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# *The Impact of Personality Cult in North Korea*

*Jae Jean Suh*



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**Korea Institute for  
National Unification**

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## I . Introduction

On October 15, 2002, Iraqi voters cast 100 percent of vote in support of President Saddam Hussein in the presidential election, extending his term of office for another seven years. Within six months, however, the Hussein regime collapsed as a result of the Iraq War, and the Iraqi people were overjoyed at the liberation from Hussein's rule and destroyed his statues everywhere. Hussein himself was arrested by the American troops on December 13, 2003, after months of hiding since the fall of Baghdad. Upon hearing the news, Iraqi citizens poured out to the streets in a festive mood. To be sure, there have been terrors and resistances in the wake of the occupation of Iraq. But, it would be fair to say that a great majority of Iraqis turned their backs on Hussein. This is a typical behavior pattern of the people who have been under the control of an oppressive regime.

In contrast, however, many North Korean defectors who fled from the oppressive regime and food shortage, and are in South Korea, would confide that Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il were great leaders and that they could hardly erase Kim Il Sung, in particular, from their memory. In other words, they apparently continue to respect Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il even after their escape to South Korea, where the power of the two Kims does not reach. This attitude will show that Iraq under Hussein and North Korea under the Kims are two entirely different cases. Such attitudes of North Korean defectors raise perplexity in the South Korean mind and make it more difficult for us to

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understand North Korea. Their conflicting attitudes could also lead to a mistaken understanding of the true nature of the North Korean regime.

At this point, some important questions need to be raised regarding North Korea's policy of personality cult and how we should assess its impact. First, how is personality cult practiced in North Korea, and why would the people who abhorred the system and so escaped to South Korea, nevertheless continue to adore the leader(s) of the regime they say they still hate? It is a very important subject of research to find out and analyze the underlying truth about North Korea's personality cult education and the structure of North Korean minds that refuse to shake off the view of their former leaders long after their defection. Failure to understand accurately the background of and reasons for their private respect for the Kims could result in a faulty and wrongful understanding of the North Korean system. Looking at the defectors who continue to rate Kim Il Sung highly, ordinary South Koreans would be curious to know if there were certain merits in the North Korean system that are yet unknown to them. Some will even go so far as to think that the reason the North Korean system continues to survive even as other socialist systems collapsed is because there are certain merits in its system. This, then, is an important issue that must be clearly examined and explained.

Second, another important subject of research to properly understand the North Korean society is to examine the impact the political education of Kim Il Sung worship has had on the people. An important fact is that there exist two conflicting positions in the political

minds of North Koreans. On the one hand, they love and respect the Kims as if they were God. On the other hand, they feel hostile, betrayed and deprived toward the starvation-ridden North Korean regime. Also, while they would deify the Kims, they would show deep animosity toward other officials. North Koreans generally feel hostile to the party cadres and believe that they are responsible for the food shortage. This is a form of class conflict between the people and the cadres. And, we will be able to understand the North Korean society accurately only if these phenomena are fully analyzed.

North Korea may have succeeded in idolizing Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il, but many scholars point out that the idolatry itself has also been working as fetters to the progress of the North Korean society. Some analysts point to the low labor productivity as one of the reasons for the North Korean economic hardship. Perhaps, the low productivity should be seen as a byproduct of its sociopolitical policies that were focused on political idolization. North Korea has been successful in political idolization but it failed to efficiently utilize its workforce. In order to overcome its economic hardship, North Korea will need to pursue openness and reforms more actively. The problem, however, seems to be the clashing attitude of the people toward the cadres, who are responsible for the attainment of these goals.

One of the most serious aftereffects of personality cult is that various political education and social controls mobilized for the purpose of deification tend to oppress and destroy human nature. As Hans Johachim Maaz observed, East Germans had suffered a serious

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damage to their mental health under the totalitarian system.<sup>1</sup> The German precedent may not repeat itself in North Korea, but the issue must be raised as an important problem in studying North Korea.

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the positive and negative effects of North Korea's personality cult strategy at various levels. The previous studies on its personality cult were largely confined to pointing out that personality cult was being promoted in North Korea, and to discussing the symbolic meaning of various memorials and structures built for this purpose. But, there has been a paucity of critical evaluations of North Korea's personality cult itself. We also need to know the truth about the North Korean leader(s) who are hidden behind the facade of personality cult. Critical analyses of personality cult and the process of its political socialization are also important for purposes of integration of two Korean systems after the unification.

I have drawn on various speeches of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il for the purpose of identifying the strategies of personality cult and the process of its political socialization. For the purpose of evaluating the impact of personality cult and the process of its political socialization, I have relied on the materials obtained through in-depth personal interviews with North Korean defectors who are in South Korea.<sup>2</sup>

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1 Hans-Johachim Maaz, *Der Gefühlsstau* (Argon Verlag, 1990), *Saikoui sum* (translated by Song Dong-jun) (Minum-sa, 1994).

2 Fictitious names are used when quoting North Korean defectors.

## **II . The Strategy of Personality Cult**

The purpose of this chapter is to study the background and reasons that will make the North Korean defectors unable to shake off the logic of personality cult and influence them to continue to believe Kim Il Sung was a leader of divine authority even after they escaped from the North Korean system and defected to South Korea. In this chapter, we will analyze the structure of various political tracts that North Korea put together to promote the personality cult of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il. The logical structures of North Korean tracts in this chapter were identified in the course of in-depth interviews with North Korean defectors and reviewing various speeches of the Kims.

### **1. Kim Il Sung's Image as a Leader of Anti-Japan Armed Struggles**

One of the most important points in promoting the personality cult for Kim Il Sung is the image that Kim Il Sung was a leader of anti-Japan armed struggles. The idea is to make people believe that Kim Il Sung helped recover the country from the Japanese through his armed struggles. In fact, the defector testimonies show that the reason they regarded Kim Il Sung as a great leader was because he "is the national hero who brought liberation to Korea through tenacious armed struggles." And, many of them testified that they believed this to be a fact of history. Under very adverse conditions, they thought, Kim Il

Sung fought against the Japanese, successfully defeated them, drove them out and liberated North Korea.

But, it is also true that many portions about Kim Il Sung's anti-Japan struggles have been distorted or exaggerated by North Korea. For example, during his anti-Japan struggles in 1940 the Japanese drove out Kim Il Sung into the Khavarovsk region of Russia. There, he was assigned to a unit of Russia's Far Eastern Army until 1945 when the Soviet Union liberated North Korea from Japan. But this fact has been hidden away from North Korea's modern history.

In any case, North Korea has highlighted Kim Il Sung's anti-Japan "partisan" activities, with distortions and exaggerations, as the most important source of merit in promoting his personality cult. North Korea also justified Kim Il Sung as Suryong (the Great Leader) by illustrating his anti-Japan partisan activities and achievements through various means of education and media publicity. Kim Il Sung himself also tried to promote his stature on the basis of anti-Japan armed struggles. This effort is clearly visible from the fact that the most frequent reference he made in his speeches was his anti-Japan armed struggle experiences.

## **2. Promotion of Kim's Image as an Infallible Leader**

Another important strategy in promoting the personality cult for Kim Il Sung is to build his image as a great and infallible leader. The idea was to establish the fact that he was a man of unlimited abilities and was incomparable to any other human being, and that based on his



abilities he was able to produce ultimate successes.

