**Juche in the Broader Context of Korean Philosophy**

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Abstract: There is ongoing debate on whether Juche (주체/主體), the North Korean state ideology, is indigenous, Marxist-Leninist, or Confucian—or if it’s a real philosophy at all. In this article, I introduce Juche and show how characteristics that philosophers identify to be unique or pronounced in premodern Korean philosophy can be found in Juche as well. Intellectual adaptation, pragmaticism, and an emphasis on continual improvement are prominent in both premodern Korean thought and Juche. Juche should be understood as a politically inflected outgrowth that is embedded within the larger context of Korean philosophy.

Key Words: Juche; North Korea; Korean Philosophy; Neo-Confucianism; Marxism-Leninism

1. **Introduction**

There’s been growing interest in Korean philosophy.[[1]](#footnote-1) The aim of this paper is to ensure that philosophy from the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK, henceforth “North Korea”) will be included in ongoing discussions. Towards that end, I introduce *Juche*, the North Korean state ideology, in its historical context, and I show how characteristics that philosophers identify to be pronounced in the history of Korean philosophy can be found in Juche as well. Koreans are said to be particularly good at adapting intellectual frameworks to suit their own needs, focused on the pragmatic implications of their thought, and invested in highlighting the need continual self-improvement. Each of these characteristics are prominent in Juche as well. The plan is to provide an occasion to discuss North Korean philosophy in a way that puts it in conversation with the larger history of Korean thought.

Let me start by introducing Juche. Juche (주체/主體), usually translated as “self-reliance,” is North Korea’s state philosophy, though experts disagree just how important the concept is to governing.[[2]](#footnote-2) Juche rejects *flunkeyism* (“serving and worshipping big powers and developed countries”) as well as *nihilism* (“looking down upon and despising one’s own country”).[[3]](#footnote-3) Its main principles are “independence in politics, self-sufficiency in the economy, and self-reliance in defence.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

Juche is also called Kimilsungism due to its origin. Kim Il-sung (1912-1994), the “eternal president,” was the founder of North Korea. Though the official North Korean position is that Juche was first conceived in the 20’s[[5]](#footnote-5) and 30’s[[6]](#footnote-6), scholars tend to agree that Juche first appeared as a political philosophy in the 50’s. One key date is 1955 when Kim Il-sung introduces Juche by name in a speech titled “On Eliminating Dogmatism and Formalism and Establishing Juche in Ideological Work.”[[7]](#footnote-7) For any state, political ideology is the means through which an institution gains legitimacy, and Juche is North Korea’s justification for its decisions.

Though it isn’t translated as such, the literal understanding of ‘Juche’ (“subjectivity”) or its long-held historical meaning in Korean (“chief object”)[[8]](#footnote-8) is fitting when considering the context in which the concept was introduced.[[9]](#footnote-9) In the 1955 speech, Kim brings up Juche as a way to emphasize one’s need to prioritize one’s identity as a Korean—and as a Korean, the need to prioritize Korean national interests.[[10]](#footnote-10) North Koreans were “not engaged in any other country’s revolution, but solely in the Korean revolution” and therefore all philosophizing was “to be subordinated to the interests of the Korean revolution.”[[11]](#footnote-11) Juche’s nationalistic bent is clear from its foremost aim, which is the unification of the peninsula (through peaceful means or otherwise).[[12]](#footnote-12)

Juche is described as the engine of the North Korean revolution, a struggle born out of the mass’s desire for independence and freedom from class and national subjugation.[[13]](#footnote-13) “Since man is a social being,” Kim Jong-il wrote, “independence must first be guaranteed socially and politically.”[[14]](#footnote-14) What’s espoused as particularly novel is Juche’s “new philosophical conception of man” which puts him at the center of the universe and emphasizes independence, creativity, and consciousness as essential features.[[15]](#footnote-15) Kim Il-sung is credited with “discovering” the principle that “man is the master of everything and decides everything.”[[16]](#footnote-16)

Juche seems motivated to emphasize man’s central importance because it thinks “[e]veryone will show enthusiasm when he realizes that he is the master.”[[17]](#footnote-17) However, Juche is also unequivocal on the importance of a good leader. “Only under correct leadership,” Kim Jong-il wrote, “would the masses, though creators of history, be able to occupy the position and perform their role as subject of socio-historical development”.[[18]](#footnote-18)

Juche is interesting as a total worldview, a philosophical package with metaphysical, social, political, and moral views. It is fundamentally opposed to *idealism*—“the mystical theory that the world and man’s destiny are controlled by the supernatural ‘might’” —and *metaphysics*— “the fatalistic belief that everything in the world is immutable and, accordingly, man must be obedient to his predetermined destiny.”[[19]](#footnote-19) Instead, Juche holds that man is the “master of everything.” Juche’s new understanding of man is argued to be superior because, unlike previous takes which were mostly confined to “abstract view on pure man, to the exclusion of social relations,” Juche rightly understands man’s substance in social relations.[[20]](#footnote-20)

A mass belief system can only be effective if it is congruent with existing sociocultural norms and responsive to the historical condition it finds itself in.[[21]](#footnote-21) Juche focuses on self-reliance and the Korean identity because North Korea thinks that’s what was lost or jeopardized during Japan’s colonial rule and the subsequent Cold War.[[22]](#footnote-22) Though contested, the popular historical take was that Korea is possibly “the most oft-invaded territory in the world”—and so, the thought went, Korea had to be especially fierce in maintaining their independence.[[23]](#footnote-23) Juche was (and is) effective because it addresses historical atrocities and reassures the citizens of the state’s capacity to forestall similar occurrences.

