

## *The Power and Poverty of Ideology*

*Some countries are known for economic prosperity and others for military strength and still others for rich cultural assets. But our country is the only country known for its ideological power.<sup>1</sup>*

The red electric torch glowing atop the 150-meter Tower of the Juche Idea in the heart of Pyongyang is a striking testimonial to the importance and omnipresence of ideology in North Korea. According to Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski, "It would be impossible to write a meaningful history of the USSR without giving sustained attention to ideological issues."<sup>2</sup> This is even more true of North Korea, whose ideology shares much in common with other communist ideologies. The difference is that under the custodianship of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il the North Korean brand of ideology has been inflated beyond what was found even in the heyday of Stalin or Mao. Certainly no other country today puts as much effort into the production, elaboration, and dissemination of ideology as does North Korea.

To the extent that ideologies are "sets of ideas which have their unity not in the ideas themselves, but in the collective or individual unconscious," they can reveal important insights about the people who subscribe to them.<sup>3</sup> Ideology serves as a guide for behavior; it is, according to the North Korean press, "a compass showing the course for a country and its people to follow, a foundation on which an entire nation comes together in a wholehearted unity, and a

banner of victory that leads a nation to infinite prosperity and development."<sup>4</sup> Ideology provides clues as to why North Korea has failed to pursue pragmatic domestic and foreign policies. In their extensive examination of North Korea, Robert A. Scalapino and Chong-Sik Lee note, "Ideology erects perimeters; it channels and interdicts as well as stimulates thought, and thus it inhibits any rapid adjustment to changing realities."<sup>5</sup> North Korea's unitary ideology is indeed a serious barrier to progress. As the French philosopher Alain said, "Nothing is more dangerous than an idea, when you have only one idea."<sup>6</sup> For North Koreans, that one idea is Juche. Article 3 of the socialist constitution proclaims, "The DPRK is guided in its activities by the Juche idea, a world outlook centered on people, a revolutionary ideology for achieving the independence of the masses of people."<sup>7</sup>

North Koreans proudly refer to Juche socialism as a thoroughly scientific theory, but Juche is not by any stretch of the imagination a set of empirically related propositions to be tested and then revised or discarded according to observations of reality. Even though Marx's predictions have fallen wide of the mark, Marxism-Leninism remains a cornerstone of North Korean ideology. North Korea's ideology is neither theory nor science but rather doctrine and dogma assumed to be true because of the authority from whence it comes. In North Korea, all ideology flows from the allegedly omniscient authority of the founder and his son; disputing or revising ideology thus constitutes an attack on their authority, inviting certain punishment. Ideologies and the myths associated with them are weapons of the political leaders and a prison in which they are confined. This truth helps explain why even though Kim Il Sung and his son created North Korea's ideology, they cannot easily adapt it to changing conditions.

A useful working definition of political ideology is "a belief system that explains and justifies a preferred political order for society . . . and offers a strategy . . . for its attainment."<sup>8</sup> The ideology of a totalitarian state like North Korea provides guidelines for virtually all fields of human endeavor, from poetry to potato farming. The ideology prominently includes ideas for transforming the nature of human beings and their society into a utopian community.<sup>9</sup> In this important sense it is revolutionary in nature, vigorously attacking the status quo. North Korea's ideology provides no rest for the weary, as one economic "speed battle" is followed by another, and the "victorious conclusion" of the "arduous march" ushers in a "forced march for final victory," which turns into a "march to paradise," even though paradise remains as distant as ever to the North Korean people. Only when they have been transformed into loyal fol-

lowers of Kim Jong Il, when South Korea has been communized, and when the international system has been democratized will the North Korean people be permitted to rest. Certainly the march will be far longer and more arduous than Kim Il Sung expected in the first decade after he had taken control of North Korea and the international communist movement was gaining momentum.

North Korean ideology sounds strange to most foreigners. The myths embedded in North Korean ideology are backward-looking: stories "concerned with past events, giving them a specific meaning and significance for the present."<sup>10</sup> The myths are part fabrication, part reorganization, and part reinterpretation of historical facts. For example, the core communist myth is the Marxist model of history, a story of the irrevocable march of history culminating in a global classless society in which the storehouses are bursting with goods produced and distributed "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need." The uniquely North Korean myths overlaid on Marxism trace the history of North Korea from its alleged founding by Tangun, the offspring of a god and a bear-woman, to the coming of demigod Kim Il Sung and his revolutionary family.<sup>11</sup> The role of these myths is not to describe reality but to glorify tradition and inspire the masses.

North Korea's adherence to a failed and fantasized ideology is not as irrational as it might first appear if one distinguishes between what works for the masses and what serves the interests of the ruling elite. Ideology may have destroyed the economy and isolated the country, but it has strengthened the power of the Kim family by glorifying their leadership and by serving as a spiritual substitute for economic success, as the quotation at the beginning of the chapter illustrates.

Heeding Friedrich and Brzezinski's advice to give sustained attention to ideology, what should one look for in terms of linkage between ideology and life? North Korea's ideology has developed over half a century into such a fantastic set of assertions that it is difficult for outsiders to take them seriously—or to imagine that the North Korean people or their leaders do. Taken seriously or not, the people are forced throughout their lives to devote many hours a week to reading, memorizing, and discussing the teachings of Kim Il Sung and his son. To what extent is ideology an epiphenomenon, something separate from everyday concerns? A major hypothesis in this book is that ideology holds North Korea back from developing into a modern society.

Ideology must say something about how the leaders think, and about their estimation of the intellectual sophistication of their followers. As it has developed over the years, Juche reflects the changing concerns of the leaders, and

the problems that they seek to solve in the path toward constructing their ideal of a totalitarian socialist state. Some problems, like poor worker motivation, are ever-present. Others, like grief over the loss of Kim Il Sung and a weakening loyalty to his son, are triggered by specific events.

As Juche has developed, it has addressed several major issues. First, the problem of maintaining North Korea's independence in the international community. Second, remolding people into ever-loyal disciples of the leader but at the same time giving them a sense of individual purpose as "masters of society." Third, glorifying the solidarity of the people as a modern Confucian national family around the party and its leader. Fourth, defending North Korea's brand of socialism in the face of declining living conditions and the collapse of the international communist bloc. And fifth, under increasingly miserable conditions in the wake of Kim Il Sung's death, giving people a reason to die, if not to live, for the regime.

### Juche: The Early Years

Here is the North Korean socialist dream: a communal society, blessed with an abundance of goods produced and exchanged without the need for money. These happy people are bound together like a great national tribe, insulated from the economic and political strife of the international community by the fact that the nation is economically self-sufficient. Being productive and self-sufficient, the people are the equal of any nation on the globe, large or small. They envy no one, for they live in an earthly paradise.

The pair of ideas that form the basis of North Korea's utopian ideology are as appealing as they are impractical. Socialism (as a precursor of communism) is the method by which this paradise is to be achieved, and Juche is its guiding principle. Juche is the absolute given of North Korean life, the defining characteristic of the nation and of any "good" North Korean. A person without Juche is worthless; a state without Juche is a colony. Juche is North Korea's gift to the world, a world that is reluctant to accept it because (according to the North Koreans) the "imperialists" led by the United States are actively scheming to defeat Juche and make the working people slaves to the capitalists.

