

## DYNAMISM OF POLITICS AND STATUS OF INTELLECTUALS IN NORTH KOREA

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*North Korea's policy on intellectuals has focused on prohibiting their voice and forcing them into taking loyalty; moreover, it has not allowed any exit as an alternative way for the discontented intellectuals. Such harsh suppression may be attributed to Kim Il Sung's political struggle with other factions, particularly the communists of South Korea origin who were accused of having worked for Americans. North Korean intellectuals had to face another ordeal during the socialist development in the 1960s when the authorities took the policy of revolutionizing intellectuals and turning them into working class, depriving them of a meaning of social group. The policy contributed to their uncertain social status and passive attitude, resulting scholarly and technological backwardness. The intellectuals are not likely to become an active agent for social and political change in the near future. Those in social science and technology will become beneficiaries of new policies initiated by the authorities, only if they succeed in theoretically justifying the policies and contribute to the implementation with technical expertise.*

### INTRODUCTION

The collapse of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union vividly reflected a symbolic completion of the life cycle of the socialist system. This historic event was the terminal point of a cycle of formation, development, change, crisis, and decline. Students of socialism who failed to predict its fate have belatedly been engaged in a retrospective analysis of the cycle, using various theoretical perspectives. They have focused on the agents of change, and particularly on the role of intellectuals in creating change. In fact, intellectuals of Central European countries — Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, etc. — were key players of the systemic change. They were especially influential in the expansion of the private sphere vis-a-vis the public sphere that was dominated by the party and the state.

The question now is whether or not intellectuals might affect any type of change in the North Korean socialist system. Will they play a leading role for social change? What kind of role will they play in the future? These are challenging questions for social scientists in general, and North Korea observers in particular. They could be answered through close investigation of the historical experience of North Korean intellectuals. By looking at the emblem of the Korean Worker's Party, which is composed of a hammer, a

sickle, and a brush, some may assume that North Korean intellectuals form one of the three pillars of the existing regime. However, since the social status of North Korean intellectuals has been different from that of the former Central European intellectuals, it is premature to assert that North Korean intellectuals will become a leading agent of future change.

This study will analyze changes in the status of North Korean intellectuals and explore the future relationship between intellectuals and social change. The distressful fate of these intellectuals began with the two historical events that occurred right after the liberation from Japanese colonial rule: national division in 1945 and outbreak of the Korean War in 1950. These events brought about persecution of the old intellectuals in the midst of factional strife among the power elite. Even some of those who voluntarily moved into the North to avoid the repression of the left in the South, and to participate in the North's state building, later came under purge. Then, the consolidation of the personality cult of Kim Il Sung and the power succession to his son led another round of deterioration of the fate of intellectuals. Kim's class policy focused on the transformation of intellectuals into a part of the working class, which resulted in not only decline of status and morale of the intellectuals but also regression of science and technology. This study will delve into the dynamic relationship between political change and the status of intellectuals from a historical perspective.

## SOCIALIST TRANSFORMATION AND PERSECUTION OF INTELLECTUALS

### *Dualistic Policy toward Intellectuals during State Building*

With the end of World War II, Korea was liberated by the U.S. and Soviet occupation armies. This, however, signified the beginning of a history of national division. When Kim Il Sung and his faction, with support from the Soviet occupation forces, were preparing for the construction of a socialist system, the size of the intellectuals in the North was minimal. The shortage was especially serious in the case of technical intellectuals. They numbered only 1,500, far below what was necessary to operate various facilities formerly run by the Japanese colonials.<sup>1</sup> In this respect, Kim Il Sung stated, "Technology and human resources solve everything."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Kim Il Sung, "*Minju geonseol ui hyeongyedan gwa munhwain eui immu* [The current stage in the construction of democracy and the tasks of cultured people]" (Kim's speech to the second meeting of provincial people's committees, parties, campaigners of social organizations, cultured people, and artists, September 28, 1946), *Collection of Kim Il Sung's Works*, Vol. II

