

## The Juche System and the DPR Korea Media as Official Mouthpiece of the Kim Family: *Pyongyang Times* Newspaper Website Analysis

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### **Abstract**

In this article we will try to understand the North Korean political system – Juche – and how North Korean (DPRK) media is shaped under the banner of this ideology. The political system of North Korea is unique and sui generis in all aspects. Korean rulers –in other words the Kim Family- are evaluated as “unquestionable oboi suryeong” (Parent Leader). In this system and according to the constitution of the DPRK, media is a tool for propaganda. The system is a mixture of socialism, Korean nationalism and Confucianism. In this political system, all Koreans –also the media - are accepted as the members of a socialist and neo-Confucian big family (taegajong). In North Korea, the system is known as “uri sik sahoejuui” (Our Style of Socialism). So the Suryeong system is different from all other socialist states. This article aims at providing a descriptive study of the media of the DPRK, influence factors and the political as well as the historical background of media activity in the country by analyzing the news site of the DPRK propaganda newspaper The Pyongyang Times.

**Keywords:** North Korean Media, *Suryeong* System, Socialism in North Korea, Juche

### **Juche Sistemi ve Kim Ailesi'nin Resmi Sözcüsü Olarak Kuzey Kore Medyası: *Pyongyang Times* Gazetesi Websitesinin Analizi**

### **Özet**

Bu çalışmada Kuzey Kore siyasal sistemi Juche ve Kuzey Kore medyasının bu ideoloji ekseninde nasıl şekillendiği anlamaya çalışılacaktır. Kuzey Kore'nin siyasal rejimi her yönüyle yegâne yani sui generistir. Kuzey Kore yönetici eliti, ya da diğer bir deyişle Kim ailesi, “sorgulanamaz oboi suryeong” (Ebeveyn Lider) olarak tanımlanmaktadır. Bu sistem ve Kuzey Kore Anayasası'na göre, medya bir propaganda aracıdır. Sistemin bizzat kendisi sosyalizm, Kore milliyetçiliği ve Konfüçyanizmin bir karışımıdır. Bu siyasal sistem içinde medya da dâhil tüm Koreliler sosyalist ve neo-Konfüçyüsçü bir büyük ailenin (taegajong) parçası olarak kabul edilirler. Kuzey Kore'deki sistem “uri sik sahoejuui” (Kendi tarzımızda sosyalizm) olarak adlandırılmaktadır. Bu şekliyle Suryeong sistemi diğer sosyalist ülkelerden tamamıyla farklıdır. Bu çalışma, Kuzey Kore propaganda gazetesi The Pyongyang Times'ın web sitesini analiz etmek suretiyle ülkedeki medyanın geneline betimleyici bir bakış sunmayı ve ülke medyasını etkileyen siyasal ve tarihi arka planı açıklamayı amaçlamaktadır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Kuzey Kore Medyası, Suryeong sistemi, Kuzey Kore'de sosyalizm, Juche

### **Introduction: North Korea and *Juche* Ideology**

The Korean Peninsula which is encompassing eighty-five thousand square miles has been settled by the human species since prehistoric times. As far as the sources go, the Korean people were first governed by the Silla Dynasty in 668 A.D while the country was always located in a strategic and dangerous place. In the more recent periods of history, Korea was situated between the great powers like China, Japan and Russia. It was occupied by China, the Mongols, Japan and after World War II, the United States and the Soviet Union. Of those major powers, China had the greatest influence and the Korean kings embraced Chinese culture (Oberdorfer and Carlin 2014, 2-3). They also paid tribute to the Chinese emperor and were subsequently protected by him. Following the decline of China, the Sino-Japanese War of 1894 had removed China as protector of Korea. The influence of Japan became also important in Korean history and the Korean peninsula has been “the cause of rivalries and of contests between China and Japan” (Gilliland 1920, 47). In 1910, Japan annexed and colonized Korea and delivered the final blow to the local Chosun Dynasty. Japanese annexation has changed the cultural structure of Korea, even the names of the Korean cities were “Japanized”: Pyongyang became “Heijo” (today known as “capital of revolution”), Wonsan “Genzan”, and Seoul “Keijo” (Sandler 1999, 21). Before the annexation, the independence of Korea had been recognized by Japan and China and also by the Western powers like the United States, Great Britain and Germany. After the Japanese annexation, leftist resistance groups were formed in Korea and China.

Kim Il Sung, the future founder of the DPRK was the legendary hero of the guerrilla warfare against the Japanese army in Manchuria. This guerrilla warfare against the Japanese forces was also the cornerstone of the foundation of the country (Ilpyong and Dong-Bok 1980, 249). Kim Il Sung who was seventeen years old when he was expelled from school for revolutionary activities joined Socialist Korean guerrilla groups which were organized by the Chinese Communist Party in 1930 (Oberdorfer and Carlin 2014, 13). According to Sandler (1999, 21) the Japanese colonization became a catalyst for the close relationship between Korean and Chinese Communism and “some Koreans saw in Communism the hope for an end to their misery”. Remarkably, Communism and Socialism have usually had a close relationship to nationalist and Anti-Colonialist movements in eastern Asia, as may be seen in the examples of Vietnam, China and Laos. Therefore, Socialism served as a development and nationalist catalyst in the region, which is clearly also the case on the Korean peninsula. Following the defeat of Japan in 1945, the post-war control of Korea was divided between the Soviet Union and the United States. After the war, the Soviet Union and the United States agreed in August 1945 to divide the country at the 38th Parallel. A U.S-oriented regime was established in South

Korea under Syngman Rhee and a Communist regime in North Korea under Kim Il Sung. Pyongyang became the new capital of the Communist state. When Soviet forces began to withdraw from North Korea, they left a Communist regime and a well-trained North Korean army under the leadership of a legendary hero, Kim Il Sung, later also known as “The Great Leader” and “The Eternal President of North Korea” (Seth 2016, 8, 11).

