

The Emotional Dimensions of North Korean Politics through the Lens of Historical Institutionalism

Hwajung Kim¹

This study explores the following research question to address issues linked to emotions, identity, and institutions: how has the cult (institution) of the three Kims affected North Koreans' strong sense of nationalism (emotion), which is based on their Juche ideology (identity)? This paper investigates four fundamental elements of historical institutionalism: time boundedness, path dependency, institutional changes, and the shadow of the past. First, time boundedness illustrates how culture and education have been used to build trust and loyalty in the general public to construct individual and family cults. Second, path dependence reveals how the Songbun system has resulted in strong nationalism throughout Rodongdang's institutionalization. Third, institutional changes highlight the significance of age divides, as different age groups do not always support the three Kims' cult. Finally, the shadow of the past helps us understand the primary processes for generating mass ardent nationalism in the form of powerful impulses for self-sacrifice.

Keywords: North Korea, The cult of the three Kims, Emotions, Historical institutionalism

¹ Hwajung Kim is a Research Professor at the Institute for International and Area Studies from Ewha Womans University. Please contact the author via hwajungkim@ewha.ac.kr. This work was supported by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea and the National Research Foundation of Korea (NRF-2021S1A5B5A16078325). Author is very grateful to the anonymous reviewers and editors of JCEA for one of the most thoughtful and constructive review processes I have ever participated in.

©2022 This is an Open Access paper distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-No Derivative Works License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. However, the work may not be altered or transformed.

1. Introduction

In North Korea (the Democratic People's Republic of Korea or DPRK), politics transcends economics (Kwon & Chung, 2012). One-party politics (as exercised by Rodongdang, the Workers' Party of Korea or WPK) has made this possible. The country has utilized political ideology, the deification of the Kim family, the socio-political classification of the populace (as in the Songbun system), and forced labor to achieve the country's political agenda, namely the military-first policy while developing and institutionalizing Rodongdang.

There are challenges stemming from the decline of the Soviet Union and the socialist bloc, globalization, and worldwide democratization, not to mention the impacts of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Revolution. Challenges such as these make North Korea even more closed and alienated as opposed to open and globalizing, while it maintains high levels of persecution and execution to keep people fearful and controllable. Some scholars foretell of regime collapse due to perceived cracks in the system, cleavages within the country, and the ultimate limitations of fear-based culture as attested to by defectors (Baek, 2016, pp. 214-239); however, the unpredictability of the country's behavior and the shroud of uncertainty that envelops it make any predictions inherently very tenuous.

What has sustained North Korea thus far? One important strategy for regime survival can be found in the one-party political structure of Rodongdang, based on the Juche (self-reliance) ideology, which has facilitated the successful transitions of leadership from Kim Il Sung to Kim Jung Il, as well as from Kim Jung Il to Kim Jung Un, while securing the personality cult of the Kim family, which is called Juche politics. This has led to a scholarly effort to understand the regime through institutionalism. Lim Jae-Cheon, one of the leading scholars in the field of institutionalism, has contributed to the significant theoretical development of North Korean studies since his thought-provoking article regarding the institutionalization of the cult of the Kims by taking the cult as an institution (Lim & Yoo, 2010).

Another strategy appears in the Arduous March, which allowed both previous leaders, Kim Il Sung and Kim Jung Il, to overcome severe national suffering and deprivation and which is also likely to continue to give Kim Jung Un the best policy options for breakthroughs moving forward. The idea of the Arduous March, also born out of Juche ideology (Kim, 2017; Koo, 1992; Lee, 2003), appeals to people's dedication and encourages self-sacrifice to avoid repeating colonial history in ways that enhance the emotive power of the leader, who then reigns over people with a cult of personality. Moreover, a recent study (Institute for Peace and Unification Studies, 2018, p.119) shows that the favorability of North Koreans toward Kim Jung Un's Juche politics has increased despite social challenges caused by requests for openness and marketization from international society. Certainly, an emotional dimension is a girder in the edifice of North Korean politics; nevertheless, there has not been much research along this avenue. Therefore, to understand and predict the regime in which Juche ideology established the national identity of North Koreans, we need to look at it from both an institutional and an emotional point of view.

This paper aims to solve puzzles related to emotions, identity, and institutions by exploring the following research question: how has the cult (institution) of the three Kims affected North Koreans' strong sense of nationalism (emotion), which is based on their Juche ideology (identity)? To answer these questions, the study incorporates four main factors of historical institutionalism (time boundedness, path dependency, institutional changes, and the shadow of the past) into analysis, and attempts to develop theoretical propositions that can be applied to future similar cases of political institutions in an authoritarian regime.