Although Kim Il Sung recognized the shortage of intellectuals, he also implemented a dualistic policy toward them. First, the policy consisted of co-opting the so-called “old intellectuals” educated under Japanese colonialism. Immediately after the Korean liberation, Kim urged old intellectuals along with national capitalists, small traders, craftsmen, farmers, workers and religious people to participate in “anti-imperialist, anti-feudal, and democratic revolution” — a transitional step leading to full-scale socialism.<sup>3</sup> Kim was quite aggressive in recruiting old intellectuals. For instance, he urged Hong Myeong-hi, a famous novelist and the author of *Im Keok-jeong*, to reside permanently in the North, when Hong visited North Korea.<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that this policy regarding intellectuals induced leftist intellectuals in the South — who were troubled by anti-communist atmosphere in the South — to join the North. During the period between the liberation in 1945 and the breakout of the Korean War in 1950, a large number of technological intellectuals (such as Jeong Jun-taek,<sup>5</sup> Yi Seung-gi, etc.), literary intellectuals (such as Han Seol-ya, Yi Gi-yeong, Im Hwa, Kim Nam-cheon, Yi Tae-jun, etc.), artistic intellectuals (such as Choe Seung-hi, Mun Ye-bong, etc.) and medical intellectuals (such as Yi Byeong Nam) crossed the border to go to the North.<sup>6</sup>

Second, the early policy on intellectuals was to educate a new breed of

(Pyongyang: Korean Workers Party Press, 1979), p. 459.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.*, p. 460.

<sup>3</sup>Kim Il Sung, “*Jinbojeok minjujuewi e daehayeo* [On progressive democracy]” (Speech to the students of Pyongyang Political School for Workers and Farmers, October 3, 1945), *Collection of Kim Il Sung’s Works*, Vol. I (Pyongyang: Korean Workers Party Press, 1979), p. 290.

<sup>4</sup>Kim Il Sung, “*Hong Myeong-hi wa han damhwa* [Talks with Hong Myeong-hi]” (May 6, 1948), *Collection of Kim Il Sung’s Works*, Vol. IV (Pyongyang: Korean Workers Party Press, 1979), pp. 313-4.

<sup>5</sup>Jeong Jun-taek was born in 1902 in Gyeonggi Province. He went to the North immediately after the Korean liberation from Japanese rule. He initially worked as the technical chief and manager of Cheongjin (Kim Chaek) Steel Mill. He was later appointed as the Chairman of the State Planning Committee (September 1948), and member of the Central Committee of Korean Workers Party (April 1956), Vice Premier of the State Council (December 1972). His status was higher than that of Yi Seung-gi, an inventor of vinalon, who went to the North in 1952. Jeong was one of the successful persons in North Korea’s policy for integrating old intellectuals.

<sup>6</sup>In the case of literary intellectuals, those with leftist views went to the North in several phases. The first flow took place at the juncture of a reshuffle of leadership among the literary intellectuals just after independence from Japanese rule. When the Korea Headquarters for the Construction of Literature and Alliance for Proletarian Literature were merged, those who lost leadership positions at this juncture — Yi Gi-yeong, Han Seol-ya, Song Yeong, Yi Dong-gyu, Yun Gi-jeong, An Mak, Park Se-yeong — crossed the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel from end-1945 to early-1946. The second flow to the North was with Southern Communist leaders under repression. When the US occupation authorities attempted to arrest Park Heon-yeong and began to limit Communist activities, Im Hwa, Yi Tae-jun, Kim Nam-cheon, Yi Won-jo went to the North in

intellectuals. In 1946, under the slogan of “train national leaders,” North Korea began to establish various institutions of education. The most representative examples are Pyongyang Institute (February 23) for the education of military and political cadre, Central Party School (June 3) for the education of party cadre, Central School for High Ranking Cadre (July 1) for the education of the administrative and economic elite, and Kim Il Sung University (September 15) as the first university in the North. The most serious issue in establishing these educational institutions was to recruit instructors, and the only solution available to the North was to co-opt the old intellectuals. Kim Il Sung was especially interested in alluring intellectuals from the South for the establishment of Kim Il Sung University. “First, we have to gather all scholars in the North, and if that is not sufficient, we have to invite advanced scholars from the South and doing this will solve the problem of recruiting educators necessary to establish our university,” Kim said.<sup>7</sup>

Due to the North’s policy for the training of new intellectuals, Kim Il Sung University, which consisted of 7 schools and 1,500 undergraduate students in 1946 at the time of its opening, expanded to house 8 schools and 3,813 undergraduate students in 1947. In 1949, the school was composed of 14 schools and its first class graduated.<sup>8</sup> The policy was successful in the technological field as well. In 1949, about 4,000 new technological intellectuals graduated from the North’s technical schools. This meant a considerable advance, considering that there were only 1,500 technicians at the time of Korean liberation. At the same time, North Korea began to send students to the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe to equip itself with high-quality

1947 and 1948, following the leaders of the South Korean Workers Party. The third flow occurred during the Korean War. With the establishment of the Republic of Korea, a number of leftist writers had changed their ideological position. During the Korean War, many other literary intellectuals joined the North either voluntarily or by abduction. Kweon Yeong-min, “*Weolbuk munin eul eotteotge bolgeotinga* [How to see the writers who went to the North],” *Weolbuk munin yeongu* [Studies on writers who went to the North] (Seoul: Munhaksasangsa, 1989), pp. 18-9.

