

Juche

Juche (/dʒuːˈtʃeɪ/^[2] Korean: 주체, lit. 'subject'; Korean pronunciation: [t͡ɕut͡ɕʰe]; usually left untranslated^[1] or translated as "self-reliance") is the official state ideology of North Korea, described by the government as Kim Il-sung's original, brilliant and revolutionary contribution to national and international thought.^[3] It postulates that "man is the master of his destiny",^[4] that the North Korean masses are to act as the "masters of the revolution and construction" and that by becoming self-reliant and strong a nation can achieve truesocialism.^[4]

Kim Il-sung (1912–1994) developed the ideology, originally viewed as a variant of Marxism–Leninism until it became distinctly Korean in character^[3] whilst incorporating the historical materialist ideas of Marxism–Leninism and strongly emphasizing the individual, the nation state and its sovereignty.^[3] Consequently, the North Korean government adopted *Juche* into a set of principles it uses to justify its policy decisions from the 1950s onwards. Such principles include moving the nation towards claimed *jaju* ("independence"),^[3] through the construction of *jarip* ("national economy") and an emphasis upon *jawi* ("self-defence") in order to establish socialism.^[3]

The practice of *Juche* is firmly rooted in the ideals of sustainability through agricultural independence and a lack of dependency. The *Juche* ideology has been criticized by many scholars and observers as a mechanism for sustaining the totalitarian rule of the North Korean regime^[5] and justifying the country's heavy-handed isolationism and oppression of the North Korean people.^[5] It has also been described as a form of Korean ethnic nationalism, but one that promotes the Kim family as the saviours of the "Korean race" and acts as a foundation of the subsequent personality cult surrounding them.^{[3][5][6]}

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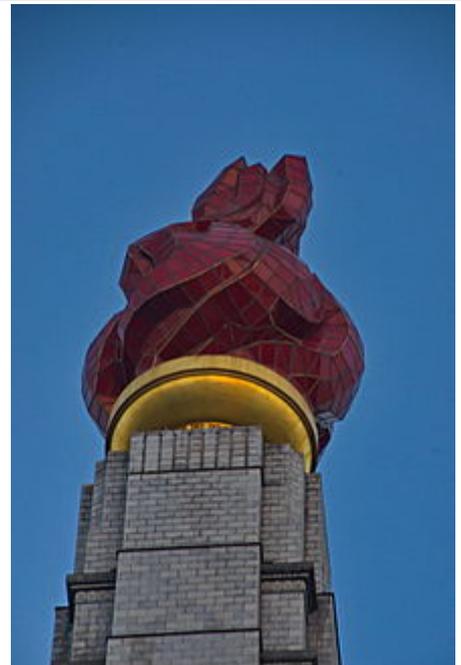
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Juche ideology



Torch symbolizing the *Juche* ideology at the top of the *Juche* Tower in Pyongyang

Chosŏn'gŭl	주체사상
Hancha	主體思想
Revised Romanization	<i>Juche sasang</i>
McCune–Reischauer	<i>Chuch'e sasang</i>
Literally "subject(ive) thought" ^[1]	

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Etymology

Juche comes from a Sino-Japanese word 主體 whose Japanese reading is *shutai*. The word was coined in 1887 to translate the concept of *Subjekt* in German philosophy (subject, meaning "the entity perceiving or acting upon an object or environment") into Japanese. The word migrated to the Korean language at around the turn of the century and retained this meaning.^[7] *Shutai* went on to appear in Japanese translations of Karl Marx's writings.^[8] North Korean editions of Marx used the word *Juche* even before the word was attributed to Kim Il-sung in its supposedly novel meaning in 1955.^[9]

In today's political discourse on North Korea, *Juche* has a connotation of "self-reliance", "autonomy" and "independence".^{[10][11][12]} It is often defined in opposition to the Korean concept of *Sadae*, or reliance on the great powers.^[13] South Koreans use the word without reference to the North Korean ideology.^[14]

