

Hope and dread in the two Koreas:

Understanding North Korea as a shadow of free capitalistic societies

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South Korea

Kim Il-sung and his off-spring, like many other dictators, have been eccentric villains that threaten the free world. Their use of aggressive language in diplomacy, overt/covert nuclear experiments, abduction of foreigners, infamous prison camps, and other dictatorial behaviors have often been mocked as a form of insanity. North Korea has functioned as a shadow archetypal figure vis-à-vis the capitalistic and westernized world. From their point of view, the warrior archetype, heroically fighting against wars, poverty, and famine in North Korea, has been activated. Capitalistic societies may have perceived North Korea as only dangerous, unpredictable, and mysterious, which is not helpful for peace in the Korean peninsula. Understanding socio-historical backgrounds and people's sufferings could facilitate communication between two Koreas.

The roots of the North Korean dictatorship may have been sown from the Korean Chosun dynasty and Japanese annexation. In 1909, the Chosun dynasty (1392-1909) surrendered to Japanese Imperialism mainly due to the shortage of weapons, poor government finances, and socio-economic affliction. The Chosun dynasty, one of the longest-lived dynasties in the world, had been too stable to open up toward the rest of the world.¹ A policy of isolation deterred the Chosun dynasty from adapting to the modern world. The Chosun dynasty had been threatened and invaded by multiple foreign entities. The contemporary North Korean isolation policy appears to be a continuation of the Chosun aversion to foreign powers.

The beginning of the encounter between North Korea and America was not peaceful, either. In 1862, the ship called the General Sherman from America entered the Taedong River and tried to invade Pyongyang. Soldiers of the Chosun dynasty

¹ Nahm, A.C. (1993) Introduction to Korean History and Culture. Seoul. Hollym. pp141-163

repelled them ferociously despite their outdated, traditional weapons.²



Image 1 A picture of American soldiers staring at dead Korean soldiers. In Cumings, B. Tr. by Kim. D. (2001) *Korea's place in the Sun*. Seoul. Changjak kwa Bipyong ISBN 89-364-8219-X, p137 in Korean

After an enforced treaty was signed between Chosun and Japan in 1876,³ America became a friendly neighbor to Japan. Several Korean diplomats visited Switzerland and America for help, but their efforts to undo the Japanese annexation of Korea never came to fruition.

The Japanese annexation of Korea for 36 years (1909-1945) was cruel and traumatic for the Korean people. Korean sex and slave laborers were forced to go to the WWII battle fields including Japan islands and China by the Japanese. There are numerous records of tortures and executions to oppress the Korean liberation

² Paullin, C. O. (1910). "The Opening of Korea by Commodore Shufeldt". *Political Science Quarterly*.25 (3): 470–499.doi:10.2307/2141171.JSTOR 2141171