Juche might be seen as a form of “psychological decolonization” as it attempts to abandon the *sadaejuui* (사대주의 事大主義 “serving the great”) attitude—an obsequious dependence on a nearby power— and to “decolonize the Korean mind.”[[24]](#footnote-24) Political reliance and cultural deference to China shaped premodern Korean foreign policy, and by the late nineteenth century, *sadae* had become a disparaging term used to describe elites who were happy to let Korea be dominated by foreign powers.[[25]](#footnote-25) In fact, Japan had accused Koreans of holding a *sadae* attitude towards China and had promised to give them back their sovereignty when occupying Korea. Kim Jong-il blamed those who “dreamed of achieving independence by depending on foreign forces” and argued that the peninsula got to the sorry state it did because it feared and worshipped bigger countries.[[26]](#footnote-26) The desire to shed any servile attitude gave rise to North Korea’s uncompromising and ethnocentric nationalism.[[27]](#footnote-27) Failing to solve one’s own problems, and following the will of others, was to give up one’s rights as a master.[[28]](#footnote-28)

Also worth noting is the fact that North Korea’s geopolitical situation repeats the historical condition faced by Korea: North Korea is small and surrounded by powerful nations (China, Russia, Japan, and the United States (through troops in South Korea)). A political philosophy that emphasizes equal sovereignty and non-intervention “would satisfy the fierce desire for respect and security of a small and weak nation-state such as North Korea.”[[29]](#footnote-29) The sociohistorical context that surrounded the birth of Juche also continues to hold fresh relevance as Korea is still divided and Sino-US and Soviet-US relations remain mixed, if not tense.

I’ll conclude the introduction by motivating the discussion: *so what* Juche shares particular characteristics with the premodern Korean philosophy?

First, situating Juche in the broader context of Korean intellectual history shows us how and why it diverged from the frameworks that dominated earlier Korean thoughts, letting us understand its philosophical bases better. For instance, asking whether Juche was influenced by Confucianism, and investigating where and how it diverges from it, gives us not only an understanding of how Juche makes political use of filial piety, but also an understanding of how Confucianism adapted into the twentieth century and beyond.

In addition to the historical and philosophical benefits, there are also political benefits to engaging seriously with Juche. North Korean philosophy is a facet of thought less commonly engaged with, and studying their ideology invites a more holistic engagement with the regime. Though we ought not to condone its human rights violations, we also ought not to commit intellectual violence by acting as if Juche isn’t worth our philosophical consideration. North Korea is more than missiles and starving citizens, and the sooner we recognize this, the better our international relations—not to mention scholarship—will be.

1. **Nonsense and Hypocrisy?**

Some write that Juche is simply an excuse of an ideology the regime uses to rationalize the Kim’s family rule, its politically motivated beginnings and continual redefining proof that it is not a self-standing, real philosophy on its own.[[30]](#footnote-30) Analyses of Juche have tended to be uncharitable and suspicious. Andrei Lankov (2007) calls Juche “an empty shell” that is too vague to be taken seriously; Alzo David-West (2009) judges Juche to be a non-philosophical nonsense; and Brian Myers (2010) argues that Juche exists for foreigners, something that is meant to be exported and praised but not actually studied or implemented.[[31]](#footnote-31)

However, Sonia Ryang suggests that Juche might be a cultural logic that isn’t convincing to outsiders but compelling to insiders, and Victor Cha writes that the regime couldn’t survive without Juche as its backbone of state control.[[32]](#footnote-32) Gordon White argues that approaches to Juche that focus on its Machiavellian purpose “tend to ignore the more fundamentally cultural, historical, and political aspects of the idea.”[[33]](#footnote-33) Han S. Park, too, thinks Juche is more than a political slogan as it evolved into a grand ideological structure.[[34]](#footnote-34) Since critics downplay Juche’s legitimacy in part because they don’t see much philosophical merit in the ideology, one way to legitimize Juche is to elucidate its philosophical commitments.

As mentioned, Juche is usually translated as “self-reliance.” This might seem ironic since North Korea only ostensibly celebrates the subject and the subject’s ability to think and act for herself. Despite Juche’s conceptual emphasis on autonomy, we know individuals in North Korea are not autonomous in the sense that they are not free to, for instance, leave the country. One might see the regime’s lack of respect for individual autonomy as evidence of hypocrisy or lack of regard for Juche’s main tenets. We also know that the country’s been politically and economically dependent, first on the Soviet Union and then on China, and continues to rely on international aid.[[35]](#footnote-35) The fact that North Korea had never in fact been politically and economically autonomous might lead one to challenge Juche’s centrality to the regime. The discrepancy might be evidence that Juche isn’t heeded as a real ideology, or that it doesn’t play an important role in guiding North Korean politics or culture.

However, a state’s inability to perfectly, or even adequately, carry out its stated ideal doesn’t make the ideal nonsensical or unimportant (consider just how well we take the United States to be doing in regard to the Fourteenth Amendment). So there might be room to affirm self-reliance as North Korea’s ideal even while noting all the instances it fails to implements its values.

In addition, there’s an alternative way to understand Juche’s emphasis on self-reliance and autonomy that renders it more coherent—and that is to focus on autonomy at the collective level. Juche prioritizes not individual autonomy, but the *Korean people’s* autonomy. Individualism is disparaged as the reason the masses were unable to gain independence, while collectivism is taken to be “man’s intrinsic need.”[[36]](#footnote-36) Recall that Juche was born out of the need to protect Korea’s national identity and interests. Cha translates ‘Juche’ as “self-determination” and writes that it points to the kind of resolve North Korea has needed in order to preserve the true Korean identity.[[37]](#footnote-37) Juche’s “self” is the nation or the people.[[38]](#footnote-38) North Korean citizens are taught that “individuals are not worthy of living if they are deprived of their nation,” a sentiment that would have been fueled by the fact that Japanese colonization forced many Koreans to live “subhuman” lives.[[39]](#footnote-39) (This attitude helps North Korea accept South Korea’s wealth without being troubled since they, and not the south, are truly autonomous (on account of the US troops in the south).[[40]](#footnote-40)) So, it is not the individuals’, but the collective’s, subjectivity and self-reliance that matter. In the course of pursuing the group’s autonomy and agency, an individual’s autonomy and agency are overlooked.

