

chamyeo hwakdae wa uirye gonggan ui byeonhwa" 조선 후기 대妃의 喪葬禮 참여확대와 의례공간의 변화 ["Expansion of Queen Dowagers' Role in Royal Funeral Rites and the Change of Ritual Space in the Late Joseon Period"], *Jangseogak 장서각 [Korean Journal of Jangseogak Royal Library]* 26 (2011): 128–60.

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30. Schilbrack, "Ritual Metaphysics," 144.
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The aim of this essay is to defend the ideology against uncharitable criticisms. My intention isn't to justify the regime's reprehensible practices, including its human rights violations. At the same time, failing to or refusing to understand Juche with the philosophical resources we have is not only intellectually dishonest but also politically inexpedient. Though it's possible that the ideology truly is a sham, or that epistemological barriers will hinder us from fully understanding Juche, an open-minded analysis is owed to Juche as it is owed to any system of thought. For the rest of the section, I'll give more context for Juche, tracing its origins and its main tenets. I'll then turn to Alzo David-West's criticisms of Juche and offer ways of interpreting Juche that alleviate his worries. My hope is that presenting North Korea's ideology in a more charitable way will help us see its merits and demerits in a clearer way.

Juche, usually translated as "self-reliance," holds up political independence, economic self-sufficiency, and military self-reliance as the ideals of the state. Victor Cha, a former national foreign policy advisor, identifies the following tenets as the core of Juche:

1. Man is the master of his fate.
2. The master of the Revolution is the people.
3. The Revolution must be pursued in a self-reliant manner.
4. The key to the Revolution is loyalty to the supreme leader, Kim Il-sung.<sup>4</sup>

Experts disagree whether Juche is a "real philosophy or not," some arguing that it is an outward-facing ideology that doesn't inform the everyday decision of the regime.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, most scholars believe Juche to be important to the regime's self-conception. Some note that the literal translation of "juche" is "subject," a key concept in Marxism and in philosophy in general.<sup>6</sup> Understanding the word to pick out an agential subject would be fitting given the context in which the term is believed to have been introduced. In a 1955 speech titled "On Eliminating Dogmatism and Formalism and Establishing Juche in Ideological Work," Kim Il-sung had brought up juche to encourage Koreans to prioritize one's identity as a Korean and, as a Korean, to prioritize Korean national interests.<sup>7</sup> A historical view of the peninsula also contextualizes North Korea's desire for self-reliance and explains why the notion of juche *qua* subjectivity was spelled out in an overtly nationalistic way. The conventional understanding, shared among North and South Koreans, is that Korea has had to assume a defensive stance against powerful neighbors for millennia—and Kim Il-sung highlighted the fact Korea was exploited whenever it was dependent on nearby powerful nations, historically China, then Japan during the occupation.

Juche formed a natural connection to anti-imperial culture in Korea. By the 1920s, communism was a major philosophical influence on anticolonialism, and the first domestic Korean communist party was established in Seoul in 1925. Socialism and Marxism, as critiques of both imperialism and capitalism, were seen as modern ideologies, and

## Defending Juche Against an Uncharitable Analysis

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### ABSTRACT

In this article, I aim to do two things: first, introduce Juche, the official philosophy of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea ("North Korea"), and second, defend Juche against Alzo David-West's allegation that it is a nonsensical philosophy. I organize David-West's complaints into two major strands—that Juche's axiom is too vague to be of philosophical use and that Juche makes too stark a distinction between human vs. everything else—and offer responses to both strands. My goal isn't to defend the regime, but to present its ideology in the most charitable way so its merits and demerits can be seen more clearly in future engagements.

### I. INTRODUCING JUCHE

*Juche* (주체/主體) is the state ideology of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK or "North Korea").<sup>1</sup> Comprehensive analyses of Juche tend to be uncharitable and suspicious.<sup>2</sup> Some North Korea specialists argue that Juche is simply an excuse of an ideology the regime uses to rationalize the Kim family rule, its politically motivated beginnings<sup>3</sup> and continual redefining proof that it is not a self-standing, real philosophy on its own. They also argue that Juche is nonsensical or that it is a sham doctrine that only gullible foreigners take seriously.