³ <http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/>

movement during the annexation.⁴

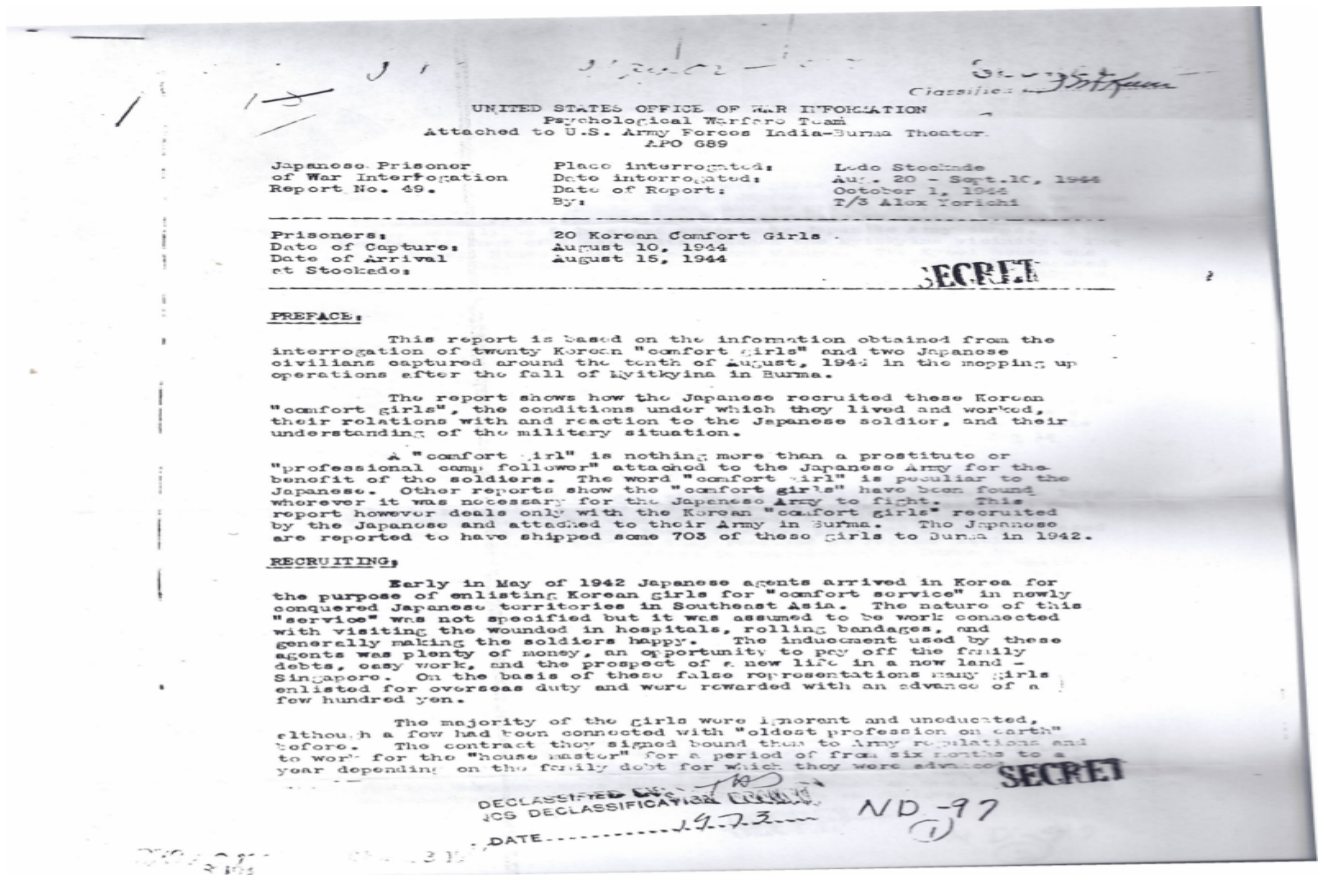


Image 2 U.S. report on Korean women being used as "comfort girls".

⁴ Kratoshkal, P.H.(2005) Asian Labor in the Wartime Japanese Empire: Unknown Histories. New York. Routledge, pp. 81-100. ISBN-13: 978-0765612632



Image 3 Pictures of comfort women. nocutnews.co.kr 2014, Jan.17



Image 4 Pictures of forced laborers in Japanese mine.

In 1945, liberated Korea was divided in half by the victors of WWII. The Soviet Union occupied the North and UN and US forces occupied the South. The division of the Korean peninsula by the superpowers confused and rendered the Koreans powerless. Even before the Korean War broke out, the United States occupation of the South was seen as an invasion by the North Koreans and the Soviet Union occupation of the North was seen as an invasion by the South Koreans.



Image 5 Picture of American soldiers and Korean civilians. euinz.tistroy.com

After the partition of Korea into North and South at the end of World War II, Kim Il-sung, who portrayed himself as a legendary guerilla fighter against the Japanese soldiers, was chosen as the leader of North Korea by the Soviets. In South Korea, Dr. Sungman Rhee who attended Princeton and Harvard Universities was

elected president. The North followed the Soviet Russian style regime and South Korea followed the example of Western democracy. In 1950, North Korea crossed the border between North and South Korea and the cruel civil war began. It lasted for 3 years. The two Koreas became surrogate pawns of a larger battle between Soviet Russia, China, America, and other western countries. Almost 3 million people, mainly civilians, were wounded or killed with 12-15 % of the North Korean population having died from the war.⁵

The North Korean economy, however, had actually been better than the South Korean economy until the 1980's, mainly because of substantial loans from Russia and China during the Cold War. North Korea also had a more advanced modernization program with its factories, power plants, and food production. The North Koreans were better fed than the South Koreans before the 1970's.⁶ Communist leaders boasted of the prosperity of North Korea as the symbol of the superiority of their ideology. The abrupt collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990's, along with floods and famine in North Korea changed everything in the 1990's. In 1994, in the middle of the national crisis, Kim Il-sung died of a heart attack and his son Kim Jong-il took control. Subsequently, Kim Jong-un, Kim Jong-il's son, took his place in 2011.