Juche’s focus on the collective, however, isn’t to say that the concept of the individual self is nonexistent or unimportant in North Korea. In a way, the individual self must be preserved since there needs to be a subject who can submit to the great leader. But the self that is important is not the physical self but the political self, the self that joins others in a continual effort to uphold the revolution. This self is also public and subject to continual improvement. (More on this self in section 3.1).

Once we see that the notion of an individual self still has a role to play in Juche, we can appeal to new psychological research on group autonomy to understand how Juche might be focusing on collective autonomy as an indirect way to focus on individual autonomy. Psychologist Frank Kachanoff found that individuals’ personal sense of autonomy is partly dependent on how much collective autonomy they feel their social group has. He defines collective autonomy as “the perceived freedom of a group to determine and practice their own cultural identity without undue external influence.”[[41]](#footnote-41) Seen in this way, Juche might be tapping into the fact that individual and group autonomy are not so separate. Kim Jong-il had said that only through collectivism can both collective and individual needs for independence be satisfied.[[42]](#footnote-42)

North Korea’s behavior is easier to understand when we consider how individuals in a low-autonomy social group pursue power and status within a hierarchy to ensure their collective autonomy isn’t threatened.[[43]](#footnote-43) Collective needs must also be met for individuals to feel empowered, and those who lack collective autonomy strive for group empowerment and engage in more collective action.[[44]](#footnote-44)Add to this the fact that what’s operative here is one’s subjective perception;even if other groups *aren’t* in fact restricting one’s group, the perception alone is enough to trigger a reaction. Kachanoff’s findings, then, show us a way to make sense of Juche’s focus on self-reliance and autonomy without immediately accusing them of hypocrisy.

Having addressed initial worries about Juche’s coherence, I’ll now turn to the traits shared by Juche and the longer history of Korean philosophy.

**3. Juche’s Shared Themes with History of Korean Philosophy**

**3.1 Syncretism**

Philosophers studying the history of Korean thought say that Koreans excel at intellectual adaptation.[[45]](#footnote-45) Large systems of thought imported into Korea—such as Buddhism, Confucianism, and Christianity—were adjusted by Korean thinkers before they took root in the peninsula. Though I can’t provide a comprehensive account, my aim is to briefly discuss intellectual adaptations in the history of Korean thought and show how the trend also relates to Juche.

Koreans’ approach to Buddhism was highly syncretic as monks often focused on disagreements among different Buddhist sects or between Buddhism and other religions.[[46]](#footnote-46) In order to resolve the intellectual conflicts among concepts such as emptiness and being, doctrine and meditation, and innate evil nature vs. universal Buddha nature, Korean Buddhists “exercised their own form of dialectical thinking.”[[47]](#footnote-47) For example, they distinguished the *essence* (*che*체/體) of the human mind from the *function* (*yong*용/用) of the human mind, essence referring to the most fundamental dimension (Buddha-natured, pure, innate) and the function referring to the manifested mind (what’s actually expressed or felt).

Similarly, Neo-Confucianism took a unique shape in Korea as its development was guided by “Koreans’ perception about their existential weakness and limitedness” in overcoming the evil present within the world.[[48]](#footnote-48) We see Korean Neo-Confucians scrutinizing our emotional vulnerability to evil more than their Chinese and Japanese counterparts. This preoccupation gave rise to the *Four-Seven debate*, which concerns the moral status of everyday emotions and reflects the desire to work out the metaphysics of emotions for the sake of developing better guides for self-improvement.[[49]](#footnote-49)

The leading Korean Neo-Confucian Jeong Yak-yong’s (정약용, pen name: 다산Dasan) Christo-Confucianism is another example of intellectual adaptation. When western theology enters Korea through Matteo Ricci in China, Dasan blends Catholicism with Confucianism, picking up from Catholicism the cosmic yet personal figure needed for morality. Dasan thought that the concept *Principle* (*li*이/理) as traditionally conceived in Neo-Confucianism couldn’t ground morality since an impersonal principle cannot justify or motivate morality. So, he replaced *Principle* with *Sangje* (상제 上帝), “The Sovereign on High.”[[50]](#footnote-50)

We can see Juche as a similar achievement in intellectual innovation as Juche blends together socialism, Confucianism, Cheondogyo (a twentieth-century Korean religion) and Christianity. North Korean leaders took foreign political ideas and transformed them according to their own needs, mixing European thoughts with Asian and indigenous elements.[[51]](#footnote-51) Its syncretism is perhaps unsurprising since Juche sees itself as a dynamic theory that responds to the changing world.[[52]](#footnote-52)

Juche’s conceptual inheritances from Confucianism is evident[[53]](#footnote-53), and Kim Il-sung acknowledged that he received the term and idea of juche from early twentieth-century scholars who were heavily influenced by Confucianism.[[54]](#footnote-54) Juche worked well for the regime because it borrowed from pre-existing Korean commitments to Confucianism.[[55]](#footnote-55) Love for nation and love for family come together in Juche as *hyo* (효 孝), Confucian filial piety, takes on both personal and political significance. The embrace of the supreme leader as a loving parent figure replaces the “abstract, class-oriented language of socialism.”[[56]](#footnote-56) Confucianism compares respecting one’s father with respecting one’s ruler, and loyalty to the leader is a crucial virtue in both Juche and Confucianism.[[57]](#footnote-57) Confucian morality is inherently relational, and Juche adjusts this aspect of Confucianism to prescribe morality in terms of one’s relationship to the party and the supreme leader.[[58]](#footnote-58) Juche also gets from Confucianism the thought that man is at the center of everything. *Book of* *Filial Piety* says that “man is the [most] valuable in the nature of Heaven and Earth,” which Juche’s slogan resembles.[[59]](#footnote-59)

Religious—especially Cheondogyo and Christian—influence on North Korean politics and culture is also striking.[[60]](#footnote-60) Kim Il-sung’s maternal grandfather was a minister, his father was an elder, and his mother was a deaconess in the Presbyterian Church[[61]](#footnote-61), and we see aspects of the Christian worldview reflected in Juche. Park argues that the “religionization” of Juche was inevitable because North Korea had compared its society to a “sociopolitical body” where the supreme leader formed the brain, the party the nervous system, and the everyday citizen the rest of the body.[[62]](#footnote-62) Juche needed a way to preserve the theory of the sociopolitical body at the face of the supreme leader’s death, and so the ideology needed to be “religionized” such that the brain of the body would be rendered immortal.[[63]](#footnote-63) This is how North Korea managed three transitions of power.