Suryong possesses unequalled wisdom, decent Communist virtues, limitless magnanimity and outstanding leadership that no other human being could ever have, and he is the supreme leader uniformly directing the working masses' revolutionary struggles for self-reliance. His unusually rich and diverse administrative experiences he accumulated in the course of revolutionary struggles and his long-lasting achievements accord him absolute authority and stature, and he is the truly trusted and respected leader of the people.<sup>3</sup>

The above quote shows that Suryong is defined not simply in terms of an institution but in terms of the reasons why his personal abilities and achievements need be praised. In this regard, Suryong is not simply a title but a concept designed to build up Kim's charisma. North Korea's "Political Dictionary" defines Suryong as follows:

Suryong of the working class is the political leader, who understands better and envisages farther than anyone else the rational development of history, dire needs of the times, correlations between the classes, the environment in which revolutionary struggles proceed, and the way to achieve the revolution. He most thoroughly represents the interests of the masses, most accurately realizes their aspirations and directions, and possesses rich experiences and a scientific art of leadership based on long and trying revolutionary struggles. He is the absolutely trusted political leader with the highest authority based on his dedicated services to the

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3 The Social Science Publishers, *The Leadership Structure*, (Compendium of Juche Ideology, 9) (Pyongyang: Social Science Pub., 1995), p. 35.

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great task of revolution of the working class and the lasting achievements that the people and the fatherland have witnessed which nothing will possibly bring down.<sup>4</sup>

In accordance with this definition, North Korea made it a national command to obey and respect Suryong absolutely and unconditionally. This command is known as the “10 Principles” to support a “unitary ideology.” The 10 Principles announced in 1974 are the North Korean version of “Ten Commandments,” and serve as a political bible for all North Koreans in their daily lives. The 10 Principles demand that everybody must struggle to death to spread Kim Il Sung’s revolutionary spirit throughout the society, regard Kim’s authority as absolute, accept Kim’s teachings as faith, and absolutely uphold the principle of “unconditionally following” and carrying out Kim’s instructions. The 10th command demands, “The great revolutionary tasks developed by the Great Suryong Kim Il Sung must be handed down to and completed by later generations.” This means that the 10 principles would equally apply to Kim Jong Il. The dogma of Kim Il Sung’s infallibility in North Korea is comparable to the concept of infallibility of God in Christianity. And, North Korea’s 10 principles seem to serve similar purposes as the Ten Commandments for Christians. Many scholars have pointed out that North Korea’s strategy to idolize Kim Il Sung evidently tried to emulate Christian doctrines in many respects.<sup>5</sup>

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4 *Political Dictionary*, (Pyongyang: Social Science Pub., 1973), p. 324.

5 For a detailed analysis on this point, see Kim Byung-Rho, *Religion and the North Korean Society: A Comparative Study of Juche Ideology and Christianity*, (Seoul: KINU, 2000).

### 3. Shifting the Blame on to Others

The “absolute and infallible” leader Kim Il Sung ruled North Korea for half a century. As widely known, however, North Korea is currently in a dire situation of having to ask for grain assistance from all over the world as it is unable to meet the most basic needs of the people such as food, clothing and shelter. The life of North Koreans turned for the worse after the death of Kim Il Sung, as if to prove that the North Korean system failed to function properly, especially due to his absence.<sup>6</sup>

Given the circumstances, why do people continue to regard Kim Il Sung as the infallible and great leader? It owes much to a cunning strategy. One of the tactics North Korea has been employing to cover up its systemic problems is the tactic of “shifting blames” on to others or to the outside world. Even the blames and responsibilities for the recent economic hardship are shifted on to lower-level officials rather than on Kim Il Sung or Kim Jong Il.

For some time now, North Koreans have heard of hearsay of unknown origin that the economic hardship was “due to the mismanagement of middle-level officials.”<sup>7</sup> At the time of “Hardship March,” the following rumors circulated widely among the people, “Happiness March for the officials, but Hardship March for the Leader

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6 Suh Dae-Sook, *Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il, the Leaders of Modern North Korea*, (Seoul: Euiyoo Culture Pub., 2000), p. 158.

7 Testimony of Lee Chul-seung (Former researcher at Hydroelectric Power Research Institute, defected in 1994) on Oct. 9, 2003.

8 Testimony of YoonX-sil (Former worker at Syringe/ampule Factory, defected in December 2002) on Aug. 18, 2003.

and the People.”<sup>8</sup>

The method with which Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il shifted blames on to their lower echelon staff, was to criticize them for failing to work diligently, or for their selfish behaviors and goof-off attitudes.

#### **4. Blaming on Individuals Without Fixing Systemic Problems**

One of the most important techniques of the personality cult strategy is to make one believe that the fundamental source of the problem is not the regime or the leader but myself and the systems around me. In other words, the trick of this strategy is to make believe that the root causes for all the problems in the North Korean society do not stem from its system or the supreme leader, but from the middle management between the supreme leader and myself; in other words, the ordinary citizens and individuals, as well as the lower-level units to which they belong.

This type of thinking is infused into the people through the so-called “life of total harmony” doctrine. Under this doctrine, everything from jobs, schools and family life, including one’s thinking and speaking, would be subject to “public self-criticism,” so that the analysis, interpretation, conclusions, and alternatives concerning all collective, national, social, organizational, and personnel problems would ultimately come down to individuals for their resolution, hence the downward problem-solving structure.

In other words, the strategy is to train the people’s way of thinking in terms of downward problem-solving mode, so that they will believe that

all absurdities and contradictions stemming from bad policies, rigid systems, or Suryong, in fact, arise from flaws in oneself, his/her surroundings or the incompetence of lower-level units.

So, the "life of total harmony" is a ploy that will force individuals to look for the causes of political, social and economic tensions and contradictions from around one's own surroundings. It is a system that literally forces individuals to discover satisfactory answers to the problems, regardless of who or what caused the problems. Indeed, this is the most powerful element that will re-direct the people's concerns over various problems of the North Korean regime to individual dimensions, or "mea culpa!"

If certain problems occur in the party's life of total harmony, North Koreans are educated to look for his/her shortcomings first. And, if they are dissatisfied with the regime or its policies, they are told to come up with problems and solutions themselves and "study harder," instead of blaming Kim Il Sung or the regime.

They will receive specific warnings if they tried to shift blames upward rather than look for the problems and responsibilities within themselves. They are constantly reminded to find the causes of the problem within themselves and try harder to rectify the flaws. In short, the people are told not to shift their responsibilities elsewhere, even though the supreme leader will.

In times of difficulty, Christians would not blame God for the responsibility but look up to Him as Savior and pray for deliverance. Likewise, North Koreans seem to regard Kim Il Sung not as a target of blame but as one of their prayers for deliverance. This is why North Koreans say they are unable themselves to intrude into Kim Il Sung's

personal domain, because he is absolute and legitimate. Just as Christians would lead their lives by the words of the Bible, North Koreans are required to live their lives by the policies of the Party, and many who are Party's favorites, will do so.<sup>9</sup>

## **5. Shifting the Blame on to Internal Enemies**

Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il not only would shift the responsibilities for various problems on to individuals, but they would also frequently deliver speeches warning against internal enemies at individual levels. North Korea has been promoting political socialization through a "follow-the-model" method. But, it would always set up internal enemies. It is well known that North Korea classified its entire population into Core Class (or, Core Masses), Complex Class and Hostile Class, and would use them as a means of social control.

Particularly noteworthy is the fact that North Korea has always come up with a set of internal enemies at every historical turning point or in times of political turbulence. For example, when it was promoting the policy of agricultural cooperatives the regime labeled those who opposed as "harmful elements," "agitating elements," and "reactionary elements." In the late 1980s and early 1990s when the regime was going through a period of crisis, slogans warning against internal enemies such as "traitors of socialism" and "anti-revolution agitators" were created. These were, of course, imaginary internal enemies.

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9 Testimony of Lee Chu-hseung.