History

Origin

Official statements by the North Korean government attribute the origin of *Juche* to Kim Il-Sung's experiences in the Anti-Imperialist Youth League in 1930 in his "liberation struggle" against Japan.^{[4][15]} The first documented reference to *Juche* as an ideology appeared in 1955 in a speech given by Kim Il Sung entitled "On Eliminating Dogmatism and Formalism and Establishing *Juche* in Ideological Work". The speech had been delivered to promote a political purge similar to the earlier Yan'an Rectification Movement in China.^[16]

Hwang Jang-yop, Kim's top adviser on ideology, discovered Kim's 1955 speech in the late 1950s when Kim, having established a cult of personality,^[17] sought to develop his own version of Marxism–Leninism into a North Korean ideology.^{[18][19]}

Development

In his 1955 speech, the first known to refer to *Juche*, Kim Il-sung said:

To make revolution in Korea we must know Korean history and geography as well as the customs of the Korean people. Only then is it possible to educate our people in a way that suits them and to inspire in them an ardent love for their native place and their motherland.^[20]

In the speech "On Socialist Construction and the South Korean Revolution in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea" given on 14 April 1965, Kim Il-sung outlined the three fundamental principles of *Juche*:

1. Political independence (Chosŏn'gŭl: 자주; RR: *jaju*; MR: *chaju*)
2. Economic self-sustenance (Chosŏn'gŭl: 자립; RR: *jarip*; MR: *charip*)
3. Self-reliance in defence (Chosŏn'gŭl: 자위; RR: *jawi*; MR: *chawi*)

On the Juche Idea, the main work on *Juche*, was published in North Korea in Kim Jong-il's name in 1982.^[21] In North Korea it functions as "the authoritative and comprehensive explanation of *Juche*".^[21] According to the treatise, the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) is responsible for indoctrinating the masses in the ways of *Juche* thinking.^[21] According to the treatise, *Juche* is inexorably linked with Kim Il-sung and it "represents the guiding idea of the Korean Revolution [...] we are confronted with the honorable task of modeling the whole society on the *Juche* idea".^[21] Kim Jong-il states in the work that *Juche* is not a creative application of Marxism–Leninism, but rather "a new era in the development of human history"^[21] while criticizing the "communists and nationalists" of the 1920s for their elitist posture, claiming that they were "divorced from the masses".^[22] The WPK's break with basic premises of Marxism–Leninism emerges more clearly in the article "Let Us March Under the Banner of Marxism–Leninism and the *Juche* Idea".^[22]

In August 1997, the Central People's Committee of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea promulgated regulations regarding use of the *Juche* Era calendar. Gregorian calendar dates are used for years before 1912 while years from 1912 (the year of Kim Il-sung's birth) are described as "*Juche* years". The Gregorian year 2018, for example, is "*Juche* 107" as 2018–1911=107. When used, "*Juche* years" are often accompanied by the Gregorian equivalent, i.e. "*Juche* 107, 2018" or "*Juche* 107 (2018)".^[23]

International outreach

According to Kim's regime, these principles were applicable around the world, not just in Korea.^[24] Since 1976, North Korea has organized international seminars on *Juche*. The International Scientific Seminar on the *Juche* Idea took place in Antananarivo from 28 September to 30 September 1976 under the sponsorship of the Democratic Republic of Madagascar. The seminar was attended by many prominent party and government officials, public figures, representatives of revolutionary and progressive organizations, scientists and journalists from more than fifty countries. Malagasy President Didier Ratsiraka expressed strong sympathies and support for North Korea. An excerpt from the opening speech says:

Regardless of the opposition forces, the determination of the people and their strength and conviction are not measured by territorial dimensions, possession of advanced technology, still less, opulence or riches. For those who wish to forget the lesson of history so easily and so quickly, Algeria, Viet Nam, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Angola – and closer to us – Zimbabwe, Namibia, and Azania are excellent examples which make them deeply reflect on. What we want is not the perfection of political independence alone. The evil forces craftily manipulate the economic levers in order to perpetuate their supremacy and reduce us to vassals and eternal mendicants.^[25]

