

The Development of Nationalism in North Korea - Mary Nasr (USYD)

North Korea of the present day is characterised by a collection of adjectives the likes of rouge, isolated, backward and xenophobic, but a look into its recent history reveals that at one point in time it in fact was all of the opposite. This paper will explore the development of nationalism in North Korea from its inception in the late 1940s to its current state, to shed light on how and why it has come to this detrimental stage. After introducing the main topics of ideology and North Korea, it will divide that country's history into sections by decade, treating ideological transformation vis-à-vis relevant political, economic and cultural developments of the time. This study puts forward the line that North Korea gradually transformed itself from a patriotic to a nationalist state, both in response, and in accordance to internal and external factors and pressures. This is seen for none other reason than political survival in an increasingly unfavourable environment. It will draw linear correlation between the increased intensity of the state espoused ideology and the steady degradation of the national economy, and conclude with reflections on the grim outlook of nationalist-oriented ideology in North Korea.

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1. Nationalism and North Korea

Official Ideology

Having been formed under the auspices of the Soviet Union in the 1940s, North Korea officially proclaimed itself to be a communist state with a Marxist-Leninist constitution. It exerted efforts to remove all elements of pre-liberation Japanese imperialist establishment, and decreed throughout the land the self-determination of the individual as being both master of his own destiny and valued member in the larger community. An equality of the sexes law was announced, and although it did not entirely equate in reality, it meant that women were also able to participate in work, contributing to the post-war rehabilitation effort.

Such was the state of revolutionary North Korea in the late 1940s and 1950s. Reconstruction took precedence in building a new nation, and the trumpeted rhetoric of egalitarianism and proletarianism rang real truth in inspiring confidence and hope for a new way. A city built from ashes within a matter of years dazzled in front of the eyes of leader Kim Il Sung, and realising what was in fact on offer, endeavoured himself on a path of intrigue and rival purging. So much so did internal bureaucracy operate on subversive tactics that by the early 1960s a personality cult began to form around the nucleus of Kim Il Sung. His word was elevated and soon canonised in the *Juche* idea. Labelled everything from an all-encompassing profound ideological philosophy to an inflated, empty and simplistic racist dogma, *Juche* is a creed that attempted to appropriate Marxist-Leninist doctrine to the indigenous conditions of Korea.

Juche reached a height of significance that by 1972 seen it become official law as enshrined in the new constitution. The campaign of Kim Il Sung idolisation was in full swing, and repercussions from a series of unwise economic decisions began to take effect. *Juche* though, did not relent. Continuous economic downfall was only responded to with more austerity, and confrontation with the United States on such issues as nuclear weapons production in the 1990s and onwards seen Pyongyang assert itself with the *Songun*, or “military first” ideology. Granting first priority to the military as protectors of the nation, *Songun* regimented society and allotted massive resources to military preparedness. *Songun* is in effect in today’s North Korean ideological fabric, and culture and lifestyle too, have been reshaped in its likening.

Unofficial Ideology

The official transition from Marxist-Leninism, to *Juche* and *Songun* has been elucidated. This does not explain the full extent of North Korea’s ideological fabric throughout time however, as the persona the regime gives out of itself rarely correlates to that of its true character. In other words, one can compare what the regime overtly says, and what the regime habitually does, and strike a more telling conclusion.

North Korea of the late 1940s for all intents and purposes did seem to subscribe to the communist creed. Having watched his country deteriorate to the Japanese hand, Kim Il Sung was truly imbued with revolutionary zeal to reclaim his country. This precisely was his motivation. From the outset, the North Korean leader-to-be was enamoured with internationalist ideals principally in a domestic context; a communist model but in a nationalist sphere. Such was the seed that grew into the nationalist chauvinism akin to what is seen today, but before that, a phase through patriotism is observed.

Patriotism is seen to be present at times both when the economy was on its way up (1950s) and doing relatively well (1960s). This paints the picture of a state prosperous and strong, where focus and is on, and attributed to the structure that is the

government. This was functional because patriotism, a less emotionally intense sentiment than nationalism, was sufficient to both sustain national construction and provide a decent standard of living, as well as keep the people loyal, committed and belonged to the state.

