Khrushchev during the 20th Congress of the CPSU, in Leninist thought the establishment of an "independent national economy" is of particular importance for postcolonial states that had achieved political

[199] Kim Il Sung, "Hyŏn kyedan e issŏsŏ chibang chŏnggwŏn kigwandŭl ŭi immu wa yŏkhal [The Tasks and Role of Local Government Organs in the Present Stage]," 17.

[200] Khrushchev, "The Crimes of the Stalin Era: Special Report to the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union," 48.

[201] Paul E. Zinner, ed., "Declaration by Soviet Government on the Principles of Development and Further Friendship and Cooperation between the Soviet Union and Other Socialist States (Moscow, October 30, 1956)," in *Documents on American Foreign Relations (1956)* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), 252–55, http://www.cvce.eu/obj/declaration_by_the_soviet_government_moscow_30_october_1956-en-0876cc2c-5d0c-414f-8a18-966b8350d514.html.

independence, given the close interconnection between national and class struggle.[202] North Korea, though a socialist state, also represented a postcolonial nation, making economic independence even more of a necessity.

When the Soviets expressed concern over North Korea's autarkic approach after the 3rd WPK Congress, they worried more about the implications of wrong economic policies than a defiance of Soviet ideological authority. If the DPRK produced too wide an array of goods, instead of importing and exporting strategically, its economic growth would be hampered, particularly due to the primitive state of the North Korean economy. Plus, besides fearing damage to the international reputation of communism if economic failure occurred in North Korea, the Soviets, who had poured tremendous resources into the DPRK's economy, did not wish to see their previous aid go to waste. In principle, the Soviets did not oppose self-reliance, but thought that in the North Korean case self-reliance ought to be de-emphasized.

There are several reasons for North Korea's acceptance of peaceful coexistence and an international division of labor at this time. First, the North Korean leadership did not yet have real cause to regard the new Soviet analysis as a threat and may not even have fully understood its future implications. As long as North Korea retained wiggle room in the creative application of peaceful coexistence to its own national conditions, as long as the Soviets did not interfere too much in the making of its own foreign and economic policy, there was no conflict. Only time could tell if such a conflict would arise. Second, peaceful coexistence and the notion of peaceful economic competition between socialism and capitalism were nothing new. For instance, a 1950 article in the WPK's theoretical organ stated that "the imperialists fear peaceful economic

[202] Khrushchev, *Report of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union to the 20th Party Congress*, 26–27.

competition with socialism" and therefore commit aggressive military actions.[203] Furthermore, during Stalin's time, the communist world was referred to as the "peace camp." Communists never viewed war and peace as absolutes. While of course advocating peace and describing imperialism as inherently warlike, the Soviets never ruled out military force against their class enemies. Since Khrushchev was merely redirecting old concepts, the North Koreans, in the beginning, probably thought of the new line as just another propaganda strategy vis-à-vis the West. They most likely never imagined the possibility of a Soviet Union cowering before imperialist aggression. Third, China at this point was ideologically in tune with the Soviet Union and recognized the validity of the 20th Congress' analysis.[204] The Sino-Soviet intervention in North Korea was a perfect illustration of this. There was no reason for North Korea to question the validity of something so universally accepted by communists, especially since following Soviet ideological leadership had been standard practice for years.

At the end of 1956 and in the course of 1957, it was Polish leadership that caused anxiety in the upper ranks of the CPSU. The Polish October of 1956 and the rise of Władysław Gomułka led to a Polish party insistent on its sovereignty and a special Polish path to socialism, pushing the boundaries of permissible creative application. In November 1957, the Soviets thus convened a conference of the world's communist and workers' parties in Moscow (henceforth "1957 Moscow Conference") to deal with the issue of ideological diversity and reaffirm the

[203] Il Kim, "P'ŭroret'ariat'ŭ tokchae shigi e issŏsŏ ŭi muryŏk ŭi kanghwa e taehan lenin-ssŭttallin ŭi haksŏl [Lenin's Theory on the Strengthening of Military Power in the Period of Proletarian Dictatorship]," *Kŭlloja*, no. 48 (January 1950): 39.

[204] As shown by Lorenz Lüthi, however, Sino-Soviet tensions were certainly present at this time, though largely invisible to other parties.

Lorenz M. Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* (Princeton (N.J.): Princeton University Press, 2008), 75–79.

CPSU's ideological leadership. Due to unanimous support among other parties for an acknowledgment of the USSR's leading role, especially by Mao Zedong, Gomułka, in attendance, was pushed into accepting the formulation of "the invincible camp of Socialist countries headed by the Soviet Union," despite his resistance.[205] Nevertheless, the declaration issued by the conference, which thenceforth became a common ideological platform for communist parties, including the WPK, carved in stone the creative application of Marxism-Leninism:

> Marxism-Leninism calls for a creative application of the general principles of the Socialist revolution and Socialist construction depending on the concrete conditions of each country, and rejects mechanical imitation of the policies and tactics of the Communist parties of other countries.
> Lenin repeatedly called attention to the necessity of correctly applying the basic principles of communism, in keeping with the specific features of the nation, of the national state concerned. Disregard of national peculiarities by the proletarian party inevitably leads to its divorce from reality, from the masses, and is bound to prejudice the cause of socialism and, conversely, exaggeration of the role of these peculiarities or departure, under the pretext of national peculiarities, from the universal Marxist-Leninist truth on the Socialist revolution and Socialist construction is just as harmful to the Socialist cause.[206]

The latter reservation was aimed at those who considered using the creative application argument to challenge Soviet ideological leadership by proclaiming their own universal truths. It also served to delineate the boundaries of diversity. Indeed, the conference declared revisionism (i.e., too much liberalization) the chief ideological threat of the times, specifically naming dogmatism (i.e., too much Stalinism) as less a danger. Setting ideological boundaries against revisionism, the declaration insisted on the universal validity and necessity of proletarian dictatorship, democratic centralism, proletarian internationalism, a principled stand against external

[205] Brzezinski, *The Soviet Bloc, Unity and Conflict*, 302–3.

[206] Communist and Workers' Parties, "Declaration of Communist and Workers' Parties of the Socialist Countries," 1957, https://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/sino-soviet-split/other/1957declaration.htm.

imperialist pressure, and internal ideological vigilance against bourgeois influence during the construction of socialism.[207] Kim Il Sung must have been pleased by these developments and the restrictions placed upon Polish-style socialism. Soviet ideological leadership served him well if it affirmed the universality of principles that buttressed his rule. In his speech to the conference, Mikhail Suslov, the Soviet's top ideologue, included as a universal principle the old Stalinist axiom according to which the class struggle escalates in the period of transition from capitalism to socialism, necessitating a vigilant ideological struggle.[208] Leading communists such as Kim Il Sung found this principle rather useful, since it provided a rationalization for repression and ideological control. Another positive aspect for Kim was the conference's strong affirmation of sovereignty and creative application. Suslov spared no praise for China's contribution to the storehouse of Marxism-Leninism in its unique approach to the construction of socialism.[209] In this light, Suslov's speech and the declaration also avowed socialist states' "complete equality, respect for territorial integrity, state independence and sovereignty and non-interference in one another's affairs," including in the establishment of economic relations.[210] According to Suslov, the USSR "fights against all forms of great power chauvinism in our relations to other socialist countries. It cannot be said that Soviet experiences are somehow being forced upon other

[207] Ibid.

[208] Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, Department of International Relations, "A Few Questions Concerning the International Situation and the International Workers' Movement: Speech of Comrade M. A. Suslov," November 1957, 169, SAPMO-BArch DY 30/11752.

[209] Ibid., 128.

[210] Communist and Workers' Parties, "Declaration of Communist and Workers' Parties of the Socialist Countries."

countries."[211] All this was good news for Kim Il Sung. For the moment, a beneficial ideological unity centered on the Soviet Union seemed possible.

Because Khrushchev encouraged creative application and tended toward ideological harmony with China, North Korea was able to move rather freely in the formulation of its own policies without sparking Soviet ire. During the 1957 Moscow Conference, the Soviets informed the North Korean delegation that it appreciated Kim Il Sung's previous actions to combat factionalism inside the WPK.[212] In March 1958, Kim Il Sung therefore felt confident to solidify his previous purges. The decisions of the Moscow Conference played no small part in this ousting of remaining factional rivals. Since the conference had accentuated the menace of revisionism, they were now designated as "revisionists" who "denied the leading role of the party." Furthermore, in accordance with the conference's declaration concerning the universality of proletarian dictatorship, Kim claimed the anti-party group opposed this dictatorship.[213] In short, Kim painted them as traitors to Marxism-Leninism who defied the ideological leadership of the Soviet Union. While dealing with internal party affairs, Kim also displayed more initiative in the economic sphere. In the summer of 1958, he launched the so-called Ch'ŏllima Movement, an input-driven production campaign inspired by—though Pyongyang denied this—China's Great Leap Forward. Like China, Kim hoped to leap forward and fulfill the Five-Year

[211] Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, Department of International Relations, "A Few Questions Concerning the International Situation and the International Workers' Movement: Speech of Comrade M. A. Suslov," 199.

[212] Goldberg, "Journal of Soviet Ambassador to the DPRK A.M. Puzanov for 16 February 1958."

[213] Maya Latynski, trans., "A Report from Comrade Sluczanski Based on a Telegram from Comrade Siedlecki Regarding the Agenda of the March Conference," March 19, 1958, Polish Foreign Ministry Archive, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110340.

Plan ahead of schedule by regimenting people into various unpaid work initiatives.[214] As the Sino-Soviet rift escalated, Moscow eventually declared as heterodox such a leap-like mode of economic development. Yet in 1958 and 59, this was not the case. According to Balazs Szalontai, the people's democracies of Europe, too, supported China's Great Leap Forward and experimented with similar methods in those years.[215] Indeed, the East German press struck laudatory notes in articles about the Great Leap.[216] At the same time, East German policy advocated the mobilization and competition of work brigades in order to effect a "leap-like" (*sprunghaft*) production that would "throw over board the old methods of linear and conventional development."[217] For the moment, China represented a paragon of Marxism-Leninism's creative application, a situation which, to Pyongyang's detriment, was about to change.

Notwithstanding the mutually amicable stances of Moscow and Beijing during the 21st CPSU Congress in January and February 1959, tensions began to mount. As it happened, the 21st Congress featured no condemnation of the personality cult and focused on revisionism instead of dogmatism.[218] Mao, who was rediscovering his love for Stalin, approved of this, but, due to internal CCP struggles, Mao's personal ambitions and convictions, as well as foreign policy conflicts with the Soviets, an ideological clash grew increasingly imminent in the course

[214] Szalontai, *Kim Il Sung in the Khrushchev Era*, 121–22, 128.

[215] Ibid., 129.

[216] Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, "Neuer großer Sprung 1959 [New Great Leap 1959]," *Neues Deutschland*, April 19, 1959, 5.

[217] Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, "Großer Sprung durch sozialistische Gemeinschaftsarbeit [Great Leap through Socialist Teamwork]," *Neues Deutschland*, May 29, 1959, 4.

[218] Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World*, 119.

of 1959.[219] An open confrontation finally crystallized on April 16, 1960 with China's release of a polemical article entitled "Long Live Leninism!" In it the Chinese indirectly challenged, foregoing an explicit association of the Soviet Union with the ideological errors of revisionists, Khrushchev's analysis of the current epoch and hence Soviet ideological leadership. They rejected the Soviet position that peaceful coexistence constitutes a form of class struggle and the defining mark of the current epoch, contending that peaceful coexistence between socialism and capitalism is no guarantee for a victorious revolution in countries still attempting to overthrow the bourgeois yoke. Instead, the specific class contradictions endemic to a specific nation determine the course of that revolution and the strategy, whether violent or peaceful, which the local proletariat must adopt.[220] As stated by the article, "The struggle for peace and the struggle for socialism are two different kinds of struggle," struggles that Khrushchev's concept of peaceful coexistence attempted to connect. To assume that peaceful coexistence between socialism and capitalism would automatically result in successful local revolutions seeking to establish a socialist system, the article maintained, was fallacious, especially in regard to the national liberation movements of oppressed nations.[221] By itself, peaceful coexistence could not move history forward and cause capitalism's collapse.

It is not quite correct to say, as some scholars do, that Mao rejected peaceful coexistence.[222] Since the concept originated with Lenin, the polemic accepted peaceful coexistence, but only as a tactical stance in the international arena, not as fundamental to the

[219] Ibid., 123–55.

[220] "Long Live Leninism!," *Peking Review*, no. 17 (April 26, 1960): 16, 19.

[221] Ibid., 22.

[222] Lorenz Lüthi, in his extraordinarily detailed historical account of the Sino-Soviet split, suggests such a rejection. Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World*, 163.

definition of the epoch or applicable in relation to one's local bourgeoisie and the imperialist subjugators of one's nation. The present epoch, the article argued, had not changed since the time of Lenin—despite the dominance of socialism over capitalism—and was still, plain and simply, "the epoch of imperialism and proletarian revolution," i.e., the epoch of "struggle between socialism and capitalism." Socialism had almost won, the epoch was nearing its end, just not quite yet. Accordingly, because it neither represented the epoch nor a form of class struggle, peaceful coexistence was not a binding position for all countries, even socialist ones. Local communists would have to act in correspondence with the local conditions or, as Mao liked to say, "contradictions."[223] The polemic therefore symbolized more than a quarrel over policy—it was a matter of fundamental Marxist-Leninist tenets and an assault on the USSR's ideological authority.

Events subsequently spiraled out of control. During the 3rd Party Congress of the Romanian Workers' Party (RWP) in June, Khrushchev launched a counterattack during meetings of party representatives, rallying around his banner fraternal parties to help criticize the Chinese representatives. Todor Zhivkov, First Secretary of the Bulgarian Communist Party, derided the Chinese characterization of the current epoch, calling it a form of "dogmatism" that is unwilling to consider the changed global circumstances. He further condemned the Great Leap Forward as a violation of "socialist planned economy" while East Germany's Walter Ulbricht changed his previously positive opinion of China's economic methods to a negative one.[224] Finally, a hot-tempered Khrushchev spoke. He chastised the Chinese refusal to accept the objective necessity

[223] "Long Live Leninism!," 7–8, 10, 14.

[224] Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, Department of International Relations, "Memorandum Concerning the Contents of the Meetings between the Representatives of the Communist and Workers' Parties, Who Came Together for an Exchange of Opinions on the Occasion of the Third Party Congress of the Rumanian Workers' Party in Bucharest," 1960, 103, SAPMO-BArch DY 30/11754.

of peaceful coexistence in the present era, comparing the CCP to a pregnant girl unwilling to grow up and be a mother despite the inevitability of childbirth: "It [the child] is going to come, whether she wants it or not."[225] The meetings ended with the adoption of a communique, according to which an international conference similar to 1957 would be convened in November. As was the case with regard to the Polish leadership in 1957, through this conference and its adoption of a common platform, Khrushchev hoped to reassert his ideological leadership. He knew that almost every party would adopt his views at such a conference, given the USSR's clout, while the Chinese positions would be pushed into the background.

To the dismay of many attendees from non-socialist countries, the conference publicized and concretized the Sino-Soviet ideological differences. As the representatives drew up a draft for a joint statement, the Chinese side insisted on several revisions. Perhaps the most important revision desired by the CCP concerned the tension between Soviet ideological leadership and national sovereignty. The draft attempted to curtail China's contestation of Khrushchev's ideological authority by applying the principle of democratic centralism to the world communist movement. If adopted, the CCP would have to adhere to the majority in the communist camp, lest it be denounced as factionalist. Since the Soviets enjoyed majority support, this would effectively imply Chinese submission. The CCP delegation therefore opposed any inclusion of a discussion about an international factionalism. They also objected to any formulation that suggested the universal applicability of the decisions of the 20th and 21st Congress of the CPSU, arguing that each party must choose for itself what and what not to adopt. To force a universal applicability is to reject the principle of equality enshrined in the 1957 Moscow Declaration, they

[225] Ibid., 132.

averred.[226] The Bulgarian delegation responded with a denunciation of China's "Sinification of Marxism" as a misuse of the creative application theorem in order to foster an anti-Soviet nationalism. Whereas the Chinese believed that the Soviets committed the crime of nationalism, in the form of national (i.e., big power) chauvinism, by forcing fraternal parties to follow its decisions and thereby contravene proletarian internationalism, the Soviets and their allies held that using the creative application argument to reject Soviet universality constitutes a case of nationalism and a violation of proletarian internationalism. In the words of the Bulgarian delegate: "Our great teacher Georgi Dimitrov repeatedly stressed that one's attitude toward the CPSU, toward the Soviet Union, is the most important separating line between true internationalism and all shades of nationalism."[227] The Soviet Union's version of proletarian internationalism represented a Soviet-centered internationalism, one which implied compliance with Soviet judgments concerning Marxism-Leninism's universality. In the end, the joint statement issued by the conference included most of the Soviet positions, but due to the lobbying of the North Korean, Vietnamese, Albanian, and a few other representatives, the portion about an international factionalism was deleted. And while the Chinese, Albanians, and North Koreans also opposed the statement's mentioning of the personality cult, this was ultimately added to the final version, as was the historical significance of the 20th and 21st CPSU Congresses, the Soviet "vanguard" role in the international communist movement, and the Soviet interpretation of

[226] Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, Department of International Relations, "Comments by the Delegation of the Chinese Communist Party on the 'Draft of a Statement by the Conference of Representatives from Communist and Workers' Parties'," November 16, 1960, 133–34, SAPMO-BArch DY 30/11767.

[227] Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, Department of International Relations, "Statement of the Delegation of the Bulgarian Communist Party on the Speeches of the Chinese Communist Party Representative Comrade Deng Xiaoping and the Representative of the Albanian Party of Labor Comrade Enver Hoxha at the Conference of Representatives from Communist and Workers' Parties in Moscow," November 18, 1960, 167–71, SAPMO-BArch DY 30/11767.

peaceful coexistence.[228] It was a temporary victory for the Soviets. The Chinese—under pressure—and 80 other parties signed the statement. However, although the tension between Soviet ideological leadership and national sovereignty, between Soviet universality and creative application, had been implicit in the international communist movement for a long time, the Chinese and their opponents had now given it a voice and placed the issue at the forefront of global ideological debates—Pandora's box stood open.

Amidst the chaos, Kim Il Sung initially assumed a centrist yet pro-Soviet position. During the Romanian Congress in June, the North Korean delegation entreated the two rivals to settle their differences, reminding both that their quarrel weakens North Korea's position vis-à-vis South Korea: "We love the Soviet Union, we love the Chinese Communist Party, we love and respect them as fraternal parties. Both parties, like others as well, help us and are our older brothers. The present disagreements put us in a somewhat difficult situation. We have an armistice, but live in a very tense situation."[229] North Korea assumed a similar stance at the subsequent conference held in Moscow, where Kim Il spoke strongly in favor of the CPSU's vanguard role in the world communist movement while concurrently hailing the CCP.[230] While

[228] Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, Department of International Relations, "Report to the Conference of Representatives from Communist and Workers' Parties' About the Draft Statement Prepared by the Editorial Committee," 1960, 49–51, SAPMO-BArch DY 30/11762.
Malgorzata Gnoinska, trans., "Record of Conversation between Polish Delegation (Gomułka et Al.) and Chinese Communist Politburo Member Liu Shaoqi, Moscow," November 29, 1960, Sygnatura XI A15, AAN, KC PZPR, Warsaw, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117783.
Communist and Workers' Parties, "Statement of 81 Communist and Workers' Parties," 1960, https://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/sino-soviet-split/other/1960statement.htm.

[229] Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, Department of International Relations, "Memorandum Concerning the Contents of the Meetings between the Representatives of the Communist and Workers' Parties, Who Came Together for an Exchange of Opinions on the Occasion of the Third Party Congress of the Rumanian Workers' Party in Bucharest," 125.

[230] Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, Department of International Relations, "Speech by Kim Il, WPK, at the 4th Plenum of the Moscow Conference," November 14, 1960, SAPMO-BArch DY 30/11762.

Pyongyang eschewed taking sides, statements by the North Korean delegations at both meetings, as well as North Korean publications, reveal a growing concern about a potential curtailment of creative applications.[231] The sudden vilification of China's creative application, such as the Great Leap Forward, suggested that Khrushchev's tolerance for alternative socialist paths would in the future be much more circumscribed. Thus, next to reducing the ideological prestige of the world communist movement, the Sino-Soviet conflict ultimately limited the permissible range of creative application and placed North Korea into increasing conflict with Soviet ideological leadership.

1960 was also a tumultuous year for South Korea, as social unrest led to Syngman Rhee's resignation in April and the subsequent introduction of a parliamentary system. Responding to this situation, Pyongyang initially found Soviet orthodoxy useful. Looking at the economic state of affairs in the South, the North Korean leadership began to draft a Seven-Year Plan that would focus on raising the DPRK's standard of living, which resonated with the Soviet policy of peaceful economic competition. As stated by Kim Il Sung, the goal was to rapidly improve North Korean lives in order to "influence the people of South Korea," who were now more impressionable due to the country's economic and political turmoil.[232] It seemed as if Khrushchev's prediction of socialism outproducing and thereby peacefully undoing capitalism might become a reality on the Korean peninsula. Peaceful coexistence therefore appeared quite viable a policy for Korea. As Kim uncharacteristically put it, "you don't scare the Americans

[231] Chosŏnnodongdang chungangwiwŏnhoe, "Kongsandang mit rodongdang taep'yodŭl ŭi hoeŭi saŏp kwa kwallyŏnhan Chosŏn rodongdang chungang wiwŏnhoe chŏnwŏn hoeŭi kyŏlchŏngsŏ [Written Decision of the Plenum of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea Concerning the Work of the Meeting of Representatives from Communist and Workers' Parties]," *Kŭlloja*, no. 182 (January 1961): 13–14.

[232] Gary Goldberg, trans., "Journal of Soviet Ambassador in the DPRK A.M. Puzanov for 21 April 1960," April 21, 1960, AVPRF fond 0102, opis 16, delo 6, p.147-163, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116110.

with rifles."[233] During his trip to the USSR in June, Kim expressed his fervent support for Khrushchev's peaceful coexistence. This was in no large part due to the fact that shortly prior to his meeting with Khrushchev, who was attempting to recruit Kim into his camp, the Soviets informed him of derisive comments Mao had uttered about Kim in November 1956.[234] Upon his return home, according an internal source, Kim, in front of high-ranking DPRK officials, lambasted the CCP's factionalism and affirmed Khrushchev's "principled Leninist positions on the issue of peaceful coexistence with countries with different socioeconomic systems." But, as the same source informs us, there remained plenty of pro-Chinese elements inside the WPK, which may help explain why North Korea did not openly denounce the CCP.[235] Resistance to a literal, strict implementation of peaceful coexistence in Korea was considerable, and party education covered the theoretical aspects of peaceful coexistence only marginally.[236] Nevertheless, at this point North Korean policy did reflect an attempt to adhere to Khrushchev's peaceful coexistence and implement it locally, as North Korea's official evaluation of the 1960 Moscow Statement illustrates as well. In this evaluation, the WPK lauded peaceful coexistence as a universally applicable line for all socialist states to follow. At the same time, the document

[233] Gary Goldberg, trans., "Journal of Soviet Ambassador in the DPRK A.M. Puzanov for 2 May 1960," May 2, 1960, AVPRF fond 0102, opis 16, delo 6, p.164-183, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116112.

[234] Gary Goldberg, trans., "Journal of Soviet Ambassador in the DPRK A.M. Puzanov for 16 June 1960," June 16, 1960, AVPRF fond 0102, opis 16, delo 7, p.1-15, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/119419.

[235] Gary Goldberg, trans., "Journal of Soviet Ambassador in the DPRK A.M. Puzanov for 25 June 1960," June 25, 1960, AVPRF fond 0102, opis 16, delo 7, p.1-15, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/119425. Of course, it is also conceivable that Kim Il Sung exaggerated his indignation toward China and spoke in a double-tongued manner.

[236] József Litkei, trans., "Report, Embassy of Hungary in North Korea to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry," July 2, 1960, MOL, XIX-J-1-j Korea, 8. doboz, 5/f, 0029/RT/1960, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113407.

highlighted Khrushchev's arms reduction proposals toward the United States, which included an abolition of military bases in foreign territory, as an expression of peaceful coexistence.[237] Since according to the WPK's stance the American military must withdraw from Korea as a precondition for peaceful unification, its reunification policy now appeared to constitute a manifestation of peaceful coexistence. Furthermore, after Kim's June meeting with Khrushchev and the latter's suggestion to advocate the establishment of a confederation between North and South irrespective of social systems, North Korea adhered to the fraternal advice and implemented yet another form of peaceful coexistence.[238]

Despite North Korean attempts to stay within the sphere of Soviet orthodoxy and ideological leadership, tensions started to accumulate. In the course of 1960, Khrushchev repeatedly rescheduled a promised visit to the DPRK, until it became obvious that he would not come.[239] At a time when Kim Il Sung needed the Soviet Union's prestige to better influence the volatile situation in the South, Khrushchev disappointed and seemed to care more about issues directly relevant to the USSR. Furthermore, fraternal ambassadors inside North Korea began to analyze North Korean policies more critically and, in light of the Sino-Soviet split, weighed them against Soviet orthodoxy. The East Germans, for example, who had previously supported a leap-like development, now railed against Pyongyang's "violations of the economic law of planned

[237] Chosŏnnodongdang chungangwiwŏnhoe, "Kongsandang mit rodongdang taep'yodŭl ŭi hoeŭi saŏp kwa kwallyŏnhan Chosŏn rodongdang chungang wiwŏnhoe chŏnwŏn hoeŭi kyŏlchŏngsŏ [Written Decision of the Plenum of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea Concerning the Work of the Meeting of Representatives from Communist and Workers' Parties]," 12.

[238] Szalontai, *Kim Il Sung in the Khrushchev Era*, 158.