The International Institute of the *Juche* Idea was established in Tokyo in 1978 to supervise international *Juche* research groups.^[26] The *Juche* Tower, completed in 1982, incorporated commemorative plaques from supporters and *Juche* Study Groups from around the world.^[11] In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Black Panther Party expressed sympathy for the ideology.^{[27][28]} The Nepal Workers Peasants Party identifies *Juche* as its guiding idea in its governance of Bhaktapur.^[29]

Concepts

Kimilsungism–Kimjongilism

Kimilsungism was first mentioned by Kim Jong-il in the 1970s^[30] and was introduced alongside the Ten Principles for the Establishment of a Monolithic Ideological System.^[30] Not long after the term's introduction into the North Korean lexicon, Kim Jong-il allegedly launched a "Kimilsungism-isation[sic] of the Whole Society" campaign.^[30] These campaigns were introduced so as to strengthen Kim Jong-il's position within the Workers' Party of Korea.^[30] According to political analyst Lim Jae-cheon, "*Kimilsungism* refers to the thoughts of Kim Il-sung. It is interchangeable with the *juche* [sic] idea".^[30] However, in his 1976 speech "On Correctly Understanding the Originality of Kimilsungism" he said that Kimilsungism comprises the "*Juche* idea and a far-

reaching revolutionary theory and leadership method evolved from this idea".^[31] In the past Kim Il-sung's thoughts had been described by the official media as "contemporary Marxism–Leninism", but by calling it Kimilsungism Kim Jong-il was trying to elevate it to the same level as Maoism, Hoxhaism and Stalinism.^[32] The younger Kim further argued that Kim Il-sung's thoughts had evolved and they therefore deserved their own distinct name.^[32] He further added that "Kimilsungism is an original idea that cannot be explained within the frameworks of Marxism–Leninism. The idea of *Juche*, which constitutes the quintessence of Kimilsungism, is an idea newly discovered in the history of mankind".^[32] Kim Jong-il went further, stating that Marxism–Leninism had become obsolete and must be replaced by Kimilsungism.^[33]

The revolutionary theory of Kimilsungism is a revolutionary theory which has provided solutions to problems arising in the revolutionary practice in a new age different from the era that gave rise to Marxism–Leninism. On the basis of *Juche* (idea), the leader gave a profound explanation of the theories, strategies and tactics of national liberation, class emancipation and human liberations in our era. Thus, it can be said that the revolutionary theory of Kimilsungism is a perfect revolutionary theory of Communism in the era of *Juche*.^[33]

According to analyst Shin Gi-wook, the ideas of *Juche* and Kimilsungism were in essence the "expressions of North Korean particularism over supposedly more universalistic Marxism–Leninism".^[33] In many ways, it signaled a move from socialism to nationalism.^[33] This was made very clear in a speech in 1982, when North Korea celebrated Kim Il-sung's 70th birthday in which love for the nation came before love for socialism.^[34] This particularism gave birth to such concepts as A Theory of the Korean Nation as Number One and Socialism of Our Style.^[35]

Following the death of Kim Jong-il, Kimilsungism was turned into **Kimilsungism–Kimjongilism** at the 4th Conference of the Workers' Party of Korea.^[36] As well as stating that the WPK was "the party of Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il", Kimilsungism–Kimjongilism was made "the only guiding idea of the party".^[36] In the 4th Conference's aftermath, the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) stated that "the Korean people have long called the revolutionary policies ideas of the President [Kim Il-sung] and Kim Jong-il as Kimilsungism–Kimjongilism and recognized it as the guiding of the nation".^[37] Kim Jong-un, the WPK First Secretary, said that "Kimilsungism–Kimjongilism is an integral system of the idea, theory and method of *Juche* and a great revolutionary ideology representative of the *Juche* era. Guided by Kimilsungism–Kimjongilism, we should conduct Party building and Party activities, so as to sustain the revolutionary character of our Party and advance the revolution and construction in line with the ideas and intentions of the President and the General."^[38]