Section 2 provides a literature review for a conceptual approach by incorporating emotions into historical institutionalism. Section 3 provides a fourfold analysis of North Korea according to the following four aspects of historical institutionalism: (1) time boundedness, (2) path dependency, (3) institutional change, and (4) the shadow of the past. In Section 4, the results of the analysis are summed up, and some conclusions about North Korean politics are drawn.

2. Literature Review

North Korean studies have been contested due to a lack of applicable theories (Kwon & Chung, 2012). Lim Jae-Cheon, a notable scholar on the subject of institutionalism, has made major contributions to North Korean studies' theoretical growth. The cult as an institution affects and even controls North Koreans' behaviors through symbols created by North Korea for the family cult, such as portraits, prestige, buildings, historical sites, ceremonies, rituals, and anniversaries; thereby, cult activities are carried out by North Koreans in their everyday organizational lives, which are littered with cult symbols (Lim & Yoo, 2010, p. 29). This perception is aligned with normative institutionalism, which tells us that a logic of appropriateness comprehending values, symbols, methods, and routines shape the behaviors of institutions and the individuals they comprise (March & Olsen, 2010).

Normative institutionalism facilitates a greater understanding of North Korean politics than rational-choice institutionalism because it draws attention to the individual's rationality and utility to maximize their own personal interests, through which dynamic the designers of institutions can achieve their intentions simply by creating the right combinations of incentives and disincentives to promote equilibria in situations (Eriksson, 2009). However, among the three major approaches to institutionalism, only historical institutionalism can provide both a view of institutional development over time and a conception of change. That is, historical institutionalism can explain how institutions affect the behavior of individuals, actors, and institutions, and can also explain why institutions persist in the long run (Hall & Taylor, 1996). Historical institutionalism, therefore, with its four main features, can be a useful tool to better understand why and how the cult has sustained the Kim family's omnipresent power over its people.

The first feature is time boundedness. The relationship between institutions and action can induce institutional settings that may ossify over time into worldviews, which are then propagated by formal organizations, ultimately shaping even the self-image and basic preferences of the actors involved in them, particularly because those settings with their worldviews are the outcomes of a

confluence of historical forces (Ikenberry, 1988). The second feature is path dependency. Institutions are seen as relatively persistent features of the historical landscape as well as central factors that push historical development along certain paths (Krasner, 1988). Institutional structures are considered to be collections of rules, norms, roles, and physical arrangements that are all relatively resilient to individuals' idiosyncratic preferences and expectations (March & Olsen, 1983). Third, institutional change is episodic and coercive (Ikenberry, 1988; Krasner, 1984). Although unintended consequences and inefficiencies can occur within existing institutions, changes in the international system are likely to occur as the disjuncture grows between the existing system of governance and the power within it (Gilpin, 1981). Lastly, the shadow of the past reflects the causal complexity that is due to the preexisting structures of social relations and their often unintended outcomes (Ikenberry, 1988). Actors within institutions may affect or mediate the institutional positions and efficacies of social forces with their political choices, thereby effectualizing the final feature of historical institutionalism—contingent historical analysis.

Meanwhile, I would argue that the theory of emotional beliefs dovetails with theoretical emotional factors in world politics (Bleiker & Hutchison, 2007; Koschut, 2020) and further develops ideas on how behaviors are affected at the institutional level. An emotional belief (such as trust, nationalism, justice, or credibility) can be found where "emotion constitutes and strengthens a belief" and has predictable effects since emotion is not an irrational force (Mercer, 2010, p. 8). Emotion should be taken, instead, as an assimilation mechanism because it supports the selection and interpretation of evidence, which helps make interpretations predictable. In addition, an ability to experience emotion facilitates and enhances wise strategic decision-making because it enables one to imagine the emotions of others, whereas incapacity, in this regard, undercuts one's analytical approach. This brings to mind the issue of how emotions and strategies are correlated in the waging of war, particularly because emotions affect attitudes, beliefs, and decision-making (Dolan, 2016). In addition, emotion carries utility, and emotion in persuasion underlines that one should treat people with dignity and respect to influence their beliefs.