## 6. Shifting the Blame on to External Enemies

In addition to its “internal enemy” ploy, North Korea has been taking advantage of “external enemies” on which to shift the blames. South Korea and the United States have been used as its external enemies. In particular, its economic hardship was blamed on the U.S. economic blockade. And, since 1992 when its nuclear problem became an international issue, North Korea developed a theory that the United States was planning to launch a nuclear attack on North Korea.

It has been exaggerating U.S. threats by insisting that not only did the United States provoke a war in the past, it was planning another war on the Korean Peninsula.

Kim Il Sung used to argue that the United States was interfering with North Korea’s industrial development and impeding its economic activities. Clearly, then, North Korea is shifting the responsibility for the economic hardship on to the United States.

Furthermore, the North Korean leadership tried to shift the blame for the food shortage on to the changing external environment since the collapse of the Socialist bloc. It argued that the changing external conditions were responsible for its lack of foreign exchange with which to purchase grains. By emphasizing that the external conditions in the 1990s were entirely different from the past, it tried to blame external sources for the difficulties North Korea was experiencing during the period of “hardship march.”

## 7. Shifting the Blames on to Natural Disasters

In the process of promoting the Kim Il Sung/Kim Jong Il personality cult, natural disasters were another blame-shifting target. As an excuse for the food shortage, North Korea tried to shift the blames on to the natural disasters it had sustained during the period, rather than to the policy failures of the leadership.

In fact, Kim Jong Il said, "In recent 3-4 years we have sustained unusually severe natural disasters. Having witnessed the disasters, those who know our situation well, and even the Americans, called it a mirade that we kept up our socialist system and played our role as a bulwark of socialism."<sup>10</sup>

Even North Korea actually acknowledged the severity of food shortage, for it could not possibly deny the reality of massive starvation deaths. But, the responsibility for this situation is shifted over elsewhere away from the government authorities. It is well documented that when North Korea asked the international community for grain assistance in 1995, it insisted that its grain supplies fell short due to the poor harvest brought on by the natural disasters.

## 8. Political Socialization to Re-shape People into Malleable Humans

One of the important points of North Korea's personality cult

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10 Kim Jong Il, "About Learning the Revolutionary Military Spirit," (From a dialogue with ranking workers of the KWP Central Committee, March 17, 1997). See *Selected Works of Kim Jong Il* (KWP Publication, 2000), p. 294.



strategy is not simply to promote the idolization of Kim Il Sung but to educate the people in such a way that they would be unable to think logically or critically. It is a strategy of political socialization that would not allow any criticism of personality cult itself. Personality cult involves lots of exaggeration and fabrication of facts. Any revelation of true facts, or criticism of them, would be a serious matter, so it was imperative to prevent such possibilities from the source.

One of the objectives of the “Human-reshaping Project,” then, is to foster uncritical, blind-following human nature. The “theory of human-reshaping” is the textbook of North Korea’s political socialization. According to this theory, the objective is to reshape individuals as human robots who will think and behave exactly as Kim Il Sung will think and behave.

The purpose of this human-reshaping project is to indoctrinate and reshape the people such that they will blind-follow Kim Il Sung without any critical thinking abilities. Consequently, most North Koreans were not allowed to learn any concepts or theories with which to analyze their reality, hence were unable to raise problems or think critically. Even the South Korean academic community was able to critically examine their own society after the scholars were exposed to such radical ideas as the “dependency theory,” “Marxism-Leninism” and “critiques of Marxism.” So, it would not be too difficult to imagine how narrow the line of thinking of North Korea would be if they were taught and allowed only the “unitary ideology (Juche)” for decades.

Defector Lee Chul-seung said he once participated in a meeting of the “three great revolutions squad.” A senior person there posed a simple question to him, “What comes first in life, materials or ideology?”

He said this simple question threw him into a shock, and it was his first experience of independent thinking.

In order to eliminate the very sources of critical thinking, North Korea even removed all pamphlets and books on Marxism-Leninism in the 1970s. In efforts to train the North Korean mind with the Kim Il Sung thought, North Korea totally confiscated all books and articles on the topics of Marx-Leninism. As a result, there is no book in North Korea today that will help nurture critical thinking or dissenting viewpoints. Under these circumstances, it would be extremely difficult to form critical viewpoints concerning Kim Il Sung. The defectors who had never been critical in North Korea confessed that they were unable to form critical opinions even in South Korea. This is one of the reasons why the North Korean defectors in South Korea are still unable to critically analyze Kim Il Sung or his policies.

### **III . The Consequences and Impact of Personality Cult**

Thus far, we have tried to identify the reasons why the North Korean people still believe that Kim Il Sung was a great leader even as they were driven into extreme economic hardship and to the edge of regime collapse. In order to promote personality cult through which it hopes to maintain the Kim Il Sung/Kim Jong Il regime, North Korea has been investing an enormous amount of national effort in this project, operating various systems and organizations, and mobilizing its populace for political rallies designed to uphold the theme of personality cult.

In this chapter, we will review the impact of various policies the North Korean leader(s) have carried out for half a century to promote their personality cult.

#### **1. The Effect of the Personality Cult Strategy**

##### **A. Overall Assessment**

The following is the essence of findings of this study regarding the structure of ideological logic for personality cult. North Korea tried to infuse into the people with the idea that the leader was great and the system superior. It tried to exaggerate past achievements if they had some merit and paint the future with robust hopes. To the extent that

there were problems, North Korea deliberately shifted blames on to others, by faulting lower echelon people, blaming external and internal enemies, or finding excuses in natural disasters. This is the basic structure of building the personality cult. And, various public relations tools and physical repressions were used to “internalize” these arguments in the minds of the people.

Apparently, the strategy of personality cult North Korea has pursued for half a century has had some success. The evidence of this success is the fact that Kim Il Sung’s power was never seriously challenged until his death. However, it would be difficult to conclude that the strategy of personality cult succeeded based simply on public consent. Another important tool was physical repressions. In fact, strict surveillance and social control in North Korea is well known. To be sure, a well-structured political argument for personality cult was developed and widely circulated through repeated education and public media, but more frequently North Korea relied on physical repressions for the purpose. Professor Suh Dae-Sook pointed out that Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il have been maintaining the regime on the basis not of popular support but of North Korean People’s Army.<sup>11</sup>

Because the regime employed physical repressions in most cases, there is an interesting side to the perception structure of the North Korean people. They show a tendency to think of Kim Il Sung and the North Korean socialist system separately. They tend to think that Kim Il Sung is great but the North Korean system contains lots of problems,

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11 Suh Dae-Sook, *North Korean Leaders Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il*, (Seoul: Eulyoo Cultural Pub. Co, 2000), p. 157.

including the massive starvation deaths. Kim Il Sung is in the absolute domain, hence all judgments are reserved, but they tend to give a negative assessment on various problems of the system.

They also distinguish Kim Il Sung from Kim Jong Il. They have a much lower regard for Kim Jong Il compared to Kim Il Sung. They say they used to have high expectations for Kim Jong Il, because they received lots of education about him. They thought the son would be perfect as the sole successor. But, they were gradually disappointed at Kim Jong Il's performance as their leader, because he would go around military units, asking to achieve national unification, while people were starving and dying in the aftermath of Kim Il Sung's death.

