

Special Feature

Identity Politics in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)

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Introduction

Few studies have analyzed the process through which the North Korean regime was established following the national division, a process that differed from that taken by South Korea, and the manner in which North Korea forced its residents to form an identity as people (*inmin*) of the new socialist state. This study analyzes the national identity of North Korea, an identity that not only played an important role in the establishment and preservation of the North Korean system, but also served as the driving force that continues to prop up the socialist North Korean regime.

If identity is perceived as a term with which to explain an individual or collective entity that interacts with the surrounding world, then North and South Korea can be seen as having shared the homogenous national identity known as a unified ethnic nation (*hanminjok*) since the division. However, the establishment and continuation of the two different state systems called North and South Korea have all but ensured that these two entities have also featured heterogeneous elements in terms of their national identity. The Korean nation lost its national identity during the Japanese colonial era when, deprived of its sovereignty, it found itself becoming a nation without a state. The establishment of different government systems in North and South Korea after liberation has resulted in the people of South and North Korea living their lives based on different identities, namely those of *gungmin* 國民 (national) and *inmin* 人民 (people).

North Korea focused on establishing a state that could be distinguished from South Korea. During the process of establishing a socialist state, it not only criticized nationalism, but also espoused the notion of proletarian internationalism. To this end, North Korea promoted amongst its residents the superiority of its system over that of the South Korean regime. In other words, the founding of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) (North Korea) was in large part a response to the establishment of the Republic of Korea (South Korea). Two different communities were created from what had historically been one. From its inception, North Korea had to pursue an identity that set it apart from South Korea; it had to become, as its name implied, the state of the *inmin*.

As such, rooted in different politics of identity, the notions of *inmin*, *gungmin*, and *minjok* 民族 (ethnic nation) that emerged in North Korea were

quite different from those that prevailed in South Korea. North Korea's placing of the class struggle and Juche ideology at the center of its state resulted in the notion of *inmin* taking on very important political implications. In this regard, *gungmin* came to be perceived as an impure existence that encompassed all enemies of the revolution. Meanwhile, *minjok* and *inmin* started to be perceived as extremely natural notions.

At this point, the *inmin* in North Korea was regarded as something to be mobilized or led. As the proletarian class, Communist Party, and Great Leader (*suryeong*) became the essential qualities that defined the *inmin*, the residents of North Korea were in essence degraded to the status of *inmin* of Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il. This study analyzes the relationship between the identities embedded in the notions of *inmin*, *gungmin* and *minjok* in North Korea.

The Formation of a National Identity as Part of the Establishment of the Government: Liberation-1955

Any discussion about national identity must inevitably take into consideration the issue of the role of modernity in the developmental process of Korean history. Political modernity has been formed as a result of the interactions between autonomous individuals serving as the main domestic political actors, the nation-states that represent the main actors at the international level, and the ideology needed to secure democratic equality without any discrimination between classes. Development has historically been the result of the interactions between these elements. Korea's opening of its doors to the outside world had the effect of externally transforming it into a 'nation-state' or *gungmin gukga*, at the international level. However, it was forced to externally form a '*gungmin*' during the process that saw autonomous individuals emerge as the main political actors. The long-standing social status system was officially abolished as part of the Gabo Reforms of 1894; moreover, the provisional government began to pursue a republican system as its international orientation in 1919. However, the two Koreas only established their actual political entities after 1945 and 1948 (Kwon 2001:69). In this regard, it becomes necessary to evaluate North Korea's performance in terms of the birth of a modern nation-state.