<sup>7</sup>Kim Il Sung, “*Jonghapdaehak eul seulde daehayeo* [On building university]” (Talk with workers in the field of education, November 3, 1945), *Collection of Kim Il Sung’s Works*, Vol. I, p. 384.

<sup>8</sup>Kim Il Sung, “*Sae Joseon eui usuhan minjok ganbu ga doegi wihayeo baeugo tto baewoo ya handa* [To become an excellent national cadre of the new Korea, one has to study and study more]” (Speech commemorating the first anniversary of Kim Il Sung University, October 1, 1947), *Collection of Kim Il Sung’s Works*, Vol. III (Pyongyang: Korean Workers Party Press, 1979), p. 457; Kim Il Sung, “*Seonjin gwhak gisul gwa aeguksasang euro mujanghan minjok ganbu ga doera* [You must become national cadres armed with advanced science and technology and patriotic ideology]” (Speech to the first graduation ceremony of the School of Physical Science, Kim Il Sung University, December 28, 1949), *Collection of Kim Il Sung’s Works*, Vol. V (Pyongyang: Korean Workers Party Press, 1980).

human resources: 80 and 100 students were sent abroad in 1948 and 1949 respectively.<sup>9</sup>

*Purge of Intellectuals during the Korean War*

The Korean War caused another round of a serious shortage of intellectuals because university students were recruited to the armed forces. After General MacArthur and his forces successfully landed in Incheon in September 1950, it became clear that North Korea could not win the war. North Korea continued to stress the slogan of ultimate victory, but it came to be concerned with post-war rehabilitation. With the beginning of cease-fire talks, North Korea summoned university students back to campus because of the need to educate technological intellectuals necessary for post-war recovery.<sup>10</sup> North Korea's policy was to make engineering and natural sciences majors to occupy more than 70% of undergraduate students. This was going to be the foundation of a Stalinist development strategy — "Emphasis on Heavy Industry, Simultaneous Development of Light Industries and Agriculture."<sup>11</sup>

It is notable that support for the education of the new intellectuals would be the beginning of the suppression of old intellectuals. To assuage the worries of old intellectuals regarding the possibility of their being replaced by the new intellectuals, Kim Il Sung made the following statements to enunciate the principle of North Korea's policy toward intellectuals:

Some intellectuals say, "Because we are transitional people, we are going to be replaced by new intellectuals." Such thinking is not correct. Regardless of who they are, those who do not develop themselves will be

<sup>9</sup>Kim Il Sung, "*Joseon minjujuewi inmin gonggwaguk changnip il junyeon* [First anniversary of the founding of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea]" (Report to the 4<sup>th</sup> session of the Supreme People's Assembly, DPRK, September 9, 1949), *Collection of Kim Il Sung's Works*, Vol. V.

<sup>10</sup>Kim Il Sung, "*Yuneunghan gisulinjae reul deo mani yangseong haja* [Let's educate talented technological personnel, even more]" (Speech to the faculty and students of Kim Chaek Industrial University, June 17, 1952), *Collection of Kim Il Sung's Works*, Vol. VII (Pyongyang: Korean Workers Party Press, 1980), p. 218.

<sup>11</sup>Here Kim Il Sung said, "In constructing our economy after the war, we must emphasize recovery and development of heavy industries while we also work on the simultaneous development of light industries and agriculture. This will allow us to strengthen the foundation of our economy and rapid improvement of the living condition of our people." Kim Il Sung, "*Modeun geoteul jeonhu inmin gyeongje bokgu baljeon eul wihayeo* [Everything must be devoted for the recovery and development of people's economy after the war]" (Report to the 6<sup>th</sup> plenary session of the Central Committee, Korea Workers Party, August 5, 1953), *Collection of Kim Il Sung's Works*, Vol. VIII (Pyongyang: Korean Workers Party Press, 1980), p. 18.

replaced. It is a law of development that things that are old and do not develop are replaced by new things.<sup>12</sup>

