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Negotiating Away the Bloodline: North Korean National Identity and the Implications for Reunification

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I. INTRODUCTION

Due to the divided nature of the Korean peninsula, each Korean state has to explain why theirs is the sole legitimate Korea. This dilemma gives national identity issues a particular resonance on the peninsula. The following analysis will show that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)'s national identity norms create disincentives for DPRK political actors to enact reforms that would make reunification possible in the medium-term.

The Socialist Constitution of the DPRK commits it to pursue reunification. A key paragraph in the preamble states,

> The great leader Comrade Kim Il Sung is the sun of the nation and the lodestar of national reunification. Regarding the reunification of the country as the supreme national task, Comrade Kim Il Sung devoted all his efforts and care for its realization. He made the Republic a powerful bastion for national reunification. At the same time, he set forth the fundamental principle and ways of national reunification and developed the movement for national reunification into a nationwide movement, opening the way for achieving the cause of reunification through the united efforts of the whole nation.

Chapter 1, Article 1 states that "the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is an independent socialist State representing the interests of all the Korean people." Chapter 1, Article 9 reads "the Democratic People's Republic of Korea shall strive to achieve the complete victory of socialism in the northern half of Korea… and reunify the country." However, policies that would help integrate the DPRK and the Republic of Korea (ROK) systems would violate key tenets of North Korean national identity. For instance, the DPRK emphasis on independence of action has led it to embrace nuclear weapons and missile tests at the expense of economic reform and growth, which hurts its ability to economically integrate with the ROK to promote reunification. As Stephan Haggard and Marcus Noland

write in "Sanctioning North Korea: The Political Economy of Denuclearization and Proliferation" in *Asian Survey*, such actions lead the DPRK to isolate itself as international sanctions are enforced.

All nation-states have national identities with normative components that help define which policy actions are acceptable for actors working within the state apparatus. After starting with all potential state actions, a state removes those policies it cannot pursue due to geographic and resource constraints, those policies it cannot enact due to other states' reactions, and then those policies that violate this nation-state's accepted normative framework. Domestic normative concerns can be a reason that states fail to take actions that, to an outside observer, make logical sense. Policies that make sense within one normative context look less attractive in a different normative context. Political actors, like water flowing down a mountainside, tend to choose the path of least resistance.

Within the realm of international relations theory, constructivism examines the role norms play in determining actor behavior. As Jeffrey T. Checkel in "The Constructivist Turn in International Relations Theory" in *World Politics* asserts, "constructivism has succeeded in broadening the theoretical contours of IR. By exploring issues of identity and interest bracketed by neoliberalism and neorealism, constructivists have demonstrated that their sociological approach leads to new and meaningful interpretations of international politics." Felix Berenskoetter, in his piece "Reclaiming the Vision Thing: Constructivists as Students of the Future" in *International Studies Quarterly*, adds:

> …that humans are capable of self-reflection to ask how they, as individuals and collectives, come to establish a sense of Self and what consequences this has for their behavior. To understand this process, the study of identity formation and its impact on international politics is central to constructivist work.

In order to show that North Korean national identity can obstruct, rather than facilitate, unification, this paper is organized as follows. First, this paper outlines the key contributing sources of North Korean national identity. Second, these sources are analyzed, showing how the individual components reinforce each other. Finally, this paper examines how North Korean national identity creates roadblocks toward major economic, political, and social reforms that could aid in drawing the two Korean systems together to facilitate reunification.

II. SOURCES OF NORTH KOREAN NATIONAL IDENTITY

North Korean national identity has four main sources of inspiration: (1) Korean culture and history, (2) localized Marxist-Leninist theory, (3) Confucianism, and (4) Japanese imperial race theory. The first two sources are explicit within the DPRK system. The latter two have been demonstrated implicitly through DPRK actions and works.

Korean Culture and History

After Kim Il-sung came to power in the North, one of his goals was to imbue the North Korean people with a sense of Korean nationalism. The Japanese imperial system subordinated Korean identity under Japanese identity. According to Key P. Yang and Chang-Boh Chee in "North Korean Educational System: 1945 to Present" in *The China Quarterly*, in the centuries before Japan controlled Korea as a colony, the Joseon Dynasty implemented "a self-imposed submission to Chinese culture." Against this backdrop, Kim Il-sung asked in 1955 "How can we teach our children to have national pride?"