The essence of Juche is difficult to grasp, either because it is so simplistic as to be unbelievable or so complex and culture specific as to be untranslatable. A starting point is to define the core meaning as a combination of national self-reliance and Korean nationalism. Bruce Cumings, a scholar who has come closer than most Westerners to understanding Koreans, says of Juche that "it is less an idea than a state of mind. The term literally means being subjective

where Korean matters are concerned, putting Korea first in everything."<sup>12</sup> Cumings adds, "The term is really untranslatable; for a foreigner its meaning is ever-receding, into a pool of everything that makes Koreans Korean, and therefore is ultimately inaccessible to the non-Korean."<sup>13</sup> Indeed, it may not be accessible even to many Koreans. Han Shik Park, a Korean-American academic who has specialized in the study of Juche, recounts an interview he had in 1981 with a Juche theoretician at Kim Il Sung University:

In a three-hour marathon session with him, I was not only thoroughly frustrated by his lengthy reiteration of well-known propaganda lines, but I also had considerable difficulty in grasping the logical and philosophical aspects of the ideology. When he sensed that I was somewhat mystified by his exposition of the doctrine, he sought to comfort me by saying the idea is such a profound "eternal truth" (*yongsaeng pulmyol ui chilli*) that it is not meant to be fully comprehensible!<sup>14</sup>

The phrase "eternal truth" that the North Korean used is the same phrase that (South) Korean Christians use when they refer to their religious beliefs. It may not be a coincidence that Kim Il Sung, the founder of North Korea and originator of Juche, came from a Christian family and thus recognized the persuasive power of Christian beliefs.

In an attempt to explain Juche to the modern-day surfer on the World Wide Web, the Korean Central News Agency has tried to clarify matters in its website (which, contrary to Juche logic, originates in Japan, owing to lack of computer infrastructure in North Korea):

Juche is [a] Korean word. It means the subject in English. ["Korean subjectivity"?] "The revolution in each country should be carried out responsibly by its own people, the masters, in an independent manner, and in a creative way suitable [to] its specific conditions." It raised the fundamental question of philosophy by regarding man as the main factor, and elucidated the philosophical principle that man is the master of everything and decides everything.<sup>15</sup>

North Koreans have written volumes on Juche, prompting foreign observers to devote many articles to the concept as well. Arriving at a satisfying definition is difficult for at least two reasons. First, the Juche idea has gathered around it layers of meaning to adapt it to the changing needs of the ruling elite. Second, Juche is not a particularly profound or cohesive set of ideas. The core of the Juche idea is national pride, which is a laudable sentiment among any people, and especially appropriate for Koreans, who live in a land surrounded by

greater powers. But national pride hardly counts as an original ideology. Juche ideology is credited to Kim Il Sung, who is characterized in the 1998 socialist constitution (and elsewhere) as "a genius ideological theoretician." The first syllable, *ju*, means "the main or fundamental" principle; the second syllable, *che*, means body or self or the foundation of something—the same as the Chinese word *ti* in the famous phrase, "Chinese learning for the foundation and Western learning for application."<sup>16</sup> Kim introduced Juche (the word had existed before but was given a new political meaning) in a speech to Korean Workers' Party (KWP) propaganda and agitation workers on December 28, 1955, during the early years when he was still working to eliminate potential political rivals. This speech has gained increasing importance in retrospect and may have undergone revisions in the intervening years to make it compatible with subsequent interpretations of Juche. It is not unusual in North Korea (as in the former Soviet Union and other totalitarian states) to revise original texts for later publication to make them consistent with more recent ideological thought or even to fabricate text and "discover" it many years later.<sup>17</sup> According to Suh Dae-Sook's biography of Kim Il Sung, some fifteen speeches referring to Juche that the North Korean press attributes to Kim from as far back as the 1930s are sheer fabrications, never having appeared until their publication in the 1970s. Looking back almost half a century to the 1955 speech, its title, "On Eliminating Dogmatism and Formalism and Establishing Juche in Ideological Work," is pure irony, for the imitation of foreign ways that Kim criticized has been replaced by a far more slavish adherence to his own failed Juche policies. The political context of the speech was Kim's campaign to purge political rivals, especially those in the Soviet and Chinese factions of his party, although criticism in the speech is primarily directed against the Soviet faction, since Stalin was already dead and Chinese troops who had participated in the Korean War were still in North Korea and would not be completely withdrawn until 1958.

Kim's speech sets forth the core Juche idea of national self-reliance and pride. North Korea must adapt Marxist-Leninist principles to Korean conditions, rather than swallow them whole: "We are not engaged in any other country's revolution, but solely in the Korean revolution."<sup>18</sup> Kim's appeal to nationalism is awkward in light of the fact that the Russians had backed his bid to rule North Korea in 1945, and the Chinese had saved the North Korean army from advancing UN troops in the Korean War. As a practicing communist, Kim attempts to reconcile nationalism with communist internationalism: "Internationalism and patriotism are inseparably linked with each other. . . . Loving Korea is just as good as loving the Soviet Union."<sup>19</sup> His rationale for this assertion is that by strengthening the revolution in

Korea, the international communist revolution is strengthened.<sup>20</sup> Kim's speech closes with two typically communist-utopian themes: an appeal to the people to have faith and optimism in the revolution, and—in anticipation of what was later to become the centerpiece and supreme irony of Juche—an appeal to the people to believe that power is in their hands, that they are “masters in everything.”<sup>21</sup>

At its inception, Juche was pragmatic in two respects: as a political tool for Kim to preserve his power and as a declaration of North Korea's intention to adapt foreign imports to Korean conditions. In a phrase as pithy as the injunction China's Deng Xiaoping, another pragmatist, used years later, Kim says, “It does not matter whether you use the right hand or the left, whether you use a spoon or chopsticks at the table. No matter how you eat, it is all the same insofar as food is put into your mouth, isn't it?”<sup>22</sup> This sentiment has been periodically echoed, with an increasing lack of sincerity, as when Kim Jong Il in 1986 boasted that “the Juche idea categorically rejects narrow-minded chauvinism in the ideological domain. The Juche idea fairly evaluates and assimilates the ideas capable of making even the smallest contributions to enhancing man's position and role in the world, no matter which nation or people have evolved them.”<sup>23</sup> But over the years the use of Juche as a means to legitimate the Kim dynasty has completely crowded out the pragmatic aspect of Juche. In fact, any idea not originating with the Kims, father or son, is condemned as heresy. Virtually every article in the North Korean press begins with the phrase, “As Kim Il Sung (or Kim Jong Il) has indicated,” whether the article deals with pig farming or foreign policy.

The breadth of the Juche idea and the possibilities for its endless elaboration and application are revealed in a statement Kim Il Sung made in 1972 during an interview with members of the Japanese press: “You requested me to give a detailed explanation of the Juche idea. But there is no end to it. All the policies and lines of our Party emanate from the Juche idea and they embody this idea.”<sup>24</sup> This admission, perhaps unwittingly, indicates how the Juche idea can be used as a tool for political dueling and social control by making the correct interpretation of Juche the criterion for patriotism.<sup>25</sup> North Korea's prison camps are filled with people who, in a moment of frustration or forgetfulness, criticized the prevailing Juche line.

It is easier to understand North Korea's dedication to Juche if one remembers that it provides an implicit criticism of South Korea. The opposite of self-reliance is *sadaejui*, translated as “servility,” “reliance on others,” or “flunkeyism.” As long as U.S. troops remain in South Korea, North Korea can hold the moral high ground by claiming to be the only independent state on

the Korean peninsula. Of course there are other measures of dependence, such as reliance on foreign powers for economic aid and military support. On these measures North Korea has fallen woefully short of the Juche idea. But “on the ground” North Korea has Juche and South Korea does not.

For North Koreans, Juche is inseparable from socialism, considered the only means by which the masses can gain their independence. Whatever changes have been made in the Juche concept over the years, North Korea's commitment to socialism as an organizational principle has never changed. By the late 1950s all industrial facilities were state owned and most farms had been transformed into party-guided cooperatives, although the goal of transforming the cooperatives into state-run farms (known as “resolving the rural problem”) has yet to be achieved.