Kim Il Sung’s ambition was to reunite Korea under a communist banner and this ambition gave way to the invasion of South Korea by the Northern forces. On June 25, 1950 North Korea invaded the South with Soviet and Chinese backing. This invasion has changed world politics and is also known as an historical turning point. It is estimated that 900.000 Chinese and 520.000 North Korean soldiers were killed or wounded. US casualties included 36.000 KIA [Killed in Action] (Oberdorfer and Carlin 2014, 8). This war made North Korea and South Korea, and also the US sworn enemies until now. As we can see in the research, the main news subjects in North Korean media focused mainly on South Korea and the US along with a continuing grudge towards Japan. The Korean War which continued for three years and one month was also a showdown between the US and USSR and meant not only the division of the peninsula into North and South Korea, but also the division of the world to two camps.

The war also changed the relationship between North Korea and other communist states, especially the Soviet Union. The most important change in North Korean style communism was the *Juche* ideology meaning “self-determination”. “Ju” means “to have responsibility” and “Che” means “body, the flesh”. So *Juche* means that “independence of a person or a country while taking a decision” and it is the opposite of *Sadaejui* which meant being a slave or servant to another big power-in other words South Korea (Adibelli 2016, 198). The *Juche* ideology consists of four formal tenets: man is the master of its fate; the master of the Revolution is the people; the Revolution must be pursued in a self-reliant manner; the Revolutions’ most important factor is loyalty to the Supreme Leader (*Suryeong*), Kim Il Sung (Cha 2012, 37). In this *suryeong* system, the leader himself is at the core of the system. *Juche*, elevates Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il to the highest positions in society along with the Korean Workers Party, the military and the guerilla fighters. *Juche* is also known as Kim Il Sungism (French, 2014, 46). Following the death of Kim Il Sung, his son Kim Jong Il and after the death of Kim Jong Il his grandson Kim Jong Un has taken on the role of *suryeong* (Park 2014, 5-6). According to *Juche* ideology, South Korea became a servant and lackey of capitalism and United States by alliance with the Western Block. The North Korean state did not collapse like the Eastern European communist states or the Soviet Union because they developed a unique system different from them. The DPRK’s party structure and leadership system is different from that

of former Eastern European communist states. Although American scholars identified North Korea as a “satellite state” or “puppet” of the Soviet Union, and described the situation in the North as “sovietization”, the North Korean government criticized the Soviet interference as “modern revisionism” and founded the *Juche* system in mid-1950s (Gwang-Oon 2007, 15,17). Interestingly, other socialist states as Romania and Albania also decided not to accept Soviet supremacy at a certain point. Albania left the Warsaw pact due to De-Stalinisation and perceived Soviet revisionism, never fully returning to the socialist camp. Romania merely chose a more independent foreign policy but mostly remained loyal to the USSR. North Korea chose a policy of drifting around China and the USSR, often playing off one against the other. This system is still continuing in the DPRK foreign policy. Therefore, the recent meeting between US President Donald J. Trump and DPRK leader Kim Jong Un should not be overrated: stability towards interior politics and flexibility towards foreign policy goals remains to be one of the corner stones of the DPRK. One important example that proves that North Korea was not just another “puppet” of the Soviet Union is the *Pueblo* incident. The *Pueblo* was an US Navy ship that was captured by the North Korean Navy near Wonsan on January 23, 1968 with its crew of eighty-three while conducting electronic surveillance on North Korean military bases. According to Gwang-Oon Kim, the United States were not able to solve this embarrassing problem also known as the “*Pueblo* nightmare” although the American officers “requested that the Soviet Union use its influence on its erstwhile “satellite state” to convince it to release the captured crew and the ship” (Gwang-Oon 2007, 16). North Korea did not move an inch. This clearly points out the distinct character of the DPRK and its foreign policy.

Kim Il Sung, in April 1965, outlined the three most important principles of *Juche*: “independence in politics” (*jaju*), “self-sufficiency in the economics” (*jarip*), and “self-reliance in national defence” (*jawi*). Those principles of *Juche* were also symbolizing North Korea’s rejection of the Soviet Union’s policy of de-Stalinization (Park 2014, 6). Many scholars have predicted that North Korean communism would also collapse after the breakdown of the USSR and other Eastern European communist states but the system has survived. Nicholas Eberstadt (2005, 513) who published an essay titled “The Coming Collapse of North Korea” in 1990, admits that he made a mistake because the North Korean regime survived for twenty-seven years after that diagnosis. According to Eberstadt, the North Korean state’s recent survival could be a modern variant of the so called Gallipoli phenomenon: “Imminent but averted collapse”. In the words of David Fromkin, with the victory of Gallipoli “the Ottoman Empire, which had been sentenced to death, received an unexpected last minute reprieve” (Fromkin, 1989, 154). This victory also secured the reputation of Mustafa Kemal Pasha (Atatürk) as a

heroic leader. Although the Ottoman Empire had been named much earlier as “the sick man of Europe” in 1853, it survived almost seventy years after that diagnosis.

The North Korean system is often described as *suryeong* (leader) system or “Confucian socialism”. It’s obvious that the elites have used and do still employ Confucian ideology for social control not only in North Korea but also in South Korea. Although the elites in the North rejected pre-modern Confucianism as “reactionary”, they used it de-facto (covering it up in socialist terms) in order to justify the state-centered ideology. Korea’s (North and South) main distinctive social characteristic is collectivism in a definition that was influenced by Confucianism. Confucianism sidelines “me” in favor of “us” and sanctifies paternalism, hierarchy, the perception that the leader is always right and strong, curbing the emotions and desires etc. (Gökçe 2017, 188). Park, Rehg and Lee (2005, 390) also state that there are five relation styles in Confucianism that regulates the social and interpersonal relationship. Those are “sovereign-subject”, “parent-child”, “husband-wife”, “relation between siblings” and “relation between friends”. According to those ethical rules, a sovereign must rule its subjects fairly and the subjects must be loyal to the sovereign (Gökçe 2017, 190). Confucian socialism in North Korea weakened the traditional extended family system of premodern Confucianism and integrated new families into the “socialist (and neo-Confucian) big family” (*taegajong*) whose father is the *suryeong* (Kang 2011, 69). It should be noted that society in South Korea adheres to similar values in social life though adopting a Western system of government. From the 1950’s until the 1980’s, the military that dominated politics of South Korea also showed characteristics of a benevolent paternal dictatorship that revered family, traditional values, national values and the armed forces. A similar tendency can still be observed in south Korean Corporate Culture. Therefore, at a closer look, both Koreas are not as far apart from each other in contrast to what it seems on the first glimpse.