In particular, Jonathan Mercer's study on social emotion and identity uncovers missing pieces between emotions and national identity by distinguishing group-level emotion from individual-level emotion, differentiating the emotional dimensions of in-groups and those of out-groups, and conceptualizing the dynamics between in-group and out-group identification (Mercer, 2014). Positive in-group feelings and in-group identification have been proven to have a substantial association: the more favorable one's feelings toward one's group are, the more one identifies with it, and vice versa; the greater one's in-group identification is, the angrier one gets at an out-group (Mercer, 2014, p. 522). One's feelings about one's own group have an impact on how one feels about other groups.

This perspective on emotion and identity provides insight into the cult of the Kim family as seen through historical institutionalism, since the cult as an institution needs to have a foundation of common emotional beliefs, such as political ideologies, which construct its norms, and rules, understandings, and routines. Such a foundation of political ideology consequently influences and inspires the behavior of an actor who, in the course of institutionalization, can possibly be seen as

rational rather than irrational or emotional. As ideology and identity are intersecting social concepts in terms of ethnicity, nationalism, and identitarianism (Malesevic, 2006), political ideology, such as Juche ideology, constructs the national identity of North Koreans.

The overwhelming force of nationalism (emotion), based on the dominant ideology of Juche (identity), sheds light on the importance of emotion as a performative factor in North Korean politics; thus, the cult (institution) of the three Kims must be carefully investigated to reveal what affects the emotional dimension of North Korean politics. This study looks at the change from Kim Il Sung to Kim Jung Il and from Kim Jung Il to Kim Jong Un through four aspects of historical institutionalism—time boundedness, path dependency, institutional changes, and the shadow of the past. To solve these puzzles, official state media (i.e., Jungang TV, Rodong Sinmun), speeches (as archived in Unikorea’s Portal of the South or as released by the North), official documents, publications, and cultural products are used as primary data sources. In addition, the study thoroughly examines secondary data sources, such as Chosun Monthly (magazine), Chosunsinbo, the CIA’s World Factbook, the Daily NK (an Internet periodical), as well as conference proceedings and peer-reviewed articles.

3. Analysis of North Korea

3.1 Time Boundedness

The three Kims have utilized culture and education for Juche implementation and execution, strengthening emotional beliefs in that ideology and laying the foundation for a cult of personality in domestic politics to justify, enforce, and secure the legitimacy of the paternal lineage of the Kim family. This is how Juche has become the backbone of North Korean politics. In fact, it has been found that the association of effects over time with power succession intensifies the degree of emotional belief enhancement in terms of trust and loyalty.

Trust has intensified the relationship between each leader and individuals in the course of developing cultural policies. In its early stages, North Korea preferred using the word “culture” when giving titles, such as Head of Cultural Department, to party members. “Culture” thus became a political terminology as well as a propagandistic tool by which to infuse arts and culture with revolutionary thought, implement Juche ideas, and manipulate people by creating a cult of personality. In a 1946 speech, Kim Il Sung proclaimed that the “Munwha-in (cultural man)” must become a fighter on the enemy lines of culture, indicating “culture” in the broader sense as an ideological battlefield (Unikorea). North Korea became actively involved in producing cultural products to engage people, stressing that the working class (Inmin) should be both creators and consumers of arts and culture (Chung, 2010). The DPRK government implemented preferential policies for cultural artists and acknowledged them as “Inmin actors” or “meritorious actors.” Since then, cultural artists have been held in high esteem by the North Korean people. In doing so, individuals became autonomous supporters of the regime with a high degree of pride.

This process of the politicization of culture extended down to the everyday lives of the common

people, strengthening their belief in the cult of personality and creating closer ties between individuals and the political system. One of the unique methods employed by Kim Il Sung was called “on-site guidance,” or visiting residents in person to deliver words, messages, and teachings (Kwon & Chung, 2012). This helped develop the cult of personality, establish the initial legitimacy of his regime, and provide intimate interactions with individuals that also raised the degree of trustworthiness.

Under Kim Jung Il’s regime, the fields of art and culture flourished, and were dedicated to Juche implementation and execution by professing the immortality and eternity of Kim Il Sung under the religious aspect of Juche (Kurbanov, 2019; Myers, 2010). This reinforced the legitimacy of North Korea’s politics as reigned over by the cult of the Kim family. In the 1980s, Kim Jung Il promoted a “literary and artistic revolution” that embedded Juche in every field of art and culture, and coined new terminology such as “Juche Aesthetics,” “Juche Music Theory,” and “Juche Literary Theory.” This period was the height of the success of Juche literature and arts. Kim Jung Il promoted the cultural policy of Gunjung-hwa, obliging the public to become involved in the process of literary and arts creation. Authorities sent a letter to participants in the National Conference of Literature Correspondents held in 1982. In the letter, the role of the correspondents was highly emphasized to encourage people to engage with and popularize cultural works. Consequently, culture played a significant role in creating sympathy, enthusiasm, and loyalty in individuals, who participated in the process of literary and artistic creation.