Juche has much in common with Cheondogyo, the Korean religion founded in the nineteenth century.[[64]](#footnote-64) Both place humans at the center of the world, incite revolution, seek to construct a “paradise on earth,” and have their own calendar. Cheondogyo even used the word ‘juche’ to describe the final and highest stage of theory, and both Juche and Cheondogyo highlight the importance of economic independence and prioritize the peaceful reunification of the two Koreas.

As a result of Juche’s religionized framing, North Korean thought separates physical selves from political selves that will live on after individuals’ physical deaths. “One’s physical life is inherited from his parents,” Kim Jong-il explains, “but one’s political life is obtained and developed through organizational life.”[[65]](#footnote-65) “Eternal life” is attained when one’s physical self acquires a political self that is integrated into the immortal social life of the national community; one’s heroic denial of one’s own desires for the sake of the country becomes forever enshrined in national memory.[[66]](#footnote-66) A “true revolutionary with a firm Juche outlook” is one who is “determined to be infinitely faithful to the party and the leader even if he would have to give up his life.”[[67]](#footnote-67) The kind of devotion required by Juche is redolent of the kind of martyrdom we see glorified in religions like Christianity and Islam. Everyday practices also complement Juche’s religious tone. The repetitive nature of daily schedules become a kind of meditation[[68]](#footnote-68); rituals are held in the form of mass games, self-criticism sessions, and holidays set aside to celebrate the leaders; state-sanctioned texts are studied and memorized; and apparently, some of the patriotic songs they sing lift melodies from well-known Christian hymns.[[69]](#footnote-69)

Kim Il-sung warned against dogmatism and called North Koreans to “resolutely repudiate the tendency to swallow things of others undigested or imitate them mechanically.”[[70]](#footnote-70) Juche continually reminds the masses that the revolution must be carried out by their own conviction. Accordingly, though it borrows heavily from Confucianism, socialism, Cheondogyo and Christianity, Juche also diverges quite a bit from them.

Scholars note that Juche, with its Korea-focused spirit, arises out of a political need. The future of socialism was uncertain when Stalin died in 1953, and not wishing to choose an allegiance between China (Mao) and the Soviet Union (Khrushchev), Kim sought his own way so he could maintain good relations with both.[[71]](#footnote-71) Kim also sought to disagree with party members who preferred Soviet or Chinese institutional models.[[72]](#footnote-72) In South Korea, the first president Syngman Rhee was arguing that communism was anti-Korean, a culturally alienating political system that threatened Korean’s national identity. Kim Il-sung’s response was Juche, an explicitly Korean version of socialism.[[73]](#footnote-73)

Up until the early 70’s, Kim Il-sung’s revolutionary ideas were considered the “Marxism-Leninism of today” and the leader himself “the great Marxist-Leninist of our time.”[[74]](#footnote-74) But communism was mentioned less and less after 1972[[75]](#footnote-75), and by the mid-70’s, Kim Jong-il had pivoted to saying that Juche was a unique ideology that could not be adequately described as Marxist-Leninist.[[76]](#footnote-76) By 2009, North Korea quietly removed all references to communism in its Constitution.

Juche rejected Marxism and Leninism on the grounds that a theory developed from European and Russian experiences couldn’t be relevant to postcolonial Korea. In the 1955 speech, Kim Il-sung asks: “Some advocate the Soviet way and others the Chinese, but is it not high time to work out our own?”[[77]](#footnote-77) He calls on North Korea to study the Soviet history of the Communist Party and the Chinese history of their revolution to learn the general truth of Marxism-Leninism, but he ultimately highlights the next step of carrying out their own revolution. What must follow is a “Korean-style socialism,” the result of applying the spirit of Marxism and Leninism to their specific conditions. Marxism-Leninism was “grafted onto” existing ideas in the Korean peninsula, which in turn transformed the European theory.[[78]](#footnote-78)

One feature that highlights Juche’s departure from Marxism-Leninism is its nationalism. Though Marxism-Leninism calls for collectivism too, North Korea replaces class-oriented group consciousness with nationalism. As mentioned, in the North Korean context, collectivism is understood in national and Confucian terms.[[79]](#footnote-79) A system is Marxist socialist when its politics is guided by class consciousness—but in Juche, national consciousness guides all aspects of its politics such that it might even be said to supersede all other forms of beliefs.[[80]](#footnote-80) Whereas Marxism saw socialist utopia as the ultimate destination, Juche sees the unification of the peninsula under the guidance of their supreme leader as the final phase of human development.[[81]](#footnote-81)

In addition to its nationalistic essence, Juche’s rejection of historical materialism also separates it from other forms of socialism.[[82]](#footnote-82) As mentioned, Juche rejects “idealism” and “metaphysics” which attributed history’s progress to transcendent sources and provided a fatalistic view of human life.[[83]](#footnote-83) Instead, Juche embraces a radically voluntarist view on history, positing humans’ mental activity to be the central mediator of the universe and going so far as to put man at the center of the universe.[[84]](#footnote-84) Though material factors are acknowledged to play a “great part” in the revolution, Juche says material conditions do not give rise to the revolution automatically because how those conditions are used depend on people’s conscious activity.[[85]](#footnote-85) Unlike natural changes which follow the laws governing the material world, social changes have subjects, and are therefore caused by the volitional acts of the subject.[[86]](#footnote-86) Juche’s insistence that human will, and not structural economic factors, drive history leads scholars to debate whether Juche should be considered a variant of Marxism-Leninism at all.[[87]](#footnote-87)

And, of course, voluntarism must be combined with submission to the appropriate leader. It is ultimately society’s “brain” (뇌수*Noesu*), the supreme leader, that drives social change, and so Juche contradicts Marx’s economic determinism in yet another way: it admits one man—Kim Il-sung—to have had an inordinate amount of influence over human history. Marx thought that individuals were more or less insignificant against the flow of predetermined human development, but Kim Il-sung considered himself an absolutely necessary figure in the revolution.[[88]](#footnote-88) Whereas Marxism embraced a scientific understanding of history as an evolutionary and deterministic process, Juche stresses people’s—and especially the leader’s—efficacy in moving history.