According to Bruce Cumings, North Korea’s “neo-socialist corporatism is a mixture of socialism, corporatism, and Confucianism” (Woong Kang 2007, 64). Ancient myths are also used in North Korean regime along with socialism and Confucianism. At the end of the Japanese colonialism, the legend of *Dangun Wanggeom*, the mythological Korean creationism legend resurfaced. According to the legend, *Dangun Wanggeom* who was the son of a human princess and the god Kwon-ung, was also the father of the Korean people. He was born on the sacred *Baekdu San* (Baekdu Mountain). North Koreans believe that, they were the descendants of this legendary ancestor and they have his pure blood. They also believe that “they are the world’s cleanest race and superior to all others” because of this ancestor (Betts 2012, 42). Kim Jong Il himself also elevated to the level of *Dangun Wanggeom* by creating a story that he was

born on the sacred Baekdu Mountain under a rainbow, although he allegedly had really been born in a military camp in the Eastern USSR. Kim Jong Il is also referred as Parent Leader (*obo-i suryeong*) and as a “hermaphrodite figure” as his maternal side was praised and frequently stressed in terms of his caring nature (Myers, 2010, 38). Eastern and Central Asian mythic values therefore continue to influence society under the banner of socialism. As mentioned before, the new revolutionary government was a mixture of Soviet Marxism – Leninism, Maoism, Korean nationalism and Confucianism. This legend also legitimizes the “all mighty leader cult with the Mandate of Heaven” from a Confucian viewpoint (French 2014, 74). North Korea is therefore really *sui generis* and not comparable with other communist regimes of the world. The North Korean regime should be defined as nationalist rather than communist (Cummings 2007, 102). A strong nationalistic tone has always surfaced in Northern propaganda and aims at delegitimizing the South. Therefore, economic prosperity has been of special importance from Seoul’s perspective. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and Iron Curtain in the late 1980s and with the death of the “Eternal President” Kim Il Sung, the North Korean regime was forced to find a way to survival. The compulsory transformation of *Juche* ideology first changed the definition of the government system to “Socialism in Our Style” (*uri sik sahoejuui*) and then the contemporary North Korea became a “communist state without communism” in Jin Woong Kang’s words (Kang 2011, 79).

According to B.R. Myers, the present race-centric ideology of the DPRK was inspired by the Japanese who ruled Korea from 1910 until the end of WWII. The Japanese were seeing themselves as part of a superior Yamato race and after 1945 North Koreans used the same mythmaking in a Koreanized style (Gill 2012, 7). This mythmaking also serves as an instrument to reinforce the perception of a classless and ethnically homogeneous Korean society. It should be added that the Japanese during their rule in Korea also courted Koreans as being members of that racial family, if they were willing to accept the supremacy of Japanese culture. Therefore, this ideology still seems to be continued unconsciously within the identity forging process in the DPRK even if a strong Anti-Japanese rhetoric continues.

Byman and Lind (2010, 46-47) states that dictators survive with a “toolbox” that contains the instruments such as restrictive social policies; manipulation of ideas and information; use of force; co-optation; manipulation of foreign governments; and institutional coup-proofing. According to Max Weber, power needs to justify itself. This justification for regimes in order to hold on power, comes from providing an ideology. Charismatic leadership and nationalistic credibility are also important for gaining legitimacy. However, in order to maintain this legitimacy, the regime must control the information environment. Most of the

regimes including the North Korean regime, inculcate their ideas into their people by using mediums such as education, arts and entertainment. Along with other propaganda instruments such as monuments and Mass Games stadium shows, state-run media are also important for maintaining the legitimacy in North Korea (Byman and Lind 2010, 51-52).

### **North Korean State-Run Media as an Instrument of Propaganda**

Article 67 of the constitution states that North Korean citizens have freedom of speech, press, assembly, association and demonstration. Other articles of the constitution such as Article 52 do address the *Juche* and the socialist system. In contrast with Article 67, domestic media is strictly censored and also listening or watching foreign media broadcasts is strictly forbidden. All media in North Korea is state-run and in official government line (countrystudies.us/north-korea). All radios and televisions are also fixed to government-run stations in North Korea. The country has almost no internet access except for the senior party cadres. Their computer usage is also strictly monitored by the government (Daniel and Pearson 2015, 146). Nevertheless, North Korean government developed its information and communication technology and built a domestic intranet and it is the first country on the list of the Committee to Protect Journalists that censored the flow of information. However, the North Korean government has been to develop its strictly monitored IT industry since the mid-1990s, in order to catch up with the global trends. The regime also encouraged government officials, engineers, scientists and the university students to make use of digital technology. The reason for why the government attached importance to this subject is that they saw that digital technology is a *sine qua non* of a modern economy. So North Korea has launched a nation-wide and strictly monitored intranet known as *Kwangmyong* (Bright Light) in 2000. For economic development and modernizing the military, Kim Jong-Il declared that science is one of the three pillars for building a *Kangsong Daeguk* (Strong and Prosperous State) and internet has a crucial role for success in scientific researches (Chen, Ko and Ji-Yong 2010, 649-650).

Other types of communication, such as cellphone usage is similarly limited. There were two mobile networks in North Korea until May 24, 2004. Nevertheless, it was restricted to elites and also geographically. On May 24, 2004, cellphones were banned by the government until December 2008. On December 2008, Kim Jong-Il did allow cellphones and user numbers climbed to two million in May 2013 (Daniel and Pearson 2015, 146-147).