[239] Gary Goldberg, trans., "Journal of Soviet Ambassador in the DPRK A.M. Puzanov for 8 October 1960," October 8, 1960, AVPRF fond 0102, opis 16, delo 7, p.130-150, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/119473.

and proportional development" in their own internal evaluation.[240] Such criticism suggested a growing intolerance toward creative application and the entailing domestic ideological experimentation. A Czechoslovakian internal analysis from April 1961 further corroborates this trend by attacking North Korea's "nationalistic" policies, Kim Il Sung's personality cult, and the WPK's supposedly misdirected use of the creative application argument.[241] In many ways this foreshadowed the barrage of criticisms found in archival documents after 1961 (see next chapter). Unlike the East Germans and Czechoslovakians, the Soviets, for the moment, were willing to give North Korea the benefit of the doubt, but events were rapidly heading toward a clash of interests.[242]

Held in October 1961, shortly after the 4th Congress of the WPK, the 22nd CPSU Congress, in retrospect, put the Soviets and North Koreans on a collision course. Khrushchev attempted to use the congress as a means to more firmly assert Soviet ideological authority. Reaffirming the USSR's "full-scale construction of communism" announced at the 21st Congress, he decisively placed the Soviet Union above the people's democracies, which were still finishing the construction of socialism. This implied that the USSR would continue to act as a model for the people's democracies to follow, consequently restricting independent approaches to socialist construction.[243] But Khrushchev's most forceful expression of ideological supremacy

[240] Bernd Schaefer, trans., "An Assessment by the GDR Foreign Ministry of the Report from the GDR Embassy in Pyongyang Regarding the Economic Situation of the DPRK for the 1st Semester of 1960," November 2, 1960, PolA AA, MfAA, A 6982, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113711.

[241] Adolf Kotlik, trans., "Report on Political Development in the DPRK," April 18, 1961, State Central Archive in Prague, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116752.

[242] Ibid.

[243] Nikita Khrushchev, *Documents of the 22nd Congress of the CPSU*, vol. 1 (New York: Crosscurrents Press, 1961), 13.

came through the personality cult issue. Whereas the 21st Congress eschewed a renewed discussion of the personality cult, it became the pivot of the 22nd Congress. Khrushchev did not mince words. He insisted that the 20th Congress' revelations concerning the personality cult possessed universal significance and continued to do so. To make his point, he mentioned other parties' compliance with the 20th Congress during their own congresses and quoted from the 1960 Moscow Statement: "The historic decisions of the 20th Congress of the C.P.S.U. . . . have initiated a new stage in the world Communist movement, and have promoted its development on the basis of Marxism-Leninism."[244] Deviation from the 20th Congress' declarations about the personality cult, if Khrushchev judged it to be so, meant a violation of Marxist-Leninist universality. Soviet ideological leadership, the personality cult issue, and Marxist-Leninist universality thus merged into one. On these grounds, Khrushchev, in his report, harshly attacked the Albanian communists, who supported the CCP and defiantly opposed the Soviets during the 1960 Moscow Conference. Because of their refusal to accept the universality of the 20th Congress, he accused them of the personality cult.[245] Khrushchev's concluding speech doubled down on his attack by enumerating the crimes of the Albanian leadership, which included the execution of a pregnant woman.[246] Such a public attack at a Soviet congress was usually reserved for the Yugoslavs and signaled a de-facto excommunication from the Soviet-centered world communist movement. One can only imagine the thoughts that the 22nd Congress aroused in Kim Il Sung, who had committed similar crimes. It was an eerie omen—Khrushchev might one day decide to accuse Kim of fostering a personality cult and, under this guise, assert

[244] Ibid., 1:150.

[245] Ibid., 1:151–53.

[246] Ibid., 1:217.

ideological supremacy over North Korea while restricting the permissible extent of creative applications.

In South Korea, Park Chung Hee's military coup on May 16, 1961 represented another crucial factor that led to North Korea's eventual rejection of Soviet ideological leadership. Recognizing Park's militant anti-communist attitude, two days later the North Korean leadership assembled and resolved to temporarily scrap the Seven-Year Plan and instead focus economic efforts on national defense.[247] Many a North Korean elite did not wish to bestow recognition upon the new regime in the South, and some may have genuinely felt a military threat, making Khrushchev's peaceful coexistence an increasingly unappealing doctrine, more than it already was. In June, however, Kim Il Sung managed to obtain Soviet military guarantees and that same month Khrushchev issued an ultimatum to the United States concerning the status of Berlin. Kim felt reassured by Khrushchev's tough stance against imperialism as he revealed in a conversation with an Albanian delegation.[248] The WPK's 4th Congress in September 1961 therefore did not see an abandonment of the Seven-Year Plan or some major turnabout in economic policy. During the proceedings, Frol Kozlov, head of the Soviet delegation, repeated Khrushchev's promise "to defend any socialist country."[249] As for Kim Il Sung's report to the congress, it did faintly hint at a continuation of a peaceful coexistence policy toward South

[247] Anna Beth Keim, trans., "Cable from the Chinese Embassy in North Korea, 'Contents of the May 18th North Korean Party Central Standing Committee Meeting,'" May 21, 1961, PRC FMA 106-00581-06, 32-33, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110055.

[248] Enkel Daljani, trans., "Report on the Delegation of the Albanian Labor Party's Meeting with Kim Il Sung," September 25, 1961, AQPPSH, MPP Korese, D4, V. 1961, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114425.

[249] Enkel Daljani, trans., "Report on the Work of the Delegation of the ALP to the 4th Congress of the Korean Workers' Party," September 7, 1961, AQPPSH, MPP Korese, V. 1961, D4, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114424.

Korea by stating that economic successes in the North would lead to an overthrow of the system in the South.[250] The report also argued that ideological differences between both states ought not hamper unification.[251] As before, Kim praised the CPSU's version of peaceful coexistence and analysis of the present epoch. He upheld the official Soviet position, according to which the present epoch is marked by socialism's growing strength and the national liberation struggle, with the former being the decisive factor in the forward movement of history.[252] Apparently optimistic, despite Kim's failure to strongly apply peaceful coexistence to Korea and despite his promotion of the Ch'ŏllima Movement, the Soviets and East Germans gave a laudatory evaluation of the 4th Congress. Based on the congress' affirmation of Khrushchev's peaceful coexistence, his analysis of the epoch, the CPSU's leading role in the world communist movement, and the necessity of an international division of labor, they felt North Korea was now squarely in the Soviet camp.[253] Indeed, there were signs that North Korea was assuming a conciliatory stance toward the Park regime, which began making overtures to Pyongyang in September. By the beginning of the next month, however, North Korea's hostility toward the

[250] Kim Il Sung, "Chosŏn rodongdang che 4 ch'a taehoe esŏ han chungang wiwŏnhoe saŏp ch'onghwa pogo [Report on the Work of the Central Committee Held at the 4th Congress of the Workers' Party of Korea]," *Kŭlloja*, no. 190 (September 1961): 37.

[251] Ibid., 64.

[252] Ibid., 96–105.

[253] Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, Department of International Relations, "Letter from Schneidewind to Schwab," September 20, 1961, SAPMO-BArch DY 30/IV 2/20/135.

Park regime became obvious.[254] Adherence to Khrushchev's interpretation of the epoch and his version of peaceful coexistence now became a burden.[255]

Under these circumstances, an astute apparatchik such as Kim Il Sung must have realized the looming threat. Continued loyalty to Soviet ideological leadership limited his domestic and inter-Korean policy flexibility and may also have caused conflict with pro-Chinese elements inside the party. He could no longer safely play the middle-of-the-road game; he could no longer have it both ways. If he were to attempt adherence to Soviet ideological leadership while pushing creative application further than before, at a time when Khrushchev's statements clearly indicated restrictions on the creative application of Marxism-Leninism, he opened himself up to a Soviet attack and potential meddling in the DPRK's domestic affairs. The Soviets might even demand a condemnation of the personality cult inside the WPK or criticize Kim personally, supplying opportunity for rivals to take his place. He had no desire to relive his 1956 experience. And what if the Soviet analysis of the current epoch was to shift again? It is doubtful that Kim was blind to the pragmatic interests served by concepts such as peaceful coexistence and an international division of labor. In China's view, Khrushchev's peaceful coexistence was about the Soviet Union curtailing local revolutions, especially anti-colonial national liberation struggles, in favor of their own national interest, consequently harming the world revolution. Peaceful coexistence was a threat to national sovereignty if interpreted as the defining feature of the epoch and combined with a Soviet-centered internationalism because it demanded adherence to whatever the Soviets arbitrarily deemed necessary toward its

[254] Szalontai, *Kim Il Sung in the Khrushchev Era*, 178–79.

[255] It is conceivable, albeit speculative, that those within the WPK leadership who were more in favor of Chinese views in the Sino-Soviet dispute used the May Coup to steer a course away from Khrushchev's interpretation of peaceful coexistence.

achievement. For North Korea it meant that the Soviets, if it suited their interests, might prefer good relations with the US over supporting the DPRK's policy in regard to the South. To the pessimist, it might even suggest a potential revoking of military protection and abandonment in the face of imperialist aggression. After all, during the 22nd CPSU Congress, Khrushchev withdrew his ultimatum concerning Berlin and the signing of a separate peace treaty with East Germany, resulting in the disapproval of many North Korean elites.[256] Douglas Selvage argues that a major reason for Khrushchev's retreat was his trepidation about the possibility of a Western embargo against the Soviet bloc in reaction to a Soviet peace treaty with the GDR. Due to the considerable volume of trade between socialist states and Western powers, such an embargo would have wrought havoc within the Soviet bloc economies. Assuming that North Korea was aware of these economic relations with the West and perhaps even Khrushchev's fear of such an embargo, one can easily see why some might question his priorities.[257]

In the face of so much uncertainty, Kim Il Sung moved toward ideological insulation and a rejection of Soviet ideological leadership. As long as he depended on the universalistic authority of another party, there existed the danger of disunity and factionalism. For example, the 22nd Congress did have an impact on North Korean university students, as revealed by their negative attitude toward Albanian exchange students after reading about congress

[256] Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, Department of International Relations, "Third Supplement Concerning the Assessment of the DPRK's Stance in Regard to the Question of the German Peace Treaty and the Resolution of the West-Berlin-Problem on 10/20/61," July 12, 1962, SAPMO-BArch DY 30/IV 2/20/136.

[257] This may also have constituted further incentive for the construction of a self-reliant economy. Moreover, the GDR, during this time, was in dire straits, economically speaking, and her socialist allies, generally, were unwilling to overcommit economic assistance, much to Khrushchev's disappointment. This, too, might have served as an indication why self-reliance is advantageous, especially for a divided nation directly confronted with imperialism at its border. If anything, the GDR's economic situation required increased trade with West Germany, which only further limited its inter-German policy options. See: Douglas Selvage, "The End of the Berlin Crisis: New Evidence From the Polish and East German Archives," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, no. 11 (1998): 218–29.

proceedings.[258] According to Szalontai's estimation, the 22nd Congress also caused discord among intellectuals and the wider population.[259] Perhaps even a few higher-ranking party members had secret concerns, although we cannot know for sure. If the situation was right, some, whether inside the party or intelligentsia, might wish to follow the Soviet path more closely and criticize Kim's leadership. To prevent this, North Korea began a process of ideological insulation, that is, the coalescence of universality and ideological leadership in the person of Kim Il Sung. A leading communist had to take good care to control universality, for his legitimacy depended on it. He was a prophet gazing into the future, leading his people to the promised land. If anyone were to doubt or reinterpret his local yet universal path, his very leadership would be called into question. Adherence to Soviet ideological leadership guaranteed the universality of local communists' path only as long as the Soviets did not deem that particular path a violation of Marxist-Leninist universality. In such a case, Soviet ideological leadership became a curse. Moreover, the Chinese contestation of the CPSU's interpretation of Marxism-Leninism made the ideology's universality seem less universal and perhaps debatable. Such a lack of certitude was a threat to communist regime stability, since a questioning of ideological truths implied a questioning of communist leadership, which is why all sides in the Sino-Soviet conflict insisted on their correctness, claimed loyalty to Marxism-Leninism, and heavily propagandized inside their countries. There was but one pure and true Marxism-Leninism. Whoever did not follow the same universal path was either a dogmatist or revisionist. It is not surprising, then, to find Hwang Chang-yŏp, the presumed architect of *chuch'e sasang*,

[258] Vojtech Mastny, trans., "Telegram from Pyongyang," December 1, 1961, Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Prague. Korea, Signature 51, Box 5, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110339.

[259] Szalontai, *Kim Il Sung in the Khrushchev Era*, 181.

hint in his memoirs that the impetus for the creation of *chuch'e sasang*—the epitome of ideological insulation, as we shall see later—was the Sino-Soviet conflict.[260] Party unity, which was a euphemism for obedience to the party leader and his ideas, was the antidote to Soviet ideological challenges to one's leadership, Kim Il Sung told an Albanian delegation in September 1961.[261] Party unity was a form of ideological insulation Kim had pursued for years, as did other communist leaders. But in light of the Sino-Soviet rift, ideological insulation would be better served through independence from Soviet ideological leadership and hence a stronger unity of universality and the personal leadership of Kim Il Sung.

And so, in December 1961, the WPK CC, at the behest of Kim Il Sung, decided on a new ideological doctrine, *charyŏk kaengsaeng* (self-reliance), effectively breaking with Soviet ideological leadership, as explored in the next chapter.[262] By the end of the year, North Korea was ready to actively reject what it considered Soviet revisionism.[263] In the course of the following year, North Korea outright dismissed peaceful coexistence as a policy applicable to Korea and solidified the concept of *charyŏk kaengsaeng* through theoretical expositions that ran

[260] Chang-yŏp Hwang, *Nanŭn yŏksaŭi chillirŭl poatta: Hwang Chang-yŏp hoegorok [I Saw the Truth of History: The Memoirs of Hwang Chang-yŏp]* (Seoul: Hanul, 1999), 125–39.

[261] Daljani, "Report on the Delegation of the Albanian Labor Party's Meeting with Kim Il Sung."

[262] Balázs Szalontai, trans., "Report, Embassy of Hungary in North Korea to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry," August 1962, MOL, XIX-J-1-j Korea, 11. doboz, 24/b, 002304/1/RT/1962, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112774.

[263] According to a Chinese source, on December 23, 1961, Kim Jong Il, who was attending university at the time, informed a Chinese student that the DPRK would soon condemn the Soviets and their revisionism and that the WPK was presently circulating among party members a 200-page document on the Soviet-Albanian conflict. Stephen Mercado, trans., "Cable from the Chinese Embassy in North Korea, 'Premier Kim's Son on Soviet-Albanian Relations,'" December 27, 1961, PRC FMA 106-00579-16, 58- 59, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/155255.

counter to the Soviet interpretation of the current epoch.[264] It was the dawn of a new period in the history of North Korean ideology.

Conclusion

Over the next few years, North Korea continuously stepped up its ideological insulation. This process involved not only a contestation of the Soviet Union's ideological leadership role but also a furtherance of Kim's cult. Yet it would be a mistake to think that a break occurred in December 1961 because of a *principled* disagreement over so-called "de-Stalinization" and the personality cult. By raising Kim's ideological power, the cult became a vehicle for insulation and buttressed North Korea's rejection of Soviet authority, which is why the Soviets and their allies began to strongly criticize it in 1962. Conversely, the personality cult became the front under which they attempted to reassert Soviet ideological supremacy. Besides, several Eastern European leaders did not sincerely eliminate the personality cult. As pointed out by Brzezinski, when the ideological clash between the Chinese and Soviets first materialized, "The most stalwart support for the Soviet position came from those East European leaders who had broken the least with Stalinism: Gheorghiu-Dej, Zhivkov, Ulbricht, and Novotny."[265] Indeed, the Soviets never denied the importance of an individual leader in the making of history, as this was core to the Leninist rationalization of communist leadership (see Chapter 4). Because communist rhetoric frequently failed to reflect reality, one could criticize North Korea for

[264] Grace Leonard, trans., "Information on the Reunification Policy of the Korean Workers' Party," May 3, 1962, SAPMO-BArch DY 30/IV 2/20/136, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112304.

[265] Brzezinski, *The Soviet Bloc, Unity and Conflict*, 408.

something one was objectively guilty of as well, as long as one officially avowed Soviet ideological positions. Heterodoxy was a matter of perception.

Korean nationalism, too, does not provide a full explanation for North Korea's break with Soviet orthodoxy. While sovereignty was an issue, Kim did not let nationalistic desires drive his attitude toward the Soviets and he did not hesitate to kowtow to the Soviets if it served his aims. Ultimately, in 1961, a variety of factors converged to make continued adherence to Soviet ideological leadership untenable. Kim Il Sung's actions, therefore, represented expedient responses to a situation that threatened his grip on power and had little to do with a sincere and principled aim to decolonize the Korean psyche. Nationalism or some type of "reservoir of nationalist sentiments" was not a sufficient condition—but perhaps a necessary one—for an independent ideological path.[266] The content of subsequent ideological developments, too, was not simply nationalist. Since North Korea began its path of ideological independence in relation to a quarrel with the Soviet version of Marxism-Leninism, it was Marxism-Leninism that provided the building blocks for North Korea's own ideological interpretations, including the infamous *chuch'e*.

[266] Jae-Jung Suh, ed., *Origins of North Korea's Juche: Colonialism, War, and Development* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2013), 11.

CHAPTER III

CONFLICTING UNIVERSALITIES: FRATERNAL CRITICISMS, NORTH KOREA'S CONTESTATION OF SOVIET IDEOLOGICAL LEADERSHIP, AND INSULATION (1962-67)

Though a watershed, North Korea's decision in December 1961 to pursue a new ideological course did not inaugurate a fundamental break with Soviet Marxism-Leninism. As the present chapter shall illustrate, from 1962 to 1967, North Korea remained squarely within the Marxist-Leninist tradition. Archival documents, in addition to North Korean party publications, contradict the usual depictions of North Korean ideology. They reveal that formulations such as *charyŏk kaengsaeng* (self-reliance) were neither wholly novel nor exclusive to Korea. North Korean ideology developed gradually and was penetrated by threads that connected it with its own past and a global intellectual environment. New ideological formulations constituted sublations of existing ideological material, amalgamations that synthesized this material into new forms. Yet these new formulations in no way existed in isolation from the world around them. Indeed, one cannot truly understand such ideological developments without reference to the international factors that helped induce them. North Korean formulations existed in discourse with Soviet formulations—both shared a common Marxist-Leninist bond.

Scholars familiar with the archives of the Soviet Union and Eastern European states may at first find this evaluation of North Korean ideology suspicious. After all, fraternal socialist states loyal to the Soviet Union severely criticized North Korea's ideological path in the 1960s, questioning its adherence to Marxism-Leninism. As demonstrated in this chapter, these fraternal criticisms, however, must be read as part of an interpretative struggle over Marxist-Leninist

universality. Each side in this struggle, North Korea and pro-Soviet forces, attempted to prove their adherence to universal truth. The East Germans, famous for their fervent loyalty to the USSR, showed themselves particularly dismissive of North Korean ideology. Because the East Germans followed the USSR's ideological leadership, they considered heterodox any contestation of Soviet universality, and North Korea's new ideological path was precisely that, a rejection of Soviet ideological leadership and the universality prescribed by it.

Given much of the previous scholarship's *chuch'e*-centric focus on North Korea's departure from Marxism-Leninism, this chapter provides a novel conception of North Korean ideology in the 1960s. While the foregoing chapters tried to show that *chuch'e* had not become some kind of leitmotif or announcement of independence from Soviet ideology, the present chapter goes yet further, arguing that even in 1965 *chuch'e* occupied a relatively humble rank in North Korean orthodoxy. The ascendancy of *chuch'e* was linked with North Korean attempts at ideological insulation. Prior to 1967, however, the *chuch'e* argument was but one of several ways in which North Korea promoted insulation and a rejection of Soviet universality. Due to international and domestic factors, Kim Il Sung and his allies began to pursue an even more insulative path in 1966 and 67, culminating in the creation of the monolithic ideological system. Fusing ideology and universality closer with Kim's person, 1967 saw the coalescence of *chuch'e sasang* and the personal thought of Kim Il Sung, a process inseparable from the universalistic struggles depicted in this chapter.

Surveying Fraternal Criticisms

Early a March evening in Pyongyang—the year was 1965—the Cuban ambassador and his entourage, on a cruise through the city, found themselves attacked by an incensed mob of

North Koreans, young and old. Fortunately for the delegation, a physical altercation did not occur. Instead, they only suffered a bombardment of variegated invectives, including racial slurs, until the authorities arrived to violently beat the crowd into submission.[267] Behind the scenes, the East Germans analyzed the incident as follows: "The incident is a clear expression of the negative influence of the WPK's leadership on the masses, who, under the conditions of the personality cult and the misguided politics of the DPRK, are educated into schematism, dependence, and nationalism."[268] Regardless of the motivations that led the North Korean mob to act as it did, the East German evaluation seems to point to a considerable ideological disagreement between the countries. But was this just an isolated evaluation in reaction to an extreme incident?

As one scours the archives of former Eastern European states, especially those aligned with the Soviet Union, one discovers that criticisms such as these are scattered throughout archival documents from the 1960s. In a 1963 examination of North Korean ideological developments in the previous year, an East German analyst, noticing the further growth of Kim Il Sung's personality cult and North Korean nationalism, explained:

> In their stance regarding the events surrounding Cuba, the Korean comrades did not base themselves on the principle of peaceful coexistence and viewed the politics of the Soviet Union as a retreat in the face of American imperialism. At the same time, under the motto of 'self-reliance,' strong nationalistic tendencies were promoted during this period in the DPRK.[269]

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[267] Grace Leonard, trans., "Report on the Incident Involving the Cuban Ambassador and the Delegation of Physicians from Cuba While in North Korea," April 2, 1965, SAPMO-BArch DY 30/IV A2/20/251, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112305.

[268] Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, Department of International Relations, "Information Concerning a Serious Incident with the Cuban Ambassador on March 28, 1965 in Pyongyang," April 21, 1965, 8, SAPMO-BArch DY 30/IV A 2/20/252.

[269] Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, Department of International Relations, "The Influence of the Chinese Communist Party on the Politics of the Workers' Party of Korea," April 8, 1963, 109, SAPMO-BArch DY 30/IV A 2/20/250.

Another such examination in the same year, besides mentioning nationalism and the personality cult, additionally blamed "dogmatism" and "factionalism" for recent trends in North Korea.[270] During the 1960s, at party organization meetings of the GDR embassy in the DPRK, critical comments appeared with particular frequency: "The political stance of the Korean comrades still has strong nationalistic tendencies, i.e., they still have too little understanding of the world communist movement, focus too much on their own problems, and do not approach everything from a Marxist-Leninist point of view."[271] Because embassy workers were charged with facilitating beneficial trade agreements with North Korea, they also disapproved of North Korea's now-famous slogan, "self-reliance" (*charyŏk kaengsaeng*): "As a socialist country, the DPRK is politico-ideologically aligned with the current politics of the CCP leadership. She is not a member of Comecon and develops her economy under the motto, 'self-reliance,' which contains strong nationalistic tendencies."[272] Official delegations visiting the DPRK, of course, were just as critical:

> The cult of personality surrounding Kim Il Sung is extremely developed. . . . The entire social life of the DPRK is marked by a pronounced militaristic-bureaucratic character, which the delegation encountered everywhere. These forms of education and methods of leadership carry with them an underestimation of the creativity [*Schöpferkraft*] of the assiduous Korean people and an insufficient appreciation of its achievements.[273]

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[270] Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, Department of International Relations, "Abridgment of the Relations Report of the GDR Embassy in the DPRK for the Year 1962," January 24, 1963, 2, SAPMO-BArch DY 30/IV A 2/20/253.

[271] Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, Department of International Relations, "Statements from the Election Report Assembly of the SED Ground Organization at the GDR Embassy in the DPRK," January 5, 1967, 38, SAPMO-BArch DY 30/IV A 2/20/257.

[272] Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, Department of International Relations, "Minutes of the Executive Meeting from 9/13/1963," September 16, 1963, 103, SAPMO-BArch DY 30/IV A 2/20/258.

[273] Politburo of the Central Committee of the SED, "Report about the Stay of a State Delegation of the GDR in the DPRK at the Celebrations of the 20th Anniversary of the DPRK's Founding," September 16, 1968, 5, SAPMO-BArch DY 30/J IV 2/2J/2340.

In short, criticisms of North Korean ideology, especially in terms of nationalism, the personality cult, bureaucratism, non-adherence to peaceful coexistence, self-reliance, dogmatism, and creativity saturate the pages of archival documents from the 1960s.

Clearly, the fraternal criticisms found in the archives point to a difference between North Korean and East German ideology in the 1960s. Yet how far does this difference go? At first, given my knowledge of the literature on the subject, I simply assumed that these criticisms represented North Korean ideology's natural heading toward an entirely new and native Korean ideology, perhaps derived from one or more of Korea's historical legacies. Yet as I continued to read over archival documents, it gradually became clear to me that criticisms occurred not because North Korean ideology was departing from Marxism-Leninism as such but precisely because North Korea was formulating an interpretation of Marxism-Leninism that contravened Soviet leadership in the matter. East German attacks had a very specific Marxist-Leninist meaning, as did North Korea's heterodoxy.

Charyŏk kaengsaeng and the Issue of Nationalism

As explored in the previous chapter, economic independence was integral to the Marxist-Leninist tradition. Whether talking about economic independence, self-reliance, self-sufficiency, self-determination, or even autarky, all were acceptable to a certain degree, depending on the circumstances. Nevertheless, such talk could just as well be deemed heterodox, again depending on the specific situation. Under the banner of *charyŏk kaengsaeng*, self-reliance became a source of conflict. *Charyŏk kaengsaeng* infused old terms such as *charipsŏng* (self-reliance, self-sufficiency, independence) and *charipchŏk minjok kyŏngje* (self-reliant/self-sufficient/independent national economy) with fresh meaning and catapulted them to the

forefront of an ideological rhetoric contravening Soviet orthodoxy. In its Marxist-Leninist theoretical exposition, North Korea's *charyŏk kaengsaeng*—like the same-named Chinese slogan of *zìlìgēngshēng* from which it was inspired—provided a view of the current epoch that was at variance with Soviet interpretations and ideological leadership.