Juche inherited its buzzwords, such as “revolution,” “social movement,” “liberation,” and “class struggle.”

Juche was heavily influenced by Marxism-Leninism, with Kim Il-sung himself having called Juche “Korean-style socialism.” Until the early 1970s, North Korea openly acknowledged her philosophical influences. Juche’s ideological origins were widely understood to be Marxism-Leninism (*Markseu Renin Juui*), and state-organized parades included oversized portraits of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin.<sup>8</sup> See, for instance, Figure 1 from Pyongyang in 1946, where Kim Il-sung’s portrait only appears after the aforementioned figures (as if to signal his continuation of their legacy).



Figure 1. Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Pyongyang’s May 1st Commemorative Event (평양의 5.1절 기념 행사), 1946. (북한, public domain, via Wikimedia Commons)

From the early 1970s, however, references to Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin slowly disappeared, and North Korea began to promulgate Juche as “the singular ideological system” (*yuilssasang chegye*).<sup>9</sup> Juche was formally adopted as the sole guiding principle of the state at the Fifth Party Congress in 1970,<sup>10</sup> and by 2009, all references to communism were removed from the North Korean Constitution.

Despite being a Marxist offshoot, Juche’s strong nationalistic underpinning set it apart from socialism and Marxism from the beginning. What made North Korea’s socialist thought different from the Chinese and Soviet applications was the incorporation of national feelings and macro-historical narratives.<sup>11</sup> Juche also departs from Marxism-Leninism in its privileging of the state over the workers; Juche is all about the Korean state, Korean identity, and Korean independence, not the working class or the individuals who make up the proletariat.<sup>12</sup> (It has this in common with other anticolonial Marxist-Leninist thought in Asia and in Africa.) Kim Jong-il said in a speech titled “Let Us Highly Display the Korean-Nation-First Spirit” that a “Korean-nation-first spirit” was needed to protect the “time-honoured history of five thousand years, a refined culture and tradition.”<sup>13</sup> Juche was introduced as a way to “decolonize the Korean mind” so Koreans could emerge as

“masters of their own destiny.”<sup>14</sup> Kim Il-sung encouraged independence and creativity in problem-solving,<sup>15</sup> and he rejected a dogmatic application of Marxism and Leninism, arguing that a European/Soviet philosophy wouldn’t apply to postcolonial Korea. Koreans were to work out their own philosophy and carry out their own revolution, Juche being the resultant “Korean-style socialism.” Workers are empowered only insofar as they form a part of the larger collective worth defending, namely, the state and race/ethnicity.

Juche is also notable in its de-emphasis of historical materialism, the view that history is driven by economic arrangements and the sociopolitical relationships that are built around modes of production. Juche’s “mentalism” highlights humans’ mental activity as the central driving force of history.<sup>16</sup> As such, Juche emphasizes the importance of a strong will to bring about the future one would like to see. Leaning into the “mind over matter” motto, Juche thinks that an agent’s decision is ultimately independent from external factors.<sup>17</sup> “The Juche age,” Kim Jong-il writes, “is a new historical era when the popular masses have emerged as masters of the world.”<sup>18</sup> Marx, Engels, and Lenin all talk about a kind of proletariat “dictatorship” after bourgeois control of the state, and Juche puts a national and mental spin on the new agency. The Juche system’s prioritization of the mental aspects of what makes a person revolutionary is a mutation from dialectical materialism, the view that all aspects of society are interconnected and that its organizing principle is structured around modes of production.<sup>19</sup> Juche highlights the agent’s sheer efforts as the prime mover of history,<sup>20</sup> but unlike other can-do philosophies, Juche specifies that citizens can forge their own path by remaining loyal to the leader who will resist external threats and usher in the “final phase of human development,” manifested in the unification of the peninsula.<sup>21</sup> This leader, of course, was Kim Il-sung.

To wrap up, Juche was initially conceived as a Korean extension of Marxism-Leninism, but its nationalist undertone and mentalism set it apart from other applications of Marxist-Leninist thought. (The cult of personality is also considered a factor that separates Juche from Marxism-Leninism, but I’ll save that discussion for a later occasion given space constraints.) Having provided a brief summary of the major characteristics of the Juche ideology, I’ll turn next to David-West’s assessment.

