

# Juche Idea: Base of Regime Legitimation of North Korea in the Age of Decaying Socialism

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There have been many studies on how the Juche<sup>1</sup> idea of Kim Il Sung in North Korea has played a role in the political and social mobilization of the masses. While employing such concepts as practical ideology and transfer culture,<sup>2</sup> those studies demonstrated that the ruling elites made use of the Juche idea to justify coercive mobilization policies. Basically they emphasized its rhetorical function. However, we have to note that even a coercive regime has a value that rationalizes the regime structure and to a certain extent induces legitimacy. Without this value the regime will confront the discontent of the masses on day-to-day political affairs, and thus hardly manage to persist. Such value is called 'legitimizing value'<sup>3</sup> and that of North Korea is the Juche idea.

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1 The notion literally means self-reliance or independence.

2 These notions were first used by Franz Schurman. But Chalmers Johnson further developed them to explain changes in socialist regimes. See Schurman, *Ideology and Organization in Communist China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968); and Johnson, "Comparing Communist Nations," in Chalmers Johnson, ed., *Change in Communist Systems* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1970).

3 For the concept of legitimating value and other components of the regime, see David Easton, *Systems Analysis of Political Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979; originally published in 1965), Chapter 12.

This research will focus on the Juche idea's function of the legitimation of the existing North Korean regime, especially in the age of decaying socialism of the Eastern European countries and the Soviet Union. In detail, it will examine not only what are the properties of the Juche idea but also what aspects of the regime the idea rationalizes. In addition, with special reference to the Juche idea, this research will delve into the question of whether there is any feasibility in a regime change that must confront the rapidly changing international environment and account for the hereditary political succession from Kim Il Sung to his son Kim Jong-Il.

### Development of Juche Idea

In the midst of turbulent intra-party factional strife after the Korean War, the origin of the notion of Juche was Kim Il Sung's motivation to consolidate his power. Kim used this notion shortly after the most prominent leader of the domestic faction, Park Heon-yeong, was executed in 1955. Insofar as Kim used it to eliminate his opponents, particularly the Soviet faction and the Yen-an faction, it was not a systematic theory or idea. The notion focused on the denunciation of Kim's opponents by charging that they were dogmatists and formalists.<sup>4</sup>

In retrospect, the notion of Juche was timely used by Kim, inasmuch as its use coincided with the diversifying trend in international communism. Hegemony of the Soviet Union in the international communist movement actually ended with the death of Stalin in March, 1953. In 1955 the Soviet Union effected a limited rapprochement with Yugoslavia, which had been expelled from the Cominform by Stalin. Furthermore, as soon as Nikita Khrushchev's secret speech at the 20th Congress of the

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4 See Kim Il Sung, "On Eliminating Dogmatism and Formalism and Establishing Juche in Ideological Work" (Speech for the party propaganda cadres on 28 December 1955), in *Kim Il Sung Jeojakjip* (Selected Works of Kim Il Sung) (Pyongyang: Korean Workers' Party Press, 1980), Vol. 9.

Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February 1956 embarked on a program of de-Stalinism, international communism turned into polycentrism. National communism emerged in the East European countries, while an ideological conflict between the Soviet Union and China started. At first glance these changes seemed to threaten the status of Kim, who had faithfully followed the Stalinist model. But it is notable that Kim made use of the changes to attack his opponents such as Park Chang-ok and Choi Chang-ik at the so-called August Factional Incident in 1956, by accusing them of anti-party elements influenced by international revisionist thought.<sup>5</sup>

During the period of the Sino-Soviet conflict in the 1960s, Kim Il Sung developed the Juche idea. While keeping a balance between Moscow and Beijing, Kim intended to pursue independence and set off competition between them in providing aid to North Korea.<sup>6</sup> Kim's intention was well documented in an editorial of the Korean Worker's Party (KWP) organ, *Rodong Shinmun*, on 12 August 1966.

We cannot accept that a certain party should lead other brother parties [in the international communist movement]. A particular party cannot become a 'center of world revolution' or a 'leading party'. Each party is responsible for leading its own nation's revolution and the national buildup. No other party is responsible for this task. If a 'center of world revolution' or a 'leading party' is allowed in international communism, it is recognizing the privileged status of a certain party. In this case, a certain party may give orders and other parties will obey them. Individual communist and worker's parties then will not be able to lead revolutions in their own countries independently.<sup>7</sup>

5 Yong-won Han, *Bukhan Yeongu* (Studies of North Korea) (Seoul: Bakyeongsa, 1989), pp. 130-131.

6 Ho-min Yang, "Juche Idea: North Korean Ideological Setting," in Chong-shik Chung and Gahb-chol Kim, eds., *North Korean Communism: A Comparative Analysis* (Seoul: Research Center for Peace and Unification, 1980), p. 137.