In March 1962, the WPK's theoretical organ featured its first official elaboration of *charyŏk kaengsaeng*. Right from the beginning, the article sought to clarify the relationship between one's local revolution and the world revolution. While both were interconnected and supported the other, according to the article, local communists were primarily responsible for their own national revolution, relying on their own strength to build socialism within their own country and thereby advance the world revolution. In correspondence with the international communist anthem known as the "Internationale," which the article quoted, the oppressed must free themselves by their own hands. To further drive home the Marxist-Leninist nature of its argument, the article also quoted from Lenin's 1917 piece "The Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution" the following phrase: "There is one, and only one, kind of real internationalism, and that is—working whole-heartedly for the development of the revolutionary movement and the revolutionary struggle in *one's own* country, and supporting (by propaganda, sympathy, and material aid) *this struggle,* this, *and only this,* line, in *every* country without exception."[274] *Charyŏk kaengsaeng* therefore meant a complete commitment to one's national revolution, a belief that wholehearted devotion to all spheres of socialist construction within one's nation constituted the most sacred revolutionary act. According to the article, the "spirit" (*chŏngsin*) of

[274] Vladimir I. Lenin, "The Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution: Draft Platform for the Proletarian Party," in *V. I. Lenin: Collected Works*, trans. Isaacs Bernard, vol. 24 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), 75. Chosŏnnodongdang chungangwiwŏnhoe, "Charyŏk kaengsaeng ŭn kongsanjuŭijadŭl ŭi hyŏngmyŏngjŏk kip'ung ida [Charyŏk kaengsaeng Is the Revolutionary Ethos of Communists]," *Kŭlloja*, no. 196 (March 1962): 2–3.

charyŏk kaengsaeng is the spirit of "the working class wanting to liberate itself while strengthening its internationalist solidarity."[275] As revealed by such phrasing, *charyŏk kaengsaeng* was not merely a domestic doctrine but also a universalistic claim. North Korea considered it a "spirit of internationalism," essentially equating *charyŏk kaengsaeng* with proletarian internationalism.[276]

North Korea's understanding of proletarian internationalism thus came to differ from the Soviet version. Soviet internationalism was a Soviet-centered internationalism, hinging on fidelity to the CPSU and its analysis of the epoch. This Soviet-centered internationalism was therefore closely bound up with the Soviet Union's ideological authority. If we recall from the previous chapter, the Chinese attempted to thwart Soviet ideological supremacy through the same nation-based internationalism as the North Koreans now began to do. In their interpretation of the present epoch, Beijing argued that communists in a particular nation must hew out their own path in correspondence with their unique local conditions. Whereas Khrushchev interpreted peaceful coexistence as the defining mark of the epoch, a form of class struggle that would guarantee the victory of socialism on a worldwide scale, the CCP thought that only one's local struggle, whether in terms of constructing socialism or leading a fight for national liberation against colonial oppressors, could promote the collapse of capitalism throughout the world, not an absolute adherence to peaceful coexistence. With *charyŏk kaengsaeng*, Pyongyang implicitly rejected the universality of Khrushchev's peaceful coexistence by prioritizing the national struggle, which Eastern European diplomats quickly

[275] Chosŏnnodongdang chungangwiwŏnhoe, "Charyŏk kaengsaeng ŭn kongsanjuŭijadŭl ŭi hyŏngmyŏngjŏk kip'ung ida [Charyŏk kaengsaeng Is the Revolutionary Ethos of Communists]," 2.

[276] Ibid., 3.

started to realize.[277] Instead of an economic division of labor, the North Koreans claimed, the best way to strengthen world socialism in the current epoch and carry out one's internationalist duty to aid the class struggle was the establishment of an economically independent and powerful socialist state.[278] In the course of 1962 and 63, North Korea fortified its new conception of proletarian internationalism, denying the leading role of the CPSU in the world communist movement. All parties were equal, North Korea declared, and the congress of one party, including its analysis of the epoch, could not serve as a binding program for all other parties.[279] The national or "subjective factor" (*chuch'ejŏk yoin*), as North Korea called it, was the decisive factor in the waging of revolution, not the international factor, despite their interdependence.[280] Mirroring Chinese positions, North Korea therefore highlighted the significance of the national liberation struggle. Like the CCP, the WPK held that the present epoch was still the one described by Lenin, a period of struggle between imperialism and socialism, making national liberation struggles, not peaceful coexistence with the imperialists, a crucial means to win the class struggle and move history forward by causing damage to

[277] Leonard, "Information on the Reunification Policy of the Korean Workers' Party."

[278] Chosŏnnodongdang chungangwiwŏnhoe, "Charyŏk kaengsaeng kwa charipchŏk minjok kyŏngje ŭi kŏnsŏl [Charyŏk kaengsaeng and the Construction of a Self-Reliant National Economy]," *Kŭlloja*, no. 226 (June 1963): 6–7.

[279] Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, Department of International Relations, "Compilation of Arguments by the Workers' Party of Korea on the Basic Questions of Our Epoch," April 21, 1964, SAPMO-BArch DY 30/IV A 2/20/251.

[280] I realize that to translate *chuch'ejŏk* as "subjective" or "national" is strange, but it is based on a contextual reading of the article, in which it constitutes the opposite of the *kukchejŏk* (international) factor. In this sense, *chuch'ejŏk* refers to a kind of national self or national subjectivity. This translation is further confirmed when examining the Marxist-Leninist origins of this concept, as explored in Chapter 4.
Sŏng-gwŏn Ro, "Hyŏngmyŏng ŭi chuch'ejŏk yoin kwa kukchejŏk yoin [The Revolution's Subjective Factor and International Factor]," *Kŭlloja*, no. 229 (August 1963): 24–28.

imperialist might.[281] Although both the Soviets and North Koreans combined national and class struggle, they did so in differing ways. Clearly attempting to appeal to South Koreans and counter the Park regime's propaganda, North Korea framed its own situation as both a struggle for socialism and national liberation. South Korea, by contrast, was viewed as a colony in dire economic straits. Whereas the DPRK, by building a self-reliant national economy, followed the Leninist principle according to which economic independence represented the prerequisite for political independence, the Park regime, Pyongyang held, only talked about such independence but, in actuality, was colonially dependent on the United States.[282]

Given North Korea's assault on Soviet internationalism and ideological leadership, the USSR painted the WPK's ideological path as nationalistic. Nationalism (K. *minjokchuŭi*), however, had a specific Marxist-Leninist meaning and should not be confused with our own conceptions of nationalism. After all, one could easily say that other socialist states such as East Germany or the Soviet Union were nationalistic as well. Indeed, nationalism in North Korea was nothing overly unique. All Marxist-Leninist projects were carried out within the boundaries of nation-states and naturally had strong nationalist overtones. During this time, Marxist-Leninists, including the North Koreans, denounced nationalism as fundamentally antithetical to internationalism and did not use the term in self-depictions. They defined their own people's loyalty toward the nation as "socialist patriotism," which was regarded as qualitatively different from nationalism. Whereas nationalism undermined the international communist movement by chauvinistically trampling upon other nations' sovereignty, by turning the working class against

[281] Chosŏnnodongdang chungangwiwŏnhoe, "Paekchŏn paeksŭng ŭi Lenin ŭi kich'i [The Ever-Victorious Banner of Lenin]," *Kŭlloja*, no. 222 (April 1963): 2–6.

[282] Chosŏnnodongdang chungangwiwŏnhoe, "Charipchŏk minjok kyŏngje ŭi kŏnsŏl ŭn choguk ŭi t'ongil kwa tongnip kwa pŏnyŏng ŭi kil ida [The Construction of a Self-Reliant National Economy Is the Path to the Fatherland's Unification, Independence, and Prosperity]," *Kŭlloja*, no. 222 (April 1963): 19–23.

itself, or by taking a developmental route harmful to historical progress, socialist patriotism did just the opposite. An East German textbook thus reads: "Only the realization of the fundamental goals of the working class, [i.e.,] the overthrow of the exploiters who stifle the progress of the nation, as well as the establishment of socialism, can give each nation true freedom, independence, and national greatness. As a result, the most internationalist class, namely the working class, is at the same time the most patriotic class."[283] Progressing along the socialist path within one's nation was simultaneously patriotic and internationalist, making socialist nations a crucial vehicle of historical progress. To both the North Koreans and the Soviets, proletarian internationalism consequently did not mean a negation of the nation, national interest, or economic sovereignty. Quite the opposite, a deconstruction of the nation was viewed as a bourgeois ploy to better exploit the masses. Those who argued that "the principle of sovereignty had become a hurdle to the development of the productive forces" were accordingly labeled "ideologues of cosmopolitanism."[284]

Fraternal criticisms about North Korean nationalism must be read within the context of a Marxist-Leninist understanding of nationalism. They neither signify nor corroborate North Korea's abandonment of Marxism-Leninism. To the contrary, they illustrate its investment in the Marxist-Leninist tradition. While both the Soviets and the North Koreans upheld proletarian internationalism, the former regarded a violation of the CPSU's version of Marxist-Leninist universality an affront to internationalism and hence nationalistic. To the Soviets, proletarian internationalism demanded the pursuit of the Marxist-Leninist course laid out by the CPSU,

[283] Günther and Arbatow, *Grundlagen des Marxismus-Leninismus: Lehrbuch*, 531. This was an authoritative East German textbook on Marxism-Leninism, translated from the Soviet version.

[284] Ibid., 525.

which included an acceptance of its analysis of the present epoch. Failure to follow Soviet leadership, in other words, constituted nationalism and was said to harm the world revolution as a result of narrow-minded national considerations. The Soviets thus condemned China's defiance during the Sino-Soviet Split, as well as the Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia, as nationalistic.[285] Conversely, China, North Korea, and Albania termed Soviet meddling in the internal affairs of other countries and parties, especially Soviet attempts to force its ideological platform onto other parties, as "great power chauvinism" (K. *taegukchuŭi*), another form of nationalism, because it was solely based on the national interest of the Soviets and not the international communist movement as a whole.[286] Steeped in Marxism-Leninism, North Korean officials naturally rejected any fraternal accusations of nationalism.[287] In rationalizing self-reliance in front of Eastern European diplomats, the North Koreans consistently called self-reliance "the best contribution of each individual country to the strengthening of the socialist camp," stressing the point that it "has nothing in common with the nationalistic movements in some other socialist countries."[288] Put differently, self-reliance was internationalism because it advanced the international goal of the working class by eliminating exploitation, protecting national sovereignty, and constructing a socialist country. While the Soviets also believed that internationalism ought to advance those aspects, they simply thought self-reliance as upheld by

[285] Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, Department of International Relations, "Information about the Splintering Activities of the Chinese Communist Party," January 27, 1966, 36–37, SAPMO-BArch DY 30/IV A 2/20/995.

[286] Kim Il Sung, "Hyŏn chŏngse wa uri tang ŭi kwaŏp [The Present Situation and the Tasks of Our Party]," *Kŭlloja*, no. 296 (October 1966): 21.

[287] Ibid., 23.

[288] Politburo of the Central Committee of the SED, "Report about the Stay of a State Delegation of the GDR in the DPRK at the Celebrations of the 20th Anniversary of the DPRK's Founding," 4.

Pyongyang was not the correct and universal approach to accomplish this goal. The difference between North Korean and Soviet proletarian internationalism was hence quite subtle.

The heterodoxy of *charyŏk kaengsaeng*, and by implication North Korea's internationalism, only makes sense when viewed from the Soviet perspective. Otherwise *charyŏk kaengsaeng* was a perfectly orthodox, Marxist-Leninist argument. The Soviets did not disagree with the notion of a successful local revolution promoting the world revolution. Khrushchev himself said that the CPSU "regards communist construction in the U.S.S.R. as the fulfillment of its internationalist duty to the working people of all countries" during the 22nd Congress.[289] East Germany, too, believed that strengthening its socialist economy was an essential task in the struggle against imperialism.[290] Soviet disagreement ultimately stemmed from North Korea's contestation of Soviet ideological leadership. Yet not even North Korea's questioning of the Soviet role as head of the communist movement was entirely unorthodox. Khrushchev himself opened the floodgates with his denunciation of Stalin's chauvinistic approach to international relations. Indeed, when the Chinese criticized the CPSU's position as head of the communist movement, an angry Khrushchev retorted, "'With the Soviet Union at the head' smells like personality cult."[291] Lest he seem hypocritical or as promoting dogmatism, Khrushchev had little choice but to reject the phrasing "at the head" when openly confronted,

[289] Khrushchev, *Documents of the 22nd Congress of the CPSU*, 1961, 1:185.

[290] The point of contention was how to go about strengthening one's economy in the struggle against imperialism. Whereas East Germany believed that Comecon was crucial in this endeavor, North Korea did not. Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, Department of International Relations, "Report of the Party Executive Committee at the Election Report Assembly of the Ground Organization of the GDR Embassy in the DPRK," April 13, 1964, 8, SAPMO-BArch DY 30/IV A 2/20/256.

[291] Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, Department of International Relations, "Memorandum Concerning the Contents of the Meetings between the Representatives of the Communist and Workers' Parties, Who Came Together for an Exchange of Opinions on the Occasion of the Third Party Congress of the Rumanian Workers' Party in Bucharest," 134.

which is why immediately after this comment he affirmed the independence of each communist party, approaching the North Korean understanding of proletarian internationalism.[292] Of course, in subsequent years, those loyal to the Soviet Union, especially East Germany, continued to utilize phraseology exalting the Soviet leadership role, phraseology that was necessary to justify why the Soviet analysis of the current epoch ought to serve as a universal guide for parties outside the USSR as well.

Although December 1961 was a watershed in terms of North Korea's contestation of Soviet ideological leadership, this ideological break was not of a fundamental nature. North Korea was merely redirecting preexisting concepts through new formulations. These and subsequent ideological developments therefore display plenty of continuity. What occurred was a type of sublation, in which preceding ideological material was amalgamated and incorporated into new ideological formulations. To visualize this process, it is useful to employ Hegel's notion of sublation (*Aufhebung*). Hegel argued that Reason (*Vernunft*) develops itself out of itself. Currently rational (*vernünftig*) concepts are literally picked up (*aufgehoben*) by the mind to form new concepts. Though the contents of new formulations are mostly the same, their rationality is not. Reason is only accountable to itself in the present. That is, an older formulation may appear contrary to the rationality of the present formulation, despite its genealogy. In the North Korean case, when viewed from a post-1961 perspective, ideological positions from the 1950s would appear familiar and easily recognizable but nevertheless heterodox. While the old content remains present, its rationality has shifted. As a result, because new formulations carried within themselves the old, an outside observer might erroneously believe that North Korea held the same heterodox views already in previous years. When

[292] Ibid.

investigating the continuity in North Korean ideology, it is thus important to take full account of the rationality of a particular formulation at a given point in time instead of letting one's own imaginations run wild. One must examine formulations in their historical present, including fraternal criticisms of North Korean ideology.

Misreadings of North Korean ideology are in fact facilitated by North Korea's own false claims and historical revisionism. Almost immediately after deciding on an independent ideological path, North Korea tied *charyŏk kaengsaeng* to the Anti-Japanese Armed Struggle led by Kim Il Sung during the colonial period.[293] Supposedly Kim Il Sung and his guerilla band had always upheld the spirit of *charyŏk kaengsaeng*, that is, they always combined the national with the international mission while, above all, fighting for the Korean revolution, a view that was identical to North Korea's interpretation of proletarian internationalism. Liberation was seen as achieved through the sole strength of the Korean guerrillas, their national victory representing a victory for the international communist movement.[294] In truth, this constituted an obvious distortion. It was not so much the case that Kim's guerrilla experience determined the ideological course of North Korea as the immediate historical environment determined the interpretation of the guerrilla experience. North Korea revised its understanding of the guerrilla struggle in order to add justification to the present course. Not surprisingly, the East Germans criticized this historical revisionism precisely because it was so closely related to present conflicts, as demonstrated by North Korea's silencing of the Soviet role in the liberation of Korea. While the Soviets liked to exaggerate their historical achievements, such as their role in

[293] Chosŏnnodongdang chungangwiwŏnhoe, "Charyŏk kaengsaeng ŭn kongsanjuŭijadŭl ŭi hyŏngmyŏngjŏk kip'ung ida [Charyŏk kaengsaeng Is the Revolutionary Ethos of Communists]," 3.

[294]Sang-hun Ri, "Hangil mujang t'ujaeng sigi e palhwidoen charyŏk kaengsaeng ŭi hyŏngmyŏng chŏngshin [The Revolutionary Spirit of charyŏk kaengsaeng Displayed During the Time of the Anti-Japanese Armed Struggle]," *Kŭlloja*, no. 226 (June 1963): 11–12.

defeating Japanese militarism, in order to buttress their own version of proletarian internationalism, North Korea did the same, which is why the East Germans viewed this new history as nationalistic—it was contrary to the Soviet understanding of proletarian internationalism and its implicit assumption of Soviet leadership in the world communist movement.[295] The East Germans were not critical of the fact that North Korea was writing a history with its nation at the center, actually welcoming this development, but that this history and its exaggerations would promote a course away from the Soviet Union.[296] Socialist states generally promoted a nation-centered history writing and a recognition of the progressive elements in one's national heritage, which is why the East Germans additionally welcomed North Korea's positive evaluation of certain facets of the "bourgeois nationalist movement" of the colonial period and the *sirhak* school during the Chosŏn dynasty, instead of simply rejecting the entirety of the historical inheritance.[297] Whereas a wholesale rejection of the nation's inheritance was considered dogmatism, ignoring the role of the Soviet Union in the writing of a national history was nationalism.

North Korea's creation of a revolutionary tradition around Kim Il Sung and his partisans additionally illustrates the ideological insulation the regime hoped to achieve. Certainly, this revolutionary tradition and history-writing was already beginning to emerge in the 1950s, but its

[295] Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, Department of International Relations, "Assessment of the Article 'A New Achievement in the Research on the Revolutionary Movement of the Korean People in Modern Times,'" March 12, 1962, 249, SAPMO-BArch DY 30/IV 2/20/137.
Chosŏnnodongdang chungangwiwŏnhoe, "Ssoryŏn Kongsandang kangnyŏng (Ch'oan) [The Program of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Draft)]," *Kŭlloja,* August 1961, 9.

[296] Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, Department of International Relations, "Assessment of the Article 'A New Achievement in the Research on the Revolutionary Movement of the Korean People in Modern Times,'" 247–50.

[297] Ibid.

true takeoff only occurred after 1961. Communist rulers found revolutionary traditions an essential tool for encouraging unity around their leadership. These traditions polished the leadership's image by combining national history, ideology, and the legitimacy of the current regime. East Germany, for example, established its revolutionary tradition largely around the so-called anti-fascist resistance struggle, given the background of top SED politicians such as Ulbricht and later Honecker, who both had anti-fascist credentials dating back to WWII. A revolutionary tradition was developed via a selection of historical facts, distortions surrounding those facts, and the establishment of a cult-like image around the historical actors involved. The SED and the East German state were thus made to appear as the legitimate heir to all of Germany's progressive heritage.[298] This ultimately helped to legitimize the correctness of the current path and demonstrate its deep native roots. And since the GDR was mostly loyal to Soviet ideological leadership, it also declared as a tradition "the battle-tempered bond between the SED and CPSU."[299] Kim Il Sung, too, realized the utility of a revolutionary tradition. In May 1956, he openly wrote that Korea's lack of a communist party existing continuously from before to after liberation, as well as the pursuant lack of a revolutionary tradition, resulted in a breeding ground for factionalism.[300] To achieve unity around his person and avoid factionalism, a strong revolutionary tradition proved indispensable. With the challenge to Soviet ideological leadership, this unity became yet more pressing, particularly if attempting to tie Marxist-Leninist universality closer to Kim's figure. It would be much harder to question the present course if it

[298] Böhme et al., *Kleines politisches Wörterbuch [Small Political Dictionary]*, 844–46.

[299] Ibid., 845.

[300] Kim Il Sung, "Chosŏn rodongdang che 3 ch'a taehoe esŏ chinsul han chungang wiwŏnhoe saŏp ch'onggyŏl pogo [Work Review Report of the Central Committee Held at the 3rd Congress of the Workers' Party of Korea]," *Kŭlloja*, no. 126 (May 1956): 70.

was indeed so firmly planted in Korean soil and Korean history. North Korea claimed that Kim Il Sung had picked up Lenin's universal banner in the colonial period and creatively applied it to the Korean revolution.[301] If the current ideological path was steeled under the leadership of Kim Il Sung during the colonial period, and if this path had led to the liberation of Korea, what party member was to doubt Kim's ideological authority in the present?

Of course this revolutionary tradition served not only the inculcation of party members but also the masses at large. *Charyŏk kaengsaeng* was less an economic approach than it was a method of inculcation. As Minister of Foreign Affairs Pak Sŏng-ch'ŏl explained while addressing the concerns of the East Germans, *charyŏk kaengsaeng* "is primarily a question of the education of the masses. One cannot take it literally."[302] This is indeed why North Korea talked about *charyŏk kaengsaeng* in terms of a "spirit" that the masses must possess in order to carry the revolution forward.[303] To hold this spirit meant to obey one's own national leadership, since it was the national leadership, especially its top leader, which analyzed the conditions prevailing inside the country and determined how to carry out one's local revolution. As long as Kim Il Sung controlled the unity of the party, *charyŏk kaengsaeng* provided an ideological justification to follow his leadership over any outside leadership. Making the slogan part of a revolutionary tradition centered on Kim Il Sung only further raised his authority. Pak's statement thus brings us to our next issue, the personality cult.

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[301] Chosŏnnodongdang chungangwiwŏnhoe, "Paekchŏn paeksŭng ŭi Lenin ŭi kich'i [The Ever-Victorious Banner of Lenin]," 5–6.

[302] GDR Embassy in the DPRK, "Memorandum about the Initial Visit with Minister of Foreign Affairs, Pak Sŏng-Ch'ŏl, on September 16, 1964," September 16, 1964, 149, SAPMO-BArch DY 30/IV A 2/20/253.

[303] Chosŏnnodongdang chungangwiwŏnhoe, "Chosŏn hyŏngmyŏng ŭi apkil ŭl palk'in ch'angjojŏk Maksŭ-reninjuŭi rojak [The Korean Revolution's Road Ahead as Revealed by the Writings of Creative Marxism-Leninism]," *Kŭlloja*, no. 249 (June 1964): 18–19.

The Personality Cult and Ideological Insulation

East German criticisms of North Korea through the interrelated terms of "dogmatism," "creativity," and "bureaucratism" were directly linked to the personality cult issue. Though not new, these terms represented core components of the de-Stalinization program and helped legitimize the new Soviet path. Dogmatism meant failure to adjust ideology to the realities within one's country, adhering instead to rigid ideas and models, often copied from other parties without adjustment, consequently resulting in an impediment on the masses' creativity.[304] A Marxist-Leninist believed in the objective necessity of the historical trajectory. But he or she also knew that history does not make itself. In order to make history in the most effective and progressive way, subjectivity needed to match objectivity, that is, the minds of the working masses had to correspond with objective reality and the historical trajectory derived therefrom. In such a case, their subjective power to create the new from the old, i.e., their creativity, increased dramatically. They could then realize historical necessity, moving history forward in accordance with their own freedom-seeking aspirations. Dogmatism, however, constituted a mismatch between subjective and objective, a situation in which ideology did not reflect, in a universal way, the particular circumstances of the masses due to a dogmatic adherence to outdated positions by the communist leadership. The solution to dogmatism was the creative application of Marxism-Leninism, which in turn was to promote the masses' creativity, since ideology would then correspond with objective reality and thus better enable them to make

[304] North Korea had several ways to express the notion of creativity, such as *changjosŏng* (creativity), *changjojŏk chŏngshin* (creative spirit), and *changjoryŏk* (creative power). East Germany also had various expressions, including *Schöpfertum* (creativity), *Schöpfergeist* (creative spirit), and *Schöpferkraft* (creative power).

history.[305] Bureaucratism also hampered creativity, because by imperiously dictating to the masses without knowing their situation, and by the masses unilaterally depending on the leadership, there will develop a rift between the leadership and the masses, preventing the latter from realizing the historical mission of constructing socialism and communism due to a general lack of faith in the revolution and fallacious revolutionary policy. The East Germans frequently argued that the North Koreans were harming their own revolution, and by extension the world revolution, through mistaken ideological positions that did not correspond with the realities of the time and incorrect methods of leadership, crippling the creative powers of the masses. To follow outdated Stalinist ways was both dogmatic and bureaucratic. Thus, attacks against North Korea in terms of dogmatism, creativity, and bureaucratism corresponded with the charge of the personality cult. In other words, the concept of personality cult encompassed dogmatism and bureaucratism, because it was said to promote both.

After 1961, criticisms of North Korea's personality cult ultimately stemmed from the WPK's contestation of Soviet ideological leadership. As mentioned in the previous chapter, some of the most Stalinist rulers were at the same time fervent defenders of the USSR. Hence, fraternal parties' denunciation of Kim Il Sung's personality cult was more of a self-interested concern over the cult's ramifications for the validity of Soviet universality than it was a principled stand to implement collective leadership everywhere. The personality cult raised a communist leader's ideological authority and helped insulate him from ideological viewpoints contrary to his own, binding universality closer to his person. If this universality contravened Soviet universality, then the personality cult made it more difficult for the Soviets to challenge

[305] The 1957 Moscow Declaration, for example, makes this point perfectly clear: Communist and Workers' Parties, "Declaration of Communist and Workers' Parties of the Socialist Countries."

the ideological viewpoints they disagreed with, influence party members, and effect a political change that would result in increased loyalty to the Soviet Union. In short, after the break with China, what the Soviets viewed as personality cult in fraternal states was simply a strong party unity around a single leader, whose ideological course was contrary to the Soviet path or in danger of becoming oppositional. Soviet desire to tear down Kim's personality cult therefore constituted an effort to reinstall Soviet ideological authority over North Korea. This is precisely why North Korea in this period condemned the Soviet Union's "meddling in the internal affairs of fraternal parties" under the pretense of "the so-called movement 'against the personality cult.'"[306]

The North Koreans did not admit to the personality cult accusation. As previously shown, bureaucratism and dogmatism constituted standard Marxist-Leninist concepts, even during the reign of Stalin. In the face of de-Stalinization, Kim used these concepts and turned them against his factional enemies. Since North Korea did not reject Marxism-Leninism after 1961, now too, he continued to rely on them. Well aware of the charges that pro-Soviet forces throughout the world—and perhaps even inside his own party—would levy against his rule if he abandoned Soviet ideological leadership, Kim Il Sung and his supporters carefully crafted the new ideological arguments to both appeal to a well-established logic and counter potential detractors abroad.

While the East Germans thought that the WPK, through its bureaucratic leadership, educated the masses into a mindset of dependence that extinguished their creative zeal, the North Koreans argued just the opposite. When Pak Sŏng-ch'ŏl described *charyŏk kaengsaeng* as a

[306] Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, Department of International Relations, "Compilation of Arguments by the Workers' Party of Korea on the Basic Questions of Our Epoch," 106–8.

method of education, this not only meant an attempt to unify the masses around Kim Il Sung but also a heightening of their creativity. Contrary to the East German interpretation, the masses were to be taught to become independent, self-reliant actors in charge of their destinies.[307] Their revolution was the Korean revolution, and they should carry it out by their own strength. Hence, North Korea, while discussing communist education and creativity, frequently emphasized the spirit of *charyŏk kaengsaeng*, according to which the Korean masses were the masters of their national revolution. Only this independent mindset would allow them to overcome all challenges that might arise in socialist construction and successfully execute party policy.[308] As seen by North Korea's quoting from the "Internationale," as well as a fabricated statement Kim Il Sung supposedly made in the 1930s, "the working class' liberation cannot be accomplished but by the working class itself."[309] The masses were the "genuine creators" of history while the party and its leader represented the guide. To avoid bureaucratism in this relationship, North Korea (and China) practiced the so-called "mass line," which mandated a close bond between leadership and

[307] According to an East German textbook: "The overblown encomiums about a leader, the exaggerations about his achievements, intentionally or unintentionally, have a damaging influence on the masses and obstruct their correct education. The personality cult evokes the false assumption in the masses that the tasks facing them could be solved by someone else. . . . Such views weaken in each worker the consciousness of responsibility for the course and success of the socialist movement; they weaken the precious feeling of being master of your own destiny." This quote is particularly interesting in light of Kim Il Sung's 1972 statements about man as discussed in Chapter 4. It is almost as if the growth of the cult corresponded with a growth of the man-is-master discourse, perhaps in order to internally rationalize the leader-centered system, or perhaps in order to create an effective foreign propaganda weapon, or both. Günther and Arbatow, *Grundlagen des Marxismus-Leninismus: Lehrbuch*, 216.