Charles K. Armstrong argues the following with regards to the North Korean identity:

The North Korean regime must also be seen in the context of several decades of radical nationalism in Korea, in which socialism and association with international communism and the Soviet Union were perceived as the best means to resolve the colonial subjugation and backwardness. What was attractive to such radical nationalists was the Soviet model of successful and independent industrialization, combined with a more just and equitable distribution of economic benefit: a controlled rationally planned, anticapitalist and anticolonial modernity. (Armstrong 2006:17)

Moreover, Armstrong also stresses that the North's emphasis on ideas over material conditions, which he labels as one of the most distinctively Korean elements of communism in North Korea, was the result of the fact that Joseon had long been more orthodox in its Confucianism than some of its neighbors. In addition, he claims that North Korea cultivated nationalistic sentiment by injecting nationalism into the socialist model borrowed from the Soviet Union (Armstrong 2006:17-21).

Although North Korea's current monolithic system started to be established during the early 1970s, the notions of the single-party and independent political regime as the cornerstones of the identity of the state had already been institutionally established during the process of the formation of North Korea that began in the immediate aftermath of the division.

Individuals, societies, and states all have their own identities; in this regard, the politics of identity are implemented not only to secure one's existence, but also to maximize one's interests. An identity can be regarded as not only the process of posing questions and developing answers designed to confirm one's existence, but should also be perceived as something that is made clearer through its relationship with others. In other words, an identity can clearly be distinguished from that of others, and in the case of a collective body, made clearer by strengthening the homogeneity amongst the members whenever an external threat to their survival emerges. To this end, in cases where national communities have waged wars with neighboring nations boasting different political systems, or in which such neighboring nations pose a clear and present threat, identity serves to unify the members of the state, strengthen ties with friendly external forces, and clearly distinguish the said national community from the hostile forces (Seo 2003:30).

As part of its efforts to establish an identity that clearly distinguished it from South Korea, the North placed a heavy emphasis on 'democratic

principles rooted in the *inmin*' in its Constitution of 1948. Article 1 of the Constitution introduces the name of the country, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), and states that the sovereignty of the state rests with its *inmin*. Here, North Korea adopted as its implement to foster ideological unification a concept of people's (*inmin*) democracy that was rooted in a class warfare-based notion of the '*inmin*' as the entity in which sovereignty was vested. Meanwhile, liberal democracy, which was rooted in the belief that the sovereignty of a state rests with 'all *gungmin*,' was harshly criticized. Thus, North Korea clearly cultivated a state identity in which the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) was to be regarded as the state of the proletarian class (Je 2008:138). This approach is also evident in the following passage taken from Kim Il-sung's speech entitled, "On the construction of a new Korea and the national united front" given on October 13, 1945 to provincial communist party delegates.

In what direction will liberated Korea head? In defining the future direction of Korea, there is an important and fundamental problem that we must consider. It is the fact that Korea was long a colony of imperial Japan. The stringent controls imposed by the Japanese prevented the development of capitalism in Korea. Korean society has remained a colonial society in which the remnants of feudalism can still be found. In particular, exploitative feudal relationships continue to hold sway in rural areas. Amidst such circumstances, the *inmin* of Korea find themselves faced with the tasks of implementing an anti-Japanese, anti-feudal, democratic revolution and establishing a democratic people's (*inmin*) republic. Who will lead these revolutions? Will it be labor or the capitalist class? In the past, Korea's capitalist class conspired with imperial Japan to exploit and suppress the *inmin*. They also used empty slogans such as 'national reconstruction' and 'national autonomy' to deceive the *inmin*. Of course, there were national capitalists who opposed Japanese imperialism. However, it was Korea's labor class that struggled against Japanese imperialism till the very end. ... The laborers who courageously fought against Japanese imperialism till the end can and must lead this revolution. (Party History Institute of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea [PHICCWPK] 1963:3-4)

As we can see from Kim Il-sung's speech, the North Korean state identity was formed by emphasizing the differences from South Korea and strengthening the sense of homogeneity amongst the citizens of North Korea. In addition,

historical incidents also contributed to the formation of the identity of the North Korean state. The first point which should be noted in this regard is the shared experience amongst those who were at the forefront of the establishment of the North Korean state system of having participated in the anti-Japanese armed struggle. This shared experience amongst the leadership group that included Kim Il-sung made it possible to use the popular support that had been garnered from such efforts to foster the rapid establishment of a state. This fact remains one of the main grounds which North Korea uses to support its claims that its state system is vested in more legitimacy than that of South Korea.