## II. RESPONSES TO DAVID-WEST ON JUCHE

In “‘Man Is the Master of Everything and Decides Everything’: Deconstructing the North Korean Juche Axiom,” David-West concludes Juche to be “non-philosophical and in fact nonsensical, being neither humanist nor materialist nor rationalist in conceptual substance.”<sup>22</sup> He complains about nonspecialists in philosophy having made inadequate claims about Juche, though his own nonspecialist status doesn’t dissuade him from reaching uncharitable conclusions about the philosophy. I’m not sure how robust or systematic we will find Juche to be as a philosophy after sustained analysis, but I’ll show that David-West’s philosophical worries can be adequately addressed. The etymology of “to respect” points us to “re” and “specere”—to respect is to look/see again,<sup>23</sup> and I’d like to respect

Juche in this sense. Andrei Lankov writes that North Korea is a “surprisingly sane place,”<sup>24</sup> and I’ll channel this spirit to see how Juche might be defended against David-West’s allegations. Below, I organize David-West’s criticisms into two major strands and offer responses to each.

**JUCHE’S AXIOM IS TOO ABSTRACT AND DEMONSTRABLY FALSE**

David-West dubs Juche as “national subjectivism” but says it’s really a kind of subjective idealism, a metaphysical view that what we take the world to be is inextricably tied to our subjective projections and observations. He takes “man is the master of everything and decides everything” as the distilled axiom of Juche, and he performs a surprisingly literal reading of the slogan to criticize Juche. For instance, he writes the following:

The *Juche* axiom, to be sure, inverts the principle that the whole is greater than its parts. Logically and naturalistically, *man* is a part of *everything*. . . . A part is not greater than the whole.<sup>25</sup>

Of course, among the fundamental distinctions between human beings and atoms is that humans are conscious agents, determined nevertheless by their material, historical, and social conditions of life. . . . Practical cognition does not, however, put human beings in a position to conquer the laws of nature at any level.<sup>26</sup>

But a more reasonable interpretation of Juche wouldn’t entail blatant mereological embarrassments or commit Juche to be saying that humans can overcome any and all laws of nature.

To illustrate by analogy, let me take a line from the American Declaration of Independence: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” If taken in David-West’s literalist spirit, we might think: clearly, not all men are created equal; humans have different heights, parents, and abilities, to name just a few disparities. But this line of questioning is crude and hardly worth our time. Putting aside questions about the Founding Fathers’ inconsistent applications of these ideas, retorting to the declaration by commenting, “but obviously people aren’t all equal!” is silly at best—and I think this is analogous to how David-West approaches the Juche axiom. There’s a need to carefully interpret what each of the words “man,” “decides,” and “everything” means, and attention to the context and aim of the utterance helps us arrive at an interpretation that doesn’t relegate the axiom to nonsense.

David-West also complains that “the abstract and one-sided construction of the axiom renders it insufficient” to properly account for all the philosophical questions that rise from the statement.<sup>27</sup> But any slogan will come up insufficient in this regard. Consider the line from the Declaration of Independence again. What does it mean for a truth to be “self-evident”? If a truth is self-evident, why did the Founding Fathers have to declare it? What does it

mean for a right to be unalienable? Aren’t people robbed of life, liberty, and the chance to pursue happiness all the time? What constitutes happiness? Are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness abstractly existing entities to which all humans are entitled? What grounds this entitlement, and under what conditions can they be revoked? Again, the fact that the slogan itself is insufficient to answer all further philosophical questions that rise from it is not a reason to doubt the meaningfulness of the thoughts expressed by it. Sometimes, a claim is philosophically valuable precisely because of the further questions it raises, some unanswerable with the initial claim alone.

Insofar as Juche is first and foremost a political philosophy—after all, it takes political independence, economic self-sufficiency, and military self-reliance as applications of Juche—I don’t think it would be productive to read metaphysical commitments from it. But even *if* we were to take Juche as a kind of idealism, there is a reading available that allows us to interpret Juche in a coherent light.