Despite previous skepticism in North Korea about young Kim Jong-un, he has survived as a dictator with cunning strategies, mainly focused on building a nuclear bomb. Even the short honeymoon between Trump and Kim did not alter the course

⁵ Armstrong, C.K. (20 December 2010). The Destruction and Reconstruction of North Korea, 1950–1960" (PDF).*The Asia-Pacific Journal*. 8 (51): 1. Retrieved 13 September 2019

⁶ Cha, V. (2018) *The Impossible State: North Korea, past and future*. New York. HarperCollins. pp 24-25

of Kim's strategies, and the world has returned to another stand-off with North Korea.

Considering the military might of the USA as the largest global exporter of weapons, and South Korea as the 9th largest global importer of arms, North Korea may have a legitimate rationale for nuclear weapons: survival. With South Korea and America regularly operating military exercises and economic sanctions against North Korea by America, the claim of North Korea on the importance of self-reliance may be both a practical necessity as well as an ideological position

Kim's clan has oppressed the human rights of North Korean people for 75 years. Their anachronistic regression to a harsh dictatorship has been sustained by brainwashing policies. Kim's ideology, so-called *Juche*, is a hybrid combination of Stalinism, Maoism, shamanism, Confucianism, Nationalism, and monotheism which rationalizes and imposes cruel policies. Its intense nationalism thrives on fear, anger, anxiety, and the religious belief that America is evil and that South Korea is America's puppet. Filial piety towards Kim Il-sung, has been idealized, even beatified, as virtuous and mature by the North Korean media. Political opponents have been imprisoned as being disloyal to Kim's regime. Collectivism that imitates a regressed form of Confucianism forces the North Korean people to be "harmonious" while denying individual differences of life values and practices. At the same time, the North Korean regime has reinforced massive secret surveillance, similar to that of the Stasi secret police of communist East Germany⁷ prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall. Instead of improving the quality of life in North Korea, the Kim regime has focused on South Korea and America as oppressors against a powerless North Korea.

⁷ Cha, V. (2018) *Ibid.* pp. 208-210



Image 6 A picture of North Korean family in the worshiping ceremony for Kim family.
http://weekly1.chosun.com/site/data/img_dir/2007/06/01/

Meanwhile, extreme conservatives in South Korea and America mock North Korea for its insanity or become infuriated by its abuse of human rights. It is part of human nature to want to help the oppressed, but we may become hypocrites by projecting our own insanities onto North Korea without reflection on our own flaws and limitations. Hasty intervention often does not guarantee real improvements, and instead creates unnecessary tension among societies. For example, South Korean prisons do not provide beds for inmates and hot water is only given once a week for 20 minutes, regardless of the weather. Developed countries are still struggling with social injustices such as racism and unfair legal proceedings against minorities and poor people. Between 2007 and 2012, an estimated 630,000 people per year have experienced homelessness in America.⁸ More than 11,340 homeless people were reported in Korea as of 2016.⁹ Interestingly, South Koreans tend to consider

⁸ <https://www.usnews.com/news/cities/articles/2019-09-23>

⁹ Bak, S. Sept 27, 2017 *Korea Herald news*.

homelessness as a structural problem, not just a product of personal deficits.¹⁰ This may be a result of the emphasis in Korean culture on collective responsibility and solidarity with the poor and minorities. Likewise, prioritizing the community over the individual may be one of the foundations for North Korean collectivism.

Obedience and humbleness toward authoritarian figures, including political leaders and their family members, are still highly praised in both Koreas. As a corollary, the North Korean regime blames individualism as an ideology of the exploitative class for many of the social ills that plague Western societies.

This Korean collectivism may have originated not only from Marxism but also from the centralized regimes of the Chosun dynasty that ruled the Korean peninsula for over 1,000 years. Traditional conservative norms limited outside influences and reinforced the tendency toward seclusion.¹¹ The transformation of Confucian patriarchy into loyalty to the Kim family appears to have helped sustain the tyrannical communism of North Korea. Autocratic rule may be either good or bad, mainly depending on the leaders and followers. For example, Singapore became one of the wealthiest countries under the authoritative leader, Lee Kwan-Yew and North Korea the poorest under the Kim family.