According to Reporters Without Borders, “the totalitarian regime in North Korea keeps its people in a state of ignorance through tight control of the media” however a “communications black market” has occurred on the North Korean – Chinese border where recordings of South Korean television soaps and films are circulating (bbc.com/news/world-

asia-pacific). Nevertheless, the Seth Rogen comedy film *The Interview*'s DVDs which is about a fictional CIA plot to kill Kim Jong-Un has been sent to North Korea by balloons. Leaflets criticizing the Kim family and bundles of US dollars were also tied to the balloons along with the DVDs ([bbc.com/news/world-asia-32213949](http://bbc.com/news/world-asia-32213949)). This is called “balloon propaganda campaigns” which is made by North and South Korean governments. Given the sacrosanct position of the Kim dynasty, the success of mocking this quasi-religious figure and targeting this discourse towards citizens of the DPRK seems questionable. It should be pointed out that, also in the early stages of Korean War, *bbira* (propaganda leaflets) were used by North and South Koreans. However, in those years the situation was different and the North Korean *bbira* seem to have been more enthusiastic than the leaflets produced by US forces (Eun-Jeong 2016, 301). As it is well-known, the USA carried out those methods of propaganda beginning with WWII and Cold War by using radio broadcasting directed towards countries such as China, USSR and socialist countries in Eastern Europe. Radio stations such as Voice of America (VOA) which was founded in February 24, 1942 and directed by the Office of War Information (OWI), Radio Free Europe (RFE) that was founded in 1951 and Radio Liberty (RL) were known as “Weapons of Cold War” and helped the capitalist system to overthrow the communist leaders and the ideology itself by stimulating the public’s “need for freedom” (Rigel, 1995, 101-103). Those radio stations were also trying to stimulate the nationalist emotions of the Soviet republics and undertook broadcasting in Armenian, Georgian, Estonian, Lithuanian languages.

Both South and North Korea are still targeting each other by propaganda broadcasting. The North Korean propaganda radio is called Voice of Korea (*Choson-ui Sori*) and broadcasts in Korean, Japanese, English, Arabic, Chinese, French, Russian, German and Spanish. The main news subjects of this radio are mainly about the “puppet” South Korean regime and the illegal activities of the “imperialist” United States. South Korea responds to those broadcasts with its propaganda radios Echo of Hope (*Heuimangeui Meari*) and Korean Ethnic Broadcasting (*Hanminjok Bangsong*). North Koreans do also acquire information from the international broadcasts listening of which is strictly forbidden (VOA, Radio Free Asia, Korea Broadcasting System). There are also ‘independent’ broadcasters such as Open Radio for North Korea, Radio Free Chosun, North Korea Reform Radio, and Free North Korea Radio (Tudor and Pearson, 2015, 155). According to BBC News Service, North Korean authorities designated radios as “new enemies of the regime” on June 13, 2004 ([news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/6037715](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/6037715)). According to Tudor and Pearson, although its believed that the country has been ruled by a “puppet regime”, South Korean radio broadcasting is considered more

trustworthy than the American radios such as Voice of America since South Koreans are evaluated as “brothers and sisters” of North Koreans (Tudor and Pearson, 2015, 158).

Although North Korea can be defined as a “fortress state” which is isolated from the international society, North Korea and China have sixteen border entrances along the Yalu and Tumen Rivers. Smuggled video tapes / CDs and DVDs are reaching to North Korean citizens by cross-border trading. It should be noted that video-cassette recorders (VCRs) were present in the North Korea beginning in the late 1980s and early 1990s, but it was very expensive for ordinary citizens to acquire. When cheap DVD players began to flood into northeastern China, those DVD players became more affordable to North Korean families. With the help of smugglers, South Korean soap operas and the American movies with South Korean subtitles have begun to flood into North Korea. The North Korean youth started to learn more about the South Korean prosperity and American culture from those smuggled DVDs. According to statistics, 350.000 DVD players were brought to North Korea in 2006 (Ha 2011, 15-16). South Korea is also using K-pop songs and groups such as Girls’ Generation and their popular song “Genie”, “HuH (Hit Your Heart) by 4 minute and “Bang, Bang, Bang” by Big Bang for propaganda. K-pop’s standard themes are love, desire, sexuality and physical attraction for another person but those feelings are also considered to be dangerous for the idea of “childish innocence” and for the conceptualization of the North Koreans as “asexual children” who do not demand libidinal pleasures. According to David Zeglen (2017, 146) Kim Jong Un’s legitimacy as “absolute celebrity” (and also the *suryeong* system) is in danger because the new generation who can achieve the smuggled CDs, USB drives and MP3 players, “does not pay attention to the authorities’ attempts to stimulate the idolization of Kim Jong Un”. In response to this “propaganda attack” of South Korea, Kim Jong Un who identifies “songs” as “weapons more powerful than a gun or aircraft” (Un 2016, 50) established the famous North Korean girls group Moranbong Band in 2012 in order to “redirect youth passions back to the Parent Leader” in Zeglen’s words (Zeglen, 2017, 146). Güven (2018, 208) also states that Kim Jong Un regime established this group in order to respond to the popular culture products by using its language but with the interpretation of *Juche* ideology. As a historical parallel, East Germany and other Soviet satellite states, in a similar fashion, first frowned upon “decadent” Western Music trends as beat and pop music, but later resorted to allowing their own pop culture to flow as Western media was consumed anyway. Therefore, we might point to Kim’s media attack as a similar response.

The North Korean regime is trying to control the information by using every tool in order to control the society and protect the *suryeong* system. For instance, common textbooks

are used at North Korean schools and their contents are mostly about Kim Jong Il, Kim family, condemnation of “puppet or imperialist states” such as Japan, South Korea and USA. This propaganda and information controlling method goes on through official broadcasting and newspapers. According to Sunghak Ha (2011, 18-19) “North Korea has attempted to strengthen its orthodox socialism through propaganda”. Besides that North Korea also regarded Cuba as its role model for the tight social control system.