One answer was reforming the education system. The DPRK education system was created in part to fulfill nationalist goals. The previous Japanese imperial and Joseon education systems had used Japanese and Chinese textbooks. The DPRK used Korean language *Hangul* textbooks instead. North Korean historians also sought to write a nationalist history of Korean civilization with clear lines separating it from Chinese civilization, rescuing Korean history from the Joseon Dynasty's narrative. In their view, as Yŏng-ho Ch'oe in "Reinterpreting Traditional History in North Korea" in *The Journal of Asian Studies* notes, Korea's history had been "viciously distorted by the feudal ruling class, the *sadae chuŭi* [flunkeyism] followers, and the big-power chauvinists."

John Curtis Perry, in his piece "Dateline North Korea: A Communist Holdout" in *Foreign Policy*, writes that North Koreans also assert that Pyongyang, "one of the world's cradles of culture," has always been superior to Seoul. This imbues the DPRK with greater historical and cultural legitimacy than the ROK. As Seoul continues to grow as a world megacity and Pyongyang relatively stagnates, the DPRK nationalist discourse has to rely on the past to assert Pyongyang's superiority. Kim Il-sung also promoted the teaching of the Pyongyang dialect over the Seoul dialect in schools, according to Yong Soon Yim in "Language Reform as a Political Symbol in North Korea" in *World Affairs*.

Kim Il-sung placed both himself and his family at the nationalist discourse's center. Kim Il-sung claimed that his great-grandfather in 1866 attacked the *General Sherman*, an American merchant marine vessel that was forcibly and

illegally trying to conduct trade in Korea, meaning his family had been fighting foreign imperialism since the mid-19th century, as illustrated in D. Gordon White's work "The Democratic People's Republic of Korea through the Eyes of a Visiting Sinologist" published in *The China Quarterly*. In Perry's words, Kim Il-sung's great-grandfather, Kim Ung-u, "is thus portrayed as the first Korean to strike a blow against American imperialism." Kim Il-sung's parents continued this pro-Korean, anti-imperial heritage by fighting against Japan. He himself fought against Japanese imperialism in the 1930s. Kim Il-sung's military background aided him in the DPRK's early days as well. Due to the North's status as a borderland through much of Joseon history, as Kyung Moon Hwang illustrates in his book *Beyond Birth: Social Status in the Emergence of Modern Korea*, military leaders and soldiers held a prominent and locally respected position in northern Korean society. This nationalist history portrays all of Korean history as leading up to Kim Il-sung and the founding of the DPRK.

If both national and family history gave Kim Il-sung the authority to lead the state, it also gave him the authority to pass on leadership through his family line. According to stories told in North Korea, in 1952, Kim Il-sung demonstrated his decision to eventually pass the mantle of political leadership of the DPRK onto Kim Jong-il by giving the younger Kim a handgun on a battlefield. Heonik Kwon and Byung-Ho Chung, in their book *North Korea: Beyond Charismatic Politics*, note that this ties Kim Jong-il directly to his father's anti-imperial pedigree, specifically to the elder Kim's fight against the United States during the Korean War. Official propaganda states that Kim Jong-il was born on the celebrated Mount Baekdu.

Official arts reinforce the importance of the anti-Japanese fight in crafting Korean nationalism. Kim Il-sung supposedly wrote many of the major DPRK operas and novels set in Manchuria during World War II featuring ethnic Korean heroes. Kim Jong-il directed a number of adaptations of his father's works. One example, *Sea of Blood*, is the story of a widow and mother from a farming village who suffers under Japanese imperialism in Manchuria and later joins the Anti-Japanese Guerilla Army. Through joining the nationalist struggle and revolution, she reclaims dignity for herself and her people.

Such works connect the anti-Japanese fight with developing Korean nationalism in a way that reinforces the Kim family's ruling legitimacy. Kwon and Chung describe how such works of art that are rooted in the past reinforce the state's legitimacy in the present as follows:

> Within the formation of the partisan state, the history and myth of the Manchurian era cannot be relegated to a thing of the past but must be brought into actuality, time and again, as a

> living history of the present. Kim Il Sung's heroism in the 1930s cannot be a legacy from the past but should be reenacted, re-experienced living heritage. In this sense, the concept of the theater state helps to explain the way in which the old heroism of the Manchurian partisans becomes an ever-new glory of the polity's contemporary life-that is, how North Korea's political history transforms into its political culture.

