

Theoretical Revision of Juche Thought and Nationalism in North Korea

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Since the mid 1980s when the socialist bloc began to change rapidly, North Korean leaders have been making theoretical revisions in Juche thought. Adopting new concepts such as "a socialist system in our own style" and "the supremacy of the Choson (Korean) nation," North Korea has been intensively propagating these ideas through their mass media. The concept of "supremacy of the Korean nation" in particular, first mentioned by Kim Jong Il in his 1986 speech, was fully systematized when Kim Il Sung professed himself a nationalist in a speech on 1 August 1991. He announced "ten programs for grand solidarity of the Korean nation" and launched a nationalist offensive toward South Korea. This was the moment that nationalism appeared as a significant issue in North Korea. What could be the motive underlying North Korea's attempt to revive the old concept of nationalism that had always been denounced as a capitalist bourgeois ideology? This article deals with this question and examines the socio-political characteristics of North Korean nationalism.

The Concept of Nationalism in North Korea

Nationalism has generally been viewed negatively in the socialist states primarily due to the tendency of socialists to regard

it as an ideology serving the interests of the bourgeois class in nineteenth century Europe, protecting capitalism in domestic as well as international markets. The second reason lies in the socialist argument that imperialism under the banner of nationalism distorted economic development and impaired proletariat interests in the colonial states. In sum, Marxists have been pursuing proletariat internationalism and perceiving nationalism as an obstacle to class struggle.¹

In direct contrast to Marx's theoretical prediction, most of the socialist revolutions took place in the form of national liberation movements. There are disparate opinions over the relationship between proletariat internationalism and nationalism. With the outbreak of World War I proletariat internationalism turned out to be only a dream and many Marxists began to turn their backs on proletariat internationalism.²

Among Marxists in the anti-imperialist movement, Lenin certainly appreciated the usefulness of nationalism. He was quite vocal in urging the movement to take advantage of any nationalist movement struggling against imperialism for the goal of socialist revolution. Although Lenin had confidence in the socialist proletariat role against imperialism, he looked to minority nationalist movements to play the precipitating role. Lenin could not ignore the historical justification of the nationalist movement, but to prevent his argument from being misinterpreted as an apology for nationalism and thus damage the proletariat interest, he did insist that only the progressive nationalists be accepted. To Lenin, therefore, seeking harmony between progressive nationalism and proletariat internationalism was the main concern related to nationalism. The originality of Lenin's contribution to the development of Marxist theory lay in his attempts to harmonize dialectically nation with class. To Lenin,

1 Horace Davis, *Toward a Marxist Theory of Nationalism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978). p. 27.

2 Ibid., p. 31.

however, the right of self-determination was only a tactical concern. It was a principle that could be abandoned at any time depending upon the situation.³

In contrast to Lenin's relatively pragmatic position, Rosa Luxemburg and Stalin were intransigent internationalists. By clinging to his strict class perspective Stalin strongly opposed nationalism. Horace Davis believed that in the whole history of communist movement there is no one more antagonistic to nationalism than Stalin. Rosa Luxemburg, a stern proletariat internationalist, regarded the suppression of nation as the inevitable product of capitalist rule and argued that the national issue would never be resolved without first overthrowing capitalism.⁴

North Korea has been following in the foot-steps of these perceptions, believing that nationalism is the manifestation of bourgeois interest inherent in the capitalist institution, and that the nationalist phenomenon does not exist in true socialist countries.⁵ North Korea argues that nationalism as a bourgeois class interest distorts the interest of proletariat class in the name of national interest. As a result, it is understood to destroy international solidarity and cooperation at the expense of the working class. From the definition of nationalism as stated in the *Philosophical Dictionary* published in 1985, we can pin down the reason for the North Korean rejection of nationalism.

By presenting "the interest of the whole nation" beyond the interest of the masses and the working class, nationalism obscures the distinction between true interest and the nation's interest. It hides the class contradiction and impedes the working class struggle for its own basic interest.⁶

3 Park Ho-sung, *Socialism and Nationalism* (in Korean), (Seoul: Kachi, 1989), p. 234.

4 Ibid., p. 234; Davis, *Toward a Marxist Theory of Nationalism*, p. 103.

5 *Political Dictionary* (in Korean) (Pyongyang: Sawhegyahak Chulpansa, 1973), p. 427.