Taken at face value, David-West believes that the maxim “man is the master of everything and decides everything” “resembles a metaphysical and thus nonsensical first principle that must be accepted on faith,” a thought that is “not a philosophy or method, but a dogma.”<sup>28</sup> However, terms like “everything” need to be taken in context. If I were looking for a particular grocery item and commenting that I looked *everywhere* to no avail, context would determine that I must have looked *at all the eligible stores within a reasonable distance*. It would be inappropriate to take “everywhere” literally to mean that I had searched the entire cosmos for the item. Similarly, for Juche, “master of everything and decides everything” must be understood in its appropriate context. The way we understand “everything” must be restricted to the kinds of thing that humans can have mastery over, and it must be the kinds of thing that humans have deciding power over. So what domain does “everything” cover in this case?

My recommendation is to take Juche to be quantifying over *social* or *political* objects and relations. We should take the “everything” talk in Juche to apply to the sociopolitical world. If we take “everything” to be quantifying over *social* or *political* realities, then the slogan becomes a claim about humanity’s ability to decide what is valuable to them, it becoming a way to express the much less controversial thesis that humans shape their communities and decide what’s important to them. David-West readily applies this reading to Marxism when he writes that “[c]lassical Marxism sees that ‘man has become the measure of all (societal) things,’” the “true sphere of domination” being social forms of organization.<sup>29</sup> It’s unclear why he’s unwilling to extend the parenthetical gesture to Juche.

Some find it intuitive that all values are intrinsically dependent on humans and that humans are “masters” over all things valuable in the sense that without a subject endowing things with value, there would be no mind-independent source of value. These ideas roughly track antirealist sentiments in moral philosophy and value theory, the view that goodness isn’t objective and mind-independent things “out there” to be discovered.<sup>30</sup> Moral

antirealists, for instance, don't believe that moral facts exist in some objective fashion; rather, humans construct, or otherwise agree upon, what we consider "moral" or "good." According to this view, morality is a product of human judgment and effort and not an independently existing feature of the world. Though moral philosophers continue to debate about antirealism's merits, the point is that existing philosophical debates lend us conceptual schemes with which to interpret Juche in a meaningful way.

### **JUCHE ASSUMES TOO STARK A DISTINCTION BETWEEN "HUMAN" AND "EVERYTHING [ELSE]"**

David-West says a literal reading of the slogan puts too extreme a distinction between "man" and "everything," not to mention the fact that cognition doesn't endow humans with the ability to transcend the laws of nature. The Juche axiom "does not make logical and philosophical sense in face of the combination of real human subjective fallibility and the objective material forces that created the social catastrophe of the Great Famine."<sup>31</sup>

Three responses are available. First, that man is the measure of all things is an ancient idea. Second, the hierarchical understanding of the universe, with humans on top, might be coming from Confucian influences over Juche. Third, the slogan need not posit a human-vs.-everything-else binary. We'll take these in turn.

David-West takes issue with Juche privileging "man" "to an extreme degree, making him the absolute measure of all things."<sup>32</sup> One might disagree with this claim, but it won't do to simply dismiss the idea given its long history and varied repetition across different philosophical systems. A fragment attributed to Protagoras (c. 490–420 BCE) says that "of all things the measure is man: of those that are, that they are; and of those that are not, that they are not."<sup>33</sup> Philosophers debate whether "man" here refers to individuals or abstract humanity, but the point is that the human-centric worldview is far from senseless. In ancient China, too, we get the suggestion that man "measures" all things in the sense that values originate from humans. The idea that humans "complete" (成 *cheng*) the cosmos is discussed in texts like *Huainanzi*, and Xunzi writes that social or moral order is determined ("completed") by human decisions (guided by the sage) even though the physical stuff of the world is created by heaven and earth. *Zhuangzi* maintains that conceptualization is central to the construction of "things" (*wu* 物), and Han Feizi takes "standards" (*fa* 法) to be heavily reliant on human decisions about the ordering of the world. These historical precedents show that while Juche's claim to originality might be dubious, its core claim about humans being the standard is an intuitive one that finds expression in both ancient Greek and Chinese contexts.