Ultimately, reactions against Kim Jong Il began to appear soon after the death of Kim Il Sung. The root causes were the frustrations of the present and the hopelessness for the future. Even the intellectuals and ranking officials, not to mention the general public, began to think that Kim Jong Il was not good enough. They began to ask whether there were anything good that Kim Jong Il had done for the people.<sup>12</sup>

Recently, there is a uniform line of thinking from high-level officials to low-level workers and farmers. The idea is that the economy, hence the nation, has been in decline since the onset of the Kim Jong Il era. Since the death of Kim Il Sung, people's expectations of Kim Jong Il have mostly evaporated and no one will hold out hope for the younger Kim's regime. The ranking officials would endure the situation and render superficial loyalty since they get relatively better benefits, while

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12 Testimony of Lee Wook-byung (Former military supply guidance agent at Nampo, defected in December 2002) during an interview on Nov. 9, 2003.

workers, farmers and lower-level people would persevere with the reality because they have no other alternatives. Frequently the North Korean defectors would say that the world has come to an end. What they meant by “an end” was that there was nothing to eat and no workplace was running, hence the end of the world.<sup>13</sup>

Despite enormous efforts over the years to promote personality cult and political socialization, Kim Jong Il's personal authority seems to have significantly degraded. Clearly, then, in order to muster political support, economic progress would be more effective than ideology education. An excellent case in point is South Korea's President Park Chung Hee (r. 1961-1979), who is highly regarded for his achievement of rapid economic growth despite his authoritarian style of rule.

## **B. The Effect of Each Strategy**

Among the many strategies to promote personality cult for Kim Il Sung, the effort to paint the image of Kim Il Sung as the sole, infallible leader seems to have made some success.

And, this infallible leader image has apparently benefited from the strategy of shifting the blames for failures or problems on to other sources, such as the lower-level officials, individual citizens, external sources and natural disasters. And, the most effective of them was to shift the blames on to low-ranking officials. This is quite apparent from the testimonies of most defectors from North Korea. Despite their

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13 Testimony of Lim Bok-sin (Age 48, Former senior technician at a Paper Mill, defected in October 1998).

experiences of economic hardship and food shortage, they would continue to argue in South Korea that Kim Il Sung's policies were correct, but the low-ranking officials were the problems.

But, most North Koreans no longer believe in the visions of bright future the regime is presenting to the people. Many of them now believe that they have been deceived.

North Koreans say they have a saying, "Lack of food makes you think fast."<sup>14</sup> The factor that most directly triggered their critical spirit against the regime was absolute poverty.

In addition to absolute poverty, they say they felt deceived because the regime was propagandizing too many things that were far from the reality they personally knew otherwise.

Ideology is intimately connected with reality, such as food, shelter and clothing, but the latter never came close to what the former promised. North Koreans are human beings, too; so they say they know how to connect the two imperatives. They say they get angry and frustrated because the regime continues to exercise control over them, even though they were so poor as to skip even the subsistence-level meals.

North Koreans often emphasize, "Even worms will begin to profess their opinions if lied to too many times." They cannot and do not openly discuss personal complaints, but they will do so between close friends and relatives. Some Security or Social Safety agents are nasty, but most of them would simply warm their seats, waiting for better

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14 Testimony of Suh Chu-young (Age 25, Former signalman at Sechon Rail Station, Namyang Branch Office, Chungjin Railway Bureau, defected to the South Aug. 14, 1999).

opportunities. This is the attitude of most of the officials at Security and Social Safety Agencies. For example, they would let the people know in advance when the inspection or audit agents will show up. Short of advance notice, they will at least look the other way about "misdemeanors." In other words, they, too, have come to realize how they have been lied to for decades. One defector testified that North Koreans have enough sense to see through their reality despite the ideological education they received, and said, "Workers are not ignorant. In fact, a dozen of ignorant workers will outsmart the smartest."<sup>15</sup>

They also said the North Korean people were full of frustrations. They now realize, "We have been living for decades without expressing our views, but everything is for naught. This is no way to lead a life." In other words, they began to break out of the fantasy and face the reality.

North Koreans often express this type of awareness by saying, "We now know all that we need to know." Some people have already overcome their frustrations, and are now waiting for new opportunities. Their outlook has already completely changed. And, they blame this outcome on Kim Jong Il.

The reason the North Korean system is still running despite the changing outlook of North Koreans is because the system of physical control is still working effectively. As Prof. Suh insisted above, the most effective means of maintaining the North Korean system are the ever-

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15 Testimony of Lee Im-young (Age 36, Third Secretary, Deputy Chief at Dandong Office, China, from the Accounting Department of Geu msusan People's Assembly, defected to the South in December 1997).



present surveillance and the abusive physical controls.

## **2. The Impact of Personality Cult**

The policy of promoting personality cult has had too many unintended repercussions on the North Korean society. The policy forced North Koreans into a miserable life that would threaten even the minimum level of subsistence: Socially, they fomented distrust and conflict between the classes; Politically, they forced the personality cult of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il upon the people; And, economically, they caused inefficiency and stagnation. In the following, let us review in detail the impact of personality cult by sectors.

### **A. On Individuals**

#### **The Oppressed Life**

Various measures taken for the promotion of personality cult have forced unhappy lives on individuals. From the socioeconomic point of view, North Koreans are forced on a life that would be similar to or worse than the serfs of the Middle Ages. They are not allowed to hold or leave jobs at will, and employment is a matter not of individual rights but of a duty to the state. Just as the serfs were bound to the master's estate in the Middle Ages, North Korean farmers and workers are tied down to their assigned factory and land for life.

In addition to the socioeconomic yoke, they are put under tight political controls. Any word or action against the Kim Il Sung and Kim

Jong Il personality cult will constitute a political crime. Even occasional meetings of friends are politically prohibited, because the closer the friendship the greater the chance of criticizing the leaders and discussing political issues. This is the reason why North Korea will allow “comrades” but not “friends.” As a result, people are bound to foster distrusting relationships, but never amicable social relationships between and among individuals, which will in turn make it difficult to feel an emotional fulfillment through social contacts. In fact, North Koreans would feel more fear and emotional instability when they meet with others due to the ever-present surveillance and the possible physical punishment.

Even though most North Koreans are socio-economically controlled, their economic hardship continues to persist. They are living on the verge of starvation, and the most basic human needs are not met and unavailable. Indeed, an untold number of people are facing starvation in North Korea today.

Under such impoverished and repressive conditions, grudges and complaints are bound to accumulate, but North Koreans are prohibited from openly expressing them. When expressions of emotions are suppressed, the sense of frustration and deprivation will naturally grow deeper. But, the highest of all “socialist ideals” is said to be the suppression of emotions. Emotions stemming from insecurity, anger, pain, sorrow and pleasure are all regarded as taboos in a socialist society. People are told to avoid negative feelings, and suppress expressions of pleasure. Controlling and suppressing emotions are regarded as virtues or socialist ideals. Only those who are highly trained in controlling one’s emotional process are said to qualify as the

cadre of the Party, Government or Military.<sup>16</sup>

North Koreans in fact understand the essence of the problem(s), but will desist from expressing them. They all know that their society has serious problems, but they will not, and must not, express them. A defector testified that all North Koreans, to a person, share exactly the same view.<sup>17</sup>

### Socio-Psychological Malaise

Many North Koreans are known to suffer from pent-up emotional stresses due to unreleased emotions over time. This stress called “han” in Korean is typically a result of undigested emotional stresses resulting from inability to openly release one’s personal feelings, frustrations, and sense of injustice. Many North Korean defectors frequently testify that there were many people with “han” in North Korea. They say there are many cadres whom the people would like to shoot first if war broke out. They say if people were to accept this sort of psychological frame of mind as destiny and adjust themselves to it, it would soon become part of life and a universal attitude.<sup>18</sup>

The psychological state of mind known as “han” could develop into a neurological illness. In neurology, this illness is called in many names, such as neurosis, psychoneurosis, phobia, obsession,

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16 Hans Joachim Maaz, *op.cit.*, pp. 89-91.

17 Testimony of Lee Jae (Age 37, Writer and Producer at Military Entertainment Unit, defected to the South in March 1999).

18 Testimony of Kim Chul-dae (former researcher at Mathematical Engineering Center, Institute of Science, defected in January 1999).

depression, claustrophobia, and hypersensitivity, all of which is caused mostly by a prolonged unstable state of mind.

