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**CORRELATIONS BETWEEN  
THE CONTEMPORARY IDEOLOGY  
OF THE NORTH KOREAN  
AND CHOSEN CONFUCIANISM VALUES**

**Introduction**

On the 9<sup>th</sup> September 1948, on the main place of Pyongyang, the communist leader Kim Il-sung proclaimed the establishment of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK or North Korea). In 1955 Kim Il-sung officially also introduced his ideology called *Juche* (master of the destiny) to the North Korean population, which is a mix of traditional values and communist dogma. In this article, I propose an approach that assumes the presence of Confucianism<sup>1</sup> (유교 – yuhyu) and Neo-Confucianism (성리학 – seongnihak) in the North Korean ideology especially

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<sup>1</sup> Confucianism is a Chinese ethical and philosophical system developed from the teachings of the Chinese philosopher Confucius. The core of Confucianism is humanism, the belief that human beings are teachable. Confucianism focuses on the cultivation of virtue and maintenance of ethics. More information is available in the following book: *Confucianism for the modern world*, eds. Daniel A. Bell & Hahm Chaibong, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2003; Remco E. Breuker, *Writing History in Koryo*, "Korean Histories", 2.1, 2010, p. 59. This ideology was introduced by An Yu, a Korean who studied in China and who returned to Korea in the beginning of the fourteenth century. More details can be checked in the following excellent book: Chang, Carsun. *The Development of Neo-Confucian Thought*, Bookman Associates, New York 1957.

during the Kim Jong-il's era<sup>2</sup>. I insist also on the fact that Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il reinvented and manipulated various forms of Confucianism because they wanted to legitimate their domination. I will try to demonstrate that the Kim Jong-il's regime not only exhibited some several Confucian aspects but also emphasized them in comparison with the Kim Il-sung regime.

The North Korean ideology is the main driver of the North Korean political system. The political system is compounded of several institutions, rules and political actors who interact for exerting a political power. In North Korea the political system is placed after the ideology. This ideology is therefore dictating who should rule and which organizations are at the top of the North Korean political system. Therefore, the political system of North Korea is only a branch of the North Korean ideology. To understand the North Korean society, its history and its way of functioning, it is rather essential to look at it from the North Korean historical point of view, searching consequently for what dictates people's lives. It has to be noted that North Korean politicians operate under conditions of a specific rationality, created by their Juche ideology (주체사상 – juche sa-sang). Given the intense and complete immersion in this ideology, North Korean elites do not consider all possible alternatives that might be available to decision-makers in other countries. Although North Korea's political doctrines may appear at least strange to Westerners, as far as it represents a contemporary expression of thought that are deeply embedded in Korean history (i.e. events related to the Japanese occupation, consequences of the Korean War, unfinished conflict with South Korea). The Juche ideology that was developed by Kim Il-sung was also basically coming from the traditional Korean political thought. According to a North Korean defector issued from the North Korean leadership, Kim himself has acknowledged that he drew the term and idea of Juche from Korean scholars taking inspiration from Confucian ideas<sup>3</sup>.

### Theories of the Confucian civilization

According to the South Korean researcher Hahm Chai-bong, in the Confucian paradigm, there are some essential patterns used for the understanding of Far Eastern Cultures: human being is not an individual; he lives in a network of relations. There are no distinctions between the public and the private sphere. The father's

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<sup>2</sup> Due to a lack of credible information, it's an incredibly huge task and therefore a great challenge to determine when the Kim Jong Il's era started. I made the hypothesis that Kim Jong-il started to rule (at least partially with Kim Il Sung) in 1970 when he was nominated to the position of deputy director of the Organization and Guidance Department of the Korean Workers Party (조선로동당 – Choson rodongdang)

<sup>3</sup> Interview with a defector realized in October 2010. For security reasons, the identity of the defector is not revealed.

responsibility is similar to the one of the rulers' of a state. Therefore, the family which is a private sphere is simultaneously a public one<sup>4</sup>.