[308] Kim Il Sung, "Kim Il-sŏng susang ŭi sinnyŏnsa [Premier Kim Il Sung's New Year's Address]," *Kŭlloja*, no. 194 (January 1962): 7.
Chosŏnnodongdang chungangwiwŏnhoe, "Modŭn him ŭl tahayŏ yŏsŏt kae koji rŭl chŏmnyŏnghaja [Let Us Make Every Effort to Capture the Six Heights]," *Kŭlloja*, no. 194 (January 1962): 11.
Chosŏnnodongdang chungangwiwŏnhoe, "Charyŏk kaengsaeng kwa charipchŏk minjok kyŏngje ŭi kŏnsŏl [Charyŏk kaengsaeng and the Construction of a Self-Reliant National Economy]," 3.

[309] Ri, "Hangil mujang t'ujaeng sigi e palhwidoen charyŏk kaengsaeng ŭi hyŏngmyŏng chŏngshin [The Revolutionary Spirit of charyŏk kaengsaeng Displayed During the Time of the Anti-Japanese Armed Struggle]," 13. In its critique of the personality cult, the East German textbook quote above also quoted the same line from the "Internationale," right after talking about man being the master of his destiny.
Günther and Arbatow, *Grundlagen des Marxismus-Leninismus: Lehrbuch*, 216.

masses as a means to ascertain their actual situation and thus better lead them.[310] In this way, the masses and the leadership formed one coeval whole, the latter supplying the correct path, the former carrying it out, thereby realizing their historical mission while concurrently displaying the highest form of creativity. The Ch'ŏllima Movement was seen as an example of such a correct path. As a result, it was thought to promote the masses' creative powers and consequently prove the masses' unity with their leadership.[311] The masses were in charge of their revolution precisely because they were one with their leadership and its correct ideological outlook.

It is important to note that the East Germans did not argue for the masses to make history independent of communist leadership. They, like other Marxist-Leninists, believed the unity of correct leadership and the masses constituted a necessary prerequisite for the creativity of the masses in the making of history. In other words, as stated by the East Germans, "the working class can only fulfill its historical role under the leadership of the Marxist-Leninist party."[312] At the same time, the East Germans thought, "The Party can only lead and teach the masses if she herself learns from the masses."[313] The communist leadership needed to recognize and represent the historically necessary interests of the masses. If this was done, the will of the masses and the will of the party became essentially identical, making the masses masters of the revolution

[310] Chosŏnnodongdang chungangwiwŏnhoe, "Tangwŏn ŭi hyŏngmyŏngjŏk ŭiji [The Party Member's Revolutionary Will]," *Kŭlloja*, no. 298 (December 1966): 2, 5.

[311] Chosŏnnodongdang chungangwiwŏnhoe, "Paekchŏn paeksŭng ŭi Lenin ŭi kich'i [The Ever-Victorious Banner of Lenin]," 7.

[312] Böhme et al., *Kleines politisches Wörterbuch [Small Political Dictionary]*, 299.

[313] Günther and Arbatow, *Grundlagen des Marxismus-Leninismus: Lehrbuch*, 412.

through an enlightened communist leadership—masses and party formed a united body that catapulted history toward its conclusion.[314]

Once again, East German criticisms were induced by North Korea's rejection of Soviet ideological leadership. In the final analysis, this was a disagreement over proper ideological course. Each side still upheld the basic Marxist-Leninist premises concerning the creativity of the masses and the role of communist leadership. These same premises, however, could be mobilized toward different ends. The mass line provides a great example. In 1956, the Chinese, still in harmony with Soviet ideology, promoted the mass line as a cure for the types of bureaucratic and dogmatic errors associated with the personality cult.[315] As another case in point, that same year, opposition to East Germany's Ulbricht, inspired by trends following the 20th Congress, composed a manifesto that called for an adherence to "the mass line," criticizing bureaucratic errors of the past.[316] Kim Il Sung's guidance tours, too, began as a preemptive response to de-Stalinization, which is why they first emerged in 1953 and truly took off in 1956.[317] Guidance tours were considered emblematic of an anti-bureaucratic leadership. In 1962 Khrushchev even praised Kim Il Sung for conducting these tours.[318] It is no coincidence that the Ch'ŏngsan-ni Method—a method of production that, among other things, required party functionaries to connect with the masses—was said to have been formulated during one of Kim's

[314] Ibid., 408.

[315] "On the Historical Experience of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat," *Renmin Ribao*, April 5, 1956.

[316]Wolfgang Harich, *Keine Schwierigkeiten mit der Wahrheit: Zur nationalkommunistischen Opposition 1956 in der DDR [No Problems with the Truth: On the National-Communist 1956 Opposition in the GDR]* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1993), 117.

[317] Sonia Ryang, *Reading North Korea: An Ethnological Inquiry* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center: Distributed by Harvard University Press, 2012), 45.

[318] Szalontai, *Kim Il Sung in the Khrushchev Era*, 114.

tours, since this method was seen as a manifestation of the mass line and therefore thoroughly anti-bureaucratic.[319] The mass line could promote many paths. Whether or not bureaucratic and dogmatic errors occurred was an entirely subjective judgment.

Of course, no communist leader wanted to admit to a detachment from the masses. The firmer his control over the party, the less his rivals could argue that such a detachment existed. He regulated the use of the mass line, which bequeathed even the most tyrannical rule with a halo. In other words, the stronger the personality cult, the less a communist leader could be accused of a personality cult—communist irony.[320]

In the same way, it was within the purview of a strong communist leader whether Marxism-Leninism was creatively applied in correspondence with the actual situation. If he was ideologically insulated, with ideological authority securely vested in him, hardly anyone could successfully challenge his creative application. While the creative application argument rationalized his independent course, ideological insulation tied this creative application directly to his person and his universalistic gaze, making his interpretations increasingly incontestable. This is essentially the story of *chuch'e*.

[319] As with many of its other doctrines, North Korea argued that the Ch'ŏngsan-ni Method was actually first developed during the Anti-Japanese Armed Struggle and then applied to the new realities after liberation. Chosŏnnodongdang chungangwiwŏnhoe, "Ch'ŏngsan-ni kyosi chiphaeng esŏ ŏdŭn sŏnggwa rŭl tŏuk konggo paljŏnsik'ija [Let Us More Firmly Develop the Achievements Gained in the Execution of the Ch'ŏngsan-ni Teaching]," *Kŭlloja*, no. 183 (February 1961): 2, 4.

[320] Communist leaders relied on a type of circular reasoning. For the masses to make history, they required correct communist leadership. The correctness of the leadership, as well as its close connection with the masses, was confirmed by the masses' successful execution of party policy. Since the leadership usually viewed this execution as successful, its leadership was proven correct. If execution was unsuccessful, blame was shifted onto the ideological deficiencies of the masses and lower party officials, who incorrectly taught the masses. According to this logic, the top leadership could never be wrong. Compare this with Scalapino and Lee's similar analysis of the mass line doctrine: Scalapino and Lee, *Communism in Korea*, 859–60.

The *Chuch'e* Problem

As we saw, in 1955, Kim Il Sung began to associate the notion of *chuch'e* with the creative application argument, contending that the Korean revolution represented the subject (*chuch'e*) of ideological work. To obviate dogmatism, Kim argued, Korean communists must not imitate the ideological work of the CPSU, whose immediate tasks were different due to different national conditions, and instead approach ideological work from the perspective of the Korean revolution and the demands placed upon it. Failure to do so would result in an incongruence between subjective and objective, that is, dogmatism.

After 1955, *chuch'e* was seldom mentioned again until October 1959, according to an internal North Korean source.[321] This is indeed confirmed by my own reading of North Korean articles. One has to scour copious volumes before finding a single instance of the word. Even in 1960 and 61, the term was rare and by no means the main thrust of North Korean ideology.[322] Whenever it appeared, it was in close connection with the creative application argument. On November 6, 1960, for example, a high-ranking DPRK official's speech, held in the presence of fraternal diplomats, called for the establishment of *chuch'e* in the sense that the WPK should proceed from the viewpoint of the Korean revolution. According to the speaker, "Only thus will we be able to make our contribution to the cause of world revolution and be able to be devoted to the duty of proletarian internationalism."[323] Yet speeches and articles usually did not have as

[321] Gary Goldberg, trans., "From the Journal of N. Ye. Torbenkov, Record of a Conversation with DPRK MFA Counselor Pak Deok-Hwan," June 1, 1960, AVPRF fond 0102, opis 16, delo 6, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/121622.

[322] Bryan Myers made a similar observation: Myers, *North Korea's Juche Myth*, 67–68.

[323] Gary Goldberg, trans., "Journal of Soviet Ambassador in the DPRK A.M. Puzanov for 6 November 1960," November 6, 1960, AVPRF fond 0102, opis 16, delo 7, p.151- 171, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/119487.

their main topic the establishment of *chuch'e*, suggesting that it was merely a North Korean way of expressing the creative application argument. A major WPK article about the 4th Congress, published in October 1961, mentioned the establishment of *chuch'e* only once, again in relation to the creative application of Marxism-Leninism.[324] While the *chuch'e* argument was used on and off when talking about creative application, it certainly was not always present in the form of the word "*chuch'e*," nor did it have to be. As mentioned before, it was common Marxist-Leninist logic to think from the standpoint of one's own revolution and to apply Marxism-Leninism creatively in accordance with the particularity of one's revolution. The fact that *chuch'e* was rarely used when the creative application argument or condemnations of dogmatism arose suggests its subordination to other ideological tenets. It further suggests that party members did not consider it the centerpiece of North Korean ideology.

Because these uses of *chuch'e* occurred prior to North Korea's proclamation of *charyŏk kaengsaeng*, fraternal diplomats did not necessarily find *chuch'e* heterodox. While fraternal diplomats criticized formulations involving *chuch'e*, they also recognized their Marxist-Leninist seed. A Czechoslovakian report from April 1961 analyzed *chuch'e* as follows: "According to Kim Il Sung, 'juche' means 'to do everything in such a way that it is in harmony with [the] concrete conditions in our country, and to creatively apply [the] common principles of Marx[ism]-Leninism and experiences of other countries to our situation.'" The report added that *chuch'e* was "a basically correct principle," but was frequently "applied altogether the wrong way."[325] Although *chuch'e* was Marxist-Leninist in nature, they complained that it was used to

[324] Chosŏnnodongdang chungangwiwŏnhoe, "Uri tang che 4 ch'a taehoe nŭn Chosŏn esŏ Marksŭ-Leninjuŭi ŭi widaehan sŭngni rŭl siwihayŏtta [Our 4th Party Congress Displayed the Great Victory of Marxism-Leninism in Korea]," *Kŭlloja*, no. 191 (October 1961): 5.

[325] Kotlik, "Report on Political Development in the DPRK."

discard the experiences of other socialist countries in socialist construction. In the context of the Sino-Soviet conflict and the new restrictions placed on creative applications, some diplomats clearly began to detect signs of a veering away from Soviet ideological leadership. At this point, however, since North Korea had not yet openly broken with the CPSU, the Soviet ambassador Puzanov, in regard to *chuch'e*, thought "that basically, [the] Korean comrades are all right, and that their wrong steps follow from their lack of experience and theoretical knowledge."[326]

After 1961, *chuch'e* became associated with *charyŏk kaengsaeng*. Starting in 1962, when discussing communist education, Pyongyang stressed the cultivation of *charyŏk kaengsaeng*, the elimination of dogmatism, and the establishment of *chuch'e*—all were intimately related.[327] Because *charyŏk kaengsaeng*, like *chuch'e*, contained within itself the creative application argument, it was not uncommon for North Korea to discuss the establishment of *chuch'e* in relation to *charyŏk kaengsaeng*. North Korea also argued that the construction of a self-reliant national economy, integral to *charyŏk kaengsaeng*, constituted an example of the establishment of *chuch'e*.[328] On the other hand, even in 1964, some articles on the creative application of Marxism-Leninism and *charyŏk kaengsaeng*, although they essentially talked about the *chuch'e* argument, featured no mention of *chuch'e*.[329] Thus, the dividing lines between *charyŏk kaengsaeng* and *chuch'e* were often rather blurred. Both were said to be

[326] Ibid.

[327] Chosŏnnodongdang chungangwiwŏnhoe, "Tangwiwŏnhoedŭl ŭi chŏnt'ujŏk kinŭng ŭl tŏuk chegohagi wihayŏ [For the Further Raising of the Party Committees' Militant Functions]," *Kŭlloja*, no. 196 (March 1962): 12. Hyŏn-chu O, "Ch'ŏngsonyŏndŭl sok esŏ kongsanjuŭi kyoyang ŭl tŏuk kanghwahaja [Let us Further Strengthen Communist Education of the Youth]," *Kŭlloja*, no. 196 (March 1962): 38–39.

[328] Chosŏnnodongdang chungangwiwŏnhoe, "Kim Il-sŏng tongji rŭl suban ŭro hanŭn chosŏnnodongdang ŭn uri inmin ŭi modŭn sŭngni ŭi chojikcha imyŏ komuja ida [The Workers' Party of Korea, Headed by Kim Il Sung, Is the Organizer of Our People's Every Victory and Torchbearer]," *Kŭlloja*, no. 197 (April 1962): 7.

[329] Chosŏnnodongdang chungangwiwŏnhoe, "Chosŏn hyŏngmyŏng ŭi apkil ŭl palk'in ch'angjojŏk Maksŭ-reninjuŭi rojak [The Korean Revolution's Road Ahead as Revealed by the Writings of Creative Marxism-Leninism]."

"organically connected," equally grounded in the idea that the primary factor is one's own revolution.[330] Still, in 1964, *charyŏk kaengsaeng* seemed more important a slogan than *chuch'e*. A 1964 political dictionary even lists the observance of "*chuch'e* [the subject] in ideology, *charip* [independence] in the economy, *chawi* [self-preservation] in national defense," and "*chaju* [autonomy] in foreign relations," principles that would later become closely associated with *chuch'e sasang*, as principles of *charyŏk kaengsaeng*.[331] *Chuch'e* was merely one out of several ideological slogans employed by the regime. It certainly did not constitute an ideology of its own.

In April 1965, on a visit to Indonesia, Kim Il Sung held a speech listing the abovementioned principles. With the exception of Brian Myers, most scholars, in my view, misread this speech and incorrectly assess the status of *chuch'e* in 1965 and the preceding years.[332] Charles Armstrong equates *chuch'e*, as it was expressed starting in 1955, with "self-reliance," which he believes was adopted as "official policy in the mid-1960s."[333] According to Jae-Jung Suh the speech "formalized Juche in terms of a set of concrete programs," by which he means the aforementioned set of principles.[334] Similarly, Jae-Cheon Lim states Kim's speech "internationally declared that his *chuch'e* idea incorporated the four concepts of *chuch'e*, *chaju*,

[330] Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, Department of International Relations, "The Principle of 'Self-Reliance' Is the Basic Principle of the Revolutionary Activities of Communists," 1963, 31–32, SAPMO-BArch DY 30/IV A 2/20/250.

[331] Sun-sŏ Pak, *Taejung chŏngch'i yongŏ sajŏn [Public Political Terminology Dictionary]* (Pyongyang: Chosŏn Nodongdang Ch'ulp'ansa, 1964), 286.

[332] Myers, *North Korea's Juche Myth*, 91–94.

[333] Armstrong, *Tyranny of the Weak*, 53.

[334] Suh, *Origins of North Korea's Juche: Colonialism, War, and Development*, 11.

charip and *chawi*."[335] Dae-Sook Suh even suggests that this speech was some type of watershed, claiming that Kim provided "full disclosure of his monolithic ideological system" and announced "political independence from China and the Soviet Union."[336] The list goes on. In fact, however, this speech was far from a watershed. Nothing in the speech was new to North Korean sloganeering. Plus, there is to be found not a single mention of a monolithic ideological system, a doctrine, as we shall see, that was only formulated in 1967.

What, then, did the speech really say? The *original* speech contained a section entitled "On the Problem of Establishing *chuch'e* and Carrying Out the Mass Line." In this section, as before, the establishment of *chuch'e* was defined as acting in accordance with the prevailing conditions in the country on the basis of one's own strength. It was also once again set against dogmatism and linked to the spirit of *charyŏk kaengsaeng*. When the 1965 speech finally arrived at the principles of *chuch'e, charip, chaju*, and *chawi,* none of which were new, no suggestion was made that these principles somehow fell under an ideology of *chuch'e*. Kim did mention the "idea/thought of *chuch'e*" (*chuch'e ŭi sasang*) but merely said that it is a principle derived from the "communist movement."[337] One should understand that "*chuch'e ŭi sasang*" was not an expression invented with this speech. Nor did it refer to an ideology. *Sasang* could indeed mean ideology, but North Korea also utilized the term to signify "idea" or "thought," as in "socialist patriotism thought" (*sahoejuŭijŏk aegukchuŭi sasang*).[338] The previously mentioned political

[335] Jae-Cheon Lim, *Kim Jong Il's Leadership of North Korea* (London: Routledge, 2009), 61.

[336] Suh, *Kim Il Sung: The North Korean Leader*, 308.

[337] Kim Il Sung, "Chosŏn minjujuŭi inmin konghwagug esŏ ŭi sahoejuŭi kŏnsŏl kwa namjosŏn [South Korea and Socialist Construction in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea]," *Kŭlloja*, no. 270 (April 1965): 17–18.

[338] Chosŏnnodongdang chungangwiwŏnhoe, "Uri hyŏngmyŏng ŭi hyŏn tan'gye wa kŭllojadŭl e taehan kyegŭp kyoyang [The Present Stage of Our Revolution and the Class Education of Workers]," *Kŭlloja*, no. 221 (April 1963): 3.

dictionary from 1964 also used "*chuch'e ŭi sasang*" in its entry on "*chuch'e*." On another occasion, the dictionary used "*chuch'e sasang*," suggesting that there existed no meaningful difference between both expressions. Its status as just one slogan among many is confirmed by the fact that unlike later dictionaries there was no separate entry for "*chuch'e sasang*."[339] In the 1968 version of the speech in Kim's *Collected Works*, however, the editors considered it necessary to replace *chuch'e ŭi sasang* with *chuch'e sasang*, because by that time *chuch'e* had become something that it was not yet in 1965, Kim Il Sung's personal *sasang*.[340]

Nevertheless, the speech did have an impact. Articles in the WPK's mouthpiece began to speak about *chuch'e* much more than before. One article in October was specifically about *chuch'e* and also quoted from Kim's April speech. The author identified the thought of *chuch'e* with "the thought [*sasang*] of *chaju, charip*."[341] Despite this, the article implied no more than an organic relationship between *chuch'e* and *chaju*/*charip*. There was no indication that *chuch'e sasang* was a specific brainchild of Kim Il Sung that stood above other types of *sasang*, though his role in the slogan's propagation was certainly recognized.

What we do see in 1965 and 1966 is a relative escalation of the discourse about North Korea's Marxist-Leninist interpretative independence vis-à-vis the Soviet Union and China. The increase in rhetoric about *chuch'e* is one example. Another is the appearance of the term "*chido*

[339] Pak, *Taejung chŏngch'i yongŏ sajŏn [Public Political Terminology Dictionary]*, 359–60.

[340] Kim Il Sung, "Chosŏn minjujuŭi inmin konghwagug esŏ ŭi sahoejuŭi kŏnsŏl kwa namjosŏnhyŏngmyŏng e taehayŏ [On Socialist Construction in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the South Korean Revolution]," in *Kim Il-sŏng chŏjak sŏnjip [The Collected Works of Kim Il Sung]*, vol. 4 (Pyongyang: Chosŏn Nodongdang Ch'ulp'ansa, 1968), 219.

[341] Chin-kyun Sin, "Chuch'e sasang ŭn kongsanjuŭijŏk chaju, charip ŭi sasang ida [Chuch'e Thought is the Communist Thought of chaju and charip]," *Kŭlloja*, no. 281 (October 1965): 9–10.

riron" (guiding theory) in 1966.[342] Its most prominent usage occurred at a party conference on October 5 via a speech by Kim Il Sung that at the time reverberated internationally, a speech that again barely mentioned *chuch'e*. In the speech, Kim argued that only the communists of the respective country can formulate their party's guiding theory, never the communists of another country, an argument, if we recall, similar to the rationalization of *charyŏk kaengsaeng* and therefore nothing wholly new, based as it was on the creative application argument.[343] North Korea's *chido riron* was not actually a concrete body of thought. Discussions of the term in 1966 feature no listing of specific tenets. *Chido riron* was a statement. At the time, Kim's relationship with the Chinese had grown tense. The Chinese Cultural Revolution, which Kim disapproved of, was in its beginning stages. Chinese meddling in the politics of other parties and disagreements over policy with the WPK were on the rise.[344] And at North Korean universities, students and faculty expressed anti-Beijing sentiments, especially in regard to China's lack of support for the Vietnam conflict.[345] Naturally, China was not pleased by North Korea's disloyalty to the Chinese cause and recent rapprochement with the USSR, now under the leadership of Brezhnev. Responding to charges of centrism levied against him by a pro-Chinese Albania in May, Kim rejected in his speech the slanderous accusations of those who claimed "we

[342]Yŏng-gi Yun, "Tangjŏngch'aek ŭn simohi yŏn'guhaja [Let Us Deeply Study Party Policy]," *Kŭlloja*, no. 293 (July 1966): 18.

Chosŏnnodongdang chungangwiwŏnhoe, "Chajusŏng ŭl onghohaja [Let Us Safeguard Autonomy]," *Kŭlloja*, no. 294 (August 1966): 8.

[343] Kim Il Sung, "Hyŏn chŏngse wa uri tang ŭi kwaŏp [The Present Situation and the Tasks of Our Party]," 19–21.

[344] Bernd Schaefer, "North Korean 'Adventurism' and China's Long Shadow, 1966-1972" (CWIHP Working Paper no. 44, 2004), 6–7.

[345] Enkel Daljani, trans., "Information on the Korean Workers' Party," October 1966, AQPPSH, MPP Korese, D 10, V, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114405.

sit between two chairs," insisting that "we also have our own chair."[346] He further attacked the Chinese, albeit indirectly, by denouncing what was called "left-opportunism" (*chwagyŏng kihoejuŭi*), an international communist concept according to which dogmatic adherence to singular Marxist-Leninist precepts, irrespective of the actual conditions, results in "hyper-revolutionary slogans."[347] Kim knew that China's Cultural Revolution was becoming an ideological problem, especially if it were to find appeal in the ranks of the WPK. As reported by the Albanians, in 1966 several WPK members of Chinese descent were removed from the party ranks.[348] Publication of Chinese materials was also reduced to a bare minimum.[349] The situation grew yet more tense in the course of 1967, as China's Red Guards condemned Kim Il Sung's rule and legitimacy, essentially calling on Koreans to overthrow the regime.[350] The archives further suggest a danger that China would "revive the Yan'an faction," several of whose members fled to China following the 1956 purges.[351] Considering all of this, emphasis on ideological independence must have seemed like a logical next step. Archival documents further reveal that Kim may also have held higher ambitions, seeking to replace China as Asia's

[346] Balázs Szalontai, trans., "Report, Embassy of Hungary in the Soviet Union to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry," October 20, 1966, MOL, XIX-J-1-j Korea, 1966, 74. doboz, IV- 250, 005007/1966, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116646.
Kim Il Sung, "Hyŏn chŏngse wa uri tang ŭi kwaŏp [The Present Situation and the Tasks of Our Party]," 21–22.

[347] Kim Il Sung, "Hyŏn chŏngse wa uri tang ŭi kwaŏp [The Present Situation and the Tasks of Our Party]," 13.

[348] Daljani, "Information on the Korean Workers' Party."

[349] Gary Goldberg, trans., "Excerpts from a 30 December 1966 Memo of the Soviet Embassy to the DPRK (A. Borunkov) about Embassy Measures against Chinese Anti-Soviet Propaganda in the DPRK," December 30, 1966, AVPRF, f. 0102, op. 22, p. 109, d. 22, pp. 50-56, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116692.

[350] Schaefer, "North Korean 'Adventurism' and China's Long Shadow, 1966-1972," 7–8.

[351] Eliza Gheorghe, trans., "Telegram from Pyongyang to Bucharest, No.76.171, TOP SECRET, May 20, 1967," May 20, 1967, Archive of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116709.

ideological leader through a program of independence and creative application of Marxism-Leninism.[352] Surely, for Kim to become Asia's foremost Marxist-Leninist theoretician would have served domestic propaganda as well, increasing his political and universalistic power at home. International events therefore bore considerable responsibility for North Korea's ideological trajectory.

Factional conflict within the WPK also contributed to an ideological change of course. High-ranking members of the so-called Kapsan faction, especially Pak Kŭm-ch'ŏl, contested Kim Il Sung's policies and personality cult in 1966 and 67. Various pieces of archival evidence hint at their dissatisfaction over North Korea's unceasing emphasis on military development, the erasure of other members of the guerrilla movement such as themselves from North Korean history, and the grooming of Kim Il Sung's younger brother as successor instead of Pak Kŭm-ch'ŏl.[353] Some evidence even suggests they held pro-Chinese views.[354] In any event, unlike 1956, it is difficult to determine the precise dispute that occurred behind the scenes, as archival records are scant and often speculative. As for the language involved, we cannot know with absolute certainty what in North Korea's ideological repertoire they drew on. For instance, based on the available evidence, it is impossible to tell whether Kim's rivals actually employed the personality cult concept to criticize him. But we do know the ideological concepts used by the victors of this factional struggle. After the WPK's 1966 October conference, Kim and his supporters pursued a militant line, using slogans such as "the arming of the whole people" and

[352] Schaefer, "North Korean 'Adventurism' and China's Long Shadow, 1966-1972," 10–11.