### Juche Becomes a Philosophy of Man

Not content with proposing a practical guide for the adaptation of Marxism-Leninism to Korean conditions, the Kims expanded the Juche idea into a philosophy of man, introducing a basic contradiction with Marxism-Leninism. Marx's historical insight was that social and economic conditions (feudalism, capitalism, socialism) shaped human beings. Structural “contradictions” in one stage of economic development inevitably give rise to a dialectical resolution achieved in the next stage. Only with the establishment of communism, in which there would be no competing classes—the working class having taken control of the means of production—would contradictions disappear. Kim Il Sung, and more important Kim Jong Il, attributed free will to human beings, thereby freeing them from the restraints of economic and political forces. In his published answers to questions submitted by the major Japanese daily *Mainichi Shimbun* in 1972, Kim Il Sung explained, “The idea of Juche means that the masters of the revolution and the work of construction are the masses of the people and that they are also the motive force of the revolution and the work of construction. In other words, one is responsible for one's own destiny and one has also the capacity for hewing out one's own destiny.”<sup>26</sup>

Throughout his lifetime, Kim struggled to imbue the cadres and the masses with the selfless can-do spirit of Juche socialism, yet he never figured out how to make people altruistic. Kim's quixotic solution to the motivational problem is to posit that man is the center of the universe, needing no motivation other than his own innate desire to work to the maximum and contribute to society.

By the 1970s two catchwords had appeared in the Juche lexicon: "independence" and "creativity." "Independence is what keeps man alive. If he loses independence in society, he cannot be called a man; he differs little from an animal."<sup>27</sup> Independence is achieved through individual creativity: people solving problems on their own. Both themes can be traced back to Kim's 1955 speech. The independence theme is the core of the original Juche concept. Creativity, that is, each individual adapting work principles to the situation in order to discover solutions, is the means to independence. This call for creativity was at best insincere and at worst delusional. Under socialism's "democratic centralism" the party provides guidelines for all aspects of life, and any adaptations of these guidelines to specific circumstances risk party censure. Kim's creativity and independence themes are not new or unique to communist thought. In the former Soviet Union the masses had also been urged to employ their "creative energy and initiative" as masters of their fate under the strict guidance of the leader and the party.<sup>28</sup> In North Korea, censure for transgressing against the party is a fact of life, where everyone from the lowliest peasant to the most decorated general must submit to an almost daily ritual of other- and self-criticisms employing the standard of whether his or her actions have conformed to the Kims' interpretation of Juche. The party rules on the correctness of the adaptation; whether or not desired results are obtained by the action is of secondary concern. Everything is recorded in one's personnel record for possible use in the future. As the sole authorized interpreters of Juche, only the two Kims are exempt from criticism.

Since it has always been apparent that most people are poorly motivated by the prospect of working for the group rather than for themselves, they must be constantly persuaded of the value of collectivism. The great problem of the Korean revolution became how to inculcate Juche ideology into people, for Kim was not simply building the nation, but "remolding" people.<sup>29</sup> A new type of Korean must emerge, just as Soviet leaders over the years sought to create a new Soviet man, and Mao envisioned a new Chinese. Kim had been able to motivate his small band of guerrilla fighters; could he motivate an entire nation in peacetime?

With the introduction of the idea of the "sociopolitical life," Kim moved Juche closer to a religion. "We might say that the socio-political life is more valuable to a man than physical life. . . . If he is forsaken by society and deprived of political independence, though he seems alive, he is virtually dead as a social human being. That is why the revolutionaries [for example, Kim's guerrilla band] deem it far more honorable to die in the fight for freedom than to keep themselves alive in slavery."<sup>30</sup> This appeal for a collectivist spirit helps clarify

what is meant by independence in North Korea: not individual freedom but a national independence that can only be achieved by people working together under party guidance.

### Kim Jong Il Interprets Juche

Thanks to the efforts of Kim Jong Il, Juche was transformed from a nationalistic ruling ideology to a cult ideology, marking a break between political persuasion and religion. Kim Jong Il, who worked in the KWP's Propaganda and Agitation Department early in his career, was secretly and unofficially designated as Kim Il Sung's successor in 1972 or 1973, and formally introduced to the nation as successor in 1980.<sup>31</sup> Not being a soldier, a statesman, or an economist, the junior Kim's self-appointed role was to interpret and propagandize Juche ideology and oversee cultural affairs. Once he got his hands on the concept, Juche became increasingly alienated from the real world, more "pure ideology" than an "implementing ideology."<sup>32</sup> Kim claims authorship of more than 400 papers, many dealing explicitly with Juche and almost all of them touching on the subject. Unconstrained by the need to achieve results in economic construction, since he was accountable to no one except his father, Kim made Juche an article of faith rather than a guide to practice.

Whereas Marxism was said to be correct in predicting the inevitable triumph of communism over capitalism, according to Kim Jong Il the Marxist materialistic outlook "was not free from historical limitations."<sup>33</sup> It was not until his father formulated the Juche philosophy of man that Marxism-Leninism was perfected. Kim Jong Il observed that "man is neither a purely spiritual being nor a simple biological being. Man is a social being who lives and acts in social relationships."<sup>34</sup> This revelation is cited as the basis for the claim that Juche is "an absolutely scientific" theory. "The chuche [or Juche] idea indicated, for the first time in history, that a man has a sociopolitical integrity, as well as a physical life. . . . True human life . . . can only be realized admirably in a socialist society based on collectivism. In this society, people are free from all manner of exploitation and oppression, domination and subordination and can lead an independent and creative life."<sup>35</sup>

Like his father, Kim junior wrestled with the problem of reconciling the claim that Juche was man centered with the Marxist idea that objective economic conditions determined the nature of the social consciousness. In a 1986 talk, "On Some Problems of Education in Juche Idea," Kim invents this unsatisfying explanation:

Some officials have a misunderstanding that the Juche philosophy has nothing to do with the general principles of dialectical materialism because it is a man-centered philosophy. . . . It is clear that [Juche] conforms to the basic principles of materialism and dialectics that man, the most developed material being, holds the position of master towards the less developed material beings.<sup>36</sup>

Thus the insight of the human-centered nature of Juche made it complete and self-sufficient: "Our party does not need any other ideological system than the system of the Juche idea."<sup>37</sup> And since unity is posited as one of the key strengths of North Korea, the entire nation must be "dyed in the same ideological color." Reference to Marxism-Leninism was dropped from the 1980 charter of the Korean Workers' Party and from the 1992 version of the constitution, which states: "The Democratic People's Republic of Korea makes Juche ideology, a revolutionary ideology with a people-centered view of the world that aims towards the realization of the independence of the masses, the guiding principle of its actions." Moreover, it turns out that the only hope the people have of correctly understanding and implementing Juche is to follow the party and the leader. "For the popular masses to be an independent subject of the revolution, they must be united into one organization with one ideology under the leadership of the party and the leader. Only the masses, who are united organizationally and ideologically, can shape their destiny independently and creatively."<sup>38</sup>

Bruce Cumings has maintained that North Korea's version of socialism with Confucian overtones is a form of state corporatism. In the Confucian tradition, society is viewed as one big family headed by a wise, stern, benevolent father to whom unconditional respect and gratitude are owed. In Juche terminology, "The leader, the party and the people form one sociopolitical organism, and share the same destiny."<sup>39</sup> The leader is said to be the "nerve center" and "top brain" of the nation. "Children love and respect their parents not because their parents are always superior to those of others or because the children receive benefits from them, but because the parents are the benefactors of their lives who gave birth to them and have brought them up. . . . All the communist revolutionaries of Korea have been accorded immortal political integrity by the fatherly leader. . . . Therefore, the loyalty of our party members and working people to the great leader is . . . unconditional."<sup>40</sup> And if the leader is the father of the people, their mother is the party: "If politics of love and trust is to be exercised in socialist society, the socialist party in power must be built into a motherly party."<sup>41</sup>

