

## International Environment and Domestic Political Change in North Korea from 1961 to 1967

How Threat Perception Funneled down into the Monolithic  
Ideological System\*

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This paper aims to explore how the international environments influenced the rise of the Monolithic Ideological System in the mid-1960s in North Korea. The Sino-Soviet split intensified over the 1960s, and formed the basis of Kim Il Sung's threat perception. North Korea attempted both to reconcile and cooperate, but it was beyond its ability. The North, maintaining the security commitment with China and the Soviet Union, tried to receive aid from both countries; especially, military aids from the Soviet Union, and economic aid from China. Such goals were hard to reach. Pyongyang soon responded by adopting self-rehabilitatio, the Parallel Policy of Economic and Military Developments and the Four Military Guidelines consecutively. What North Korea chose during the Sino-Soviet split was self-reliance, or in other words, independence. It implied that North Korea was independent from the two communist giants. Pyongyang's stance

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went more independent and aggressive especially after the Cultural Revolution in China. The North's threat and later crisis perception and domestic forces' response to the new international settings made Kim Il Sung regard even the slightest dissent or dissatisfaction as a threat to himself. If such a challenge were combined with foreign powers, it could be a great danger to his crown and survival. Therefore, It would be concluded that the Monolithic Ideological System took place as a preemptive measure in the domestic arena.

Key Words: *Gapsan* Faction, *Juche* Ideology, Monolithic Ideological System, Sino-North Korea Relations, Sino-Soviet Split, Soviet-North Korea Relations, *Suryong* System, Threat Perception

## 1. Introduction

The enactment of the “Socialist Constitution” in December 1972 is widely known as a watershed in the development of the North Korean political system. The Constitution replaced the previous “People’s Democratic Constitution,” which was enacted in 1948 when the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) was established. Although the new constitution might look like just legal amendments, its effect was enormous — it meant that the absolute concentration of political power under Kim Il Sung as *Juseok* or Chairman had been completed. As many scholars describe, the so-called *Suryong* (Supreme Leader) System or the

Monolithic Leadership System (*Yuiljidocheje* in Korean) had been institutionalized.<sup>1)</sup> This political system has survived more than four and a half decades and is maintained in the Kim Jong Un era.

Whether we define the North Korean political system institutionalized in 1972 as the *Suryong* system or another type of dictatorship, the process of its institutionalization had been embarked on since 1967. In 1967, the *Gapsan* faction, among whom Park Geum-chol, then Member of the Presidium of the Political Committee, Korean Workers' Party (hereafter KWP) Central Committee (hereafter CC) cum Party Secretary, and Lee Hyo-soon, then Member of the Presidium cum the Chief of the Bureau of South Korea, had been leading figures, was suddenly eliminated from the political scene. They were the communists whose activities against Japan were closely connected with Kim Il Sung's guerrilla struggle in Manchuria in the 1930s, and they had significantly contributed to the consolidation of Kim Il Sung's monistic leadership, playing a key role in ostracizing the Yanan and the Soviet faction in August 1956. Considering their careers, the purging incident in 1967 was unexpected and mysterious.<sup>2)</sup>

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1) It is enough to refer to Suzuki Masayuki, *Kim Jong Il and the Suryong System Socialism* [Korean Translation] tr. Yoo Young-gu (Seoul: The Joong-ang Daily News, 1994), especially p. 92; Lee Chong-Suk, *A Study of the Korean Worker's Party: Its Guiding Thoughts and the Change of Structure* [In Korean] (Seoul: Yoksabipyong-sa, 1995).

2) According to the North Korean official documents, they were severely criticized for committing countless crimes. Lee, *Ibid.*, p. 305.

Whatever the reasons for the purge of the *Gapsan* faction might be, it marked a crucial turning point in North Korean political history, which paved the way for the institutionalization of the *Suryong* or Monolithic Leadership System in 1972.<sup>3)</sup> While the monolithic leadership system can be seen as a form of governance, the Monolithic Ideological System (*Yuilsasangchegy* in Korean) is best described as an ideological underpinning for the former. This kind of governance can rarely be found in the literature of comparative politics save for the regime type which Juan J. Linz called “sultanistic.”<sup>4)</sup> In the history of socialism, the Soviet Union under Stalin’s reign in the 1930s and 40s, China during the Cultural Revolution, and Romania under Nicolae Ceausescu’s rule are in some respects comparable to North Korea after 1972. However, none surpassed the North Korean system in terms of the extent and duration of such governance.

The unexpected purge of the *Gapsan* faction was followed by the purge of the military commanders including Kim Chang-bong, then Minister of National Defense, and Heo Bong-hak, then General Chief of Staff of the Korean People’s Army. These military generals rose to high ranks and important positions in the

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3) In the North Korean official history, they were criticized as “revisionists and bourgeoisie cliques.” *Chosun Rodongdang Ryaksa* [The Brief History of the Korean Worker’s Party](Pyongyang: the Korean Workers’ Party Publishing Co., 1979), p. 600.

4) Juan J. Linz, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes*(Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2000), pp. 151~155.

1960s. Since they fought against the Japanese Imperialism with Kim Il Sung in Manchuria in the 1930s, they had been undoubtedly loyal to Kim Il Sung, and even active in mythifying Kim's anti-Japanese guerrilla activities in the late 1950s and 60s. Nevertheless, they were purged secretly by Kim Il Sung himself, and it implied that there would be a politically significant change or move connected with the nature of the regime. So the purges of the late 1960s are a very important clue to understanding the regime characteristics in North Korea.