... our partisan members are comrades who voluntarily joined the resistance to Japanese imperialism in order to protect the interests of the *inmin*. Many communists were produced during the long armed struggle, ... Communist members are those who joined the party based on their determination to fight for the ultimate victory of the revolution and for the happiness of the *inmin* until the last drop of their blood. ... Only one who cut his teeth under the struggle and who is thoroughly armed with the Marxism-Leninism theory needed to become a worker who is aware of the importance of standing with one's class under any environment, and a worker who can organize and mobilize the *inmin* to achieve revolutionary victory, can become a member of the Workers' Party. (PHICCWPK 1970: 67-68)

In order to establish their identity as members of a socialist state, North Korea needed to create a shared sense amongst an *inmin* class that had long been exploited by the ruling class. At this time, the most efficient method was to use the national awareness of the vivid memories of the pain caused by the Japanese colonial rule (Kim Gyeong-mi 2009:221).

The identity of the North Korean state established through the above-mentioned means was altered to one based on the ideology called nationalism in the aftermath of the formation of a nation-state (*minjok gukga*). The Japanese colonial era had the effect of strengthening resistance nationalism on the Korean peninsula. Especially, in the case of North Korea, this resistance nationalism was transformed into a political ideology used to mobilize the public for economic development and to justify a dictatorial system. In other words, during the process of forming an *inmin* state, North Korea was able

to emphasize the 'oneness' of the nation by using political and psychological mobilization tools designed to establish a state identity and unify the members of the state into one unit (Seo 2003:30-34).

The Establishment of a State Identity during the Kim Il-sung Regime: 1955-1993

After having eliminated his political competitors, Kim Il-sung strove to secure public support from the people who had experienced colonial rule using assertions such as "the Korean nation has long pursued the Juche ideology." The state identity reflects the interests of power groups; however, it is also related to political interests during the formation period, and subsequently learned through social practices. The state identity of North Korea was formed not only during the Japanese colonial rule, division into two Koreas, the Korean War and post-war restoration, but also during the process that saw Kim Il-sung seize political power and Kim Jong-il entrench his own regime. The Juche ideology played the most decisive role in the formation of the state identity in North Korea (Seo 2003:31-32).

It would be no exaggeration to say that the state identity of North Korea revolved more around the 'philosophy' of the man who seized power, Kim Il-sung, and the 'identity' that was formed based on his thought than was the case in any other country. This was carried out in a manner that allowed the state and entire society to share in the 'benefits' that were gleaned from such thoughts. Let us now look at Kim Il-sung's speech entitled, "On eliminating dogmatism and formalism and establishing Juche in ideological work" which he gave before party propagandists on December 28, 1955. This can be regarded as the point in time in which the Juche ideology emerged for the first time.

Although very regrettable, our propaganda work has in many ways fallen victim to dogmatism and formalism. The principal shortcomings in ideological work are the failure to delve deeply into all matters and the lack of Juche. ... What is Juche in our party's ideological work? What are we doing? We are not engaged in any other country's revolution, but solely in the Korean revolution. This, the Korean revolution, determines the essence

of Juche in the ideological work of our Party. Therefore, all ideological work must be subordinated to the interests of the Korean revolution. ... It is of paramount importance to study and widely publicize among the working people the history of our country and of our people (*inmin*)'s struggle. (Kim Il-sung 1977:145-146)

The above-mentioned speech was used during the establishment of the Kim Il-sung regime to purge the Soviet Korean and Yen-an factions from the Workers' Party. Kim's claims that Juche was rooted in 'the history of our *inmin*'s struggle' was designed to rapidly entrench his status as a patriot and leader of the new state amongst the North Korean *inmin* by highlighting his role in the partisan anti-Japanese struggle.