Loyalty was amplified due to Kim Jung Il’s “Songun Literary Policy” laid out in the next phase, as he nominated his son Kim Jung Un as the future third leader of the Kim dynasty during the collapse of the Soviet Union and socialist allies in Eastern European countries in the 1990s. Becoming a nuclear power signified the greatness of the three Kims with a high degree of loyalty from individuals (Kim, 2021; Lim & Ko, 2020). In a continuation of Songun politics, Kim Jong Un accomplished the task started by his predecessors, secured the country’s legitimacy in world politics, and justified the paternal lineage of the Kim family to rule over the party and the people (Mo, 2021). Although Kim Jong Un’s focus on arts and culture infused with Juche seems to be less prominent than that of Kim Jong Il, he has introduced and developed broader subfields of culture (i.e., sports, contemporary arts, electronic music, science, technology, and digital cultural contents) to keep up with the constantly changing environment of the digital age. A series of cultural policies of Kim Jong Un, such as education reforms, global city plans for Pyongyang, housing construction plans, and the establishment of amusement parks and entertainment facilities, have accelerated North Korea’s transition toward a modern state. Despite the social changes caused by marketization, North Koreans hold positive views on the charismatic personalities of Kim Jong Un and his leadership (Park, Hyun, & Kim, 2015).

To legitimize, enforce, and protect the Kim family’s paternal lineage, the three Kims reinforced the emotional beliefs of the mass population through the culture and education embedded in Juche ideology. Trust and loyalty between each leader and individual made possible the successful achievement of the cult of the Kim family.

3.2 Path Dependency

Justification for both the individual cult and the family cult intermixed with high-level amplified nationalism based on Juche formulated the idiosyncratic characteristics of the North Korean extra-constitutional nation. This was possible through constitutional reforms. The 1972 DPRK Constitution defined North Korea as a one-party state, emphasizing the necessity of the dictatorship to the proletariat to be able to continue consolidating Geagup-rosun (classification of social classes) and Gunjung-rosun (paving a path toward a mass public) (Jeon & Han, 2018).

A constitutional reform in 1992 formally replaced the dictatorship of the proletariat with a people's democratic dictatorship emphasizing the mass public, or Inmin. Since then, "Sovereignty for Inmin" or "Inmin Democracy" have been widely adopted for the party's political narratives. The 2016 constitutional reform, officially called "the Kim Il Sung & Kim Jung Il Constitution," strengthens control over the Inmin by purging anti-socialists and traitors. Regardless of political control measures, the Inmin showed loyal, chauvinistic, and dedicated behaviors toward the Kim family. An incentive mechanism between high officials and their supporting groups within Rodongdang has helped institutionalize one-party politics infused with Juche ideology.

Filial piety, as congruent with Juche ideologies, supports the idea of the greatness of the Kim family to maintain their social status and pass it on to their descendants (Kang, 2011). The cult of personality and charismatic personalities played a significant role in creating the collective patriotism of the Inmin. The more party members and officials obey the Kim Il Sung & Kim Jung Il Constitution, the more able they are to keep their standing and positions in Rodongdang. This intensifies not only the Songbun system but also the emotive power of the Kim family and the three Kims' cult of personality. As such, national organizations (i.e., youth leagues, occupational organizations, agricultural alliances, alliances of women) help strengthen the people's emotional beliefs necessary to carry out the party's decisions. In recent years, Kim Jung Un has also tried to utilize nationwide conferences, particularly for youth leagues comprised of young adults in their 20's and 30's, which are considered important to the mobilization of labor for construction projects or the army (Chosunsinbo).