As life became more difficult for the North Korean people in the 1980s and 1990s, a "politics of benevolence" theme was emphasized. According to Juche, the people are "heaven." Hence the party and the leader must listen to them to learn of their needs and wishes. In communist jargon this is known as the "mass line," the one breath of democracy in the system. "The working class party must always go among the masses and listen to their desires." In a capitalist society, where individual motivation is provided by money, people are treated as commodities. Under socialism, people are to be treated as the masters, with the party and the leader as their servants. "Serve the people" has been one of Kim Jong Il's mantras. As for the leader, "In order to realize genuinely benevolent politics in socialist society, a political leader who unfailingly loves the people must come forward. A political leader of socialism should be a master in leadership but, first of all, he must be a man of virtue who loves the people boundlessly."<sup>42</sup>

The correct Juche view of the leader is known as the "revolutionary view of the leader." In a scripted question-and-answer program broadcast on North Korean television, this view is explained, "Above all, the leader [*suryong*—absolute leader, a phrase reserved for Kim Il Sung] holds an absolute status that cannot be compared to anyone else in the revolutionary struggle. So-called extraordinary individuals have existed throughout history, but they have remained only individuals, they cannot be compared to the leader."<sup>43</sup> Just as socialist consciousness does not automatically arise from social conditions, a true socialist leader does not arise from social conditions:

The previous theories [for example, Marxism-Leninism] said that only if an historical inevitability is created on the basis of an objective condition, a leader will necessarily emerge. . . . This kind of opinion is theoretically wrong, and is practically very extremely harmful. . . . The ideology about the nature of a revolutionary view of the leader elucidates that the leader is not any individual, but one who possesses extraordinary traits and qualifications, which just any individual cannot have; and because of this, he holds an absolute status and plays a decisive role in the revolutionary struggle. . . . Today, the world's people are consistently envious of our people, calling our people the people blessed with the leader.<sup>44</sup>

The leader is virtually a divine gift to the people, like the divine right of kings in Western tradition and the Confucian belief that a virtuous king ruled with the mandate of heaven. There is no social contract between leader and follower, and loyalty should not be made contingent on anything the leader

does. Absolute loyalty, love, and obedience is to be given unconditionally to the leader—a view of the leader as one who transforms followers rather than who must please and satisfy them.<sup>45</sup>

Consistent with the Juche view of leadership, in 1997 Kim Jong Il acceded to the general secretaryship of the party not by election, as provided for in the charter of the Korean Workers' Party, but by "declaration" of the KWP's Central Committee and Central Military Commission, following a series of staged meetings throughout the country in which resolutions recommending Kim Jong Il's election received "unanimous approval."<sup>46</sup>

Through propaganda, the reclusive Kim Jong Il assumed the role of benevolent leader. While his father the "great leader" was alive, the junior Kim was called "dear leader," a more familiar and endearing form of address. To prove himself a "dear leader," Kim Jong Il presented himself as a promoter of the people's standard of living, for example, by organizing the August Third Movement, whereby consumer goods would be manufactured locally. In 1993 the North Korean propaganda machine began to characterize Kim Jong Il's ruling style as one of "benevolence," "boldness," and "broad scale," reminiscent of earlier campaigns describing the peasant soldier Kim Il Sung as personifying the Confucian traits of benevolence and virtue.<sup>47</sup> Certainly one indication of the younger Kim's boldness was his adoption, after his father's death, of the appellation "respected and beloved general," in the face of strong evidence that he had no military training and was neither respected nor loved by his countrymen. Kim Jong Il's love and concern are said to be all-encompassing. He "respects the aged fighters," "regards young functionaries . . . as precious treasures of the revolution." "He is taking good care of people from different strata—including workers, farmers and intellectuals," and "especially, the dear comrade leader is looking after those who have a shameful past."<sup>48</sup> Not to put too fine a point on the matter, Kim Jong Il "put[s] up the people as the most beautiful and excellent beings in the world and deeply worships them."<sup>49</sup>

Kim Jong Il's cult of personality has grown apace since his father's death in 1994. Early on Kim Il Sung had boasted that his family, as far back as the nineteenth century, was a heroic revolutionary family, his purpose being to establish a ruling dynasty that would make his own position unassailable and guarantee his son's succession. Within months of taking the post of KWP general secretary in October 1997, Kim Jong Il's propaganda people began a campaign to place his diseased mother, Kim Jong Suk, in the first rank of revolutionary immortals, completing the roster of the "three generals" of Mount Paektu: father, son, and now mother (Kim Il Sung's second wife, who is living, is a political nonperson). The little Kim was born to the purple. "Slogan trees,"

whose bark is said to have been carved with slogans by Kim Il Sung's band of revolutionary fighters in the 1930s and 1940s, are still being "discovered" (that is, carved). These slogans "prove that the succession to the cause of the Korean revolution was ensured in those days."<sup>50</sup> Examples of carvings lauding the "bright star" Kim Jong Il who was destined to succeed his father, the "sun," include "Birth on Mount Paektu of the Bright Star, Heir to General Kim Il Sung" and "Longevity and Blessing to the Bright Star above Mount Paektu Who Will Shine with the Beam of the Sun." Granite mountainsides in North Korea are similarly defaced with propaganda slogans lauding the two Kims.

### Juche on the Defensive

The Marxist myth of the inevitable victory of socialism was seriously damaged when the communist governments of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union collapsed in the late 1980s and early 1990s. First the North Korean elites, and later the masses, had to be given an explanation. On May 5, 1991, Kim Jong Il gave a talk to senior party members, "Our Socialism for the People Will Not Perish," in which he rebuts the criticisms that the capitalist democracies were leveling at socialism.<sup>51</sup> On the alleged superiority of capitalism: "The imperialists and reactionaries, loudly advertising the 'advantage' of private ownership, are urging socialist countries to abandon social ownership and restore private ownership. . . . The people in our country experienced through their actual lives that social ownership alone provides them with an abundant and cultured life." On alleged human rights violations: "In our socialist society which regards man as most precious, human rights are firmly guaranteed by law; even the slightest practice infringing upon them is not tolerated. In our country all people's rights ranging from the rights to employment, food, clothing and housing to the rights to free education and medical care are fully guaranteed." On alleged restrictions of political freedom: "The imperialists and reactionaries disparage political life in the working-class party and other political organizations led by the party as if it were the 'restraint' of freedom . . . If people in socialist society do not lead political life properly in the working-class party and other political organizations led by the party, they cannot preserve their socio-political integrity." On alleged lack of ideological freedom: "The U.S. imperialists and their stooges are saying that we have no ideological 'freedom' . . . . Our people have accepted the Juche idea . . . as their conviction, of their own accord, and from their vital need."

If socialism offers such benefits, why has it yielded to capitalism in other countries? "Of course it is not easy for the revolutionary idea of the working

class to hold undivided sway in socialist society because this society still retains survivals of obsolete ideas and is subject to the ideological and cultural infiltration of imperialism. Although man's ideological consciousness is influenced by socio-economic conditions, the establishment of a new socio-economic system does not change people's ideological consciousness automatically."