Secondly, Confucianism formed the philosophical background of Korea for millennia, and the human-favoring hierarchy that David-West takes issue with might be Confucian in origin. Geir Helgesen writes that Juche inherits the Confucian picture that order and hierarchy are built into the world.<sup>34</sup> The Neo-Confucians take this basic Confucian conviction and develop a robust metaphysical

apparatus around order and hierarchy, arguing that an invisible force, *li* (理 principle), structures the world and that *li* is a loftier organizing force than *qi* (氣 vital force). In a similar way, Juche might be seen as a development of the Confucian view that a particular order or hierarchy governs the universe—and whereas Neo-Confucianism appealed to the abstract *li* as the source of order and deemed it the preeminent force, Juche might be putting human agency, volition, or consciousness as the decisive force that orders reality, considering it the preeminent force. Juche, then, can be seen as an attempt to adapt Marxism into the Korean context by incorporating local philosophies, "Korean-style socialism" being a kind of tradition-respecting ideology. The North Koreans "transcended Marxism-Leninism" and saw "social relations as the pivot of politics, and so they stress ideological education as the most important tool in directing social development. In this, they are in accordance with the teaching of Confucius."<sup>35</sup>

I don't mean to suggest that Juche is unanimously considered a Confucian ideology, nor does Juche seem to see itself as such.<sup>36</sup> But the Confucian influence illustrates just one possible source of Juche's commitment to hierarchy and shows that the view isn't so outlandish. Many systems of thought, including Confucianism, Christianity, and Mahayana Buddhism, posit metaphysical hierarchies in the way we understand the world. David-West's complaint against Juche's prioritizing of humans over other animals and objects, then, is not a unique complaint against Juche that undermines it.

Lastly, there's no need to posit an essential subject-object binary in order to make sense of Juche. Humans may shape society in ways they see fit, and make decisions about what is valuable, without mistaking themselves to be somehow essentially separate from everything else. Marx's historical realism, which argues that societies are organized around modes of production because humans must labor to subsist, takes social relations—such as the way labor power is organized—to be the driving force of history. Insofar as Marx considered human labor to be the beginning point of his theorizing, "material" included humans, and "consciousness" also included humans. There's no need to posit a strong idea/matter or subject/object distinction in Marx's thought, and there is no reason to read it into Juche, either.

Juche reduces the extent to which material conditions shape history, agreeing with Marx that they impact human behavior but denying that material conditions are the sole or the strongest driving force of history. Rebuilding a state that was reduced to rubble during the Korean War, Kim Il-sung, in line with many strands of Marxism, might have thought that economic determinism—the view that economic configurations of labor and capital determine all other social and political relationships—isn't true. People's consciousness, including their ways of making sense of the world, was conditioned by previous societies and produced by a particular given culture.<sup>37</sup> Developing a state philosophy that would speak to its people, then, needed to include a perspective that is familiar—for instance, a family-like perspective and a hierarchical perspective that Koreans would have been used to from Confucianism. With

Juche, Helgesen writes, North Koreans add to Marxism “the human being’s decisive role, in that they changed the philosophical focus from matter/idea to a new one called man/matter.”<sup>38</sup> Even while Juche invokes Confucian underpinnings, it also “seems that *Juche* in this way brought Marxism closer to its origin, with its thesis about people creating their own society, while at the same time being a product of this society.”<sup>39</sup>

In neither the case of Marxism nor Juche do we need dualistic understandings of “man” and “everything else.” It’s not as if “mind” or “consciousness” is neatly separated from “matter” or “labor conditions” in Marx’s philosophy, and similarly, “human” need not be separated from “everything” in Juche. We need not take Juche to involve “a false perception of objective reality,” which attributes “false powers to human beings with disastrous philosophical and social implications.”<sup>40</sup> It’s one thing to insist on this interpretation and disagree with Juche on historical realist grounds—but we shouldn’t call Juche philosophical nonsense if there are interpretations available that would render it coherent and even consistent with other philosophical systems.