[353] For a more complete discussion, see: James F. Person, "Solidarity and Self-Reliance: The Antinomies of North Korean Foreign Policy and Juche Thought, 1953-1967" (The George Washington University, 2013), 218–24.

[354] Eliza Gheorghe, trans., "Telegram from Pyongyang to Bucharest, TOP SECRET, No. 76.247, July 28, 1967," July 28, 1967, Archive of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116710.

"the fortification of the whole country," slogans that Pak apparently opposed.[355] At the same time, they called for a stronger ideological unity around Kim Il Sung, for the people to become one with Kim in "ideology and will" and display "limitless loyalty to the leader [*suryŏng*]," just like the Anti-Japanese guerrilla fighters had supposedly done.[356] This culminated in the ouster of Kim's opponents in May 1967 and an ideological shift toward increased militancy, extreme leader veneration, and the suppression of foreign influences.

In the same month, Kim also gave an impactful speech on the dictatorship of the proletariat. On the surface, such a topic may seem benign, but Kim had in mind specific targets, namely, those who advocated Soviet or Chinese theoretical positions in order to question the WPK's current path.

Some context is needed before proceeding. According to the basic Marxist-Leninist worldview, capitalism is followed by communism. Since full communism is not achieved instantaneously after the proletariat's seizure of power, however, there ensues a period of proletarian dictatorship, i.e., the proletariat's control of state power in order to prevent a return of the bourgeoisie and to prepare the attainment of communism. This preparatory period is otherwise known as socialism, the transition period between capitalism and communism. Controversy arose after the CPSU's 22nd Congress, during which Khrushchev declared the USSR's "full-scale construction of communism" and the concomitant emergence of the so-called

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[355] Hyŏn Ch'oe, "Chŏnch'e inmin ŭi mujanghwa wa chŏn'guk ŭi yosaehwa [Arming the Whole People and Fortifying the Whole Country]," *Kŭlloja*, no. 298 (December 1966): 7–17.
Ch'oe, the author of the article, was one of Kim Il Sung's staunchest supporters in this factional struggle. Hence, it is interesting to note that the article does not talk about *chuch'e sasang* at all.

[356] Ibid., 12, 14.
Chosŏnnodongdang chungangwiwŏnhoe, "Hangilmujangt'ujaeng esŏ iruktoen yŏnggwangsŭrŏun hyŏngmyŏng chŏnt'ong ŭl tŏuk pinnaeija [Let Us Further Glorify the Glorious Revolutionary Tradition Established During the Anti-Japanese Armed Struggle]," *Kŭlloja*, no. 302 (April 1967): 6.

"state of the whole people," which was to replace the dictatorship of the proletariat: "It stands to reason that when socialism had triumphed *completely and finally* in our country and we entered upon the *period of full-scale communist construction,* the conditions which necessitated the dictatorship of the proletariat disappeared, its domestic purposes were fulfilled." In other words, the Soviets now maintained that the period leading up to the attainment of full communism, after the complete victory of socialism, no longer constituted the socialist transitional stage, making proletarian dictatorship obsolete. Full-scale communist construction, according to the new mantra, necessitated a higher form of democracy that entrained all of the people. This state of the whole people was no longer the state of a specific class but one in which class contradictions had disappeared.[357] The Chinese vehemently opposed Khrushchev's state of the whole people. They argued that both Marx and Lenin asserted the need for proletarian dictatorship until *full* communism was reached.[358] To the Chinese, naturally, Khrushchev's formulation, by ignoring the class nature of the state, reeked of bourgeois revisionism. After all, during the Cultural Revolution, class contradictions became an ideological focus and rationalizing vehicle for the terror that occurred.

Attempting to establish a uniquely North Korean position in regard to the above Sino-Soviet ideological conflict, Kim Il Sung warned of right and left errors in the grasping of the transition to communism. Although he did not say it, by "right" he meant pro-Soviet, whereas "left" meant pro-Chinese. While advocates of the "right-opportunist" view believed that proletarian dictatorship ended with socialism, "left-opportunists" saw proletarian dictatorship as

[357] Nikita Khrushchev, *Documents of the 22nd Congress of the CPSU*, vol. 2 (New York: Crosscurrents Press, 1961), 104–9.

[358] Mao Zedong, "On Khrushchev's Phoney Communism and Its Historical Lessons for the World" (Foreign Languages Press, July 14, 1964), https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/works/1964/phnycom.htm.

a transition from capitalism to full communism. Kim chastised those Korean communists who fell into either camp, stating that neither view was correct. Instead, one had to examine the issue of proletarian dictatorship from the perspective of one's own revolution. The DPRK was presently in the phase of socialist construction and still needed to achieve "the complete victory of socialism," he asserted. Since the DPRK was not simply transitioning from capitalism to full communism, it was wrong to talk about proletarian dictatorship in relation to such a transition. One should discuss proletarian dictatorship with regard to the DPRK, where a complete victory of socialism would not be reached until the "productive forces" were at a sufficiently high level. During this time, proletarian dictatorship needed to be maintained, and even after socialism's complete victory, in the transition to full communism, Kim believed, proletarian dictatorship would be necessary as well.[359]

If the reader is at this point confused as to how Kim's vision differed from the left-opportunists, then rightly so. Suffice it to say, the distinction was weak and exaggerated. He quite naturally rejected the Soviet view, worried what such an emphasis on a democracy of the people and an eventual disappearance of proletarian dictatorship could do to his rule, but taking a unique position vis-à-vis the Chinese interpretation required some intellectual gymnastics. While Kim's understanding of proletarian dictatorship was basically identical to China's, the thrust of his argument aimed at doctrinaire intellectual and intra-party squabbles over whether the Soviet or Chinese doctrine was correct. It was in this light that he mentioned *chuch'e* in the

[359] Kim Il Sung, "Chabonjuŭi ro but'ŏ sahoejuŭi e roŭi kwadogi wa p'ŭroret'aria dokchae munje e taehayŏ [On the Problem of the Transition Period From Capitalism to Socialism and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat]," in *Kim Il-sŏng chŏnjip [The Complete Works of Kim Il Sung]*, vol. 38 (Pyongyang: Chosŏn Nodongdang Ch'ulp'ansa, 2001), 445–61.

speech, entreating party members to study the issue of proletarian dictatorship creatively, on the basis of the Korean revolution.[360]

Much clearer in the speech was Kim's stance on the issue of class struggle. By insisting that in socialist society class struggle signified a building of unity between people, he implicitly countered the way in which China executed its cultural revolution, where class struggle led to open clashes between people. The goal was to homogenize—or as Kim called it, "working-classize" (*rodonggyegŭphwahada*)—the people, materially and ideologically, not turn them against each other. This, he thought, represented an appropriate measure to prepare the eventual transition into a communist society, as it generated the necessary disappearance of class differences.[361] Such a material transformation, i.e., the erasure of material class differences, especially between workers and peasants, city and countryside, was a traditionally Marxist-Leninist notion, one which Khrushchev's "state of the whole people" also drew on for theoretical inspiration.[362] The erasure of class differences in the ideological sphere, too, belonged to Marxism-Leninism and was summed up with the concept of "cultural revolution," a term North Korea employed as well. The cultural revolution was not an originally Chinese concept. Mao's inspiration for his version of the cultural revolution came from the traditional Marxist-Leninist understanding. As summed up in East German orthodoxy, "In 1928, the 6th Congress of the Communist International—on the basis of the Great Socialist October Revolution—adopted into its program the inseparable connection between the dictatorship of the proletariat and the cultural

[360] Ibid., 452–53.

[361] Ibid., 458–61.

[362] Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, "Beseitigung der Klassenunterschiede wird rascher vor sich gehen [The Elimination of Class Differences Will Occur Faster]," *Neues Deutschland*, October 18, 1961, 10.

revolution as a law of the transition period from capitalism to socialism." Its goal was to eliminate all remnants of the old ideology, promote the "conscious social creative power" of the masses, and turn them into a new socialist person.[363] With the concept of "working-classizing" Kim Il Sung hoped to contribute his own original version of the cultural revolution doctrine. Hence, he did not fully accept the Soviet viewpoint either and held that continuous vigilance against counterrevolutionary elements, by means of a firm proletarian dictatorship, remained mandatory, despite the increasing homogenization of the people. In practice, Kim's cultural revolution bore resemblance to the Chinese Cultural Revolution, since the speech was followed by an obsessive extermination of foreign things, including books, in order to better establish an ideological system around the person of Kim Il Sung—all in the name of class struggle.[364] Kim thus obtained the benefits of a radical cultural revolution without the chaos.

Kim's speech, often termed the "May 25 Instruction," thus marked the start of a new ideological direction. The speech clearly attempted to raise Kim's theoretical powers by discussing intricate Marxist-Leninist issues while asserting superiority vis-à-vis Soviet and Chinese theories. He thereby tied ideology closer to his person and further insulated North Korean ideology, making difficult the utilization of Soviet or Chinese arguments to challenge his rule. When he called on people to look at theoretical issues from a subjective (*chuch'ejŏk*)

[363] Böhme et al., *Kleines politisches Wörterbuch [Small Political Dictionary]*, 895–99.

[364] Jae-Cheon Lim provides an interesting statement from a high-ranking North Korean defector confirming the xenophobia that swept North Korea after May 25, 1967. Lim, *Kim Jong Il's Leadership of North Korea*, 41.
One can even observe this in the editing of speeches, such as his April 1965 speech in Indonesia. Whereas in the original version, in regard to the establishment of *chuch'e*, the word Kim used to signify "establish" was Sino-Korean (*hwangniphada*), the revised 1968 version replaced it with a native Korean word (*seuda*). A similar change was made to the word *noryŏk* (effort), which was replaced with the word *him* in the 1968 version.
Kim Il Sung, "Chosŏn minjujuŭi inmin konghwagug esŏ ŭi sahoejuŭi kŏnsŏl kwa namjosŏn [South Korea and Socialist Construction in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea]," 18.
Kim Il Sung, "Chosŏn minjujuŭi inmin konghwagug esŏ ŭi sahoejuŭi kŏnsŏl kwa namjosŏnhyŏngmyŏng e taehayŏ [On Socialist Construction in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the South Korean Revolution]," 220.

perspective, what he really meant was to follow his perspective. It was his creative application of Marxism-Leninism, nobody else's.

This ideological insulation culminated in the development of the "monolithic ideological system" (*yuil sasang ch'egye*) over the course of 1967. Unnoticed by most scholars, this was not an entirely new concept. As early as 1959, the so-called "party ideological system" (*tangjŏk sasang ch'egye*) constituted part of North Korean orthodoxy, referring to party members' loyal adherence to the ideological viewpoints and leadership of the CC led by Kim Il Sung.[365] Its fundamental opposite was an individualism or factionalism in which one considered one's "individual viewpoint more precious than the party's viewpoint."[366] To avoid this error, one had to thoroughly "study the party's history, the party's politics, and the writings of Kim Il Sung," a practice that was common in fraternal parties as well.[367] By April 1967, North Korean formulations began to show signs of the concept's redirection and sublation. Attacking factionalism, in light of the recent factional dispute, one article stressed the "party ideological system." At another point in the article, however, the author called it the "monolithic party ideological system" (*yuilchŏgin tangjŏk sasang ch'egye*), emphasizing, more than in previous formulations, the need to "think and act" in accordance with Kim Il Sung's ideas.[368] Another article in the same month employed the term "monolithic ideological system" (*yuilchŏgin sasang*

[365] Chosŏnnodongdang chungangwiwŏnhoe, "Tangjŏk sasang ch'egye rŭl ch'ŏlchŏhi hwangnip haja [Let Us Completely Establish the Party Ideological System]," *Kŭlloja*, no. 168 (November 1959): 31–32.

[366] Ibid., 34.

[367] Ibid., 35.

[368] Chosŏnnodongdang chungangwiwŏnhoe, "Hangilmujangt'ujaeng esŏ iruktoen yŏnggwangsŭrŏun hyŏngmyŏng chŏnt'ong ŭl tŏuk pinnaeija [Let Us Further Glorify the Glorious Revolutionary Tradition Established During the Anti-Japanese Armed Struggle]," 8, 10–11.

ch'egye), claiming that this system was already established by Kim's guerrillas.[369] As before, such historical revisionism served to solidify, through propaganda and the study of revolutionary traditions, the current ideological path. Yet even this author used the concept inconsistently, once terming it the "revolutionary ideological system" (*hyŏngmyŏngjŏk sasang ch'egye*).[370] In an unusual move, the month of May went without an issue of the WPK's theoretical journal, *Kŭlloja*, indicating ideological quarrels within the party. It also hints at the impact of Kim's May 25 speech. With the June issue, discussion of Kim's guerrilla legacy continued in full force, as did mentions of an ideological system. The concept was still not used consistently, however, and was sometimes referred to as the "Marxist-Leninist ideological system" (*Maksŭ-reninjuŭijŏk sasang ch'egye*).[371] Nevertheless, the glorification of Kim's role in ideological matters and loyalty to his person was a constant theme. The monolithic ideological system became the equivalent of Kim's thought, to be established within party members *and* the masses at large.[372] North Korea even tried to pass off Kim's ideas about the transition period and proletarian dictatorship as a "new and excellent contribution to the development of Marxist-Leninist

[369] Hyŏng-ch'uk Chŏn, "Hangilmujangt'ujaeng shigi e iruktoen hyŏngmyŏngjŏk inmin muryŏk kŏnsŏl ŭi chŏnt'ong [The Tradition of the Revolutionary Building Up of the People's Armed Strength That Arose in the Period of the Anti-Japanese Armed Struggle]," *Kŭlloja*, no. 302 (April 1967): 16. Note that this article paid no special attention to *chuch'e*.

[370] Ibid., 18.

[371] Chosŏnnodongdang chungangwiwŏnhoe, "Poch'ŏnbo jŏnt'u sŭngni 30 chu nyŏn [The 30th Anniversary of the Victory of the Poch'ŏnbo Battle]," *Kŭlloja*, no. 303 (June 1967): 4.

[372] Chosŏnnodongdang chungangwiwŏnhoe, "10 wŏl ŭi sasang ŭn sŭngnihago itta [The October Thought Is Winning]," *Kŭlloja*, no. 309 (November 1967): 10–11.

theory," something that North Korea continued to do in subsequent years.[373] Kim was no longer merely applying Marxism-Leninism creatively, but he was "creatively developing Marxism-Leninism."[374]

These ideological developments reached a climax on December 16, 1967 with Kim Il Sung's speech "Let Us Even More Thoroughly Embody the Revolutionary Spirit of *chaju, charip,* and *chawi* in All Spheres of State Activity." The speech featured a ten-point program that set in stone North Korea's new orthodoxy. Arguably the most important part of the speech pertained to the monolithic ideological system and *chuch'e sasang*. To foster the working classizing of the people, Kim declared the necessity of the monolithic ideological system (now *yuil sasang ch'egye*) and its establishment throughout society. He further preached the "embodiment" of *chuch'e sasang* "in all spheres." Framing *chaju, charip,* and *chawi* as embodiments of *chuch'e sasang*, Kim subsumed (or sublated) these previously independent principles under *chuch'e sasang*. The realization of *chaju, charip,* and *chawi* was now equated with the realization of *chuch'e sasang* and vice versa.[375] In fact, according to the official explanation of the speech that followed the next month, Kim's whole platform was a manifestation of *chuch'e sasang*.[376] Even *charyŏk kaengsaeng*, as well as the entire corpus of

[373] Chosŏnnodongdang chungangwiwŏnhoe, "Tang taep'yoja hoe ŭi widaehan sasang ŭn pinnage kuhyŏn toego itta (The Great Ideas of the Conference of Party Delegates Are Brilliantly Being Realized)," *Kŭlloja*, no. 307 (September 1967): 4.

[374] Chosŏnnodongdang chungangwiwŏnhoe, "10 wŏl ŭi sasang ŭn sŭngnihago itta [The October Thought Is Winning]," 8.

[375] Kim Il Sung, "Kukka hwaltong ŭi modŭn punya esŏ chaju, charip, chawi ŭi hyŏngmyŏng jŏngsin ŭl tŏuk ch'ŏlchŏhi kuhyŏn haja [Let Us Even More Thoroughly Embody the Revolutionary Spirit of chaju, charip, and chawi in All Spheres of State Activity]," *Kŭlloja*, no. 310 (December 1967): 2–42.

[376] Chosŏnnodongdang chungangwiwŏnhoe, "Kim Il-sŏng tongji kkesŏ ch'ŏnmyŏng hashin widaehan 10 taejŏnggang ŭl nop'i pattŭlgo hyŏngmyŏng kwa kŏnsŏl esŏ saeroun chŏnjin ŭl iruk'aja [Let Us Highly Venerate the Great 10-Point Platform Proclaimed by Comrade Kim Il Sung And Achieve New Progress in Revolution and Construction]," *Kŭlloja*, no. 311 (January 1968): 3.

the WPK's politics and lines [*rosŏn*], was now considered a means to realize *chuch'e sasang*.[377] All this constituted a qualitatively new development, as was the notion of "Marxist-Leninist guiding idea" (*Maksŭ-reninjuŭijŏk chido sasang*), a title now attached to *chuch'e sasang*.[378] Kim portrayed *chuch'e sasang* as North Korea's own way of practicing Marxism-Leninism, a trend that only escalated in subsequent years. Whereas North Korea's 1964 political dictionary completely neglects any mention of *chuch'e* or Kim Il Sung in its entry on Marxism-Leninism, in the 1970 edition the same entry spares no praise for *chuch'e sasang*, Kim's creation of this idea, and his development of Marxism-Leninism "to its highest stage."[379] In North Korea, Kim Il Sung had become the world's most preeminent Marxist-Leninist theoretician, and *chuch'e sasang* was one of his Marxist-Leninist theoretical creations, part of his so-called "revolutionary thought." *Chuch'e sasang*, defined in terms of the creative application argument and the components outlined above, did not exhaust Kim's revolutionary thought but nonetheless often definitionally coincided with this revolutionary thought.[380]

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[377] Ibid., 4.
Sŏn-kuk Ri, "Charipchŏk minjok kyŏngje kŏnsŏl rosŏn ŭn sahoejuŭi, kongsanjuŭi kŏnsŏl ŭi happŏpch'ikchŏk yogu e puhaptoe nŭn ch'ŏlchŏhan hyŏngmyŏngjŏk kyŏngje kŏnsŏl rosŏn [The Line of Constructing a Self-Reliant National Economy, The Line of Thorough Revolutionary Economic Construction in Correspondence with the Lawful Demands of Socialist and Communist Construction]," *Kŭlloja*, no. 311 (January 1968): 36.

[378] Kim Il Sung, "Kukka hwaltong ŭi modŭn punya esŏ chaju, charip, chawi ŭi hyŏngmyŏng jŏngsin ŭl tŏuk ch'ŏlchŏhi kuhyŏn haja [Let Us Even More Thoroughly Embody the Revolutionary Spirit of chaju, charip, and chawi in All Spheres of State Activity]."

[379] Pak, *Taejung chŏngch'i yongŏ sajŏn [Public Political Terminology Dictionary]*, 160–62.
Chŏngch'i yong sajŏn [Political Dictionary] (Pyongyang: Sahoe Kwahak Ch'ulp'ansa, 1970), 224–25.

[380] Kim Il Sung's revolutionary thought, in similar ways to *chuch'e sasang*, was thus frequently defined as the thought of creatively applying Marxism-Leninism in Korea, basing oneself on one's own strength, and the principles of *chaju*, *charip*, and *chawi*. Chosŏnnodongdang chungangwiwŏnhoe, "Tang ŭi yuil sasang ŭro tŏuk ch'ŏlchŏhi mujanghaja [Let Us Even More Thoroughly Arm Ourselves with the Party's Monolithic Ideology]," *Kŭlloja*, no. 314 (April 1968): 3.

In 1967 and the following year, North Korea's ideological insulation soared. Ideology and its universal truth further merged with Kim Il Sung's person, whose "revolutionary thought" constituted the thought of the party and society. According to the new orthodoxy, the "party's monolithic ideology [*yuil sasang*] . . . is Comrade Kim Il Sung's great revolutionary thought [*sasang*]."[381] Similarly, the notion of "our party's *chuch'e sasang*"—which represented the standard expression before 1967—was frequently used interchangeably with "Comrade Kim Il Sung's *chuch'e sasang*."[382] The ideology of the party and the theoretical gaze of Kim Il Sung thus coalesced more blatantly than was the case in foregoing years. As we saw, even before this shift occurred, *chuch'e* and the related creative application argument served insulation by making Kim less dependent on the ideological interpretations of the Soviet Union. But because Marxism-Leninism remained an externally existing set of universal truths, to be discerned and creatively applied by him, contestations of his interpretations were still possible, especially in the context of the polarizing ideological contest between the USSR and China. As long as party unity was solidly tied around his leadership, the universalization of Korea's particular situation and the concomitant legitimization of his rule were secure. The factional conflict of 1966/67, however, once again raised the specter of a disunity threatening Kim's universalizing gaze. Further fusing ideology with his person while elevating his Marxist-Leninist theoretical powers became a desirable solution not just for Kim but also for those who wished to eliminate internal party rivals and move up the ranks. In a situation in which the country's ideology symbolized the direct equivalent of Kim Il Sung's thought, and in which this ideology was the most

[381]Ibid., 2..

[382] Ibid., 3.

advanced and therefore most universalistic ideology in the world, what internal or external opposition could seriously damage Kim's legitimacy or challenge his rule?

Beyond Heterodoxy: A Conclusion

It is important to keep in mind that the various ideological developments and conflicts discussed in this chapter occurred within the boundaries of the Marxist-Leninist tradition. Within this tradition, heterodoxy was a relative phenomenon, contingent on the perspective of one's own orthodoxy. Fundamentally, the sort of ideological battles that raged between the Soviets and Chinese, as well as the fraternal criticisms directed at North Korea, constituted conflicts of diverging universalities. Heterodoxy arose when a particular leadership perceived a contestation of its universality. In other words, heterodoxy was reviled precisely because it struck so close to home. This conflict therefore bears similarity to the religious conflict Europe experienced centuries ago. Catholics and Protestants may share many doctrines and beliefs, cooperate in joint projects, but nonetheless disagree on theological grounds. Both form part of a common intellectual tradition, allowing for mutually intelligible disagreement often grounded in shared principles that are variously interpreted or mobilized toward different ends, perhaps giving rise to entirely new principles. From these commonalities one develops both a sensitivity to and a loathing for divergences.

Yet a shared intellectual tradition can also foster consensus, even if only accidental. Because ideological differences between the GDR and DPRK were often rather subtle and part of a shared intellectual tradition, heterodoxy could also arise among East German citizens. In the 1960s, East German ambassadorial staff received instructions from the upper party echelons to study the classics in relation to the mistaken positions of the CCP carefully, with the intention of

thereby reinforcing the infallibility of Soviet Marxism-Leninism in the minds of East Germans.[383] Plus, those employed at the embassy in North Korea engaged in substantial discussion and criticism of the WPK's supposed ideological errors. Their ideological training was of particular significance, given their direct confrontation with heterodoxy, which was not the case for the average East German. Given North Korea's frequent references to Marx, Engels, and Lenin in their self-rationalizations, the East Germans' theoretical purity was indispensable. After all, the North Koreans were happy to mention the founding fathers of Marxism-Leninism in front of the East Germans who attacked their positions, going as far as imploring them, on one occasion, to conduct a more thorough study of the classics.[384] Naturally the party leadership wanted the embassy staff to internalize and reflect official party positions in their everyday work. At times, however, during party organization meetings, staff issued comments not to the liking of the party leadership, such as in relation to *charyŏk kaengsaeng*, actually finding part of the doctrine positive.[385] On another occasion, an employee was criticized for agreeing with North Korea's view that the national liberation movement in Asia, Africa, and Latin America constituted the driving force of the world revolution, because this view contradicted the Soviet doctrine of socialism's peaceful economic competition with capitalism as a form of class

[383] Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, Department of International Relations, "Resolution of the Election Report Assembly of the SED Party Organization at the Embassy in Pyongyang," April 13, 1964, 28, SAPMO-BArch DY 30/IV A 2/20/256.

[384] Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, Department of International Relations, "To the Chairman of the Ideological Committee of the SED County Leadership in Hainichen," 1963, SAPMO-BArch DY 30/IV A 2/20/253.

[385] Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, Department of International Relations, "Minutes of the Members' Assembly of the Party Organization from June 14, 1963," June 15, 1963, 53, SAPMO-BArch DY 30/IV A 2/20/258.

struggle and the main drive of history.[386] The employee's mistaken position was attributed to "certain ideological weaknesses" and he was charged to carry out a study of the classics, since, after all, North Korea's ideological errors were also said to be a mere consequence of a deviation from and knowledge of the writings of the founders.[387] Such undesired agreement was aggravated by the fact that the SED, during Stalin's time, held the same or similar positions as North Korea in the 1960s, a phenomenon made yet more likely by the general continuity before and after de-Stalinization. Thus, besides disagreement, archival documents additionally feature, from time to time and depending on the intent or knowledge of the actor, consensus.

Consensus is especially visible when looking beyond the USSR-DPRK dynamic. A number of parties from around the world held similar or identical positions to those of the WPK, largely because these positions reflected global trends. D.N. Aidit, Chairman of the Communist Party of Indonesia, for instance, shortly after having visited the DPRK in 1963, praised the WPK's policies and also advanced the notion of the "*Banteng* Spirit," which he defined as "the spirit of trust in one's own strength . . . and the concrete praxis of the Indonesian revolution," an idea which was fairly close to North Korea's own views.[388] An indigenous Indonesian term based on a native animal, "*Banteng* Spirit" easily reminds us of North Korea's use of *chuch'e* or the spirit of *charyŏk kaengsaeng*, which contained a similar meaning. In the context of the Sino-Soviet Split, many communist parties were grappling with the issue of independence. The Eurocommunist movement of the 1970s and 1980s is perhaps the highest expression of this shift

[386] Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, Department of International Relations, "Minutes of the Executive Meeting from 1/8/1964," February 3, 1964, 5–6, SAPMO-BArch DY 30/IV A 2/20/259.

[387] Ibid., 6.