7 "Let Us Defend Independence", in Jun-Yop Kim, Chang-sun Kim, and Il-seon

Prior to such expression to oppose the privilege of a leading party and to maintain independence in leading the revolution, the four guiding principles—independence in ideology, politics, economy, and defense—were proposed during the end of 1950s and early 1960s. Notably, by the time independence was emphasized, the Juche idea became a systemic legitimating value whereby the ruling elites centered around Kim Il Sung could rationalize all the policies and authority structures as well.

A scrutiny of official documents of North Korea shows that the status of the Juche idea escalated and finally superseded Marxism-Leninism during the 1970s. Marxism-Leninism had been considered the principle of the party until the end of the 1960s. According to the report for the revision of the party constitution that the Third Party Congress adopted in April 1956, the new constitution was the embodiment of the organizational principle of Marxism-Leninism and the realization of Korean particularity.<sup>8</sup> However, the Juche idea has been the guiding principle of the party since the early 1970s. The new constitution (article 4) of North Korea adopted in December 1972 reads: "The Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea takes the Juche idea as the guiding principle of the republic, the ideology that creatively applies Marxism-Leninism to our own situation." The ascending status of the Juche idea, in comparison to Marxism-Leninism, was confirmed at the Sixth Party Congress in October 1980 when the revised party constitution described that the KWP was guided only by the Juche idea and the revolutionary idea of Kim Il Sung.<sup>9</sup> To sum up, the notion of Juche, which was first publicized in the midst of factional strife during the 1950s, developed into a guid-

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Lee, eds., *Bukhan Yeongu Jaryojip* (Source Book of North Korea Studies) (Seoul: Asiatic Research Center, Korea University, 1981), Vol. 1, p. 66.

8 National Unification Board, *Joseon Nodongdang Jaryojip* (Source Book of the KWP National Congresses) (Seoul: NUB, 1980), Vol. 1, p. 524.

9 *Ibid.*, 1988, Vol. 4, p. 133.

ing principle of the party in particular and a legitimating value of the regime in general during the 1970s.<sup>10</sup>

### Properties of Juche Idea

It has been maintained by North Korean authorities that the Juche idea was a 'creative adoption' of Marxism-Leninism for the independent development of the Korean revolution.<sup>11</sup> The notion of creative adoption originated in Kim Il Sung's speech in 1951, which stressed the particularity of the Korean nation.<sup>12</sup> However, there has been neither clear explication of the notion of creative adoption nor an open interpretation of the relationship between the Juche idea and Marxism-Leninism. Furthermore, the status of the Juche idea has been stated in a contradictory way: on the one hand, the idea is the unitary idea of the KWP, and on the other, it is not incompatible with Marxism-Leninism.<sup>13</sup> Since there is no clarification of the notion, it might seem to be political rhetoric. Nevertheless, we have to analyze the structure of the idea in order to examine how the existing regime and the ongoing process of the hereditary succession of power have been justified.

10 For more details on the changes of the idea's content, see The Research Institute for *National Unification*, *Bukhanchejeeui Silsanggwa Byeonhwajeonmang* (Reality and Prospect of North Korean System) (Seoul: RINU, 1991), pp. 92-112.

11 For instance, Kim Jong-Il said that: "The Great Leader Comrade Kim Il Sung creatively adopted Marxism-Leninism to the Korean situation, created the Juche idea in the process of seeking the revolutionary path, and paved the way for the independent development of our revolution." Kim Jong-Il, "Let Us Move Forward with Marxism-Leninism and Juche Idea," in *Kim Jong-Il Jeojakseon* (Selected Works of Kim Jong-Il) (Seoul: The Institute for Far Eastern Studies, Kyungnam University, 1991), p. 166.

12 Gahb-chol Kim and Seongjun Koh, *Juche Sasanggwa Bukhan Sahoejueui* (Juche Idea and Socialism in North Korea) (Seoul: Munusa, 1988), p. 66.

13 Il-chul Shin, "Development of Juche Idea by Kim Jon-Il: With Special Reference to Socio-Political Organism," in Jin Young Suh, ed., *Hyeondae Junggukgwa Bukhan 40 Nyeon* (Modern China and Forty Years of North Korea) (Seoul: Asiatic Research Institute, Korea University, 1990), Vol. 3, pp. 250-252.