6 Sawheghahak Chulhakyonguso, *Philosophical Dictionary* (in Korean) (Pyongyang: Sawheghahak Chulpansa, 1985), p. 253.

To Kim Il Sung, nationalism seemed to have both imperialist and aggressive elements. He preferred, therefore, the concept of "Juche thought" with the connotations of defending oneself from foreign attacks and invasion, rather than nationalism in the active sense. Therefore from Kim Il Sung's position Juche thought can never be regarded as a nationalist idea, nor could it be regarded as anti-nationalist thought either. In North Korea, the term socialist patriotism is used in place of nationalism. "Socialist patriotism is the thought that combines class consciousness with national self-determinism and the love of the fatherland."⁷ This definition strongly reflects the class-based worldview. It is the context in which North Korea designates Juche thought as socialist patriotism.

Juche Thought as the North Korean Counter-measure to Changes in the Socialist Bloc following the Death of Stalin

The Formation of Juche Thought as Regime Ideology

For a better understanding of why North Korea suddenly switched from proletariat internationalism or socialist international solidarity to Juche thought emphasizing self-reliance from socialist states, we have to look into the external conditions that had direct influence on the birth of Juche thought.

North Korea's response to Soviet revisionism and turmoil of the East European socialist bloc.

Rapid changes in the socialist bloc provided the international background for the birth of Juche. The practice of idolization waned in the Soviet Union following the death of Stalin in March 1953, and revisionism gained momentum. By the end of 1954 critique of the socialist system had spread throughout the world. With Khrushchev's anti-Stalinist address at the 20th plenary

7 Ibid., p. 351.

session of the party in 1956, Stalin's former reputation as the great leader of mankind, inspiration to the world, father of the Soviet people, master of science and academy, military genius, and the greatest, most gifted leader in history, were all denounced as torture-mania on the part of a militarily ignorant mass-murderer who brought catastrophe to the Soviet Union. The torture and purges he had committed, Stalin's paranoid fantasy, were brought into broad daylight.⁸ Khrushchev's address, criticizing the depravity of socialist morality, shook the entire socialist bloc to its very foundations.

Khrushchev's revisionism had an immediate impact on the East European bloc. In Poland, Hungary and Yugoslavia, anti-Soviet nationalist sentiment was in extant and Khrushchev's address added fuel to the fire.

In the Poznan incident in Poland, May 1956, the Soviet military killed 53, wounded 300 and arrested 323 when a labor demonstration for "bread and freedom" developed into an uprising.

The 1956 incident in Hungary was more serious. After suppression of a riot by the Soviet military, grievances spread among all social groups and classes including party members, the intelligentsia, students and factory workers, and exploded into a nation-wide revolutionary movement. They demanded independence from the Soviet Union and the resignation of Hungarian political leadership.⁹

As can be seen in the following citation, Kim Il Sung defined the changes in the socialist bloc as a conspiracy of reactionary elements backed by imperialists, and he was quite concerned about its possible impact on North Korea.

8 Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 450-51.

9 Yoondonghyogee, "East Revolution and Destalinization" Donggu Sawheyonguwon ed., Chounchek Pyonjipbu, translated, *The Turmoil of Eastern Contemporary History* (in Korean) (Seoul: Chounchek, 1990), p. 197; Howard Davis and Richard Scase, Han Sang in (trans.), *Sociology of Comparative Systems* (in Korean) (Seoul: Nutinamu, 1990), p. 185.

The anti-revolutionary revolt in Hungary provoked by imperialist interventionists and anti-revolutionaries was swiftly quelled by Soviet internationalist aid requested by the Hungarian Labor revolutionary government and by the heroic struggle of the Hungarian people who were supported by the peace-loving people of the world.¹⁰

Not only did the Hungarian people topple the local anti-revolutionaries and brilliantly uphold their socialist accomplishments, but they also contributed greatly to the great task of guaranteeing peace and security by crushing the conspiracy of the Western imperialists who attempted to establish a new battleground in the heart of Europe.¹¹

The Hungary incident took the form of an anti-socialist and anti-Soviet nationalist movement of the workers. And it certainly was a large scale civil uprising that could not have been quelled without Soviet military intervention. In North Korea, however, news of this incident was delivered to the residents in distorted form. If the Soviets had not intervened, the collapse of the socialist bloc might have taken place in 1956 earlier than 1989.

The civil uprising of anti-Soviet nationalism in the Eastern bloc were real threats to the Kim regime. From this time onward, Pyongyang began to implement a policy of isolation in order to block the "unwholesome wind" from sweeping into North Korea. It is worth noting that this self-isolationist policy is still playing as the main counter-measure even to the recent situation following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the socialist bloc. One of Kim Il Sung's addresses at that time clearly reveals such policy will.

10 Kim Il Sung, "The address delivered by the premier Kim Il Sung at the Pyongyang city welcoming mass rally for delegates from the Czechoslovakia Republic 1 April 1957" (in Korean) in *Rodong Shinmun* 2 April 1957.