During the Cold War era, the Juche ideology became entrenched and reproduced as part of the confrontation between East and West. It was during this period that the United States' role as the North's 'sworn enemy' began to be emphasized. (Seo 2003:32-34) This is evidenced by the following excerpt.

Above all, the main problem we faced was that of determining whether we should adopt capitalism or socialism in order to promptly overcome the miserable state we found ourselves in. The path of capitalism meant allowing exploitation and oppression to continue as is. This path could not be used to motivate the proletariat to construct a new fatherland. Furthermore, we ran the risk of moving from subjugation to one form of imperialism to another. As such, it soon became clear that we could not go down the path of capitalism. ... The American imperialists not only destroyed the houses and property of laborers and farmers, but also those of small enterprises and rich farmers. (Kim Il-sung 1977:518-519)

Having adopted Soviet-style socialism under the Cold War structure, North Korea set itself up as an opponent of the United States, a capitalist country that it viewed as a new imperialist entity that had essentially replaced Japan. The Juche ideology was used at the national level to integrate the leader with the public by cultivating popular support and a cult of personality around Kim Il-sung's leadership. In his analysis of the role of the Juche ideology in the state identity of North Korea the German scholar Ingeborg Goethel concluded that this cult of personality in fact had a negative impact on the state identity. More to the point, he maintained that while a state identity becomes hard

to maintain over the long term if individual identity and dignity are not allowed to take root, such cults of personality in fact have a negative impact on individual identity and dignity (Goethel 1995:27-28).

In addition, the active participation of the group at the forefront of the establishment of the North Korean system in the anti-Japanese armed struggle was used as a tool to foster the rapid formation of the state identity and the popular support needed to enhance the legitimacy of the state system. Kim Il-sung's participation in the anti-Japanese armed struggle became the historical source of the state identity of North Korea and of the state's governance principles.

The starting point for the independent development of our people (*inmin*)'s revolutionary struggle under the slogan of true Marxism-Leninism was the organization of the League for the Overthrow of Imperialism in 1926. ... The anti-Japanese armed struggle was carried out to throw out the foreign invaders and their colonial anti-feudal society, to achieve sovereignty and the independence of the nation, to oppose the exploitation and oppression and actualize the liberation of the oppressed laborers. ... The Juche ideology was created, developed, and enriched during the long and difficult anti-Japanese revolutionary struggle. The structure of Juche ideology was established within the Korean communist movement. (Kim Il-sung 1977:571-573)

In its capacity as a historical symbol of its nationalist discourse, the Korean War of 1950 was also used to reproduce the state identity of North Korea. Although North Korea started the Korean War that was soon pushed to the brink of becoming a world war following the intervention of neighboring powers, North Korea defined it as a war to liberate the fatherland. This was achieved by changing the character of the war so that it became a war for national liberation, a class struggle, an anti-imperial and anti-American struggle, and even a revolutionary war. In this regard, Kim Il-sung explained the Korean War in a speech entitled, "A speech broadcast to all the *inmin* of Korea," which he gave on June 26, 1950.

The traitor Syngman Rhee plans to expand the anti-*inmin* reactionary governance system in place in South Korea to North Korea and to repeal the results of the democratic revolution achieved by our *inmin* through a

fratricidal war. ... The traitor Syngman Rhee intends to turn our fatherland into a colony of the United States and to make the entire people (*inmin*) of Korea slaves of American imperialism. ... The time has come for us to achieve unification. ... Long live those people (*inmin*) of Joseon who have stood up to wage war in the name of all our *inmin*! (PHICCWPK 1977:275-278)

North Korea has denied that it attacked South Korea first, and rather claimed that the Korean War was the result of the provocations of the United States and the Syngman Rhee regime, provocations that were eventually repelled by the great leadership of Kim Il-sung. This logic, which has revolved around connecting the deification of Kim Il-sung to anti-imperial policy, has served as the historical grounds used to rationalize the Kim Il-sung centered resistance nationalism that emerged in North Korea. In other words, the Korean War constitutes the historical source of an anti-imperial mindset under which the purity of the Juche-based socialist system must be protected at all costs.