The DPRK official history records that “at that moment, there was an urgent reason for our Party to establish thoroughly the Monolithic Ideological System over the whole Party.” The reason, according to the records, was that “when the imperialist maneuvering was strengthened, and the revisionist currents infiltrated from the outside, the revisionists attempted to implement the Party policy hypocritically and maneuvered in veiled and unveiled ways to restore bourgeois and feudalist Confucian thoughts.”<sup>5)</sup> In a word, they were purged because of the violation of the Monolithic Ideological System. However, it is doubtful that they were really involved in revisionist actions to commit violations against it. Considering their loyalty and close relations to Kim Il Sung, official explanations about their purges are insufficient or even suspicious. Accordingly, their purges might be

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5) *Chosun Rodongdang Ryaksa*, p. 598.

closely related to the formation of the Monolithic Ideological System, not the outcomes of it.<sup>6)</sup>

What made possible or caused such a system in the 1960s? The main argument of this article is that one of the leading factors that drove the establishment of the Monolithic Ideological System could be external. The official record of the KWP indicates that changes in the international environment encouraged the ‘hidden’ forces and ‘revisionists’ to maneuver within the Party. At that time, Kim Il Sung justified his *Juche* idea by frequently emphasizing threats from outside. The Sino-Soviet disputes, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the US’s involvement in the Vietnam War, the normalization of diplomatic relations between South Korea and Japan, the political development in South Korea under the Park Chung Hee regime, the Cultural Revolution in China, the Nixon Doctrine, and the Sino-US détente, etc. were no doubt major historical events that enormously influenced the security environment surrounding North Korea.

Although the existing literature covering this period acknowledges the importance of external factors, they tend to treat the international environment as a complementary or an intermediate variable at best for the formation of the *Juche* ideology, the Monolithic Ideological System, and/or, ultimately, the *Suryong* system. However, I hypothesize that external factors operated

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6) See Ryoo Kihl-jae, “Purges in the 1960s and the Rise of Sultanism in North Korea”[In Korean], *IRI Review*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (Winter 2003-Spring 2004).

much more powerfully upon the establishment of the new political institution in the 1960s. The North Korean political system we see and face today originated from that time and in that moment, not in the previous period. So it is important that we delve into how and to what extent international relations influenced the development of the particular political system in the domestic arena.

In the following sections, I will present how Kim Il Sung's perception of external threats had developed and how the North Korean regime coped with them.

## 2. Kim Il Sung's Perception on the International Environment and Pyongyang's Response: Between *Juche* and Interests

In the 1960s, Kim Il Sung's perception of the international environment was believed to have developed in three stages. The most important event was the Sino-Soviet split that had lasted for many years during which Kim Il Sung had to walk a fine line between the two great powers. Not only did it undermine the security of North Korea significantly, but the Sino-Soviet dispute restricted economic and military aids vital to the North. In the first phase, from 1961 when North Korea successfully concluded alliance treaties both with China and the Soviet Union to Khrushchev's

downfall in 1964, North Korea had formulated the Parallel Pursuit of Economy and Defense and the Four Military Guidelines. The next phase was a period between the Soviet Premier, Kosygin's visit in February 1965, which led to a thaw in the Soviet-North Korea relations, and the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in May 1966. The third phase coincided with the Cultural Revolution, which brought down the Sino-North Korea relations to a low point, and the Second Conference of the KWP in October 1966 around when the Monolithic Ideological System was explicated. The political transformation resulted from it had continued until the restoration of the Sino-North Korea relationship in 1970. This article will address, however, international developments up to 1967.

The Fourth Congress of the KWP held in September 1961 was referred to as the "Congress of Victors."<sup>7)</sup> Since the liberation of Korea from the Japanese colonial rule in 1945, Kim Il Sung and the Communist regime in the northern part of the Korean peninsula had struggled to cope with various challenges including the establishment of the North Korean state, the Korean War, post-war economic recovery, and power struggles in the domestic arena. Kim, however, successfully survived and managed to carry on with difficult tasks. In this regard, there was much to celebrate

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7) This expression is from the editorial of *Rodong Shinmun*(11 September 1961), in Suh Dong-man, *History of the Establishment of the Socialist System in North Korea* [In Korean](Seoul: Sunin, 2004), pp. 788-789.



in the Fourth Congress. Moreover, just two months before the Congress, Kim made significant international achievements by concluding the ‘Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance’ with the Soviet Union and signed a similar treaty with China five days later in July 1961. It was his diplomatic victory to forge alliance relationships with two major Communist powers in dispute. Without taking sides between the USSR and China, Kim Il Sung must have hoped to maintain amicable relationships simultaneously and even contribute to a reconciliation between the two countries.<sup>8)</sup> However, his diplomatic achievements did not last long.

On 12 December 1961, in conversation with his Eastern European colleagues in Pyongyang, Soviet Ambassador Puzanov mentioned that the recent KWP CC session had made “unsatisfactory commentaries” on the Twenty-Second Party Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (hereafter CPSU) where personality cult had been condemned. He also noted that nationalistic propaganda was appearing again in North Korea.<sup>9)</sup> The session to which Ambassador Puzanov referred was the

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8) Robert A. Scalapino and Chong-Sik Lee, *Communism in Korea: Part I: The Movement*(Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972) [Korean Translation] tr. Han Hong-koo, Vol. 3 (Seoul: Dolbegae, 1987), p. 732.