11 Kim Il Sung, "The joint declaration of the government of Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Czechoslovakia Republic (4 April 1993)" Choson Chungang Tongshinsa, *Korean Central Almanac 1958* (in Korean) (Pyongyang: Choson Chungang Tongshinsa, 1958), p. 74.

We must always remember that if our Party members neglect constant ideological training, then anti-Marxist ideas and trends of all shades can infiltrate from outside or breed within.¹²

In this context, the government motive for thorough surveillance of North Korean residents introduced in 1958 is clear. Although a food ration system introduced then could be seen as a follow-up of collectivization, it could be interpreted more relevantly as political control. China and the Soviet Union both imposed collective farming projects, but not strict food rationing.

North Korea's response to de-Stalinization and the critique of idolization

Khrushchev's critique of idolization completely transformed Kim Il Sung's attitude; prior to this revisionism he had maintained a very close relationship with the Soviet Union. There is no overemphasizing that the relationship was an exemplar case of political and economic dependency that rendered impossible any use of the words self-reliance or Juche. As a result of this dependent relationship, Kim Il Sung had been exerting every effort to Sovietize North Korea under the slogan of "let's learn from the Soviet Union," expressing his "respect and gratitude" to Stalin. Kim Il Sung wrote the following words in the Letter to Stalin the Great Leader delivered on 28 August 1946, at the founding ceremony of the North Korean Worker's Party.

Cheers to the emancipator and patron of the Korean nation, our benefactor and friend, the Great Leader Stalin! We convey our greatest respects and the deep gratitude of the Korean people in cognizance of the fact that the liberation of North Korean people and the development of our country could not have been possible without your deepest consideration and the military aid of

12 Kim Il Sung, "Unity of the Socialist Camp and the New Stage of the International communist Movement," (Report to an enlarged Plenary Meeting of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea, 5 December 1957) *Kim Il Sung Works* 11, p. 352.

the Red army. We Koreans have confidence in your continued aid, certain that it will definitely bring us victory.¹³

The warm relationship froze rapidly with Khrushchev's revisionism and critique of Stalinist idolization. He also criticized the practice in North Korea idolizing of Kim Il Sung. To this critique, Kim Il Sung openly launched a counterattack:

Political intervention and economic pressure through the taking of arrogant advantage of affording assistance demonstrates a complete indifference to proletariat internationalism. Among the socialist countries, there should not be any so-called aid on collateral terms nor on conditions of intervening internal politics, as is adopted among the capitalist countries. Aid between socialist countries should be given solely to reinforce the sovereignty and independence of the recipient countries and strengthen the development of the socialist block. Some are describing the Party Assembly¹⁴ of one country as the beginning of "the new stage," and by declaring the decision made by a particular party as "the common decree" of the international communist movement, are trying to apply it to other brother parties. A decision or a measure of a party obliges the party itself and should never be used to regulate the activities of other parties. In particular, attempts to apply the movement against the so-called idolization of an individual to other parties and taking advantage of it for domestic intervention of brother parties and countries and subvert the party leadership of other countries should never be allowed. Did many brother parties already suffer needless "fever" through the commotion of "anti-idolization of an individual," and did the international Communist movement not already suffer great loss? Despite this, even today some are still continuing the rabble of "anti-idolization."

13 Kim Il Sung, "A letter to Stalin the great leader" (28 August 1946) Tongilwon, *Works on Korean Workers' Party Assembly* (in Korean) (Seoul: Tongilwon, 1980), pp. 18-19.

14 This seems to be referring to the 20th Party Assembly that criticized the personal idolization of Stalin.

It should be sternly rejected by the international Communist movement.¹⁵

For Kim Il Sung, the first priority was to safeguard the regime by preventing the movement from criticizing personal idolization and keeping revisionism from seeping into North Korea. Means were pursued to block foreign thought and reinforce ideological armament. These measures were embodied in the Juche concept of isolation.

We should raise our good Communist voice to oppose revisionism in our Party and stop the activities of the revisionists. We should suppress them and isolate them so as to block it from infiltrating the masses. We should prevent people from rallying behind revisionism and through enlightenment and consolidating the unity between communists and the masses, side with the stance of Marxism-Leninism and strengthen the communist rank and file. By means of ideological struggle, we must train the party and all communists, and arm the masses with revolutionary thought to prepare them for their revolutionary struggle."¹⁶

Challenges to Kim Il Sung leadership and Kim's response

One of the internal reasons underlying the development of Juche ideology was to find an excuse to remove Kim's political enemies from the political scene.¹⁷ Critique against Kim Il Sung was intensifying especially over his responsibility for the unsuccessful Korean War. In addition, with the Soviet critique against idolization, anti-Kim groups began openly to criticize his personal idolization practices. Kim Il Sung purged members of South Korean Worker's Party such as Ho Kai, Park Hon-yong, Lee Sung-yup during the Korean War, Yonan groups in 1956,

15 "Let's uphold the socialist side" *Rodong Shinmun*, 28 October 1963 editorial.