The DPRK's leaders have long understood this paradigm. As Kim Jong-il is reported to have said, "works which do not cater to the Party's requirements are of no use at all." Cultural works have to be "socialist in content, national in form," meaning that the regime encourages using Korean art forms to convey regime-approved messages.

Localized Korean Marxism-Leninism and Juche

North Korean historians have used Marxist-Leninist historical theories to reinforce the Korean nationalist historical narrative. By the early 1960's, the consensus among DPRK historians was that the *General Sherman* incident ushered in Korea's capitalist era. The logic, as illustrated in Ch'oe, is as follows:

> This is the year when the first beacon flared for the national struggle against foreign aggression, which was the most important form of the people's movement throughout the modern period, and also marks the beginning of the transformation of our country from a feudal to a modern society as the new movement for modernization, such as the spread of the enlightenment idea, appeared against the background of maturing capitalistic relations.

This decision also served to further legitimize Kim Il-sung's rule. Choosing the *General Sherman* incident as the beginning of modern Korean history not only tied his family to the beginning of modern Korea, but also underscored the role of anti-imperial struggle as part of Korea's modern historical mission. Just as a capitalist period must precede a communist one in communist historiography, Kim Il-sung's family helped usher in Korea's capitalist era, but still in the service of fighting against imperialism. Considering historical inevitability's importance in Marxist-Leninist historical discourse, Kim Il-sung's rule and the DPRK's founding become not only necessary, but also destined.

The Korean Workers' Party has long been an explicitly revolutionary party. The first article of the party's 1956 regulations states, "the immediate goal of the Korean Workers' Party is to complete the anti-imperialist, anti-feudal,

democratic revolution on a national scale; the final goal is the construction of a Communist society." According to Kim Il-sung, "anyone can become a Communist if he would dedicate himself to the struggle against all forms of exploitation and oppression and for the liberation and happiness of all men."

Kim Il-sung did not wish to mimic Soviet or Chinese communism. When Kim Il-sung founded the DPRK, he understood his country was relatively small compared to the nearby communist giants. He wished for the DPRK to enjoy greater freedom of action than other small communist states. As he put it, "we are not engaged in the revolution of another country but in our Korean revolution."

Kim Il-sung's answer was *juche*, which puts the DPRK and the Korean people first in all matters. According to Bradley K. Martin in *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader*, *juche* emphasizes DPRK independence in the realms of economics and foreign policy. James E. Hoare in his *Historical Dictionary of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea* defines the term as follows:

> *Juche* revolves around two concepts: the people are the masters of their destiny, and they should remain independent of all outside influences. External contact and the acceptance of assistance are permitted, but the nation should avoid spiritual and psychological dependence and any sense of deference to stronger powers. While *juche* stresses the central role of human beings, people can play out this role only through subordination to a leader.

The DPRK Constitution's first line reads "the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is the socialist motherland of Juche which has applied the idea and leadership of the great leader Comrade Kim Il Sung." During the Cold War, *juche* received greater attention than Marxism-Leninism in the DPRK. As White and Perry both note, bookstores were more likely to carry Kim Il-sung's writings on *juche* than major Marxist-Leninist works.

In practice, *juche* represents North Koreans implementing Marxism-Leninism in a particularly North Korean context. *Juche* acts as the ideological weaponry that protects the DPRK from encroachment by the outside world, including the communist world, and its imperialist tendencies. B. R. Myers writes in *The Cleanest Race* that part of Kim Jong-il's legitimacy was based on the idea he learned *juche* directly from his own father. Kim Jong-il protected *juche* with *seon-gun*: the DPRK's military-first policy. *Seon-gun* is also popularly referred to as *chongdae cheollhak*, meaning "the barrel-of-a-gun philosophy," which is a reference to Mao's idea "political power grows from the barrel of a gun." Kwon

and Chung illustrate the relationship between *seon-gun* and *chongdae cheolhak*. In practice, *seon-gun* is the military-first policy, while *chongdae cheollhak* grounds the military's primacy in society. Kim Jong-il described *seon-gun* as follows: "Our Party's Military-First Politics is founded on the philosophy of the gun barrel, which advocates that revolution is pioneered, advanced, and completed by the barrel of a gun." *Seon-gun* thus protects the *juche* state, allowing it to continue with its Marxist-Leninist policies and revolution. As a revolutionary party that based its legitimacy in the anti-Japanese fight, the Korean Workers' Party first needed a strong military hand to ensure control of the North and then ensure its Marxist-Leninist policies were implemented throughout society. *Seon-gun* simply reinforces this tendency and ensures the DPRK's independence of action.

