

Kim Il Sung: A Political Biography of the Korean Communist Leader

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From the time of the Russian Revolution, when the Korean people were first introduced to communism, to the 1980s, there have been many leaders of the Korean communist movement who have fought for the cause. Included among them have been Yi Tong-hwi, who first organized the Korean Socialist Party in 1918; his secretary Pak Chin-sun, who was active in the Executive Committee of the Comintern; Kim Chae-bong, who was the first chairman of the Korean Communist Party, organized in 1925 in Seoul; and Pak Hŏn-yŏng, who emerged as the leader of the Korean Communist Party after the liberation of Korea in 1945.¹⁾ However, the most important Korean Communist leader of the twentieth century is without question Kim Il Sung, the current North Korean President, who had headed the North Korean government ever since its founding. In fact, Kim has been in power longer than any other living head of a socialist government. He has been the only leader that the people of North Korea have known during the past four decades, and his political prowess as the leader of a small but militant communist

1) For the activities of early Korean Communist leaders, see, among others, M.T. Kim, *Koreiskie internacionalisty v borbe za vlasti sovetov na dal'nem vostoke, 1918~1922* (Moskva: Nauka, 1979).

state in East Asia has been felt not only by the big and powerful neighbors of Korea but also by third world countries across the globe.

There are a number of difficulties involved in the study of his life and politics. Detailed information on the life of any communist political leader is a closely guarded secret, and Kim is no exception. This difficulty is compounded by the fact that the story of his early development does not have its roots in Korea, and his early communist and guerrilla activities were not conducted under the auspices of the Korean communists; his early association was rather with the Chinese communists and with the Soviet authorities in the Far East. Thus, when he returned to Korea at the end of World War II, few in his own country knew of him or of his revolutionary activities. Furthermore, when he was installed by the Soviet occupation authorities in the North to Sovietize the northern half of a divided Korea, the fiercely anti-communist South denied him any recognition for his genuine anti-Japanese revolutionary activities, denouncing him as an agent of the Soviet Union. The difficulties in the study of his life and politics are still more complicated due to his insatiable appetite for self-esteem, his fabricating of a non-existent past, and his exaggeration of minuscule accomplishments so as to create the image of a model communist revolutionary who had fought to save his country, in the tradition of Lenin of the Soviet Union and Mao of China. Even the public record of his rule in the 1950s and 1960s has been distorted to justify his policies and accomplishments of the 1970s and the 1980s. His writings have been revised four times to glorify the splendor of his rule and his self-reliant ideas.

These fabrications, exaggerations, distortions, and absurd tributes notwithstanding, it is important to study his life and politics, not merely to set the record straight but more importantly to evaluate the kind of communist state that he has built in North Korea. After four decades of his rule, Kim has anointed his son to succeed him as the leader of North Korea. Although the elder Kim is still the President of the government and the General Secretary of the Workers' Party of Korea,

he has effectively turned over the daily work of government to his son.

This is a brief survey of his life and politics, covering the record of his revolutionary activities in Manchuria and the Soviet Union, his rise to power after the liberation of Korea, the challenges to his leadership, his difficulties with both China and the Soviet Union after the Sino-Soviet dispute, his efforts to be independent, his policies on reunification and the non-aligned movement, and an evaluation of the communist state he has built. It should be noted here at the outset that this is but a cursory survey, touching only on the most significant aspects of his life and politics.²⁾

I. Early Schooling and Revolutionary Activities

Kim Il Sung was born on April 15, 1912 in Pyongyang, the eldest of three sons to a couple named Kim Hyŏng-jik and Kang Pan-sŏk. His father often traveled to Manchuria; young Kim followed him and received his education there. During the six years of his elementary school education, he attended three different institutions: the first four years were at Badaogou Elementary School in Manchuria, less than two years were at Ch'angdŏk Elementary School in Ch'ilgol in Korea, and the last year was at Fusong Elementary School in Manchuria, where he finished his basic education. He advanced to middle school in Manchuria; the first institution that he entered was a Korean establishment called Hwasŏng School, which had been founded by Korean residents in Manchuria, but he later transferred to an all-Chinese institution, the Yuwen Middle School. Kim was expelled from this school and jailed for his participation in underground communist activities, and his formal

2) This is an abridged outline version of a much lengthier study on Kim Il Sung, Dae-Sook Suh, *Kim Il Sung: His Life and Politics* (forthcoming).

education ended at the eighth grade.³⁾

One reason for his frequent changing of schools was his family situation. Kim's father died in 1926, when the younger Kim finished elementary school. Three years later in 1929, when he was only seventeen, Kim was arrested for his subversive activities. He was released from jail in less than a year, but within two years his mother passed away, in July 1932, leaving Kim and his two younger brothers. Kim had no family life to speak of as a youngster, and he claims that he began anti-Japanese revolutionary activities as early as April 1932. The present North Korean People's Army traces its origin to April 25, 1932, when Kim was alleged to have organized his first guerrilla unit in Manchuria.⁴⁾

It is difficult to verify such a founding, since Kim was only a youngster of twenty years at that time. Indeed, there seems to have been no Korean communist guerrilla organization that was significant enough for the Japanese forces in Manchuria to take notice of it. Even more perplexing is the claim that Kim is said to have taught elementary-school children the tenets of Marxism and Leninism and the principle of capitalism from 1929 to 1932, the period from when he was released from jail until he founded an armed guerrilla unit. It is unthinkable for an eighth-grade expellee to teach elementary school children, but it is even more absurd for him to claim to have taught Marxism and Leninism to Korean children in the remote villages of Manchuria in the late

3) For the latest North Korean version of Kim's biography, see a three-volume study by the Workers' Party of Korea, *Widaehan suryŏng Kim Il Sung tongji chŏn'gi* (Pyongyang: Chosŏn nodongdang ch'ulp'ansa, 1982).