16 Ibid.

17 written by Suh Dae Suk and translated by Suh Joo Suk, *Kim Il Sung the North Korean Leader* (in Korean) (Seoul: Chonggyeyonguso, 1989), p. 95.

pro-Soviet Union groups between 1957–1959, and the Gapsan group in 1967. In the process he promoted anti-factionalism and sought justification to strengthen party unity and solidarity. Kim emphasized the establishment of Juche and used it to justify purging his political opposition. Kim Il Sung first used the word “Juche” in a speech on 28 December 1955, criticizing his political opposition and justifying himself in the name of Juche:

The mistake committed this time by Park Chang-ok and others lay in their denial of the history of the Korean literary movement. In their eyes, there are no struggles by the able writers who took part in the Korean Proletariat Literary League....Because Park Chang-ok made no attempt to study the history of our country and our reality, he came to collaborate ideologically with Li Tae-jun, a bourgeois reactionary writer....Comrade Park Yong-bin said after he had been to the Soviet Union that since the Soviet Union moves toward easing international tension, we too should do away with slogans opposing American imperialism....The disputes raised by Ho Ka-i and Park Il-u led to nothing but a weakening of discipline within the party....Criticism of Park Chang-ok and also of Ki Sok-bok was too late. If only the criticism had been made at the time of the fifth plenary session of the party Central Committee, things would not have progressed this way....The experiences of struggles against the Park Hon-yong clique and against spies should be made known clearly to party members so that they will understand how to ferret out spies.¹⁸

At this time Kim made use of the word Juche as a rudimentary ideological tool to remove his political opposition.

As a result of the so-called anti-factionalist incident in 1956, Yoon Gong-hum, Suh Hwe, Lee Yong-kyu, and Kim Kan, who had all been attacking Kim Il Sung, were exiled to China. Choi Chang-ik and Park Chang-ok were expelled from the party. Both the Soviet Union and China then intervened in North Korean politics, criticizing Kim Il Sung. He thus restored Choi Chang-ik

18 *Collection of Kim Il-Sung Works*, (in Korean) Vol. 9, p. 469.

and Park Chang-ok's Central Committee memberships and withdrew his decision to expel the other four. This incident firmly resolved him to maintain autonomy from the Soviet Union and China.¹⁹ Referring to dogmatism, formalism, factionalism and bureaucratism of his opposition, Kim Il Sung called for the establishment of Juche.

Kim Il Sung's response to the influence of the Chinese Cultural Revolution

The Cultural Revolution of China in 1966 shocked Kim Il Sung as much as did the critique of idolization from the Soviet Union. Its impact on North Korea can be seen through two manifestations, one of which was wall posters. Following the downfall of Khrushchev in 1964, Pyongyang expedited normalization with the Soviet Union through Brezhnev and Kozinkin, which may have discomfited China, and beginning in January 1967, the Red Army began to criticize Kim Il Sung with wall posters. One elder general who had participated the Korean War, accused Kim Il Sung as "a revisionist and follower of Khrushchev." The Chinese also reproached North Koreans for belittling the Cultural Revolution.²⁰

In addition, as in East European socialist states, popular grievances came to the verge of explosion by means of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Although the Chinese Cultural Revolution was designed by Mao Tse Tung in his struggle for power, it also served as a channel for popular grievances against bureaucratism.²¹

Kim Il Sung was deeply worried over the likely onslaught of the movement into North Korea. Therefore, changes in China

19 Han Hong-gu, "Easy North Korean contemporary history," Kim Nam-sik and et. al, *For the Correct Understanding of North Korean Society* (in Korean) (Seoul: Hyunjangmunhakssa, 1989), p. 110.

20 Suh Dae Suk, *Kim Il Sung the North Korean Leader*, (in Korean) p. 165.

21 Mori Kazeko, *China and the Soviet Union* (in Korean) (Seoul: Samingak, 1989), p. 88.

shocked him no less than did those of the East European states and the Soviet Union.