The following year, as the "yellow wind of capitalism" continued to blow in North Korea's direction, Kim delivered another major address in defense of socialism.<sup>52</sup> After reminding his audience, "It is an inexorable law of historical development that mankind advances toward socialism," he addressed the question of how to view "the recent frustration of socialism and the revival of capitalism in some of those countries which had been advancing along the road to socialism." "The path to socialism is an untrodden path that has to be blazed" and "therefore, difficulties and trials are inevitable . . . and an unexpected situation may also crop up." "The frustration of socialism . . . is only a local and passing phenomenon. However, we can never regard this as an accidental phenomenon, nor can we consider that this has been caused merely by an external factor."

Kim continued, "As the great leader always says, when anything is wrong with us, we must find the reason in ourselves, not elsewhere. . . . The basic reason for the frustration of socialism in some countries which had been building socialism is that they did not put the main emphasis on strengthening the motive force of building socialism and on enhancing its role because they failed to understand [that is, preserve] the essence of socialism by centering on the popular masses." Marxism, it seems, was a good basis for establishing socialism but not for continuing the revolution. Socialist leaders in other countries had concerned themselves only with the material, failing to transform the mental states of their people. "It is wrong to think that a change in the social system and material conditions will inevitably be followed by a change in the ideological consciousness of people." "The main emphasis in the ideological revolution should be put on educating everyone to remain boundlessly faithful to the party and the leader and to serve the masses devotedly."

Given the inherent weakness of socialism compared with capitalism (as it would seem), political pluralism cannot be tolerated. "Historical experience shows clearly that if anti-socialist ideas are disseminated by liberalizing ideology, and the activities of anti-socialist parties are guaranteed through the tolerance of 'multi-party democracy,' the class enemies and reactionaries will raise their heads, commit anti-socialist acts and come to drive the working-class party out of power." "The socialism of a country will ruin itself without even exchanging one gunshot in confrontations with imperialists no matter

how strong its economic power and military capacity are."<sup>53</sup> That is, ideological change provokes political change, which in turn threatens the regime.<sup>54</sup>

To prevent socialism from being polluted by capitalism, "In socialist society, transitional society where the class struggle continues, the state must also exercise dictatorship against the anti-socialist elements." "If we weaken the dictatorial function of the government . . . we can not provide the people with democratic freedom and rights, defend our revolutionary achievements and we can leave the socialist system itself endangered."<sup>55</sup>

"Socialism in our own style" (reminiscent of a similar idea that had been adopted by the Soviet Union years earlier) became the new slogan in the late 1980s, as North Korea sought to distance itself from other socialist and formerly socialist countries—in fact, from everyone. In a 1997 work, "On Preserving the Juche Character and National Character of the Revolution and Construction," Kim sounded a strong nationalistic note, erecting an ideological wall around North Korea. "The Juche idea clarified that the country and nation are the basic unit for shaping the destiny of the masses." This idea replaces the Marxist principle that "the working class has no motherland." What "socialism in our own style" means (apart from being autarkic and totalitarian) is of little consequence. The point is that North Korea's brand of socialism is not to be lumped together with the socialisms that have already collapsed or are in the process of collapsing.

### Resisting Imperialist Pollution

Inevitably, word of the changes occurring in other socialist countries has begun to permeate North Korea's borders, finally coming to the attention even of farmers in the remote rural areas. How is this news to be handled? One of the paradoxes of socialism is that, despite its proponents' claim of superiority to individualistic capitalism, practicing socialists tend to lapse in their faith. After an early burst of enthusiasm in the 1950s, a time when forced collectivism in North Korea imposed order on the society and economy, producing remarkable economic gains, cracks in the socialist economy began to appear, widening as the years passed. It turned out that the selfish nature of human beings was not so easily changed. North Korea's leaders have attributed the instability of socialist ideology to three circumstances: individualist ideas are still harbored in the unreformed masses; the imperialists are craftily seeking to overthrow the new socialist order; and the imperialists' agents (that is, domestic elements critical of the Kim regime) seek to undermine socialism from within.



Until socialism began to collapse in Europe in the late 1980s, campaigns to combat and eliminate individualism were undertaken as a form of rear-guard action, a matter of weeding out hostile elements and drumming the virtues of socialism into the masses. But the downfall of socialism abroad demonstrated how shallow socialism's roots were. Kim Jong Il began to devote more attention to reinforcing the faith. The campaign to demonstrate the superiority of socialism employed three themes: the shortcomings of capitalism; the narcotic allure of capitalism; and the consequences of recidivism in the former socialist states.

First, the sum and substance of capitalism's shortcoming is the "bourgeois mentality": an individualistic and egoistic striving for money. Capitalist society is frequently described as following the law of the jungle in which human "wolves" prey on one another in a state of anarchy, with the powerful surviving and the weak perishing in the vicious pursuit of money. Human relations and culture are dead. The workers live short, brutish, meaningless lives. Unemployment is endemic; those lucky enough to have a job work for slave wages. The weakest members of society, the children, suffer most. Since no human law or order is imposed on society, evils proliferate: murder, robbery, fraud and swindling, lust, depravity, and dissipation are on the short list. Most important, people in a capitalist society have no control over their lives; they are "latter-day slaves to the capitalist owners of production."<sup>56</sup>

Even in North Korea's controlled information environment the people, especially the elite, have heard rumors of the more glamorous aspects of the outside world. To lessen the impact of this information, the party has resorted to the technique of attitude inoculation, admitting that capitalist society has at least the semblance of economic success and political freedom but warning that appearances are deceiving.<sup>57</sup> For example, the argument is made that whereas capitalists may enjoy a more lavish lifestyle than North Koreans, they are spiritually impoverished. As for the apparent wealth of capitalist states, only a small core of capitalists, owning most of the property, are said to enjoy such wealth. Thus if a North Korean should hear of the bustling capitalist cities with their gleaming buildings and streets full of cars, they should infer that these cities are populated by the lucky few. Obviously a contradiction lurks within this argument, since many buildings and cars presuppose many owners or renters. When a North Korean delegate to the Red Cross talks visited Seoul in 1972, he accused the South Koreans of collecting all the cars in the country to put on Seoul's streets to impress their guests; Lee Bum Suk, a South Korean delegate to the talks, facetiously answered that they had also put wheels on the buildings to bring them into Seoul.<sup>58</sup>

Another shortcoming attributed to capitalism is that its freedoms are specious. As for freedom of speech, North Koreans are told, again somewhat contradictorily, that the ruling capitalist class "ensures unlimited freedom for the ideological activities to champion and propagate the bourgeois ideas which represent its class interests" but "mercilessly suppress[es] such ideas as are considered to be a threat to its ruling system."<sup>59</sup>

Capitalism has been likened to a drug which will paralyze the political consciousness of the North Korean people.<sup>60</sup> An article in the party newspaper *Nodong Sinmun*, "The Imperialists' Wily Strategy of Disintegration," explains, "The main object of this strategy is the mind of people. In other words, imperialists are seeking to get the normally sound mind of people in revolutionary and progressive countries to degenerate."<sup>61</sup> A North Korean who first encounters, say, the wealth of the average South Korean citizen (who is supposed to be an impoverished slave) is likely to be startled and confused. But the inoculation prepares him by providing a ready-made "narcotic" explanation for his confusion. Capitalist ideas are said to have long-term effects, crowding out socialist ideas. Kim Jong Il explains, "[Capitalist ideas] destroy [North Koreans'] national culture and paralyze the consciousness of national autonomy and the revolutionary spirit."<sup>62</sup> It is dangerous to yield even slightly to the capitalist's temptations, because "if one retreats one step from the imperialists, one is doomed to retreat two more steps, and one will be finally forced to retreat 100 steps. If one makes one concession on one thing today, one will have to make a concession on everything tomorrow."<sup>63</sup>