The economic success of the 1960s coupled with the increased totalitarianism of the bureaucracy made conditions ripe for the personality cult of Kim Il Sung to expand. The 1970s were ushered in with profuse laudatory to Kim Il Sung, and lavish birthday celebrations and monumental dedications until the 1980s were typical. Ideology is seen now to undergo a phase of transition from patriotism to nationalism via the *Juche Sasang* (self-reliance). In essence, the Juche ideology era of the 1970s and 1980s took the (already contradictory) tenet of communism in one nation and centred it around the regime, but primarily around Kim Il Sung and the Kim bloodline. Rhetoric took on deep, emotive connotations, where people no longer became autonomous of their own selves, instead reliant upon Kim for political life, the only life deemed worth living.

Economic crisis beacons upon the 1990s and the succeeding Kim regime responded with an extreme form of nationalism, inward in viewpoint and ethnic in nature. The populous endured daily hardship to survive and pressure on the government to keep people at bay was high. Emotionally constricting and deluding them became the only means possible to avoid all-out collapse.

Issues of Ethnicity, and Ethnonationalism

The strain of ideology that the regime chose to indoctrinate its people with is one of the most intrinsic, instinctive and blinding sentiments known to man. By basing politics on a firm ethnic emotional base, people are stripped of the capability to logically and rationally examine for themselves the degree of treatment that they are receiving from the source. Already capitalising on a history riddled with negativity at the hands of foreigners, as well as the still recent Japanese colonial memory, the Kim regime succeeded immensely in creating an environment conducive to ethnic training. This entails a gradual closing of doors and blockade of outside information, as well as the intensification of untruths about the domestic situation and about Kim's background.

'Ethnonationalism,'¹ a theory that is used in this study, is one that asserts that subjective elements such as symbol, memory, myth, value, tradition, and essentially, love for an ethno-nation, are all the combined engine of the vehicle that is nationalism. It is a view principally delineating the rationalisation of nationalist behaviour based on sentiment and emotion, with an emphasis on family, kinship and ethnicity. It is in other words, to "think with one's blood."² It is important to note that this is the case whether the biological descent in ethnicity corresponds to reality or not, as what is perceived is in most cases what sentiment and action is based on.

It is clear that ethnonationalist sentiment characterises the last decade that this paper treats, the 1990s. Although earlier years can not be labelled as ethnonationalist, indications from the earliest point in North Korean history do show its emergent nature, with each decade onwards illustrating further its expansion to reach the 1990s stage as a response to crisis. We shall now begin this chronological exploration.

2. Communist but Not: The late 1940s and 1950s

¹ Connor, Walker. 1994. *Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

² Connor, Walker. 1994. A Nation is a Nation, is a State, is an Ethnic Group, is a....In *Nationalism*, ed, John Hutchinson, p.37. New York: Oxford University Press.

Overview

As stated previously, North Korea was founded a communist state three years after liberation in 1948. After amassing a considerable military force credit to the Soviet Union, Kim Il Sung was given support after many requests for the attempt to seize South Korea and forcibly reunify the country. Seoul was captured within days, but initial euphoria turned into disaster with the North being soon retaken. Chinese intervention levelled the tide, and the war eventually ended in no real change in political circumstance. Millions were killed and displaced, and Kim brazenly deceived his people, telling them that it was the South that attacked and that they themselves won the war.

So the North set upon reconstruction, which within few years was dramatic. The type of society and culture that was formed from this point was fairly conventional. The rhetoric of internationalism and the proletariat was dominant and genuine friendship and solidarity with fellow communist countries meant that North Koreans were somewhat informed of the world, its event and issues. A universal education system was set up and media and culture gained traction. Publications catering to all sects of society were serialised, and although highly ideological in content, were well contributing to a functioning and quickly developing country.