### Man-Centrality Idea

One of the basic principles of the Juche idea is that man is the master of everything and determines everything. Kim Jong-Il's article "On Juche Idea"—which was presented at the Conference of Juche Idea Commemorating the Seventieth Birthday of Kim Il Sung in 1982—developed the idea of 'man-centrality' and 'human determinism' which had not been clearly articulated by previous sources. According to Kim, man understands the world and transforms it to being subordinate to himself. This is so because man has three attributes that other creatures do not have: independence, creativity and consciousness. First, with independence, man is free from the constraints of nature and society and is able to change them to obey him. Second, owing to creativity man can improve his own fate by replacing old ones with new ones. Finally, with consciousness man controls his goal-oriented activities.<sup>14</sup>

Here we can contrast man-centrality in the Juche idea with historical materialism in Marxism. Even though Marx recognized that a class consciousness as a human factor finally contributes to the change in the mode of production, he considered it to be a product of contradiction between the forces of production and the relations of production. Through a close examination of *German Ideology* which dealt with consciousness, we can find the following three propositions:

1. Consciousness is "determined" by actual life process.
2. Consciousness forms its corresponding ideologies.
3. New ideologies come into conflict with the existing relations of production when the relations of production come into conflict with the forces of production.<sup>15</sup>

14 Kim Jong-Il, "On Juche Idea," in *Kim Jong-Il Jeojakseon*, pp. 71-72.

15 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *German Ideology* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), pp. 42-51.

For Marx, consciousness is a representation of the contradiction in economy. Consciousness forms its corresponding ideologies which criticize the existing mode of production or lead revolutionary activities. However, even though consciousness finally develops into revolutionary activities, it is not created by human intelligence but is finally determined by circumstances.

In contrast, according to the man-centrality notion of the Juche idea, man decides his own fate because of the attributes of independence, creativity and consciousness. This notion not only justifies the party's attempt to inculcate masses of the people and remold them into communist men, but also extols the masses armed with the Juche idea as a driving force for historical development.

### **Continuous Revolution in Socialism**

Not only is the Juche idea different from Marxism in the explanation of the driving force in history, but also the former is distinguished from the latter in the interpretation of socialism. Both Marxism and the Juche idea discriminate between socialism and communism; however, the Juche idea differs from Marxism in the explanation of how socialism will be transcended by communism. By illuminating the difference, we need to examine how the Juche idea justifies continuous revolution.

According to Marxism, socialism is a transitional phase in which the political power of the state maintains control against counter-revolutionaries and establishes new property relations. In this phase efficient workers are compensated with higher rewards for the achievement of abundant economy.<sup>16</sup> When the state succeeds in achieving these goals it becomes unnecessary and "dies out" or "withers away."<sup>17</sup> While presenting the famil-

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16 Melvin Rader, *Marx's Interpretation of History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 128-129.

17 Friedrich Engels, "Socialism: Utopian and Scientific," in Robert C. Tucker, ed., *Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1972), 2nd ed., p. 713.

iar slogan "from each according to his abilities, to each according to his work," Lenin emphasized the high economic productivity in socialist construction through wielding powers by the party elites, i.e., through the dictatorship of the proletariat.<sup>18</sup>

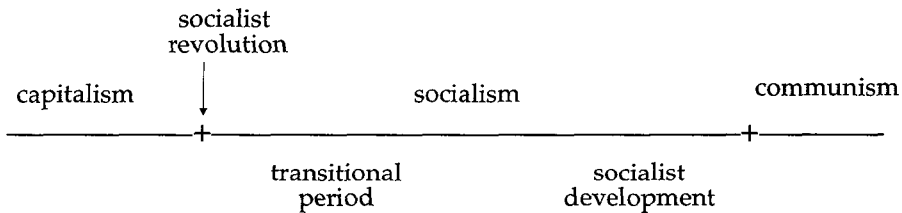
Kim Il Sung has also stressed the material base as a condition for the achievement of communism. However, his Juche idea can be distinguished from Marxism-Leninism in that the former has divided socialism into two periods: the building of the socialist institution and the development of socialism. As shown in Figure 1, Kim Il Sung has proposed the 'transitional period' of building the socialist institution between socialist revolution (i.e., the abolishment of the capitalist mode of production) and socialist development.<sup>19</sup> In the transitional period the exploitative class relationship ends and socialist institutions are established, and yet a gap between classes—the peasants and the workers in particular—would remain. For this reason, according to the Juche idea, the dictatorship of the proletariat should be continued during the period of socialist development for the abolishment of the gap.<sup>20</sup> In other words, even after the establishment of a new relation of production, political power should be exercised by the state for the development of socialism.

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18 Alfred G. Meyer, *Leninism* (New York: Praeger, 1963), p. 203.

19 Kim Il Sung, "Transitional Period from Capitalism to Socialism and Problem of Proletariat Dictatorship" (A talk presented before the party cadres of ideological work on 25 May 1967), in *Uri Hyeokmyeongeseoeui Juchee Daehayeo* (On Juche in Our Revolution) (Pyongyang: KWP Press, 1970), p. 483.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 487.

**Figure 1.** The Juche Idea's Configuration of Socialism

Here the Juche idea rationalizes the slogan of uninterrupted revolution through generations during the period of socialist development and legitimates the Three Great Revolutions in idea, technology, and culture.