Throughout history, political power has tried to control the media and communication with regulations. The political system of a country also determines the harshness of those regulations and mainly the communication system of that country (Cengiz, 2015, 258). For instance, in Western Europe for almost two hundred years after the spread of printing, the basic principles of authoritarianism were utilized for controlling the press. That authoritarian system was also used and adopted in modern times by countries such as Japan, Imperial Russia, Germany, Spain and many of the Asian and South American states (Siebert, Peterson and Schramm, 1963, 9-10). According to Siebert, Peterson and Schramm, there are four theories of press. *The Authoritarian Theory*, as mentioned before, is the theory of press control that determined mass communication pattern in many countries than any other press control method. It was developed during the late Renaissance period and used effectively by Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy for realizing direct government control of the mass media. *The Libertarian Theory* also known as free press theory, was developed with the “self-righting process” idea of John Milton. As it is well-known, according to liberalism, individuals can make contribution to the social and individual development by using his/her mind. As the “individual” and “his/her mind” is the main reference point of this theory, the “individual” should be free to publish whatever he/she likes (Ozgen, 2006, 106). *The Social Responsibility Theory*, was developed as the criticism of the *laissez-faire, laissez-passer* mentality of the libertarian theory. According to this theory, “press sees its role as serving both financial needs and the public’s need for information” (Song, 2005, 11). The terrifying power of the press in democratic societies and especially in the U.S. is also criticized by many observers. According to left-wing intellectuals mass media is subservient to the wealthy people and it openly supports the military-industrial complex. Edward Scripps states that “the government of such a democracy as ours is practically a government by newspapers” (Schudson, 2011, 8).

*The Soviet-Communist Theory*, shaped by Marxist-Leninist ideology, states that only the privileged class benefits from the freedom of press in capitalist system. According to Karl Marx (1818-1883) dominant classes became more and more powerful by seizing and controlling the means of production and capital. In this situation, the intellectual production

would also have controlled by those dominant classes. Although Marx never openly mentioned the press, his ideas about intellectual production formed the basis of the Soviet media system. However, the fundamental principles about press were mostly developed by Lenin rather than Marx (Cengiz, 2015, 258). Lenin states that, “freedom of press” is only a deceptive slogan of “pure democracy”, it is deceptive because we cannot talk about “freedom of press” while the printing presses and biggest stocks of paper are appropriated by the capitalists. According to Lenin, in bourgeois societies, freedom of press means a kind of right used by the wealthy in order to shape and fabricate public opinion and to hypnotize masses systematically (Ozgen, 2006, 123). In that case, the press must be liberated from capitalist enslavement. In Soviet-Communist Theory, the media is owned by the state and its used as a propaganda tool for the Communist system and party. Mass media is also used by the elite of the Communist party for “public announcements”. Another important function of media in the Soviet system is to educate the working class and to work for the benefit of society rather than individuals. Therefore, for the sake of the benefit of society and working class, the Communist Party legitimized and considered censorship as necessary.

As a matter of fact, Article 125 of the 1936 USSR Constitution states that, “In conformity with the interests of the working people, and in order to strengthen the socialist system, the citizens of U.S.S.R. are guaranteed by law: a. freedom of speech, b. freedom of the press, c. freedom of assembly, including the holding of mass meetings, d. freedom of street processions and demonstrations.” (constituii.files.wordpress.com) In that case, the main duty of the press is to “strengthen the socialist system” and we can talk about freedom of press as long as it performs this duty. In the North Korean Constitution, the aforementioned Article 67 refers to freedom of press nevertheless Article 63 indicates that the rights and duties of citizens are based on the collectivist principle, “One for all and all for one” (countrystudies.us/north\_korea).

### **Newspapers, Radio and Television in North Korea**

The DPRK leadership has sustained with the help of nationalism, mythology and the *suryeong* system that limns the Korean people “as childlike innocents in a hostile, impure world, protected by their “Parent Leader”” in B.R. Myers’s words. The *suryeong* system is also compatible with fundamental Korean values such as Confucianism. The regime uses every possible medium such as education, memorialization, arts and entertainment and media which is strictly controlled by the state (Byman and Lind, 2010, 52). This state system can be seen as a mixture of a Confucianist, socialist (Marxism-Leninism) and nationalistic-mythological (the legend of *Dangun Wanggeom* for instance legitimizes the “purity of the blood” myth) thought.

This mixture is embodied in the *suryeong* system or at the “Parent Leader” who is also a legendary war hero (Kim Il Sung). Kim Il Sung was established as the “sun of the nation” and “eternal President of the Republic”.

Kim Jong Un states that “one should imbibe the Party’s ideas the way one breathes air” (Un, 2016, 22). In that case media in North Korea is the source of oxygen for the Party along with the other instruments such as monuments, Mass Games and so on.

The Freedom of the Press Report that was issued by Freedom House in 2016, states that there is no free press in North Korea. According to the report, North Korea is one of the most repressive media environments in the world in 2015. The report also mentions that all journalists working at the newspapers of the country are also members of the ruling Korean Workers’ Party (KWP) and all media outlets are major vehicles for political propaganda of the regime, party and Kim family ([freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2016/north-korea](http://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2016/north-korea)). According to a report issued by Freedomhouse in 2018, although several foreign news agencies have established bureau offices in Pyongyang, those organizations are strictly controlled by the state. In August 2017, a North Korean court sentenced two South Korean journalists and their publishers to death in absentia for describing recent economic and social changes in North Korea in the book *North Korea Confidential* ([freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2018/north-korea](http://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2018/north-korea)).

*Rodong Sinmun* (Labour Daily) is the North Korean official newspaper of the KWP and it has a web page in English. According to the book *North Korea: A Country Study* published in 1981, the circulation of this newspaper is approximately 1.5 million. It is the most widely read newspaper in North Korea and its main objective is the propaganda of Kim dynasty. The newspaper is recognized as the mouthpiece of North Korean government and was founded in November 1945 in Pyongyang. In its *Understanding Korea* series published by Foreign Languages Publishing House by North Korean officials, the mission of the newspaper is explained as follows:

Its mission is to make a positive contribution to accomplishing the revolutionary cause of Juche down through the generations, guided by the Juche idea and the Juche-oriented theory of the press, and by carrying forward the brilliant traditions of revolutionary publications established by Kim Il Sung in the flames of the anti-Japanese revolutionary struggle (Sim, 2017, 70).