The Soviet Factor

Although unacknowledged for decades now, Soviet guidance and support given in the early years was indispensable to North Korea's growth as a nation. Accordingly, this influence is reflected in the ideological and cultural fabric of the country at the time. Apart from a most obvious Marxist-Leninist constitution, the everyday in North Korea was infused with vocabulary of comradeship and revolution, as well as an hailing and emulation of the Soviet Union. Publications carried translations of Soviet literature and personal travelogues to the Soviet Union, and Russian was made the second language.

One would not be blamed by thinking that the overt imagery of Lenin and Stalin portraits, as well as accolades of the ones described above, equated to a Soviet dominance of North Korea at the time. This would not be accurate, as it is known that Kim Il Sung was troubled by the degree of Soviet clout in his country and sought to a plan for a future non-reliant on them.

The relationship was worth its time in the late 1940s and 1950s for its material benefits, but gradually towards the late 1950s, an assertion in official media for the sake of the nation become increasingly apparent. This is evident by the fact that by the time the 1960s are ushered in, almost all traces of Soviet influence are gone, dusted off to make way for inclinations more autonomist in nature.

Prevailing Patriotism

The term 'patriotism' (*aegukjuui*) features quite early on in the North Korean historical trajectory. Not noticeable in the early years for obvious reasons of ideological contradiction, it bursts on to the stage on the event of the Korean War, interestingly, not for the first two months when all was going well, but from there onwards, when things *weren't* going to plan.

People up until then were in jubilation, pleased with the victory over US forces and with imminent reunification, but when the situation turned and drastic measures were needed to be taken to survive, the regime appealed to the people's sense of patriotism in

the daily newspapers and radio broadcasts to do their part to contribute to the warfront. Headlines reminded people of the benefits they enjoy in their egalitarian society thanks to the state, and photographs profiled model patriots to be admired and emulated. This continued in the post-war period, and the same style of patriotic exhortations were constantly used to spur on the people towards the reconstruction effort.

Few newspaper articles from the late 1950s then came to introduce a new concept called 'socialist patriotism' (*sahoejuuijok aegukjuui*). Paradoxical in name yet completely acceptable to the North Koreans, this idea contributed to the development of an environment conducive to selective ideological engineering, explaining that only when a person is a good patriot can he be a good socialist. This idea will be addressed again later.

Nascent Nationalism

Amongst the rhetoric of communism and patriotism combined during this period, the scent of nationalism too, can be detected. Commonly associated with the patriotic urges to speed up reconstruction, but also attached to the event of the 1959 repatriations of ethnic Korean Japanese residents to North Korea, the words 'homeland' (*joguk*) and 'race' (*minjok*) become increasingly apparent. During the war people are appealed to as brothers and sisters, denoting the extended ethnic family unit of the nation, and anti-Americanism is framed in a nationalist perspective by equating the removal of US forces in the South to the reunification of the country.

The point at which the nationalist priority could be explicitly exemplified however, is the advent of the infamous '*Juche* speech' of December 28, 1955. On this day, Kim gives a speech negating the blind swallowing of Marxist-Leninism, and insists on officials to know the unique conditions of Korea first and then to apply or 'creatively adapt' selective tenets of it for a successful Korean revolution. What he also does in that speech though, is continue to praise the Soviet Union, and equate the loving of the Soviet Union with the loving of Korea.³ This shows that although the time was generally that of a non-nationalist milieu, there were indeed significant references towards a sovereign national entity. In this way, nationalism of this era is nascent and emerging.

3. The Nation's Golden Age: The 1960s

Overview

With success in reconstruction and a population functioning well, North Korea of the 1960s starts to assert itself in ways not previously possible. Several military clashes and incidents with South Korea and the United States feature prominently in this decade, and domestically, a culture less superimposed, and more hybrid starts to form. It is from here that the friendly/hostile dichotomy becomes more defined, where a balance of exchange and good relations with likeminded nations, as well as an amplified vilification of enemies, creates a balanced and contented atmosphere, devoid of ideological extremism.