The people living under the socialist systems have extreme fears toward government agents and are very suspicious of other people. This may not be a symptom of neurosis, but based on defector testimonies it is clear that there are many who are suffering from this syndrome.

North Koreans are said to be suffering from two kinds of fears. First is the fear that I could fall prey to the system as a political scapegoat. Because they have lived oppressed lives, there always is a fear of one kind or another. Fear of public execution is one and suddenly disappearing neighbors are another source of fear. North Koreans believe that under the present situation where everything and anything could become unlawful and illegal at any moment, anyone could be charged with illegality. They feel constantly unstable for fear that they might fail to carry out the instructions of the party.<sup>19</sup>

The fear or phobia of North Koreans also stem from the surveillance and reporting systems. They always fear that someone is watching over them, and worry that if reported as a political criminal the entire family would be punished. This sort of feeling is widely shared by ordinary citizens. Even ordinary citizens should reserve their words, since informants (or “the eyeballs”) are everywhere.

Because North Koreans are in such an unstable state of mind, everyone around would “all be startled” if a safety agent called out, “Hey!” The reason is that once a security or safety agent decided to

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19 Testimony of defector Chung Suk-young (Age 23, Elementary school teacher, North Hamkyung Province, defected in January 1999).

investigate a citizen, no one could escape citation of violations of some party rules and regulations. So, everyone fears so deeply as to worry that "the agent knows everything down to the bottom of my mind." If a security agent were looking for someone, he/she would simply freeze on the spot out of fear. Most people who are taken to various detention camps are not due to any particular anti-regime behaviors but due to wrong expressions of words.<sup>20</sup> So, everyone always has fears and suffer from some type of phobia.

The second fear North Koreans are suffering from is uncertainties concerning their livelihood. They fear that I might also become like that person dying from starvation. Amid numerous starvation deaths, survival itself would be uncertain, hence the fear.

The two fears are intimately related to death. They both stem from uncertain future, instability of daily lives, political repressions and psychological fears. The higher their social positions, the deeper their political fears; and the lower their levels, the more unstable and uncertain their livelihood. Due to the aftershocks of openness, the higher echelon people are purged more often. People in the special categories, such as having lived abroad, are more conscious of surveillance and informers.<sup>21</sup>

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20 Testimony of Lee Jae (Age 37, Writer and producer at Military Performance Unit, defected in March 1999.).

21 Testimony of Lee Im-young (Age 36, Accounting Department, Geumsusan People's Palace, defected in December 1997).

### Cardiac Neurosis

Cardiac neurosis is a result of constant fears turning into a heart problem. A North Korean defector testified that about 80 percent of North Korean women were suffering from this illness.<sup>22 23</sup>

Defector Kim Kyung-hae testified that most married women in North Korea are suffering from heart problems (cardiac neurosis). Almost every married woman has heart conditions of one kind or another, because they must endure the stresses of daily lives in addition to the fears and uncertainties coming from their social life. Men would seldom suffer from this illness, which is more common among women. The mother of one defector was an internist in North Korea, and when female patients come to her clinic she would first of all ask if they were married, because the doctor would want to examine the heart condition first. This is an indication of how many married women were suffering from heart illnesses.

The cardiac neurosis could be an important indicator of the level of pain of North Korean people.

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22 Patients suffering from cardiac neurosis would complain about heart problems, even though there is no specific physiological heart disorder. (For professional details, see <http://foodbes.net/ian.com> and <http://hanumpe.kr/h4fr/fr020607.htm>

23 Testimonies of defectors Kim Kyung-hae and Kim Nan-ae.

## B. On the Society

### Aggravating Social Conflict

One of the strategies to promote personality cult for Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il was to shift the blames on to lower level officials, while emphasizing that Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il were infallible. This strategy brought on a serious conflict between the classes. North Korea tried to absolutely deify Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il, while shifting the blames for economic hardship and other problems on to lower level officials. As a result of constantly accusing low-level officials of corruptions, illicit trafficking, bureaucratic mannerism and abuses of power, most citizens came to feel hostile to them. This is one of the aftereffects of political socialization, which promoted the two top leaders as sacred, while the rest of the officials took the blames.

At least in the 1970s when the succession problem was emerging, the North Korean people generally accepted Kim Il Sung's characterization, "Our world is a world of the working class." In the 1980s, however, they rejected this premise and used to say, "Our world is a world of officials."<sup>24</sup>

Under the recent economic hardship, the struggle between the officials and the people over the scarce commodities has become fierce, and their mutual hostility has become sharper. As the economic hardship worsened, the ruling class would monopolize the scarce

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24 Testimony of Lee Chul-seung (Researcher at Hydroelectric Research Institute, defected in 1994) during an interview on Oct. 9, 2003.

resources by mobilizing all kinds of just and unjust methods, and the people had to suffer a severe sense of relative deprivation. Broadly speaking, about 10 percent of the people are powerful and well to do, about 40 percent belong to what may be called middle class, engaged in smuggling or business of some sort, and the remaining 50 percent are the deprived class who are suffering from very difficult conditions. Until the early 1980s, people thought the officials and non-officials were living together under same conditions. But, as economic hardship deteriorated, people began to believe that inequality between the officials and the general public became apparent and serious. Increasingly, many citizens would complain, "Recent three years were more difficult than pre-liberation days. Our antipathy is beyond control." These grudges stem from their desperate condition of absolute poverty. North Koreans' grudges and sense of rejection against officials are widespread, even though their levels and nature of complaint may differ from person to person and from one class to the other. But, the interesting point is that their grudges are aimed mainly at the officials below Kim Jong Il.

North Koreans would never openly swear at or curse out officials, but between close friends they would do so all the time. They believe all officials are thieves, who simply keep their positions by means of flattery.

People say officials deserve firing squads. They would rob and skim profits from the people engaged in peddling, but officials are free to indulge in large-scale transactions. Officials usually do business, taking advantage of existing systems and organizations. They would telephone a storage or warehouse keeper or a detail leader and ask



them to put several bushels of rice on the truck he was sending over to some place. The lower level managers would simply have to comply. In short, they are engaged in underground business transactions, taking advantage of official lines, or, what may be called “white-collar crimes.” They are like parasites, taking personal profits out of national systems.

North Koreans would call such officials “a landlord-like bastard” or “Sorim,” a well-known villain in the novel, *Imkukjung*. About the officials, they would complain, “The problem is the middle leg.” But, they would not openly resist or protest because if they were to argue with party officials they would be criticized as harming the authority of the party.<sup>25</sup>

Another problem the people point out is that officials would file false reports. To protect their own skin, the officials would report that everything was fine when in fact everything was wrong, and people believe this type of false reporting practice is what hampers national development.

Defectors also relate that officials often take self-protective measures against the rising grudges of the people, by installing grid fences and padlocks around their homes, saying, “I fear citizens because they all look like reactionaries to me.”

Many officials fear that the citizens might beat them to death, and they are afraid of the ordinary people. Some even speculate that in the event of major political upheavals the elite belonging to Core Masses, such as families of party or security department would be the first ones

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25 Testimony of Kim Jung-hoon (Union leader, Pa-hong Rail Factory, defected in April 2003) during an interview on Oct. 27, 2003.

fleeing to South Korea.

It would be next to impossible to expect an organized resistance in North Korea. But, personal level avenges are taking place quite often and in many places. Incidents like terrorizing the safety agents, security agents and party cadres are frequent.<sup>26</sup> So, officials would seldom venture out at night. In one area of Hamkyung Province, there was even a case of sabotage. The following are a few examples of people's hostile behaviors against officials. The Foreign Ministry officials would wear Red Guard uniforms on their way to work and change into normal attire at the office for fear that people might unleash their anger at them.