According to the eminent German research Gerhold Becker, Confucianism is however a changeable ideology. He states that nowadays Confucian societies do not respect moral and ethical values<sup>5</sup>. This phenomenon was called a "moral emptiness". Social relations started to be deteriorated. The Confucian society may also be a prosperous ground for corruption due to the system of mutual dependences.

Stefania Skowron-Markowska considers that Confucius grew up in a complicated historical reality<sup>6</sup>. Local conflicts were not rare. These events made an opportunity for new philosophy to set up new values. For example when he travelled around China, Confucius observed major changes such as the disintegration of the family, the apparition of classes. Therefore, he deduced that the society would need a cure in order to solve all these previously mentioned problems. He considered that the source of a perfect society would be a traditional family living in a strict hierarchy, and in great esteem of his elders. He considered that the basic familial relation were decisive for the stabilization of the family.

According to Lukasz Gacek, the historical aspects of the Asian policy are not always applied in Modern Asia. For example this Polish researcher underlines that the Chinese emperor may perform his duties in a wrong way. People were given a right to overturn a bad ruler, without taking in account the global interest<sup>7</sup>.

The North Korean model may also have its roots in the Legalism. The Legalism was developed in ancient China in the period of the Qin dynasty (221–206 BC). The main goal of the legalists was to create a strong and centralized state. The legalists suggested an implementation of a system of awards and punishments. The mechanisms proposed by the legalists led to an increase of the spying control of the population. According to Lukasz Gacek, many solutions were adapted by communist authorities in modern China<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Hahm Chai-bong (1997), *Confucian Tradition and Economic Reform in Korea*, Korea Focus, May-June, Vol. 5, No. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Becker Gerhold, *Wypełnianie moralnej pustki. Konfucjanizm a kwestie etyczne modernizacji Chin*, [in:] Tomala Karina, Gawlikowski Krzysztof (eds.), *Przemiany państwa i społeczeństwa w okresie reform 1978–2000*, Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, Wydawnictwo Trio, Warszawa 2003, pp. 120–130.

<sup>6</sup> Stefania Skowron-Markowska, *Lunyu as anthropological sources of knowledge concerning contemporary Chinese society*, [in:] Adam Jelonek, Bogdan S. Zemanek (eds.), *Confucianism Tradition – Toward the New Century*, wyd. Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2008, p. 41.

<sup>7</sup> Lukasz Gacek, *Confucianism and Politics*, [in:] Adam Jelonek, Bogdan S. Zemanek (eds.), *Confucianism Tradition – Toward the New Century*, wyd. Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2008, p. 67.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

## Confucianism during the Kim Il-sung's era<sup>9</sup>

### *The battle of Kim Il-sung against feudalism*

From 1945 to 1954 the North Korean political system repudiated Confucianism and historical legacy which was considered responsible for the problems of North Korea<sup>10</sup>. For example starting from the 1950's, the regime's first reforms promulgated by Kim Il-sung were processed through the land reform which aims at destroying the colonial institutions. North Korean communist institutions confiscated land and properties possessed by the Japanese eradicating the economic base of the traditional kinship community. The first stage of this socialist reform used many ideological slogans calling for the abolition of established feudalistic institutions but did not directly challenge the basic ideological roots of Confucianism in Korea. North Korea also never tried to break up the family unit even though it did attempt to weaken the value of family and abolish cultural resistance to socialist idealism. The state's coercive reform was successful in abolishing feudalistic culture. It is also evident that it weakened overall traditional culture and institutions. Therefore, residuals of Confucianism and traditional family culture persisted. Between 1948 and the early 1960's, the traditional Confucian expression "show filial piety to parents" was not used officially in the state's suppressive mobilization<sup>11</sup>. In this period the political position of North Korea was too weak on the global scene; Kim Il-sung was too immature to use some elements of the Korean national history. Kim Il-sung was much more dependent on his soviet advisors who recommended him rather to implement a Stalinist regime in North Korea. Nevertheless, two years after the death of Joseph Stalin in 1953, Kim Il-sung brought up the Juche Idea, his ideology which was based on "independence, self-reliance" and on some Korean social and historical concepts. The Juche Idea is a political thesis of Kim Il-sung which says that the Korean masses are the masters of the country's development. According to ideologists, the Juche is based on the idea that "man is the master and decides everything." At the beginning (the term of Juche was used for the first time by Kim Il-sung in December 1955), the Juche Idea was formulated as principles that the government uses to justify its policy decisions<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> Kimilsungism can be defined as the ideology and system of power instituted by Kim Il-Sung. In 1948, when the Democratic People's Republic of Korea was established, Kim Il-Sung became the first premier of the North Korean communist regime. Until his death in 1994, Kim strongly ruled the country, sharing the power with Kim Jong Il in the late 1960's. Kimjongilism is also often used. This term is related to the ideology of Kim Jong-il which is based on Kimilsungism. *Kim Jong Un: DPRK to carry forward revolution*, "China.org.cn", 12<sup>th</sup> June 2012