Other important newspapers of North Korea are *Joson Inmingun* (Korean People’s Army Daily), the newspaper of North Korean Army, *Minju Choson* (Democratic Korea), the

government newspaper and *Rodong Chongnyon* (Working Youth) newspaper of the trade union federation ([www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-15259016](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-15259016)).

*Minju Choson* was first published in June 1946 and it's the organ of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly and the Cabinet of the DPRK. The mission of the newspaper is to rally the working people of the state and the officials around the KWP by spreading the Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism thought (Sim, 2017, 71). The newspaper was first published under the name of *Pyongyang Ilbo* (Pyongyang Newspaper) then changed its name (Song, 2005, 49). Another important national newspaper published in North Korea is *Chongyon Jonwi* (a.k.a. *Rodong Chongnyon*), the organ of the Central Committee of the Kimilsungist-Kimjongilist Youth League. The newspaper has changed its name four times until today and its first issue was published in April 1946 under the title of *Chongnyon* (Youth). According to Wonsook Song (2005, 50), "the paper's style of writing and editing tends to be contemporary and appeals directly to passionate, progressive and optimistic youth". *Joson Inmingun* is an army newspaper and its mission is also to equip citizens with the *Juche* ideology. In line with official ideology, the army of North Korea is the "party's army" and the party is the highest political authority of North Korea. During the Kim Il Sung period, the Korean Workers' Party played the central role in politics. However, under the leadership of his son Kim Jong Il, North Korean party-state system was transformed to a military-first (*Songun*) political system (Ilpyong, 2005, 118). The Korean People's Army's (KPA) main duty is to protect the *Juche* ideology under the banner of military-first (*Songun*) politics (Woo, 2016, 254). Therefore, *Joson Inmingun* belongs to the party and the army.

There are also ten local newspapers in the different regions of North Korea: *Pyongnam Newspaper* (1945), *Hamnam Newspaper* (1945), *Hambuk Newspaper* (1945), *Jakang Newspaper* (1949), *Langkang Newspaper* (1955), *Kangwon Newspaper* (1945), *Hwangnam Newspaper* (1945), *Hwangbuk Newspaper* (1945) and *Kaeseong Newspaper* (1952) (Song, 2005, 51).

*The Pyongyang Times* is another important newspaper along with the *Rodong Sinmun* for our research. This newspaper is published in English and reflected North Korea's politics for foreigners. The newspaper was first published on May 6, 1965 and is the country's only English newspaper. The eight-page tabloid weekly is distributed to 120 countries and published by Foreign Languages Publishing House ([www.pyongyangtimes.com.kp/en/](http://www.pyongyangtimes.com.kp/en/)).

The television and radio stations are also strictly controlled by the state. In KWP's radio and television stations Korean Central Broadcasting Station and Korean Central TV, programs are made in reverence of the 'Great Leader' Kim Il Sung and the 'Dear Leader' Kim Jong Il.

There is also one cultural television channel (*Mansudae TV*) and a state-run external radio station (Voice of Korea) in North Korea. The Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) is the primary news agency of the country ([countrystudies.us/north-korea/64.htm](http://countrystudies.us/north-korea/64.htm)).

### English News Sites in North Korea

As mentioned before, the media in North Korea has mainly served as a propaganda tool of the Party and the Korean Workers Party strictly controls the media (Song 2005, 64). According to Kim Jong Il, “without ideological work, it would be impossible for socialism to emerge, exist and develop”. Before the 1990s, little information flowed in or out of the country (Ha 2011, 17). North Korean authorities used the traditional press effectively until 1997. North Korea was one of the countries that did not have internet access along with Afghanistan, Bhutan, Burma, Burundi, Congo, Gabon, Guinea Bissau, Iraq, Liberia, Libya, Mauritania, Oman, Equatorial Guinea, Rwanda, Somalia, Syria, Yemen and Zaire/Congo in 1996 (Song 2005, 59). Every country had different reasons for this lack of connectivity but this media isolation in North Korea served to create and consolidate an ideology (*Juche*) and to build a personality cult to ensure the Kim regime’s power.

Kim Jong Un, the grandson of the “Eternal President of the Republic” Kim Il Sung, followed the path of his father and grandfather, and the policies and ideologies of his regime do not differ greatly from the previous regime (Park 2014, 10). For instance, the legendary status and “deification” of the “Kim dynasty” (Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il) has been emphasized by Kim Jong Un in order to legitimize himself. He always highlights that he will follow “the path, ideas and directions” of his father and grandfather in culture, education, arts and literature. The importance of the Party, the army and *Juche* ideology (and a new relative concept: Kimilsungism and Kimjongilism) are always emphasized by Kim Jong Un (Boltaina Bosch 2013, 5-6). Yong Soo Park explains this rigidity with the path-dependence theory that was developed by scholars who were critical of neoclassical economic theory and gives the example of the situation of an African cheetah running after a small antelope at full speed in order to explain the impossibility or at least the complexity of change in North Korean system:

Although a much bigger antelope comes into the cheetah’s view, it is easier and better for the cheetah just to keep chasing the small antelope because it requires a tremendous amount of energy and a more sophisticated technique for the cheetah to suddenly change direction in order to pursue the bigger one (Park 2014, 4).

Unpreventable developments in information technologies have forced the Kim Jong Un regime for a controlled and cautious change. According to Wonsook Song, North Korean

government used the internet as a propaganda tool. In a report that was issued by the U.S. Department of State in 1999; “computers based in North Korea accessed frequently to the U.S. Department of State’s website in order to collect information” (Song, 2005, 59).