Rebuilding the anti-Japanese revolutionary struggle

The strategy of isolation from the changes underway in the Soviet Union and East European states combined easily with the Juche logic of past anti-Japanese revolutionary struggle. In saying that "the most important issue confronting us in leading the hard and complex anti-Japanese revolutionary struggle to victory was to strengthen our revolutionary subject," Kim Il Sung linked the anti-Japanese revolutionary struggle with Juche thought. Through various academic projects in search for the roots of Juche thought in the national independence movement, historical tradition was literally pulverized. From 1955,²² Pyongyang began to exploit the traditions of the anti-Japanese struggle in order to secure a historical justification for Juche thought. By mobilizing all the North Korean academics to study its history, Pyongyang produced massive studies on labor, farmer, and student movements of the 1920s and 1930s in a magazine called *Historical Science* between 1955 and 1967. Later were published the *History of Korean War*, comprising 22 volumes from 1979 to 1983, *Contemporary Korean History* in 1983, and *Korean History* in 1987. "The study on the history of our labor movement and struggle of national liberation are being neglected and the compilation projects are almost in a deadlock. How can we rightly implement the Korean revolution without studies on the experiences of our past labor movement and national liberation struggles?"²³

22 Kim Il sung, through his essay titled "Lenin's Theory is Our Guide Line," contributed to *Gunroja* (In Korean) (April, 1955) begins to distort the anti-Japanese partisan movement in the 1930s as his own unique deeds.

23 Tongilwon, *The Fourth Korean Workers' Party Assembly Material Collections* (In Korean) (Seoul: Tongilwon, 1988).

The essence of Juche and self-reliance

The meaning of the term Juche is quite clear in Kim Il Sung's first use of the word on 28 December 1955 in *On the Establishment of Juche and Resistance against Dogmatism and Formalism in the Project of Ideology*: "Some say they prefer the Soviet style or the Chinese style, but are we not at the stage of creating our own style?" The first use of the term was to pursue an independent line cutting off the relationship with the Soviet Union in order to hold fast against the impact of changes in the socialist bloc. Here we see the germ of Juche thought summarized in the concept of independence used to justify his isolation policy.

We should not wholly accept the experience of others. Falling into dogmatism will cause the party to be isolated from the people and unable to implement properly the national or international tasks incumbent upon us. Therefore, holding fast to self-reliance and independence has significant implication on the development of revolution in the concerned countries and unity in the international communist movement. Each country's experience in the process of socialist revolution and socialist construction should be respected by all other parties.²⁴

In Kim Il Sung's address in Indonesia April 1965, Juche thought was presented in its first systematized form as (1) Juche in the philosophical and political sectors, (2) rehabilitation by one's own efforts in the economic sector, and (3) building of self-reliant national economy, and the line of the masses.²⁵ In his 1966 speech known as "Let's Uphold Self-Reliance," Kim Il Sung presented a systematized content of the independent line, the essence of Juche ideology.

24 "Let's Uphold Socialist Side" *Rodong Shinmun*, 28 October 1963 editorial.

25 Kim Il Sung, "On Socialist Construction in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the South Korean Revolution," (Lecture at the "Ali Archam" Academy of Social Science of Indonesia, 14 April 1965), *Kim Il Sung Selected Works IV*, (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1971) pp. 202-51.

Every circumstance demands that we establish Juche thoroughly. Our party will adhere to independence in our external activities and fulfil the self-reliant line as before.²⁶

However, the term "Juche thought" were still not used in this writing. It was first defined as such through the proclamation of Political Decree for the Republic Government at the fourth round of the fifth session of the Supreme People's Committee on 16 December 1967, and also through the Fifth Party Assembly in 1970, as the most certain Marxist-Leninist guiding theory for the success of the revolution and the construction, and the steadfast guidance for all policies and activities of the DPRK government. It was firmly expressed in the fundamental policy lines of "Juche in thought, independence in politics, self-sustenance in the economy, and self-reliant defense."

The government of the Republic will by establishing our Party's idea of Juche in every field thoroughly implement the line of independence, self-sustenance and self-defense to consolidate the political *chajusong* [self-reliance] of the country, strengthen the foundation of an independent national economy capable of ensuring the complete reunification, independence and prosperity of our nation, and increase the defense capabilities of the country so as to protect its security with our own forces.²⁷

Juche thought was formed to safeguard the Kim regime by blocking the influence of reforms in East European states. Gradually it developed into a governing ideology for social integration, idolization of Kim Il Sung and mobilization of labor after they overcame the regime crisis. It further unfolded into the "armament of society by Juche thought." Kim Il Sung used it by switching its former governing principle of severance into a logic

26 "Let's Uphold Self-Reliance," *Rodong Shinmun*, 12 August 1966, editorial.

27 Kim Il Sung, "Let Us Embody the Revolutionary Spirit of Independence, Self-Sustenance and Self-Defense More Thoroughly in All Branches of State Activity," 16 December 1967, *Kim Il Sung Works 21* (Pyongyang, Korea: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1985), p. 414.

of revolution and construction. One notable example is the "revolutionary mass line," defined as the fundamental principle of our party activity based on Juche thought that holds the working mass as the master and the judge of all things. The mass line and the principle of revolution is often used as a panacea to entice the people to pay loyalty to Kim Il Sung as well as to mobilize labor for the Chollima (Long Distance Racehorse) and Samdae hyukmyung sojo (Three Great Revolution Organizations) movements. Juche thought was the foundation of economic structure.