9) Report on information from the Ambassador of the USSR in the DPRK received on 12 December 1961. GDR Embassy Pyongyang, 20 December 1961. SAPMO-BA, DY 30, IV 2/20/137 cited in Bernd Schaefer, “Weathering the Sino-Soviet Conflict: The GDR and North Korea, 1949-1989.” *Cold War International History Project BULLETIN*, Issue 14/15(Winter 2003-Spring

Second CC Plenum of the Fourth KWP Party Congress convened on 1 December 1961 by Kim Il Sung who had returned from the Twenty-Second Party Congress of CPSU. The Plenum made a decision to pursue the *Jaryok Gaengsaeng* or self-rehabilitation which was originally coined by the Chinese Communist Party. Three days later, the ambassadors of Bulgaria, Poland, Hungary, and East Germany further discussed the recent developments in North Korea and concluded that Kim Il Sung had made concessions to the pro-Chinese forces in the KWP leadership whose influence had been growing.<sup>10)</sup> Since Kim was attached to his own “personality cult,” it was believed that he viewed the Soviet move as a direct threat and shifted to an anti-Soviet, pro-Chinese stance.

Choi Myeong-hae points out that North Korea took the path of economic self-reliance because the Soviet Union had canceled 25 million rubles in loans and grants - an unprecedented amount for North Korea supposed to be provided after the establishment of government in 1948. Yet, as the Soviet failed to secure support from North Korea in its anti-China campaign, it suspended the loans in return.<sup>11)</sup> On the other hand, it should be noted that the

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2004), p. 29.

10) Report on a dinner with the Ambassador of the PR Bulgaria on 15 December 1961. GDR Embassy Pyongyang. 21 December 1961. SAPMO-BA, DY 30, IV 2/20/137 cited in *Ibid.*

11) Choi Myeong-hae, *The Relations of Alliance between China and North Korea* [In Korean](Seoul: Oruem, 2009), p. 199. It is the most prominent publication

Soviet canceled loans in 1962, making it irrelevant to the North Korean decision for self-rehabilitation policy adopted in December 1961.<sup>12)</sup>

More investigation is needed when the Soviet Union made a decision to suspend loans to North Korea. Still, it is worth noting that Eastern European diplomatic cables reported that criticism towards the Soviet had already been made inside North Korea by late 1961. For example, Jozséf Kovács, the Hungarian Ambassador to North Korea, reported that “[A]ccording to very confidential information we received at the end of December (from a party worker in Hamheung), Com[rade]. Kim Chang-man — a member of the Political Committee and the Vice-Chairman of the CC, who dealt primarily with ideological work — visited the Hamheung artificial fertilizer factory in connection with the ‘Tae’an reorganization.’ Before an invited audience of Hamheung city and provincial party leaders, Kim Chang-man declared that the leaders of the CPSU had adopted a revisionist point of view regarding peaceful co-existence, proletarian dictatorship, and so on. According to our informant, he did not approve the openly

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in describing the North Korea-China relationship in the 1960s and the trilateral relations among the USSR, China, and North Korea.

- 12) The existing literature provides few answers about why North Korea started to accuse the Soviet Union of its revisionist tendency and shifted to pro-China stance from 1962. A small number of previous studies have pointed out the economic pressure from the Soviet Union as a main cause based on North Korea’s official position. For instance, see Lee Tae-Sup, *A Study of Kim Il Sung’s Leadership* [In Korean](Seoul: Deulnyok, 2001), pp. 296~297.

anti-Soviet outbursts of the Albanian leaders, but emphasized that in the debate, ‘*the CPSU is not right in every respect either*’ (Italicized by the author).” In addition, Ambassador Kovács went on to report that “in February and March similar lectures were delivered in the party organizations of the capital and of the more important provincial centers. In some places they spoke about the revisionist threats just in general, whereas in other places they made concrete references to the leaders of the CPSU. *At the end of February, the issue of the revisionist threat suddenly appeared* (Italicized by the author) in the press as well [...].<sup>13)</sup>

With the Sino-Soviet dispute intensifying in the early 1960s, North Korea tried to maintain a delicate diplomatic balance between the Soviet Union and China, so that it could maximize economic assistance and the security guarantee from both sides. It seemed like the most pragmatic and realistic option for North Korea, and was expected to be viable based on the treaties with both countries. Ostensibly this strategy was working to some extent as both the Soviet Union and China sought North Korea’s support. However, as Choi rightly points out, an alliance relationship binds or tethers treaty partners.<sup>14)</sup> When international

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13) “Report, Embassy of Hungary in North Korea to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry,” April 5, 1962, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, MOL, XIX-J-1-j Korea, 13. doboz, 27/a, 0025/RT/1962. Translated for NKIDP by Balázs Szalontai, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113487>.

14) Choi, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 166~187. Although Choi’s explanation on the China-North Korea relations still retain its validity, its explanatory power has declined with

relations was imposed on domestic politics, or when the Soviet Union became critical of Kim's personality cult in the North Korean context, the partnership would be weakened and constrained. In other words, the idea of self-rehabilitation, brought forward in 1961, became closely related to political self-reliance.

North Korea, however, made active efforts to improve its relationship with the Soviet Union and it became apparent when a new Soviet ambassador arrived in Pyongyang. Ambassador V. P. Moskovsky had been able to meet Kim Il Sung twice within 20 days of his arrival. The North's intention was obvious. Ambassador Moskovsky shared his view on the host country's stance in conversation with the Hungarian Ambassador Kovacs. According to one of the Hungarian diplomatic reports that revealed Moskovsky's thoughts, he observed that

“... recently a certain improvement has become noticeable in Soviet-North Korea relations. The staff of the Embassy and the military attaché are received by the Korean functionaries more promptly than before, and they are even allowed to inspect certain issues concerning the M[inistry] of D[efense] and the M[inistry] of I[nternal Affairs]. ... Kim Il Sung received the message of Comrade Khrushchev with pleasure, he agreed with the idea of improving relations between the two countries. The Korean leaders also favorably received the Soviet supplies intended to serve the DPRK's de-

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the new leadership under Kim Jong Un.

fense needs, including submarines and facilities strengthening the defense of Pyongyang. Since his arrival (on 9<sup>th</sup> August) he has already met Kim Il Sung two times, the latter is very friendly to him, and he hopes he will also succeed in establishing a good personal relationship with him.”<sup>15)</sup>

In other words, the Soviet succeeded in improving the Soviet-North Korea relations by providing military supplies for North Korea.