4) The fact that Kim had organized his first partisan army until on April 25, 1932 was not revealed until 1968. See Paek Pong, *Minjok ŭi t'aeyang Kim Il Sung changgun* (Pyongyang: Inmun kwahaksa, 1968). The Korean People's Army, the present North Korean Army, was established on February 8, 1948, but from 1978, North Koreans backdated the founding of their army to coincide with the founding of Kim's first guerrilla until on April 25, 1932 (*Nodong sinmun*, February 8, 1978).

1920s.⁵⁾

Regardless of these claims, it is important to note his awakening to the cause of communism in his youth. He had come into contact with communists and their subversive groups, and he had abandoned his unhappy family life and wandered into and willfully joined a band of guerrillas. More important than his intellectual awakening to the cause of communism is his participation in anti-Japanese, communist guerrilla activities. In contrast to his educational experience, his partisan guerrilla activities were substantial, and he did score some important victories against the Japanese. Kim claims that he organized a Korean revolutionary military unit under the banner of international communism in order to free Korea from Japan, and he claims to have fought the Japanese until the end of the Second World War, returning victoriously after the defeat of Japan.

After operating with small bands of guerrillas, the partisan unit that Kim eventually joined was a Chinese communist guerrilla force known as the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army [NEAJUA], commanded by the Chinese communist Yang Jingyu.⁶⁾ Information concerning the establishment and operation of this army has been made known by the Chinese; similarly the Japanese efforts to suppress the operation of this army are also known today. Responding to the call for a united front at the Seventh Congress of the Comintern, various units of this army were united in February 1936, and six different armies under the larger NEAJUA were proclaimed. Kim fought in the Second Army of the NEAJUA, eventually advancing to the rank of company commander of the Sixth Company of the Second Army of the NEAJUA. The person who had the greatest influence on Kim in his guerrilla days in the

5) Paek Pong, *Minjok ūi t'aeyang Kim Il Sung changgun*, op. cit., pp. 75~87.

6) For Yang Jingyu, see Ji Yunlong, *Yang Jingyu huo kanglien diyilujun* (n.p.: Dongbei, 1946); Hongqi biao biao (Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 1957~1958), vol. 5, pp. 119~123 and 124~131.

NEAJUA was his Chinese superior, Wei Zhengmin.⁷⁾

The unit Kim commanded consisted mostly of Korean partisans, and Kim fought gallantly against the Japanese, scoring some important victories. The most successful campaign Kim waged during his guerrilla days was a raid into a small Manchurian-Korean border town called Poch'ônbo, in June 1937. His unit temporarily occupied the town, killing the local Japanese police and destroying the local government offices. Kim's subsequent campaigns were equally successful, and the Japanese eventually posted a 200,000 yen reward for information leading to his arrest.⁸⁾ This amount was equal only to the reward put up for information leading to the arrest of the commander of the NEAJUA, Yang Jingyu.

At the height of his guerrilla operations from 1937 to 1940, Kim commanded as many as 300 Korean and Chinese soldiers, but at times he operated with fewer than fifty men when fighting the Japanese in Manchuria. When the Japanese organized an expeditionary force under the command of Major General Nozoe Shotoku to wipe out the anti-Japanese guerrillas, the NEAJUA was defeated, and its commander Yang Jingyu and Kim's mentor Wei Zhengmin, as well as many unit commanders, were killed in battle. The reason for the success of the Japanese expeditionary force was not only the efficient operation of the Japanese gendarmes but, more importantly, defections among the rank and file of the NEAJUA.⁹⁾ In the case of Kim, his immediate Korean superior and a long-time anti-Japanese guerrilla fighter, Chôn Kwang, defected to the Japanese and helped the latter to wipe out the Korean guerrilla units of the Second Army.

Kim, however, survived this Japanese expedition, and led a small

7) For Wei, see *Wei Manzhouguoshi* (Jinlin: Renmin chubanshe, 1980), pp. 530~533. See also Ji Yunlong, *op. cit.*

8) *Manshū kokugun* (Tokyo: Ranseikai, 1970), p. 402.

9) *Manshūkoku chianbu keimushi*, *Manshūkoku keisatsushi* (Seoul: Manshūkoku chianbu keimushi, 1942), pp. 533~542. *Manshū kokushi* (Tokyo: Manmo tōhō engōkai, 1971).

band of his men in retreat to the Soviet Union, in March 1941, by crossing the border near Meili, to the north of Vladivostok.¹⁰⁾ Kim regrouped the guerrillas who had fled Manchuria to the Soviet Union from 1941 to 1945 in the Russian Maritime Province, and he himself was trained by the Soviet army that was stationed there. During his five-year stay in the Soviet Union, Kim became one of the leaders of the Korean guerrilla units and won recognition as such from the Soviet military.¹¹⁾ It is during this time, that Kim was married to his long-time guerrilla comrade, Kim Chŏng-suk, in 1941, and the following year they had their first son, Kim Jong Il, born to them in February 1942.