In fact the principle of complete self-rehabilitation was not positively chosen but was a reactive adaptation to external conditions, as was the case with Juche thought. Because Kim Il Sung rejected the critique of idolization, the Soviet Union switched their previous free economic aid to long-term loans, and the sum itself was greatly reduced. Kim Il Sung made a round of calls to the Soviet Union and the East European socialist countries for 50 days (from 1 June to 19 July 1956) to seek aid for the first term of the five-year economic planning (from 1957 to 1961). But he was unable to get any assistance for the five-year plan, so the country had to rely on its own efforts. Without the aid from the outside aid, North Korea had to resort to forced mobilization of labor.

Juche thought also developed into the theoretical framework to indoctrinate subjects loyal to Kim Il Sung and create the personality that enjoys working.²⁸

Juche thought is obviously a typical regime ideology rather than an ideological system devoted to the general interest of the nation.

28 Pyon, *Theory of Rebuilding Personality* (in Korean) (Pyongyang: Sahweghwahakchulpansa, 1985); Suh Jae-Jean, Kim Tae Il, *A Study on Personality of North Korean Residents* (in Korean) (Seoul: RINU, 1992).

Changes in the Socialist Bloc in the Late 1980s and the Theoretical Revision of Juche Thought "A Socialist System in Our Own Style"

With the collapse of the socialist bloc in the late 1980s, the element of Juche thought emphasizing isolation was stressed through slogans such as "a socialist system of our own style" or "the supremacy of the Korean nation." Deng Xiaoping's policy of reform and opening in 1978 and Gorbachev's perestroika forced Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il into a second regime crisis similar to that of the mid 1950s.

As can be seen in the following address by Kim Jong Il, North Korea's response of blocking foreign thought and reinforcing ideological education was reminiscent of the period that gave birth to Juche thought.

In circumstances where the imperialists and reactionaries viciously attempt to make ideological and cultural infiltrations into the socialist countries, any slackening of ideological indoctrination programs could lead to influx of the winds of bourgeois liberalization. To bolster ideological infiltration as a prelude to open aggression is the typical method of the imperialists. We must thoroughly crush the schemes of the imperialists attempting to infuse the wind of bourgeois liberalization into the socialist countries and ideologically demolish them from within. In order to surmount the old-fashioned ideological residues that remain in socialist society and to fend off the infusion of various unhealthy ideas from outside, we must forcefully stage an ideological revolution and convert the people into communist revolutionaries of the Juche type....Our party has fundamentally embraced an ideological revolution and has intensified various indoctrination programs such as the indoctrination of the principles of Juche thought, party policies, revolutionary tradition, classes, collectivism and socialistic patriotism among party members and workers, thereby arming them well with the revolutionary and Juche ideas of our party

and successfully realizing the ideological unity of the entire society."²⁹

In sum, by emphasizing and firmly upholding the supremacy of "socialism in our own style," North Korea is urging everyone to "live our own way" and prevent the winds of reform in China and the Soviet Union from infiltrating. That is, the reforms in China, East Bloc and the Soviet Union are unnecessary and have no relevance for North Korea. Rejection of foreign ideas, one of the core principles of Juche thought, is quite persuasive.

The ideological viewpoint and way of thinking of our own style means that we think the way in which our party road and policies dictate. By keeping whatever thought that runs counter to our party's road and policies from reaching the inside of us, we must cause Juche thought and its embodiment, namely, our party's road and policies alone, to overflow in the whole society.³⁰

The attempt to maintain the regime during the crisis of the entire socialist bloc, as was done in the 1950s, can be seen in "socialist system in our own style," just a new term to emphasize the independent line that was immanent in the Juche thought.

Changes in Socialist Bloc in the Late 1980s and the Theoretical Adaptation of Juche Thought to "The Supremacy of the Korean Nation"

Another theory revision of Juche thought in response to the late 1980s is the idea of "the supremacy of the Korean nation." Until 1985³¹ North Korea had been rejecting nationalism by

29 Kim Jong-il, "Socialism of Our Style, Centered on the Masses, Is Ever-Victorious and Invincible," *Rodong Shinmun*, 27 May 1991.

30 "Let Us Think and Work as Dictated by Juche Thought," (in Korean) Central Radio (2 September 1991).