Surprisingly, despite a collectivism that demands self-sacrifice, North Korean people show a conflicting mentality: overt conformity to the government and covert egocentrism and insensitivity to violence and injustice.¹² Psychological as well as

¹⁰ Yoon, I. (2006) Homelessness and community attitudes in South Korea compared with Japan. *Development and Society* 35(2), December, pp 217~239

¹¹ Armstrong CK.(2021) Central themes for a unit on Korea. <http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/>

¹² Jeon, W. (2012) Understanding the society and people of North Korea based on North Korea defectors' testimonies. *World Cultural Psychiatry Research Review*. 7(1) 29-31.

political and economic restructuring may be required to repair North Korea. ¹³.

Eastern Germany has experienced hardship both spiritually and materially. Freedom did not solve the problems of poverty and alienation. Some West Germans were not

happy about reunification, since they had to pay more than 1.6 trillion euros.¹⁴

Similarly, many Koreans, especially those who are young or conservative, fear the economic consequences of the reunification of the Korean peninsula. The younger generation does not have any memory of a unified Korea and conservatives are concerned more about the economy than egalitarianism.

Jung suggested that relativizing good and evil may convert both into halves of a paradoxical whole.¹⁵ He clarified that “collective contents, such as religious, philosophical, political and social conflicts, select projection-carriers of a corresponding kind---Freemasons, Jesuits, Jews, Capitalists, Bolsheviks, Imperialists, etc....Our earthly world is split into two halves, and nobody knows where a helpful solution is to come from.” ¹⁶ He was against communism which he saw as robbing human freedom in social, moral, and spiritual aspects.¹⁷ But he did not comment on the dangers of capitalism compared to communism. Democratic and free societies also need to look into their own flaws which sacrifice spirituality for material prosperity, the poor for the rich, the minor for the major, etc. So Tae-san (1891-1943), the founding master of Won-Buddhism in Korea, developed a positive

¹³ Kim, M. (2015) A Psychological Consideration for Psychological Unification of North and South Korea. *Journal of Digital Convergence*. 13(1) 555-562 (in Korean)

¹⁴ Kirschbaum, E. The dark side of German reunification. September 29, 2010 Reuter: Global News Journal. <http://blogs.reuters.com/global/2010/09/29>

¹⁵ Jung, C.G., ed. by Jaffe.A., tr. by Winston, R., and Winson, C. (1989). *Memories, Dreams, and Reflections*. New York. Vintage Books. p 300

¹⁶ Jung, C.G., Tr. by Hull, R.F.C. (1970) *Civilization in Transition*. C.W. 10. Bollingen Series. XX. New York. Princeton University Press. para 610

¹⁷ Ibid. para 559.

vision. He taught that as “material civilization develops, spiritual civilization cultivates accordingly.”¹⁸

Jungians also use the concepts of the irrational third, which overcome dualism among all the conflicts. Levinas, a modern French philosopher, also emphasized the dialogue with others through hospitality, empathy, and compassion. Levinas valued being with the ‘other’ as a transcendental opportunity.¹⁹ Without understanding others with compassion, we cannot communicate with traumatized people who have been isolated for long periods of time as victims of persecution.

Can South Koreans embrace North Koreans as “us” who share the same language and history, beyond simply encountering them as an ‘other’? It is not clear yet, since the collective psyche of the two Koreas have grown apart in many ways. The unification process in the Korean peninsula should not aim to regain a group-oriented totality and isolating nationalism, but rather a harmonious oneness which integrates differences and heals wounds. It should be different from isolating or megalomaniac nationalism.

Jung wrote, “Western civilization is scarcely a thousand years old and must first of all free itself from its barbarous one-sidedness.”²⁰ Jung was a rare individual who could be at least partially free from Eurocentrism. He praised the values of other cultures including the cultures such as Eastern, African and Native American. But the Far East is not fundamentally different from West in that the Far East also developed

¹⁸ <http://www.sotaesancenter.org/sotaesan.html>.

¹⁹ Plant, B. (2006) Apologies: Levinas and Dialogue. *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 14(1). pp79-94.