Kim Chŏng-suk was born on December 24, 1919 in Hoeryŏng, Hamgyŏng pukto, and she had a background similar to that of Kim Il Sung. She went to Manchuria following her father and became an orphan, joining the guerrilla unit of the NEAJUA as a kitchen helper. She fought with Kim Il Sung, and she is said to have shielded Kim in battle, taking a bullet meant for Kim. She was also arrested and imprisoned by the Japanese, but when she was released, she rejoined Kim's forces and continued to fight against the Japanese. She bore him another son in the Soviet Union and a daughter in Pyongyang after she returned to Korea. In September 1949, long after Kim was elected head of the North Korean government, Kim Chŏng-suk died while delivering a stillborn baby. She was affectionately called Vera, a Russian name.¹²⁾

Considering the revolutionary past of most Korean independence fighters, Kim's record of guerrilla activities is commendable. He fought

10) For the record of Kim's retreat into the Soviet Union in March 1941, see, among others, *Manshū kokushi*, *op. cit.*, p. 325; *Manshū kokugun*, *op. cit.*, p. 411; also *Tokumu ihō* (May 1943), pp. 5~60.

11) See a recent study by Wada Haruki, "Kin Nichisei to Manshū no kōnichi busō tōsō," *Shisō* (July and September 1985), pp. 55~83 and pp. 39~71.

12) For Kim Chŏng-suk, see *Yōksa sajōn*, vol. 1 (Pyongyang: Sahoe kwahak ch'ulp'ansa, 1971), p. 251~54. For her activities, see *Hangil ppalchisan ch'amgaja dŭl ūi hoesanggi*, vol. 2, p. 140; vol. 7, p. 108; and vol. 10, p. 55. For her death, see *Akahata*, September 28, 1949.

the Japanese on the side of the communist revolutionaries at incredible odds, and though ultimately defeated, he persisted without surrendering to the Japanese and without compromising his principles. In his effort to build a Korean image, Kim has been reluctant to admit his past affiliation with both the Chinese and Soviet forces, but his contact with them was indeed important to his political future in liberated Korea. There were few Korean revolutionaries who were so fortunate as to have such connections with two of North Korea's most powerful neighbors. Kim also nurtured and controlled most of the guerrilla comrades he had acquired in China and the Soviet Union, and he held on to them as the mainstay of his political base in his struggle with other rival groups in North Korean politics.

II. Consolidation of Power and Challenges to Leadership

Kim returned to Korea in September 1945, arriving in Wonsan by boat from the Soviet Union. There were also many other Korean revolutionaries who returned to Korea after the defeat of Japan. Four major political groups emerged in North Korea: a group of domestic Korean Communists, who had operated within Korea and Japan; the Yanan group, who had returned from the Chinese mainland; the Soviet-Korean group, who had returned to Korea with the Soviet occupation forces, and Kim Il Sung's partisan group, who had fought in Manchuria.

Most numerous were members of the domestic group, the Korean Communist Party, which had its headquarters in the South and its branches in the North.¹³⁾ The Yanan group, also divided into groups in the South as well as in the North, was known as the New Democratic Party. The Soviet-Koreans had no roots in Korea itself, and many of them were citizens of the Soviet Union as well as members of the Soviet occupation army. Because of his four-year stay in the Russian Maritime

13) For Korean Communist activities after the liberation of Korea, see Kim Nam-sik, *Namnodang yŏn'gu* (Seoul: Tolbegae, 1984).

Province, Kim was often confused as a Soviet-Korean, but his group was distinctly different, consisting mostly of partisan guerrillas who fought the Japanese in Manchuria and who fled to the Soviet Far East in the early 1940s. Kim's partisans did not consider the Soviet-Koreans from the central Asian republics of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan to be members of their group.¹⁴⁾

Compared with the more seasoned revolutionaries of the other groups, who were well known to the people of Korea, Kim was relatively unknown and his partisans were small in number. However, Kim had two important advantages in his effort to consolidate political power in the North: one was the support of the Soviet occupation authorities, and the second was the prolonged division of Korea. There are a number of reasons why Kim was chosen as an agent of the Soviet occupation authorities in their effort to Sovietize North Korea. One reason was that the Korean communists who controlled the domestic group were not known to Stalin and other political leaders in the Soviet Union, and the Soviet occupation of the North was a military occupation to which the Kremlin did not send a Korean communist from Moscow. And the other old Korean communists who had operated in the Comintern either severed their relationship with Moscow or became Soviet citizens and retired in the Soviet Union. The 25th Division of the Soviet army that occupied the North was dispatched from the Russian Maritime Province, and the political unit of this army knew Kim as a leader of the Korean partisan guerrilla group that had operated in Manchuria and fled to the Soviet Union. Two persons who were most responsible for supporting Kim during the Soviet occupation were Major General Andrei Alekseevich Romanenko, the chief civilian administrator of the occupation, and Colonel Alexandre Mateevich Ignatiev, Kim's mentor.¹⁵⁾

14) For the study of Soviet Koreans in North Korean politics, see Dae-Sook Suh, *Koreans in the Soviet Union* (forthcoming).