31 This is the year *Philosophical Dictionary* (in Korean) was published. The book interprets nationalism in class perspectives.

emphasizing it as "an ideology justifying the interest of the bourgeois in the name of people's interest, that is, it is obscuring class contradiction and impeding the working class struggle, serving as justification for foreign invasion and plunder." However, what could be the underlying motive for North Korea suddenly to redefine the concept in 1985 and began to mobilize nationalism under the banner of Korean supremacy? This happened to be the same year Gorbachev rose to power and implemented perestroika. Then, what relationship has supremacy of the Korean nation with Juche thought? What is its function?

It is the refined theory of own-style socialism differentiating the differences in origin and spoken language from the other socialist states in order to block reforms in the socialist states from affecting North Korea. Massive volumes interpreting the nation's essence and nationalism were published in 1985 and *The Theory on the Supremacy of Our Nation* comprising 206 pages was printed in 1989.³² In these books we can easily see fundamental change in the North Korean concept of nationalism. Regarding "the nation's essence," one of the constitutive elements of the nation, all books quotes Kim Jong Il's definition of the word: "The basic essence constituting nationality is consanguinity, language, and common region. Among these, consanguinity and common language are the most important elements of nation."³³ This definition is certainly different from the concept of proletarian internationalism based on class.

Why strike out the old class-based hue? Kim Jong Il was indicating that notwithstanding the transition of the other social-

32 "Political Arguments: the Symbol of the Nation," *The South Korean Issue* (in Korean) (October 1985); Rhee Kyu Rhin, "An Understanding of the Concept of Nation Clarified by Our Dear Leader Kim Jong Il," *Social Science* (in Korean) (February 1986); Choi Kilsan, "A Theory on Nation Clarified by Our Party," *The South Korean Issue* (in Korean) (February 1986); Goh Yong-hwan, *The Supremacy of the Our Nation* (in Korean) (October 1985) p. 14.

33 "Political Arguments: the Symbol of the Nation," *The South Korean Issue* (in Korean) (October 1985) p. 14.

ist states to capitalism, North Korea should uphold own-style socialism.

The reason for my argument for the supremacy of our nation is that we should actively step forward in revolution and construction in the spirit of treasuring our own nation and high nationalist pride. Those who belittle their own nation and blindly uphold others cannot be loyal to their party and the people and cannot have the attitude of master in their revolution. We should have no illusion about large or developed countries. Illusion is not reality. We always should start from the concrete reality of our own country. Large or advanced countries do not always move along rightful paths. Nor are the experiences of these countries suitable to our reality. We should properly evaluate the role of large countries and develop goodwill relations with them, but not give up our independence and blindly follow what they do....We should have the firm will to step forward our own way as benefits our reality.³⁴

This means that despite Soviet perestroika and the Chinese transition to market socialism, North Korea would maintain independence and have its own way. Just as Juche developed as an ideological tool to safeguard the regime in the 1950s, "socialist system of our own style" and the "supremacy of the Korean nation" were instigated to bolster the regime in the late 1980s.

It is clear that the situation was so desperate that the Kims renounced Proletariat internationalism and upheld nationalism to protect their regime. An essay of the time begins with the interpretation of Kim Jong Il's definition of the nation.

The people's struggle for independence proceeds through the unit of nation-state and the fate of the masses is pioneered within the scope of the nation-state. As long as there exist national boundaries, distinction in nations and people live in nation-

34 Kim Jong Il, "On the Problems Raised in the Education of Juche Thought, in a Conversation with Responsible Officials of the Central Committee of Korean Workers' Party on 15 July 1986," *Gunroja* (July 1987), p. 11.

states, the fate of the masses cannot be thought to disregard the fate of their own country and the fate of the nation.³⁵

This short paragraph contains three messages. First, the unit of independence is no longer proletariat internationalism but the nation-state. Pyongyang revived the concept of nation to persuade the people in the face of the downfall of socialism and is thereby proclaiming the socialist system in our own style as a unique brand of socialism. It is relevant here that the DPRK constitution was revised in 1992, substituting the phrase "Korean Workers' Party's Juche thought, which is the creative application of Marxism-Leninism, to our reality" with "Juche thought is the revolutionary thought with human-centered worldview for the realization of autonomy of the people."

Second, although the objective of nationalism has been to emphasize independence, the word independence here means maintenance of the North Korean socialist system by blocking the mainstream of reform in the socialist bloc.

Third, it should be pointed out that in North Korea the term nation neither includes South Korea nor posits the South as the object of the North Korean "nation." The definition of the nation as common lineage, language, and land is to emphasize only that North Korea has nothing in common with the other socialist states.³⁶

As is Juche thought, supremacy of the Korean nation is also linked to the logic of Kim Il Sung idolization. How is the Korean nation different, and what does "supremacy" mean? It does not refer to the affluent material life, social security nor democracy

35 Rhee Kyu Rhin, "An Understanding of the Concept of Nation Clarified by Our Dear Leader Kim Jong Il," *Social Science* (in Korean) (February 1986) p. 6.