[388] Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, Department of International Relations, "The Global Communist Movement and the Revolution in Southeast Asia (Main Points of the Speech Held at the Reception for the CPI Delegation on September 29, 1963)," November 11, 1963, 143–44, SAPMO-BArch DY 30/IV A 2/20/669.

toward independence. North Korea was not unique in this regard, nor was this an exclusively postcolonial phenomenon. For example, Paul de Groot, head of the Communist Party of the Netherlands (CPN), praised Kim Il Sung's October 1966 speech, in which he called for the autonomy of each party, rejected the notion of a leading party, argued that each party ought to have its own guiding theory, and criticized Soviet meddling in the internal affairs of other parties, consequently triggering a concerned East German analysis: "de Groot again defends the 'autonomy' of every communist party. He demands that every party must devise and put into practice its own 'guiding theory.'"[389] Similar to Kim Il Sung, de Groot was also responding to a domestic situation in which the charge of being a puppet of the Soviets would not have granted electoral success.[390] Naturally, as a result of de Groot's challenge to the Soviet leadership role, the East Germans criticized the CPN as nationalistic. De Groot countered this by means of the classics, arguing that according to Lenin, "the national element" may play a positive or negative role in revolution depending on the conditions. In the Netherlands, he contended, in light of the entrenchment of imperialism in Europe, these conditions dictated the revolutionary significance of "the national element."[391] North Korea also believed in this significance, particularly in relation to the Leninist notion of the national liberation struggle, given imperialism's foothold in

[389] Kim Il Sung, "Hyŏn chŏngse wa uri tang ŭi kwaŏp [The Present Situation and the Tasks of Our Party]," 19–21. Politburo of the Central Committee of the SED, "Articles by the Chairman of the Communist Party of the Netherlands, Paul de Groot, on a Speech by Kim Il Sung in the Central Organ 'De Waarheid,'" February 23, 1967, 3, SAPMO-BArch DY 30/J IV 2/2J/1891.

[390] Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, Department of International Relations, "Information for the Members and Candidates of the Politburo Concerning the Conference of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Netherlands on September 26/27, 1964," October 26, 1964, 191, SAPMO-BArch DY 30/IV A 2/20/999.

[391] Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, Department of International Relations, "Leninism and the Present Times: The Report of Comrade Paul de Groot, Honorary Member of the Central Committee of the CPN," February 7, 1970, 29, SAPMO-BArch DY 30/13622.

Asia and South Korea. A strong, independent, and free nation meant a weakening of imperialism and hence constituted an asset to historical progress.

As revealed by such global interconnections, the DPRK's ideological shift during the 1960s actually testifies to the global relevance of North Korean ideological developments. Insulation did not mean isolation. Nevertheless, after 1967, North Korean ideology and Soviet Marxism-Leninism were rapidly heading in opposite directions. By the 1980s, there existed marked differences between the two, which might lead some to say that one can no longer talk about a common intellectual tradition. This begs the question, did ideological insulation and the ascendancy of *chuch'e sasang* eventually result in a fundamental divide between North Korean ideology and Marxism-Leninism? Did they become more different than alike?

CHAPTER IV

CHUCH'E SASANG AND THE MARXIST-LENINIST TRADITION: BEYOND THE MYTH OF NORTH KOREAN IDEALISM (1968-89)

In April 1983, East Germany hosted a pompous Marxist philosophical conference in honor of the 100th anniversary of Karl Marx's death. Representatives from around the world gathered in the East German capital to celebrate and share their thoughts about Marx's life and work. Attending the event, Kim Chung-rin, Secretary of the WPK CC, conveyed his government's reflections in a speech that was printed fully in the SED's party newspaper. He described Marx as "the first leader and great teacher of the international working class" who made "immortal contributions for the cause of the liberation of mankind" and "for the first time in human history originated the teachings of scientific communism."[392] Kim continued:

> Marx's greatest contributions to the history of human thought consist of the fact that he explained the fundamental principles of the materialist dialectic and, on this basis, proved the inevitability of the downfall of capitalism as well as the necessity of the victory of socialism and communism, thus transforming socialism from a utopia into a science. On the basis of a processing of all philosophical thinking and all socio-historical conceptions, from the philosophy of Democritus and Epicurus in ancient times to Hegel and Feuerbach in the modern era, Marx put an end to idealistic conceptions concerning the relationship between matter and consciousness, between essence and phenomenon, and forged the materialistic-dialectical worldview and socio-historical conception, according to which matter is primary and all things and phenomena change and develop in correspondence with the laws of motion of matter. By conceptualizing the developmental process of society as a natural and historical process of the development of matter, he uncovered the laws of motion of capitalist economy and on this basis thoroughly explicated the laws of the emergence, development, and downfall of the capitalist mode of production. . . .
> Marx further founded the theory about the party of the working class and its tactics: if the working class and the working masses want to emerge victoriously from their struggle against the heavily armed capitalist class, they must have a

[392] Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, "Wissenschaftliche Konferenz 'Karl Marx und unsere Zeit - der Kampf um Frieden und sozialen Fortschritt' [Scientific Conference 'Karl Marx and Our Times - the Struggle for Peace and Social Progress']," *Neues Deutschland*, April 15, 1983, 9.

> revolutionary avantgarde, the party, and be led by it. Marx's theory about the dictatorship of the proletariat . . . became a mighty weapon that enabled the working class to fulfill its historical mission.[393]

Besides the paeans to Marx and Marxism, Kim's speech also featured positive appraisals of Marxism-Leninism, calling on the world's communists to rally around "the banner of Marxism-Leninism," at a time when North Korea was openly proclaiming its own banner, a banner Kim placed right beside Marxism-Leninism, "the banner of the immortal *chuch'e* ideology [*Dschutsche-Ideologie*]."[394]

The above reflections stand largely in contradistinction to scholarly depictions of North Korean ideology in the 1980s and thereafter. Charles Armstrong talks about North Korea's "humanistic idealism," contrasting North Korean ideology with Marxism and Marxism-Leninism.[395] Similarly, Bruce Cumings describes North Korean ideology as "an idealist metaphysic that bears close resemblance to Korean neo-Confucian doctrines" and likens it to "Hegel's philosophical idealism."[396] Both scholars see North Korean ideology as a type of voluntarism in which human will is ontologically primary while material forces are secondary, an inversion of Marx's materialism and base-superstructure dynamic. Han Shik Park also states that North Korean ideology is "in defiance of the material determinism of history." "Spiritual consciousness," he contends, "determines the course of history and it alone underlies all other

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[393] Ibid., 9–10.

[394] Ibid., 10.

[395] Armstrong, *The North Korean Revolution, 1945-1950*, 6.

[396] Bruce Cumings, "The Kims' Three Bodies: Toward Understanding Dynastic Succession in North Korea," in *North Korea in Transition: Politics, Economy, and Society*, ed. Kyung-Ae Park and Scott Snyder (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013), 81.

structures."[397] According to these major scholars, then, North Korean ideology, as it developed its own philosophical principles under the umbrella of *chuch'e sasang*, clearly stood in opposition to Marxism.

I disagree with the above scholars' portrayals of North Korean ideology. In the following pages, I contest the notion of a North Korean idealism. An insistence on idealism obfuscates North Korean ideology's relationship to the Marxist-Leninist tradition at the end of the Cold War. Another problem is the cursory nature of contrasts between Marxism and North Korean ideology. Hegel may be named, but his actual philosophical writings are never dealt with. Marx's critique of Hegel is echoed in a rather superficial way, with the attendant conclusion that this critique would somehow apply to *chuch'e sasang* as well. Moreover, how North Korean ideas compared to the contemporaneously existing ideologies of other communist regimes, especially the Soviet Union, is a problem that gets sidelined. For the uninitiated reader, this generates an image of a spiritually cloistered country, whose ideology by the late 1980s had little to do with Western thought. Nothing could be further from the truth. As exemplified by Kim Chung-rin's speech, North Korea consciously positioned itself within the Marxist and Marxist-Leninist traditions. *Chuch'e sasang*, even as it acquired what North Korea claimed were original philosophical principles, remained quite closely related to Marxist-Leninist premises. In fact, these principles were not as novel as North Korea portrayed them. They were ultimately derived from preexisting Marxist-Leninist doctrines. By covering up this derivation, North Korea effectively silenced Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin, replacing them with the voice of Kim Il Sung. Even in the 1980s, Marxist-Leninist materialism remained an important component of

[397] Han Shik Park, "The Nature and Evolution of Juche Ideology," in *North Korea: Ideology, Politics, Economy*, ed. Han S. Park (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1996), 13.

North Korean ideology, assisting in the rationalization of revolutionary consciousness and leadership. As it turns out, when taking a closer look at North Korean and East German conceptions about materialism, consciousness, and leadership, North Korean ideology was much less exceptional than is typically assumed.

Silencing Marx: North Korea's Humanism

With the declaration of the monolithic ideological system and the elevation of *chuch'e sasang* in 1967 began a stronger identification of Marxism-Leninism with the personal thought of Kim Il Sung, fostering ideological insulation. Previously independent Marxist-Leninist principles were subsumed under Kim's *chuch'e sasang*. Whatever was Marxist-Leninist in North Korea was at the same time in correspondence with Kim's ideas. This effectively blurred distinctions between *chuch'e sasang* and Marxism-Leninism. It was difficult to discern what originated with Marxism-Leninism and what originated with Kim Il Sung. The creative application argument, for example, now seemed more of a North Korean invention than a principle derived from Marxism-Leninism. When looking at the definition of *chuch'e sasang* in a political dictionary from 1970, the creative application argument, *chaju*, *charip*, *chawi*, *charyŏk kaengsaeng*, and North Korea's preexisting definition of proletarian internationalism were all understood as components of *chuch'e sasang* while *chuch'e sasang* itself was termed "most correct Marxist-Leninist guiding idea," an idea North Korea claimed was recognized by "all of the world's revolutionary peoples" as presenting "the only correct path" in the "international communist movement and the anti-imperialist struggle."[398] The same dictionary

[398] *Chŏngch'i yong sajŏn [Political Dictionary]*, 553–55.
Political dictionaries were essentially ideological dictionaries that codified the meaning of ideological concepts.

defined Marxism-Leninism as a "worldview" conveying "a method for changing the world" on the basis of "nature and society's laws of development." Although "the great leaders [*widaehan suryŏngdŭl*] Marx and Engels," in addition to Lenin and Stalin, were recognized for their important contributions to the history of revolutionary thought, the dictionary regarded Kim Il Sung's thought as the "highest stage" in this genealogy. His "revolutionary thought" was "our epoch's great Marxism-Leninism." Thus, in incredibly vague terms, the dictionary did acknowledge Marxism-Leninism's dialectical materialism, historical materialism, political economy, and scientific communism, but again stressed Kim's theoretical advancement of these doctrines as exemplified by his thoughts about proletarian dictatorship.[399] Rather than discussing the actual contents of Marxism-Leninism, the dictionary mostly focused on Kim's achievements. This contrasts with the 1964 political dictionary, whose entry on Marxism-Leninism paid no heed to Kim's thought.[400] In essence, the close identification of Marxism-Leninism with the thought of Kim Il Sung meant that Marxism-Leninism need not be studied as an external doctrinal corpus and instead be acquired through the writings of Kim Il Sung, who had developed Marxism-Leninism to a higher stage.[401]

Since North Korea did not deny the validity of Marxism-Leninism, considering it the basis upon which its own ideology was built, North Korean representatives, when engaging with fraternal socialist states, found no contradiction in their vocal support for Marxism-Leninism.

Unfortunately, they were not published annually. Other socialist states, such as East Germany, also published such dictionaries.

[399] Ibid., 224–25.

[400] Pak, *Taejung chŏngch'i yongŏ sajŏn [Public Political Terminology Dictionary]*, 160–62.

[401] While ideological study frequently centered on Kim's writings already in earlier years, this method of insulation reached new heights after 1967.

Kim Il Sung, so it was said, had merely developed universal Marxist-Leninist principles, not revised them. This is why Kim Chung-rin was able to say the things he did without contravening his state orthodoxy. This is also why we can find phrasings such as "mutual support in our common struggle on the basis of Marxism-Leninism" in agreements between North Korea and East Germany, even in 1985.[402] The same applies to North Korea's advocacy of Marxism, which referred to the writings of Marx and Engels, because Marxism connoted a lower but nonetheless universally valid stage in the history of revolutionary thought. East Germany and other communist regimes viewed Marxism like this as well, maintaining that "Lenin, in correspondence with the new conditions, creatively applied Marxism and further developed it into Marxism-Leninism."[403] Hence, although North Korea replaced the voices of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin with the voice of Kim Il Sung, who now represented an embodied sublation of these previous thinkers, doctrinally the relationship between North Korean ideology and Marxism-Leninism remained an intimate one, more intimate than even North Korean propaganda liked to admit, as it might cast doubt upon Kim's theoretic inventiveness. After all, when North Korean ideology took a radical turn in 1967, this produced no fundamental doctrinal revolution. And in subsequent years, too, ideological change was gradual and marked by sublation.

In 1972, North Korean ideology took another turn. On September 17, the North Koreans, in the name of Kim Il Sung, presented a Japanese newspaper with an extended explication of *chuch'e sasang*. The text began with a definition: "Simply put, *chuch'e sasang* is the idea that the masses of the people are the masters of the revolution and construction and that they are also

[402] Central Council of the Free German Youth, Department of International Relations, "Agreement of Cooperation Between the Free German Youth and League of Socialist Working Youth of Korea for the Years 1986 to 1990," May 27, 1985, SAPMO-BArch DY 24/22341.

[403] Böhme et al., *Kleines politisches Wörterbuch [Small Political Dictionary]*, 603.

the driving force of the revolution and construction. In other words, it is the idea that one is the master of one's destiny and that one has the power to determine one's destiny."[404] Several paragraphs later, there followed the usual discussions about establishing *chuch'e* and carrying out one's own revolution by one's own strength.[405] But then Kim elaborated on the significance of autonomy (*chajusŏng*) for human beings. According to Kim, if man loses his autonomy as a human being, then "he is no different from an animal." Man, Kim wrote, is a "social being" whose "sociopolitical life is more precious than his physical life." For this life to lose autonomy is tantamount to death since then man's physical life becomes worthless. He further framed the history of class struggle—referencing the downtrodden masses in feudalism and capitalism—as a struggle for autonomy. Therefore, Kim argued, the construction of socialism and communism represents a struggle to secure autonomy and end all forms of "class and national subjugation," for man to act as "master of nature and society" and to lead an "autonomous and creative life."[406] Kim went on to declare that *chuch'e sasang* is centered on man: "man is the master of all things and decides all things," transforming the world to suit his needs.[407] Yet in order to assume this creative role, man requires a correct "ideological consciousness." Otherwise, if man "lags behind ideologically," Kim asserted, he is but a "mental cripple who is of no use to our society."

[404] Kim Il Sung, "Uri tang ŭi chuch'e sasang kwa konghwaguk chŏngbu ŭi taenaeoe chŏngch'aek ŭi myŏt kaji munje e taehayŏ [On a Few Problems Concerning Our Party's chuch'e sasang and the Domestic and Foreign Policy of Our Republic's Government]," *Kŭlloja*, no. 366 (October 1972): 2.

[405] Ibid., 4–5.

[406] Ibid., 5.

[407] Ibid., 7.

Ideological education, hence, is of paramount importance, inculcating the youth with "socialist patriotism" and "communist morality" in order to mold them into "a new type of human."[408]

North Korea subsequently began talking about *chuch'e* philosophy (*ch'ŏrhak*), pretending that Kim Il Sung's response to the Japanese newspaper contained something original. Not long after its publication, North Korea claimed that through the article Kim "further perfected and systematized *chuch'e sasang*," developing Marxism-Leninism to an even higher stage. While Marxism revealed the lawful motion of nature and society, *chuch'e* philosophy supposedly advanced Marxism by explaining "man's nature as a social being" with autonomy and his "position in transforming nature and society."[409] Kim Il Sung, North Korea alleged, "for the first time [in history], scientifically elucidated man's nature, position, and role from a Marxist-Leninist standpoint."[410]

Adding a philosophical component to *chuch'e sasang* only further consolidated the coalescence of ideology, universality, and the person of Kim Il Sung. Prior to 1967, North Korea made no attempts to attribute to Kim Il Sung theoretical advancements in Marxism-Leninism's underlying philosophy, historical and dialectical materialism. These were interrelated Soviet concepts used to highlight and rationalize the "scientific" nature of their state ideology and the communist leadership's quest for man's liberation. Whereas historical materialism (*ryŏksajŏk yumullon*) referred to the investigation of human society's laws (of motion) and the laws of human society's historical development, dialectical materialism (*pyŏnjŭngbŏpchŏk yumullon*)

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[408] Ibid., 8.

[409] Chosŏnnodongdang chungangwiwŏnhoe, "Widaehan chuch'e sasang ŭn makŭl su ŏmnŭn shidaejŏk sajo [The Great chuch'e sasang, the Unstoppable Trend of Our Times]," *Kŭlloja*, no. 368 (December 1972): 2–3.

[410] Chosŏnnodongdang chungangwiwŏnhoe, "Saram i modŭn kŏt ŭi chuin imyŏ modŭn kŏt ŭl kyŏlchŏnghandanŭn kŏt ŭn chuch'e sasang ŭi kich'o ida [That Man Is Master of All Things and Decides All Things Is the Basis of chuch'e sasang]," *Kŭlloja*, no. 368 (December 1972): 20.

represented the methodology behind Marx's thinking and the epistemological as well as ontological foundations of Marxism. With the 1972 philosophical additions to *chuch'e* began a concerted effort to more definitely display Kim Il Sung's advancement of dialectical and historical materialism. This is reflected in a 1973 political dictionary's entry on historical materialism, according to which Kim's notions about man raised "historical materialism to a new and higher stage."[411] Now there seemed little reason to closely investigate the writings of Marx, Engels, and Lenin in regard to matters of dialectical and historical materialism since Kim Il Sung had already developed this philosophy to a whole new level. A North Korean, then, should learn this philosophy through the voice of Kim Il Sung instead of its originators, hence aiding North Korean ideology's insulation. Nonetheless, the silencing of Marx, Engels, and Lenin did not mean that the introduction of *chuch'e* philosophy fundamentally transformed North Korean ideology's previous outlook concerning questions of materialism and man's role in history. The philosophical worldview of North Korean ideology experienced only little change. In fact, *chuch'e* philosophy covered up its own vacuity and lack of originality by primarily referencing Kim Il Sung, much like North Korea had already done with previous claims about Kim's theoretical inventiveness.

There was hardly anything new or original about Kim Il Sung's statements from September 1972.[412] As he himself admitted right after defining *chuch'e sasang* in terms of man determining his own destiny, "We are not at all the first ones to have discovered this idea. All

[411] *Chŏngch'i sajŏn [Political Dictionary]* (Pyongyang: Sahoe Kwahak Ch'ulp'ansa, 1973), 311.

[412] Brian Myers makes the same point: Myers, *North Korea's Juche Myth*, 119–34.

Marxist-Leninists think like this. It is just that I have especially stressed this idea."[413] More strikingly, in another so-called interview with a different Japanese newspaper, when Kim was asked if he had created a new philosophy, he humbly declined such an assessment and reminded everyone that the necessity of "autonomy" (*chajusŏng*) and "creativity" (*ch'angjosŏng*) was not his invention but that he "merely emphasized this problem."[414] Indeed, long before North Korea added a *chuch'e* philosophy, it was common, in regard to the notion of *chuch'e*, to talk about having "an attitude of being master." But this phrasing only referred to the national revolution and the need to "creatively apply Marxism-Leninism." To have a "subjective stance" (*chuch'ejŏk ripchang*) simply meant to approach all problems from the perspective of one's national revolution.[415] Similarly, the concepts of "autonomy" and "creativity" contained a rather nation-centered meaning, even though they were concurrently viewed as universally valid due to their derivation from "Marxism-Leninism's general principles." North Korea directly connected phrasings such as "the party and people as the revolution's masters" with autonomy and creativity.[416] Autonomy primarily meant national and party autonomy, or, as Kim Il Sung previously put it, "Only by securing autonomy [*chajusŏng*] can each single party correctly carry out the revolution in its country, contribute to the world revolution, and solidify the confraternity

[413] Kim Il Sung, "Uri tang ŭi chuch'e sasang kwa konghwaguk chŏngbu ŭi taenaeoe chŏngch'aek ŭi myŏt kaji munje e taehayŏ [On a Few Problems Concerning Our Party's chuch'e sasang and the Domestic and Foreign Policy of Our Republic's Government]," 2.

[414] Kim Il Sung, "Kyŏngaehanŭn suryŏng Kim Il-sŏng tongji kkesŏ ilbon chŏngch'i riron chapchi 'sekkai' p'yŏnjipkukchang kwa hashin tamhwa [A Conversation the Dear Leader Comrade Kim Il Sung Had with the Managing Editor of the Japanese Political Theory Magazine 'Sekai']," *Kŭlloja*, no. 367 (November 1972): 7–8.

[415] Chosŏnnodongdang chungangwiwŏnhoe, "Sahoejuŭijŏk aegukchuŭi wa ryŏksa kyoyang [Socialist Patriotism and History Education]," *Kŭlloja,* no. 260 (November 1964): 6.

[416] Sin, "Chuch'e sasang ŭn kongsanjuŭijŏk chaju, charip ŭi sasang ida [Chuch'e Thought is the Communist Thought of chaju and charip]," 11–13.

of the communist world movement."[417] Creativity, as the previous chapter showed, referred to humans' history-making powers, a concept North Korea mobilized to signify, in particular, the history-making powers of its own people by constructing socialism. While placing these universal Marxist-Leninist principles in a local context, North Korea admitted their origins. Instead of muting Lenin, Pyongyang openly recognized that "Lenin always stressed the importance and power of the independent, creative activity of the working masses, the masters of the revolution."[418] With the advent of *chuch'e* philosophy, however, these concepts coalesced in the notion of man-as-master and assumed the role of a universal truth derived from the thought of Kim Il Sung.

Karl Marx's own writings further call into question North Korea's claims. Take *The Germany Ideology*, for example. In the very beginning, Marx clarified that he is examining human history, highlighting the privileged role of human beings, who, unlike animals, have "consciousness" and alter whatever "natural foundations" they may be faced with.[419] Marx's goal in this piece was to challenge the ideological illusions that plagued humans under bourgeois rule. According to Marx, "They, the creators [*Schöpfer*], have bowed before their creations [*Geschöpfe*]."[420] This is a fascinating formulation, because whenever the East German communists pondered man's position as master and his active role in the construction of a new society, they employed terms such as "*Schöpfer*" (creator), "*Schöpfertum*" (creativity), "*Schöpferkraft*" (creative power), and "*Schöpfergeist*" (creative spirit). *Schöpfer* also contains a

[417] Kim Il Sung, "Hyŏn chŏngse wa uri tang ŭi kwaŏp [The Present Situation and the Tasks of Our Party]," 19.

[418] Sin, "Chuch'e sasang ŭn kongsanjuŭijŏk chaju, charip ŭi sasang ida [Chuch'e Thought is the Communist Thought of chaju and charip]," 13.

[419] Marx and Engels, "Die deutsche Ideologie," 20–21.

[420] Ibid., 13.

religious undertone in German, as God is often referred to using this term. Surely, this nuance was not lost on Marx since right before this statement he mentioned humans' ideas about God and humans' capitulation to their own spiritual creations. Rather than depend on alien forces, including religious ideas, Marx wanted humans to be autonomous: "A being only considers itself autonomous once it stands on its own feet, and it only stands on its own feet once it owes its existence to itself."[421] Communism would finally grant man this autonomy. To Marx communism meant "the conscious mastery [*Beherrschung*] of those powers, which, produced by the mutually effecting interaction of men, have until now impressed and ruled [*beherrscht*] them as thoroughly alien powers."[422] He likened the state of communism to the Hegelian notion of a "society as subject," where the harmonious interconnection of individuals constitutes "a single individual."[423] In Marx's view, communism represented the ultimate human liberation, a complete mastership of nature and society in which all forms of exploitation have disappeared. Marx regarded all of human history as a struggle toward this goal, for man to be at home with himself, one with his own nature (i.e., species-being). Communism, in other words, is "the return of man for himself as a *social*, that is, truly human, human being."[424] Indeed, it is difficult to deny the man-centeredness of Marx's philosophy. Thus, in earlier years, even the North Koreans admitted that "Marx pointed out that the proletariat's struggle for communism is truly

[421] Karl Marx, "Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte (1844) [Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts (1844)]," in *Karl Marx - Friedrich Engels: Werke*, 40 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1968), 540.

[422] The "*herr*" in "*Beherrschung*" is quite similar to the Korean "*chuin*" (master). Interestingly, the "*chu*" of "*chuin*" is the same "*chu*" found in "*chuch'e*."

[423] Marx and Engels, "Die deutsche Ideologie," 37.

[424] Marx, "Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte (1844) [Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts (1844)]," 536.

genuine humanism."[425] The point here is not to systematically compare North Korean ideology with Marx's ideas, since one can easily find disparities on the basis of one's own interpretation, but to illustrate the exaggeration displayed by North Korea's claims about Kim Il Sung's originality.

When examining East Germany's Marxist-Leninist views, this exaggeration is only amplified. While it seems quite evident now that Kim Il Sung created no fundamentally new philosophy, some might argue Kim's view of man contained an idealism contrary to Marxism-Leninism, especially as *chuch'e* philosophy acquired more elaborations under Kim Jong Il. At first glance, it is true, North Korean statements about man's ability to "decide everything" appear rather voluntaristic and idealistic. North Korea's obsession with ideology only further seems to indicate a rejection of materialism. But if that is the case, then why do we find East German statements about creativity and consciousness that closely resemble North Korea's own views? Something is amiss. After all, the East Germans were fervent advocates of Marxist-Leninist materialism. Is it possible that North Korea never abandoned this materialism?

Materialism, Consciousness, and North Korean Ideology

The 6th Congress of the WPK in October 1980 formalized the heir apparent status of Kim Jong Il, Kim Il Sung's son, by bestowing upon him high-ranking political offices. In terms of ideology, the Congress further silenced Marxism-Leninism, not mentioning the concept at all.[426] Instead, Kim Il Sung's report to the Congress revolved around *chuch'e sasang* and the need to

[425] Hyŏng-il Kim, "Kyegŭpsŏng kwa in'gansŏng [Class Nature and Human Nature]," *Kŭlloja*, no. 227 (July 1963): 12.