15) For the Soviet account on the occupation of North Korea see *Osvo-*

Major General Romanenko knew nothing about the Korean Communists who had operated in North China with the Chinese communists, the Yanan group, and he considered Soviet-Koreans from Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan to be Soviet citizens. Under his direction, Colonel Ignatiev directed the Sovietization of North Korea by setting up Kim Il Sung as their agent.¹⁶⁾ It was Colonel Ignatiev who guided Kim through the difficult stages of organizing a mass party, the Workers' Party of Korea, and the establishing of a communist government. He remained even after the Soviet army withdrew from the North, as an advisor to Ambassador T.F. Shtykov.¹⁷⁾

While the Soviet support for Kim was crucial, the prolonged division of Korea helped him to consolidate his power in the North. The division of Korea weakened the strength of the domestic group and the Yanan group, since most of the leaders of the Korean communist Party remained in the South. Kim had to deal only with those emissaries sent to the North by Pak Hŏn-yŏng, the acknowledged leader of Korean communism. Also because of the division, Kim was not challenged by more well-known Korean revolutionaries and non-Communist political leaders such as Syngman Rhee, Kim Ku, and Kim Kyu-sik. Kim Il Sung had to contend only with those communists who returned to the North because their home domicile was in the North. By the time that the two separate governments were established in Korea, Kim was already elected Premier of the North Korean government, and those prominent Korean communists who fled the American occupation zone in the South later joined him to serve in his cabinet.

bozhdenit Korei (Moskva: Akademii Nauk, 1976).

16) See Dae-Sook Suh, "A Preconceived Formula for Sovietization: North Korea," in T.T. Hammond, ed., *The Anatomy of Communist Takeovers* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), pp. 473~489.

17) In a recent article, Wada Haruki stated his belief that Major General Romanenko knew Kim Il Sung in the Russian Maritime Province before the Soviet Union occupied North Korea (Wada Haruki, "Kin Nichisei to Manshū no kōnichi busō tōsō," *op. cit.*).

Kim was given a better than fair chance for successful competition with the other contending groups. He was elected head of the administration of the North, but he was not in control of the most important organ of any communist state, the party. The chairman of the Workers' Party of Korea was Kim Tu-bong, the head of the Yanan group. Important officers in the party were leaders of the other contending groups, and only a few of his own partisans were elected to the Central Committee of the party. Indeed, except for two persons, even the membership of his own cabinet was a mixture of representatives from the domestic and other groups.¹⁸⁾ Only a handful of Kim's partisans were elected to the Supreme People's Assembly, and the news media and propaganda networks were controlled by the Soviet-Koreans. However, the most important weapon in the consolidation of his political power was the domination by his partisans of the North Korean army and security forces. Kim's control of political power in the North can be characterized as a military takeover by the partisan guerrillas under Soviet tutelage.

Challenges to his leadership came soon enough. In less than two years after the establishment of a separate communist government in North Korea, Kim managed to launch an attack on South Korea, thus starting the Korean War. The Korean War is often analyzed as an international conflict resulting from the cold war confrontation between the East and the West. It is also often regarded as the result of collusion among the Soviet Union, China, and North Korea to expand the sphere of Communism in Asia. Because of the involvement of the United States and the United Nations in the effort to stem the tide of aggression, and because of the Chinese involvement on the side of the North in order to sustain a communist regime in Korea, the Korean War indeed had

18) For early party and government leaders, *Pauk Chosŏn nodongdang ch'angnip taehoe, checharyo* (Pyongyang: Puk Chosŏn nodongdang chungang ponbu, 1946); *Ch'oego inmin hoeŭi che ilch'a hoeŭirok* (Pyongyang: Ch'oego inmin hoeŭi sangim wiwŏnhoe, 1948).

an international character. However, domestic factors leading to the origin of the War should also be considered.¹⁹⁾

For Kim, the Korean War was an effort on the part of Korean communists to reunify their country militarily. Kim established the Korean People's Army even before the North Korean government. His partisan guerrillas trained the North Korean people for combat, sending them to participate in the Chinese civil war in Manchuria.²⁰⁾ He built his first factory in the North for the purpose of manufacturing arms, and he indoctrinated his people to fight for the reunification of their fatherland. Indeed, Kim might have succeeded in his effort, had it not been for the American intervention in the War. By the time Kim realized that his "fatherland liberation war" had turned into a conflict that he could neither win nor lose by himself, the management of the War was taken away from him and a ceasefire was agreed upon by non-Korean participants in the War.

More important to Kim was the challenge to his leadership, which came as the result of the unsuccessful conclusion to the War. Contending groups challenged Kim's leadership from the time of the Korean War itself to the time when the Chinese volunteers withdrew from Korea in 1958. The domestic group challenged Kim during the War when it became obvious that the goal of national reunification was not to be accomplished. The leaders of the domestic group, headed by Kim's Minister of Justice, Yi Sŭng-yŏp, planned to overthrow Kim and replace him with their own leader, Pak Hŏn-yŏng, then Vice-Premier and Foreign Minister. They mobilized military units and attempted a coup

19) For a North Korean account of the Korean War, see *Chayu wa tongnip ūl wihan Chosŏn inmin ūi chŏngŭi ūi choguk haebang chŏnjaeng* (Pyongyang: Chosŏn nodongdang ch'ulp'ansa, 1954).

20) There were many Korean Communists in Manchuria. See, for example, Kim Kwang-hyŏp's participation in the Northeast Interim People's Committee in Liu Baiyu, *Huanxing dongbei* (Shanghai: Fangsheng chubanshe, 1946), pp. 105~110; Zhou Erfu, *Dongbei hengduanmian* (n.p.: Jinri chubanshe, 1946), pp. 129~132.

to oust Kim in early 1953, but Kim and his partisans crushed them mercilessly. Twelve conspirators were arrested, tried, and convicted, and ten members were executed.²¹⁾

Also, during the Korean War, Hō Ka-i, the highest ranking Soviet-Korean, presented Kim with party organization problems and the expulsion of disloyal party members. Kim swiftly dealt him a blow, that was hard enough to drive Hō to commit suicide.²²⁾ Because of the Chinese participation in the Korean War and the subsequent Chinese occupation of North Korea for five years, many Soviet-Koreans returned to the Soviet Union. Those Soviet-Koreans who remained in North Korea suffered from the political changes that occurred within the Soviet Union in the 1950s, such as the death of Stalin, the de-Stalinization campaign, and the issue of collective leadership.