The economy too, was performing well, and with a clear superiority over that of South Korea's, North Korea prided itself as the legitimate egalitarian Korea over the US-puppet dictatorship of Park Chung Hee. Rhetoric of the nation per se (patriotic or

³ Myers, Brian. M. January 2006. *The Watershed That Wasn't*, pg 102, Acta Koreana, Vol. 9, No. 1, January 2006: pg.102.

nationalist) was still not overt and commanding, but nonetheless featured in select contexts, and very evident in the policy and action of Kim Il Sung in the way he led the country. The 1960s can be seen as the nation's 'golden age'; a time when citizens were housed and well nourished, quite satisfied, and not excessively ideologically oppressed.

Increasing Bellicosity

When one examines publications and sources of the time, most indicatively the daily newspaper, the *Rodong Sinmun*, one will see at times the lack of mutual exclusivity of Marxist-Leninist rhetoric with that of the autonomy of the nation, and also a noticeable intensification of Anti-American and South Korean hatred and bellicosity. Such events as the skirmishes of the DMZ (1966-69), the capturing of the USS Pueblo (1968), the shooting down of the EC-121 plane (1969), and the Korean Airlines YS-11 hijacking (1969), among others, are indicative of this.

Why the North engaged in such numerous provocative acts during this decade cannot be definite, but putting aside their assumed perceived threat to security, there may be explanations more consistent with its internal situation and current state of ideological standpoint that may shed more light.

Kim Il Sung started to taste what he had always wanted; an independent country with him in control, and such actions could be suggestive of his keen impulse to assert national strength and legitimacy on the peninsula. In engaging in provocative acts, he was not only testing the surrounds, but also performing to his people that their nation was one to be reckoned with, with him at its helm. Apart from the incursive Pueblo incident, which was tirelessly exhausted for propaganda purposes, none of Kim's offensives were reported as acts of aggression in the press, instead, accounted in such a way to drum up hatred in general towards Americans and Japanese as imperialists, and towards the South Korean government as puppets and traitors. In this way, the protection and assertion of the state is used as a means to strengthen the nationalist inclination.

Cultural Constructs

Culture of this time was a combination of the liberal and the conservative. A traditional and modest moral code remained within daily interaction, lifestyle and dress, but the themes of communism, physical labour and the nation were common. The personality cult of Kim Il Sung was quickly gaining footing and honorific tributes to him in song were increasing in number. Anti-Americanism manifested itself in literature and art, where propaganda posters exhorted imperial American forces to cease their schemes and be rid of the country. Poems similarly sang tributes to the beauty of the nation, equally lamenting its pollution in the form of foreign occupation, and novels told of evil American missionaries and spooks.

Soviet culture exchange magazines were still in publication so culture was not as totalitarian and bereft of diversity as it went on to become, but the growing focus on the persona of Kim Il Sung and on the party were becoming clear. Although far from being an ideologue in background, Kim started to be prominently quoted on issues of ideology and everyday life, and these were expect to be studied and adhered to. His innate nationalist tendency too, now had the scope to express itself, and imagery of him associated with symbolism of a greater Korea were not rare. Art and literature magazines in particular started to take a deeper pondering into the notions of the race and nation, and frequent articles devoted many words on these qualities (*minjokjok*

tuksong) in their construction and expression in the arts. A new national identity at this point in time is forming.

A New National Identity

The decade of the 1960s perhaps characterises the most genuine and unique stance in regards to the nation that the history of North Korea has ever seen. The economy was steady and in superior shape, yet Kim was not satisfied, as he also took into account the bigger picture of economic responsibility for the South. Anti-Americanism and hatred were unmistakable, and it encompassed the South Korean “traitor government” too, but the people subject to this government were genuinely portrayed as victims and sufferers. Kim often reminded his people not to become indulgent and forget about their compatriots in the South, and his well-known urge to construct more tractors to compensate for the South upon reunification is indicative of this.