By the establishment of a socialist institution, sources of exploitation and poverty would be eliminated finally, but a gap between social members in their material and cultural conditions would remain. The reason for the gap is that remnants of idea, technology, and culture of the old society are backward. Socialism is a transitional phase which is differentiated from communism because of the former's backwardness in idea, technology, and culture as well as a gap between classes.... In order to overcome transitional characteristics of socialism and to build a communist society, we have to continue the revolution for liquidating the backwardness in idea, technology, and culture.<sup>21</sup>

According to the Juche idea the revolution in idea aims at the indoctrination of the masses so as to provoke revolutionary fanaticism. The revolution in technology intends to increase productivity for the civilized living standard of the people. Kim said that this revolution should be achieved through independent, modernized and scientific management of the national economy. The revolution in culture attempts to improve the intellectual and cultural standard. These three revolutions have been closely

21 Kim Jong-Il, "Let Us Move Forward with Marxism-Leninism and Juche Idea," p. 170.

related to the rise of Kim Jong-Il as the designated successor to his father Kim Il Sung, as we shall see later.

### Functions of Juche Idea

What are the major functions of the Juche idea in the age of declining socialist regimes? How do the properties discussed above contribute to the regime legitimation? There might be many answers to these questions. Not only did the idea contribute to consolidating the power base of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong-Il by legitimizing of the purge of their opponents, but it also promoted a sense of nationalism while emphasizing independence in international affairs. More importantly, it now plays an important role to legitimate the structure of the existing regime under the name of the 'socio-political organism,' lays the foundation for hereditary succession, and rationalizes the particularity of the socialist regime by calling it 'socialism of our own style' in a new age.

### Legitimation of Regime Structure: 'Socio-Political Organism'

Each political system has a legitimating value whereby the regime structure, i.e., the structure of authority relations between the ruling elites and the masses, is rationalized. As Chalmers Johnson has aptly pointed out, the legitimating value in the socialist regime is usually initiated and rationalized by the ruling elites.<sup>22</sup> Accordingly, it is not an appeal to a set of existing predispositions but a guiding principle of the ruling elites to direct a new change. This type of value in North Korea is the Juche idea. While the Juche idea provokes revolutionary sentiment by emphasizing the human factor, it maintains the importance of a

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22 Johnson, "Comparing Communist Nations," p. 10. The authoritarian regime also is based on legitimation from the top. In an analysis of Asian authoritarian regimes, Jyotirindra Das Gupta has called such a way of legitimation 'top-down legitimation.' See "A Season of Caesars: Emergency Regimes and Development Politics in Asia," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (April 1978), p. 321.

particular form of structure in authority relations between the leader, the party and the people. This regime structure, which is based on the notion of collectivity, is called the 'socio-political organism.'

What should be examined here is the logic of how the socio-political organism of the Juche idea defines authority relations in North Korea. To draw a preliminary conclusion, in the Juche idea the authority relations between the leader, the party, and the people are delineated as follows: (1) the masses of the people as subjects of the revolution should be subordinate to the leader and the party; (2) the leader is the 'brain' of the organism; and (3) the party is the nexus of the organism.

The socio-political organism is a type of collectivism according to which individuals should serve the society to which they belong. Individuals cannot survive without the persistence of the collective. Such collectivist ideas have frequently been expressed in terms of "one exists for totality and totality exists for one". For the same reason, the party's view on labor is also based on collectivism.

The view or attitude on labor for the interest of the collective is based on the collectivism which posits that the socio-political life is more important than the individual life.... Only when a society or group is strong, wealthy and prosperous can a high level of independence and the creative life of an individual be continuously guaranteed.<sup>23</sup>

The interests of the collective has priority over individual interests. Accordingly, revolutionary loyalty and comradeship are emphasized, and are measured by faithfulness to the leader, Kim Il Sung.<sup>24</sup> In this respect the Juche idea criticizes pluralism

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23 KWP, *Jucheeui Nodonggwon* (Juche's View on Labor) (Pyongyang: KWP Press, 1991), p. 26.

24 KWP, *Suryeonge Deahan Chungsilseonggwa Sahoe Jeongchijeok Saengmyeongche* (Faithfulness to the Leader and Socio-Political Organism), (Pyongyang: KWP Press, 1990), p. 50.

as a mode of politics. By advocating competition for survival, pluralism breaks the unity and cohesion of the masses and produces social disorder and chaos.<sup>25</sup>

Then what is the role of the party between the masses and the leader? The party inspires the loyalty of the masses to the leader Kim Il Sung. For this purpose the party binds and mobilizes them through 'mass line', such as the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Method, the Spirit of Chongsanri, the Chongsanri Method and the Daean Management System.<sup>26</sup> The mass line is implemented through various forms of transmission belts, that is, auxiliary organizations of the party. The auxiliary organizations not only train the masses through group activity but also indoctrinate them to instill loyalty and revolutionary sentiment; accordingly, they are called the 'party's trustworthy supporters', or the 'party's periphery organizations'.<sup>27</sup>

The party is a mechanism of the binding socio-political organism by inspiring the loyalty of the masses to Kim Il Sung. Therefore the Juche idea emphasizes a mythical authority of the party

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25 Kim Jong-Il, "Historical Lesson in Building Socialism and the General Line of Our Party" (A talk to the senior officials of the Central Committee of the KWP on 3 January 1992), in FBIS-EAS-92-024 (5 February 1992), p. 14.

