

Political culture of north korea

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From an early date Korean political culture is characterised by isolationism and a strong desire to maintain the country's independence (" Kim Il Sung", para 2). Relationship with its neighbouring countries are poor and with the countries in the West, are almost equal to zero. Even with such relationships, Korea has been unable to stop the encroachment of its neighbours. It was made the Japanese protectorate in 1905 and later the number of Japanese immigrants in Korea have risen so much that the Koreans have become second-class citizens within their own land.

Kim Il Sung

Kim Il Sung's real name was Kim Song Ju. He was born in Pyongyang on 15th April, 1912. At the age of 17 he was jailed for being a part of a student political group led by the South Manchurian Communist Youth Association. After his release from jail he joined the Anti-Japanese United Army. He emerged as a significant leader in this time period and later changed his name to Kim Il Song, in honor of his uncle who participated in nation-wide protests against the Japanese in 1919.

Kim Il Sung as a leader

After the Second World War the Korean peninsula was divided into two parts, North and South. North Korea was sponsored by Russia while the South was aided by USA. Kim Il Sung was selected to take charge of the formation of a provisional government for the North. Under his leadership the Korean Workers Party was inaugurated. A number of reforms were introduced to the North, including an eight-hour working day, equality of the sexes, and suppression of religion. Land and wealth formerly belonging to the Japanese

or to enemies of the regime was confiscated and redistributed, industry was nationalised, and Soviet-style economic planning was initiated (“ Kim Il Sung”, para 12)

His opponents within the party were purged to secure his absolute rule. Kim led the military committee, coordinating action against the South Koreans in 1950. With carefully prepared plans and without any warning to the South Koreans, his army swarmed into the South. The war continued for three years and during these three years about three million people lost their lives. Between 600, 000 and one million North Koreans needlessly starved to death due to the economic legacy of Kim's regime. Kim claimed to have won that war but no peace treaty was ever signed.

Kim Il Sung, through land reclamation, gave priority to increased agricultural production. He emphasised on trade, developed the country's infrastructure, and encouraged people to rely on domestically produced equipment. He discouraged them to even think about foreign aid and taught them that self reliance should be the key goal to everyone's success. From 1972 onwards, North Korea became poorer because it could not afford to buy advanced technology from the West and its industrial production declined. A personality cult had glorified Kim, but by the mid-1990s the rapid economic growth of North Korea's early years had given way first to stagnation and then to hardship, and there was widespread dissatisfaction with the repressive regime (Scalapino & Lee p. 175)

When he died in 1994, the country lost its venerated founding leader. Just a few years earlier, its powerful alliances had evaporated with the fall of the Soviet bloc and China's move toward a market-based system. The economy

was on the rocks and energy and food were in short supply. A series of weather disasters, combined with an inefficient state-run agricultural system, further eroded the food supply, leading to mass starvation ("Dear Leader or Demon", para 12)

Kim Jong Il

Kim Il Sung's successor, Kim Jong Il, was born on 16th June, 1942. Growing up in a time when anti Japanese revolutionary struggle was at its peak, Kim Jong Il cultivated uncommon characteristics and qualities through his experiences of his real life and practical activities. During his training period under his father's tutelage in the 1970s, he was often referred to as the "Party Center," and he launched a number of campaigns to take over the daily operations of the Party.

When he came to power on the death of his father in 1997, Kim Jong-Il ruthlessly set about establishing his own authority. His government is said to be extremely secretive and brutal to dissidents. Kim's disastrous agricultural and economic policies have caused his people to suffer under one of the world's longest, deadliest famines. On the domestic front, Kim has given occasional signs that he favors economic reforms similar to those carried out in China by Deng Xiaoping. But at home he has done little or nothing to relax the absolute control of the state and party over all aspects of economic life.

He has certainly given no sign of considering the de-collectivization of agriculture, which was the foundation of Deng's reforms (Chong-Il p. 84). With the sort of image Kim Jong Il carries around with him many analysts thought that the communist regime would finally come to an end in North

Korea, but it is almost a decade since he has been in power and still ruling over North Korea and extending his father's philosophy of Juche. Kim Il Sung's style of ruling his country according to Stalinism was submerged into his Juche philosophy and later it subordinated into a more militant theme of Kim Jong Il's Red Banner Policy.