<sup>10</sup> Waldemar Dziak, *Confucianism and Kimilsongism*, [in:] Adam Jelonek, Bogdan S. Zemanek (eds.), *Confucianism Tradition – Toward the New Century*, wyd. Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2008, p. 169.

<sup>11</sup> Those who are married and families receive protection from the State. It is strongly affirmed that families are the cells of the society and shall be well taken care of by the State.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Breen, *Kim Jong Il: North Korea's dear leader who he is, what he wants, what to do about him*, John Wiley&Sons (Asia) Pte Ltd, Singapur 2004, p. 67–70.

In order to justify the independence of the North Korean model, Kim Il-sung also had to copy the Confucian patterns. The North Korean Constitution of 1972 itself identifies the family as a cell in the body of the society and the State as an organ looking after its cells<sup>13</sup>. The primary goal of using the socialist family cell ideology was to integrate the family into the state. The North Korean constitution eliminated all traces of feudalism and focused on the party and Suryŏng (the leader) while being in revolutionary service to the socialist state<sup>14</sup>. The government in the state constitutes a prolongation of the family where the head of the family constitutes the father. Obedience and duties have to be performed toward the father and the government. Therefore, the North Korean society is often described as being Confucian or Neo-Confucian. It seems that this system has borrowed a lot from the ideology known as "Legalism" which was adopted by the Wei State of the first Chinese emperor. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Confucian scholars were buried and all books of philosophy other than legalist tracts were burnt. This doctrine implemented during the China's Ming dynasty (1364–1644) is a re-interpretation of Confucian teachings.

### *Ideological transformation*

Despite the initiatives of the domestic policy mentioned before, the ancestral Confucian system centered on patriarchy was maintained in North Korea. One of the incorporated elements was the social division. One of the first social divisions which existed in Asia was already introduced in the Han dynasty in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD<sup>15</sup>. During the Choson Dynasty (1392–1910), a system of classification of the population was spread over the Korean population. Each man who was over 15 years old was forced to wear a special tablet indicating his name, address and age. According to the Polish researcher Waldemar Dziak from the Polish Academy of Sciences, those with higher positions had tablets in ivory, lower categories people had tablets in wood<sup>16</sup>. As a comparison the North Korean system also assumed a division of the population into 3 classes and 47 sub-classes (the Songbun policy). This division was established in order to assess the loyalty of the North Korean

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<sup>13</sup> *Socialist Constitution of The Democratic People's Republic of Korea*, 27<sup>th</sup> December 1972, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Pyongyang 1972, article 63.

<sup>14</sup> This domestic revolution policy was officially disclosed in a 1961 speech by Kim Il Sung entitled "*The Duty of Mothers in the Education of Children*": *Speech at the National Meeting of Mothers*, 16<sup>th</sup> November 1961", [in:] Kim Il Sung Works, Vol. 15, Korean Workers Party Press, 1963 Pyongyang.

<sup>15</sup> Krzysztof Gawlikowski, *The Western and the Confucian approaches to war: The universe based on struggle versus the universe based on harmony*, [in:] Adam Jelonek, Bogdan S. Zemanek (eds.), *Confucianism Tradition – Toward the New Century*, wyd. Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2008, p. 31.