Yet attributing such potency to the drug of capitalism raises a troublesome issue: if the drug is so powerful, if it has already intoxicated most of the socialist countries, how are the North Korean people supposed to resist it? As the international situation worsened for North Korea in the 1990s, Kim Jong Il tried to tone down the threat by teaching that capitalism is not to be feared: "Imperialism is by no means an object of fear; it is doomed as the refuse of history. If you are afraid of confrontation with imperialism and abandon the anti-imperialist struggle, you will never free yourselves from its domination and control. The revolutionary parties and peoples must see through the vulnerabilities of imperialism."<sup>64</sup>

The third means of demonstrating the superiority of socialism is to point to the plight of those who have abandoned it. According to North Korean propaganda, the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe sowed the wind and reaped the whirlwind. "Former socialist countries drove their economies into catastrophic crises by bringing in the capitalist economic system and management style under an illusion about them. . . . They do not operate the economy or man-

age production under unified state plans. Instead, they go their own ways producing anything they find profitable, changing production at will and thus plunging the national economy into chaos.<sup>65</sup> Of course, North Korea's economy by this time was moribund, as any North Korean could clearly see. Could things be worse elsewhere? Yes they could: "Workers are forced to give capitalists all their labor for their pursuit of profits . . . and many of them are sold to capitalist countries as latter-day slaves."<sup>66</sup> It is said that specially made videos of life scenes in postcommunist economies, depicting former high-level officials selling hot dogs on the street, are widely shown.<sup>67</sup>

To appreciate the argument that foreign capitalism is poison, it is necessary to recall North Korea's history. Before liberation most people did live a relatively miserable existence, often lacking adequate food, clothing, and housing, just as they do today. The difference is that in the past they worked for Korean or Japanese landlords, whereas today they work for themselves, that is, for the government. Life may be the same, but its interpretation is different, illustrating the philosopher Gilbert Ryle's definition of myth as "the presentation of facts belonging to one category in the idioms appropriate to another."<sup>68</sup>

Much of North Korean propaganda, like good propaganda anywhere, is exaggeration built around a kernel of truth. Capitalism does have flaws, the capitalists do indeed desire to bring their market system to the socialist countries, and the newly reformed economies of the former communist states are certainly struggling. At times, North Korean propaganda takes a bolder tack by turning the truth on its head and then accusing the capitalists of lying. The greatest falsehood, which many defectors say simply stunned them when they learned the truth, is that the Korean War was triggered by an American-South Korean invasion of the North. To keep the people from ever again trusting Americans, North Korean propaganda warns, "By 'peace' the imperialists mean aggression and war, by 'disarmament' they mean arms buildup and by 'détente' they mean tension."<sup>69</sup> According to this logic, the more cooperative, helpful, and peace loving the capitalists seem, the more deceiving and aggressive they are.

The portals through which foreign ideology and culture can flow into North Korea are so varied that the only means of keeping out all foreign ideas is to completely cut the people off from the outside world. The North Korean government has come closer than any other modern government to achieving this goal. Yet a little information does seep in. The authorities have warned against pollution from radio (dials on North Korean radios are fixed, but some people alter their radios and manage to receive foreign broadcasts), films, music (although South Korean songs are very popular in North Korea), dance, liter-

ature, tourists, economic and cultural exchange delegations, foreign aid teams, and foreign business people.

Much as the regime desires to isolate its people, the need for foreign aid, business investment, and tourism revenues has provided a modest opening for information to flow into the country. Realizing that acceptance of foreign aid is an explicit admission of the failure of Juche, and fearing that the people will begin to wonder whether the capitalist foreign aid donors are as evil as they are supposed to be, the government has mounted a vigorous campaign to explain the nature of capitalist foreign aid. In a major talk, Kim Jong Il said:

Aggression and plunder are the real nature of imperialism. No matter how the international situation may change, the dominationist ambition of the imperialists will not change. Nothing is more foolish and dangerous than pinning hopes on the imperialist 'aid,' unable to see through the aggressive and predatory nature of imperialism. The imperialist 'aid' is a noose of plunder and subjugation aimed at robbing ten and even a hundred things for one thing that is given.<sup>70</sup>

This theme is constantly presented to the North Korean people, embellished to make the message more vivid: "A huge monster called imperialism tries all kinds of magic to catch countries moving toward independence with a fishing rod of temptation. The market economy is one of the fishing rods of temptation. Hanging from the fishhook are two specious baits called 'economic cooperation' and 'aid.'"<sup>71</sup>

If North Korea's agricultural sector improves to the extent that people can survive at a subsistence level with domestic harvests supplemented by Chinese aid, the contradiction of accepting capitalist foreign aid may disappear. But North Korea's ideologues have dug a deeper hole for themselves in their attitude toward capitalist trade and investment. While vigorously soliciting foreign business deals (and trying to keep foreign business segregated from the mainstream economy), the authorities warn their people to treat all foreigners with suspicion:

Technical cooperation, joint ventures, and joint management are frequently used in developing economic relations between countries. Such economic exchanges bring in various delegations, inspection teams, and visitation delegations. In such cases, scientists, technicians, and a certain number of personnel will stay in other countries for a short or long time. Waiting for this critical moment, the imperialists have slyly placed impure elements in delegations, groups of visitors, inspecting teams, tourists

entering other countries, and manipulated them in order to use them to infiltrate ideological culture. These people cunningly maneuver to create a fantasy about capitalism through contacts with the people in a given country.<sup>72</sup>

### *Juche in Extremis*

As the economy ground to a halt in the 1990s and hundreds of thousands of North Koreans faced hunger, disease, and death, the North Korean media redoubled their emphasis on the importance of relying on ideology to effect a turnaround in the economy and to bolster morale. Economic managers were urged to mobilize "inner reserves," a resource never clearly identified. "The reserves for production growth are in the heads of the people. When functionaries and working people are motivated to generate new ideas, reserves will emerge from here and there as a matter of course and the work of exploring and enlisting reserves could take firm root as people's own work."<sup>73</sup> This loaves-and-fishes approach was the best economic plan the government could come up with. Unfortunately, it contradicted the long-held policy of democratic centralism, whereby the people were expected to follow unquestioningly the orders of the party and in turn receive its benefits. Kim Jong Il's instruction to party officials to "nudge the masses to handle enterprise management" was unlikely to produce results after years of collectivization.

To breathe new life into the discouraged masses, the martial themes of the "red flag" and the "arduous march" were emphasized. Although references to the red banner or red flag of communism had been as common in North Korea as in other communist countries, an ideology taking that name apparently first appeared in the 1996 New Year's joint editorial, "Let Us Advance Vigorously in the New Year, Flying the Red Flag."<sup>74</sup>

The road to victory would not be easy: "[the revolutionaries] sacrifice themselves on the glorious road of revolution with a clean revolutionary conscience because they also firmly believe that the revolutionary cause led by their leader is most just."<sup>75</sup> As for the Arduous March, as late as October of 1997, it was "the unshakable determination of our party to bring the 'Arduous March' to a victorious end this year without fail,"<sup>76</sup> but as North Korea entered another hungry winter, the only thing that ended was the Arduous March, to be replaced by the "forced march to final victory" in the new year, which was later optimistically referred to as the "march to paradise."