In addition, North Korea regards cultural infiltration as the main strategy employed by the new colonial forces. Cultural infiltration distorts the national culture, paralyzes the awareness of national independence and revolutionary spirit, and corrupts the *inmin*. North Korea calls for the thorough rejection of such influences and emphasizes the importance of political ideology, the elimination of toadyism (*sadae juui*), dogmatism and revisionism, the prohibition of bourgeois cultural elements, and the development of a revolutionary, socialist national culture. North Korea's identity has been built around the constant reminder of the Korean War, the securing of the anti-American mindset, and the entrenchment of the perception of the oneness of the Great Leader (*suryeong*)-Workers' Party (*dang*)-people.

"As man is a social being, we can rightly conclude that social and political life is more precious than physical life." (*Kim Il-seong jeojakjip* [Selected Works of Kim Il-sung]. Vol. 27:396) The concept of life within the Juche ideology also maintains that while people have a physical life, social and political life remain more precious than physical life. ... The concept of life within the Juche ideology is based on the belief in the revolutionary Great Leader (*suryeong*) as the core ideal. ... The Great Leader (*suryeong*) provides the most precious element of all to the people, political life, and is the benefactor that allows the people to develop their political life. A

man's parents give him physical life but the Great Leader provides his social and political life. ... Therefore, allegiance to the Great Leader (*suryeong*) who gave the most precious social and political life is the natural duty of all revolutionary warriors of the Great Leader. One can only bask in his political life when he gives his allegiance to the Great Leader (*suryeong*). (Gang 1986:37-420)

The collectivist culture formed during the various mass movements also contributed to the establishment of state identity in North Korea. As part of the search for methods to restore the economy in the aftermath of liberation and the Korean War and reorganize the public into socialist beings, North Korea established a state structure based on a collectivist culture in which socialist competition and mass campaigns were employed to link everyone under the leadership of the Party. The emergence of Kim Il-sung's heavy industry-first policy and conclusion of the anti-factional struggle that brought an end to increasingly vehement political struggles occasioned by differences in economic development strategies paved the way for Kim Il-sung to implement the *Chollima* Movement which promoted the Three Revolutions (ideological, technological and cultural revolutions) as the means to foster the development of productivity and the ideological reorganization of the masses (Seo 2003:36-39).

Geared towards all *inmin*, the *Chollima* Movement which has been actively carried out in our country constitutes the most splendid public policy of our Party. The *Chollima* Movement is a popular movement which organically combines efforts to bring about collective innovation in terms of constructing the economy and culture with programs to reorganize and cultivate the workers.¹ (Kim Il-Sung 1977:262-274)

In North Korea, socialist competition and mass campaigns were intertwined with the ideological reorganization of the public and economic development based on collectivism. This process was accompanied by power struggles that

1. In Kim Il-Sung's *Indonesia Ali Archam sahoe gwahagwoneseo han gangui 1965 nyeon 4wol 14 il: Joseon minju juui inmin gonghwaguk eseoui sahoe juui geonseolgwa namjoseon hyeongmyeonge daehayeo* [A lecture given at the Ali Archam Academy of Social Sciences in Indonesia on April 14, 1965: On the construction of socialism in the DPRK and the revolution in South Korea]

eventually resulted in the establishment of Kim Il-sung's monolithic system. Thus, mass movements contributed to the formation of state identity in North Korea, and the unique North Korean-style socialist structure. This was brought about by inducing the support and participation of the masses based on the monolithic leadership of the Great Leader (*suryeong*).