At coalmines, they would openly tell the propaganda instructors from the central party to go back, saying, "Bring some rice and clean soot out of my throat." So, when the propaganda instructors from the central party attempt to conduct their projects in the provincial areas, the level of hostility of the people is so high that they have to move around covertly. It is almost like penetrating behind enemy lines during the Japanese occupation period. As a result, the party propaganda projects are conducted at particular places behind the scenes, and lectures are given only to "core workers."<sup>27</sup>

Due to the hostile attitude of farmers, the deputy chairpersons of the Agricultural Committees are generally afraid to go out for on-site

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26 Testimony of Lee Kwan-moon (Age 33, Worker at the 10.19 Mine, Namchon Chemical Factory, Atomic Power Industry Department, Pyongsan, North Hamkyung Province, defected May 12, 1998).

27 Testimony of Lee Soo-dong (Diplomat assigned to North Korean Embassy in Italy, defected in February 1998)

guidance works. This would mean that the level of hostility among the people is very high and serious.

Because many North Koreans are engaged in peddling, they frequently come into contact with railroad safety agents. So, North Koreans generally hate most the railroad safety agents and the mobile safety agents who make rounds in the marketplaces. People also try to avoid soldiers. They say nothing is left once the soldiers pass through, because they steal everything along the route. People call these soldiers "Tobi," or indigenous bandits.<sup>28</sup>

They say the instructions from high-level offices are not fully carried out at lower levels. Since the official in charge would be reprimanded in any case, officials would avoid such posts unless there were some chances of making profits.

Due to the hostilities of the people, officials would find themselves between the rock and a hard place. Kim Jong Il would frequently purge officials, blaming that they failed to implement necessary measures, even though his policies were right. In short, officials are being squeezed between the pressures from the top and hostilities from the bottom.<sup>29</sup>

North Korea's power elites are fully aware of these grudges of the people and their potential volatility. This is precisely the reason why the North Korean leadership is persistently hanging on to its closed-door

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28 Testimony of Kim Nan-ae (Worker at Quality Control Inspectors' Office, Science and Technology Commission, defected in October 1997)

29 Testimony of Kang Kuk-in (Materials receiver at Electric Machine Factory, Hweryong, North Hamkyung Province, defected in February 2003) during an interview on July 3, 2003.

policies. The power elites do realize the fact that in the event of a war many would aim the guns at them rather than outward. They would argue that this possibility is confined to a part of Complex Masses, but in fact such behaviors are also expected from the general public. It appears that the North Korean elites are fully aware of the social contradictions that were brought on by their own exclusive privileges and their repressive policies. So, they are constantly guarding against possible resistances of the people.

By now, however, people began to change their view that only the officials were to blame. First of all, there occurred a series of shocking events in the 1990s, and the target of blame has been moving up from the mid-level officials to higher levels. So, North Koreans will now want to blame Kim Jong Il, but to avoid personal dangers people would continue to blame mid-level officials rather than Kim Jong Il himself. People will not talk about Kim Jong Il because if ever one appeared to suspect Kim, he/she would be risking his/her life. But, there are reports that the people along the border region are openly criticizing Kim Jong Il.<sup>30</sup>

### Promoting a Dual Outlook on the Society

Another problem the political socialization for unconditional personality cult has brought on is the widespread cynicism and sarcasm about the authority of state. Superficially they all seem to

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30 Testimony of Kim Nan-ae (Worker at Quality Control Inspectors' Office, Science and Technology Commission, defected in October 1997) during an interview.

oblige, but in places where surveillance is absent, people would resist and become critical of their society. One of the social characteristics of a repressive regime is that people would hide their feelings and only express politically safe emotions that come from pretension and disguise.

These behavior patterns are characterized by dual moral standards, duplicitous thinking, dual personality and contradictory moral codes. These terms in fact describe the same phenomenon. It means that people would follow public rules in their public lives, but they would follow an entirely different set of moral values of their own in their private lives. The fact that they follow a dual moral standard shows that in public lives a broad spectrum of people maintain cynical attitudes toward public authority.

By following one's own values privately, they are in effect liberating themselves from public systems. These attitudes are part of self-defense mechanism and an important socio-psychological phenomenon that supports a psychological duality in the people of the developing socialist societies.

Under this type of psychological disaffection, people would gradually turn away from official values, hide out privately, depend on alcohol, concentrate on materialistic personal interests, ignore social norms, prefer lives at the system's periphery, and participate in illegal economic activities. And, these "soft exits" are the types of self-defense mechanism of the people in socialist societies.

Furthermore, a sort of class antipathy, or "us" versus "them," has developed between the officials and workers, rulers and the ruled, and the regime and the masses. Underneath these perceptions lies the

psyche of rejection. Instead of integration with the ruler, people would seek separation and independence.<sup>31</sup> Searching for an alternative ideology to socialism would not be a concern of the masses at this stage. Therefore, even the most vocal critique would continue to use official political terminologies and demand for a better and true socialism, because any language critical of socialism would still be too dangerous. Deep inside, however, he/she would probably ignore, or be cynical toward public authority.

From a review of these concepts, it is clear that individuals under the socialist systems will maintain a dualistic strategy of trying to avoid political punishments by the repressive regime and protect personal interests. In the public realm, they will follow public principles, but in their private realms, they will pursue individualism; in public they obey but in private they criticize, which would be a treacherous behavior. Externally they oblige, but internally they resist, trying to meet both sides of the same coin, simultaneously.

This phenomenon may be defined as individualistic rationalism, which is a unique concept in the socialist society.<sup>32</sup>

Yanqi Tong spoke of three reactions of citizens in the declining process of socialist systems.<sup>33</sup> They are "exit," "voice," and "loyalty," respectively. Under the politically oppressive systems, very few were able to "hard exit," such as defections or emigrations. Voiding was also very restricted. An absolute majority, therefore, had to remain in the

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31 Yanqi Tong, "Mass Alienation under State Socialism and After," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, vol. 28, No. 2, pp. 215-218.

32 John Harsanyi, "Advances in Understanding Rational Behavior," in Jon Elster, ed., *Rational Choice*. (NY: New York University Press, 1986).

system. If they didn't choose "loyalty," they had no other alternatives. As a result, they had to opt for a "soft exit" from the official system, or, as some scholars called it, the "second society." This option will include making intentional mistakes, absenteeism, reporting in sick, and other well-known and effective evasion from official duties.<sup>34</sup>

Social scientists, such as Havel<sup>35</sup>, Shlapentokh<sup>36</sup>, and Kuran<sup>37</sup>, who had closely observed the socialisms in the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries, described these behaviors in terms of dualistic individual behavior patterns.<sup>38</sup> James Scott has also developed new concepts like the weapons of the weak, the resistance through daily lives, and the techniques of resistance.<sup>39</sup>

In order to understand the behavior patterns of North Koreans, it is necessary to distinguish the real thoughts from fabricated behaviors. It is said that what they do in the public realm and in private are entirely separate and different. For example, their attitude during the ideology

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33 Yanqi Tong, "Mass Alienation under State Socialism and After," pp. 215-237.

34 *Ibid.* p. 219.

35 Vaclav Havel, et. al., *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens against the State in Central-Eastern Europe*, (NY: Sharpe), pp. 24-27.

36 Vladimir Shlapentokh, "Two Levels of Public Opinion," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 49 (1985), p. 448.

37 Timur Kuran, "Now Out of Never: The Element of Surprise in the East European Revolution of 1989," *World Politics*, vol. 44, No. 1, p. 13.

38 For details see Suh Jae Jean, *The Second Society in North Korea: A Study on the Duality of Social Structure and Social Consciousness*, (Seoul: Nanam Publishers, 1995), Chapter II.