In recognition of the people's discouragement, party organizations were urged to "spruce up the streets of their towns and villages, their homes, and

their workplaces all the more and lead a more cultured and aesthetic life. By so doing, we will make the whole society be firmly dominated by a merry and lively atmosphere to suit the demands of the realities of the new age of the *juche*-oriented revolution we are in."<sup>77</sup> Perhaps the most pathetic ideological campaign during the lean years of the 1990s was the attempt to turn people's attention away from their miserable physical existence and toward the hereafter, an admission that North Koreans had more to die for than to live for. Typical slogans included "living today for tomorrow," "devote everything to handing over greater and more brilliant assets for the next generations," and "the more our generations undergo sufferings and shed sweat, the happier our future generations will be."<sup>78</sup>

As living conditions failed to improve approaching the millennium, with Kim Jong Il presumably growing more concerned about the legitimacy of his rule and the possibility that foreign powers would take advantage of North Korea's growing weakness, the guns-and-bombs-to-protect-the-leader campaign was intensified, reminiscent of the Kamikaze ethic employed by Japan in the final days of World War II. A graphic rendering is the following: "Self-detonating explosion [*chap'ok*] demands a resolute and pathetic decision [*pijanghan kyolsim*]. The spirit of suicidal explosion can be cherished only by those who thoroughly resolve to voluntarily choose death for the sake of the party and the leader."<sup>79</sup>

### **Believing in Juche**

It is easy for outsiders to criticize *Juche* for its lack of validity, internal logic, and value as a practical guide for living. But how do the North Koreans view *Juche*? By forcing people to engage in endless study and self-criticism, Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il have tried to create a new socialist human being who is infinitely loyal to the leader and the party, but how well have they succeeded?

This is a complex question, because at the very least one must distinguish among beliefs in different components of *Juche* thought on the part of different segments of North Korean society. A similar question has been asked about the dedication of the citizens of former communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union to their ideology, and the answers to that question may shed some light on the North Koreans' depth of faith in *Juche*, despite obvious differences in culture and circumstances. Although commitment to socialism was strong in the Soviet Union in the 1950s, by the 1960s a strong note of criticism was discernible, coming first from Soviet intellectuals.<sup>80</sup> In East Germany in the 1980s the breakdown in belief in Soviet-imposed com-

munist ideology was becoming apparent. Reinhart Schönsee and Gerda Lederer describe the commitment to official ideology of five political classes in East Germany.<sup>81</sup> The leadership elite (*nomenklatura*) were cynical; the bureaucrats and intellectuals, some of whom were directly responsible for creating and disseminating ideology, engaged in doublethink in order to outwardly support the ideology that guaranteed their special privileges; the middle-class professionals believed even less in the ideology, although they too were aware of the advantages to be gained by supporting the status quo; the masses outwardly accepted the ideology but offered passive resistance to its teachings by refusing to live like "good" communists; the outcast class met secretly to complain about the system. Thus an entire political-social structure was grounded on the false premise that people believed in communism. Only the outcasts showed any form of resistance—a resistance that would later grow into broad social pressure for change. North Korea differs from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union in at least one important respect; namely, the greater social control that the government exercises over the people prevents the formation of organized resistance groups.

The main goals of the interviews of defectors conducted for this book were to assess belief in *Juche* and satisfaction with the Kim Jong Il regime. Even among a group of only twenty defectors differences of opinion existed about the beliefs of the general population, so the conclusions drawn in this chapter should be treated as hypotheses. To simplify matters, the beliefs of two social groups—the masses and the elite—on the following dimensions of *Juche* will be considered: socialism; *Juche* national self-reliance and independence; people as the masters of society; the importance of the sociopolitical life; the revolutionary view of the leader; belief in the personality cults of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il; and confidence in the future of socialism.

### The Masses

Despite boasts made in the North Korean press that the entire North Korean people are heart and soul behind Kim Jong Il and the party, continual calls in the press for greater efforts at ideological education indicate an absence of total commitment. This conclusion is supported by testimony from defectors. It seems that the average North Korean citizen believes socialism as an economic model is superior to capitalism (which has not been experienced) and that the capitalists are vigorously working to subvert socialism in the few countries in which it remains. Some defectors to South Korea, even after many years, voice strong complaints about the capitalist system and the materialism of South

Korean society. One defector complained that the South Korean people lie, act aggressively, and spend money with abandon. He said that although his relatives in South Korea knew of his defection, not one offered a penny to help him get on his feet (the South Korean government grants a modest stipend to defectors).<sup>82</sup> Surveys conducted in the former Soviet Union reveal this same commitment to socialism in the abstract.<sup>83</sup> In North Korea, the socialist spirit appears to be modestly realized at the local level. Defectors echo the official press when they affirm that, on the whole, North Korean people are more likely to help one another than are the capitalist southerners. Yet this commitment to a communal principle is accompanied by a reluctance to embrace the virtues of communal work. Even when the government was providing regular rations, people had to be cajoled to put effort into communal work.

It seems that most people also support the idea of *Juche* as a principle of national sovereignty, pride, and self-sufficiency. Pride in one's own country and the desire to preserve its independence characterize all nations. The goal of national self-sufficiency appeals to everyone, but people with sufficient knowledge of economics realize that, in the modern world, national economies must operate interdependently. The applications of *Juche* to agricultural and industrial production are probably less appreciated. "*Juche*" as a label has been attached to any idea hatched by the Kims. *Juche* farming, for example, prescribes when and how crops are to be planted. *Juche* steelmaking dictates the steelmaking process. In all cases the goal of the *Juche* method is to make local production units self-sufficient or to make the entire nation self-sufficient. Since these methods are handed down by the party, often without a thorough understanding of the technical aspects of a task (although party cadres are supposed to consult with local workers), production methods often lead to failure, one example being intensive terrace farming, which denuded the hillsides. Yet as party policy attributed to the teachings of Kim Il Sung or Kim Jong Il, these production guidelines must be followed.

The more philosophical aspects of *Juche* later added by Kim Jong Il are not likely to be understood well by the average North Korean. People as the masters of a society in which they have no voice must make little practical sense. The idea of the sociopolitical family may sound comforting in principle, but one wonders how many people truly believe that living for the "national family" under the fatherhood of Kim Jong Il is preferable to living for oneself and one's immediate family.

Defectors from North Korea unanimously agree that the vast majority of North Koreans harbored great love and respect for Kim Il Sung as the man who freed them from the Japanese, defeated the Americans in the Korean War,

and built the foundations of the national economy. The tears shed for the Great Leader when he died were real. Many of the stories that make up the Kim Il Sung myth are believed. He was their George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and Dwight D. Eisenhower all rolled into one. He was the only Korean leader they had known. Except for the most ignorant and superstitious, most of the masses probably did not believe that Kim could control the weather or work miracles, but they could accept such statements as being worthy of him. They also believed he was recognized throughout the world as an outstanding man of his time.

It is hard, however, to find a defector who has anything good to say about Kim Jong Il. In Pyongyang he was referred to as "that man" (*ku saram*).<sup>84</sup> Perhaps if the Kim Jong Il myth continues to be drummed into the people for another twenty years, and the economy improves, people will begin to believe. But by cause or coincidence, just around the time in the early 1980s that Kim Jong Il was introduced to the people as their future leader, the North Korean economy began to decline. Despite waves of propaganda that declare the post-Kim Il Sung years to be an era of heroic achievements, people have found life under Kim Jong Il increasingly difficult to bear. One wonders what conclusions the less-educated segment of the population drew from the series of devastating natural disasters—floods, droughts, and tidal waves—that struck North Korea beginning in 1995, the year after the Great Leader's death. The Korean phrase "tiger father, dog son" must be in everyone's minds.

Do the masses believe in the future of "socialism in our own style," given that they are told that North Korea is the last bastion of socialism? Do they likewise see any hope of a victorious conclusion to the forced march? Do they believe the New Year's predictions that perennially predict a "turnaround" in the North Korean economy? Little evidence can be found for such beliefs. They may believe that socialism is bound to triumph in the end, but in the depths of a depression, their thoughts are mostly fixed on survival.