In Moskovsky’s account, Khrushchev seemed to have a good understanding of North Korea but tended to overestimate Kim Il Sung’s capacity. Two days before Moskovsky’s assignment to Pyongyang, Khrushchev met him and said, the Soviet Union “had made a mistake when they applied mechanically the criticism of Stalin’s personality cult to the Korean Workers’ Party.” He explained further that unlike Stalin who

“had no contact with the masses, ... the person in question [Kim Il Sung] regularly tours the country, inquires into the work of the factories and co-ops, and, thus, he has quite extensive contacts with the workers and the peasantry. Kim Il Sung has certain new conceptions, and these may be illuminating for us as well. For instance, he holds a CC meeting on the spot in the countryside if that facili-

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15) Report, *Embassy of Hungary in North Korea to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry*, August 27, 1962, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, MOL, XIX-J-1-j Korea, 5. doboz, 5/bc, 0066/1962. Translated by Balázs Szalontai. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112773>.

tates better understanding of the question of the day. (Such a case was the CC session dealing with the development of fruit production held on 7 April 1961 in the district of Bukcheong.) For instance, said Comrade Khrushchev, one can approve of the resolution passed by the CC last November on the reorganization of industrial management, disregarding a few errors. The district directorates established for agricultural management also must be considered as positive.”

Then, Khrushchev instructed Moskovsky “to do his best to improve relations between the CPSU CC and the KWP CC, and between the two governments.”<sup>16)</sup>

In spite of Moscow’s efforts, unilateral action was not sufficient to improve the relationship. For instance, the North Korean leadership had left unanswered Moskovsky’s proposal on Khrushchev’s visit to North Korea for more than 10 days, and the Soviet Union eventually withdrew it. Moskovsky said, “But it had been more than probable that it was not because of his illness that they [the Koreans] kept delaying the answer, but because Comrade Khrushchev’s visit to the Far East would have put China in an awkward position.”<sup>17)</sup>

The diplomatic cables showed that the Soviet Union had correctly understood the intention and stance of North Korea. In

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16) *Ibid.*

17) *Ibid.*

1962, Chinese efforts to win over the North came to bear fruit in a boundary treaty favorable to North Korea in October. In the meantime, the Sino-Soviet relations faced another conflict following the India-China border disputes from July. Under these circumstances, North Korea had to be aware of Chinese moves as much as it made efforts to improve ties with the Soviet Union. But it did not take long to see this delicate diplomatic maneuver off-balance.

North Korea apparently sided with China in the aftermath of the Cuban Missile Crisis, but at the same time, it made an official comment that the Soviet Union acted on a sound strategic decision. It was an epitome of balanced diplomacy in this regard. Not surprisingly, North Korea tried to secure practical benefits out of its equidistance policy. Just after the Cuban Missile Crisis, Vice Premier Lee Ju-yeon led a trade delegation to China and signed a bilateral agreement on the mutual supply of key materials between 1963 and 1967. During this period, China agreed to provide the whole array of critical materials necessary for North Korea's Seven Year Plan to improve the national economy. Thus, this cooperation would compensate for the shortage caused by the suspension of aid from the USSR.<sup>18)</sup>

While the government delegation was on its visit to China, Kim Il Sung met the Soviet Ambassador Moskovsky on 1 November

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18) Choi, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 206~207



1962 and expressed his intent to dispatch a delegation to consult on military assistance with the Soviet, saying that “(regarding the Cuban Missile Crisis) the essence of our task is supporting the revolution by all means.” The request was immediately accepted. On 14 November, Moskovsky had another meeting with Kim Il Sung where Kim requested for weapons and equipment including submarines and MiG-21 jet fighters, saying “we have no doubts in the correctness of its [Moscow’s] domestic and foreign policies.” In the end, Kim Il Sung’s opportunistic approach did not succeed. The Soviet lost their confidence in Kim, and the military delegation returned empty-handed.<sup>19)</sup>

Like preceding years, the Fifth Central Committee Plenum was convened in December (from 10-15<sup>th</sup>). The Plenum espoused the Parallel Policy of Economic and Military Development and the Four Military Guidelines — to arm the entire population; to fortify the entire country; to train the entire military as a cadre army; and to modernize weaponry. With respect to the Parallel Policy of Economic and Military Development, the term “parallel” was deceptive, for its purpose was to “strengthen national defense first at the expense of economic growth to a certain degree.” While the idea of self-rehabilitation, adopted in the Fourth Plenum in the previous year, gave more weight to economic development, the principle of the parallel policy in 1962 clearly focused on national

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19) *Ibid.*, pp. 208~209.

defense. According to Choi, the policy shift originated from the fear of abandonment by China and the Soviet Union.<sup>20)</sup> The literature assumes without rigorous explanation that such developments had just manifested Kim Il Sung's intention of self-reliance. Therefore, the explanation by Choi was more convincing in light of the sequence of events and theoretical rigor.