[426] Imre Májer, trans., "Telegram from the Hungarian Embassy in Pyongyang, 'New Party Rules of the Korean Workers' Party'," November 11, 1980, MNL OL XIV-J-1-j Korea 25-006569/1980, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111637.

permeate the whole society with it. Kim called this process *chuch'e-sasang-ification* (*chuch'e-sasang-hwa*), a process Kim declared necessary for the attainment of the "working class' revolutionary cause of realizing autonomy [*chajusŏng*]." This meant to transform "each member of society into a communist man of the *chuch'e* type," who thinks and acts in accordance with *chuch'e sasang*.[427] Only through *chuch'e-sasang-ification* could socialism and communism be built and human liberation realized.[428] Moreover, the ideological unity of society was to be matched by the ideological unity of the party. The party ranks, Kim proclaimed, must strengthen their "ideological and volitional unity on the basis of *chuch'e sasang*."[429] While in previous years such an ideologically unified party was still sometimes referred to as "party of the new type [*sae hyŏng ŭi tang*]," which, as we saw in Chapter 1, was a Marxist-Leninist notion mobilized to generate a disciplined and ideologically uniform party around the party head, now ideological unity was signified by the "party of the *chuch'e* type [*chuch'e hyŏng ŭi tang*]."[430] Not too long after the Congress, on March 31, 1982, a "philosophical" treatise entitled "On *Chuch'e sasang*" was published under the name of Kim Jong Il, squaring his political positions and status as successor with a theoretical aptitude appropriate for a foremost communist leader. The treatise added to the formalization of *chuch'e sasang*, elaborating on preexisting doctrines.

[427] Kim Il Sung, "Chosŏn rodongdang che 6 ch'a taehoe esŏ han chungang wiwŏnhoe saŏp ch'onghwa pogo [Report on the Work of the Central Committee Held at the 6th Congress of the Workers' Party of Korea]," *Kŭlloja*, no. 462 (October 1980): 20.

[428] Sŏng-ch'ŏl Chŏng, "On sahoe ŭi chuch'esasanghwa nŭn uri hyŏngmyŏng ŭi ch'ongjŏk immu [The Chuch'e-sasang-ification of the Whole Society Is Our Revolution's Overall Mission]," *Kŭlloja*, no. 463 (November 1980): 18.

[429] Kim Il Sung, "Chosŏn rodongdang che 6 ch'a taehoe esŏ han chungang wiwŏnhoe saŏp ch'onghwa pogo [Report on the Work of the Central Committee Held at the 6th Congress of the Workers' Party of Korea]," 56.

[430] Chosŏnnodongdang chungangwiwŏnhoe, "On sahoe ŭi chuch'esasanghwa wiŏp ŭl wansŏnghagi wihan widaehan kangnyŏng [The Great Program for the Completion of the Cause of Chuch'e-sasang-ifying the Whole Society]," *Kŭlloja*, no. 463 (November 1980): 7–8.

Speaking in terms of the Cold War period, one can consider this treatise the pinnacle of North Korea's efforts to *chuch'efy,* as it were, its ideology and silence Marxism-Leninism. Despite these attempts, however, plenty of Marxist-Leninist notions remained, especially Marxism-Leninism's materialism.

In the treatise, Kim Jong Il reviewed and expanded on Kim Il Sung's thoughts about man, yet nonetheless assigned all credit for these philosophical discoveries to his father. While repeating Kim Il Sung's mantra about man as a "social being" who is "master of his own destiny" and who "decides everything," Kim Jong Il recasted the concepts of "autonomy" (*chajusŏng*) and "creativity" (*ch'angjosŏng*) as "man's fundamental attributes" and included a third attribute, "consciousness." (*ŭisiksŏng*).[431] Autonomy was viewed as the most fundamental of all three attributes. It represented humans' desire to be free from all forms of oppression and to assume the role of master. Creativity meant humans' ability to "transform the world," to create the new out of the old. Put differently, creativity was the act of realizing one's autonomy. But in order to change the world in accordance with one's desire for autonomy, one required consciousness, the third attribute. That is, creative activity and the realization of autonomy was only possible through a consciousness that could correctly guide humans in their creative, self-realizing endeavors.

It is easy to mistake this talk of autonomy, creativity, and consciousness for a fundamental departure from Marxism-Leninism and its understanding of materialism. One should therefore pay close attention to the historical conditionality of these attributes. According

[431] Kim Jong Il, "Chuch'e sasang e taehayŏ [On Chuch'e sasang] (1982)," in *Chuch'e ch'ŏrhak e taehayŏ [On Chuch'e Philosophy]* (Pyongyang: Chosŏn Nodongdang Ch'ulp'ansa, 2000), 23.

to Kim Jong Il, "autonomy, creativity, and consciousness develop socio-historically."[432] In other words, they assume different forms under different social and historical conditions. Under socialism, they assume their highest form yet. As stated by Kim Jong Il, "the masses of the people are the subject of history." Their power to "transform nature and society," however, increases as "history develops."[433] It is not an absolute power without any conditions:

> While the masses of the people are the subject of history, their position and role is not the same in every period or society. In the exploitative society of the past, for a long time unaware of their social and class situation as well as their strength, the working masses of the people could not unite into a single political force. . . . Only by seizing state power and the means of production and by establishing a socialist system can the working masses of the people liberate themselves from exploitation and oppression and consciously create history as the true masters of society and their destiny.[434]

Capitalism and class society, hence, stand in the way of human liberation, the final hurdle to the realization of historical necessity. "All of human history," Kim Jong Il declared, "is a struggle for autonomy." To fully attain this autonomy, one must "eliminate the old social system" and institute socialism. Although autonomy, like creativity and consciousness, is implicitly present at the beginning of history, its full potential is only gradually realized over the course of history's development, reaching its highest realization under socialism.[435] Since socialism is not an arbitrary goal, but one derived from a lawful historical necessity, humans, to achieve liberation and act as masters of their own destiny, must know this necessity—historical necessity must become self-conscious. When transforming nature and society, Kim argued, "man utilizes the

[432] Ibid., 24.

[433] Ibid., 28.

[434] Ibid., 30.

[435] Ibid., 32–33.

objective laws."[436] Nevertheless, humans first need to "grasp the world and its laws of motion and development" before they could creatively change it.[437] And it is "*chuch'e sasang*" which "reveals the laws of historical development and social revolution."[438] Following the dictates of North Korea's state ideology, then, is equivalent to the conscious fulfillment of historical necessity leading to one's freedom. *Chuch'e sasang* sets the problem and provides the solution—it is the very embodiment of historical necessity, an ideology perfectly reflective of the objective laws. The better humans internalize this ideology, the more conscious they become, the higher their creativity develops, and the more their autonomy is realized. As famously stated by Friedrich Engels, "Freedom is the understanding of necessity," a phrase Mao Zedong later amended for clarification: "Freedom is the understanding of necessity *and* the transformation of necessity."[439] Necessity is inescapable, but by understanding it, by comprehending the objective laws, one can volitionally transform the world to serve the goal of freedom, something that was not possible in societies prior to the enlightenment supplied by communist ideology. Fortunately for humans, this necessity is in their favor, as it dictates a path inevitably heading toward their liberation.

Although Kim Jong Il claimed that Kim Il Sung's revelations about human nature and humans' role in history represented original contributions, it is difficult to ignore the fact that

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[436] Ibid., 27.

[437] Ibid., 24–25.

[438] Ibid., 28.

[439] Friedrich Engels, "Herrn Eugen Dühring's Umwälzung der Wissenschaft," in *Karl Marx - Friedrich Engels: Werke*, 20 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1975), 106.
Mao Zedong, "Talk on Questions of Philosophy," August 18, 1964, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-9/mswv9_27.htm.

Marxism-Leninism championed a worldview virtually identical to North Korea's. One must look no further than an East German dictionary entry on dialectical and historical materialism:

> Historical materialism, for the first time in history, scientifically ascertained and illustrated the role of the masses of the people as creators of history. It proved that the working class is appointed by history to create a communist society in which the masses of the people, on the basis of social ownership of the means of production, comprehensively utilize the laws of nature, society, and thinking for the welfare of humanity, consciously shape their own history, and realize their freedom.[440]

Socialism, according to East German orthodoxy, finally allowed the masses to possess a liberating consciousness in tune with their actual being and the objective laws.[441] In terms of historical materialism, then, the chief difference between the East German and North Korean view was a matter of wording. Whereas the East Germans believed that Marxism-Leninism is the ideology and scientific system reflective of objective laws, the North Koreans argued that *chuch'e sasang* is even more reflective of these laws than Marxism-Leninism. Like North Korea, the East Germans also sought to "overthrow all relations in which man is a wretched, miserable, degraded being, and construct a new social order in which he can posit and develop himself as active subject of history."[442] But this was to be done via Marxism-Leninism, not via the supposedly higher ideological stage of *chuch'e sasang*.

The farther we travel back in time, the more obvious North Korean ideology's relationship to Marxist-Leninist historical materialism becomes. "Objective reality," Kim Il

[440] Böhme et al., *Kleines politisches Wörterbuch [Small Political Dictionary]*, 201.

[441] Ibid., 331.

[442] Ingrid Mayer, "Marxistische Philosophie und sozialistisches Menschenbild [Marxist Philosophy and the Socialist Idea of Man]," *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 17, no. 6 (January 1969): 654.

Sung noted in 1972, "required us to display autonomy and creativity."[443] That same year, an article in the WPK's theoretical organ elaborated on the phrase "man decides everything" by stating that "Man becomes the most powerful being in the world because he recognizes the secrets of the objective world, correctly reflects those [objective] demands, and thus possesses infinite strength to reshape the world."[444] The same article actually plagiarized Marx's statement that "theory also becomes a material force as soon as it seizes the masses," using almost the exact same terms without mentioning Marx's name: "When truth is grasped by the masses, then it becomes a great material force."[445] In contrast to 1972, North Korea still regularly cited Marx and Lenin prior to 1967. For instance, a North Korean article from 1963, referencing Marx's *The German Ideology*, highlighted the importance of "communist consciousness" and its reflectiveness of material reality.[446] In those days, it was common to discuss "universally valid general laws" that could be "consciously used" by the masses to aid in their liberation.[447] "Through the consciousness-possessing subjective efforts of individuals," as another article

[443] Kim Il Sung, "Kyŏngaehanŭn suryŏng Kim Il-sŏng tongji kkesŏ ilbon chŏngch'i riron chapchi 'sekkai' p'yŏnjipkukchang kwa hashin tamhwa [A Conversation the Dear Leader Comrade Kim Il Sung Had with the Managing Editor of the Japanese Political Theory Magazine 'Sekai']," 4.

[444] Chosŏnnodongdang chungangwiwŏnhoe, "Saram i modŭn kŏt ŭi chuin imyŏ modŭn kŏt ŭl kyŏlchŏnghandanŭn kŏt ŭn chuch'e sasang ŭi kich'o ida [That Man Is Master of All Things and Decides All Things Is the Basis of chuch'e sasang]," 18.

[445] Karl Marx, "Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie: Einleitung," in *Karl Marx - Friedrich Engels: Werke*, 1 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1981), 385.
Chosŏnnodongdang chungangwiwŏnhoe, "Saram i modŭn kŏt ŭi chuin imyŏ modŭn kŏt ŭl kyŏlchŏnghandanŭn kŏt ŭn chuch'e sasang ŭi kich'o ida [That Man Is Master of All Things and Decides All Things Is the Basis of chuch'e sasang]," 18.

[446] Hun Lim, "Sahoejuŭi wa chonggyo [Socialism and Religion]," *Kŭlloja*, no. 230 (August 1963): 31–32.

[447] Sin, "Chuch'e sasang ŭn kongsanjuŭijŏk chaju, charip ŭi sasang ida [Chuch'e Thought is the Communist Thought of chaju and charip]," 9.

stated, "the necessity of the revolution is realized."[448] When Kim Jong Il framed consciousness in terms of a fundamental characteristic of humans, as supposedly discovered by Kim Il Sung, he merely helped to cover up the Marxist-Leninist roots of North Korean ideology. Speaking in terms of materialism, North Korean ideology, as expressed in Kim Jong Il's treatise, features only minor alterations of ideological orthodoxy in previous years. Preexisting doctrines were simply reconstituted in slightly different forms.[449]

To fully elucidate the Marxist-Leninist materialism of North Korean ideology, however, one problem remains: the issue of revolutionary consciousness. Was North Korea indeed unique in its emphasis on consciousness? Was this a typically Asian phenomenon derived from the Confucian tradition? As shown above, both North Korean ideology and Marxism-Leninism believed that in order to be revolutionary, that is, capable of transforming the world, consciousness must accord with objective laws. While this indicates a materialism, North Korea also held that "the masses' ideological consciousness of autonomy plays the decisive role in revolutionary struggle."[450] In the North Korean view, the masses required a correct "class consciousness" in order to successfully wage revolution.[451] The higher the historical stage and the more advanced the revolutionary struggle, the more ideological consciousness matters: "After the working class has seized state power and erected a socialist system, in the process of

[448] Ro, "Hyŏngmyŏng ŭi chuch'ejŏk yoin kwa kukchejŏk yoin [The Revolution's Subjective Factor and International Factor]," 24–25.

[449] Brian Myers has noticed this as well, pointing out that Kim Jong Il's 1982 treatise hardly featured anything new. Myers, *North Korea's Juche Myth*, 162.

[450] Kim Jong Il, "Chuch'e sasang e taehayŏ [On Chuch'e sasang] (1982)," 42.

[451] Ibid., 43.

building socialism and communism, the role of ideological consciousness rises incomparably."[452] Although proper material conditions (i.e., socialism) are necessary for the full unfolding of revolutionary consciousness, "the ideological factor," North Korea contended, is of "decisive significance," since "material conditions do not automatically result in the breakout of a revolution."[453] North Korea consequently rejected "fatalism" (*sungmyŏngnon*), i.e., the notion of leaving one's fate to the spontaneous and predetermined development of nature and society. Surprisingly, although at first glance such statements seem uniquely North Korean, the privileging of consciousness, especially under the condition of a highly advanced and revolutionary society, was not at all alien to the Marxist-Leninist tradition.

Already during Stalin's time, Soviet Marxism-Leninism stressed consciousness and human will, rejecting the type of economic or material determinism that scholars frequently contrast with North Korean ideology. Soviet and East German criticisms of Rosa Luxemburg, one of Germany's most famous socialist revolutionaries, provide a good case in point. Fred Oelßner, a member of the SED's central committee, authored a 1951 book—subsequently republished two times—detailing Luxemburg's thought while at the same time criticizing its divergence from Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy. Although the SED hoped to integrate Luxemburg into East Germany's revolutionary legacy, it also needed to denounce and prove wrong her heterodoxy, particularly given her censure of Lenin. The East Germans identified Luxemburg's writings with economic determinism, which they condemned using labels such as "mechanical materialism" and "historical fatalism." Oelßner portrayed the dead revolutionary as someone who only cared for "objective development" while entirely ignoring "the subjective actions of

[452] Ibid., 44.

[453] Ibid., 46.

humans."[454] She did not see humans as the active force, Oelßner contended, but instead turned history and its laws of development into a person determining itself out of itself. Oelßner thus stated: "But Marxism-Leninism teaches that she [Luxemburg] does not have to blindly obey these laws; rather, that she—if she has recognized these laws with help of her science—can accelerate development and steer it in a particular direction. Marxism-Leninism arms the proletariat with the weapon that makes it the conscious creator of social development."[455] Material conditions therefore do not necessarily determine humans' willful action. Rather, if these conditions and the laws associated with them are cognized, then human will becomes the decisive force of transformation.

In his effort to undo the "*chuch'e* myth," Brian Myers has also noted the significance of willful action in Stalinist thought. This anthropocentricism, he explains, continued into the post-Stalin period, as the Soviets were in the middle of developing a "Marxist humanism" at the beginning of the 1970s.[456] Unfortunately, Myers does not elaborate on the Marxist-Leninist philosophical contents of this trend, a trend that was not new to the 1970s. I shall attempt to do so. Examining how such a humanism manifested itself in East German orthodoxy only further illustrates the many parallels between North Korean ideology and Soviet Marxism-Leninism. In fact, a close look at this philosophy hints at the real origins of North Korea's *chuch'e* discourse.

The East Germans certainly recognized the primacy of consciousness over material conditions in socialist society. Most are familiar with Marx's well-known claim concerning the relationship between will and productive relations:

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[454] Fred Oelßner, *Rosa Luxemburg: Eine kritische biographische Skizze [Rosa Luxemburg: A Critical Biographical Sketch]* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1956), 163.

[455] Ibid., 203–4.

[456] Myers, *North Korea's Juche Myth*, 125–26.

> In the social production of their lives, humans enter definite and necessary relations that are independent of their will, productive relations that correspond with a definite developmental stage of their material productive forces. . . . It is not the consciousness [*Bewußtsein*] of men that determines their being [*Sein*], but, conversely, it is their social being [*gesellschaftliches Sein*] that determines their consciousness.[457]

Yet there exists much less familiarity with Marxist-Leninist interpretations of this relationship, such as the following statement given by East Germany's first leader, Walter Ulbricht, in 1959: "Since the Great Socialist October Revolution, the workers in the liberated countries determine the course of events. Men no longer enter productive relations that are independent of their will, but rather conscious ones that depend on their will."[458] Put differently, "men become the masters of their own relations and the laws regulating those relations."[459] Like the North Koreans, the East German communists believed in the continuously growing power of ideological consciousness as class differences are destroyed and a more advanced social system is established:

> Ultimately Marxist-Leninist philosophy will increasingly pervade all areas of socialist society and social activity and in this way acts as the spiritual foundation and ideal [*ideelle*] driving force of socialist society. . . . In their actions, behavior, and thought, the more the workers are led by the insights, convictions, and ideals of Marxist-Leninist philosophy, the better they will understand the big picture of socialism's development, and the better they can grasp their own activity as a necessary component of this development and harmonize their person with the humanist goals of socialism. Knowledge about this correspondence and the social significance of one's own activity has a stimulating effect on the performance potential of humans. It promotes the development and reliability of socialist modes of behavior and, in human action, generates important moral driving

[457]Karl Marx, "Zur Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie [On the Critique of Political Economy]," in *Karl Marx - Friedrich Engels: Werke*, 13 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1961), 8–9.

[458] Gerhard Koch, "Subjektiver Faktor und objektiv-gesetzmäßiger Entwicklungsprozeß der sozialistischen Gesellschaft [Subjective Factor and the Objective, Lawful Developmental Process of Socialist Society]," *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 14, no. 9 (January 1966): 1051.

[459] Günther and Arbatow, *Grundlagen des Marxismus-Leninismus: Lehrbuch*, 164.

> forces. Thus, the Marxist-Leninist worldview increasingly becomes a driving force that speeds up the development of socialist society.[460]

Simply put, in socialist society, the willful action of humans, guided by Marxism-Leninism, reaches historically new levels, a view identical to North Korea's, minus the term "Marxism-Leninism." Indeed, the above quote also indicates that *chuch'e-sasang-ification*, that is, the state ideology's pervasion of the entire society and the creation of a new "communist man of the *chuch'e* type" was a concept easily relatable to older Marxist-Leninist ideas. As we already saw in Kim Il Sung's 1972 response to the Japanese newspaper, North Korea had been talking about making a new man, a man who is one with the state ideology, for some time. Actually, the notion of a "new communist man" can be found prior to the 1970s as well, related as it was to the concept of the "new Soviet man."[461] And in the case of East Germany, it was the development of a so-called "socialist person" (*sozialistische Persönlichkeit*) that became the focus of human remolding.[462] This new person could only exist through the possession of a new spirit: "The constant development of socialist consciousness is also a decisive factor for the development of socialist persons and socialist society, and it raises the workers to conscious, free

[460] Günther Hoppe and Alfred Kosing, "Marxistisch-leninistische Philosophie und Gestaltung der entwickelten sozialistischen Gesellschaft in der DDR [Marxist-Leninist Philosophy and the Creation of the Developed Socialist Society in the GDR]," *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 19, no. 3 (January 1971): 258.

[461] Chosŏnnodongdang chungangwiwŏnhoe, "Ch'ŏngsan-ni kyosi chiphaeng esŏ ŏdŭn sŏnggwa rŭl tŏuk konggo paljŏnsik'ija [Let Us More Firmly Develop the Achievements Gained in the Execution of the Ch'ŏngsan-ni Teaching]," 5.

[462]Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, "Wie wächst die sozialistische Persönlichkeit? [How Does the Socialist Person Grow?]," *Neues Deutschland*, November 16, 1971, 4.

creators of their social life."[463] Though the contents of this personhood were somewhat different from North Korea's version, the underlying Marxist-Leninist logic was quite the same.[464]

Perhaps the most striking commonality between North Korean and East German conceptions of revolutionary consciousness is found in East Germany's privileging of the "subjective factor" (*subjektiver Faktor*) over the "objective factor." "Subjective factor" referred to Marxist-Leninist leadership, political forces, ideology, and "the consciousness and organization of the workers," in short, it was the self-conscious and active national revolution.[465] In relation to the objective factor, which included such aspects as the developmental level of the productive forces and the international situation, the subjective factor was regarded as "the decisive moment."[466] The national revolution, embodied and consciously carried forward by the masses, occupied a primary, albeit dialectically interconnected, rank vis-à-vis the world revolution: "We [i.e., our people] know ourselves as the subject of history in our times."[467] Stalin's socialism in one country, as one can see here, did not die with Stalin, and most certainly not in North Korea, where the subjective factor was also intertwined with the national revolution. In the previous chapter, I cited a North Korean article from 1963 according to which the

[463] Böhme et al., *Kleines politisches Wörterbuch [Small Political Dictionary]*, 331–32.

[464] For example, the East German version of the new man did not include such facets as unwavering loyalty to a single leader.

[465] Hans Steussloff, "Zur Wechselwirkung von objektiven und subjektiven Faktoren bei der weiteren Gestaltung des Sozialismus [On the Reciprocity of Objective and Subjective Factors in the Further Construction of Socialism]," *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 30, no. 1 (January 1982): 18–19.

[466] Ekkhard Lassow, "Die wachsende Rolle des subjektiven Faktors: Eine Gesetzmäßigkeit des historischen Fortschritts [The Growing Role of the Subjective Factor: A Law of Historical Progress]," *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 22, no. 5 (January 1974): 533.

[467] Steussloff, "Zur Wechselwirkung von objektiven und subjektiven Faktoren bei der weiteren Gestaltung des Sozialismus [On the Reciprocity of Objective and Subjective Factors in the Further Construction of Socialism]," 19, 26.

"subjective factor" (*chuch'ejŏk yoin*) is decisive over the international factor.[468] The article, moreover, stressed "people's consciousness-possessing subjective [*chuch'ejŏk*] efforts" in relation to material conditions and the international environment.[469] This subjective factor, the article held, needed to be further developed through a "spirit of *charyŏk kaengsaeng*," by relying on the strength of one's own people in pushing forward the revolution.[470] On hand of these similar treatments of the subjective factor in East Germany and North Korea, despite their diverging aims, one can see that the birth of the *chuch'e* discourse occurred within the framework of a Marxist-Leninist discourse.[471] However, with the emergence of *chuch'e* philosophy, the notion of the masses as subjects of their national revolution was de-territorialized, transformed into the universal slogan of "man decides everything," and ultimately re-territorialized by arguing that this universality originated on Korean soil.[472]

In summary, subjectivity, consciousness, ideology, and willful action played a crucial role in the Marxist-Leninist tradition throughout its evolution. North Korean ideology, being part of this tradition, naturally expressed many of the same themes. For communist regimes, the prioritization of the spiritual over the material was not only important, it was vital to the

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[468] Ro, "Hyŏngmyŏng ŭi chuch'ejŏk yoin kwa kukchejŏk yoin [The Revolution's Subjective Factor and International Factor]."

[469] Ibid., 24–25.

[470] Ibid., 26.

[471] The notion of subjective factor was not new to East Germany in the 1970s, though philosophical discussions of the concept certainly increased.

[472] One can really notice this sublation in a 1973 definition of *charyŏk kaengsaeng*: "The master of each country's revolution is that country's party and people, and the decisive factor in the victory of the revolution, too, is that country's subjective strength. This is a law flowing from the fundamental principle of *chuch'e sasang* that man is the master of everything and decides everything." In contrast to the pre-1972 understanding, the doctrine of the subjective factor in one's national revolution was now said to be derived from the philosophical insights of *chuch'e sasang* rather than Marxism-Leninism.
Chŏngch'i sajŏn [Political Dictionary], 704.

rationalization of the vanguard party. Economic determinism represented an intolerable enemy because it suggested an automatic development in which the party and the consciousness of the masses were a mere consequence of objective laws. Luxemburg, in opposition to Lenin's vanguardism, argued that the party ought to function merely as the "mouthpiece" (*Sprachrohr*) of the masses' will.[473] Her arguments suggested that if the masses held ideas contrary to the communists, the communists should reevaluate and follow the will of the masses as told by the masses. A Marxist-Leninist, to the contrary, privileged the position of the communist, i.e., the enlightened individual who has seen the truth of history. Although a Marxist-Leninist also saw himself as a mouthpiece or representative of the masses' will, he or she decided what that will was. Marxist-Leninists emphasized human will precisely so that they could determine its contents. Their analysis of history prescribed the masses' desires, their will, and the path they must tread to reach the inevitable future. If the masses' desires contravened the communists' prescription, then their consciousness was deemed insufficient or reactionary, requiring ideological education. Ideology—invented by the communist—came first, but it was rationalized on the basis of supposedly preexisting objective laws or material conditions that the communists had supposedly cognized. And the Marxist-Leninists relied on this objectivity to make their schemes appear scientific rather than arbitrary and subjective. Once the masses held these objective laws in their minds through the vehicle of the state ideology, then they were said to be truly conscious and capable of steering history toward its conclusion. Their will became the most powerful force of historical development once it chimed in unison with the state ideology and loyally carried out the dictates of the prescient communist leadership. North

[473] Rosa Luxemburg, "Der politische Führer der deutschen Arbeiterklasse [The Political Leader of the German Working Class]," in *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Brigitte Hoeft et al., vol. 2 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1972), 280.

Korean elites therefore had no incentive to abandon Marxist-Leninist materialism, since this materialism rationalized the prescription of a specific consciousness. Materialism additionally rationalized their leadership, which brings us to the next Marxist-Leninist legacy of North Korean ideology: leadership conception.

Marxist-Leninist Leadership Conception and North Korean Ideology

Some may find North Korea's notion of man as master contradictory to its adulation of the leader. Myers, for example, does, thereby buttressing his thesis that *chuch'e sasang* does not constitute the regime's true ideology.[474] When it comes to leadership conception, however, I find Myers' separation of real and fake ideology somewhat crude since it obscures the Marxist-Leninist connection. Indeed, beginning in 1967, North Korean ideology highlighted the leader's role in more blatant ways than had been the case in previous years, a trend that only continued to escalate. Already in 1968, socialist patriotism acquired an extra layer according to which "infinite loyalty toward the leader is the highest expression of socialist patriotism."[475] By 1970, the leader was known as "the supreme brain [*ch'oego noesu*] who leads the entire proletarian dictatorship system," in addition to being "the sole center of the unity of the whole party and the entire people."[476] An organic view of society grew increasingly prominent, so much that by the time the Berlin Wall collapsed, the leader, party, and masses were conceived of as an indivisible,

[474] Myers, *North Korea's Juche Myth*, 133.