Another important element that should be considered with regards to the formation of the state identity in North Korea is the strong will of the two individuals who played the decisive roles in the establishment, maintenance, and strengthening of the state: Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il. Thus, while Kim Il-sung introduced a direction for a state identity that was forged through historical incidents such as the anti-Japanese armed struggle, the Korean War, and internal power struggles, Kim Jong-il, after having absolutized the power and ideology of Kim Il-sung, inherited the role of successor of Kim Il-sung. Kim Jong-il formed a state identity during the process of erecting a Great Leader (*suryeong*)-centered unitary structure that was rooted in the establishment of a monolithic ideological system (Seo 2003:44). This monolithic ideological system was officially entrenched in 1967, or when Kim Il-sung began to exercise sole power. It subsequently spread to the entire society following Kim Jong-il's introduction in February 1974, in his capacity as the anointed successor to Kim Il-sung, of the Ten Principles for the Establishment of the One-Ideology System (*yuil sasang*).²

Kim Jong-il's implementation of the monolithic ideology of Kim Il-sung from the 1960s onwards was followed in the 1970s by the active use of the Juche ideology to equate the Great Leader (*suryeong*) with the state during the process of transforming Kim Il-sung's monopolization of power into a cult of personality. The Juche ideology was in particular used to consolidate the logic behind the emotional attachment which connected Kim Il-sung to the *inmin*, and to make the North Korean people obey a hierarchal order that

2. 1) We must give our all in the struggle to unify the entire society with the revolutionary ideology of the Great Leader Kim Il-sung; 2) We must honor the Great Leader comrade Kim Il-sung with all our loyalty ...; 8) We must value the political life we were given by the Great Leader comrade Kim Il-sung, and loyally repay his great political trust and thoughtfulness with heightened political awareness and skill; 10) We must pass down the great achievement of the revolution by the Great Leader comrade Kim Il-sung from generation to generation, inheriting and completing it to the end (Lee 1995:135).

was in reality based on a patriarchal culture and Confucianism-based thinking already deeply embedded in society. As such, the Juche ideology not only contributed to concretizing the state identity of North Korea, but also became, given its collective orientation, the key principle used to connect the Great Leader (*suryeong*) to the Workers' Party and the masses in the implementation of state matters such as the establishment of a monolithic ruling structure, economic construction, and foreign policy. This collectivism in turn became the foundation of a North Korean state identity that featured nationalism and independent socialism as its two main axes (Seo 2003:44).

This situation also resulted in changes in North Korea's policy toward South Korea. In reality, the North has exhibited two faces as far as its politics of identity are concerned. More to the point, North Korea has had two overarching perspectives when it comes to South Korea. Thus, it regards South Korea as its partner in the achievement of a reunification that is based on national independence and unity, but also as an entity subjugated to the United States that opposes unification. Furthermore, North Korea has defined South Korean regimes, in their capacity as puppets of American imperialism, as agents of colonialism or forces arranged against unification that have perpetuated the national division. On the other hand, in accordance with its notions of a national unified front and of an anti-American struggle for national liberation, North Korea has perceived the South Korean people as its main partners in the overthrow of the South Korean government. While continuing to hold firm to its stance that national sovereignty could only be achieved through reunification, North Korea began from the late 1980s onwards to increasingly emphasize the concept of national unity. To this end, North Korea also changed its position regarding the main actors in the reunification process. More to the point, it began to identify the entire Korean nation, North and South as well as overseas Koreans, as the main actors that should bring about reunification through the strengthening of the Three Revolutions (cultural revolution + technological revolution + ideological revolution) (Kim Il-sung [1991]1992:45; Seo 2003:87). Thus North Korea moved beyond its previous class-based perspective and began to emphasize the national character of the reunification issue.

The announcement of the July 4th North-South Joint Communiqué of 1972 has had great repercussions both domestically and internationally.