Socialism of Our Style

Socialism of Our Style, also referred to as Korean-style socialism and our-style socialism within North Korea, is an ideological concept Kim Jong-il introduced on 27 December 1990 in the speech "Socialism of Our Country is a Socialism of Our Style as Embodied by the *Juche* idea".^[35] Speaking after the Revolutions of 1989 that brought down the Eastern Bloc regimes, Kim Jong-il explicitly stated that North Korea needed—and survived because of—Socialism of Our Style.^[35] He argued that socialism in Eastern Europe failed because they "imitated the Soviet experience in a mechanical manner".^[35] According to Kim, they failed to understand that the Soviet experience was based on specific historical and social circumstances and could not be used by other countries aside from the Soviet Union itself.^[35] He added that "if experience is considered absolute and accepted dogmatically it is impossible to build Socialism properly, as the times change and the specific situation of each country is different from another".^[35] Kim Jong-il went on to criticize "dogmatic application" of Marxism–Leninism, stating:^[39]

Marxism–Leninism presented a series of opinions on building of Socialism and Communism, but it confined itself to presupposition and hypothesis owing to the limitations of the conditions of their ages and practical experiences [...]. But many countries applied the principles of Marxist–Leninist materialistic conception of history dogmatically, failing to advance revolution continually after the establishment of the socialist system.^[39]

North Korea would not encounter such difficulties because of the conceiving of *Juche*.^[40] In his words, North Korea was "a backward, colonial semifeudal society" when the Communists took over, but since the North Korean Communists did not accept Marxism because it was based on European capitalist experiences, or Leninism, which was based on Russia's experience, they conceived of *Juche*.^[40] Additionally, he believed the situation in North Korea was also more complex because of the American presence in South Korea.^[40] Thanks to Kim Il-sung, Kim Jong-il argued, the revolution had "put forward original lines and policies suited to our people's aspirations and the specific situation of our country".^[40] "The *Juche* idea is a revolutionary theory which occupies the highest stage of development of the revolutionary ideology of the working class", Kim Jong-il said, further stating that the originality and superiority of the *Juche* idea defined and strengthened Korean socialism.^[40] He then conceded by stating that Socialism of Our Style was "a man-centered Socialism", explicitly making a break with basic Marxist–Leninist thought, which goes that material forces are the driving force of historical progress, not people.^[40] Socialism of Our Style was presented as an organic sociopolitical theory using the language of Marxism–Leninism, saying:^[41]

The political and ideological might of the motive force of revolution is nothing but the power of single-hearted unity between the leader, the Party, and the masses. In our socialist society, the leader, the Party, and the masses throw in their lot with one another, forming a single socio-political organism. The consolidation of blood relations between the leader, the Party and the masses is guaranteed by the single ideology and united leadership.^[41]

"Great Leader" theory

Unlike Marxism–Leninism, which considers material forces the driving force of historical progress (known as historical materialism), *Juche* in North Korea considers human beings in general the driving force in history.^[42] It is summarized as "the popular masses are placed in the center of everything, and the leader is the center of the masses".^[42] *Juche*, North Korea's government states, is a "man-centered ideology" in which the "man is the master of everything and decides everything".^[42] In contrast to Marxist–Leninist thought in which people's decisions are inextricably linked to their relations to the means of production (a concept referred to as "relations of production"), in *Juche* thought man is independent and decides everything.^[42] Just like Marxist–Leninist thought, *Juche* believes history is law-governed, but that it is only man who drives progress, stating that "the popular masses are the drivers of history".^[43] However, for the masses to be successful, they need a "Great Leader".^[43] Marxism–Leninism argues that the popular masses will lead (on the basis of their relation to production), but in North Korea the role of a Great Leader should be essential for leadership.^[44] This theory allegedly helped Kim Il-sung establish a unitary one-man rule over North Korea.^[44]