Still, it is also plausible that North Korea embraced the policy shift in an active manner. The argument points out that the North Korean leadership was to take the offensive against the South under Park Chung Hee who had seized power through a recent coup. Some Hungarian diplomatic cables shortly after the Plenum recorded Ambassador Moskovsky's account about Park Geum-chul as he had met Mr. Park then.

Park Geum-chul was purported to have said regarding the South Korean regime under Park Chung-hee that "for the time being no adventurist military preparations were to be expected because of the following two reasons: 1) The transfer of power to civilian authorities was going on, that is, they were putting other clothes on the Fascist dictatorship, and they were busy with that. 2) The South Korean economic situation was difficult, and it was inconceivable under the circumstances that they would make serious preparations to pursue adventurist aims." But Ambassador Moskovsky also pointed out that the North was not capable of

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20) *Ibid.*, p. 210.

launching an attack on the South, and that China had been suffering economic difficulties. Therefore, he concluded that policy goals were unrealistic while “these contradictory statements serve the aim that they [the North Koreans] can justify [their actions] in any event.”<sup>21)</sup>

Starting from the summer in 1963, the North Korean army had launched small-scale armed provocations at South Korean and American forces along the Military Demarcation Line and the intensity of attack had escalated over time. It was obvious that Kim Il Sung wanted to raise tensions in order to justify sacrifices that people of North Korea had to make.<sup>22)</sup>

On the international front, Kim Il Sung had envisaged a unity of alliance by his careful balancing act, only to realize the futility of his effort. Without a practical alternative, he had no choice but to jump on the Chinese bandwagon.<sup>23)</sup> However, Kim did not hesitate to express his skepticism toward and critical view of both China and the USSR, although he ostensibly sided with China.

“Kim Il Sung told to the Romanian ambassador that the Chinese are taking extreme measures, bordering on the severance of all rela-

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21) “Report, Embassy of Hungary in North Korea to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry,” February 15, 1963, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, MOL, XIX-J-1-j Korea, 6. doboz, 5/d, 0011/RT/1963. Obtained and translated for NKIDP by Balazs Szalontai <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110602>.

22) Scalapino and Lee, *Op. Cit.*, p. 744.

23) Choi, *Op. Cit.*, p. 211

tions, that he, Kim Il Sung, does not approve of their position and thinks that if the Chinese displayed cool-mindedness and patience, one could avoid [these] extremes. He is concerned about these extreme Chinese measures, and at the same time he does not share the point of view of the leaders of the Soviet Union who have recently launched ‘vicious attacks against the Chinese party’.”<sup>24)</sup>

With Khrushchev abruptly overthrown in October 1964, Kim Il Sung, feeling increasingly uncomfortable with the relationship with China, saw a window of opportunity open to improving relations with the USSR. Kosygin’s visit to North Korea in 1965 and subsequent military cooperation with the Soviet Union might have offered maneuvering space, which had been unavailable for Kim due to the absence of “alternatives.” For Kim Il Sung, he needed a legitimate political justification to take advantage of this opportunity. Then, the concept of the famous *Juche* Ideology or “self-reliance” had emerged. As a matter of fact, “self-reliance” in the North should be construed as nothing but the strategic recalculation from the admission of foreign policy failures toward the Soviet and China. However, there were meaningful differences between “self-reliance” in preceding years and the same concept

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24) “Memorandum of Conversation between Soviet Ambassador to North Korea Vasily Moskovsky and Romanian Ambassador to North Korea [M.] Bodnaras [1],” August 22, 1963, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, AVPRE, fond 0102, opis 19, papka 97, delo 5, listy 81-83. Obtained and translated for NKIDP by Sergey Radchenko. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110497>.

after the Kosygin visit in 1965. While the former had been evoked for domestic purposes — to strengthen Kim Il Sung’s political legitimacy — the latter encompassed the element of strategic flexibility between the Soviet and China. Put differently, Kim realized the limitations of bandwagoning.<sup>25)</sup>

Kim Il Sung’s perception manifested itself in his many speeches, yet “The Present Situation and the Tasks of Our Party” addressed to the Second Party Conference in October 1966 was particularly revealing.

To begin with, Kim directly criticized the Soviet Union and China. “Modern revisionism and dogmatism have laid grave obstacles to the development of the international revolutionary movement.···Modern revisionism revises Marxism-Leninism and emasculates its revolutionary quintessence under the pretext of ‘changed situation’ and ‘creative development’.”<sup>26)</sup> Obviously these remarks were an open condemnation targeting the Soviet Union. Then, he delivered sharp criticism of China. He went on, ‘Left’ opportunists fail to take into account changed realities and dogmatically recite isolated propositions of Marxism-Leninism; they lead people to extremist acts under super-revolutionary slogans. They also divorce the Party from the masses, split the

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25) Choi, *Op. Cit.*, p. 241.

26) Kim Il Sung, “The Present Situation and the Tasks of Our Party”(October 5, 1966), *Kim Il Sung Selected Works IV* (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1971), p. 349.

revolutionary forces and prevent a concentrated attack on the principal enemy.”<sup>27)</sup>

Subsequently, though stressing the importance of socialist unity against imperialist powers, Kim asserted that differences among Communist parties should be acknowledged.

“The imperialists are now attempting to devour the socialist countries one by one. Under these circumstances, the most important thing is to defend the socialist camp jointly from imperialist aggression; for this, the socialist camp must stand firmly united as one. However, because of its internal differences, the socialist camp is not advancing as a solid bloc and as a united force now. This has a negative influence on the development of the world revolutionary movement and the international situation.”<sup>28)</sup>

His arguments were that differences among communist parties are internal affairs.