In this way, North Korea domestically was a successful, functioning and happy nation, yet for all that mattered, incomplete. Political punishment and repression were sure becoming a substantiated fear, but Kim’s ideology at this time was not extreme enough to strike terror in the hearts of people over the most simplest of things. Kim did put his nation first, and started to put his own self before that, but through a genuine sentiment of empathy for brothers in the South, infused with elements of both a wider patriotism and nationalism, North Korean national identity of the 1960s was one that validly incorporated North and South, abroad and exiled, all together in the one and same unified ethnic national entity. Yet, it was not long to last.

4. Personality Cult Takeover: The 1970s and 1980s

Overview

By the early 1970s, Kim distanced himself from the Soviet Union, and another soon to occur occasion would make him pursue this path even more hastily. The Sino-Soviet rift, a worsening of relations between China and the Soviet Union over nuances of ideology, gained traction in the 1960s and led Kim to pursue a strategic equidistance from both once-benefactors. He took this as the perfect opportunity to promote his *Juche* ideology and other many sub-ideologies that were all inward looking and centered around the Korean nation. This seen the transitioning patriotism-cum-nationalism ideology taken over by the personality cult, where the basic fabric of the creed was transplanted into the context of the figure of Kim Il Sung.

Culture was in the process of undergoing revitalisation, and an array of creative works such as the five immortal revolutionary plays and other arts embossed upon people a great impression of themselves and country. The economy however, did not reflect this sentiment, and the manifold unwise purchases thus far began to reap affect on its state in the present day. “Speed battles” masked economic slowdown and illuminated ideological cunning that the regime fell back on, and a surpassing of the South Korean economy over the North meant they had to work harder on the propaganda front to counter the humiliation.

The 1980s seen this economic madness take full throttle, and with materialising energy and food shortages, a series of grandiose monuments built in tribute to Kim Il Sung exemplified the degenerate state the country had been rendered to. Crackdowns

on dissent generally intensified out of paranoia, and thickening faults in the utopian veneer incited more extreme reactions in terms of ideological engineering and conditioning of the people. The regime with Kim at its apex was elevated to supreme emotional and existential bliss meanwhile, and with large swathes of the population languishing in poverty, this epoch marked the beginning of the end of any chance the regime had in hoping to be a legitimate force on the Korean peninsula.

'Our' Ideologies

So far, the official continuum from Marxism-Leninism to *Juche*, and the unofficial continuum from patriotism to nationalism has been noted. The Sino-Soviet rift mentioned above is one of the main catalysts that incited development towards the *Juche* framework. It allowed Kim the rhetoric of socialism and the proletariat, that which he gained initial legitimacy on, but also made room for an indulgence in nationalist romanticism and cult to his person. Predominantly a socialist independent stance in a domestic locale, its overriding structure contained few sub-ideologies or catch phrases that were incorporated into everyday life. *Sahoejuŭijŏk Aegukchuŭi* (Socialist Patriotism) and *'Urisik Sahoejuŭi'* (Our-Style Socialism) are two of that such.

'Socialist Patriotism' was said by Kim Il Sung to be both a patriotism of the working class towards socialism and communism and a nationalist independent consciousness, and a combining of those with a love of one's class and system, nation and people. This definition was given in the late 60s but it was from the 1970s that the rhetoric took practical effect. It overtly hailed dictatorship of the proletariat, yet conversely stipulated that to be an ardent internationalist one must first be an ardent patriot. It essentially ingrained in people a national superiority and corresponding emotional attachment to their country with the Kim political lineage as its utmost representation.

It was in response to the breakdown and dissolution of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union in the 1980s that the North then came up with 'Our-Style Socialism.' Serving to extol *Juche* and the magnanimity of Kim, but also taking deeper the nationalist superiority complex, this was a countermeasure reaction to sustain morale in the people in light of deteriorating conditions both on the international political arena and in the domestic economic sphere. Rhetoric was wholly subjective and emotive, and cultivated an extremely narrow and fantasy-like perception and image of the country, when in reality it was nearer towards the opposite. 'Our' stunted ideologies clearly do not lead the nation toward a progressive and productive path at this point in time.