The theory turns the Great Leader into an absolutist, supreme leader.^[45] The working class is not to think for themselves, but instead to think through the Great Leader.^[45] The Great Leader is the "top brain" (i.e. "mastermind") of the working class, meaning that he is the only legitimate representative of the working class.^[45] Class struggle can be realized only through the Great Leader and difficult tasks in general and revolutionary changes in particular can be introduced only through and by the Great Leader.^[45] In historical development, it is the Great Leader who is the leading force of the working class.^[45] The Great Leader is also a flawless human being who never commits mistakes, who is always benevolent and who always rules for the masses.^[46] The leader is incorruptible.^[46] For the Great Leader system to function, a unitary ideological system must be in place.^[47] In North Korea, that unitary ideological system is known as the Ten Principles for a Monolithic Ideological System.^[47]

The "masses"

Unlike the Joseon dynasty, where there was a huge gap between the upper and lower classes, North Korea had adopted the concept of a gathered-together "people". Instead of a strict social hierarchy, North Korea had in theory divided the union into three classes, namely peasant, worker and *samuwon* (intellectuals and professionals), where each was just as important as the other. The *samuwon* class consisted of clerks, small traders, bureaucrats, professors and writers. This was a unique class that was created to increase education and literacy of North Korea's population.

Normally, Communist nations would value only the farmers or laborers, thus in the Soviet Union the intelligentsia was not defined as an independent class of its own, but rather as a "social stratum" that recruited itself from members of almost all classes: proletariat, petite bourgeoisie and bourgeoisie. However, a "peasant intelligentsia" was never mentioned. Correspondingly, the "proletarian

intelligentsia" was exalted for bringing forth progressive scientists and Marxist theoreticians whereas the "bourgeois intelligentsia" was condemned for producing "bourgeois ideology", which were all non-Marxist worldviews. Language reforms followed revolutions more than once, such as the New Korean Orthography in North Korea (which failed due to Korean ethnic nationalist fears of precluding Korean unification), or the simplification of Chinese characters under Mao Zedong (a consequence of the divergent orthographic choices of Taiwan and the People's Republic of China), or the simplification of the Russian language after the 1917 revolution in Russia and consequent struggle against illiteracy, known in Soviet Russia as Likbez (*Likvidaciya Bezgramotnosti*, liquidation of illiteracy).

They believed in rapid industrialization through labor and in subjecting nature to human will. By restructuring social classes into a mass of people who are theoretically all equal, the North Korean government claimed it would be able to attain self-reliance or *Juche* in upcoming years. This is questionable, because the country suffers massive food shortages annually and is heavily dependent on foreign aid.^[48]

Songun

Songun (literally "military-first policy") was first mentioned on 7 April 1997 in Rodong Shinmun under the headline "There Is a Victory for Socialism in the Guns and Bombs of the People's Army".^[49] It defined the military-centered thinking of the time by stating; "the revolutionary philosophy to safeguard our own style of socialism under any circumstances".^[49] The concept was credited to "Respected General Kim Jong-il".^[49] In a joint editorial on 16 June 1998 entitled "Our Party's Military-First Politics Will Inevitably Achieve Victory and Will Never Be Defeated" by Kulloja (the WPK theoretical magazine) and Rodong Sinmun, it was stated that *Songun* meant "the leadership method under the principle of giving priority to the military and resolving the problems that may occur in the course of revolution and construction as well as establishing the military as the main body of the revolution in the course of achieving the total tasks of socialism".^[50] While the article clearly referred to "our Party", this was not a reference to the WPK but rather to the personal leadership of Kim Jong-il.^[50] On 5 September 1998, the North Korean Constitution was revised and it made clear that the National Defence Commission, the highest military body, was the supreme body of the state.^[50] This date is considered the beginning of the *Songun* era.^[50]