That new intellectuals are growing in number does not mean that we can underestimate the contribution of old intellectuals. Because we are in serious shortage of professionals, it is especially important to foster cooperation between old and new intellectuals.<sup>13</sup>

Despite Kim's statement, the old intellectuals, in reality, felt threatened. This was particularly true among the literary and artistic intellectuals who were used as tools of political propaganda and struggle. The old intellectuals began to be under attack in 1951. Kim Il Sung criticized that the old literary and artistic intellectuals did not arouse the people's hatred toward South Korean and U.S. forces and the people's determination to continue to fight,<sup>14</sup> and that they focus on the works that described political struggle in South Korea. In this context, the literary and artistic intellectuals were urged to create prototypical heroes and events, thereby negating reality and inventing unfounded fiction.

Up to the early days of the Korean War period, intellectuals from the South, affiliated with the South Korean Worker's Party, were leading the literary and artistic circles in North Korea. Therefore, an analysis of how they were purged and suppressed is a necessary step to understand the changes in the status of old intellectuals in North Korea, amid the turmoil of the conflict between different elite groups.

In December 1950, a serious strife between the Soviet faction and the Kim Il Sung faction became apparent in the third plenary session of the Central Committee of the Korean Worker's Party held at Byeolori, Ganggye. The event signaled that the fate of the literary and artistic intellectuals from the South was doomed. In January, the leader of the Soviet faction, Heo Ga-Yee was demoted to the position of Vice Prime Minister of the cabinet from his former post of Vice Chairman of the Central Committee of the party. Similarly, Kim Yeol was removed from his post — head of the organization department in the Korean Worker's Party. This was a serious blow to the

<sup>12</sup>Kim Il Sung, "*Dang jojik saeopeul gaeseonhalde daehayeo* [On improving the organization of the party]" (Concluding remark, the 4<sup>th</sup> plenary session of the Central Committee, Korea Workers Party, November 2, 1951), *Collection of Kim Il Sung's Works*, Vol. VI, p. 508.

<sup>13</sup>Kim Il Sung, "*Urinara gwhak eul baljeonsikigi wihayeo* [For the development of science in our country]" (Speech to a meeting of scientists, April 27, 1952), *Collection of Kim Il Sung's Works*, Vol. VII, p. 186.

<sup>14</sup>Kim Il Sung, "*Uri munhakesului myeotgazi munjae daehayeo* [On several problems of our literature and art]" (Conversation with authors and artists, June 30, 1951), *Collection of Kim Il Sung's Works*, Vol. VI, pp. 401-3.

Soviet faction; accordingly, the faction had to unite to prepare for a counter-attack against the Kim Il Sung faction. The South Korean Worker's Party faction was a good potential ally for the Soviet faction because it boasted a large number of literary and artistic intellectuals armed with tools to engage in ideological affairs.<sup>15</sup> As for the South Korean Worker's Party faction, it had no other option but to cooperate with the Soviet faction, because the North Korean army had retreated to the northernmost area and Kim Il Sung was determined to use the head of the South Korean Worker's Party faction, Pak Heon-yeong, and his associates as scapegoats for the defeat.

The formation of the alliance was visible, as the Soviet faction which was dominant in the party's propaganda and agitation affairs appointed intellectuals from the South to important posts. Such an alliance was possible because the Soviet faction was still influential despite the demotion of Heo Ga-Yee. The Soviet faction continued to occupy important posts: Park Jeong-ae was the Vice Chairman of the Central Committee, Park Chang-ok was the head of the party's propaganda and agitation department, Park Yeong-bin was the head of the party's organization department, Gi Seok-bok was the Vice Minister of Culture and Propaganda, and Jeong Yul was the head of the department of arts. Thus, although Han Seol-ya of the Kim Il Sung faction was heading the Federation of Literary and Artistic Intellectuals, the Soviet faction was predominant in the field and this allowed it to create a meaningful alliance with the South-originated faction's literary and artistic intellectuals.