Cultural Revolution

This period, in particular the 1970s, was the golden age of culture in North Korea. Art in the form of revolutionary theatre, film, music, literature and fashion flourished, and a level of diversity in expression granted such richness never before seen. Themes were varied yet limited: revolutionary zeal, ideological awakening, triumph over imperialism, morality of the Koreans, and corruptness of the outside. The 'integrity and pride of the nation' (*minjokjok keungjiwa jabusim*) featured prominently, as did symbolism of Kim Il Sung and imagery of the 'mother party' (*omoni dang*).

Sea of Blood and *The Flower Girl* are the most well known of the so-called 'immortal classics.' The former is the story of one woman's heroism under Japanese colonial oppression and the latter is a tale of a poor flower-selling girl who eventually achieves liberation. Both contain larger themes that are relevant to North Korean nation and society, and are said to illuminate the *Juche*-based theory of arts method and style.

So popular were they that they were adapted to film, book and other media form, and are still played to this day in theatre houses and cinemas across the country.

Music and poetry too burgeoned, and countless reams of lyrics devoted to the greatness of Kim, the wonder and beauty of Korea's nature and happiness of the people, were overwhelming. North Korea at this point adopted certain wanted characteristics from foreign arts, including instruments and melodies, to their own, yet conveniently discarded the rest, such as undermining or decadent content. In the same way that ideology was appropriated opportunely to the North Korean nation, this too would come to define its *Juche*-styled arts and culture.

Combining traditional morals and apparent progressive outlook, North Korea also solidified set feminine and masculine looks for the proper citizen to emulate. This consisted of conservative dress and tidy hairstyles, simple colours and patterns, which in turn, served to regulate the manner of interaction carried out among people in society.

Cracks in the Nationalist Front

Decades of mismanagement and corruption on the part of the North Korean government began to take its toll in the 1970s/1980s period. Not only were food and fuel shortages beginning to cause serious concern, but at a time of rising national debt, the average person most definitely would have questioned why the regime was pouring vast amounts of resources and labour into the construction of non-functional structures the likes of towers and statues. Indeed, the 1970s brought a standard of cultural living more sophisticated than previously, but the increasing perversion of ideology and selective social engineering became too great to disregard.

People did genuinely celebrate their nation in sentiment, its achievements and identity, but the burden of such overt façade maintenance with its mandatory rituals began to slowly kill the joy. When people were being told they were the happiest and luckiest in the world yet did not even have enough to eat and keep warm, there is no doubt that the national romance, in all its sincerity, began to die down. The regime that trumpeted itself as the giver of life in the country was fast losing its legitimacy.

Another telling indication of the fissures that creaked the nationalist front is the altered stance on reunification at this time. The once-genuine care for the South Korean compatriots dramatically takes a downturn and instead is replaced by South Korean horror stories; people languishing under a military dictatorship, children so poor that they need to work in order earn a living while dreaming of school, and immoral acts between native women and US marines resulting in mixed-blood offspring. In essence again, a frenetic propagandistic attempt to counteract a reality seriously unfavourable to the North and its *raison d'être*.

When looking particularly at the latter part of this period, being an atmosphere generally more strict, tense and consisting of full obligation for sustenance, it becomes clear that it could not have resulted in anything other than a real degradation in the once true nationalist front. It also shows from these developments the ideological manipulation that the regime became entangled in, in efforts to avert crisis. For fortune good or bad, and for time sooner than later, it was just not meant to be.

5. Crisis And Response: The 1990s onwards

Overview

Crisis defines the 1990s, in fact, a prolonged state of it involving the events of the collapse of the socialist bloc, the death of Kim Il Sung and the devastating famine.

Having entered the decade with all but no friends, North Korea undoubtedly must have felt a dangerous sense of loneliness. The Soviet affair was consigned to the dustbin of history, and other communist nations of creed had ventured down the economic reform or rejuvenation path to success. China remains the North's most valuable ally, but one must only scratch the surface to reveal the disdain each indeed have for the other. Talks with the United States on the nuclear issue were not lasting, but the North gained considerable sympathy from the South Korean Kim Dae Jung administration in the form of his Sunshine policy and its practically unconditional aid.