Shortly after the third party congress, the Yanan group, headed by Ch'oe Ch'ang-ik and supported by a few previously admonished members of the Soviet-Korean group, including Pak Ch'ang-ok, challenged Kim's leadership during his trip to the Soviet Union in June and July of 1956. The Yanan group downgraded one-man dictatorial rule in favor of collective leadership in North Korea, and they also countered Kim's plan for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of North Korea by advocating the production and distribution of more consumer goods instead of an emphasis on heavy industry.²³⁾ Here again, Kim's partisans were mobilized to oust the majority of the Yanan group from the party and

21) *Mijeguk chu'ui koyong kanch'ŏp Pak Hŏn-yŏng, Yi Sŭng-yŏp todang ūi Chosŏn minju chu'ui inmin konghwaguk chŏnggwŏn chŏnbok ūmmo wa kanch'ŏp sagŏn kongp'anmunhŏn* (Pyongyang: Chosŏn minjuju'ui inmin konghwaguk ch'oeo chaep'anso, 1956).

22) Kim Il Sung, *Tang tanch'e dŭl ūi chojik saŏp esŏ ūi myŏtkaji kyŏlham dŭl ūi taehayŏ* (Pyongyang: Chosŏn nodongdang ch'ulp'ansa, 1951), pp. 3~85; Kim Il Sung, *Nodongdang ūi chojikchŏk sasangjŏk kanghwa nŭn sŭngni ūi kich'o* (Pyongyang: Chosŏn nodongdang ch'ulp'ansa, 1953), pp. 2~73.

23) Paek Pong, *Minjok ūi t'aeyang Kim Il Sung changgun, op. cit.*, pp. 399~403. See also *Kim Il Sung sŏnjip*, 2nd ed., vol. 5, pp. 359~393.

government posts, eventually expelling Kim Tu-bong, the former chairman of the Party. Most of the Soviet-Koreans then returned to the Soviet Union.

It is true that his challengers were inefficient and disorganized, but in any case Kim met his challengers masterfully, and by the time of the fourth party congress in 1961, he had not only solidified his political power but also declared himself self-reliant and independent from the influences of both the Soviet Union and China.

III. The Sino-Soviet Dispute and Korean Identity

Kim succeeded in establishing absolute power by the time of the fourth party congress in 1961. Indeed, there was no group except the partisans who could challenge him. Kim worked hard himself not only to fend off political challenges by his rival groups but also to indoctrinate his people in total devotion to the building of a new communist society in North Korea. He launched numerous campaigns to mobilize the people to reconstruct the cities and countryside, which had been ruined by the War. He pinned medals on the workers for their toil, exhorting them to be competitive in exceeding the goals set by the party and to work for love of country and not in expectation of material reward.²⁴⁾

However, Kim's more immediate problem in the 1960s was international relations, because he was caught in the middle at the height of the Sino-Soviet dispute. During the first half of the 1960s, Kim was engaged in a virulent feud with the Soviet Union, and during the second half of the decade, he became the target of attacks by the Chinese Red

24) Kim Il Sung, *Sahoe chu'ni kyŏngje kwalli munje e taehayŏ*, 3 vols. (Pyongyang: Chosŏn nodongdang ch'ulp'ansa, 1970). See also Kim Il Sung, *Chosŏn nodongdang chesach'a taehoe esŏ han chungang wiwŏnhoe saŏp ch'onghwa pogo* (Pyongyang: Chosŏn nodongdang ch'ulp'ansa, 1961).

Guards. These were unfortunate encounters with two of his benefactors, the Soviet Union and China, but because of the Sino-Soviet dispute Kim was led to seek his Korean identity and to expand his horizons to the third world, and subsequently he joined the non-aligned movement.

During the initial stage of the Sino-Soviet dispute, Kim was extremely cautious, trying to maintain North Korean neutrality. In the name of unity in the Socialist camp, Kim insisted without success on the solidarity of the international communist movement.²⁵ However when the dispute reached the point of open vituperation, North Korea supported China, thus opening a Soviet-Korean dispute. When the Soviet Union and East European Communist countries began to attack North Korea for its support of China, North Korea attacked the Soviet Union on two subjects: one was the Soviet interpretation of Korean history and the other was on the economic relations between the Soviet Union and North Korea.

Three North Korean historians led the attack in September 1963 on the Soviet study of Korean history, accusing Soviet scholars for less than adequate understanding of Korea. They criticized the Soviet historians for mechanically copying the works of Japanese scholars and their colonial mentality; the Koreans stated that had the Soviets read the Chinese works on Korea, their understanding of Korean history would have been improved. On the substance of Korean history, the North Koreans faulted everything that the Soviet scholars wrote from the founding of Korea to the interpretation of the contemporary history of 1930s.²⁶

On economic relations, North Koreans summarily rejected the Soviet

25) *Chajusŏng ŭl ongho haja* (Pyongyang: Chosŏn nodongdang ch'ulp'ansa, 1966) ; *Nodong sinmun*, August 12, 1966.