“It is really regrettable for the Communists of the whole world that the differences between the fraternal parties have gone so far beyond ideological and theoretical bounds today that they can hardly be settled. But, however serious they may be, the differences between fraternal parties are an internal affair of the socialist camp and the international communist movement. Differences among the parties must not be developed into an organizational split, but must

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27) *Ibid.*, p. 350.

28) *Ibid.*, p. 351.

on all accounts be settled by means of ideological struggle guided by a desire for unity.”<sup>29)</sup>

Secondly, Kim’s perception of threat was clearly presented in his address. The US’s threat against North Korea had been intensified more than ever since the Korean War, Kim asserted. The American involvement in the Vietnam War and US “instigation” of the normalization of diplomatic relations between Japan and South Korea were the outright examples of mounting US threats to North Korea. In his view, “at the present period the attitude towards U.S. imperialism is a major yardstick to verify the position of the Communist and Workers’ Parties.” Accordingly, “Communists should always hold fast to the principled position of opposing imperialism, U.S. imperialism above all.” And “[I]t is also wrong only to clamour against U.S. imperialism without taking concrete actions to stop its aggression. Particularly, one should not put obstacles in the way of the anti-imperialist forces taking practical measures in union to deal blows to the U.S. imperialist aggressors.”<sup>30)</sup> And although “[U]nder the present situation, the U.S. imperialists should be set back and their forces be dispersed to the maximum in all parts and on every front of the world···and they should be tied up, hand and foot, everywhere they set foot so that they may not act arbitrarily.”<sup>31)</sup> However, “the

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29) *Ibid.*, pp. 352~353.

30) *Ibid.*, p. 336.

31) *Ibid.*, p. 337.

countries of the socialist camp, because of their differences, are not keeping step with each other to oppose U.S. imperialist aggression and aid the Vietnamese people. This troubles the fighting people of Viet Nam and really grieves Communists.”<sup>32)</sup>

Thirdly, emphasizing the aggravated international environments that had resulted from US aggressive maneuvers and the split in the socialist camp, Kim Il Sung insisted that North Korea stand firm at the forefront of the revolution and be ready to fend off any provocations and adventurism from enemies. In particular, he emphatically stressed North Korea’s self-reliance by metaphorically saying that “they allege that we are taking the ‘road of unprincipled compromise’ and are ‘straddling two chairs’..... We have our own chair.” It was a rebuttal to Soviet and Chinese accusations of “centrism,” “eclecticism,” or “opportunism.”<sup>33)</sup>

Furthermore, Kim continued,

“[U]nder these circumstances, we must continue to propel the economic construction of socialism and, at the same time, build our defenses more energetically. We must make our defensive might invincible and get everything ready to cope with any surprise attack by the enemy. True, this will require allocation of much manpower and materials to national defence, and it will inevitably delay the

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32) *Ibid.*, pp. 341~342.

33) *Ibid.*, p. 365.



economic development of our country to a certain extent. But we should direct greater efforts to the strengthening of our defense power to make the country's defence perfect, even if it calls for some readjustment of the development rate of the national economy.”<sup>34)</sup>

### 3. Inviting Threat to the Domestic Scene: Pretext or Real Factor?

More than a year before the Second Party Conference, Kim Il Sung mentioned the word *Juche* Ideology for the first time in his lecture at the Ali Archam Academy of Social Sciences in Indonesia, and specified four principles of that idea, later named ‘instructive guidelines’ of *Juche* Ideology. The backdrop against which Kim had raised the idea of self-reliance was obviously the rapidly changing international security system. Kim pointed out,

“[e]ach party carries on its revolutionary struggle under the specific circumstances and conditions of its own country; by doing so it enriches the experience of the international revolutionary movement and contributes to its further development. The idea of *Juche* conforms to this principle of the communist movement, and stems directly from it.···While resolutely fighting in defence of the purity

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34) *Ibid.*, p. 372.

of Marxism-Leninism against revisionism, our Party has made every effort to establish *Juche* in opposition to dogmatism and flunkeyism towards great powers. *Juche* in ideology, independence in politics, self-sustenance in the economy and self-defence in national defence — this is the stand our Party has consistently adhered to.”<sup>35)</sup>

More specifically, it was apparent that the relations with China had deteriorated by the time when Kim Il Sung brought forward the idea of *Juche*.<sup>36)</sup> As mentioned above, it was noticeable that the high-ranking party cadres were unexpectedly purged at the Fifteenth Session of the Fourth KWP Central Committee Plenum in May 1967, while Kim’s advocacy of the *Juche* discourses was underway. According to Shin Kyong Wan,<sup>37)</sup> the then Deputy Director of the Central Committee, this incident was not caused by any challenge to Kim Il Sung himself like the ‘August Faction Incident’ in 1956, but a challenge to the post-Kim Il Sung succession design, which came to be known to outside observers much later.

In the mid-1960s, it was believed that the core of the KWP had

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35) Kim Il Sung, “On Socialist Construction in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea and the South Korean Revolution,”(April 14, 1965), Kim Il Sung Selected Works (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1971), pp. 229~230.

36) “On the Development of Situation in the DPRK in May 1965,” May, 1965, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Czech Foreign Ministry Archives. Translated for NKIDP by Adolf Kotlik. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114568>.