### III. CONCLUSION

There’s a reason why North Korea hasn’t imploded yet, and it’s uncharitable to its leaders and citizens to think that it’s merely due to coercion or brainwashing. A better explanation is that the regime operates with a cultural logic that isn’t convincing to outsiders but compelling to insiders.<sup>41</sup> Cha writes that the Juche ideology “forms the backbone of the state’s control” such that without it, the state could not survive.<sup>42</sup> Insofar as Juche is the official state philosophy of North Korea, it would be politically expedient, not to mention intellectually worthwhile, to analyze it in a way that would help us make sense of its motivational force. An open-minded yet context-sensitive interpretation must precede any analysis worth taking seriously, and I hope to have begun this work.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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### NOTES

1. I’ll capitalize the word to refer to the ideology; when referring to the word or the concept, I won’t capitalize.
2. Andrei Lankov, “Juche: Idea for All Times”; Alzo David-West, “Man Is the Master of Everything and Decides Everything”; B. R. Myers, *The Cleanest Race*.
3. When Stalin died in 1953, there was no longer a natural center for socialism. North Korea now had to choose whether to politically side with China (Mao) or the Soviet Union (Khrushchev). Fearing alienating either one of them, Kim Il-sung decided to “go the Korean way” and develop the Korean-specific Juche ideology, maintaining ties with both China and the Soviet Union. Also, Rhee Syung-man (the South Korean president) was suggesting that communism was a break from the tradition of Korea, culturally alien and therefore a threat to the people’s national identity. So Kim Il-sung answered with Juche, Korean socialism. See Geir Helgesen, “Political Revolution in a Cultural Continuum,” 191–92.
4. Victor Cha, *The Impossible State*, 37.
5. Andrei Lankov argues that Juche is simply too vague to be taken seriously and that the interpretation of its philosophy has changed countless times. According to Lankov, Juche

is an empty shell, a term that includes everything the North Korean leadership considers “correct” at any given moment in time (see his “Juche: Idea for All Times”). Alzo David-West also attacks Juche on philosophical grounds, concluding that it is “non-philosophical and in fact nonsensical” (see his “Man Is the Master of Everything and Decides Everything”). B. R. Myers writes Juche exists just for foreigners, something that is to be praised but not actually studied (*The Cleanest Race*). Felix Abt is skeptical of this deflationary view given his lived experience there (see his *A Capitalist in North Korea*).

6. Myers, *The Cleanest Race*, 44–45.
7. Lankov, “Juche: Idea for All Times.”
8. Sonia Ryang, *Reading North Korea*, 199.
9. Ryang, *Reading North Korea*, 199.
10. Cha, *The Impossible State*, 39.
11. Daniel Schwekendiek, *A Socioeconomic History of North Korea*, 31.
12. Cha, *The Impossible State*, 38.
13. Kim Jong-il, “Let Us Highly Display the Korean-Nation-First Spirit.”
14. Kim Jong-il, “Let Us Highly Display the Korean-Nation-First Spirit.”
15. Kyo Duk Lee, “Peaceful Utilization of the DMZ’ as a National Strategy,” 4.
16. David-West, “Man Is the Master of Everything and Decides Everything,” 70.
17. Lee, “Peaceful Utilization of the DMZ’ as a National Strategy,” 4.
18. Kim Jong-il, *On the Art of the Cinema*, 1.
19. Ryang, *Reading North Korea*, 199.
20. Cha, *The Impossible State*, 37.
21. Cha, *The Impossible State*, 38.
22. David-West, “Man Is the Master of Everything and Decides Everything,” 68.
23. This etymology is mentioned in Ryang, *Reading North Korea*, 208.
24. Andrei Lankov, *The Real North Korea*, xii.
25. David-West, “Man Is the Master of Everything and Decides Everything,” 69.
26. David-West, “Man Is the Master of Everything and Decides Everything,” 69.
27. David-West, “Man Is the Master of Everything and Decides Everything,” 69.
28. David-West, “Man Is the Master of Everything and Decides Everything,” 71, 76.
29. David-West, “Man Is the Master of Everything and Decides Everything,” 71.
30. See Richard Joyce, “Moral Anti-Realism.”
31. David-West, “Man Is the Master of Everything and Decides Everything,” 80.
32. David-West, “Man Is the Master of Everything and Decides Everything,” 70.
33. Hermann Diels and Walther Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 80B1.
34. Helgesen, “Political Revolution in a Cultural Continuum,” 189.
35. Helgesen, “Political Revolution in a Cultural Continuum,” 211.
36. See Alzo David-West, “Between Confucianism and Marxism-Leninism,” for a discussion on how the North Korean regime has responded to Confucian and Neo-Confucian historical figures depending on their latest political needs. Like Marxism-Leninism, Confucianism predated Juche in the Korean peninsula, but scholars debate the extent to which Juche can be described as Confucian. Cha argues that the ideology was effective as a source of control because it borrowed conventional Korean