26) See the entire text of the North Korean attack in *Nodong sinmun*, September 20, 1963. Three North Korean historians were Kim Sŏk-hyŏng, Kim Hŭi il, and Son Yŏng-jong. They attacked the Russian work, *Vse-mirnaia istoriia*, by the Akademiia nauk, SSSR (Moskva: Gos. izd-vo polit, lit., 1955~1957).

ridicule of North Korean economic plans. More specific allegations came when the Soviet Union ridiculed the Asian Economic Seminar that was held in June 1964 in Pyongyang.²⁷⁾ The North Koreans revealed that the Soviet Union in the past had sold building materials and Soviet manufactured goods at a price much higher than the international market price, and in return had carted away from Korea tons of gold bullion and a large quantity of nonferrous metals at a price much lower than the international market price.²⁸⁾

After the fall of Khrushchev in October, 1964, North Korean relations with the Soviet Union did improve. A number of Soviet leaders, such as Premier Kosygin and Alexandr N. Shelepin, came to Pyongyang to improve relations, and for Kim's part, it was imperative that he renew close ties with the Soviet Union: at this time the South Koreans were moving to help the United States in the Vietnam War, and a Normalization Treaty was being concluded between Japan and South Korea that promised rapid economic growth in the South.

In the latter half of the 1960s, the Chinese Cultural Revolution reached North Korea, and the Red Guards in China began to put up wall posters denouncing Kim starting from 1967. One poster speculated on a coup in North Korea by General Kim Kwang-hyöp, a partisan, and another accused Kim Il Sung of being a revisionist for his refusal to send North Korean volunteers to assist North Vietnam. A Red Guard journal in Guangzhou in February 1968 branded Kim Il Sung a counter-revolutionary and a capitalist, building for himself numerous villas in the most scenic places in Korea and living like an emperor of bygone days.²⁹⁾ These were mere accusations, but more serious was a territorial

27) *Pravda*, August 18, 1964. A Korean version of this article appeared in *Nodong sinmun*, September 7, 1964.

28) *Nodong sinmun*, October 6, 1964 ; October 19, 1964 ; December 3, 1964 ; and December 21, 1964.

29) "Jinri chaoxiu jituan," *Wenge tongxun*, no. 1 (February 15, 1968). For the Red Guard posters, see restricted documents, in *North Korea, 1945~1967* (n.p.: n.d.), pp. 27~28.

dispute between North Korea and China surrounding *Paektusan*, the highest mountain in North Korea, considered by Kim to be a sacred sanctuary from his revolutionary past.³⁰⁾ In this dispute with China, Kim kept his vigilance and maintained a firm stance without yielding to Chinese accusations. Kim did not engage the Chinese in a running dialog, but toward the end of the 1960s a relaxation of tensions between China and Korea was made possible by changes within China, namely, the end of the Cultural Revolution. In April 1970, Zhou Enlai visited Kim in Pyongyang, and normal relations were restored.

As a result of these difficult encounters with the Soviet Union and China, Kim looked elsewhere to broaden his horizons, and he decided to expand North Korean relations with the third world. Instead of making a visit to Moscow or Beijing, Kim went to Indonesia in April 1965, receiving a honorary doctorate from an Indonesian university. He also put an end to any national celebration commemorating either the Soviet liberation of Korea on August 15 or the Chinese participation in the Korean War on October 25. He proclaimed that only those dates that had any direct relevance to North Korea, such as his own birthday (April 15), the founding of the state (September 9), and the founding of the party (October 10) should be celebrated. The only international day that he continued to observe was May Day.

On the occasion of the Second Party Conference in October 1966, Kim broke his silence and declared North Korean independence in the international communist movement.³¹⁾ He stated that the international communist movement was experiencing trials and tribulations because of modern revisionism and dogmatism. Koreans, he said, had been the victims of big-power chauvinism and harbored bitter memories of inter-

30) For the Sino-Korean territorial dispute, there is a good map, showing the disputed territory, in the Department of State, *China-Korea Boundary*, no. 17 (June 29, 1962).

31) Kim Il Sung, *The Present Situation and the Tasks of Our Party*(Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1968).

ference in Korean affairs. His people were also mindful of a modern revisionism that tended to reject class struggle. There were those who would accuse the Koreans of eclecticism and opportunism, of taking the road of unprincipled compromise, and straddling two chairs. But, Kim said the Koreans had their own chair and need not sit uncomfortably straddling two non-Korean chairs.

This declaration of independence by Kim was costly in terms of North Korean economic development. His ambitious seven-year economic plan was extended three years to make it an unprecedented ten-year plan. Intermittent and uncertain Soviet military assistance forced the North Koreans to devote more resources to their self-defense forces, and their military outlays increased steadily, taxing heavily the projected economic development. Kim's problem was compounded by the fact that South Korea was making great strides in its economic development in the late 1960s as a result of the influx of Japanese capital into Korea. Furthermore, South Korean military forces were participating in the Vietnam war; as a consequence, a heightened military vigilance in the North tended to lead to the promotion of more military men on active duty to political prominence in North Korea.