39 James Scott, *The Weapon of the Weak Everyday Forms of Resistance*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); James Scott, *Domination and the Art of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

class and their words and expressions during the 10-minute break are entirely different. It is said that they must maintain a Janus face to survive in the North Korean system. And, such tendency is more salient if one's social status is higher.

Another example is that while an individual has his biological father, he also has Kim Il Sung as his political "father." This type of dual ways of thinking has become a second nature from the moment of birth in North Korea<sup>40</sup>. The state is maintaining socialism, and the people are engaged in capitalism. The state is insisting upon collectivism, while the people are pursuing individualism. The people live in their own way of capitalism, even under state interventions. This is the know-how of survival they have learned through 10-plus years of personal experiences since the collapse of socialism. People who started out early in their personal business are able to lead somewhat stable lives, but those who tried to depend on the party are facing desperation. Those who borrowed money from their relatives in Japan or China, and went into business are the best off class of people. In short, capitalism is spontaneously sprouting from within the North Korean system.

Even Juche Ideology, which is the ruling ideology, is understood differently from the wishes of the authorities. The instructors of political studies would reinforce by saying, "You are the master of your own destiny, and you are the pioneers of your own destiny." But, the people would complain that the government would not take necessary actions

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40 Testimony of Lee Jae (Age 37. Writer and producer at Military Performance Unit, defected in March 1999).



to connect this with reality. The people generally believe that the Worker's Party is the master of their lives, because it can help or kill them at will. The basic tenet of Juche Ideology is simple, "The master of one's own destiny is oneself, and the power to explore one's destiny also comes from oneself. The master of revolution and construction is the people, and the power to drive revolution and construction also comes from the people." But, most people do not remember all other words, except that, "The master of one's destiny is oneself." They understand the words, "the master of one's own destiny," to mean that one is fully responsible for securing necessary foods and leading one's own life.<sup>41</sup>

### C. Political Levels

The Kim Il Sung/Kim Jong Il personality cult was intended to solidify their political power. It has helped strengthen Kim Il Sung's power and the power succession to Kim Jong Il. Paradoxically, however, personality cult is also dysfunctional in maintaining Kim Jong Il's power. The reason is that Kim Il Sung's charisma was so solid and powerful in the minds of the people that there was little room for them to respect Kim Jong Il as a great leader. Kim Il Sung may have been too tall for Kim Jong Il to measure up to even if he put on high-heel shoes. Kim Il Sung was too brightly deified for Kim Jong Il to shine his own light. For Kim Jong Il, then, Kim Il Sung has become a major hurdle to jump

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41 Testimony of Suh Chul-young (Signalman at Sechon Rail Station, Namyang Branch Office, Chungjin Railroad Bureau; Defected August 14, 1999).

over.

Traditionally, top leaders have always detracted their predecessors to raise his own authority. The reason Nikita Khrushchev launched the de-Stalinization movement was precisely because Stalin's stature was too highly deified that there was no room for Khrushchev to step in. Kim Jong Il, of course, is not Khrushchev in any case, so he is trying to utilize the deified Kim Il Sung's authority to promote his own. This strategy is possible because of their father-son relationship, and it seems to be working to some extent. But, there is a limit for Kim Jong Il to claim his own authority. Furthermore, Kim Jong Il is in a position of having to inherit all the burdens of fallacies and contradictions accumulated during the Kim Il Sung era. Since the North Korean people firmly believe in the greatness of Kim Il Sung, they assume all the problems of the North Korean system are entirely the responsibility of Kim Jong Il. Another reason is that North Korea's economic difficulties began to surface from the mid-1970s when Kim Jong Il emerged as the successor.

Consequently, all the problems since must be the responsibility of Kim Jong Il. Most North Koreans believe that their economic hardship is due to the mistakes of Kim Jong Il.

At the same time, however, the favorable assessments given to Kim Il Sung will also be discredited in due course. When the distorted history to promote the deification of Kim Il Sung is revealed as false, all the credit will instantly disappear and his stature drop off the precipice. Kim Il Sung's stature among North Koreans will instantly disappear if only one historical fact was properly informed of them: If North Koreans find out that the Korean War was not started by Americans but by Kim

Il Sung himself, the basis of his legitimacy will instantly dissipate.

### D. Economic Levels

The Kim Il Sung/Kim Jong Il personality cult has brought on a suicidal impact on the economic sector. The fundamental causes

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a n d i t n o t t o b e s e e n a s a r e p r e s e n t a t i o n o f t h e o f f i c i a l p o s i t i o n o f t h e K o r e a I n s t i t u t e f o r N a t i o n a l U n i f i c a t i o n . T h e a n a l y s e s , c o m m e n t s a n d o t h e r o p i n i o n s c o n t a i n e d i n t h i s m o n o g r a p h a r e t h o s e o f t h e a u t h o r s

## Personality Cult: The Consequences of Personality

Chapter 17: The Effect of the Personality Cult Strategy 17A. Overall Assessment 17B. The Effect of Each Strategy 202. The Impact of Personality Cult 2A. On Individuals 2B. On the Society 2C. On the Political Sector 3D. On the Economic Sector 17V. Conclusions

On October 15, 2002, Iraqi voters cast 10 percent of vote in support of President Saddam Hussein in the presidential election, extending his term of office for another seven years. Within six months, however, the Hussein regime collapsed as a

result of the Iraq War, and the Iraqi people were overjoyed at the liberation from Hussein's rule and destroyed his statues everywhere. Hussein himself was arrested by the American troops on December 13, 2003, after months of hiding since the fall of Baghdad. Upon hearing the news, Iraqi citizens poured into the streets in a festive mood. To be sure, there have been terror and resistance in the wake of the occupation of Iraq. But, it would be fair to say that a great majority of Iraqis turned their backs on Hussein. This

is a typical behavior pattern of the people who have been under the control of an oppressive regime. In contrast, however, many North Korean defectors who fled from the oppressive regime and fled to the South Korea, would confide that Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il were great leaders and that they could hardly erase Kim Il Sung, in particular, from their memory. In other words, they apparently continue to respect Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il even after the

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if they escape to South Korea, a helicopter pilot of the two Kim does not return. This privilege will allow

that Iraq under Hussein and North Korea under the

Kims are two entirely different cases. Such attitudes of North Korean defectors raise perplexity in the South Korean mind and

make it more difficult for us to understand the impact of Personality Cult in North Korea and North Korea. Their conflicting attitudes could also lead to a mistaken understanding of the true nature of the North Korean regime. At this point, some important questions need to be raised regarding North Korea's policy of personality cult and how we should assess its impact. First, how is personality cult practiced in North Korea, and why would the people who abhorred the system and so escaped to South Korea, nevertheless continue to adore the leader(s) of the regime they say they still hate? It is a very important subject of research to find out and analyze the underlying truth about North Korea's personality cult education and the structure of North Korean minds that refuse to

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ult in a faulty and wrongful understanding of the North Korean system. Looking at the defectors who continue to rate Kim Il Sung highly, ordinary South Koreans would be curious to know if there were certain merits in the North Korean system that are yet unknown to them. Some will even go so far as to think that there is reason the North Korean system continues to survive even as other socialist systems

collapse because there are certain merits in its system. This, then, is an important issue that must be clearly examined and explained. Second, another important subject of research to properly understand the North Korean society is to examine the impact the political education of Kim Il Sung worship has had on the people. An important fact is that there exist two conflicting positions in the political attitudes of North Koreans. On the one hand, they love and respect the Kims as if they were God. On the other hand, they feel hostile, betrayed and deprived toward the starvation-ridden North Korean regime. Also, while they would deify the Kims, they would show deep animosity toward other officials. North Koreans generally feel hostile to the party cadres and believe that they are responsible for the food shortage.