The conflict between the allied factions and the Kim Il Sung faction became apparent regarding the literary model in the works made by the literary intellectuals affiliated with the South Korean Worker's Party. For instance, Eom Ho-seok, a protégé of Han Seol-ya of the Kim Il Sung faction, attacked Kim Nam-cheon of the Southern faction. This led Gi Seok-bok of the Soviet faction to defend Kim.<sup>16</sup> Kim Nam-cheon, the chairman of the Federation of Literary and Artistic Intellectuals published a short novel, *Honey*, to enhance the morale of the North Korean army. In the work, the

<sup>15</sup>Unlike Kim Il Sung and his associates, the Soviet faction led by Heo Ga-Yee was known to be quite favorable to Park Heon-yeong and his South Korean Workers Party. For instance, when the North Korea Workers Party and the South Korean Workers Party were merged in 1949, Heo's Soviet faction pushed to accept all the previous members of the South Korean Workers Party through a superficial review procedure. Kim Il Sung was dissatisfied with the Soviet faction's lenient attitude toward the Southern party members. Robert A. Scalapino and Chong-Sik Lee, *Communism in Korea, Vol. I: The Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), Chapter 6.

<sup>16</sup>On the conflict between the two groups, see Yi Cheol-ju, *Bukeui yesulin* [Artists of the North], pp. 90-5.

hero of the novel is a reconnaissance soldier injured during combat and nursed by an elderly woman in the mountains. Thanks to honey given by the woman, he recovers and returns to the battlefield. The soldier tortures himself as he suffers from the guilt of having abandoned the battle. In the end, he is freed from his torments as he decides to fight for the Korean Worker's Party. Eom Ho-seok published a critical essay titled "On Some Issues Concerning Literary Patterns" in a spring issue of *Rodong Shinmun* in 1952. The essay was intended to attack Kim Nam-cheon's work on the grounds of the sentimentalist and defeatist aspects of the novel. Eom's criticism was that Kim's work betrayed the cause of socialist literary writing. Gi Seok-bok, a second generation Soviet Korean, was familiar with Marxist-Leninist aesthetics and joined the debate by writing "On Some Problems in Our Literary Criticism." The article rebuked Eom Ho-seok's argument. According to Gi, Kim's description was based on real battle situations and Kim's novel was loyal to socialist realism.

Such literary battles were quite common during this period. These included Im Hwa's<sup>17</sup> poem *Are You Where You Are Supposed to Be?* and Yi Tae-jun's novel *Noble People*. The works by literary intellectuals from the South were attacked by critics from the Kim Il Sung faction. Gi Seok-bok assumed the role of defending writers from the South. This round of literary conflict ended with a theoretical victory for Gi Seok-bok. However, authors like Yi Tae-jun, Kim Nam-cheon, and Im Hwa had to stop writing in order to avoid further political debate and suppression.<sup>18</sup>

As the end of the war neared, the members of the South Korean Worker's Party and intellectuals from the South were subject to even greater suppression. In the fifth plenary session of the Central Committee of the Korean Worker's Party held in December 1952, Kim Il Sung reported that there was a continued presence of factionalism.<sup>19</sup> He was obviously pointing to those

<sup>17</sup>Im Hwa, originally from the South, was a leading figure in the literary circle in North Korea. His prominence made him a target of Kim Il Sung's faction. In December 1926, along with Yi Gi-yeong and Han Seol-ya, he joined the Korean Artist Proletarian Federation (KAPF), which was first organized by the old Korean Communist Party and was engaged in literary movement for the proletariat. In 1932, Im became the secretary of KAPF. The Japanese authorities outlawed KAPF in 1936; nevertheless, he continued to publish works along with his fellow writers. On August 18, 1945, with Yi Tae-jun, he organized and chaired the Central Council for the Construction of Korean Literature. In 1948, he followed Park Heon-yeong to the North. In the North, he became a member of the Federation of Literary and Artistic Intellectuals. He was also appointed to the presidency of the Korea-Soviet Press and was vice-chairman of the Korea-Soviet Cultural Association. These appointments show his connection to the Soviet faction. He was reluctant to assume prominent roles and supported other literary intellectuals from the South, including Yi Tae-jun and Kim Nam-cheon.

<sup>18</sup>Yi Cheol-ju, *Buk eui yesulin* [Artists of the North], p. 117.



from the South. The “Ideological Review Meetings” that began during the end of March 1953 purported to prune the influence of Park Heon-yeong and Yi Seung-yeop. In the process, most of the intellectuals from the South were suppressed because of their connections to Park and Yi. During the Ideological Review Meetings of the Federation of Literary and Artistic Intellectuals, Im Hwa and Kim Nam-cheon were subject to the most severe criticisms, and those close to them were urged to “confess” their misdeeds.<sup>20</sup> In the end, immediately after the ceasefire in 1953, leaders of the South Korean Worker’s Party, including Yi Seung-yeop, Jo Il-myeong, Im Hwa, Park Seung-won, Yi Won-jo, Yi Gang-guk, Bae Cheol, Yun Sun-dal, Baek Hyeong-bok, Jo Yong-bok, Maeng Jong-ho, Seol Jeong-sik were tried and were “found” guilty of espionage for the United States.<sup>21</sup> Following the purge, the Korean Worker’s Party issued a decree through which it confiscated and burned essays, articles, and works by about forty literary intellectuals from the South.<sup>22</sup>