Indeed, it was the rise of the partisan generals in the late 1960s that brought the North to the brink of war. The eleven-member Political Committee of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea consisted entirely of partisans, without a single technocrat.³²⁾ All partisans were professional military men, and many were still on active duty. With this kind of composition in the highest policy making committee, Kim's orientation turned toward militancy, and the unchecked prominence of these professional military men tended to cause the committee to overreact to the slightest provocation. It was under these

32) See the various lineups of North Korean party leaders at various stages of party congresses and conferences, in Dae-Sook Suh and Chae-jin Lee, *The Political Leadership in Korea* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1976), pp. 159~191.

circumstances that North Korea sent a commando team to assassinate President Park Chung Hee of South Korea, captured the American spy ship *Pueblo*, and shot down an EC-121 reconnaissance plane.³³⁾

Kim ended the difficult decade of the 1960s by purging most of his partisan generals by the time of the fifth party congress in 1970. Kim's partisan generals had transformed their military prominence into political influence, and they had taken Kim to the edge of a precipice too often with their wild adventurism. It is also during this decade that Kim took his second wife, Kim Sŏng-ae, and her presence was very much in evidence when Kim entertained many heads-of-state in the 1970s.³⁴⁾

IV. Reunification Policy and Third World Policy

The events of the 1970s and the 1980s brought rapid changes, including a realignment in the old East-West confrontation. In addition to the continuing feud between China and the Soviet Union, there was the Sino-American rapprochement and the Soviet-Japanese and Sino-Japanese peace treaties. Kim adopted two measures to cope with the changing political environment; one was to open negotiations with South Korea to explore the possibility of peaceful reunification, and the other was to solidify his ties with the third world countries. In both of these endeavors, Kim was less than successful because he refused to modify his basically militant attitude toward the South, and he tried blatantly to promote himself as the leader of the third world.

In dealing with the South, his basic attitude of winning the South over to the cause of communism had not changed, and he maintained a hard-line policy to subjugate the South and force an agreement. The

33) *Invincible is the Korean People's Army Founded and Trained by Ever-Victorious, Iron-Willed Genius Commander, Marshal Kim Il Sung* (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1968).

34) It is generally considered that Kim took his second wife in the summer of 1963.

initial negotiations conducted in July 1972 brought about an agreement between the North and the South on three principles for the reunification of Korea: to maintain the independence of the country after reunification, to reunify the country peacefully, and to bring about a great national unity transcending ideological differences.³⁵⁾ Kim later revealed that what he meant by these principles was to drive out the United States from South Korea, to halt the military improvement and modernization programs of the South, and to strengthen the anti-government democratic forces in South Korea.³⁶⁾

Subsequently Kim announced a five-point policy for reunification,³⁷⁾ but this was also abandoned with the excuse that the South Korean government was suppressing political dissidents and opposition leaders. Kim stated that he would not negotiate with the South so long as President Park was in power, and when in fact President Park was assassinated in 1979, Kim revived his effort to reunify the country, outlining his ten-point policy for national reunification at the time of the sixth party congress in October 1980.³⁸⁾ Kim advocated a Supreme National Council and the creation of a confederal republic. He also advocated the development of a national economy, the establishment of transportation and communication networks throughout Korea, and the creation of a combined national army.

This may represent a change in his hard line and militant policy, but when the South proposed a meeting of the supreme leaders of both

35) Kim Il Sung, *On Some Problems of Our Party's Chuch'e Idea and the Government of the Republic's Internal and External Policies* (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1972).

36) For Kim's explanation, see Kim Il Sung, *Talk With the Managing Editor of the Japanese Politico-Theoretical Magazine, Sekai* (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1972), pp. 24~34.

37) Kim Il Sung, *Let Us Prevent a National Split and Reunify the Country* (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1973), pp. 5~17.

38) Kim Il Sung, *Report to the Sixth Congress of the Workers' Party of Korea on the Work of the Central Committee* (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1980).

North and South Korea, Kim immediately rejected the proposal, condemning the new South Korean president for his brutal suppression of the Kwangju uprising. Instead, North Korea proposed a joint meeting of one hundred political leaders from both North and South in February 1982. The problem with such a proposal was that it displayed a condescending attitude on the part of North Korea; the latter stated its own choices for the members of the South Korean delegation to the meeting, and these included South Korean political dissidents.

But whatever the various proposals and policies, the fundamental problem of Kim's reunification policy is still the matter of trust. The South Korean people basically do not trust Kim and his pronouncements. Indeed, it is hard to believe conciliatory reunification proposals from the North when it has a record that includes North Korean terrorists attempting to murder the South Korean President and the killing of government officials in Rangoon, Burma. It seems that Kim's basic objective of reunifying the South by incorporating the South into the North has not changed. Kim still advocates a fundamental reunification policy through strengthening the North Korean base, enlarging the revolutionary forces in the South, and consolidating international revolutionary influence—in other words, he aims, to achieve reunification by overthrowing the South Korean regime.

In dealing with the third world countries, Kim was successful in having the North included in the conference of non-aligned nations, and he was also successful in having many of the third world countries recognize his Republic and endorse North Korean resolutions in the United Nations,³⁹⁾ but he failed dismally in his foremost objective: to project himself as the leader of the third world.

In his effort to win recognition for North Korea in the third world, Kim and his government officials traveled widely. Kim collected yet

39) *Yearbook of the United Nations*, vol. 29 (New York: Office of Public Information of the United Nations, 1978), pp. 193~204.

another honorary degree from Algeria in May 1975, and he granted many interviews to foreign correspondents, publicizing his firm stance against the imperialistic designs of the big powers, particularly those of the United States in Korea. Kim entertained lavishly, lining up young school girls on both sides of the streets of Pyongyang to welcome many obscure heads of state from African nations. Such names as Mobut Sese Seko Kuku Ngbendu Wa Za Banga were not necessarily Korean household words and few North Korean children knew in which continents or oceans such small countries as Sao Tome or Principe or the Seychelles were located.

Kim also established, at great cost to the people of the North, many centers in remote corners of Africa and Latin America for the study of his ideas, and he also sent elaborate art troupes to tour the globe to propagandize his brand of socialism. He hosted conferences and workshops to disseminate his "thought" and his style of socialist patriotism, but he won few converts. Except for those he supported financially, none of the third world leaders looked to him personally for inspiration.

