



ARTYKUŁ

„About the greatness, wise leadership and extraordinary personality of our dear leader” or several thoughts about the political system of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea

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To understand the phenomenon of communism in its Korean form, one needs to previously get acquainted with the social and cultural reality in which this type of totalitarianism set its roots and from which it evolved.

Deliberations on the development of communism in Korea need to begin with an outline of three matters:

1. the level of education and wealth of a majority of its citizens
2. the fact that for thousands of years they had based their lives on the Confucianism doctrine which entails absolute respect and devotion to authority
3. the history of Korea ruled by absolute rulers which then, when there was a lack of strong leadership, became dependent on external forces.

It is hard to imagine a more suitable ground for the growth of the cult of an individual than a poorly developed society based on traditional Confucian values, which for centuries had been ruled over by caesars representing „the Divine” and having „the divine mandate” to rule in the eyes of the people.

The Red „Son of the Divine”

The image of a leader plays a huge role in Asian societies, hence their official versions often have little to do with reality. An excellent example of this was changing the place of birth of Kim Jong-il to mountain Paektu (the highest mountain in North Korea) where the first mythical ruler and progenitor of the Korean people, Tangeuna, is said to have come from.

Mountain Paektu became the official cradle of the „Korean revolution”, which course was mythologised and presented in a falsified way.

According to official propaganda, the „leader” was more important than the party, which was only to be a transmission belt for implementing his ideas and which lost any value without the leader.

For the farming masses of Korea isolated from the outside world, uneducated, constantly indoctrinated and learning to obey the „divine” caesars for many generations, similar stories provided by the communist propaganda were something familiar and natural. The cult of the individual having supernatural abilities was joined in North Korea with the complete eradication of religious life - the only subject of worship was to be the communist leader who, similarly to caesars, was given paternalistic characteristics and was called „the father of the nation”.

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Kim with Soviet officers in 1945

(source: Wikimedia)

Also this approach was backed with references to the history of Korea which had to face all kinds of hardships without a charismatic leader. The best example of this was the dependency on Japan in the first half of the 20th century.

Communist leadership and bounds of blood

One peculiar „Korean” characteristic of the cult of the individual was the first, so-called scientific theory of the leader. It stated that the strength of a given country and its importance in the world was not decided by the size of its territory, nor its demographic, economic or military potential, but the leader’s personality. Per this theory, Kim Il-Sung, following Joseph Stalin’s and Mao Zedong’s deaths, became the greatest living leader, and thus should have become the most important reference point for the entire, global communist movement.

Only a person bound with the leader with blood ties could continue the „revolution”. Moreover, the choice of the successor should belong to the leader, since only he could introduce the most suited candidate to all the

ways of ruling a state.

Tradition turned out to be helpful also when legitimising Kim Il-Sung's decision to make Kim Jong-Il his successor. Then, the authorities used the conviction prevalent among the people about the first-born son inheriting his father's personality traits. It set the precedence that only a person bound with the leader with blood ties could continue the „revolution“. Moreover, the choice of the successor should belong to the leader, since only he could introduce the most suited candidate to all the ways of ruling a state. Since it not only required to have the leader's genius, inherited in his family, but also many years of getting complicated lessons by the successor, one could only do that in the leader's closest circle.

Kim Jong-Il, as the appointed successor of the great leader, promised to be fully loyal to the „father of the nation“ and to keep him alive as long as possible. This relationship stretched to beyond mortal life, since many funds were used to keep the embalmed remains of Kim Il-Sung as well preserved as possible.

Juche, or self-reliance in Bolshevik style

A separate matter worth analysing is the Juche ideology (literally meaning self-reliance or individual existence), so the so-called independent political thought of Kim Il-Sung. The Juche ideology was initially described as the extension of the Marxism-Leninism doctrine and then elevated to the rank of a new science. Its basic foundations emphasized, among other things, the sovereign position of the Korean communist party in leading the „revolution“, adopted for local specificity.



The stationing of the armed

forces of North Korea, South Korea and American troops at the Korean Peninsula in the middle of 1987 (source: Institute of National Remembrance)

It was connected with the „fight against subjectivity“ and „dancing to someone else’s tune“, which was meant as the rejection of the blind imitation of socio-political processes of the Democratic People’s Republic of China and the USSR, threatening to become dependent on one of these countries which would weaken the Kims’ power.

The main element of the Juche philosophy was the statement that every man needs to be self-reliant and active, which is to be understood as the unconditional participation in the realisation of the leader’s plans, presented as responsibility for one’s fate which can and should be individually shaped.

Juche, being the Korean road to socialism, was to be based on four main pillars: Juche in ideology, meaning the Korean Communist Party has its own leading ideas and realises only its own interests; independence in politics, meaning complete equality between the countries and the rejection of any foreign pressure; independence in economy, meaning the striving for sovereignty in economy; self-defence in defence of the country, meaning making North Korea able to defend itself against any foreign military threat, at the same time assuming that for achieving success on the battlefield, the enthusiasm of the soldiers, their heroism and „revolutionary enlightenment“ are crucial.

It is worth noting, that Kim Il-Sung also came up with a philosophical system on the basis of Juche, which was to give answers to all the problems and questions which could arise in the process of „revolution“. He also included in it his original view on the role of the man, the party and the leader in a perfect socialist society and also the description of the role of the individual in nature and society. The main element of the Juche philosophy was the statement that every man needs to be self-reliant and active, which is to be understood

as the unconditional participation in the realisation of the leader's plans, presented as responsibility for one's fate which can and should be individually shaped. The existence of the individual under the Juche ideology consisted of the biological existence and the socio-political one, while the latter was more important than the former, since it could only be achieved through unity with the leader, which was to provide some form of immortality. The political thought of the leader, also thanks to his successors, touched all aspects of life like literature, art and the educational system.

The aforementioned conditioning in an enormous way determined also the current functioning of the political system of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Thus, they influence the development of the international situation in this region.



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