<sup>16</sup> Waldemar Dziak, *Confucianism and kimilsongism*, [in:] Adam Jelonek, Bogdan S. Zemanek (eds.), *Confucianism Tradition – Toward the New Century*, wyd. Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2008, p. 169.

population to Kim Il-sung. The Songbun policy prevents disloyal elements from becoming members of the KWP<sup>17</sup>. Each class of citizens had different privileges and restricted rights. Interestingly in both periods, the concept and the social stratification was accepted by the population<sup>18</sup>.

Confucianism was not only a philosophical and ethical system but also a cult of the family. Everyone was expected to show filial piety towards their parents, ancestors and the king. Participation in family sacrifices helped to link the individual to the monarch, who was considered the 'father' of the national community. Traditional Korea, in other words, was a 'Family-State' that equated loyalty to the king (patriotism) with filial piety. Thus, Confucian culture logically had to become a topic of propaganda in the 1970's<sup>19</sup>. Kim Jong-il made therefore the cult of Kim Il-sung the most extreme in the world (as an acceptance of the notion of filial piety). In the early 1970's, he created and organized the "4.15 Creation Group" named after Kim Il-sung's April 15 birthday which created classics believed to be written directly by Kim Il-sung<sup>20</sup>. For Kim Il-sung's seventieth birthday, Kim Jong-il managed the construction of the Kim Il-sung stadium<sup>21</sup>. In this way, Kim Jong-il wanted to demonstrate that his filial piety was greater than the one of the population.

In Kim Il-sung's speech the essential aspects of feudalistic Confucian ideology that have remained within the popular culture is the logic of traditional Confucian culture centered on patriarchal authority. The dominating discourse came to involve the state's increased effort through the process of social reform to absorb the traditional system and culture as influenced by Confucianism. Confucian culture became a propaganda tool to increase the regime's stability beginning in the late 1960's. This traditional Confucian culture tended to strengthen the function of family as a cell. That's why Kim Il-sung, considered as the head of the "Korean family" was frequently described as a person with Confucian virtues<sup>22</sup>. For examples, the Party openly describes Kim Il-sung as a god – the "Sun of Love" – "superior to Christ in love, superior to Buddha in benevolence, superior to Confucius in virtue and superior to Mohamed in justice"<sup>23</sup>. Furthermore, the Confucian

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<sup>17</sup> James Pearson Daniel Tudor, *North Korea Confidential*, Tuttle North Clarendon 2015, p. 98.

<sup>18</sup> Krzysztof Gawlikowski, *The Western and the Confucian approaches to war: The universe based on struggle versus the universe based on harmony*, [in:] Adam Jelonek, Bogdan S. Zemanek (eds.), *Confucianism Tradition – Toward the New Century*, wyd. Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2008, p. 32.

<sup>19</sup> In his speech "On Questions about Dealing with Our National Cultural Heritage," Kim Il-sung said: "We must not, in disregard of this fact, reject the artistic works of the past blindly, simply because they are tinged with Buddhism or with feudal-Confucian ideas. We must develop their progressive and people-oriented aspects critically".

<sup>20</sup> *North Korea: a dead president's society*, "The Independent", 8<sup>th</sup> July 2004.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Debra A. Miller, *North Korea*, Greenhaven Press, Drake Road 2004, p. 31.

<sup>23</sup> Jasper Becker, *Rogue regime: Kim Jong Il and the looming threat of North Korea*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2005, p. 77.

view compares the political system to the human body, where the country leader is like the brain and the people the body that must carry out the leader's decisions and commands. A similar analogy applicable in Confucianism is that of a wise, all knowing father who takes care of the loyal nation. Koreans were used to these concepts and therefore Kim Il-sung was able to use them in propaganda to encourage a kind of collective political loyalty to support its regime. Regarding education matters, Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il had differences of opinion. Kim Il-sung thought that boys and girls should not be together in school. He also prohibited dating and marriage among students. In the 70's, many North Korean students who studied abroad came back to their home country suggesting that a mixed system is better. Kim Il-sung considered them as revisionists<sup>24</sup>.