This aid was in response to a series of disastrous floods. The mid 1990s bore witness to unprecedented levels rainfall, but compounding the scale of damage and destruction, stripped vegetation due to acute hunger meant that these tropical rains could not be handled by topsoil. It reeked havoc most fatally in the mid-late 1990s, where between one and three million are surmised to have tragically perished.

The death of Kim Il Sung in 1994 however, was the major ideological event of the decade. Many predicted the final collapse of the headless beast, yet it endured, due in most part to the sheer totality of establishment that the aforementioned erected in his life. The country was plunged into astounding chaos and uncertainty, but made it through, again in large part owing to the further enhancing of its malleable ideology and combined colossal coup in propaganda.

The Korea Nation First Idea

The Korea Nation First Idea, known in Korean as the *Choson minjok jeiljuui*, is an idea put forth by Kim Jong Il, son and successor to Kim Il Sung upon his death. Serving to emulate his father in order to extract his own legitimacy as leader in front of the people, Kim Junior set about to officially canvas the Korean nation and race as supremely superior to other peoples and creeds. Like the North's many other sub-ideologies, this too is a hodge podge of clichés consisting of the morality of the Korean people, the greatness of the leader, the excellence of the ideology and the noble cause of the revolution. It was published in few treatises and talks in the late 1980s, but was from the 1990s that the rhetoric and imagery really took off for full political effect.

A look into its fabric reveals xenophobia, racism and a complete lack of rationality. It is overwhelmingly emotive in style, familial in reference and deceiving in its selection of facts. Korea's history is blatantly distorted and an affair centred around the mythological progenitor of Dangun has been wholly contrived to benefit the leadership seated in Pyongyang. Issues of the past have been readily revived, and injustices of the Japanese colonial period and American bombing of the war revitalised to incite passionate hatred for race enemies. In essence, this idea has elevated the entity of the nation to a temple-like institution where people are expected to devote their whole bodies and minds towards to express mandatory gratitude. Accordingly, in function, it serves to psychologically distract them from their economic misery while keeping them working as cogs to sustain the system.

The Korea Nation First Idea can be seen as racist, chauvinist and further stunting in North Korea's trajectory of progress. It is extremely effective in manipulating people as it clutches them by their inherent emotional weaknesses, and controls their movement to the direction the regime steers.

Cultural Tyranny

Culture therefore, became comparable to a trap, rendering itself so steeped in propagandistic dogma that simple words no longer retained their simple meanings, instead assuming ideological connotations. An example is the joint analogy of the sun and the stars that came to be known as Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il respectively.

The extent to how deep and pervasive ideological conditioning was in the provinces at such a time of disorder is unknown, but the city of Pyongyang still upheld its thick veneer of commitment to the main line. Publications continued to flood the scene regardless of dire lack of resources, and magazines of the time are seen to be printed on extremely poor quality recycled and often damaged paper.

Propaganda posters in particular enjoyed their heyday in the 1990s, and streets were filled with them, serving quite effectively to impart ideological impact on mere viewing, without the need to be taking the time to read and comprehend. Songs and music, already emotive in nature, heightened their poise, and music videos did well in reinforcing selective symbols for effect. Indeed, at a time of mass lethargy, mass imagery production would have been very effectual in transmitting the political line, delivered ingeniously by the combined efforts of talented artists and sly propagandists.

What the regime had to newly compete with at this time though, was the increasing influx of alien material from South Korea and China. The economic disparity between the countries had become common knowledge, so instead of futilely denying or ignoring it, the regime moved to play the higher moral ground, emphasising the righteousness and purity of the North Korean people and nation, in contrast to the morally defunct and misguided capitalistic Southern brethren.

So despite this challenge, which in fact served to strengthen the ethnic line, the official cultural landscape of North Korea became completely controlled and fixed, cleansed of any and all conflicting content. Culture of various media came together to collectively construct a context fully harmonious and nurturing of the main nationalist line, where those who did not know anything else simply did not know anything else.