26 Kim Jong-Il, "Korean Worker's Party is the Revolutionary Party that Succeeds the Honorable Tradition of Down-With-Imperialism," in *Kim Jong-Il Jeojakseon*, pp. 139-140.

27 There are two ways through which the auxiliary organizations are controlled by the party: One is the horizontal and the other is the vertical. On the one hand, the party committee at every level guides and supervises party committees which belong to the organizations. In other words, the party committee of the organization is required to implement decisions of the party committee at the corresponding level. On the other hand, the dual membership of the Central Committee members of the party contributes to the party's control over the organizations. Since most of the officials of the national organizations are CC members, they control lower levels of organizations through their own hierarchical structures such as congresses and standing committees. See Chong-Wook Chung, "Mass Organizations and Campaigns in North Korea," in Robert A. Scalapino and JunYop Kim, eds., *North Korea Today: Strategic and Domestic Issues* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1983), p. 89.

by portraying it as the successor to the tradition of the anti-Japanese revolution.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, the idea demonstrates that the party's leadership is same as Kim's leadership on the ground that he is the supreme leader of the party.<sup>29</sup>

In order to play a role in the binding socio-political organism, the party stresses an ideological education of cadres and organizational discipline. On the one hand, the party inculcates the Juche idea upon all party cadres and prevents other forms of political expression and opinion. According to Kim Jong-Il, without the Juche idea as the unitary ideology of the party, the party will fail to guarantee its unity and will provide reactionaries with opportunities to revive.<sup>30</sup>

On the other hand, the party adopts the organizational principle of democratic centralism, first proposed by Lenin. The notion of 'democratic' is intended to induce the voluntary participation of the cadres in party works, whereas that of 'centralism' requires strict discipline. What should be noted is that the notion of democratic is a rhetorical one and is always subordinate to that of centralism:

By following the principle of democratic centralism in party works, the party is able to establish a strict discipline under which all the cadres act in perfect order under the guidance of the leader and implement the party's direction and decision unconditionally.<sup>31</sup>

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28 *KWP Constitution*, cited in Source Book of KWP National Congresses, 1980, Vol. 2, p. 525.

29 Kim Jong-Il, "Korean Worker's Party is the Revolutionary Party that Succeeds the Honorable Tradition of Down-With-Imperialism," pp. 135-136.

30 Kim Jong-Il, *Joseon Nodongdangeun Uri Yinmineui Modeun Seungrieui Jojikjaimyeo Hyangdojaida* (Korean Worker's Party Is the Organizer and the Guide for the Victory of Our People) (Pyongyang: KWP Press, 1990), p. 19.

31 Sang-geol Lee, *Jucheeui Sasang, Riron, Bangbeopeui Simhwa Baljeon* (Deepening and Development of Juche's Idea, Theory, and Method) (Pyongyang: Social Science Press, 1984), Vol. 4, pp. 167-168.

It is important to note that the notion of democratic is not compatible with that of 'centralism' in the Juche idea, inasmuch as the latter supersedes the former. In sum, the particular form of regime structure in North Korea, embodied in the socio-political organism, requires the loyalty of the masses to the leader Kim Il Sung and the party, whereas it stresses the party's role as an intervening mechanism to bind and indoctrinate the masses so as to legitimate the regime as a whole.

### Legitimation of Hereditary Succession

The rise of Kim Jong-Il as the designated successor to his father Kim Il Sung has often been explained in terms of his rising status in the party apparatus. At the unpublicized 7th plenum of the Fifth Central Committee of the KWP in 1973, the junior Kim was appointed as secretary in charge of organization, propaganda and agitation.<sup>32</sup> But it was not until 1980 that Kim's acquisition of power was publicized.<sup>33</sup> At the Sixth Congress of the KWP in 1980 Kim Jong-Il was appointed to the overlapping membership of the three crucial organizations: the Standing Committee of the Politburo, the Secretariat, and the Military Committee. Among Central Committee members no one other than Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong-Il took overlapping memberships in the three organizations.