Juche in practice

In the view of some observers, *Juche* is not mere rhetoric, but rather an ideal of self-reliance that North Korea has attempted to put into practice.^{[51][52][53]}

Diplomacy

Based *On the Juche Idea*, Kim Jong-il argued: "Independence is not in conflict with internationalism but is the basis of its strengthening".^[54] He stated that North Korea co-operated with "socialist countries", the "international communist movement" and "newly-emerging nations" on the basis of non-interference, equality and mutual benefit.^[55]

North Korea emerged from Soviet occupation and fought alongside the Chinese Communists in the Chinese Civil War and the Korean War. However, it soon asserted its independence from both the Soviet Union and China. Though it rejected de-Stalinization, it avoided taking sides in the Sino-Soviet split. As the Communist bloc split, introduced market reforms and collapsed, North Korea increasingly emphasized *Juche* in both theory and practice.^{[56][57][58]}

North Korea was admitted to the Non-Aligned Movement in 1975 and began to present itself as a leader of the Third World. It fostered diplomatic relations with developing countries and promoted *Juche* as a model for others to follow.^{[59][60]}

National survival has been seen as a guiding principle of North Korea's diplomatic strategy.^[61] Even in the midst of economic and political crises, North Korea continues to emphasize its independence on the world stage.^[62]

Economics

In *On the Juche Idea*, Kim Jong-il stated: "In order to implement the principle of economic self-sufficiency, one must build an independent national economy"^[55] More specifically, he stated, "Heavy industry with the machine-building industry as its backbone is the pillar of an independent national economy"^[63] He also emphasized the importance of technological independence^[64] and self-sufficiency in resources^[65] However, he stated that this did not rule out international economic co-operation.^[65]

In 1956, Kim Il-sung declared *Juche* to be the guiding principle of the economy. After the devastation of the Korean War, North Korea began to rebuild its economy with a base in heavy industry, with the aim of becoming as self-sufficient as possible.^[66] As a result, North Korea developed what has been called the "most autarkic industrial economy in the world".^{[51][67]} North Korea received a lot of economic aid and technical assistance from the Soviet Union and China, but it did not join COMECON, the Communist common market.^{[68][53]} In the 1990s, it had one of the world's lowest rates for dependence on petroleum, using hydroelectric power and coal instead of imported oil.^[69] Its textile industry uses vinylon, known as the "*Juche* fiber", which was invented by a Korean and which is made from locally available coal and limestone.^{[70][71]} The history of the development of vinylon often featured in propaganda that preached the virtues of technological self-reliance.^[67] North Korea had 10,000 CNC machines in 2010.^[72] The first domestic homemade CNC machine was introduced in 1995 and in 2017 it has around 15,000 machines.^[73]

Commentators have often pointed out the discrepancy between the principle of self-sufficiency and North Korea's dependence on foreign aid, especially during its economic crisis in the 1990s.^[74] The pursuit of economic autarky has been blamed for contributing to the crisis.^[75] On this view, attempts at self-sufficiency led to inefficiency and to the neglect of export opportunities in industries where there was a comparative advantage.^[76]

Defense

In *On the Juche Idea*, Kim Jong-il stated: "Self-reliance in defense is a fundamental principle of an independent sovereign state".^[77] He stated that it was possible to get aid from friends and allies, but that this would be effective only if the state was militarily strong in its own right.^[78] He advocated a state where "all the people are under arms and the whole country becomes a fortress".^[79] He also advocated the development of a local defense industry to avoid dependence on foreign arms suppliers.^[80]

North Korea has attempted to put this into practice.^[81] The Korean People's Army is one of the largest on earth. It is currently developing its own nuclear ballistic missile.^{[82][83]} Domestic production of UDMH fuel for liquid fueled missiles^[84] and Tumansky RD-9 Turbojet engine which powers Mikoyan-Gurevich MiG-19 and Shenyang J-6.^[85] CNC machines are used for production of missiles and centrifuges.^[73] North Korea's propaganda since the Korean War has contrasted its military autonomy with the presence of American forces in the South.^[67]