Due to these extra-constitutional characteristics of the DPRK Constitution, the leader can propose ideal visions for the country, as shown in North Korean political rhetoric (Jeon, 2020). The "Partisan politics of Kim Il Sung," the early development plan of the nation, underlined providing every member of the Inmin with food (steamed rice with beef soup), housing (a tile-roofed house), and clothing (made of silk). Kim Jung Il specified the country's economic and military development plan to make it a "socialist superpower" via the agency of Songun politics. As the economic situation continued to worsen, Kim Jung Un downgraded the level of Kim Jung Il's vision to a "socialist civilized nation," pursuing Baekdu politics to maintain the legacy of his forefathers. According to this ideal vision, he specified a development plan and set a realistic goal based on a vision of Baekdu-daeguk (making a great nation) (Rodong Sinmun). Rodongdang operates three subordinate organizations (the Central Committee, Central Military Committee, and Central Prosecution Committee) and holds periodic conferences (Party Congress, Cell's Chairmen Conference, and Conference of Party Cell Secretaries). This mechanism facilitates the three Kims'

efforts to consolidate political omnipresent power and become god-like figures as supported by authorities, convince party members to uphold the democratic dictatorship, and cultivate the extreme nationalism of the mass public. According to the Seventh Party Congress held in 2015, it is estimated that there are 3.4 million party members and 2 million candidates for membership.

The Party Cell, comprised of the lowest-ranking officials, serves as an important unit for linking one-party politics to the mass public by delivering the party's decisions and monitoring the everyday lives of the people. Kim Jung Un, as General Secretary of the party, utilized Party Cell Secretaries during the Arduous March, imposing on them a heavy responsibility to show their loyalty to the party and to be exemplary models for the people (Daily NK). He forces cell secretaries to have a strong sense of responsibility, emphasizing that the only thing that overcomes tough situations is the nationalistic duties of secretaries to care and sacrifice for the mass public. It is believed that only through sacrifice can North Korea relieve the people's difficulties.

In addition, a new position (the First Secretary of the Party's Central Committee) created under the General Secretary in mid-2021 could have two contradictory meanings: creating a potential successor to Kim Jung Un to consolidate his power, or enacting a necessary power distribution in the party due to Kim's declining leadership. Nonetheless, Kim Jung Un has shown his strong will to take the lead in inter-Korean relations, liberate South Korea, and unify the Korean Peninsula through the nation's superb military power. Kim referenced "nuclear power" 26 times in his speech at the eighth Party Congress (Yun, 2021), which implies a rapid paradigm shift in North Korea's foreign policy vis-à-vis the US from peaceful sentiments during the Trump era to hostile warnings toward the Biden Administration. In turn, this abrupt change in foreign policy direction entails strong beliefs in self-reliance based on Juche and nationalistic collective action for regime survival.

Therefore, in the process of the institutionalization of Rodongdang to justify both the individual cult and the family cult with the core value of Juche, the intricate relationships between the Kim family's emotive power and the degree of rigidity of the Songbun system come to rely more on path dependency. This has resulted in a higher level of idiosyncrasy in the politics of North Korea relative to those of other socialist states. Also, to some extent, mutual distrust between classes, albeit both intended and controlled by the top pyramid, exacerbates the centralization of political power. The mutual distrust between classes facilitated the extreme nationalism of the Inmin.

3.3 Institutional Change

Although the Songbun system has enhanced the nationalist behaviors of the Inmin, institutional changes have brought about generational gaps that have not necessarily supported the cult of the three Kims. It has been shown that the younger generations have dissatisfaction that negatively affects cult activities, such as deifying portraits and statues of the three Kims, visiting historical areas, or participating in ceremonies, anniversaries, or rituals. Rather, the younger generations are eager for openness and market economic reform.

According to a survey on the perception of belief systems, such as social consciousness, political consciousness, and social life, vis-à-vis North Korean defectors, conducted by the Korea Institute

of National Unification from 2012 to 2013, it was found that three generations of North Koreans have different feelings and views on the regime (Park et al., 2015, p. 115). The rationed generation, who were born before 1968, took nationalism and loyalty to the regime for granted. This generation was not critical of Kim Jung Un's military-first policies or the socialist economic system. However, the two younger generations hold different perceptions.

The generation of the Arduous March, those born between 1969 and 1982, were dissatisfied with the system, holding negative feelings about unconditional loyalty. However, this generation holds a positive view of individualism and familyism while reluctantly accepting the Juche ideology as the country's identity. In addition, they had a very positive sense of market economy development, reform, and openness. The following generation, called the marketized generation, who were born after 1982, showed unsatisfactory attitudes toward the system and were skeptical about the organized life controlled by one party. This generation negatively viewed the vicious cycle of bribes happening in society. Similar to the generation of the Arduous March, the marketized generation positively viewed the necessity of a market economy, relevant reform and innovation, and the desire for openness.