While *seon-gun* helped Kim Jong-il leave his own distinct mark on DPRK politics, *chongdae cheolhak* granted him legitimacy by tying his policies to his succession story of his father gifting him a gun. In addition, the ideal DPRK citizen is also a gun willing to be wielded in the name of the state to protect the revolution. The purer one is, the better a weapon for the leader's use one can become and the closer to the nation's leaders one can stand. *Chongdae cheolhak* embeds the military in society, but while also standing over the society it militarizes.

Select works of officially sanctioned North Korean literature since the introduction of *seon-gun* have emphasized the ideal *chongdae* citizen. *The Great General of Sŏn'gun [Seon-gun] and the World of Love*, published in 2005, asserts that there is no greater love in the world than "the love and trust between the Leader and the army, between the Leader and the people." As a result, *seon-gun* becomes a "politics of love." Kim Jong-il, in this interpretation, instituted *seon-gun* because he loves his people. Elevating the military's status thus allows him to protect the nation and the revolution. If Kim Il-sung gave the people a purpose in *juche*, Kim Jong-il gave the people *seon-gun* to protect *juche*.

Modified Confucianism

As a matter of stated policy, the DPRK state rejects Confucianism. However, erasing centuries of cultural practice cannot happen overnight. The fact that the North Korean state has passed power down from father to son twice reinforces the idea that the state in part relies on Korean society's historical Confucian ethos. With that said, the North Korean state only draws on Confucianism when necessary instead of submitting to every Confucian norm. Confucianism in North Korea is a useful tool, not a dogma.

In practice, Kim Il-sung explicitly drew on Confucian filial piety. At Heartbreak Ridge, Kim Il-sung informed his army corps commanders to tell their men to "realize that it is the wish of their parents and the Party's line that not even an inch of the sacred soil of the fatherland be yielded to the enemy." Kim Jong-il emphasized his "pure revolutionary line." Martin asserts that this revolutionary bloodline, drawing on Confucianism, formed the cultural basis for the carefully coordinated leadership transition from Kim Il-sung to Kim Jong-il. After Kim Il-sung's death, Kim Jong-il observed three years of official mourning, using policy to uphold a Confucian norm. Jae-Cheon Lim in "North Korea's Hereditary Succession: Comparing Two Key Transitions in the DPRK" in *Asian Survey* points out that the DPRK state emphasizes Kim Jong-un's physical similarity to Kim Il-sung in order to grant the younger Kim greater legitimacy, thus further reinforcing the patriarchal line as the basis of the latest Kim's rule. State officials excuse the DPRK's relative material poverty by drawing on what Patrick McEachern in "North Korea's Policy Process: Assessing Institutional Policy Preferences" in *Asian Survey* refers to as the "clean poverty" ethos within Confucianism, which he defines as "how the state is virtuous, especially in times of corruption or material domination, not despite but because of its material poverty." DPRK officials thus use the Confucian cultural context in Korean history to tie poverty and morality together during times of economic trouble.

With this said, the DPRK state has ignored Confucian norms when necessary. When the author of *The Great General of Sŏn'gun [Seon-gun] and the World of Love* describes Kim Jong-il's love for his people as "the affection that is as strong as the entirety of love shown by 10 million parents to their children," the author applies the Confucian parallel between fatherly responsibilities to their children and the emperor's responsibilities to their subjects. However, the author also subverts this Confucian ethos by using this norm to elevate and praise a Marxist-Leninist secular leader. Similarly, as Peter M. Beck points out in "North Korea in 2011: The Next Kim Takes the Helm" in *Asian Survey*, Kim Jong-un has not followed his father's example and observed three years of mourning, but has instead already publicly assumed control, such as becoming the head of the Korean People's Army. This is due to the much shorter transition period Kim Jong-un experienced than Kim Jong-il. Finally, Kim Jong-un inherited his father's leadership role despite not being Kim Jong-il's eldest son. While political power was kept within the family, the latest power transition did not follow along strict Confucian lines.