The *inmin* of North and South Korea as well as Koreans abroad, all of whom have yearned for the unification of the fatherland, have passionately welcomed and supported the North-South Joint Communiqué. They are filled with excitement at the thought of the rapid actualization of unification based on the three principles for unification instructed by our Great Leader (*suryeong*). The government, political parties, and social organizations have expressed their full support for the North-South Joint Communiqué. ... The July 4th North-South Joint Communiqué has filled the entire country with a deep passion for unification and created an atmosphere that is conducive to national unity. However, some recent moves in South Korea have run counter to the basic spirit of the July 4th Communiqué. The South Korean authorities agreed to the three principles of independence, peaceful unification, and great national unity and affixed their seal to the July 4th North-South Joint Communiqué. However, even before the ink on the Joint Communiqué was dry, they began to make comments that did not reflect the spirit of the Joint Communiqué. For instance, they have asserted that a simple piece of paper does not suffice to resolve the issues surrounding unification, and that the long-term stationing of U.S. forces in Korea is desirable. They have not stopped their slandering of North Korea and its system. They have also continuously oppressed the South Korean *inmin* who are struggling for the unification of our fatherland. (Kim Jong-il 1994:1-2)

The Crisis of State Identity during the Kim Jong-il Regime: 1994-Present

As seen above in our assessment of the process in which North Korea formulated and established its state identity, Kim Il-sung's identity politics were based on the political methods of defining and cementing his preeminence through the forming of emotional connections internally and clearly distinguishing himself externally. In the aftermath of the death of Kim Il-sung, Kim Jong-il has attempted to distinguish North Korean residents from the South Korean *gungmin* by emphasizing the concept of the people (*minjok*) of Kim Il-sung.

Our Dear Leader Kim Jong-il pointed out as follows. "We should continue to strengthen the heroic image and revolutionary achievements of our

Great Leader (*suryeong*) so as to teach our *inmin* to cherish the endless pride that comes from being the people (*minjok*) of Kim Il-sung and worship the Great Leader (*suryeong*) as the permanent sun of Juche.” It is our Dear Leader’s will and belief that we should worship the Great Leader as the sun of Juche and as the father of Joseon socialism and that we should continuously inherit the achievements of the Great Leader. (Im 2004:21)

This can be construed as Kim Jong-il’s desire to upgrade Kim Il-sung’s status to that of the ‘permanent sun’ and to rule over North Korea based on What can best be termed as basking in the reflected glory of his father Kim Il-sung. However, this position inevitably runs contrary to North Korea’s stance of approaching the people (*inmin*) of North and South Korea from the standpoint of one unified nation. In other words, the concept of the people (*minjok*) of Kim Il-sung inescapably clashes with the notion of ‘our nation’ (*uri minjok*). In this regard, while North Korea has emphasized this notion of the people (*minjok*) of Kim Il-sung domestically, it has externally, as part of its unified front strategy, promoted the concept that the people (*inmin*) of North and South Korea belong to the same nation (*minjok*). Thus, its political maneuvering on the international scene has been based on a different identity.

Dear Leader Kim Jong-il is the leader who will commence the transitional phase towards the unification of the fatherland based on the power of *Songun* 先軍 (military first) in the new century. ... The unification of the fatherland is a very difficult and complicated task that involves expelling American imperialism that seeks to permanently divide our nation, and uniting all members of the nation with different ideologies, notions, political opinions and religions as one. This can only be actualized by engaging in the independent anti-American imperialism-based politics needed to guarantee victory in the anti-American struggle, and by the advent of great national unity-based politics required to bring together all members of the nation (*minjok*) on the path towards patriotic unification. ... The essence of *Songun* politics, which serves as the sword for the unification of the fatherland, is embedded in the politics of national independence, politics of great national unity, and the politics of peace keeping. In this regard, the source of our invincibility lies in these political principles. (Jang 2005:123-124)

As we can see from the quote above, the “unification of the fatherland”

emphasized by North Korea should be construed as part of its anti-American identity politics designed to separate the United States from the Republic of Korea (South Korea), and as nothing more than an expression of its intent to achieve, through its politics of national identity known as ‘great national unity’ (*minjok daedangyeol* 民族大團結), unification under communism.