[475] Chosŏnnodongdang chungangwiwŏnhoe, "Sahoejuŭijŏk aegukchuŭi [Socialist Patriotism]," *Kŭlloja*, no. 318 (August 1968): 5.

[476] *Chŏngch'i yong sajŏn [Political Dictionary]*, 196.

united body.[477] But even before then, the leader was considered indispensable for the successful execution of the revolution, as Kim Jong Il's 1982 treatise pointed out as well. "The masses must be fused with leadership," Kim asserted, because "they can occupy the position of masters of socio-historical development only through correct leadership."[478] While it is certainly true that North Korea's leadership conception was unique at the end of the Cold War, privileging the role of the leader in ways unknown to Soviet Marxism-Leninism, this did not mean that Marxist-Leninist leadership rationalization simply disappeared. To the contrary, it remained an integral part of North Korean ideology, reconciling the apparent contradiction between the masses' role as master and the leader's supreme position by means of Marxist-Leninist materialism and vanguardism.

Apart from Soviet intellectual trends in the late 1980s, Marxism-Leninism, throughout the Cold War, championed the indispensability of communist leadership. This necessity was not regarded as contradictory to the masses' role as free creators of history. Quite oppositely, they were dialectically connected on the basis of historical materialism. While historical necessity demanded the masses' liberation, the communist leadership recognized this necessity, enlightened the masses, and led them to action. According to historical materialism, since the working class is the most revolutionary class, destined to lead humanity to communism through its overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the establishment of socialism, the Marxist-Leninist party, the vanguard of the working class, represents the most revolutionary organization and liberator of mankind. In the East German worldview, "only the revolutionary party of the working class

[477] T'ae-jun Pak, "Tongjiae e kich'ohan hyŏngmyŏngjŏk ŭiri ŭi wŏlli nŭn sahoejuŭisahoe ŭi koyuhan todŏkjŏk wŏlli [The Principle of Revolutionary Obligation, Which Is Based on Comradely Love, As the Inherent Moral Principle of Socialist Society]," *Kŭlloja*, no. 567 (May 1989): 22–29.

[478] Kim Jong Il, "Chuch'e sasang e taehayŏ [On Chuch'e sasang] (1982)," 31.

and hence the working class is qualified to make the laws of social development the basis of organization and thus the basis of the totality of society's movement. That is, she [the party] connects revolutionary theory, organization, and movement into one unity [*Einheit*] that enables the forward movement of the whole society."[479] Man could only be master if he followed the dictates of the party, for the party possessed historical truth—there was no contradiction.

In the Marxist-Leninist tradition, there always subsisted a latent potential for the privileging of a single leader over the party, i.e., the identification of the chairman, first secretary, or general secretary with the will of the party. This was made possible by the doctrine of democratic centralism, which dictated the obedience of the minority once the majority had reached a decision. The doctrine also stipulated the election of higher ranks by lower ranks, culminating in the election of the politburo and its supreme leader by the central committee, or, in the words of East German orthodoxy, "leadership of the party by an elected center."[480] Once elected, the lower levels were required to comply with the decisions of the higher levels. Thus, true power rested in the "elected center." If the party chief's power was secure, then his will was essentially the same as the party's. And because the party was the historically necessary guide to liberation, the top leader became a figurative embodiment of history.[481] Although the Soviets and East Germans condemned exaggerations concerning the role of historical leaders in the post-

[479] Hoppe and Kosing, "Marxistisch-leninistische Philosophie und Gestaltung der entwickelten sozialistischen Gesellschaft in der DDR [Marxist-Leninist Philosophy and the Creation of the Developed Socialist Society in the GDR]," 255–56.

[480] Böhme et al., *Kleines politisches Wörterbuch [Small Political Dictionary]*, 179.

[481] Trotsky famously prophesized this authoritarianism in his critique of Lenin's ideas about the party: "In the internal politics of the Party these methods lead, as we shall see below, to the Party organisation 'substituting' itself for the Party, the Central Committee substituting itself for the Party organisation, and finally the dictator substituting himself for the Central Committee."
Leon Trotsky, *Our Political Tasks*, trans. New Park Publications, 1904, https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1904/tasks/ch03.htm.

Stalin period, they continued to assert that there have existed individuals "who, owing to their abilities, recognize with particular clarity and represent the historically necessary interests of their class."[482] "The emergence of outstanding individuals," the East Germans maintained, was the fulfillment of "historical law."[483] One can easily recognize the potential for authoritarian abuse inherent in such a leadership conception, and indeed, such abuse was endemic to Marxism-Leninism as it was realized in socialist states.

The notion of proletarian dictatorship only exacerbated this authoritarianism. As covered in Chapter 1, Marxist-Leninists considered essential the establishment of an ideologically unified, disciplined party of the new type as a prerequisite for a successful exercise of proletarian dictatorship. Even the East Germans, much like North Korea, continuously referred to their state ideology, Marxism-Leninism, as a "unitary [*einheitlich*] system."[484] The homogeneity of this system was safeguarded by a united party in which individuals strictly adhered to party hierarchy and dutifully carried out the orders of their "elected" superiors. Disunity and factionalism were intolerable as the East Germans believed as well: "The Marxist-Leninist party is a unity of will [*Einheit des Willens*] irreconcilable with the existence of factions."[485] Proletarian dictatorship was inseparable from this style of party leadership since the Marxist-Leninist party, as the "conscious avantgarde of the working class," acted as guide in this transitional period. Through the iron fist of the proletarian (i.e., socialist) state, so it was thought, all forms of oppression would be eliminated, "counterrevolution" prevented, "the existence of antagonistic classes"

[482] Böhme et al., *Kleines politisches Wörterbuch [Small Political Dictionary]*, 746.

[483] Günther and Arbatow, *Grundlagen des Marxismus-Leninismus: Lehrbuch*, 214–15.

[484] Böhme et al., *Kleines politisches Wörterbuch [Small Political Dictionary]*, 602.

[485] Ibid., 606.

overcome, and class differences gradually erased, consequently giving rise to a "solidification of the politico-moral unity [*Einheit*] of the people," the SED held. Not just the party, but also the masses were to possess a "unitary will [*einheitlicher Wille*]."[486] Proletarian dictatorship, hence, did not just mean the liberation of the working class but the liberation of "all the working masses of the people" through a higher form of democracy incorporating all of the people, otherwise known as "socialist democracy."[487] But liberation required a correct historical consciousness, and since Marx stated that "communist consciousness" can also form in classes other than the proletariat, the Marxist-Leninists considered their task clear: implant proletarian consciousness (i.e., the consciousnesses of the communist leadership) in the masses as a whole, or, as the North Koreans began to call it in 1967, "working-classize" the masses.[488]

As the notion of "working-classizing" indicates, North Korea relied on historical materialism as well in rationalizing the progressiveness of the consciousness prescribed by the leadership. The masses were to hold a working-class consciousness. Kim Jong Il, in his 1982 treatise, recognized "the revolutionary leadership of the working class," stating that "the party of the working class is the staff of the revolution, and the leader of the working class is the revolution's supreme leader."[489] This party was to have "only one ideology" and "one ideological will," but, unlike in East Germany and the Soviet Union, this ideology and will was

[486] Günther and Arbatow, *Grundlagen des Marxismus-Leninismus: Lehrbuch*, 160–61.

[487] Böhme et al., *Kleines politisches Wörterbuch [Small Political Dictionary]*, 204, 606.

[488] Marx and Engels, "Die deutsche Ideologie," 69.

[489] Kim Jong Il, "Chuch'e sasang e taehayŏ [On Chuch'e sasang] (1982)," 30.

more explicitly identified with the leader.[490] The monolithic ideological system was made monolithic only through his ideology. Indeed, since this logic was derived from Marxism-Leninism, one can find expressions such as "unity of ideological will and action" even in the North Korea of the 1950s.[491] Once again, as one travels backward in time, the Marxist-Leninist connection becomes increasingly obvious. For example, proletarian dictatorship—which reinforced East Germany's organic conception of society, a conception one scholar summed up as "unity of leader-party-class-mass"—served as inspiration for North Korea's own organic metaphor as a 1970 dictionary shows: "In the proletarian dictatorship system, the leader, the party, the class, and the masses form one indivisible united body."[492] Kim Il Sung, as "the leader of the working class," was able to "see the farthest" and "know better than anyone else the laws of historical development."[493] In this way, any theoretical contradiction between the role of the leader and the masses was negated since the leader's position directly corresponded with the universal requirements of the working class and hence the masses as a whole—he embodied their will, their desire for liberation. Once they realized that the leader's will represented their historical interests, and once they made their will correspond with the leader's will, carrying it

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[490] Chosŏnnodongdang chungangwiwŏnhoe, "Uri tang ŭn pulmyŏl ŭi chuch'e sasang e ŭihayŏ chidodoenŭn yŏnggwangsŭrŏun tang [Our Party Is A Glorious Party Led By the Immortal chuch'e sasang]," *Kŭlloja*, no. 455 (March 1980): 3.

[491] Gwang-hak Han, "Hangil mujang t'ujaeng ch'ogi kongsanjuŭija taeryŏl ŭi t'ongil tan'gyŏl ŭl wihan t'ujaeng [The Struggle for Unity in the Ranks of Communists in the Early Days of the Anti-Japanese Armed Struggle]," *Kŭlloja*, no. 169 (December 1959): 59.

[492] Dieter Koop, "Wissenschafts- Und Politikverständnis Im Wissenschaftlichen Kommunismus [The Understanding of Science and Politics in Scientific Communism]," in *War Der Wissenschaftliche Kommunismus Eine Wissenschaft? Vom Wissenschaftlichen Kommunismus Zur Politikwissenschaft [Was Scientific Communism a Science? From Scientific Communism to Political Science]*, ed. Michael Greven and Dieter Koop (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 1993), 47.
Chŏngch'i yong sajŏn [Political Dictionary], 631.

[493] *Chŏngch'i yong sajŏn [Political Dictionary]*, 195.

out with revolutionary zeal, then they assumed the rank of master. Loyalty to the leader was the same thing as adherence to one's own will, which was the same thing as adherence to the state ideology and party policy, which was the same thing as following the laws of history.[494] Hence, the more organic this leadership conception became, the less the apparent contradiction. In its theoretical expression, it was an organism held together, in large part, by the rationalizing logic of Marxist-Leninist materialism, communist leadership, and proletarian dictatorship.

Conclusion

While immersing oneself in the theoretical conceptualization of North Korean ideology, one ought not forget that this is merely theoretical. Theory does not necessarily translate into reality, though it may provide clues that facilitate the investigation of reality. Although East Germany shared many of the same doctrines with North Korea, the extent to or way in which they were realized was different in each country. Despite East German notions about ideological unity, the elimination of bourgeois ideological influences, the continuously increasing power of proletarian dictatorship, and the organicity of society, the GDR was much less repressive than North Korea. Not surprisingly, many representatives of East Germany's youth organization, in attendance at the 13th World Festival of Youth and Students hosted by Pyongyang in 1989, reportedly "had great difficulties dealing with the social conditions" in the DPRK.[495] State ideology may help elucidate the rationalization behind many aspects of life in communist regimes, but it cannot provide a full explanation for the specificity of that life.

[494] Kim Jong Il, "Chuch'e sasang e taehayŏ [On Chuch'e sasang] (1982)," 70–74.

[495] Central Council of the Free German Youth, Office of the First Secretary, "Report About the 13th World Festival of Youth and Students," 1989, 15, SAPMO-BArch DY 24/14110.

This chapter had a very specific goal, namely, to challenge the paradigm of a North Korean idealism and demonstrate North Korean ideology's Marxist-Leninist materialism. Due to this limited scope, I was unable to cover in any detail those facets of North Korean ideology that cannot be found in Marxism-Leninism, especially the various myths surrounding the Kim revolutionary family. My depiction here is not to suggest that North Korean ideology produced nothing unique, but when it comes to Marxist-Leninist materialism, North Korea simply adopted this materialism and rebranded it. It is much easier to find uniqueness in the specific configuration of North Korea's conception of leadership. Nevertheless, even in this case one should judge carefully. North Korea continued to share a plethora of notions about communist leadership with other Marxist-Leninist parties, particularly in relation to historical materialism and vanguardism.

Kim Chung-rin's statements at the beginning of this chapter illustrate North Korea's deliberate efforts to remain within the Marxist-Leninist tradition. Admittedly, in domestic propaganda North Korea rarely offered such praise for Marx, avoiding a direct ascription of specific doctrines to Marx, lest Kim Il Sung's unoriginality be discovered. This begs the question, why did North Korea not simply abandon the Marxist-Leninist tradition, denounce its tenets, and create an entirely new ideology? Structural constraints certainly played a role. That is, many elites would have found such a move unfathomable. To suddenly overhaul the rationalizing logic of leadership and the entire system would have done more harm than good. Ideological change instead occurred gradually and built on what came before. Besides, the Marxist-Leninist framework provided a powerful tool for regime legitimacy, placing North Korea and its leadership at the forefront of historical progress while promulgating policies that themselves were said to contain scientific certainty. Another important reason was outside-

oriented propaganda. North Korea was able to claim membership in the prestigious Marxist-Leninist tradition and collaborate with Marxist-Leninist parties and forces sympathetic to Marxism-Leninism. In domestic propaganda, the regime could then turn around and portray ideological solidarity with foreign entities—who shared many of the same beliefs—as a confirmation of its own state ideology. North Korean representatives abroad thus often declared solidarity with other socialist states on the basis of common Marxist-Leninist doctrines but in domestic propaganda painted these displays as affirmations of the universality of *chuch'e sasang*. Foreign propaganda, in this way, strengthened domestic propaganda.

FINAL THOUGHTS

From the dawn of Korea's division to the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe, North Korea never left the Marxist-Leninist tradition. As North Korean ideology evolved over the years, a plethora of Marxist-Leninist premises and doctrines either remained unaltered, received redirection, or were reconstituted under new headings. When examined from the perspective of Marxism-Leninism, North Korean ideology, at any point in the Cold War period, appears much less exceptional than is commonly assumed. More importantly, such an examination provides insights into the actual development of the ideology, a development that was gradual and globally relevant. Two significant turns in North Korean ideology, in 1961 and 1967, were brought about not without the influence of global ideological quarrels. At the same time, neither turn resulted in a rupture, so that even in the 1980s North Korea adhered to ideological conceptions quite familiar to Marxist-Leninists from around the world.

With a few reservations, it is indeed possible to extend this continuity scheme all the way back to Marx. Leszek Kołakowski did precisely that when he analyzed Lenin's interpretation and expansion of Marx's ideas. According to Kołakowski, Lenin's thought, although some might consider it a perversion of Marx, is built upon the fundament of Marx and Engels' writings. Presumed perversions utilized the many ambiguities and self-contradictions in the Marxist doctrinal corpus. Thus, based on Marx's version of social constructivism, i.e., the class nature of ideas and institutions, Lenin rationalized the destruction of anything that stood in the way of historical progress.[496] In order to justify the elimination of certain ways of thinking, Lenin did not have to deal with opposing ideas on their own terms, but he simply had to declare

[496] Kolakowski and Falla, *Main Currents of Marxism: Its Rise, Growth, and Dissolution*, 662–63.

their class nature and resultant role in the historical oppression of the masses. The assumption that Marx's historical materialism was right came first. With this scientific certainty in hand, virtually anything could be deemed counterrevolutionary and hence evil. Lenin also built on the vanguardism inherent in Marx's thinking as especially evidenced by *The Communist Manifesto*, developing this vanguardism into the concept of an ideologically homogenous party carrying its consciousness into the masses.[497] Stalin, adhering mostly to the Leninist version of Marxist doctrine, later enlisted these ideas to serve the purpose of revolutionary terror. Kołakowski, however, does not view Stalin's reign as an aberration from Leninism. To the contrary, he considers what is often called "Stalinism" a natural outflow of Leninism, a system that "has not been affected in any essential way by the changes of the post-Stalin era."[498] I have argued much the same. Conceptually, hardly anything changed after the death of Stalin. If changes did occur, they constituted conceptual redirections rather than revolutions. No matter how often communists in the post-Stalin period may have discussed collective leadership and inner-party democracy, the authoritarian potential so inherent in Leninism, and arguably Marxist doctrine as well, never disappeared and continued to reassert itself at different times and in different locales. This was the case in North Korea, where Marxist and Leninist precepts that especially lent themselves well to authoritarian abuse remained core components of the state ideology throughout the Cold War. Of course, doctrinally, North Korean ideology in the 1980s was by no means identical to Marxism or even Leninism, but both continued to live on in altered form. The same applies to other socialist regimes, who also modified Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy as time passed, nevertheless maintaining its authoritarian components as a means of self-rationalization.

[497] Ibid., 667–68.

[498] Ibid., 790.

Only in the 1980s do we begin to see a questioning of these authoritarian components in the Soviet Union, as Gorbachev and other reform-minded Soviet officials abandoned the scientific certainty of Marxism-Leninism and the objectivity of the class struggle.[499] Not surprisingly, party rule collapsed right around the time the party discarded its self-rationalization derived from historical materialism. Also not surprising, both North Korea and East Germany refused to follow these Soviet trends. East German hardliners, such as Erich Honecker and Kurt Hager, continued to insist on the traditional class-line. In a 1988 conversation with Kim Il Sung, Margot Honecker, Erich Honecker's wife, therefore stressed that "the class struggle exists objectively," finding agreement with the North Korean leader in opposition to Gorbachev.[500]

Instead of drawing rigid comparisons between North Korean ideology and the writings of Marx and Lenin, it is much more useful to posit North Korean ideology as an incessantly moving point on a spectrum. In this way, one can appreciate North Korea's modifications of preexisting

[499] The Soviet contribution to the 1987 International Peace Seminar of Youth in Berlin, during which North Korea and many other organizations participated as well, is a representative example of changes in Soviet ideology. According to the Soviet contribution, common humanistic and democratic values, shared by people from around the world, whether in capitalist or socialist states, have priority over any type of socio-economic conflict between the two sides of the Iron Curtain. On this basis, the Soviets called for a "transformation of interstate relations" in order to create various types of cooperation. But perhaps the most shocking conclusion made by the Soviet representative at the 1987 Peace Seminar was the following: "The Soviet Union does not claim to be the only one in possession of truth. Truth is not decreed by a vote. One cannot exact it with force or by a show of strength. Truth is the result of study and the honest effort of all." Consensus and unity was to be achieved via democratic coordination between communists, social democrats, and other progressive forces, diminishing the leadership role of the Soviet Union. Marxism-Leninism, the USSR's guiding ideology, similarly diminished in importance, since, unlike in earlier years, ideological truth was no longer absolute and uncontestable.
Central Council of the Free German Youth, Department of International Relations, "Bulletin No. 1 for the 1987 International Peace Seminar of Youth in Berlin," March 23, 1987, 7, SAPMO-BArch DY 24/22370.
Central Council of the Free German Youth, Department of International Relations, "Position of the FDJ on the Character, Execution, and the Perspective of the World Festival of Youth and Students," 1989, 26, SAPMO-BArch DY 24/14532.
For more on the Soviet shift toward common human values, see: Valdez, *Internationalism and the Ideology of Soviet Influence in Eastern Europe*, 111–25.

[500] Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, Department of International Relations, "Personal Record About the Conversation With the General Secretary of the Workers' Party of Korea, Comrade Kim Il Sung, on 11/3/1988," November 8, 1988, 88, SAPMO-BArch DY 30/11555.

doctrines and at the same time recognize the true origins of the country's state ideology. The result is a blurring of orthodoxy and heterodoxy, a distinction that becomes meaningful only if placed in relation to and discourse with a specific historical counterpart. Doctrinal disagreement and the creation of new doctrines consequently do not need to imply an absolute difference between North Korean ideology and other forms of Marxism-Leninism. Indeed, despite the particularity of North Korean ideology, especially as familial vocabulary reminiscent of Confucianism increased in prominence, it is not too farfetched to denote North Korean ideology as a form of Marxism-Leninism, even as it silenced this designation. North Korean ideology was so deeply permeated by the Marxist-Leninist tradition that in terms of theoretical conceptualization Marxism-Leninism outshone whatever might be deemed Confucian. And given North Korea's membership in the Marxist-Leninist tradition, even the label "Marxist" is not entirely unreasonable if viewing North Korean ideology on a spectrum.

Perhaps the most significant legacy North Korean ideology inherited from Marx via Leninism is found in Marx's thoughts about the source of ideas. It was Marx who famously argued that ideas cannot be truly understood on their own terms. In *The German Ideology*, he challenged Hegelian philosophy's understanding of ideas. Whereas the "Old Hegelians" attempted to rationalize the ethical perfection of the current state through the rationality of the present, Marx pointed out, the "Young Hegelians" disagreed and believed such a perfection was yet to be reached through a fighting of ideas with ideas. Marx found both types of Hegelians to be wrong because they misunderstood the nature of ideas and historical change.[501] To solve their errors, he suggested the correspondence of ideas with a certain material reality. "Thought," Marx argued, is the "direct efflux" of man's "material behavior." That is, ideas stem from man's

[501] Marx and Engels, "Die deutsche Ideologie," 20.

"real life process," the material relations in which he lives and acts. In Marx's view, any understanding of ideas must begin with an analysis of this life process and not with ideas themselves: "We set out with real productive men and, on the basis of their real life process, also illustrate the development of ideological reflexes and echoes of this life process."[502] Accordingly, ideas have no independent existence. Rather, they change with a change in the material activity of men. On the basis of their material origins, Marx distinguished between good and bad ideas. Good ideas are those corresponding with material reality. Bad ideas, or what some people term "false consciousness," do not reflect material reality and instead cover it up. Marx summed up these bad ideas with the concept of ideology. While ideology is also grounded in man's life process, it is not universally representative of his plight. Rather, ideology serves the ruling class' maintenance of power. In other words, bad ideas are regressive, whereas good ideas are progressive, corresponding with the forward movement of history. Good ideas aid in the liberation of mankind and are universal by virtue of their class nature; they represent the interests of the proletariat in its historically necessary quest to undo the bourgeois state. Spiritual products thus arise from definite, analyzable material conditions, and these conditions provide the true rationality of the ideas in question. Rationality, according to Marx, is derived from materiality, not from rationality itself. The true meaning of an idea is not found in the idea itself but in the material process that created the idea.

As we saw, although Marxist-Leninist regimes did not believe correct ideas would automatically enter the masses as material conditions changed, they still grounded the rationality of an idea in material processes, that is, in the idea's relationship to the revolution and historical progress. Like Marx, they privileged the lower moment, i.e., the particular material conditions

[502] Ibid., 26–27.

prevailing in a society and the world, over the higher moment, i.e., the various ideas that spring forth from these conditions. By using Marx's approach, lower moments acquire their own rationality, a rationality that is more real than the self-proclaimed rationality of the idea in question. The ideas forwarded by the vanguard party are good and rational because they are in correspondence with the rationality of material reality, a rationality that dictates the necessity of a particular revolutionary course, whereas bourgeois ideas simply seek to paralyze revolutionary change and are thus irrational. In this scheme, ideas are not judged on their own terms but based on preconceived and arbitrary notions of their conditionality and social reflectiveness. Whenever the regime does not like a particular idea, it merely needs to deem the idea reactionary or counterrevolutionary to justify its suppression. Communists therefore happily support liberal freedoms in bourgeois society as a means to promote their cause but are just as happy to deprive their enemies of the same rights as soon as they begin to hold any sort of power—all in the name of history. If the state employs forceful means to suppress communism, then they are the victims of class oppression; if the proletarian state imprisons thousands of dissenters, then it is justified. Morality is accepted only insofar as it promotes the revolutionary cause.

Besides providing a useful way of understanding North Korean ideology and its development in relation to contemporaneously existing Marxist-Leninist ideologies, envisioning North Korean ideology on a spectrum and in terms of a Marxist-Leninist tradition enables us to ask and investigate if there exist doctrines or theoretical conceptualizations that are particularly prone to authoritarian abuse or what may be termed totalitarianism. I would argue, much like Kołakowski, that Marx's conceptualization of ideas in history and Lenin's further development of this conceptualization and combination with conscious vanguardism lent themselves especially well to the rationalization of authoritarian regimes and the crimes they perpetrated.

This spectrum may also cast more recent theoretical systems into a critical light, most importantly social constructivist schools of thought. Like Marxism, by which it was partially inspired, social constructivism has no need to engage with ideas on independently existing moral terms. For social constructivism, morals themselves can be explained away on the basis of their socially constructed nature. And it is the socially constructed nature of an idea, inseparable from relations of power and oppression, which, in this scheme, represent the true rationality of the idea under investigation. This was Michel Foucault's vision as well, and many a thinker after him enlisted the same strategy as is particularly evident in the fields of gender theory and race theory, all of which, much like Marx, deal with oppressed groups constrained by oppressive social structures and ideological constructs. Although their aims may be full of good intentions, their theoretical methodology may itself involuntarily promote authoritarianism, an activist authoritarianism whose potency only soars as it gains political and social acceptance. Particularly as theoretical frameworks are converted into political slogans, they begin to lose their critical edge and run the danger of becoming dogma. The theory may claim to know the reality of certain ideas and social norms by having gleaned the truth of society's structure, or, as Herbert Marcuse called it, "the whole which determines the truth," but it may just as well transform into an a priori system, a preestablished truth that manifests itself wherever one wishes it to appear, wherever one wishes to eliminate the old and replace it with the new.[503] Marcuse's Marxism draws on this whole—i.e., the existence of an oppressive social structure—to warrant the non-applicability of tolerance to speech that reproduces the whole. Tolerance is intolerable if it promotes the structures one detests. In such a case empirical evidence contravening the rationality of the whole may assume the role of political enemy. Yet worse, empiricism itself

[503] Herbert Marcuse, "Repressive Tolerance," in *A Critique of Pure Tolerance* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), 83.

might be found guilty of fostering oppression, rendering all its conclusions invalid without ever having to investigate them closely. It is precisely the simplicity by which such a theory-gone-dogma operates that makes it so powerful. If combined with vanguardism, which Marcuse hints at with his advocacy of an "educational dictatorship," its power only intensifies.[504] For present-day socialists and social activists of various progressive convictions, then, all this may suggest that criticisms of Stalinist or Soviet abuses are insufficient to prevent another tragedy and that there may inhere serious flaws and authoritarian potential in Marxist thought and in its descendants.

[504] Ibid., 106.

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