Enduring Ethnic Supremacy

It is clear that by the 1990s, the government of North Korea has lost all right legitimacy to run the country, and even to exist as a separate state. The last decade seen the economy degrade to an appalling condition with a terrible human cost, yet the regime survived, owing in great part to the intricately contrived ethnic superiority con. Indeed it is not wrong to have ethnic or cultural pride in one's nation, but North Korea has neglected to educate its people on issues where they may be incited think and evaluate the situation for themselves. In such a case obviously, they would see their wretched plight and revolt.

As a result, North Koreans are stuck not only in a time warp of economic and physical underdevelopment, but also in a distortion about their own selves and race. Exterior differences exist, but no race is fundamentally superior to another, and this is an idea that the North Koreans have not been familiarised towards for at least the last three decades. The pervasive nature of the content of propaganda, the sheer totality of the system, and the established structure of terror and surveillance keep this in check, where those who think they may know better or at least any different, are too wise to speak out for real fear of their lives.

So the regime persists. Feeding its people with conceptually simple, yet emotionally rich stimuli, the government keeps its populous subdued in a straightforward state of complimentary love for the internal nation and hate for the outside world. It embraces the nation's shared history and those related values and

sentiments in its publications, and weaves through them a common and continuous ethnic thread that pertains itself to all its viewers. It gives them identity and a sure place to belong, but sadly does not allow for their creativity and needs as unique and independent individuals. In an atmosphere more strict, tense and consisting of full obligation for sustenance, an around-the-clock daily lifestyle of race and ideology is indeed not as grand as the propaganda would let off.

6. The Outlook of Nationalism in North Korea

When looking at the historical development of North Korea and its ideological trajectory, a downward death spiral is clear. North Korea for all intents and purposes started off as a well intentioned revolutionary state, but over the decades, Kim's self regard, possibly fuelled by his insecurities, usurped the nation and its best interests. The Kim line has now backed themselves into a corner, and finding no other possible escape, are left only to persist with the same self defeating and painful ideological extremism that is ethnic nationalism. After all, development means reform, and reform requires opening, which would surely bring down the system.

The system by now however, has so firmly based its legitimacy on this ethnic claim that people endure a collapsed economy and miserable living standards for it. In fact, the *Songun* ideology takes care of this, touting that the defence and protection of the race against scheming American imperialists demands the concentration of resources towards the military. So, propaganda production ensures the outward saving of face, and the invisible structure of fear serves to internally incite people towards their own self-surveillance. How long this circumstance will last, and how much more extreme the ideology can get is uncertain, but the inevitable event of the bursting of the bubble does not present itself as an optimistic case study.

Upon reunification, one may think that the ideology of ethnic nationalism would serve to act as a glue to mend the broken ethnies. The Kim family version of ethnicity has been so severely perverted however, that Northern Koreans are almost certainly faced with a life of confusion, cognitive dissonance, and difficulty in a reunified Korea under Seoul. Indeed the tragically ironic ones would long for the Kim regime, the all-embracing ideology and that previous stability; an ill sense of nostalgia for what was once known.

For the fact is, that North Korea is a political dictatorship first, and an ethnic nationalist state second. Simply put, had the North in truth cared about the ethnies as it trumpets, it would have put the people's well being, and not its own political survival, first. But it does not. So insomuch that this is a sentiment contrived and unnatural, when the two Koreas are reunited, more *new* problems will arise as opposed to a seamless union on the base of a common ethnic ground.

So in such a case, Seoul will need to establish extensive and thorough rehabilitation moulds to deal with a troubled population. Northerners will have to reengineer their national identity vis-à-vis a capitalist, globalised South Korea, and this would be a long and difficult task considering the extent of their conditioning, but not impossible. Or it may be the case that the Kim ideological apparatus has fixed people so deeply, that they may only be able to survive physical hardship, and not psychological hardship. Issues such as this remain to be seen.

It will then be at such a point in the lives of the people of the North that they will realise that not only were they fed lies, but that they, as a member of one race, are as plain and wonderful as every other. It may take generations for a new whole Korean identity to be formed, but it will be an authentic one, bringing together the diversity and commonality of all the race at that.