In sum, the severe conflict that among the elite emerged during the Korean War led to the purge of old intellectuals, especially those affiliated with the South Korean Worker’s Party. The war not only intensified conflict between North and South Korea, but also conflict within North Korea. The future of old intellectuals in North Korea appeared to be doomed. Without adapting themselves to the emerging system in North Korea, they had no reason to be recognized in the North. Old intellectuals born in North Korea were subjected to the same rule. Kim Il Sung thus could succeed in establishing a monolithic system in which only docile intellectuals could survive and be used as tools for building his version of socialism.

<sup>19</sup>Kim Il Sung, “*Dang eui jojikkeok sasangjeok ganghwa neun uri seungni eui gicho* [Organizational and ideological strengthening of the party are the foundation of our victory]” (Report to the 5<sup>th</sup> plenary session of the Central Committee, Korea Workers Party, December 15, 1952), *Collection of Kim Il Sung’s Works*, Vol. VII, pp. 386-430.

<sup>20</sup>Yi Cheol-ju, *Buk eui yesulin* [Artists of the North], pp. 142-4.

<sup>21</sup>Park Heon-yeong’s trial was held separately in December 1955. On trial record, see Kim Nam-sik, *Namrodang yeongu* [A Study of South Korean Workers Party], Vol. I (Seoul: Dolbaegae, 1984), pp. 480-511.

<sup>22</sup>“The second decree to burn books” was ordered in 1958 along with “Concentrated Guidance from the Central Party.” Because of the defeat in the factional strife in August 1956, the Soviet and Yenan factions disappeared from the North Korean political scene. Among the books ordered to be burnt were Choe Chang-ik’s *Joseonminjok haebangsa* [History of the Liberation of the Korean People] and works by Park Chang-ok and Kim Du-bong. The books burnt amounted to about 1/3 of all North Korean publications. Works by 140 authors were subject to this book-burning. Kim Jeong-gi, *Milpa* [Secret dispatch] (Seoul: Daeyeongsa, 1967), pp. 237-40.

*Re-education of Intellectuals during Socialist Development*

In the late 1950s, North Korea faced another serious shortage of intellectuals as it implemented its socialist development strategy — Emphasis on Heavy Industry, Simultaneous Development of Light Industries and Agriculture. Since the lack of engineers in factories particularly hampered production, Kim Il Sung initiated a policy of registration of the engineers and moved many managerial workers to on-site production lines. Immediately after the ceasefire, the Ministry of Heavy Industries set an example by sending about 130-140 of its technical staff to the factories. Kim Il Sung urged other organizations, including the Korean Worker's Party and the government to follow the policy.<sup>23</sup>

For North Korea, the construction of socialism meant something more than industrialization. Industrialization had to be supported by a full-scale re-education of technological intellectuals. Because of their functional specialties that could be mobilized for building socialism, most of the engineers and experts were temporarily exempt from the ideological conflict among the elite groups. However, this changed in 1958 with the launching of the the "Flying Horse Movement." The movement was intended to maximize labor productivity. According to the North Korean media campaign at that time, poor productivity was deemed to be associated with passive and conservative attitudes of technicians. Kim Il Sung warned that technicians were still prisoners of passivity and conservatism and were far behind labor workers and farmers in terms of consciousness. He argued that socialist industrialization necessitated a proper cooperation between workers and technicians. For Kim, the obsolete thinking of technicians, however, made them ignore the creativity of the workers. He noted the following problems caused by the passivity and conservatism of technicians:

First of all, they are followers of mysticism. Conservatives think that industry, science, technology, and machines are mysterious. To consider everything as mysterious means that ultimately only the "ghosts" know. Common people cannot know and only they know what science, industry, and technology are, as if they were "ghosts." Some people in the Science Academy say that science cannot be learned in just one or two years and argue that it has to be studied at least 10 to 20 years. Such people are notoriously unproductive; they do not produce anything they can

<sup>23</sup>Kim Il Sung, "*Joseonrodongdang jungangwiwonhoe samwol jeonwonhoeui eseo han gyeollyon* [Concluding remark at the March plenary session of the Central Committee, Korea Workers Party, March 21, 1954]," *Collection of Kim Il Sung's Works*. Vol. VIII, pp. 346-7.

be proud of even when they are given 10 years for research. They themselves are prisoners of mysticism.