### **Analysis of News Subjects Published in *The Pyongyang Times* English Page**

The most important news sites of North Korea are *Rodong Sinmun*, *Pyongyang Times*, *KCNA* and *Naenara*. All of those are serving as mouthpiece of Kim Dynasty, the Party and the government. Our example will be *The Pyongyang Times* which serves as the “propaganda newspaper” abroad. The newspaper has eight different sections: “Politics”, “Economy”, “Culture”, “Women”, “Sports”, “Reunification”, “South Korea” and “International”. *The Pyongyang Times* is different from *Rodong Sinmun* and *Naenara* because there is no section such as “Supreme Leader’s Activities”. Therefore, in the “Politics” section most of the news is about Kim Jong Un. When we look at the “Economy” section of the newspaper we can see that the main subjects are about farming activities and agro-industrial sectors such as “Mushroom farms” and “Rabbit breeding”. The aim of “women” section of the newspapers is to describe “the ideal women and mother who will raise children that is strictly bounded to the *Juche* ideology”. For instance, the newspaper claims that North Korean women have many rights with the news article “Korean women enjoy genuine human rights” (<http://www.pyongyangtimes.com.kp/?bbs=25460>). This section is naturally different from the newspapers of the capitalist world. In those newspapers, fashion, secrets of beauty namely the news which “sells”, are distributed.

In “About us” sector of *The Pyongyang Times*, the newspaper is described as “DPRK’s single English newspaper” and its aim is to “highlight Korean peoples’ efforts to build a socialist cultured nation and efforts to unify in an independent and peaceful way”. It’s an eight page weekly that is distributed to over 120 countries (<http://www.pyongyangtimes.com.kp/>).

According to newspapers’ internet site the newspapers another aim is “to build a peaceful and happy society”. As it was mentioned before, those aims are compatible with the Soviet-Communist Theory and DPRK’s constitution.

In the “International” section of the newspaper; news about the U.S., China, Russia and Cuba seem to be more important than those of other countries. Especially the U.S. is evaluated as an enemy for the state and evaluated as “evil”.

**Table 1.** International News Section of *Pyongyang Times* Reports by Country

Country	No of News	Negative	Neutral	Positive
U.S.A	46	41	2	3
China	28	0	2	26

<b>Russia</b>	31	0	4	27
<b>Cuba</b>	16	0	0	16
<b>Japan</b>	29	24	3	2
<b>Iran</b>	7	0	0	7
<b>Syria</b>	6	0	1	5
<b>S. Korea</b>	2	0	0	2
<b>Israel</b>	4	4	0	0
<b>Palestine</b>	5	0	0	5

Table 1 shows the main subjects of international news and the evaluation of countries by the Pyongyang Times. From 01.01.2018 to 11.07.2018 there are 46 news about U.S.A and 41 of them have negative content. News about Israel and Japan do also mostly have negative content. As Japan annexed and colonized Korea in 1910, this country is seen as an enemy of North Korea. Furthermore the U.S. was seen as an enemy because of the Korean War. The South Korean regime is also seen as “puppet government” and lapdog of the evil capitalist system and the U.S.A.. As a general evaluation, we might conclude that the media in the DPRK is keeping its readers updated on current and former socialist states, regional countries and rivals. The positive coverage of Russia and China seems to be logical as both countries are close regional and economic partners in Pyongyang’s foreign relations. On the other hand the coverage of Syria, Iran, Cuba and Palestine points out to continuity in terms of ideological closeness and -even more important- an anti-imperialist struggle. Therefore, the North Korean media audience may get limited information on world politics but is certainly kept up to date on the global anti-imperialist movement as propagated by Pyongyang.

Within the foreign language news services of the DPRK, the US is presented in negative terms. In order to construct an image of solidarity with the DPRK's perceived anti-imperialist struggle, news regarding US actions are following a certain scheme. Usually a negative comment regarding the US and its foreign policy by any country is given in summary or exact wording. Then, a negative connotation regarding that development and pushing responsibility for the perceived negative reaction towards the US is given. if possible, other official statements by third states are also included in order to construct the image of the US as a "pariah state". Summarized, the DPRK media tries to carve out an image of "international solidarity" against the US from an international point of view by summing up the largest possible number of negative statements against the US. It may be said that the DPRK follows press policy of the Eastern block between the 1950s and 1980s, in creating the image of the "evil US" as a "boogeyman" threatening world peace and global stability. In contrast, "progressive states" that are upholding a united front against so called US imperialism are presented as acting with a

single voice. Whether the DPRK is aware that such statements might seem outdated for the international reader is unknown. Possibly, the official narrative published in Korean language media is just refurbished for an international audience.

Within the *Pyongyang Times*, we are able to present multiple examples of the changing course of the DPRK's foreign policy as well as the traditional hagiography of the leadership. At the beginning of 2018, the traditional "leader worship" is linked to international relations in form of glorifying words for the Kimjongilia flower at exhibitions in Russia and China. (*Pyongyang Times* 06.01.2018) As both countries tend to be close to the DPRK, the traditional policy of presenting the population, -but as in case of the *Pyongyang Times*- also a foreign audience a positive image of the leadership, is continued. While it is very likely that news subjects within the DPRK and towards foreign readers are altered, those kind of news are likely a mirror of domestic media coverage. An example of "international solidarity" between the DPRK and "progressive groups" on the international stage is given in the signing of the "Pyongyang Declaration" by the Workers Party of the Democratic Republic of Congo (08.01.2018). Those kind of events are usually presented shortly, without elaborating on the background of the respective foreign partner. Whether this is done as a mirror image of domestic news, and kept short due to the limited exposure of the DPRK population towards international events or due to the relative insignificance of those groups for foreign audiences is not clear yet. Important is, that a positive image of the DPRK as an international player can be presented in the media. In the beginning of 2018, a review of the past year (2017) is accommodated by harsh criticism towards the "US and its minions" who have been kept in bay by the DPRK's military strength and nuclear deterrent policy. Apparently, in the beginning of 2018 the US is still presented as the usual enemy (24.01.2018). An interesting glimpse towards the breaking of ice between the DPRK and the ROK is given in an otherwise uncommented short piece on the visit of the South Korean Presidency's head of the National Security Office, Jong Ui Yong (03.05.2018). The short and neutral coverage is likely due to still developing process, nevertheless, demeaning language towards the South is absent. The visit of leader Kim Jong Un to China is presented in a number of news, where the positive impact of personal ties between Kim and Xi Jinping is also stressed. Here we see an example of continuity of DPRK-China relations, which usually tend to be followed closely and very positively unless a greater strengthening of DPRK-Russian ties is preferred (30.03.2018). Furthermore, the *Times* stresses that all sections of the DPRK populace are closely following the foreign visit which marks a tendency of greater openness towards foreign policy in general. As the audience of the *Pyongyang Times* is consisting of foreigners, this development might also be intended to