Why does North Korea embrace voluntarism? Cumings (1982) writes that Juche is a form of social corporatism and gets voluntarism from corporatism, a family of collectivist political theories that center on hierarchy, family, and organic connection. Juche’s rejection of historical materialism and determinism might also stem from Confucian influences. Having long been influenced by Confucianism—the Joseon dynasty was explicitly founded on Neo-Confucianism—Korean society is conditioned by, and encouraged to model, previous societies’ ideals and rituals. Scholars note that Korean Neo-Confucianism was particularly conservative and normative.[[89]](#footnote-89) Given this framework that emphasizes a connection with the past, one could see why Kim Il-sung might have felt uneasy agreeing that present material reality (lived conditions including production and power relations) determines present immaterial reality (consciousness, ways of thinking). Juche instructs people to find solutions to present problems from the history of Kim Il-sung’s revolutionary actions or Korea’s more general revolutionary tradition, and this sentiment is incompatible with historical materialism which argues that what we think, including what we consider the best way forward, is dependent on current material conditions.

Instead of looking to other systems of thought, Gray (2023) suggests that we look at Juche’s material underpinnings to develop a pragmatic rationale for its voluntarism. Kim Il-sung repeatedly commented that North Korea’s economy was behind because of Japanese colonialization, and a voluntarist theory might have been needed to mobilize the masses to catch up economically.[[90]](#footnote-90) Since humans are considered the drivers of history, Juche highlights the importance of sacrifice and discipline needed to enact the kind of future a nation would like to see.

There’s also the fact that historical materialism won’t explain how different cultures can converge on the same political ideology. If material conditions shape consciousness, how could people in Europe *and* Asia, with varying histories and contexts, come to embrace the same revolutionary spirit? So, Kim Jong-il emphasizes the importance of the will, writing that “it does not matter how developed the productive forces are or how sufficient the material basis is” because what matters is the people’s transformation into “communist-type human beings.”[[91]](#footnote-91)

We’ve been focusing on Juche’s departure from Marxism-Leninism, in part due to its Confucian influences, but this shouldn’t immediately lead us to the conclusion that Juche should be seen as a Confucian ideology. Scholars debate whether North Korea is a Confucian state[[92]](#footnote-92) or not[[93]](#footnote-93), though Juche seems to inherit, at the very least, the Neo-Confucian idea that order and hierarchy are built into the world.[[94]](#footnote-94) At the same time, North Korean leaders don’t fit the traditional Confucian patriarch. Artistic renderings depict the Kims as artless, spontaneous, and loving instead of scholarly or virtuous, traits usually associated with a Confucian ruler. Confucian leaders needing to be benevolent is one thing; requiring that a political leader “boundlessly” and “unfailingly” love the people strikes as another thing.[[95]](#footnote-95)

Perhaps more importantly, it doesn’t seem as if Juche sees itself as an outgrowth of Confucianism. North Korea relates to premodern Korean Confucians in a way that suits their most immediate ideological needs, indicating a lack of definitive attitude towards their intellectual past. For instance, the regime either praises or condemns Dasan, one of the most prominent Korean Neo-Confucian, depending on whether it needs to align itself with the history of progressive Korean thought or needs to bolster its own party’s popularity over Dasan’s.[[96]](#footnote-96)

Though not an official part of the Juche ideology, the cult of personality also separates Juche from Confucianism.[[97]](#footnote-97) The cult of personality surrounding the Kim family elevates Kim Il-sung, Kim Jong-il, and Kim Jong-un to god-like statures, and they are continually upheld as exemplars. Citizens are expected to “always put the main emphasis on increasing loyalty to the party and the leader.”[[98]](#footnote-98) The popular masses are in the center of everything, and the leader is in the center of the masses, so the leader is in the absolute center of everything.[[99]](#footnote-99)

This aspect of North Korean politics garnered criticism early on; there was a coup against Kim Il-sung in 1956 on account of his seeming infallibility, and Khrushchev demanded that Kim criticize his own personality cult. Though Stalin, too, developed a cult of personality, North Korea’s is special since it includes the Great Leader’s whole family and has been resilient as a mode of ruling.[[100]](#footnote-100) Though Confucianism does encourage leaders to sway subjects with moral charisma[[101]](#footnote-101) and encourage subjects to respect its leader, Confucian classics such as *Analects* and *Xunzi* critique past and present rulers, suggesting that leaders aren’t beyond reproach.

To recap: Philosophers note the vibrant intellectual adaptations in the Korean peninsula, and noticing how Juche builds on its major influences helps us place Juche in the broader Korean intellectual trend. Instead of asking whether Juche is a form of this or that ideology, seeing Juche as a “combined ideological form” might help us better understand Juche.[[102]](#footnote-102) In the next section, I’ll discuss another parallel we find in Juche and the history of Korean philosophy: the philosophical focus on continual effort and sustained willpower towards self-improvement.