If we view North Korea as an extension of the Choson Kingdom, the dynastic succession is a rule. Following the deaths of Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il, Kim Jong-un (김정은) became the ruler of North Korea. It has to be said, that in the Choson dynasty, a teenager could become the king even when his father died prematurely. Thus, blood is the prime criteria for a royal family and for the continuation of the North Korean Regime.

Eventually, Confucianism placed a heavy trust emphasis on earning the trust of the people as part of governance and politics and reverence to elders, the new dynasty strove to heighten political transparency and accountability by maintaining thorough records. Each government bureau kept a daily record of their work called Deunnok (Daily Administrative Records of Bureau). In this regards, the Chunchugwan (Office of Annals Compilation) was the body responsible for collecting these daily records and publishing them at regular intervals as Sijeonggi (Current Administrative Records). Choson also began from the beginning of the dynasty onwards to publish detailed pictorial records of significant state events and ceremonies such as royal marriages, royal funerals, royal sacrificial rites, royal banquets, king's procession and the construction and repair of palaces. These records included intricate details pertaining to such aspects of ceremonies as the procedures, participants and expenses involved. In North Korea, the notion of records and controls emerged already in the 1950's when Kim Il-sung was nominated as the head of North Korea and during the political purges which took place in these times in North Korea.

### **Confucianism during the Kim Jong-il's era**

From the late 1960's, at the time when Kim Jong-il emerged at the head of the Organization and Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the Korean Workers Party<sup>25</sup>, the state-dominated discourse about Confucian culture entered

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<sup>24</sup> John H. Cha, K. J. Sohn (eds.), *Exit Emperor Kim Jong-il – Notes from His Former Mentor*, Abbott Press, Bloomington 2012, p. 40.

<sup>25</sup> Choe Sang Hunn, *Korea Reports Death of Official Guiding Succession*, "New York Times", 5<sup>th</sup> June 2010.

into active political discourse. For the first time “Ŏbŏi” (아버이/Father or even Parents) discourse emerged and was linked to full-scale ideological legitimization of the stable socialist family-state. It eventually led to the formation of the previously mentioned “father” discourse<sup>26</sup>. It has to be said that Kim Jong-il was at the head of these campaigns. The official ideology was composed of terms related to the religious terminology such as “faith”, “believers” and “miracles” which are deeply rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition. The final aim of the North Korean ideology was to build a “heaven on earth” which reminds religious goals. Kim Jong-il also created a large pantheon of North Korean leaders and heroes who participated in the struggle against Japanese and in the Korean War. These people are Kim Il-sung (the North Korea “God”), Kim Jong-il (“Jesus”) and Kim Jong-suk (the mother of Jesus “Mary”) and other members of the Kim family.

Kim Jong-il elaborated also a major cult toward his father Kim Il-sung. Kim Il-sung started to be a representation of the image of the State Emperor who is the “father of the nation”<sup>27</sup>, and a “sage” who can be “a teacher”.

Kim Jong-il, who will later inherit Kim Il-sung’s supreme political power, tried to theoretically justify his own absolute power and advocate a new Confucian form of socialism. This can be illustrated by his thesis “Theory of the Socio-Political Organism” published in 1987. In the process of the Kim Il-sung-Kim Jong-il father-to-son transfer of power, the North Korean regime consequently restored the traditional logic of “loyalty and filial piety” in political discourse. The transformation of North Korean society’s Confucian culture revealed in the process of ideological justification a type of Confucian family-state that went to extremes in the union of loyalty and filial piety. The aim of Kim Jong-il was the justification accomplished when the filial piety at home extending to the filial piety in the one social family was in accordance with loyalty to the state. Starting in the 1970’s (when Kim Jong-il started to work in the Organization and Leadership Department of the Central Committee of the Korean Worker’s Party, i.e. the most powerful organization in North Korea), children were taught to respect not only their parents, but also the parents of Kim Jong-il and Kim Il-sung. According to defectors, the Confucian principle of filial piety had been even reinforced concerning the son’s duty to his parents during the Kim Jong-il’s regime. In the 1980’s, young people were more often taught to consider what their parents had done for the country during their lifetimes.