present the unilateral stance of people and leadership towards foreign relations. As Kim is assigning a prominent role to his wife, her appraisal of the performance of a Chinese Art Troupe offers another example of presenting positive Sino-DPRK relations. With the role of a first lady literally unknown under Kim's predecessors, an image change in politics as well as news coverage is apparent, as shown in the previous example (16.04.2018). A news piece on the bestowment of the International Kim Il Sung price views it as an important cultural event and evaluates it as the continuation of "positive" DPRK international activities. Those kind of news are intended towards a foreign as well as domestic audience and should be evaluated as "positive routine". (11.04.2018) A visit by the director of the DPRK's foreign affairs ministry to several African countries is covered in great depth, presenting a proactive DPRK in foreign affairs and trying to point out the countries' role as supporting partners for developing countries. It is interesting to note that the DPRK has tried to cultivate that image at least since the 1960s and still continues in that course (02.05.2018). A news piece on coordinated South Korean-US military manouvres is presented as a negative event regarding inter-Korean relations, however it is remarkable that the piece is absent of foul language. Therefore, the tendency towards a more open approach towards the South and the US, foreshadowing closer DPRK-US talks, is clearly visible. It seems that both audiences, domestic and foreign, are prepared for a downtoning of anti-imperialis rhetorics (16.05.2018). Subsequently, high - level inter-Korean talks are presented in a neutral and quite professional manner (02.06.2018). Nevertheless, solidarity and condolence messages towards the Palestinian Authority are coupled with anti-imperialist and anti-Israeli messages, showing continuity in the DPRK's image as an anti-imperialist country (21.05.2018).

**Table 2.** International News Subjects in the *Pyongyang Times* Reports by Subject

<b>Subjects</b>	<b>No of News</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Positive</b>
<b>DPRK Leadership (International Context)</b>	5	0	0	5
<b>Foreign delegations and the DPRK</b>	9	0	1	8
<b>DPRK nuclear policy/defense issues</b>	3	1	0	2

<b>DPRK- Republic of Korea relations</b>	3	1	2	0
<b>DPRK-China relations</b>	9	0	1	8
<b>DPRK cultural activities abroad</b>	3	0	0	3
<b>DPRK-US summit</b>	1	0	1	0
<b>S. Korea</b>	2	0	0	2
<b>Israel</b>	4	4	0	0
<b>Palestine</b>	5	0	0	5

### Conclusion

North Korea (DPRK) has a unique ideology, *Juche*, which is a mixture of socialism, Korean nationalism and Confucianism. North Korean officials identify this *sui generis* ideology as “*uri sik sahoejuu*” (Our Style of Socialism). The Kim Dynasty, especially the founding father of the state Kim Il Sung is identified with the legendary half-God *Dangun Wangeom* who was born at holy *Baekdu Mountain*. Because of this legend, no one can question the Kim Dynasty in North Korea, in contrast to other countries’ leaders. Nevertheless, as the mythological justification of the Kim regime has gained a quasi-religious character, we might ask whether some aspects of Kim’s media policy and legitimacy might be compared to theocratic or religiously legitimated governments/ countries. With a world divided into friends and foes, the North Korean media seems to run a certain message. However, the tone of propaganda can very well be tuned regarding global political developments: in a phase of rapprochement, hate tirades are likely to cease. On the other hand colder relations with a state are likely to be reflected in the media as well.

The Media in North Korea also serves as the official mouthpiece of the Kim Dynasty, the KWP and the government. The media is also compatible with the local socialist system along with Korean nationalism and the mythological creation legend of *Dangun Wangeom*. Within this limits, we cannot speak of freedom of press and media independence in North Korea. While the media in North Korea is still strictly controlled, with the development of technology, especially young citizens of North Korea can achieve access to smuggled media productions outside of the bounds of ideology. *The Pyongyang Times* newspaper is a kind of propaganda newspaper which is published especially for the foreign audience. Online and pressed versions of that newspaper is available. The newspapers main target is to give

information about North Korean discourse about US- North Korean, South Korean- North Korean and Japan-North Korean relationships. As we can see clearly on our research, the DPRK leadership and the KWP could not be criticized by the newspaper. Relationship and the news subjects about the US and Japan are mostly given in negative manner. Therefore, we have to say that the newspaper isn't so harsh about the South Korean issues although it criticizes the South Korean governments as "puppet regimes" of the US. The news subjects about China, Cuba and Russia are mostly given in positive manner.

With the help of music groups (K-pop) of South Korea origin, American movies with Korean subtitles etc., the opinions of the North Korean youth are slightly changing. Kim-Jong Un- most probably having received education in Switzerland- is well aware of this trend and tries to counter that development in creating a more open entertainment culture. Furthermore, Kim-Jong Un, in contrast to his father, cultivates the image of a leader that is present among the common citizens, hugging young soldiers, visiting families in their homes together with his wife and not even concealing handicaps, as he was shown in TV with a broken leg. On one side, the godlike image of the dynasty continues, but on the other side, Kim-Jong Un presents himself as a real life celebrity, countering outside influences. His recent meeting with US President Donald J. Trump in Singapore and the media attention might be cited as an example how Kim elevates himself in the media – for foreign but even more for domestic audiences. Last but not least, Kim Jong Un in habit, speaking and stature closely copies the behavior of the DPRK's revered founding father, Kim-Il Sung. This is a policy to re-unite careful reforms together with the myth of the good old times- all presented in visual media. We should conclude that even propaganda directed at foreign audiences principally mirrors Pyongyang's self-image towards its domestic audience. In that sense, hostile and friendly rhetoric's, the description of foreign policy developments etc. should be primarily evaluated as a tool of legitimizing the DPRK's leadership vis-a-vis its own people.

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