**3.2 Continual Improvement**

A salient feature of Korean Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism is a focus on sagehood and the perpetual working towards it. Korean philosophers’ moral psychological discussions in the Confucian and Neo-Confucian contexts gave philosophy a practical aim: to be morally transformed through sustained effort and study, i.e., to become a sage. Though self-cultivation is famously prioritized in Confucianism in general, and though all ethical systems focus on self-improvement to some extent, it took on an emphatic tone in Korea as rites were written into the national law (*Gyeongguk Daejeon* 경국대전 經國大典) in the fifteenth century and failure to carry out the rituals were severely punishable.[[103]](#footnote-103)

The widely understood imperative was that humans “depend on themselves and their own inherent abilities to solve their own problems (social and personal).”[[104]](#footnote-104) Two major Joseon scholars, Yi Hwang (이황, pen name: 퇴계Toegye) and Yi I (이이, pen name: 율곡Yulgok), emphasized consistent practice, and Toegye’s work on sagehood was the most published text in the entire Joseon dynasty. Self-transformation through practice was a thoroughly emphasized commitment in the history of Korean philosophy. An agent was personally responsible for becoming a moral person, so when Christianity was first introduced in the peninsula, many Confucians rejected it on the grounds that an agent’s mastery over their desires, and not supernatural beings, played the decisive role in their moral fate. Even Dasan, who (initially) embraced Catholicism, highlighted human’s free will to decide between good and evil, maintaining that humans’ ability to make moral decisions and shape their moral fates distinguished them from other animals.[[105]](#footnote-105)

Sometimes Confucians borrowed from other philosophies to enrich Confucian moral cultivation. Toegye appropriated the concept of mindfulness from Buddhism as an extension of gyeong (경/敬), a concept traditionally understood as “seriousness” or “somberness.” He reorients gyeong to mean something like “the mind’s mastery over one’s thoughts and actions,” with a new meaning closer to something like “mindfulness.”[[106]](#footnote-106) Toegye, as a Confucian invested in the notion of sagehood, helps himself to the Buddhist concept to inform the Confucian process of continual self-improvement, gyeong underlying the daily practice of remaining vigilant of one’s mind as to cultivate good thoughts, which can lead to good actions.[[107]](#footnote-107)

In Juche, too, there is an emphasis put on self-mastery, free will, and the perpetual working towards an ideal agenthood. We already saw how Juche distances itself from other forms of socialism by rejecting historical materialism, opting instead for the view that human consciousness and will are crucial drivers of historical outcomes. Like Confucianism, Juche rejects any ideology that denies the subject’s ability to improve herself and her circumstances.[[108]](#footnote-108) Juche emphasizes humans’ control over the world, and though its claim to originality is overstated, perhaps North Korean leaders’ accomplishment lies in their ability to consolidate their power by affirming humans’ free will and agency.

Struggling is glorified in North Korea, as evidenced by its repeated mention in *On the Juche Idea*: “A revolution begins with struggle and ends with struggle”; “The revolution can be pushed forward only by the active struggle of the revolutionaries and the popular masses; “A people who energetically struggle, with confidence in their own capability, will be able to do any difficult work.”[[109]](#footnote-109) In *On the Art of the Cinema*, we also find:

“There are no born revolutionaries, nor are there any perfect revolutionaries. A person’s revolutionary world outlook is formed, consolidated, and developed only through patient education and practical struggle. Even after one has established one’s revolutionary world outlook, one can scarcely claim to be a perfect communist. One may suffer momentary frustration and doubt during the complicated source of revolution, and then gather one’s strength and courage again, in order to harden oneself still more and continue with the struggle.”[[110]](#footnote-110)

A comrade’s goal isn’t to be perfect, but to garner the strength and courage to continue to struggle towards an ideal. “Steady growth and development through struggle,” Kim Jong-il says, “represent the natural course of life.”[[111]](#footnote-111)

Continual struggle is grueling, so Juche takes art’s imperative to be reminding and empowering people to continually uphold the revolutionary spirit. The point of consuming art is to “receive a lasting impression of real people who are shaping and developing their own revolutionary world outlook.”[[112]](#footnote-112) The masses need to be reminded of the process by which citizens are revolutionized so they can see why a revolution is necessary, see that everyone can work towards it if they’re determined, and see that they *must* work towards the revolution.[[113]](#footnote-113)

The emphasis on individual effort doesn’t preclude the need for a morally charismatic leader. Salient in both Neo-Confucianism and Juche is the need for a special leader who is expected to be the paragon of virtue that one could emulate. Toegye and Yulgok believed that the king must be the “living embodiment of the ideals of ‘sagehood’,” endowed with moral and social responsibility in virtue of the power and influence they had. The commoners, in turn, had the responsibility of dutifully following their leader as well as owing excellence to each other.[[114]](#footnote-114) The North Korean cult of personality, too, leads citizens to see their leaders as an embodiment of moral excellence. Comrades owe loyalty to the leader and excellence to each other, seemingly achieving what was only a dream to Zhu Xi, a prominent Chinese Neo-Confucian: the founding of a society where the ruler would be a father towards his subjects who feel a personal obligation towards him.[[115]](#footnote-115) Of course, the relationship between Confucian sages and commoners is very different from the relationship between Juche’s supreme leader and the masses. But both share the need for a moral exemplar, and once we compare the Neo-Confucian Joseon king to Juche’s supreme leader, the similarity grows: both are uncontestable political leaders who are expected to be morally exemplary, both exist within socio-political systems where loyalty to the leader is the utmost civic virtue, and both don’t leave much room for the individual to diverge from what the leader deems appropriate.

In fact, Juche goes beyond the morally charismatic leader to derive a God(figure) who is the idealized person, the perfect agent that can be imagined but not realized.[[116]](#footnote-116) God is not a transcendent being but an imagined extension of the human, the perfected human. North Koreans believe that humanity had been making steady (objective) moral progress towards the end where human nature will be perfected to be like God, the perfect moral agent. Kim Jong-il gives God-like characteristics to the people: “An individual’s strength and wisdom are limited, but those of the popular masses are unlimited. If there is an omniscient and omnipotent being in this world, it is none other than the popular masses.”[[117]](#footnote-117) One will never in fact be a perfect comrade, but one is to pursue continual progress to become “God-like” in perfection; sanctification in this picture amounts to being loyal to the party and the supreme leader in order to perfect one’s role in the revolution. In this way, Juche reimagines the transcendent God and endows the otherwise-religious notion of sanctification with a sociopolitical role while keeping in concert with the preexisting Korean trend of closely connecting philosophy with moral self-improvement.