In economic issues, the presence of Confucian values is also strong: During the Kim Jong-il’s era, especially in the 1980’s and 1990’s, North Korea has

<sup>26</sup> There are changes in the titles used to refer to Kim Il Sung. As for the titles of Kim Il Sung, he was called “General” after liberation, and “Leader” or “Premier.” However, this began to change after the mid 1960s: Our father Kim Il Sung the Ruler. Jin Woong Kang, *The ‘Domestic Revolution’ – Policy and Traditional Confucianism in North Korean State Formation*, Harvard Asia Quarterly, 1<sup>st</sup> February 2008.

<sup>27</sup> Choe Sang Hunn, *Korea Reports Death of Official Guiding Succession*, “New York Times”, 5<sup>th</sup> June 2010.



definitely used some of the anti-mercantile elements of the Confucian tradition: the authoritarianism has been strengthened. Confucian values are also transposed on the organizations of North Korean Companies. The North Korean state is controlling most industries and has the monopoly over the distribution of commodities like salt<sup>28</sup>. Analyzing some North Korean companies, we can remark that values like hierarchy and familistic groupism are included in the management of North Korean companies. (The biggest companies in North Korea belong to members of one family, for instance the Mansudae Overseas Project Group of Companies is directly connected to the Kim Jong-un's family<sup>29</sup>). It means that the Confucian ethic is incorporated into business activities.

Concerning the question of equality between men and women, the notion of the subordination of women<sup>30</sup> has also been strengthened during the Kim Jong-il's reign. It is due to the fact that the former wife of Kim Il-sung, who was an enemy to Kim Jong-il, Kim Sung Ae (김성애) was always defending the rights of women (she was the chair of the Korean Democratic Women's Union). Thus, this organization has been even more powerful than some Party Organizations<sup>31</sup>. However, Kim Sung Ae was never really accepted by Kim Jong-il. Kim Jong-il kicked her out from the North Korean political scene. Afterwards, women started to be more subordinated than in the past.

The structural frame of the North Korean system was set in place in accordance with the dynastic systems of the Ancient Korea. Respect for elders was emphasized. Like the Choson Kingdom, North Korea has been brutal and uncompromising to any rebellious figures challenging the Kim dynasty. Even the dictatorial and brutal leader Kim Jong-il showed his respect for the elders. In comparison to Kim Il-sung, he reinforced the cult of the members of his family and was strictly cooperating with the old generation of North Korean politicians. These people, such as Kim Yong Nam (김영남 – North Korean Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly, born in 1928), Kim Ki Nam (김기남 – vice-chairman of the Committee for Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland, born in 1926), O Kuk Ryol (오극렬 – a general of the North Korean Army, born in 1931) and others are still at the head of North Korea in spite of their ages.

When Kim Jong-il emerged at the head of North Korea (unofficially in the 1970's, officially in the 1980's), he tried to reinforce the Korean nationalism. Not

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<sup>28</sup> Jasper Becker, *Rogue regime: Kim Jong Il and the looming threat of North Korea*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2005, p. 75.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with a defector realized in October 2010. For security reasons, the identity of the defector is not revealed.

<sup>30</sup> According to the Confucian model of society, women had to occupy a position lower than men. Most Confucians accepted also this issue as being natural.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with a high ranking party defector realized in June 2009. For security reasons, the identity of the defector is not revealed. Another defector also stressed that according to Kim Jong Il's edicts the competences of Women Political Organizations were minimized already in the late 1970's.