Religious features of *Juche*

Some South Korean scholars categorize *Juche* as a national religion or they compare its facets to those of some religions. For instance, *Juche* has been compared to pre-existing religions in Korea (notably neo-Confucianism and Korean shamanism) due to their shared familiar principles.^[86] While the influence of traditional East Asian religions on *Juche* is widely disputed, the ideology has been thought of by several academic studies as having aspects of a national and indigenous religious movement in addition to being a political philosophy due to the following features: the presence of a sacred leader, rituals and familism.^[87] Despite the religious features of *Juche*, it is a highly atheistic ideology that discourages the practice of mainstream religions. This draws from *Juche*'s Marxist-Leninist origins. North Korea is officially an atheist state, much like the Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin.

Presence of a Sacred Leader

Although the ideology appears to emphasize the central role of the human individual, *Juche* can be fulfilled only through the masses' subordination to a single leader and accordingly, his successor. The ideology teaches that the role of a Great Leader is essential for the popular masses to succeed in their revolutionary movement because without leadership they are unable to survive.^[88] This is the foundation of North Korean cult of personality surrounding Kim Il Sung. The personality cult explains how the *Juche* ideology has

been able to endure until today, even during the North Korean government's undeniable dependence on foreign assistance during its famine in the 1990s.^[87] The concept of the "Sacred leader" in *Juche* as well as the cult around the Kim family has been compared to the State Shinto ideology of Imperial Japan in which the Emperor was seen as a divine being.^[89]

Through the fundamental belief in the essential role of the Great Leader, the former North Korean leader Kim Il-sung has become the "supreme deity for the people" and the *Juche* doctrine is reinforced in North Korea's constitution as the country's guiding principle.^[90] The parallel relationship structure between Kim Il-sung and his people to religious founders or leaders and their followers has led many scholars to consider *Juche* a religious movement as much as a political ideology.^[86] However, those familiar with cults would again posit that *Juche* bypasses the tenants of religion completely and instead meets the criteria of a totalitarian cult.^[91]

Juche's emphasis on the political and sacred role of the leader and the ensuing worshipping by the popular masses has been critiqued by various intellectual Marxists.^[88] They argue that the North Korean working class or the proletariat has been stripped of their honor and therefore call the cult of personality non-Marxist and non-democratic.^[92]

Rituals

The religious behavior of *Juche* can also be seen in the perspectives of the North Korean people through refugee interviews from former participants in North Korea's ritual occasions. One pertinent example is the Arirang Festival, which is a gymnastics and artistic festival held in the Rungrado May Day Stadium in Pyongyang. All components of the festival, from the selection of performers, mobilization of resources, recruitment of the audience and publicity for the show have been compared to facets of a national religious event.^[93]

The Arirang Festival has been described to demonstrate the power of the North Korean government to arrange a form of religious gathering. It has done so by "appropriating a mass of bodies for calisthenic and performative arts representing the leader as the Father and his faithful followers".^[94] The Festival's effectiveness in transforming its participants into loyal disciples of *Juche* seems to originate from the collectivist principle of "one for all and all for one" and the ensuing emotional bond and loyalty to the leader.^[94] According to the accounts of refugees who have been recruited to mass gymnastics, the collectivist principle has been nurtured through physical punishment such as beatings and more importantly the organization of recruits into small units, whose performances were held accountable by larger units.^[95] The Festival's ritualistic components of collectivism serve to reinforce a "certain structure of sociality and affect", establishing Kim Il Sung as the "Father" in both the body and psyche of the performers.^[94]

Familism

Charles K. Armstrong argues that familism has transformed itself into a kind of political religion in the form of *Juche*. With the emergence of *Juche* as North Korea's guiding political principle since the 1960s, the familial relationship within the micro-family unit has been translated into a national, macro-unit with Kim Il-sung representing the father figure and the North Korean people representing his children. *Juche* is thus based on the language of family relationships with its East Asian or neo-Confucian "resonances of filial piety and maternal love".^[96]