**3.3 Pragmatic Bent**

Now we come to the last shared trend: premodern Korean philosophy’s focus on the pragmatic is found in North Korean thought as well. When Buddhism was first introduced in Korea, Confucian scholars rejected it on the grounds that it wasn’t sufficiently focused on *this* life. For instance, Jeong Mong-ju unfavorably compared the Buddhists—who searched for emptiness and Nirvana—to Confucians who dutifully fulfilled social (including sexual) duties.[[118]](#footnote-118) Speculations about the afterlife or a blessed existence that doesn’t directly involve earthly life didn’t interest Korean Confucians, and this was a trend that generalized to many Korean thinkers. Late Joseon philosophers of the *silhak* movement (“practical learning” 실학) believed that abstract debates are futile and vain, and thinkers such as Park Ji-won (박지원) and Park Je-ga (박제가) argued that the value of scholarship lies in its use and that teachings without clear applications fail to quality as true scholarship.[[119]](#footnote-119) Waves of silhak scholars advocated for economic, political, and social reforms aimed to benefit the everyday citizens with land ownership, increased access to technology, and more.[[120]](#footnote-120)

Similarly, in North Korea, social relevance is ultimately the only thing that matters when it comes to philosophy. Kim Il-sung favorably mentioned *silhak* scholars his speeches and writings[[121]](#footnote-121), and Kim Jong-il wrote that all human questions “arise in the context of man’s social life, and as such they always assume a social character.”[[122]](#footnote-122) Some scholars actually trace Juche back not to Confucianism but to Silhak.[[123]](#footnote-123) In North Korea, philosophy isn’t about pursuing some abstract Truth or individually contemplating the meaning and significance of one’s own life, but about political awakening; “a theory that does not conform with the specific revolutionary practice is useless,” and “the starting point is not the propositions or formulas of the established theories but the actual realities.”[[124]](#footnote-124) The insistence on philosophy’s social relevance is a trend that we can trace back to the Joseon dynasty.

Halla Kim writes that Korean philosophy, including Juche, has “always been preoccupied with altering reality with its practice in the concrete daily context” and that Korean philosophers are “by their very nature, at bottom, practically oriented,” steadily emphasizing “self-cultivation, character building, and leadership in a community for the sake of promoting public good.”[[125]](#footnote-125) North Korean philosophy’s commitment to the practical is in line with how Korean philosophy has tended to be historically. Cawley explains that the practical orientation “stems from the close relation of philosophy with religion in their joint effort to set human beings free from their existential predicaments and shortcomings”[[126]](#footnote-126)—and this explanation avails itself to North Korea too given its quasi-religious framework.

1. **Conclusion**

Juche has not received sustained attention from philosophers so far, and previous analyses have tended to be uncharitable or incomplete. This article aimed to establish a connection between premodern Korean philosophy and Juche to show that Juche belongs with the rest of Korean philosophy not only due to its geographic or historical connections, but also due to its philosophical and metaphilosophical commitments.

The upshot isn’t to pick out essential traits of Korean philosophy, but to show that Juche is imbedded within an ongoing discourse. Instead of asking whether Juche is Confucian, or Marxist-Leninist, or Christian, I focused on its colonial and postcolonial history and its syncretistic development. It’s important to see the intellectual trajectory of Juche because it helps us understand that Juche isn’t an intellectual anomaly. Political violence can also take intellectual form, and while Juche isn’t as revolutionary, novel, or impactful as the regime alleges, it isn’t utter nonsense, either. Accordingly, we can explore how Juche took shape as a result of various historical and philosophical influences.

To close, I want to suggest that Juche might be best thought of as a kind of orientation, more attitude than a set of propositions to accept or reject. Juche highlights the mass’s collective agency, rejects any religious, metaphysical, or historical views that question the mass’s ability to shape the future, and calls for utmost loyalty to the leader and the country. Its excessive voluntarism and nationalism are a kind of corrective, “an antidote to a feeling of inferiority” and an attempt to “increase the sense of national dignity.”[[127]](#footnote-127) In this vein, Cumings suggests that Juche might describe an emotion more so than a philosophical stance, and I think this suggestion is valuable.[[128]](#footnote-128) Juche might seem elusive or even contradictory when we try to understand it solely as a set of propositions to believe, but once we see it as a way of approaching the world, some of the opacity might disappear. Elisabeth Camp’s notion of a *perspective*, for instance—an open-ended disposition to encounter, interpret, and respond to parts of the world in certain ways—might provide a better framework to understand Juche thought.[[129]](#footnote-129) I’ll explore this option in future work.[[130]](#footnote-130)