This is a form of class conflict between the people and the leaders. And, we will be able to understand the North Korean society accurately only if these phenomena are fully analyzed. North Korea may have succeeded in idolizing Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il, but many scholars point out that the idolatry itself has also been working

as fetters to the progress of the North Korean society. Some analyst

point to the low labor productivity as one of the reasons for the North Korean economic hardship. Perhaps, the low

productivity should be seen as a byproduct of its sociopolitical policies that were focused on political idolization. North Korea has been successful in political idolization but it failed to efficiently utilize its workforce. In order to overcome its economic hardship, North Korea will need to pursue openness and reforms more actively. The problem, however, seems to be the clashing attitude of the people toward the cadres, who are responsible for the attainment of these goals. One of the most serious aftereffects of personality cult is that various political education and social controls mobilized for the purpose of deification tend to oppress and destroy human nature. As Hans Jhachin Maz observed, East Germans had suffered a serious impact of Personality Cult in North Korea damage to their mental health under the totalitarian system. The

German precedent may not repeat itself in North Korea, but the issue must be raised as an important problem in studying North Korea. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the positive and negative effects of North Korea's personality cult strategy at various levels. The previous studies on its personality cult were largely confined to pointing out that personality cult was being promoted in North Korea, and to discussing the symbolic meaning of various materials and structures. It for this purpose. But, there has been a paucity of critical evaluations of North Korea's personality cult itself. We also need to know the truth about the North Korean leader(s) who are hidden behind the facade of personality cult. Critical analyses of personality cult and the process of its political socialization are also i

important purposes of integration of two Kore

an systems after the unification. I have drawn on various speeches of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il for the purpose of identifying the strategies of personality cult and the process of its political socialization. For the purpose of evaluating the impact of pe

rsnality cult and the process of its political socialization, I have relied on the materials obtained through in-depth personal interviews with North Korean defectors who are in South Korea.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The Strategy of Personality Cult [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The purpose of this chapter is to study the background and reasons that will make the North Korean defectors unable to shake off the logic of personality cult and influence them to continue to believe Kim Il Sung was a leader of divine authority even aft

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r they escaped from the North Korean system and defected to South Korea. In this chapter, we will analyze the structure of various political tracts that North Korea put together to promote the personality cult of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il. The logical structures of North Korean tracts in this chapter were identified in the course of in-depth interviews with North Korean defectors and reviewing various speeches of the Kim [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] One of the most important points in promoting the personality cult for Kim Il Sung is the image that Kim Il Sung was a leader of anti-Japan armed struggles. The idea is to make people believe that Kim Il Sung helped recover the country from the Japanese through his armed struggles. In fact, the defec



er testimonies show that the reason they regarded Kim Il Sung as a great leader was because he "is the national hero who b

rought liberation to Korea through tenacious armed struggles." And, many of them testified that they believed this to be a fact of history. Under very adverse conditions, they thought, Kim Il Sung's impact of Personality Cult in North Korea. Sung fought against the Japanese, suc

cessfully defeated them, drove them out and liberated North Korea. But, it is also true that many portions about Kim Il Sung's anti-Japan struggles have been distorted or exaggerated by North Korea. For example, during his anti-Japan struggles in 1940 the Japanese drove out Kim Il Sung into the Khabarovsk region of Russia. There, h

ewas assigned to a unit of Russia's Far Eastern Army until 1945 when the Soviet Union liberated North Korea from Japan. But this fact has been hidden away from North Korea's modern history. In any case, North Korea has highlighted Kim Il Sung's anti

anti-Japan "partisan" activities, with distortions and exaggerations, as the most important source of merit in promoting his personality cult. North Korea also justified Kim Il Sung as Suryong (the Great leader) by illustrating his anti-Japan partisan activities and achievements through various means of education and media publicity. Kim Il

Sung himself also tried to promote his stature on the basis of anti-Japan armed struggles. This effort is clearly visible from the fact that the most frequent reference made in his speeches was his anti-Japan armed struggle experiences [REDACTED]. An

other important strategy in promoting the personality cult for Kim Il Sung is to build his image as a great and infallible leader. The idea was to

establish the fact that he was a man of unlimited

abilities and was incomparable to any other human being, and that based on his strategy of Personality Cult abilities he was able to produce ultimate successes. Suryong possesses unequalled wisdom, decent Communist virtues, limitless magnanimity and outstanding leadership that no other

human being could ever have, and he is the supreme leader uniformly directing the working masses' revolutionary struggles for self-reliance. His unusually rich and diverse administrative experiences he accumulated in the course of revolutionary struggles and his long-lasting achievements accord him absolute authority and stature, and he is the truly trusted and respected leader of the people.

The above quote shows that Suryong is defined not simply in terms of an institution but in terms of the reasons why his personal abilities and achievements need be praised. In this regard, Suryong is not simply a title but a concept designed to build up Kim's charisma. North Korea's

"Political Dictionary" defines Suryong as follows: Suryong of the working class is the political leader, who understands better and envisages farther than anyone else the rational development of history, dire needs of the times, correlations

between the classes, the environment in which revolutionary struggles proceed, and the way to achieve the revolution. He most thoroughly represents the interests of the masses, most accurately realizes their aspirations and directions, and possesses rich experiences and a scientific art of leadership based on long and trying revolutionary struggles. He is the absolutely trusted political leader with the highest

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his dedicated services to the [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] Impact of Personality Cult  
in North Korea great task of revolution of  
the working class and the lasting achievements that the people and  
the fatherland have witnessed which nothing will possibly  
bring down. In accordance with this defini-  
tion, North Korea made it a national command to obey and respect  
Sung absolutely and unconditionally.  
This command is known as the "10 Principles" to support a  
"unitary ideology." The 10 Pr-  
inciples announced in 1974 are the North Korean version  
of "Ten Commandments,"  
and serve as a political bible for all North Koreans in their  
daily lives. The 10 Principles demand that every-  
body must struggle to death to spread Kim Il Sung's revolu-  
tionary spirit throughout the society, regard Kim's authority as absolute, accept  
Kim's teachings as faith, and absolutely uphold  
the principle of "unconditionally following" and carrying out  
Kim's instructions. The 10th command demands, "The great  
revolutionary

tasks developed by the Great King Kim Il Sun

g must be handed down to and completed by later generations." This means that the 10 principles would equally apply to Kim Jong Il. The dogma of Kim Il Sun's infallibility in North Korea is comparable to the concept of infallibility of God in Christianity. And, North Korea's 10 principles seem to serve similar purposes as the Ten Commandments for

Christians. Many scholars have

pointed out that North Korea's strategy to idolize Kim Il Sun eventually tried to emulate Christian doctrines in many respects.

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The "absolute and infallible" leader Kim Il Sun ruled North Korea for half a century. As widely known, however, North Korea is currently in a dire situation of

having to ask for aid and assistance from all over the world as it is unable to meet the most basic needs of the pop

ulation, such as food, clothing, and shelter.

After the death of North Koreans turned for the worse after the death of Kim Il Sun, as if to prove that

North Korea's system failed to function properly, especially due to his ~~circumstances~~, why do people continue to regard Kim Il Sung as the infallible and great leader? It owes much to a cunning strategy. One of the tactics North Korea has been employing to cover up its systemic problems is the tactic of "shifting blame" on to others or to the outside world. Even the blame and responsibilities for the recent economic hardship are shifted onto lower-level officials rather than on Kim Il Sung or Kim Jong Il. For some time now, North Korea has had a rash of hearsay of unknown origin that the economic hardship was 'due to the mismanagement of middle-level officials.' At the time of "Hardship March," the following rumors circulated widely among the people, "Happiness March for the d