Japanese Imperial Race Theory

During Japan's imperial rule in Korea, Japanese propaganda aimed to convince Koreans that both the Korean and Japanese peoples were brothers in a unified race. A number of Korean collaborators moved to the DPRK. An official history

of the early postwar period posits that "the Great Leader Kim Il Sung refuted the mistaken tendency to doubt or ostracize people just because they… had worked for Japanese institutions in the past." Kim Il-sung's brother had been an interpreter working with the Japanese military in China. These collaborators ended up creating propaganda based on the Japanese imperial template. Koreans were a pure, "inherently virtuous" race that had suffered in a dangerous world. To quote B. R. Myers,

> Like Kim [Il-sung], Hirohito appeared as the hermaphroditic parent of a child [meaning pure and innocent] race whose virtues he embodied; was associated with white clothing, white horses, the snow-capped peak of the race's sacred mountain, and other symbols of racial purity; was said to be joined with his subjects as one entity, "one mind united from top to bottom"; and referred to as the Sun of the Nation (minjok ŭi t'aeyang [*minjok-ui taeyang*]), the Great Marshal ([*daeweonsu*] taewŏnsu) whom citizens must "venerate" ([*bat-tteul-ta*] pattŭlda) and be ready to die for.

He goes on to write that "the North Koreans' race theory gives them extra reason to want a leader who is both mother enough to indulge their unique childlikeness and father enough to protect them from the evil world." When the ROK government hosted an American athlete who was ethnically half-Korean, an item in the official DPRK press read, "mono-ethnicity [*tanilsŏng* / *danilseong*] is something that our nation and no other on earth can pride itself on… There is no suppressing the nation's shame and anger at the talk of 'a multi-ethnic, multi-racial society'… which would dilute even the bloodline of our people." The ROK is portrayed as a bloodied woman, "a foul whore of America." While South Koreans discuss immigration and intermarriage, the official DPRK media is already referring to Kim Jong-un as "the outstanding leader of the Korean race."

Drawing on Japanese imperial race theory, DRPK propaganda emphasizes North Koreans' purity, in contrast to South Koreans tainted by foreign influence. To an extent, the DPRK's reinvention of Japanese imperial race theory can be interpreted as a form of internalization. Stuart Hall in "Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity" in *Journal of Communication Inquiry* defines "internalization" as "the 'subjection' of the victims of racism to the mystifications of the very racist ideologies which imprison and define them." The use of the Japanese imperial racial discourse can thus be seen as North Koreans accepting the imperial era's dominant discourse as true, then later modifying that discourse to fit a postwar context.

III. MUTUALLY REINFORCING NATIONAL IDENTITY NARRATIVES

The DPRK state is savvy about making sure these four national identity components reinforce each other. *Juche*, as a particularly Korean form of Marxist thought grounded in the Korean wish not to be subservient to outside powers, allows the regime to unite Marxism-Leninism with Korean nationalism. The regime finds the more authoritarian aspects of Confucianism useful, as these have been co-opted into a nationalist and authoritarian discourse in which the people implicitly consent to having this regime. Race theory allows the regime to assert its superiority over the outside world. The importance of the military runs through all four components as the lynchpin holding the system together. The lack of a free press and academia mean that the public cannot easily parse out any internal contradictions in North Korean national identity.

IV. DPRK NORMS

From the interplay between these sources of national identity, we can infer the following normative framework: (1) The DPRK must maintain independence of action. (2) The DPRK cannot be subservient to any outside power, including politically, economically, and culturally. This means that the DPRK must maintain relatively isolationist and Marxist-Leninist economic policies for the time being. (3) The Korean people must be culturally and racially pure. (4) The military holds a prominent place in North Korean society. (5) Kim Il-sung and his chosen successors are the personification of the Korean people. Kim Il-sung's founding of the DPRK was historically inevitable and necessary for the protection of the Korean people from foreign aggression.

This normative framework constrains North Korea's policy choices, as can be seen in many of its critical decisions. As White discovered while in the DPRK, during the Sino-Soviet split, DPRK officials said they chose neither the Soviet nor Chinese side, but instead supported "the Korean side." Throughout the Cold War, North Korea was relatively cut off from the rest of the communist world. Perry writes that rail and air connected Pyongyang only to Beijing, Moscow, Khabarovsk, and East Berlin, with only the Pyongyang-Beijing train active daily. Pyongyang maintained distance from even its closest allies.