Yet even in hard times they accept or at least tolerate socialism and *Juche* and the greatness of the leaders who brought them to ruin. How does one account for this persistence? First, the North Korean masses have never experienced political or social freedom. During the Choson dynasty many of them worked for landlords. Shortly after the turn of the century, the entire country's economy was geared to supply the Japanese. After the war the communists imposed their centralized form of nonparticipatory government. To the North Korean people, life in an autocratic society is business as usual. And this life is backed by centuries of Confucian teaching that ordinary people have their proper station in life and should subject themselves to the will of their superi-

ors, who in principle rule as benevolent fathers. Since political ideas are handed down to the people by the omniscient Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il, there is no room for discussion or debate, only interminable explanation and elaboration.

The masses in North Korea differ from those in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in one important respect—they are cut off from outside information. Although the people have been told that unspecified countries have abandoned socialism and are now suffering the consequences, they have no access to firsthand information to judge foreign conditions. And certainly they have little information about life or thought in noncommunist countries such as South Korea, Japan, or the United States. It is difficult for outsiders to imagine how people can evaluate good from bad, useful from useless, when they have such a limited standard of comparison. If the North Korean people do not believe what they are told, they have nothing else to believe.

Finally, defectors say that even though they were unconvinced on some ideological points, and actively disbelieved others (such as the Kim Jong Il cult), they had no energy to pursue their thoughts and certainly no opportunity to discuss them. So, to avoid complicating their lives, they abandoned political thought and resigned themselves to repeating the political lessons they were taught. This is not a case of fearing to voice doubts or ask questions in public; this is a case of not even raising questions in one's mind. The average North Korean has become politically disengaged. Similar responses to totalitarian communist regimes have been reported in the former communist countries of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Eric Scheye quotes Czech citizens on the psychological mood under communism: "People did not hear or listen to what went on outside themselves. Everyone was in their own small world."<sup>85</sup> As one defector from North Korea said, "If a normal desire to learn the truth survived in their minds, the distortion of history could not have continued this long."<sup>86</sup> Yet alongside this lack of belief—and even interest in—political thought is a strong emotional attachment to things North Korean. This defector recounts how, as a resident of North Korea, he was moved to tears by a North Korean film, heavily laden with propaganda; when he saw the movie again after fleeing to South Korea (the South Korean government has relaxed its restrictions on the import of North Korean cultural works), the work struck him as absolutely silly.<sup>87</sup>

### The Elite

In the context of a discussion on ideological belief, the elite population is defined as the several thousand top party, government, and military officials living in Pyongyang who have access to foreign information, for example, by

being included in the distribution list of *Chamgo tongsin* (Reference News), a government publication covering international and domestic news stories not available to the public. Some of the elite have also had the opportunity to travel outside the country for education or for their official work. For these people, is Juche primarily a tool used to control the masses, or do they truly believe in its principles? If they do believe, less change can be expected in North Korean thought and practice than if they use ideology merely as a tool to get what they want. A tentative conclusion is that, in the words of Reo M. Christenson and others, ideology "captures and is captured by leaders."<sup>88</sup>

Members of the elite believe in socialism as a utopian idea but probably see little hope for its realization in the foreseeable future. They are like many people in capitalist countries who recognize the beauty of a truly cooperative lifestyle but have no expectation of realizing it. With their limited knowledge of the outside world, they realize that North Korea is virtually the last country trying to make socialism work. And if they examine their lives, they will realize that they have used their positions to acquire whatever goods they can obtain on the black market, a very capitalist endeavor.

The elite population probably also firmly believes in the importance of national pride, independence, and economic self-reliance, for like all citizens they have a strong patriotic streak and generally lack an appreciation of the interdependent nature of the national economy.

On most other points of ideology, it is likely that elite citizens are nonbelievers. The sociopolitical life probably sounds too much like a pseudophilosophical justification for blind loyalty to the Kims. The idea of people as masters of society who completely subordinate themselves to the will of the party and the leader is recognized as contradictory. Kim Il Sung was respected as a great leader, even by those who knew that much of his personality cult was manufactured. Kim Jong Il is feared but not respected.

### Squaring the Circle

Unlike the masses, who by lack of information, lack of education, and lack of opportunity "enjoy the strange luxury of not having to think" (to quote Blair Ruble's characterization of Soviet citizens under Stalin), the elite population faces a cognitive dilemma.<sup>89</sup> These people recognize the contradictions in Juche ideology, and because of their white-collar work and their relatively more affluent lifestyle, they have time to think about contradictions. Yet they have even less freedom to discuss issues than the masses because they are more

closely watched by each other and by security personnel. To some degree the indoctrination may have gotten to them, especially in the form of self-criticisms they must undergo, which must at least sound genuine. They are also more involved in teaching and modeling the ideology.

To some degree the elite citizens may live a double mental life, one public and the other very private, like the intellectuals in the former Soviet Union as described by David Remnick. "Gorbachev, me, all of us, we were double-thinkers, we had to balance truth and propaganda in our minds all the time."<sup>90</sup> Schönsee and Lederer portray the elite of East Germany in the same way: privately cynical and corrupt, engaging in Orwellian double-think.<sup>91</sup> Most likely, the elite population as well as the masses rarely engages in political thought, thereby avoiding the discomfort of cognitive contradictions. When a contradiction arises, people do their best to justify and rationalize, like people everywhere. Besides, even elite members of society, with their greater but still fragmentary knowledge of the workings of capitalism and liberal democracy, have little in the way of alternative ideologies to contemplate. They may be dissatisfied and puzzled about the contradictions in their ideology, but they are not in a position to contemplate a different ideology. And behind any fear of voicing antistate thoughts is the greater fear that if capitalism sweeps away socialism, they are most likely to lose their privileged positions.

For the masses, the basis of Juche ideology is plausible. It is a myth in which they are accustomed to living. In this sense, the masses are not a revolutionary force but a great conservative impediment to change in North Korea. The elite know better, but their interest lies in preserving the status quo. This is especially true of Kim Jong Il, who is the only one with the authority to revise Juche. But even if he were to attempt such a revision he would risk being accused by the masses of being unfaithful to his father's wishes. Thus the elite and the masses are bound by fifty years of ideology and myth.

Juche ideology functions as an anchor to keep the North Korean state from moving with the times. As outlined in this chapter, the emphasis of Juche has changed over the years, or more accurately, new concepts have been incorporated into Juche, but the basic concepts that hold back the Korean people remain: the commitment to socialism, insistence on achieving economic self-sufficiency, the leader's cult of personality. In a larger sense, the content of Juche is not its most constricting feature; rather, it is ideology.

If Juche could function in the background of North Korean life, as a creed and associated myths to be pointed to with pride but honored often in the breach (like democracy in the United States), it would serve a useful function

of providing North Korean society with identity and cohesiveness. But the central place Juche has been given in North Korean society, as a subject of countless hours of study and discussion and as a political tool, has made North Korea a caricature in the international community.

## *The Turning Point Economy*

*The might of our economy is basically the might of ideology and unity.<sup>1</sup>*

The refusal of the Kim regime, under both father and son, to discard an unworkable ideology and adapt to a changed international environment has destroyed the North Korean economy and the lives of millions of people. The condition of the economy will determine the country's fate: survival as a sovereign state or absorption by South Korea.

Economic planning in North Korea is at the mercy of Kim Jong Il's pursuit of regime security and his continuing attempt to apply an economic plan grounded in ideology and wishful thinking. The economy has predictably suffered. Weakened by years of mismanagement and the disappearance of the international socialist trading system, North Korea's broken economy has become a seemingly insurmountable challenge, forcing the masses to engage in nonsocialist economic activities and threatening the long-term security of the Kim regime. ✓

### **The Economy in the Late 1990s**

The economic statistics, as well as they can be estimated by outsiders (since the North Korean government stopped publishing economic statistics in the