Next, these conservatives are still subject to remnants of Japanese imperialism and ideology. These people say, "I attended a college in Japan. In your case, is there anything you know?" They thus boast about their "exploitation" during the Japanese occupation and try to denigrate other people. They try to interpret our reality with their old technological standard and ideology. We have to crush such ideological tendencies.<sup>24</sup>

To overcome the technological mysticism and old ideological tendencies of technicians and scientists, Kim Il Sung emphasized an ideological struggle against them and re-education according to the party line. Based on his understanding that these technological intellectuals were far behind workers and farmers, he sent them to workplaces to live with workers so that they could learn the workers' revolutionary attitude.<sup>25</sup> This became the outline of his policy on "Revolutionizing Intellectuals and Turning Them into Working Class" in the 1960s.

In this new campaign for the re-education of intellectuals, the literary and artistic intellectuals were the most suppressed. They were criticized as producing few realistic works on the collectivization of agriculture implemented in the 1950s, and as besieged by dogmatism and formalism. Kim Il Sung was dissatisfied with familism, particularly that the literary and artistic intellectuals took care of people they knew. He was referring to the sympathy shown by the people when such authors as Im Hwa and Yi Tae-jun, affiliated with the South Korean Worker's Party, were suppressed.<sup>26</sup>

The re-education of the literary and artistic intellectuals finally led to another round of purges — "Concentrated Guidance from the Central Party" which began in the fall of 1958.<sup>27</sup> Many old intellectuals had to "confess their crimes" associated with Park Heon-yeong's South Korean

<sup>24</sup>Kim Il Sung, "*Sahoejueui geonseol eseo sogeukseonggwa bosujueui reul bandaehayeo* [Against passivity and conservatism in building socialism]" (Speech at all-nation production innovators' meeting, September 16, 1958), *Collection of Kim Il Sung's Works*, Vol. XII (Pyongyang: Korean Workers Party Press, 1981), pp. 521-2.

<sup>25</sup>Kim Il Sung, "*Sahoejueui geonseol eui saeroun angyang eul wihayeo naseo neum myeotgaji munje* [Some problems concerning another leap forward for the construction of socialism]" (Speech to the council of workers representing the party, the state, economic organizations, and social organizations, September 25, 1958), *Collection of Kim Il Sung's Works*, Vol. XII, pp. 558-9.

<sup>26</sup>Kim Il Sung, "*Jakga, yesulindeul sok eseo nalgeun sasangjanjae reul bandaehaneun tujaeng eul him itge beollilde daehayeo* [On beginning struggle against old ideological remnants among the writers and artists]" (Speech to writers and artists, October 14, 1958), *Collection of Kim Il Sung's Works*, Vol. XII, pp. 551-9.

<sup>27</sup>Kim Jeong-gi, *Milpa* [Secret dispatch], pp. 281-91.

Worker's Party, Park Chang-ok's Soviet faction, and Choe Chang-ik's Yenan faction. Intellectuals from the South, who were barely surviving in North Korea, were forced to criticize themselves regarding their dubious practice of communism between Korean liberation in 1945 and the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950. They had to cite their social background in their self-criticism: capitalist origin and connection with the flawed Park Heon-yeong line. In the process, many of them who were unable to cope with the psychological pressures killed themselves, and the North Korean authorities considered this to be proof of their anti-revolutionary tendency.

## SOCIALIST MOBILIZATION AND CLASS STATUS CHANGE OF INTELLECTUALS

### *Loyalty Test of Old Intellectuals during North-South Korea Competition*

In the 1960s, the North still faced the problem of handling the remaining intellectuals originated from the South, including those who joined the Northern army during the Korean War as volunteers. Now the North did not rely on large-scale purges of the intellectuals with Southern origins, but in chose to dispatch them to the South as spies. Except for scientists and technicians, the North made intellectuals with Southern origins undergo communist educational programs and then prove their loyalty to the socialist regime of the North through espionage missions in South Korea. Those who completed their missions back in the South were considered as those with proven loyalty, whereas those who somehow failed and reported themselves to the South Korean police were judged as unfit for North Korea.<sup>28</sup>