²⁰ Jung C.G. Tr. by Hull, R.F.C. (1977) *Psychology and Religion: West and East Bollingen Series. XX.* New York. Princeton University Press. *para* 976

traditions that emphasize rationality within a Confucian tradition while also devaluing other cultures. Sino-centrism or Kim's nationalism may be another example of one-sidedness. In the Far East, traditional patriarchy emphasizing filial piety and loyalty to kings and nation, sometimes played the role of oppressing one's unique voice for the sake of group solidarity. Opponents have been criticized, devalued, ignored, and even attacked as being immature, dangerous, and inhumane. It would make a great difference if a conscious application of the psychology of the shadow archetype could serve to encourage reflection by individuals and groups on their own limitations and flaws rather than blindly blaming other individuals and groups. Von Franz described contemporary political divisions as a kind of neurotic dissociation which activates the shadow archetype by projecting the unacceptable onto an opponent.²¹ Such neuroticism does not belong exclusively to the Korean peninsula.

The Kim family claims that the nation they are forging is different from all other nations. They force their citizens to believe that Kim Il-sung is the most sacred leader in the history of the whole world. North Korea has officially prohibited all religious gatherings, not just because Marx wrote that religion was the opium of the people but because they claim that Kim Il-sung is a religious being.

²¹ Von Franz M-L. (1975) *His Myth in Our Time*. Toronto: Inner City Books, p. 264

The Russian science keeping North Korea's dead leaders looking fresh

By Reuters

March 6, 2019 | 12:18pm



The body of North Korean leader Kim Jong Il lies in state at the Kumsusan Memorial Palace in Pyongyang.

Image 7 Mummified Kim Kong's body. todayus.com. 2012. Jan. 12

Traditional Eastern beliefs can be helpful in overcoming the dualism of good and bad or the pseudo-religiosity in the two Koreas.

The Tao doesn't take sides;

it gives birth to both good and evil

The Master doesn't take sides

she welcomes both saints and sinners...

Hold on to the center...

If you over-estimate great men, people become powerless.

If you overvalue possessions, people begin to steal. ²²

²² Lao Tzu Chapter 5, 3

Wonhyo (617-686), a Korean medieval monk, developed the concept of interpenetration (Hon-yung 혼융 混融 or Tong-dal 통달 通達). Wonhyo's teachings emphasize mutual containing, reflection, compromise, and interpenetration of each other,²³ as a way to bring the best out in human nature and to provide a practical way for dealing with conflicts. Harmonizing the two extreme positions will be achieved only after we accept all the extreme positions of ourselves and others. ²⁴

One-sidedness, socially and individually, pushes people to be stuck with their own perspectives and to live within a shell in which only a homogenous voice prevails. Being awakened from ego-centered thinking and lust for self-satisfaction requires the sometimes painful recognition that we can be wrong and sometimes others matter more than ourselves. Wonhyo teaches that One Mind is different from exclusiveness and selfishness and that we need to behold that all things are interconnected and inter-related with each other as One Mind. (Il-shim 일심 一心)²⁵

Wonhyo's teaching can be rephrased: Go through the core of shadow within and without, and then achieve the integration between us and the other, and furthermore, ego and the Self.

²³ Muller A. C. (2006) Key Operative Concepts in Korean Buddhist Syncretic Philosophy: Interpenetration (通達) and Essence-Function (體用) in Wŏnhyo, Chinul and Kihwa (1995) *Bulletin of Toyo-Gauen University*. 19 (757) No3 March pp33-48

²⁴ The Estimation on the Contents of Wonhyo's "Reconciliation of Dispute in the Aspect of Seeds" in Reconciliation of Disputes in Ten Aspects *Critical Review for Buddhist Studies* 2019, vol. no.26, pp159-183 DOI :10.29213/crbs.26.201910.159

²⁵ Park T. WonHyo(元曉)'s Philosophy of 'Mind Interrelating as if Oneness'(一心) *Chol-hak-Nonchong (Debates within Philosophy)* 2019, vol.98, no.4, pp. 27-54 (in Korean)



Image 8 In a folk art, Wonhyo is portrayed as a monk who is drinking polluted water contained in skeleton. At night in a dark cave, he drank water for thirsty and was satisfied with good taste in decent bowl. In next morning, he found that it was in skeleton and became enlightened that everything was up to one's mind and illusion. Since then, he wrote many scriptures, gave great sermons, but stayed within common people's community. He danced, ate, slept and played with anybody with open-minded attitude. Picture in Koya-culture.com.

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