Its normative framework also predisposes Pyongyang to take economic policies that may seem counterproductive to outsider observers who do not share the same framework. For instance, according to Don Oberdorfer in *The Two Koreas*, Soviet aid was on favorable terms. DPRK never repaid the Soviet Union's soft loans used to build factories. The Soviet Union also subsidized Soviet-DPRK trade, despite the fact that North Korea benefited more from Soviet-DPRK trade than the Soviets did. By the 1980's, the Soviet Union saw the DPRK as one of its

least vital client states. However, as Byung-Joon Ahn in "The Soviet Union and the Korean Peninsula" in *Asian Affairs* asserts, North Korea assumed that the Soviets would guarantee its security. Meanwhile, the DPRK state stopped paying interest on its debt to Western creditors in 1984, which in 1987 declared North Korea in default.

The normative framework even orients Pyongyang away from asking for aid in difficult times and away from anything that might undermine its sense of pride. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the DPRK has at times in effect traded away aid for the privilege of having its nuclear deterrent. As the BBC reported in 2012, the DPRK's recent decision to sacrifice American food aid in exchange for conducting a missile test shows the regime is willing to sacrifice material economic benefits for pride. The DPRK does not want to become economically subservient to another country. While nation-states run like China and Vietnam have embraced reform to enhance state capacity and pursue policy goals, North Korea continues to shut itself off from the outside world, thus moving it away from an increasingly globalized and cosmopolitan ROK. The reasons for such internationally isolating moves are complex and in part reactions to outside powers, but in the end the DPRK has agency and has chosen its own path. While the DPRK has shown some flexibility in opening areas for overseas tourists and foreign investments, policy reform has not run as deep as in China because its policy choice is guided by a more constrained normative framework. As this analysis shows, the role of North Korean national identity cannot be ignored in presenting DPRK actors with certain incentives for policy action.

V. IMPLICATIONS FOR REUNIFICATION

Based on current force levels, as Jae-Jung Suh illustrates in "The Imbalance of Power, the Balance of Asymmetric Terror: Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) in Korea" in *The Future of US-Korean Relations: The Imbalance of Power*, the DPRK will be unable to militarily reunify the Korean peninsula anytime soon. This means the DPRK will have to choose a less militaristic approach for reunification. Doing so would require bringing the DPRK closer to the ROK economically, politically and socially. However, the DPRK cannot do so without violating its own norms based on its national identity. This is not to say that the DPRK cannot reform, but that DPRK political actors face serious disincentives to enact substantial economic, political, and social reforms.

Economic Challenges

The DPRK lags behind the ROK on every economic indicator. According to the CIA World Factbook, in 2011 the ROK economy was estimated to be $1.574 trillion, compared to $40 billion in the DPRK. For the same year, the Gross

Domestic Product (GDP) per capita for North Korea was at $1,800, while in South Korea it was $32,100. The DPRK only exported $2.557 billion and imported $3.528 billion worth of goods and services, compared to $552.8 billion and $521.6 billion respectively for the ROK. South Korea's market is one of the most internationally integrated in the world, while North Korea's is relatively autarkic.

The DPRK cannot economically integrate with the ROK's larger, globally integrated market without forsaking its economic independence. Both the Asian financial crisis and the 2008 international financial crisis reflect integrated markets' vulnerabilities, while also creating further disincentives for the DPRK to integrate into the world economy. Integrating economically would also require the DPRK to recognize international economic norms, such as paying off its external debt. The ROK Ministry of Unification officials point out that the DPRK cannot finance major economic reforms as long as it is the subject of international sanctions for its nuclear program. Economically integrating with the ROK would violate both Marxism-Leninism and *juche*.

While the Chinese government has reformed while nominally claiming to be communist, the DPRK has rejected Chinese advice to reform for over a decade. Meanwhile, some analysts like Jaewoo Choo in "Mirroring North Korea's Growing Economic Dependence on China: Political Ramifications" in *Asian Survey* interpret DPRK rejections of Chinese advice as accusations of revisionism. In fact, the DPRK originally tilted towards the Soviet Union when China started reforming in 1978 because DPRK leaders viewed Chinese reform as revisionism.

Political Challenges

DPRK propaganda claims that "the south Koreans' most fervent wish, now as before, is to live in a free and united nation under the Dear Leader's rule," as opposed to living under the ROK's faux-elected leaders, who run a "puppet state" and a "Yankee colony." However, ROK citizens are unlikely to roll back hard-fought democratic gains. In 2012, Freedom House rated the ROK as "Free" with a score of 1 (with 1 being the highest) on political rights, 2 on civil liberties, and 1.5 on overall freedom. Meanwhile, North Korea was rated as "Not Free," receiving a low score of 7 on all three metrics. As the *Washington Post* reported in 2011, a majority of ROK citizens under the age of 40 do not believe that reunification is necessary.