In the survey's in-depth interviews, it was shown that younger generations were unwilling to engage in cult activities, such as showing respect while looking at portraits and statues of the three Kims, traveling to historical places to deify the family cult, or attending ceremonies, anniversaries, or rituals (Park et al., 2015, pp. 122-9). These survey results uncover the important issues in the perception changes of the members of Rodongdang, where one-fifth of the population, five million people, are involved in political activities, national affairs, and the socialist planned economy due to the wider gap between classes.

Since the Kim Jung Un regime took office, the upper class has comprised 10% to 15% of the population, the middle class 20% to 30%, and the lower class 60% to 70%. The classification of the uppermost layer became clear (Park et al., 2015, p. 42). The ratio of the upper layer has been significantly narrowed compared to that of the Kim Jung Il era, with 10% for the upper class, about 40% in the middle, and 30% in the lower group. This means that the proportion of the middle class is declining. The size of the lower class is on the rise. In the meantime, North Koreans' expectations for life have increased, and their living standards have risen. There is a widespread perception among residents that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

Whereas the Songbun system aided the Inmin's nationalist tendencies, institutional changes created generational differences that did not inevitably lead to the three Kims' cult. On the one hand, discontent among younger generations has a detrimental impact on cult activities; on the other hand, they are ready for openness and market economic change. Although it is not explicitly shown in domestic society, younger generations of North Koreans tend to have negative feelings about the wider gap between the rich and the poor, with the middle class collapsing.

3.4 The Shadow of the Past

The Songbun system and the Party Cell are the main mechanisms for arousing mass fervid nationalism in the form of, for example, strong sentiments for self-sacrifice. These are the outcomes of the country's efforts to maintain the feudal monarchy and ensure the survival of the autocratic regime. The more the three Kims faced challenges, the more emotive power they were likely to exert to consolidate the individual cult and the family cult. Perhaps ironically, emotive power helped the Kims formulate and instill rules, understandings, and routines in the daily lives of North Koreans, even while their Songbun system heavily coerced them.

According to that system, established in the 1950s, every citizen is assigned to one of three main categories: (1) the core class, including revolutionary families, families of patriots, and soldiers killed in the Korean War; (2) the wavering class, such as defectors, betrayers, or political prisoners; or (3) the hostile class, comprised of pro-Japanese or pro-American individuals, or spies (Baek, 2016, pp. 7-9). A family in each class encompasses descendants in accordance with his or her perceived political loyalty and the family's political background at the time of the inception of North Korea. Within each of the three categories, citizens are divided into fifty-one subclasses. In addition, there is a new class, called Donju (capitalists), which Kim Jung Il implicitly accepted with the emergence of Jangmadang (illicit black markets) during the Arduous March in the 1990s. Later, this capitalist class became one of the strategic partners of the Party. Kim Jung Un likewise has collaborated with the Donju class, particularly for the purposes of his five-year economic plan; however, after his mention of the "Arduous March" speech in early 2021, he imposed heavy sanctions on the markets (Daily NK).

The highest Songbun class is comprised of all political leaders and reinforces fake Korean War narratives, which allow the three Kims to propagandize that they "made sacrifices" (Baek, 2016). This "sacrifice" story escalates the level of belief in the immortality and eternity of the Great Leader and the Great Successor by those who show more loyalty to the regime, and those loyalists, in turn, are incentivized with privileges in terms of political, economic, social, and individual status. This incentive mechanism forces high officials to sacrifice greatly, and in turn, pushes them to compel autonomous sacrifice from the mass public to gain complete control. When challenged regarding the power succession of the dictatorship, the three Kims have utilized the compensation mechanism in the Songbun system, which is successive through the generations of the patriarchal family. This entices the higher classes to control the lower classes to maintain their own relatively highly privileged social status. This is how complete control over the mass public can be achieved through the class system.

As already noted, the Party Cell carries out an important function in connecting the party to the everyday lives of the mass public; it reinforces resilience and tolerance from the bottom, thereby making the continued survival of the autocratic regime possible. A Party Cell secretariat can be endowed only with a "perfect" person with omnipotent capabilities (Han, 2021). The party describes the perfect person as having 12 personal traits: a communist socialist perspective, high

principles, responsibility, a political personality, role-model behavior, creativity, gravitas, humanity, truthfulness, optimism, morality, and integrity.