Armstrong also notes that North Korea has actually transferred the "filial piety of nationalism in the family of the leader himself" by positioning Kim Il-sung as the universal patriarch.^[97] He argues that while the official pursuit of the *Juche* ideology in the 1960s signaled North Korea's desire to separate from the "fraternity of international socialism", the ideology also replaced Stalin as the father figure with Kim Il-sung.^[98] In effect, North Korea's familial nationalism has supplanted the "rather abstract, class-oriented language of socialism with a more easily understandable and identifiable language of familial connections, love and obligation".^[99]

The cult of personality surrounding Kim expanded into a family cult when Kim Jong Il became the heir apparent after assuming important posts in the WPK and military in the early 1980s.^[100] Armstrong calls this a "family romance", which is a term Freud had used to describe "the neurotic replacement of a child's real parents with fantasy substitutes".^[101] Through the establishment of the North Korean family romance with the language, symbols and rituals related to familism, Kim Il Sung has been consecrated even further posthumously as the Great Father.^[86]

Criticism

Throughout the 1990s, the North Korean regime became increasingly nationalistic—at least, in its official pronouncements—leading Kim Chonghun to state that "Socialism of our Style" was really "Socialism without Socialism".^[102] Speeches and official announcements made references to socialism, but neither to Marxist–Leninist thought nor to any basic communist concepts.^[103] Shin Gi-wook argues that "there is no trace of Marxist–Leninism or the Stalinist notion of nationhood [in North Korea]. Instead, Kim stresses the importance of the Korean people's blood, soul and national traits, echoing earlier Korean nationalists such as Sin Chaeho, Yi Kwangsu and Choe Namson. He no longer has any interest in applying Marxism–Leninism to the North Korean situation; indeed it is no longer useful for the country".^[103]

Charles K. Armstrong says that "North Korean Communism would not only be quite distinctive from the Soviet model, it would in some respects turn Marxism–Leninism upside-down".^[104] The key differences are that the North Koreans place the primacy of ideology over materialism, retaining the vocabulary of family lineage and nationalism and giving it primacy over class struggle and supporting social distinction and hierarchy over classless society and egalitarianism.^[104] He concluded that North Korea may look "Stalinist in form", but that it was "nationalist in content".^[104]

Brian Reynolds Myers dismisses the idea that *Juche* is North Korea's leading ideology, regarding its public exaltation as designed to deceive foreigners. He argues that it exists to be praised and not actually read.^[105] Based on his own experiences living in North Korea, Felix Abt describes Myers' arguments as "shaky" and "questionable". Having seen the extent to which North Korean university students actually believe in *Juche*, Abt says it is "rather absurd" to describe the ideology as "window-dressing" for foreigners. He also questions how only three decades of Japanese occupation could simply upend the impact of "thousands of years" of history in Korea.^[52]

Dae-Sook Suh has stated that Kim Il Sung had failed to explain the difference between Socialist patriotism and nationalism which Kim stated he opposed. Suh also criticised Kim for allegedly failing to explain how Marxism–Leninism has been applied to Korean conditions.^[106]

See also

- Ilminism
- Imperial cult
- Juchesasangpa, the South Korean representation of *Juche* as a domestic political movement
- Strasserism
- National Bolshevism
- Kim Il-sung bibliography
- Kim Jong-il bibliography
- Political religion
- Songun
- Workers' Party of Korea

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External links

- "The Cleanest Race": C-SPAN video discussion about Brian Reynolds Myers's *The Cleanest Race* in which he takes an in-depth look at North Korean society and the domestic propaganda to which its citizens are exposed. Myers argues that North Korea is a paranoid, military-dominated nationalist state with a government that is influenced heavily by Japanese Fascism
 - "The International Institute of the Juche Idea"
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