only politicians promoted the Korean culture but also various artists<sup>32</sup>. The situation was similar by the late Choson period when a national enlightenment movement, which combined nationalist ideologies and faiths, had already formed outside the scope of Confucianism. This movement appeared as a diverse intellectual movement promoting awareness of Korean culture's unique identity. Key spokesmen promoted an enlightened, nationalistic perspective within historical studies, and Korean language studies. The tradition of strong nationalism among the Korean people coexisted with another tradition called sadaechui<sup>33</sup>. Kim Jong-il's (and to a less extent Kim Il-sung's) real antipathy towards foreign influence serves to intensify the nationalism of the North Korean people, who were told that world civilization originated from the Korean peninsula<sup>34</sup>. Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il took their inspiration also from Buddhism. Thus, it has to be quoted that according to the Buddhist ideology, the king was the highest ruler in the society. The people considered the king as the living Buddha of Buddhism. He's the spiritual and material leader who redeemed the world and the being who connect the past, the present and the future. The will of the king was decisive and this was justified by Buddhism. Such characteristics of Buddhism in relation to the king's ruling authority are appearing in the establishment of the Kim Il-sung's system and especially during the Kim Jong-il's era. The king (Kim Jong-il) claimed to have been chosen as the ruler according to the myth (Kim Il-sung).

### Concluding Remarks

As a conclusion, I would like to underline that the historical roots of some aspects of the North Korean ideology are based in Confucianism. Nevertheless, there is no direct referring to Confucianism in the North Korean ideology. North Korea's socialist reform, which continued from liberation through the post-war revolution, was centered on a policy of domestic revolution. The key-contradiction originated in the discord between traditional culture and forced reform. Eventually, the patriarchal system was accepted during the Kim Jong-il's era, adopted by the state and even elevated to use as an ideological tool to justify its Confucian form of socialism. Nevertheless, it's important to underline that there is a big danger in considering Korea as a homogeneously Confucian society. Koreans are sometimes viewed as double-faced. On the one hand, Koreans are self-controlled and meticulous in their fulfillment of their obligations. On the other hand, Koreans have reputation for emotionalism<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> Interview with a defector realized in October 2010. For security reasons, the identity of the defector is not revealed.

<sup>33</sup> Sadae (사대), lit. "serving-the-Great".

<sup>34</sup> Don Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, Addison-Wesley, Reading 1997, p. 401.

<sup>35</sup> On the same way, the shamanism, one of Korea's most characteristic cultural expressions, contrast with the self-control idealized by Confucians.

Nevertheless, while the North Korean government is always more opposed to any kind of official religion, as Bryan Myers mentioned, Confucianism is all about tempering instincts with intellectual discipline, with book learning. Then North Korea is much closer to Imperial Japan and fascist states that we saw in Europe in the 1930's in that it glorifies pure racial instincts<sup>36</sup>.

It has to be underlined that on the northern part of the Korean Peninsula, after the end of the Korean War, each new tradition was created without any references or justifications in the Past. In other words, it's impossible to find inspirations from outside. However, the kimilsungism aimed at adopting some foreign solutions with maintaining domestic traditions. Korean communists formed a system prepared to function in their own country which was not different from the Soviet pattern. The main Korean structures were based on the Soviet model (such as the Organization and Leadership Department of the Korean Workers' Party based on the soviet *Orgsburo*); nevertheless this topic will have to be analyzed within another research article.

## Abstract

The main aim of this article is to analyze some aspects of the historical roots of the North Korean ideology and political system. This study argues that the North Korean ideology is to a certain extent rooted in the historical background of the Korean Peninsula but has also been purposely changed and manipulated in form to deal with at-the-time difficulty and circumstance that the regime faced. Meanwhile what can be observed in the North Korean ideology is that there is no direct referring to the antecedents. These claims are illustrated in this article by various primary material of a propagandistic nature published in North Korea and by research articles.

**Key words:** Confucianism, Kim Il-sung, Kim Jong-eun, Kim Jong-il, legalism, North Korea

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<sup>36</sup> Robert Siegel talks to B.R. Myers, author of the book *The Cleanest Race: How the North Koreans See Themselves and Why It Matters*, who takes an unorthodox look at the North Korean regime and its people. They discuss the expressions of grief displayed by North Koreans for their leader, "npr.org". 29<sup>th</sup> December 2011.