As Party Cell secretaries play important roles as intermediaries between the higher-ranking party members and the mass public, corruption has been rampant among them. According to defectors, secretaries abuse their political power by taking bribes in exchange for ignoring unacceptable, illicit activities of the party members or the mass public, such as transactions on the black market, human/arms/wildlife trafficking, or the sale of illegal drugs (Baek, 2016; Kim, 2017; Kim, 2019). Therefore, negative perceptions of the secretaries are widespread. Counteractively, manipulation, and disinformation by the party have, with the evolving concepts of Juche over time, led the mass public to deify the greatness of the Kim family; this justifies the party's raising of the levels of punishment for misbehaviors by secretaries, but, at the same time, sheds a negative light on all family members and descendants.

The complex mechanism of Songbun and the Party Cell increases filial piety toward autocratic leaders, instilling both awe and fear, as if of an immortal god. Excessive nationalism, regardless of whether it emerges superficially or genuinely, has flourished, as the party has enhanced emotional beliefs in the inception of North Korea despite its false-history-based manipulation. This amplifies the necessity of the military-first policy of the party, and in doing so, inspires people to sacrifice themselves for the greater vision of a utopian country. Selfless dedication of this kind has reinforced emotional beliefs in the cult of the Kim family.

4. Conclusion

This study explored the following research question to address issues linked to emotions, identity, and institutions: how has the cult (institution) of the three Kims affected North Koreans' strong sense of nationalism (emotion), which is based on their Juche ideology (identity)? To answer these questions, the study examined four key aspects of historical institutionalism (time boundedness, path dependency, institutional changes, and the shadow of the past) and attempted to develop theoretical propositions that can be applied to future similar cases involving political institutions in authoritarian regimes.

First, time boundedness revealed how trust and loyalty in the general public have been built through culture and education to develop the individual and family cults. The three Kims have used culture and education to implement and execute Juche, building emotional convictions in that ideology and establishing the framework for a cult of personality in domestic politics to legitimize, enforce, and secure the Kim paternal bloodline. Juche has become North Korea's political pillar. The link of effects over time with power succession increases trust and loyalty. The success of the Kim family cult was made possible by the trust and loyalty between each leader and person.

Second, path dependency uncovered how the Songbun system has led to extreme nationalism in the process of the institutionalization of Rodongdang. The distinctive traits of the North Korean extra-constitutional country have been developed by justification for both the individual and

family cults intermixed with high-level amplified nationalism based on Juche. Regardless of political restrictions, the Inmin acted loyal, chauvinistic, and committed toward the Kim dynasty. The Inmin's collective patriotism was shaped in large part by the cult of personality and charismatic leaders. Mutual mistrust between classes exacerbates the concentration of political power to some extent, although it is both designed and controlled by the top of the pyramid. The Inmin's intense nationalism was aided by mutual animosity between classes.

Third, institutional change underlined the importance of generational gaps, which did not necessarily uphold the cult of the three Kims. It has been demonstrated that discontent among younger generations has a detrimental impact on cult activities, such as deifying portraits and statues of the three Kims, visiting historical sites, or participating in ceremonies, anniversaries, or rituals. Younger generations, on the other hand, are ready for openness and market economic change.

Finally, the shadow of the past helped us understand the main mechanisms for mobilizing mass fervent nationalism in the shape of strong impulses for self-sacrifice. The more challenges the three Kims encountered, the more emotive force they were likely to use to cement their individual and family cults. The Songbun system and the complicated Party Cell process develop filial piety for dictatorial leaders, evoking both awe and horror as if they were eternal deities. Excessive nationalism, whether feigned or genuine, has thrived as the party has bolstered emotional beliefs in the formation of North Korea, notwithstanding its bogus history-based deception. This emphasizes the importance of the party's military-first stance, inspiring members to sacrifice themselves for the larger ideal of a utopian society. This type of selfless commitment has strengthened emotional beliefs in the Kim family cult.