This, then, raises the following question: How has the rapid emergence of Kim Jong-Il in the party and the preparation of

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32 Dong-bok Lee, "Hereditary Succession in North Korea," paper delivered at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, 30 August-3 September 1979, Washington, D.C., p. 23, cited in Byung Chul Koh, "Political Succession in North Korea," *Korea and World Affairs*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (Fall 1984), p. 564.

33 However, it is said that the political succession issue was first discussed at a secret meeting held immediately after the 6th plenum of the Fifth Central Committee on 22 December 1972. At this meeting, the two old cadres, Choi Yong-geon and Kim Il, proposed Kim Jong-Il's succession to his father Kim Il Sung. Institute for North Korea Studies, ed., *General Survey of North Korea* (Seoul: INKS, 1983), p. 168.

political succession been legitimized? There have been two ways: propaganda of the junior Kim's contribution to the development of the Juche idea and the logic of uninterrupted revolution through ongoing generations. The mass media praised him for having systemized the Juche idea "in conformity with the demands of the times and evolving revolution".<sup>34</sup> In turn, the Juche idea, which stresses the uninterrupted revolution even after the establishment of socialist institutions, has legitimized this hereditary political succession. According to party theorist Hwang Jang-yop, inheritance of the leadership was successfully achieved so that the continuous revolution through generations is guaranteed in North Korea.

Whether a wise leadership is available is a basic question determining the ultimate destiny of a revolution....The experience of history shows that when the inheritance of the revolution is not guaranteed, the party may degenerate, and revolutionary cause pioneered by the leader may face a serious ordeal. This important question of the role of the leader and the inheritance of the leadership in carrying out the cause of the working class, was brilliantly solved for the first time in history only by the Great Leader Comrade Kim Il Sung, who fully understood the long-standing yearning of the people to be led by an outstanding leader in unprecedentedly difficult circumstances.<sup>35</sup>

This concept of continuous revolution in the Juche idea developed to the Three Great Revolutions in idea, technology, and culture in 1973. Programs of these revolutions were enacted by work teams composed of not only party cadres but young college students. The work teams were under the direction of the desig-

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34 Korean Central Broadcasting Network, "The Great Accomplishment of Our Party Which Is Deepening and Evolving the Immortal Juche Idea" (An unattributed talk aired on 5 February 1992), cited in FBIS-EAS-92-028 (11 February 1992), p. 12.

35 Hwang Chang-yop, "On Inheriting the Leadership," Summary of World Broadcasts: Far East-6554-C1-2, 1980, cited in James Cotton, "The Ideology of the Succession in North Korea," *Asian Perspective*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Spring-Summer 1987), p. 15.

nated successor, Kim Jong-Il. Accordingly, the launch of the Three Great Revolutions resulted in the expansion of Kim's power by driving out the established forces opposing him from posts in factories, workshops and cooperative farms and by replacing them with youths supporting him.

Since the revolution in idea has been the most important task among the three revolutions, the rise of Kim Jong-Il guaranteed dissemination of the Juche idea and its ascending status. In turn, the junior Kim praised the idea of his father as "an idea which provided solutions to problems arising in a new age different from the era that gave rise to Marxism-Leninism."<sup>36</sup>

As heir apparent, the junior Kim's commitment to the spread of the leader's idea is quite similar to that of Lin Biao during the early stage of the Cultural Revolution in China. Just as Lin turned the military into a politicized instrument to spread Maoism, so Kim Jong-Il fully mobilizes the work teams to impose the Juche idea. One difference is that even though Lin was a designated successor to Mao, his power was limited because he remained only as a defense minister under the premiership of Zhou Enlai in the state.<sup>37</sup> In short, Kim has no competitor, while Lin was checked by Zhou.

### **Legitimation of Regime Particularity: 'Socialism of Our Own Style'**

Since the socialist regime is characterized by the absence of an evolving consensus among the people, it attempts to remold the people by imposing a legitimating value. The regime in North Korea has done so through the Juche idea. However, with recent

36 Kim Jong-Il, *On Correctly Understanding the Originality of Kimilsungism* (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1984), p. 3.

37 Lin planned to re-create the post of head of state at the Second Plenum of the Ninth Central Committee convened on 23 August 1970, in order to place him over the Zhou's post. However, Mao rejected Lin's plan even before the plenum, because he remembered the painful experience of Liu Shaoqi's abuse of the post and felt danger of power concentration around Lin. John Gardner, *Chinese Politics and the Succession to Mao* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1982), p. 44.

changes in the environment, particularly the collapse of socialist regimes in the Soviet Union and East European countries, the ruling elites faced the questions of how to interpret these changes and how to prevent ideological restlessness.

To probe these questions, Kim Jong-Il newly proposed 'socialism of our own style' in 1991,<sup>38</sup> and further developed the slogan in a talk to the senior cadres of the Central Committee of the KWP on January 3, 1992.<sup>39</sup> According to Kim, socialist regimes in other countries collapsed for the following reasons.