notions of Confucianism; hierarchy, social harmony, and respect, which serve as bedrocks of a Confucian society, accompanied the regime's need for control (*The Impossible State*, 39). Though Juche seems to have inherited, at the very least, the Confucian and Neo-Confucian idea that order and hierarchy are built into the world (Helgesen, "Political Revolution in a Cultural Continuum," 189), this isn't enough to call North Korea a Confucian state (Ryang, *Reading North Korea*, 193–94) since many philosophical systems divided the universe into hierarchical categories (think of Christianity with its God-humans-beasts hierarchy and Mahayana Buddhism with its ultimate truth-conventional truth distinction). In addition, North Korean leaders don't fit the mold of the traditional Confucian patriarch; artistic and political renderings depict the Kims as joyful, naïve, spontaneous, and loving instead of scholarly or virtuous, the traits usually associated with a Confucian ruler. Kim Il-sung is described as an androgynous Parent Leader (Myers, *The Cleanest Race*, 48–49) and is sometimes symbolically and visually represented in feminine ways, e.g., welcoming soldiers into his bosom and featuring rosy cheeks. Ryang thinks it muddies the water to consider Juche Confucian since the crucial private father figure is missing (*Reading North Korea*, 192–94). The cult of personality also forms a contrast against Confucianism. Though Confucianism does encourage leaders to sway subjects with moral charisma (*Analects* 2.1) and encourage subjects to respect their leader, Confucian classics such as *Analects* and *Xunzi* are full of criticisms of their past and present rulers, suggesting that leaders aren't beyond reproach.

37. Helgesen, "Political Revolution in a Cultural Continuum," 200.
38. Helgesen, "Political Revolution in a Cultural Continuum," 199.
39. Helgesen, "Political Revolution in a Cultural Continuum," 199.
40. David-West, "Man Is the Master of Everything and Decides Everything," 81.
41. Ryang, *Reading North Korea*, 208.
42. Cha, *The Impossible State*, 39.

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## Sudden Enlightenment: Paradigm-Shifting Awakening

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#### ABSTRACT

Sudden enlightenment is awakening to be attained all at once. Hyun-Eung, a Korean Buddhist monastic, has proposed a new interpretation of this claim: that sudden enlightenment is the revolutionary awakening of the dynamical and indivisible structure of cognitive subjects and objects. I argue that Hyun-Eung's "revolutionary enlightenment" is achieved through a "paradigm shift" in Thomas Kuhn's sense as presented in his *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Enlightenment is obtained when one's essentialist and realist worldview is replaced, through a revolutionary change of paradigm shift, by a new perspective based on the Buddhist teachings of dependent arising and emptiness. Prior to enlightenment, each person views herself as a separate and independent individual who has her own essence. However, when our perspective on self and the world changes with the understanding of dependent arising and emptiness, it becomes clear that no one and nothing can exist independently of conditions. Everything comes into existence, abides, and passes out of existence only in dependence on conditions. Sudden enlightenment requires a revolutionary change in one's perspective of self and the world. I conclude that this concept of revolutionary enlightenment aptly explains the features of sudden enlightenment.

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

The Chan tradition of East Asia teaches that enlightenment is followed by directly perceiving the truth. It also claims that enlightenment occurs suddenly and all at once rather than gradually or progressively. True enlightenment comes naturally, all of a sudden, and all at once; otherwise, it is not genuine enlightenment, or so Chan Buddhists argue. This debate on sudden and gradual enlightenment (頓漸論爭) has continued to attract much attention among East Asian Buddhists for more than a millennium.