37) His real name is Park Byoung-yeop.

decided secretly the “Kim Il Sung to Kim Young Ju” succession scheme as a design for the next generation leadership. This plan had not been publicly discussed even within the Party. At that time, Kim Young Ju, a younger brother of Kim Il Sung, was elected as the Party Secretary at the 14th Plenum of the KWP CC in October 1966. Prior to his election, he was nominated as Director of the Department of Organization and Guidance of the Party in 1959. Moreover, Kim Young Ju rose to power at a surprising speed while completely seizing the section of organization within the Party as a candidate member of the Political Committee. As Kim Young-Ju was monopolizing power, Park Geum-chul, then Vice Chairman of the Political Committee who had been in charge of the section of organization before, was increasingly being marginalized within the KWP. As a leading figure in the *Gapsan* faction, Park strongly resisted the change. Park and his supporters even rejected Kim Young Ju as a successor on the ground that Kim’s resistance career in the colonial era was doubtful. Instead, they showed their intention to recommend Park Geum-chul as the heir-successor of Kim Il Sung, while criticizing Kim Young Ju from March 1967.<sup>38)</sup>

One year later, however, Kim Il Sung recalled the reasons they were dismissed as follows, even if he did not identify them.

“If a person fails to arm himself firmly with the Party’s mono-

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38) Jung Chang-Hyun, *Kim Jong Il Seen By Side* (Seoul: Gimmyoungsa, 2000).

lithic ideology, he cannot correctly tell right from wrong nor bravely fight his way through difficult and complex circumstances. Due precisely to this failure in the past, the management of the Komdok Mine became passive in ore production by complying with the bad elements' instructions, and the personnel of the General Federation of the Unions of Literature and Arts meekly agreed with *the rogues who advised them to eliminate the word "Chollima"* (from the text of the song *March of the People's Army*; italics added).

“If the management of the Komdok Mine had fully integrated the Party's Monolithic Ideological System, they would never have accepted *the bad elements' instructions*; rather they would already have increased their production of ore to the 100,000-ton mark as the Party Central Committee advised.”<sup>39)</sup> (italics added)

According to Kim Il Sung's own account, Park Geum-chul and the *Gapsan* faction had violated the Monolithic Ideological System, that is, Kim's instruction and guidelines for the Party. However, this claim is dubious at best. In the rapidly changing international environment in the early 1960s, Kim Il Sung had

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39) Kim Il Sung, “Let Us Develop the *Chollima* Work team Movement in Depth, a Great Impetus to Socialist Construction,” (May 11, 1968), *Kim Il Sung Selected Works V* (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1976), pp. 53-54.

developed a siege mentality and a perception of constant crisis, while faced with challenging dual goals at home — building economy and strengthening national defense. The external conditions served as an impetus to advance the *Juche* discourses and the Parallel Policy of Economic and Military Developments, but they had already influenced Kim’s threat perception and made him impatient. The unity and solidarity of the Party was paramount in coping with such challenges. Thus, it could be assumed that Kim thought the high-level decision-making process had been hampered with the rise of the *Gapsan* faction. Although they did not oppose Kim’s policy and, much less, deny his authority, they attempted to make the sectional autonomy and, above all, resist the succession design which was projected hastily owing to the crisis perception spurred by the change in the international arena. In Kim Il Sung’s view, their behaviors were harmful to unity and solidarity within the Party, which was required to overcome the crisis.<sup>40)</sup>

Changes in international environment, especially relations with the Soviet Union and China, obviously provided good reasons for

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40) The Romanian cables recorded that a North Korean who had conversed with a Hungarian diplomat only mentioned the following as to the purge in 1967 “that while they can tolerate deviations from the party line, they can’t tolerate a lack of respect for the leader – Kim Il Sung.” “Telegram from Pyongyang to Bucharest, No. 76.203, TOP SECRET, June 13, 1967,” June 13, 1967, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Archive of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Obtained and translated for NKIDP by Eliza Gheorghie. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116707>.

Kim Il Sung to bring all the sectional authorities into his grip. Within the constantly unfavorable international environment, Kim Il Sung's power and authority could become easily vulnerable to challenges if external powers cultivated domestic forces of opposition or acted in collusion with them. On the other hand, if North Korea was free from the situation where the country had to rely on foreign powers for resources, domestic challengers would only find little chance to undermine Kim's control. Out of his own experiences, Kim understood the importance of foreign support and the vulnerability of dependence. He himself could secure power thanks to the Soviet support in 1945. The failed "August Faction Incident" in 1956 was another reminder that domestic frictions could invite foreign intervention. There was always a possibility that hostile international conditions joined domestic forces against him. In sum, international politics could be internalized at any moment.

In this regard, the purge in 1967 revealed a more complicated picture. Although it seemed closely related to a succession plan within the KWP, the backdrop of the purge of loyal supporters was the international environment as an enabling factor of domestic political change. In the North Korean case, the international state-system during the Cold War influenced the coalition pattern and regime type, at least indirectly. The *Suryong* system or the monolithic leadership system requires more research. This article only points out that, despite its continuity, there were

qualitative differences in the North Korean political system before and after 1967.

#### 4. Concluding Remarks

This article aims to explore how the international environment influenced on the rise of the Monolithic Ideological System in the mid-1960s in North Korea. Based on the diplomatic documents of the former socialist East European countries and the Soviet Union, and the North Korean official documents, the article has traced Pyongyang's relations with the Soviet Union and China, the two strong allies to North Korea that spiralled into dispute in the late 1950s once Stalin had been denounced. The Sino-Soviet split was intensified and proceeded over the 1960s, and, accordingly, formed the basis of Kim Il Sung's threat perception.

In the early phase of the split in 1961, Kim could maintain good relations with both countries, by concluding almost simultaneously the alliance treaties with both. However, this did not result from the North Korean diplomacy, but from both countries' necessity to induce Pyongyang not to lean on the other's side. For North Korea, cooperation with both countries was essential in confronting the United States which had always been a formidable enemy to the communist world and North Korea itself. Furthermore, the North tried to get aid from both countries as

much as possible; especially, military aid from the Soviet Union, and economic aid from China. In reality, however, Pyongyang failed to acquire the aid from the Soviet Union, and this experience prompted Kim Il Sung to propose self-rehabilitation which was coined by the Chinese Communist Party.