References

- Baek, J. (2016). *North Korea's hidden revolution. How the information underground is transforming a closed society*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press.
- Bleiker, R. & Hutchison, E. (2007). *Understanding emotions in world politics: reflections on method*. Canberra: Australian National University.
- Chung, T. (2010). Early North Korean cinema <Naegohyang> and <Yonggwangro>. *Contemporary Cinema Research*, 6(2), 419-444.
- Dolan, T. M. (2016). Emotion and strategic learning in war. *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 12(4), 571-590.
- Eriksson, L. (2009). Self-governance in micro level theory. *The Politics of Self-Governance*, (March), 61-74.
- Gilpin, R. (1981). *War and change in world politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

- Hall, P. A. & Taylor, R. (1996). Political science and the three new institutionalisms. *Political Studies*, 44(5), 936-957.
- Han, K. B. (2021). The background of North Korea's hosting big events consecutively. *Monthly North Korea*, (May), 34-53.
- Ikenberry, G. J. (1988). Conclusion: an institutional approach to American foreign economic policy. *International Organization*, 42(1), 219-243.
- Institute for Peace and Unification Studies. (2018). *Bukhan-jumin-ei Tongil-eishik [North Koreans' Awareness on Unification]*. Seoul: Seoul National University.
- Jeon, Y. S. (2020). The path to a socialist civilization: prospect and tasks ahead. *Buk-han-hak-bo*, 54(2), 3-31.
- Jeon, Y. S. & Han, S. H. (2018). *NK Pop-North Korea's electronic music and pop music*. Seoul: Geulnurim.
- Kang, D. (2011). They think they're normal: enduring questions and new research on North Korea—a review essay. *International Security*, 36(3), 142-171.
- Kim, J. (2021). What are North Korea's nuclear capabilities? *Submitted as coursework for PH241*, Stanford University, Winter 2021 (March 26, 2021). (URL: <http://large.stanford.edu/courses/2021/ph241/kim-j2/>).
- Kim, S. K. (2017). *Juche (self-reliance) in North Korea*. *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Social Theory*, (2017), 1-3.
- Kim, Y. (2019). "Introduction: Hallyu and North Korea—Soft Power of Popular Culture." In *South Korean Popular Culture and North Korea*, edited by Youna Kim, 1-38, Abington: Routledge.
- Koo, B. H. (1992). *Political economy of self-reliance: the case of North Korea, 1961-1990*. University of Cincinnati.
- Koschut, S. (ed.) (2020). *The power of emotions in world politics*. Berlin: Routledge.
- Krasner, S. D. (1984). Approaches to the state: alternative conceptions and historical dynamics. *Comparative Politics*. *Ph.D. Program in Political Science of the City University of New York*. 16(2), 223-246.
- Krasner, S. D. (1988). Sovereignty: an institutional perspective. *Comparative Political Studies*, 21(1), 66-94.
- Kurbanov, S. O. (2019). North Korea's Juche ideology: indigenous communism or traditional though? *Critical Asian Studies*, 51(2), 296-305.
- Kwon, H. & Chung, B. H. (2012). *North Korea: Beyond Charismatic Politics*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Lee, G. (2003). The political philosophy of Juche. *Stanford Journal of East Asian Affairs*, 3(1), 105-112.
- Lim, J. C., & Yoo, H. Y. (2010). Institutionalization of the cult of the Kims: its implications for North Korean political succession. *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, 22(3), 341-354.
- Lim, S. & Ko, S. (2020). North Korean leaders' personality reflection on provocation patterns: narcissism and fear. *Journal of Contemporary Eastern Asia*, 19(2), 216-233.
- Malesevic, S. (2006). *Identity as ideology: Understanding ethnicity and nationalism*. Springer.

- March, J. G. & Olsen, J. P. (2010). *Rediscovering Institutions*. New York: The Free Press, Simon and Schuster.
- Mercer, J. (2010). Emotional beliefs. *International Organization*, 64(1), 1-31.
- Mercer, J. (2014). Feeling like a state: Social emotion and identity. *International Theory*, 6(3), 515-535.
- Mo, C. H. (2021). North Korea's building of a civilized socialist country and SDGs: with a focus on healthcare sector. *Culture and Politics*, 8(1), 41-63.
- Myers, B. R. (2010). *The Cleanest Race: How North Koreans See Themselves and Why It Matters*, New York: Melville House.
- Park, Y.J., Hyun, I.E., and Kim, H.S. (2015). Bukhan-jumin-ei Empowerment: Juche-ei Dongruck [Empowerment of North Koreans: Driving Force of Juche]. *KINU Research Series*, 15(6). Seoul: Korea Institute for National Unification.
- Yun, D. M. (2021). Snap bag policy for North Korea and a path towards unified Korean peninsula with denuclearization. *Monthly North Korea*, (April), 10-14.



Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>)