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1. Here’s an incomplete list of recent or forthcoming works focused on Korean philosophy as of mid-2023: *Traditional Korean Philosophy: Problems and Debates* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2016); *Dao Companion to Korean Confucian Philosophy* (Springer, 2017); *Religious and Philosophical Traditions of Korea* (Taylor & Francis, 2019); *Emotions in Korean Philosophy and Religion* (Springer, 2022); *Oxford Handbook on Korean Philosophy* (OUP, forthcoming). *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* and *The Slovak Journal of Aesthetics* both published symposia on Korean aesthetics in 2022, and the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* recently established a new subject area in Korean Philosophy. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Lankov (2007), David-West (2009), Myers (2010), and Gray (2023) argue that Juche is too vague, if not nonsensical, for it to be genuinely relevant to the regime’s decision-making. Abt (2014) and Cha (2018) disagree. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *On the*, 39 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *On the*, 35, 40-1; *Socialism is*, 25 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Kurbanov 298 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *On the*, 7 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. White (45) writes that Juche “ideas in an embryonic form” existed by the mid-40’s. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. A Big Dictionary, 3810 (through Kurbanov 298) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. ‘Juche’ isn’t a term unique to North Korea; see Kurbanov 298 and Cumings 290 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. *Kim Il Sung Works*, 403; Lankov 2007 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. *Kim Il Sung Works,* 403 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. *Kim Il Sung Works*, 414 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. *On the*, 4, 10, 18-19 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. *On the*, 20 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. *On the*, 9; *Socialism is*, 11 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. *Socialism is*, 9 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. *Kim Il Sung Works*, 424 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. *On the*, 16-7 [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. *On the*, 73 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. *On the*, 72 [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Park 1996, 11 [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. See White, 45 [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Lee 2003, 108; Political Scientist Ji-young Lee challenges this narrative. Thanks to Sandra H. Park for bringing this to my attention. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. White 45; also see Person 2016 and Lone and McCormack 1993, 180 [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. White 44 [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. *On the*, 5, 6 39; *Socialism is*, 10 [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Park 1996, 11 [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. *On the*, 24 [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Lee 2013, 106 [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. see David-West 2011 [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. See Kim (2023) for a response to David-West [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Ryang 208; Cha,39 [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. White, 44 [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Park, 1996, 17 [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Kim Jong-il seems to acknowledge this potential tension; he claims in *On the Juche Idea* that temporary aid might be received but “the main thing is one’s own initiative” (24) and “[o] nly when one is strong, will foreign aid prove effective” (50). [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. *Socialism is*, 2 [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. 37-40 [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Park 1996, 12 [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Park 1996, 12 [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Cha 40; White 46 [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. 2017 [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. *Socialism is*, 3 [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. See Kachanoff 2022 [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. See Kachanoff 2020, 2017 [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. See So Jeong Park’s “Adaptive and disruptive innovation across cultural boundaries” lecture in *Introduction to Korean Philosophy* Coursera and the introduction in Cawley 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. See Muller forthcoming. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Kim 2022 [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Cawley 2021 [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. See P.J. Ivanhoe’s chapter in *Three Streams* for a good introduction. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. This is a term that occurs only five times in the entire *Four Books*, so it’s notable that Dasan gives it such a central place in his philosophy. See Cawley 2021 section 6.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Kwon and Chung 2012, 1 [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. *On the,* 28,77. Also see Kurbanov 2019 and Gray 2023 [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. See David-West 2011 and Lerner 2010 [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Lee 2003, 110 [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Cha 40 [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Armstrong, 384 [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Kurbanov, 302 [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Cha, 39-40 [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Kurbanov, 302 [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Halla Kim (2022) writes “[a]ll the major philosophical movements in Korea thus developed within, or its close association with, the religious or quasi-religious practices either as the foundations or ramifications.” [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Cha 66-7 [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Cha notes how this arrangement makes it such that it’s not anyone else’s job to think since it’s the supreme leader’s job, *qua* the brain, to think and decide all things (42-3). [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Both Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il are enshrined as “eternal presidents” (Socialist Constitution of the Democratic Peoples’ Republic of Korea. 2017, 3) [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. See Kurbanov for discusion [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. *On the*, 65 [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Park 1996,15 [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. *On the,* 64 [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. See Kim 2017 [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. An anecdote from an acquaintance who studied at Kim Il Sung University as a foreign exchange student. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Li 159 [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Helgesen, 192; Cheong 142; Lee 2003, 108 [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. White 45 [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Helsegen, 193 Gray 2023, 268 [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Cheong 139 [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Kurbanov, 297 [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Cheong 139 [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. *Kim Il Sung Works*, 411 [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Cumings 277; also see White, 44 [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Cha, 39 [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Park 1996, 11 [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Cha, 38 [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Though see Gray 275 [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. *On the*, 70 [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. David-West, 70-1, Park 1996, 13 [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. *On the*, 33 [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. *On the*, 14 [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Gray 261-2; See Cumings (1982) for a list of other elements of Marxism-Leninism Juche discards. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Kim, 1990, 28 and Byun, 1991 87-8 (cited in Lee 2003, 111) [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Lerner (2010), Kwon and Chung (2012) [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Gray 266-7 [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. *On the*, 212. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Kim 2010; Kwon and Chung 19ff [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Ryang 2012, Cumings 1982 [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Helgesen, 189. Juche might be getting the hierarchy from religions like Christianity, too. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. *Socialism is*, 32 [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. see David-West 2011 [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. The cult of personality isn’t unique to North Korea; see Cumings 1982, 274ff [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. *On the*, 62-3 [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Lee, 2004, 5 [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Cheong, 49, Kwon and Chung 2012, 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. See *Analects* 2.1 [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. Gray 2023 [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. see Cawley 2021 [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Cawley 2021 [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Setton 1989, 380; Dasan’s relationship to Catholicism is complicated. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Cawley 2021 [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. Cawley 2021 [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. *Socialism is*, 11-2 [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. 26, 33, 44 [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. 35 [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. *Art of*,41 [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. *Art of,* 35 [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. *Art of*, 32 [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Cawley 2021 [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. Kang 1979, 65; Kim Jong-il writes in *Socialism is a Science* that “In our country, everyone regards and supports the leader as they would their own father. They trust and follow the Party, regarding its embrace as that of their own mother.” (35) [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Park 1996, 15-6 [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. *Socialism is*, 23 [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. Kang 2006, 160-1 [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Kim 2019, 492 [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. See, however, Ahn (2018) who argues that silhak is “no more than a “historiographical construct” without empirical historical foundation.” (119) [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. David-West 2011, 93-4 [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. *Art of*, 25 [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. Gray 2023, 272 [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. *On the*, 48 [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Kim 2022; also see Ivanhoe 100 [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. 2021 [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. White 45, *On the*, 38 [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. 289 [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. Camp 2017 [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. I’d like to thank Sandra H. Park and an anonymous referee for helpful conversations and feedback on a previous draft. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)