1. They did not put the main emphasis on strengthening the main motive force of construction of socialism, while seeking the economic factor only.
2. They failed to differentiate socialism from capitalism by adopting liberalism as a mode of political interaction.
3. They did not strengthen the regime's solidarity based on 'independence' and 'self-determination.'

According to Kim, first, by adhering to the building economy those regimes failed to carry out a continuous revolution in general and ideological and cultural revolution in particular. In this respect, Kim has attributed the success of building socialism to the remolding of the masses into the main defender of socialism.

The socialist economic system cannot be maintained or managed to conform with its nature, apart from the socialist government, and socialist government can neither keep its existence nor play its function in keeping with its nature, if it is separated from the people with the socialist idea. In light of this, it is clear that the popular masses who are equipped with the socialist idea are

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38 Kim Jong-Il, "Socialism of Our Own Style Centered Around the Masses of People Will Be Certainly Victorious" (A talk presented before the Central Committee members on 5 May 1991), in *Kim Jong-Il Jeojakseon*, pp. 541-570.

39 Kim Jong-Il, "Historical Lesson in Building Socialism and the General Line of Our Party." This was publicized in *Rodong Shinmun*, the organ of the KWP, on 4 February 1992.

always the decisive factor in the development of the socialist society and its destiny.<sup>40</sup>

Second, Kim has maintained that the penetration of liberal ideas broke the unity and cohesion of the society and finally demolished the societal foundation. He has contrasted collectivism in socialism with liberalism in capitalism and has given a priority to the former. Finally, just like his father, Kim has not admitted the difference between the center and the periphery in the international communist movement, while saying that "there can be no higher or lower parties or leading or led parties."<sup>41</sup> According to Kim, by keeping self-determinism and banning the penetration of so-called 'reform' or 'restructure,' the socialist regime of our own style can be maintained.

Accordingly, for Kim Jong-Il the North Korean regime confronting the changes in environments is able to persist not by the adaptation to these changes but through illuminating the particularity of the North Korean regime under the name of 'socialism of our own style.' Thus Kim has stressed the Three Great Revolutions, the revolution in idea in particular, for the success of socialist development. However, it should be noted that socialism of our own style is nothing but more political rhetoric, which intends to reinforce the ideological education of the people and eliminate the reference for regime comparison in a new age of declining socialism.

### **Juche Idea and the Possibility of Regime Change**

Then, how much can the Juche idea contribute to the persistence of the existing regime of North Korea in the future? Can we expect the possibility of a regime change in light of a rapidly changing environment? In answering these questions we must take into account the condition for a regime change in view of the

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40 Ibid., p. 13.

41 Ibid., p. 15.

experience of Eastern Europe. On one hand, a regime cannot be changed unless there is popular discontent with the existing regime. Such discontent is articulated in an 'alternative value' that is able to replace the existing legitimating value. A power struggle within the palace, like a coup d'état that proposes no alternative value, cannot bring about a regime change. An elite shift through such a power struggle alters the authority relations without any significant change in the structure of the regime. Likewise, intermittent riots derived from discontent with living conditions cannot develop into a regime change. This is so because the riots give the ruling elites an opportunity for harsh repression. Furthermore, repetitive riots lead the ruling elites to become immune, desensitized, and even prepared for them.<sup>42</sup>

On the other hand, an 'identity vacuum'<sup>43</sup> of the ruling elites is also necessary for a regime change. Since the socialist regime is based on top-down legitimacy, it will experience a regime breakdown when the ruling elite no longer feels confident to legitimize the existing regime. Provided that the elites feel a strong identity with the regime and try every possible means, including the use of military force, the regime still will not change. Therefore, a regime change in socialist countries occurs when the two junctures come about: emergence of an alternative value and spread of identity vacuum among the ruling elites. That is, only when the legitimating value is seriously challenged and the elite loses the will to rule, will a regime be changed.

Based on this postulate regarding the condition of a regime change, we can predict the future of the socialist regime in North

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42 James W. Button, *Black Violence: Political Impact of the 1960s Riots* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 175.

43 For the discussion of this concept, see Giuseppe Di Palma, "Legitimation from the Top to Civil Society; Politico-Cultural Change in Eastern Europe," *World Politics*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (October 1991), pp. 49–80. Di Palma has maintained that the regime change occurred when the ruling elites lost their will to rule. Since the socialist regimes in the Eastern European countries were imported products, the self-legitimation or legitimation from the top eroded when the ruling elites felt the loss of global partnership by the collapse of neighboring regimes.

Korea, with special reference to the Juche idea. To draw a conclusion at first, possibility of a regime change in the short run is extremely remote. There is little evidence that an alternative value will emerge and replace the Juche idea nor that the ruling elite feels any identity vacuum. Rather, the elites reinforce ideological education that stresses the particularity of North Korean socialism under the name of 'socialism of our own style' and the structure of regime in terms of 'socio-political organism.'