Although Pyongyang was disappointed at the Soviet's cowardliness in dealing with the Cuban Missile Crisis, it attempted to garner military assistance from Moscow. When it was refused, it adopted the Parallel Policy of Economic and Military Development and the Four Military Guidelines which were quite aggressive and militant. North Korea began to emphasize and mythify Kim Il Sung's anti-Japanese guerrilla struggle in Manchuria in the 1930s, which meant clearly that Kim's legitimacy was not originated by the external forces but by his own career.

Since the relations between the Soviet Union and the North improved after the fall of Khrushchev in 1964, military and economic aid from the Soviet Union was resumed. However, the Sino-Soviet split was not resolved, and China under Mao Zedong's leadership went into a more adventurous way as it embarked on the Great Cultural Revolution. While, on the one hand, Kim Il Sung made great efforts for the unity in the socialist world, he, on the other hand, proceeded to strengthen his grip on political power with the *Juche* Ideology which contained nationalistic and independent deviations. Most of all, Kim Il Sung wanted to



prevent foreign countries' interventions. This inclination was strengthened by the Chinese Cultural Revolution which gave him heightened threat and crisis perceptions.

Against this backdrop, the purge of the *Gapsan* faction took place. The North's official documents tell us that the faction members critically violated law which had to be strictly obeyed by all party members. However, the documents are not convincing because the members had been loyal to Kim Il Sung. According to former high-ranking North Korean defectors, there was an intensive debate over the succession problem after the 2nd Party Conference in 1966. If the *Gapsan* faction raised questions to the problem, this probably provoked Kim Il Sung to regard them as a challenge to himself who had been obsessed with threat and crisis perceptions from the North's international relations. No matter how minor a challenge was to his authority, any challenge could become a grave threat to his leadership if it were backed up by any foreign powers. Therefore, in Kim's eyes, such a challenge must be preempted and thwarted before it becomes dangerous. It would be concluded that the Monolithic Ideological System took place as a preemptive measure in the domestic arena.

On balance, the lack of primary data prevents us from showing convincingly the specific influence of the international factors on the domestic regime change. North Korean official documents do not directly tell us what happened in the power bloc, although they give considerable clues for us to understand how Kim Il Sung

perceived the international crisis then. My argument is that it is quite obvious that threat or crisis perceptions were pivotal impetuses to establishing the Monolithic Ideological System by Kim Il Sung himself, his successor (whether Kim Jong Il or Kim Young Ju), or a collective leadership of the partisan group within the Party.

However, limitations exist in explaining the causal relations between the international environment and domestic politics. As Gourevitch rightly pointed out, “the international system, be it in an economic or politico-military form, is underdetermining. However compelling external pressures may be, they are unlikely to be fully determining, save for the case of outright occupation. Some leeway of response to pressure is always possible, at least conceptually. The choice of response therefore requires explanation. Such an explanation necessarily entails an examination of politics: the struggle among competing response s.”<sup>41)</sup>

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41) Peter Gourevitch, “The Second Image Reversed: The International Sources of Domestic Politics,” *International Organization*, vol. 32, no. 4 (Autumn, 1978), pp. 900~911.

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# 국제환경과 북한의 국내정치변동, 1961~1967: 대외위협인식이 유일사상체계 형성에 미친 영향을 중심으로

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이 연구는 1960년대 북한을 둘러싼 국제환경이 유일사상체계의 등장에 어떻게 영향을 미쳤는가를 살펴보려는 목적을 갖는다. 1960년대에 접어들면서 격화되기 시작한 중소 분쟁은 전 기간에 걸쳐 진행되었고, 따라서 그 자체로 북한에 위협을 제기했다. 따라서 북한은 중소 양국의 화해와 협력을 기대했지만, 그것은 북한의 능력을 벗어나는 것이었다. 북한으로서는 양국으로부터의 안보적인 공약을 유지하면서, 또한 경제적, 군사적 지원을 제공받도록 노력하는 것이 최대의 목표였다. 그러나 이러한 북한의 목표는 쉽게 달성될 수 있는 것이 아니었다. 이에 대한 북한의 대응은 중국식의 경제전략 개념인 ‘자력갱생’을 구호로 제시하고, 나아가서 ‘경제·국방 병진노선’, ‘4대 군사노선’ 등 안보적인 구호를 내세우게 된다. 중소 분쟁의 외증에서 북한이 선택한 것은 자주인 것이다. 이러한 경향은 명백히 사회주의 양

대국으로부터의 독립을 의미하는 주체사상으로 이어지게 된다. 북한에게 불리하게 전개되는 국제 정세 하에서 중소 분쟁과 중국의 문화대혁명은 북한으로 하여금 더욱 더 독립적이고 자주적인 입장을 갖도록 하였다. 이러한 국제정세에 대한 대응과 인식은 국내적으로 김일성에 대한 사소한 이견도 커다란 도전으로 간주하도록 만들었다. 특히 '8월 종파 사건'을 통해 중소 양국의 개입을 경험했던 김일성으로서 국내정치적 도전이 외세와 결합했을 때 자신의 존재를 위협할 수 있다는 점에서 이를 미연에 방지하고자 유일사상체계를 내세웠다고 할 수 있다.

주제어: 갑산파, 북소관계, 북중관계, 수령제, 위협인식, 유일사상체계, 주체사상, 중소 분쟁