Kim Jong Il has been accused of being involved in two bombings; one in Rangoon in 1983 and another in 1987, which killed all passengers in a South Korean airplane. No evidence directly links Kim Jong Il to the bombings, however, and some analysts believe his father was still firmly in control of international activities throughout the 1980s, while giving his son more power over domestic affairs. He spends more than 25% of his country's annual GNP on the military while most of the citizens go hungry. Jong Il has also proved himself to be a movie lover and has directed a couple of movies himself and written six operas, while his scientists make nuclear war heads.

Kim Il Sung as a Communist

In the words of Morelly, the author of the influential treatise *Le Code de la Nature*, published in 1755:

" The only vice which I know in the universe is avarice; all the others, whatever name one gives them, are merely forms, degrees of it. . . Analyze vanity, conceit, pride, ambition, deceitfulness, hypocrisy, villainy; break down the majority of our sophisticated virtues themselves, [they] all dissolve in this subtle and pernicious element, the desire to possess."

Such economically determined psychology lies at the root of every socialist and communist doctrine (Pipes 2001). Kim Il Sung was one man who was

obsessed with gaining power over not only his own people but he went to extremes and even created his own religion so that the people should start worshipping him. When workers of the Korean Workers Party tried to overthrow Kim in 1953, the eleven conspirators, who failed in their coup, were not only executed but their properties were confiscated as well. He purged his opponents in all possible ways in order to ensure that he stays in power.

Kim Il Sung's personality was a true specimen of a communist. Russia had an influence over the political system of North Korea right from the onset. Kim Il Sung was highly impressed by the communist rule in Russia and he developed a Marxist-Leninist political ideology that emphasises the need for autonomy and patriotic self-reliance. Called 'Juche', or 'Kim Il Sung Thought', the ideology demanded total loyalty to the paramount leader and the "religion of Kim Il Sungism", and stressed on the benefits of sacrifice, austerity, discipline, dedication, unity, and patriotism. It has been described as "encyclopedic thought which provides a complete answer to any question that arises in the struggle for national liberation and class emancipation, in the building of socialism and communism." The practical effect of Juche was to seal the DPRK off from virtually all foreign trade ("Kim Il Sung", para 38).

Kim Il Sung's personality cult was similar to that of Stalin. In that he was accused of tampering history, tyranny and injustice and self glorification. Kim's zeal for communism is evident from the fact that the North Korean media, which is owned and controlled by the state, promoted Kim's image as an infallible genius and the driving force behind the resistance to the Japanese and the liberation of the North. Kim had more than 34,000 monuments of himself erected throughout the country. Practice of any other

religion except the worship of Kim Il Sung was outlawed. The official calendar started from his birthday and that day was an official holiday too.

Kim Il Sung was so obsessed with his ideals that he started to believe in himself in a godly manner. The painters and artists of the country were instructed to paint only his personality in a pompous manner and project it to the rest of the country. All this was believed, by Kim Il Sung, as not a forceful extension of his one-man show personality to the masses but he had actually started to live in a pseudo-shell of belief that the citizens of his country actually adored him.

In my point of view the personality of Kim Il Sung was a fragment and extension of Stalin. This is supported by the fact that he not only tried to follow him in the way he ruled North Korea but he also sought his help and looked up to him in various matters of state. In the Korean War of 1950-1953, while South Korea was supported by USA, North Korea was aided by USSR primarily because it was a communist country. Kim Jong Il has proved himself to be a true replica of his father.

He has not only ensured the continuity of his father's policies and reforms but he has also gone to the extent of further subjugating the agrarian community by spending more on his military might. He has promoted his father's personality cult by making it a compulsion for each citizen to visit Kim Il Sung's museum at least once each year and also by paying tribute to the Senior Kim by wearing lapel badges and all those who dare to offend are sent to concentration camps within the country. Kim Il Sung has become so much part of a North Korean's daily life that to reject Kim is more like rejecting his own self.

Conclusion

With 1% of the citizens in concentration camps and 25% of GNP being utilized to further the ruler's military prowess, North Korea is definitely not in pursuit of a prosperous future. While the exiguity of the basic facilities of life and the over all plight of the nation is being blamed on the West in general and the US in particular, nobody dares to question the extravagant life of the dictators of North Korea. North Korea is going through its worst era right now; with its predominant support/donor, in the shape of USSR, disintegrated and with the West pressing hard on it on the contentious issue of its nuclear programme.

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