Conclusion

During the early stages of the North Korean regime, North Korea was defined as a socialist state in which the sovereignty was vested in the *inmin* defined as being made up of members of the proletarian class such as laborers and farmers. However, following the establishment of the Juche ideology as an implement with which to maintain his monolithic dictatorship, Kim Il-sung employed a political strategy that effectively placed the sovereignty that had heretofore been vested in the *inmin* of North Korea in the hands of the Great Leader (*suryeong*). This strategy was one in which the history of the anti-Japanese armed struggle and the contrasts between the Northern identity and that of the South Korean regime were heavily emphasized.

In the aftermath of the death of Kim Il-sung, North Korea sought to form a state identity that revolved around the differences with South Korea, a step that was achieved with the growing identification of North Koreans as the people (*minjok*) of Kim Il-sung. However, as North Korea cannot abandon its calls for the ‘unification of the fatherland’ that have constituted an integral part of its campaign to prove the supremacy of its system, it finds itself unable to discard the notion of a unified ethnic nation (*danil minjok* 單一民族). As a result, North Korea has sharpened its message regarding the pride of the Korean nation in its national independence, while also emphasizing the role of the Great Leader (*suryeong*) system and Juche ideology as the most significant characteristics of Juche socialism. Put differently, North Korea’s state identity has become a two-fold one in which it has sought not only to highlight its ‘differences from and superiority over’ South Korea, but also to expose the fact that the two Koreas are the ‘same but different.’

North Korea responded to the Sino-Soviet split that began during the mid-1950s by beginning to emphasize North Korean-style Juche socialism. Meanwhile, North Korea sought to overcome the domestic and international

crisis occasioned by the collapse of the Soviet Union and its Eastern European satellites during the 1990s by emphasizing the domestic nature of its socialist system. Thereafter, rather than blindly adhering to the merits of North Korean socialism, North Korea started to gradually emphasize the national homogeneity that exists between North and South Korea. North Korea has implemented a discriminative strategy as part of its state identity that has seen it separate the South Korean regime from the people (*gungmin*). Thus, while the South Korean regime has been identified as an entity that should be overthrown, the *gungmin* of South Korea and the *inmin* of North Korea are viewed as entities that should be united. In other words, while it emphasized the fact that the South Korean regime, in its capacity as an entity that furthered the colonial policies of U.S. imperialism, is the enemy of the people (*minjok*), it has also elevated itself to the status of the state that would liberate South Korea from such U.S. imperialism. As such, it is clear that in North Korea, national (*minjok*) identity has constituted an important variable in terms of the establishment of policy.

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Abstract

North Korea made great efforts after liberation to establish a national identity that could be distinguished from that of South Korea. Here, such means included the acceptance of the Soviet system and the following of the tenets of the proletarian internationalism adhered to by socialist countries. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) was established amidst a propaganda-based competition with the South Korean government to prove the superiority of its chosen system to the Korean people.

As the proletarian class, Communist Party, and Great Leader (*suryeong*) became the essential qualities that defined the *inmin*, the residents of North Korea were in essence degraded to the status of people (*inmin*) of Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il. This study analyzes the relationships of identity between *inmin*, *gungmin* and *minjok* in North Korea. Identity politics during the early stage of the North Korean regime revolved around the usual socialist propaganda that national sovereignty rested in the members of the proletarian class such as the *inmin* (laborers and farmers). However, in the aftermath of Kim Il-sung's establishment of the Juche ideology as a means to prop up his dictatorship, the North pursued a form of politics that saw national sovereignty be transferred from the *inmin* of North Korea to the Great Leader. Here, emphasis was placed on the history of the anti-Japanese armed struggle so as to distinguish the North's identity from that of the South Korean regime.

Keywords: North Korea (DPRK), identity, nation, national identity, Juche ideology