His efforts were not all in vain, however. When he first established a Republic in the North, only seven countries recognized his government. During the first decade only four more countries recognized the North, but over the next two decades ninety-nine countries accorded recognition to his government, bringing the total to 110 countries.⁴⁰⁾ He was successful in having the United Nations pass a resolution in favor of the North, but he soon learned the limits of his policy and of the support of the non-aligned movement. What he needed for North Korea was not the support of the third world but the cooperation of the technologically advanced, industrialized countries to develop its economy.

40) For North Korean diplomatic relations, see Byung Chul Koh, *The Foreign Policy Systems of North and South Korea* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 11~14. See also Tai Sung An, *North Korea: A Political Handbook* (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1983), pp. 80~82.

In this regard, Kim is too proud to ask for assistance from the latter and too poor to buy their technology.

V. The Republic of Kim Il Sung

Kim may have had only limited success in his efforts in the third world, and he may have failed to reunify the South, but his success in the North is unquestionable. He rewrote the Constitution of the Republic in 1972, incorporating his ideas as the principle of governance of the North, and he had himself elected President of the Republic while still maintaining his position as the General Secretary of the ruling party. He gradually shifted political power from the party to the state; for example, instead of using the Political Committee of the party as a power base, he transferred his political authority to the Central People's Committee of the Supreme People's Assembly.

Kim had his birthdays greeted with elaborate fanfare, building himself the largest monuments ever constructed by the Koreans in their history. His absolute power surpassed that exercised by the traditional Korean kings. His words are law and his slightest whim is the command of the people. He may have crowned himself with personal glories and forced the people to cater to his every fancy, but what he has built during the past four decades resembles more his own personal kingdom than a communist state, and the people he rules resemble more his loyal subjects than a new communist humanity. As a result, it is not the communist or socialist system built by him that has produced a successor to the leadership; rather it is Kim who has appointed his son heir to his personal domain.

There are many provisions in the new constitution to indicate that it has apotheosized his rule in the North. Kim's ideas are canonized as the only principles of the state, and his revolutionary tradition as the only cultural heritage of the people. His usurpation of legislative power has been blatant, and there is no legislation that has not been passed unani-

mously. Although he is regularly elected for a four-year term, no one questions the legality when he has served beyond his term. The constitution stipulates that the term of office may be extended to the time of the next election only when unavoidable circumstances render the election impossible, but his every term of office has been extended, and no election has been held on time. No one serves in the top government posts, including the vicepresidents, the members of the Central People's Committee, and the Administrative Council, without the recommendation of the President. All judicial branch workers including judges and procurators are accountable for their work to Kim. While the constitution stipulates that the Court is independent in administering the law, the Central Court, the highest court in the North, is accountable to the President of the Republic.⁴¹⁾

Kim's cult of personality eclipses that of such Communist leaders as Stalin of the Soviet Union and Mao of China in scope, magnitude, and fervor. Kim's cult requires not only subjugation to him but also reverence for his parents and loyalty to his son, and so on, generation after generation. Kim does not practice communism in the Democratic People's Republic but a peculiar brand of oriental despotism.

Kim is rarely called President, and he is commonly referred to as the Supreme Leader. Kim used to call Lenin the Supreme Leader of the Soviet Union, and he called Stalin the "Godfather of the Korean People."⁴²⁾ He also called Mao the Supreme Leader of the Chinese People, but under his new self-reliant ideology, he now refers only to himself the Supreme Leader. Kim is feasting on his subjects' slavish adulation and absolute submission. His photograph is displayed ahead of the national flag and the song of Marshal Kim Il Sung is sung ahead of the

41) For the North Korean constitution, see *On the Socialist Constitution of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea* (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1975).

42) *Pravda*, August 15, 1952. Also in *Kim Il Sung Sŏn'jip*, 1st ed., vol. 4 (Pyongyang: Chosŏn nodongdang ch'ulp'ansa, 1953), pp. 255~279.

national anthem.

For his sixtieth birthday, he built himself a revolutionary museum in marble that recorded a much exaggerated version of his revolutionary past; he built a bronze statue of himself painted in gold that stands sixty-six feet high. For his seventieth birthday, an Arch of Triumph slightly larger than the one in Paris was built for him decorated with seventy carved Korean azaleas, marking each year that he had lived. A "Tower of *Chuch'e* Idea" was also built to commemorate his seventieth birthday. The tower is said to be the tallest stone tower in the world, and it stands 170 meters—one meter taller than the Washington monument in the United States. It is built with 25,550 blocks of white granite, each stone marking each day Kim lived until his seventieth birthday. This is not all: the North Koreans have renovated the old Pyongyang stadium, and renamed it Kim Il Sung stadium—also to commemorate his seventieth birthday. This stadium has a seating capacity larger than the one built in Seoul for the summer Olympics.

Kim's record is indeed impressive; not only has his rule been long, but also his accomplishments have been many. Exaggeration of his accomplishments, fabrication of his record, and unusual tributes to him do disservice to this true record of accomplishment. His revolutionary activities in Manchuria, his consolidation of power, his meeting of the challenges to his leadership, his conduct in the Soviet-Korean and Sino-Korean disputes, and his subsequent declaration of North Korean independence are all creditable. Where he has difficulty is in his failure to build and refine a socialist or communist political system in the North. What he has built in the North is a republic in name only to accommodate his personal rule, and not the communist system of government for which so many Korean communists worked and died. In this sense, Kim has betrayed the hopes of all the Korean communists, past and present, who sacrificed their lives for the cause of communism in Korea.