36 On 1 August 1991, Kim Il Sung did refer to South Korea in his address titled "Let's Achieve the Great Reunion of Our Nation" before responsible members in the Committee for Peaceful Unification of the Fatherland and northern-branch members of National Unification Pan-National Association, but this reference seems minor.

but to the benefit of Kim Il Sung's Juche thought and North Korean socialist institutions.

The kernel wellspring of strength comprising the supremacy of our nation lies in our nation's dignity and pride in serving our Great President and Leader. Honorable comrade Kim Il Sung has for the first time in history posited the people as the master of the world and of their own fate. He is the Greatest President and people's true President who is devoting the people to the revolutionary achievement in order that they pioneer their own fate....Our nation serving the truly respectable President Kim Il Sung is the world's most glorious, happy and dignified nation....Dear Leader Kim Jong Il, the true leader and people's teacher, succeeds the thought and guidance of honorable President Kim Il Sung. He initiates many projects, makes them affluent and shining, and leads us to the ideal society where full self-reliance is realized.³⁷

Supremacy of the Korean nation, like Juche ideology, plays the ideological role of obscuring present economic difficulties by comparing the current North Korean situation with that of the Japanese Imperial period and portraying any grievances of North Korean residents as unrealistic perception.

Today, we live in an era of great progress. The country had previously lost luster on the world map but now is "the paragon of socialism" pioneering the road to communism, the ideal of mankind, under the high banner of Juche thought at the center of the world, and illuminating the fatherland of Juche thought as a land of heros unique in the world. With the great national dignity and pride to have been born as the people of the Korean nation, today our people are struggling with full vigor to proliferate our nation's glory and pride in the world.³⁸

37 Goh Yong-hwan, *The Supremacy of Our Nation* (in Korean) (1985.10) p. 138.

38 Kim Il Sung, "Our Dignity and Pride of Serving the Great Dear Leader Kim Il Sung as the President Is the Quaint-Essence of the Spirit of the Supremacy of the Korean Nation," *Study on Philosophy* (in Korean) (February 1991). p. 2.

Conclusion: the Characteristics of North Korean Nationalism and Our Tasks for Unification

Based on the historical root of Juche thought in the anti-Japanese nationalist movement, "the socialist system of our own style" and the "supremacy of the Choson (Korean) nation," both very similar to the Juche of the late 1950s, serve to reinforce severance from the outside world by deepening its anti-foreign idea especially from the newly reformed socialist bloc. When nationalism is viewed as resistance against foreign powers, Juche thought can be understood as ultra-nationalism. Since it also applies against South Korea, however, we can say that Juche thought is anti-nationalist to the Korean nation as a whole.

The most important lesson of this article is that nationalism should be an ideology contributing to the national interest as a whole rather than for a particular person or regime. Could there be any other reasons than the maintenance of dynastic Kim regime for Juche thought to argue for severance? Do policies of isolation protect the economic development model? The answers can only be no. The most important function of Juche thought then, is to justify severance and closing and mobilize people to maintain the Kim Il Sung regime, a typical regime ideology rather than a nationalist idea.

What could be our tasks to expedite unification? How can we overcome North Korean isolation? First, North Korea needs to purge Juche thought of its element of severance and participate with us in our pursuit of mankind's universal value. This is the only way to reunify into one nation of common blood, language, culture and history. It is fortunate that North Korea has begun to reemphasize nationalism even though it was attempting to moderate proletariat internationalism and further cut itself off from the outside world.

Inducing North Korea to pursue universal values together with the rest of the international community is one way to prevent the outbreak of another Korean War, which would be

tantamount to national suicide. The task of Korean nationalism, therefore, is to realize on the Korean peninsula the conciliatory international trend after the Cold War. It should thus deepen cooperation between the two Koreas and take a step towards co-existence and co-progress of the Korean nation.

Second, although North and South Korea have not yet accomplished political unification, mutual cooperation for the greater national welfare is one way to overcome North Korea's policy of severance. The world today is undergoing a transitional era from military to economic competition. The two Koreas by shifting from the relationship of antagonism to cooperation could gain much mutual economic benefit. South Korea's capital and technology with North Korea's labor force could improve the welfare of the whole nation without too much cost and provide an opportunity for Pyongyang to revise Juche thought, which has fallen into the logic of severance and closing. To achieve this, we need a practical strategy to persuade North Korea that national independence in today's international society translates into economic competitiveness.