In detail, there are three reasons for the low possibility of a regime change, provided that North Korea maintains its closed system. First, to a certain extent the Juche idea does successfully legitimize the regime. Despite that Juche thought originated from Kim Il Sung's motivation to consolidate his power, later it developed to a systemic legitimating value. Suppose the authority structure centered around Kim Jong-Il after the death of his father is replaced by another elite group, such as the military. This case does not guarantee a regime change if the elite group cannot present an alternative value to replace the Juche idea.

Second, the Juche idea, which is embodied in 'socialism of our own style' as the most sophisticated notion in recent years, prohibits the masses and the party cadres from comparing their regime with the collapsed socialist regimes as well as with the capitalist regimes. Furthermore, based on the notions of socio-political organism and socialism of our own style, the ruling elite not only reinforces the ideological education of the people, but also isolates them from the outside world. This is so because, as shown in the classical theory of sociology, the elimination of the reference for a comparison prevents the formation of a sense of relative deprivation among the masses and prohibits the party cadres from feeling any loss of identity.

Finally, a scrutiny of the history of North Korea shows an absence of experience with democracy and capitalism, an experience which could contribute to the emergence of an alternative value and an organized opposition. Some Eastern European countries such as Czechoslovakia and East Germany underwent

an industrial revolution and experienced the establishment of democratic institutions before the Second World War. The absence of such experience in North Korea makes it difficult for an alternative value to rise and denounce seriously the Juche idea, even when the regime faces a perilous economic situation.

Nevertheless, we cannot exclude the possibility of a regime breakdown in the long run. After the death of Kim Il Sung, the junior Kim and his associates will for various reasons be forced to instigate a reform policy conducive to the introduction of new values and the increase in income disparity, which will produce a sense of relative deprivation among the people. In North Korea, where the channel for interest articulation is not institutionalized, widespread relative deprivation will bring about a spontaneous explosion with violence.<sup>44</sup> This explosion may lead to chaos rather than an immediate regime change such as the establishment of a democratic regime. This is so not only because the Juche idea will no longer be able to work as a dominant value, but because an alternative value will not be developed fully enough to replace the old one. In the case of some Eastern European countries such as the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, composed of multi-nations, the resulting chaos brought about a separation into independent states. In North Korea, however, which has no ethnic division, it is highly feasible that the chaos will persist for a time before the establishment of a new regime.

## Conclusion

This research examined how the legitimating value in North Korea, the Juche idea, rationalizes the existing socialist regime in the rapidly changing political environment, and then it predicted the future of the regime with special reference to the idea. The Juche idea that has two distinctive properties, i.e., man-centrality

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44 For the discussion of spontaneous uprising, see Thomas H. Green, *Comparative Revolutionary Movements: Search for Theory and Justice* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1990), 3rd edition, pp. 88-92.

and continuous revolution through generations, contributes to the legitimation of the regime in the following respects. First, the regime structure embodied in 'socio-political organism' defines the particular authority relations between Kim Il Sung, the party and the masses of people. This particular form of regime structure is based on the concept of collectivity, the best interest of which can be represented by the leader Kim Il Sung only. Second, the Juche idea, which stresses the uninterrupted revolution through generations for the socialist development, justifies a hereditary political succession from Kim Il Sung to Kim Jong-Il. The Three Great Revolutions has allowed the junior Kim to extend his power base. More importantly, the work teams of the revolutions have contributed to the dissemination of the logic that inheritance of the leadership can guarantee the continuous revolution through the generations. Finally, the Juche idea illuminates the particularity of the existing regime of North Korea. Under the name of 'socialism of our own style,' the idea prohibits the masses from comparing their regime with other socialist regimes. Furthermore, the Juche idea rationalizes the ideological education by illustrating that a man armed with a revolutionary spirit is the main force to fortify the existing regime and to confront capitalism.

Based on the analysis of the Juche idea's role of regime legitimation, we can expect that a regime change will not occur in the near future. Many observers of North Korea focus on the analysis of an expected consequence of Kim Jong-Il's political succession after the death of Kim Il Sung. Some foresee longevity of the junior Kim's power, and others predict an immediate breakdown of his power base due to the absence of charismatic leadership. However, what should be noted is that a regime change occurs only when the two junctures finally come about: emergency of an alternative value and a feeling of identity vacuum among the elite. That is, a regime change happens only when the existing structure of authority relations is seriously denounced by an alternative value and the elites lose the will to rule. In North

Korea, owing not only to the absence of democratic experience but also to the notion of socialism of our own style that prevents the people from comparing the regime with others, the feasibility of a regime change is very low in the short run—even after the death of Kim Il Sung.