Without enacting the necessary political and economic reforms, it is unlikely that the DPRK can make reunification more popular among ROK youth. The alternative to political reform within the DPRK would be Pyongyang integrating

under Seoul's control. After decades spent arguing that the DPRK system is the only one fit to rule over all Koreans, the DPRK leaders are unlikely to defer to a political system they see as subservient to Americans. Furthermore, since North Korean leaders see South Korea as culturally and racially polluted, they would have difficulty accepting rule under those seen as unclean. Each of the four components of DPRK identity supports the legitimacy of the Kim family to rule over all Koreans as their national personification.

Social Challenges

According to the CIA World Factbook, both the DPRK and the ROK remain rather ethnically homogenous. As noted in both Myers and *The Korean Herald* in 2012, both countries have conservative leanings towards issues like homosexuality. Religion is the biggest potential social divide between North and South. While state-sanctioned religious practice has been allowed in the DPRK since the 1970's, this is mostly for international consumption. Defectors claim the DPRK still curtails independent religious practice.

Meanwhile, in the ROK, a majority claim some form of religious belief. Using the KBS World numbers published in 2012, as of 2005, 53.1 percent of South Koreans claimed to be religious. The religious population was 43 percent Buddhist, 34.5 percent Protestant, and 20.6 percent Catholic. DPRK propaganda portrays Christianity as an American intrusion. Accepting these South Korean Christians would violate the DPRK vision of Korean nationalism and Japanese imperial race theory since these Koreans would be deemed impure for following a foreign religion imposed by foreign imperialists. Allowing for greater freedom of religion in the DPRK based on individual religious sentiment would threaten the state's monopoly on moral authority. Under the DPRK system, the Kim patriarchs are supposed to lead based on their moral authority. Accepting moral authority that comes from alternative sources outside of Korean indigenous culture and *juche* violates the idea of the Kim family being Koreans and their inherent virtuousness personified.

VI. CONCLUSION

Per the 2000 Joint Declaration, both the ROK and the DPRK note the common ground between the ROK's unification goals and the DPRK's stated wish for confederation. This arrangement potentially sidesteps many of the problems associated with reaching full reunification outlined above. However, this does not directly address sovereignty issues. According to Max Weber's definition, a state is sovereign if it "claims the *monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force* within a given territory [emphasis original]," meaning it has the only legitimate military means to impose its will. If the ROK and the DPRK continue to have separate

militaries under confederation, then both are sovereign. The military holds a special place in North Korean society and history, meaning the DPRK will likely be unwilling to unilaterally forfeit its military. However, if both states have militaries, they will still be in the same security dilemma. Putting a confederation superstructure on top of this security dilemma will potentially allow for mutual understanding leading to reform on the DPRK's end, but this would once again return the DPRK to the point where it will have to choose between key tenets of its national identity or reforming to please the internationally-oriented ROK. Such an arrangement would reduce the DPRK's normative dilemma, but not erase it completely. Confederation would present DPRK leaders the opportunity to pragmatically update DPRK norms, but this would require a level of self-imposed pragmatism Chinese leaders have embraced, but DPRK leaders have rejected.

Meanwhile, if both states had a unified military under confederation, such a military would be difficult to control due to differing norms and conflicting loyalties. While a unified military would create an institutional basis for potentially greater understanding, it would also risk creating an unwieldy command structure rife with factionalism and mistrust. Creating a functioning unified military under confederation that would be acceptable to all necessary stakeholders would require a high degree of political skill, support, and coordination simultaneously in Seoul and Pyongyang. Such a potentially unstable institution would be subject to demands for its end once any major divergences in the national interest between the two confederation partners appeared.

Sometimes a leader enacts liberalizing reforms unexpectedly and against great domestic resistance, like in Burma. However, DPRK leaders cannot do so without violating the central tenets of their nation-state's own identity. Doing so would risk de-legitimizing the state. This creates disincentives for DPRK political actors to enact reforms that facilitate reunification with the ROK. In particular, we currently do not know to what extent Kim Jong-un has consolidated power within the DPRK. We also do not know to what extent Kim Jong-un and other major actors personally believe liberalizing reforms are desirable. Even if Kim Jong-un does support reform, he will have to outwit political veterans in carrying them out. The outlook for the DPRK to enact meaningful reforms that can make reunification a reality in the medium-term is grim.

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