The clandestine dispatch of the intellectuals was closely related to hostile North-South relations and the international environment. The division of Korea was further consolidated by the bloody, three-year war, and a full-scale competition between capitalist and socialist systems had begun. In 1961, a military regime — a widespread polity in the Third World at that time — was born in South Korea. At the international level, the Cold War

<sup>28</sup>Not all remaining intellectuals from the South were handled in this way. Purge, an abnormal way of suppression, was also used. Han Seol-ya, who had contributed to the Kim Il Sung regime, was purged in early 1960 for his works that were accused of having violated party's guidance. When his purge was decided on the fifth plenary session of the 4<sup>th</sup> Central Committee, he was deprived of several prestigious positions. From March 1963, his followers were purged after severe criticism in "Ideological Review Meetings." His works were ordered to be burnt. This may be called the "third book-burning." Yi Hang-gu, *Bukhan eui hyeonsil* [North Korean reality], pp. 474-80.

was intensifying along with the escalation of the Vietnam War in the mid-1960s. These series of events threatened North Korea. The North responded by taking the provocative policy of "Strengthening Three Revolutionary Potentials": revolutionary capabilities not only in the North but also in South Korea, and in the international system. This was the background that led the North to adopt the policy of sending intellectuals who originated in the South as spies to test their loyalty and ideological uprightness.

During the Cold War, especially in the period of intensified competition between North and South Korea, Songdo College of Political Economy<sup>29</sup> was the training center for North Korea's strategic infiltration into South Korea.<sup>30</sup> The students with Southern origins were of three types: first, those affiliated with the South Korean Worker's Party who came to the North before the Korean War; second, those who were drafted by the North Korean army during the war; and third, those who crossed the border during the war and later served in the party, government, and economic sectors in North Korea.<sup>31</sup> According to Kim Il Sung's statements, a goal of the college was to reconstruct the underground party and to revive the labor movement in the South. In the case of unification, the graduates as cadres were supposed to be in charge of administration and party projects in the South.<sup>32</sup>

The graduates of the college were dispatched to South Korea in large numbers after the eighth plenary session of the fourth Central Committee of

<sup>29</sup>The North Korean authorities favorably treated students of Songdo College of Political Economy. They received the same salary and rationing as in their previous posts for 4 years during their attendance. Each entering class was composed of from 200 to 250 students who were divided into small study and work groups of 5 to 6 students and lived under strict organizational discipline. The students included those who were well educated as well as those who did not receive regular education in the South. Just as in training centers of the Korean Workers Party, strict party discipline was imposed on the students while they intensely studied the textbooks that were used in the Central Party School. Kim Jeong-gi, *Milpa* [Secret dispatch], pp. 252-7.

<sup>30</sup>This college was built upon the Seoul Political School that had been established in Hwangju, Hwanghae Province in 1950, and Geumgang Hakwon built in Seoheung-gun, Hwanghae Province in October 1952. The Seoul Political School was established to train spies during war. As the war lasted longer than expected and as reoccupation of Seoul was unlikely, Seoul Political School was renamed Geumgang Hawkwon. Geumgang Hakwon ceased to exist as many leaders of the Southern faction were jailed or executed and as students were sent to Cheonma Mine in North Pyeongan Province. Kim Jeong-gi, *Milpa* [Secret dispatch], p. 243.

<sup>31</sup>*ibid.*, p. 245.

<sup>32</sup>Kim Il Sung, "Songdo jeongchi gyeongje daehak je ilhoe joleopsikeseo han yeonseol [Speech at the first graduation ceremony of Songdo University of Political Economy]" (1957.8.25), *Collection of Kim Il Sung's Works*, Vol. XI (Pyongyang: Korean Workers Party Press, 1981).

the Korean Worker's Party in February 1964. The plenary session adopted "Strengthening Three Revolutionary Potentials" as an official party policy.<sup>33</sup> In this way, many intellectuals from the South began to be victimized by the competition between North and South Korea.

*Class Status Change of Intellectuals under Kim Il Sung's Monolithic Rule*

Under the policy of "Revolutionizing Intellectuals and Turning Them into Working Class" in the 1960s, North Korea began to negate the existence of intellectuals and tried to reorganize its class structure. In truth, the policy was a tool to remove factors that hindered potentially the development of a personality cult of Kim Il Sung in the late 1960s. The concept of revolutionizing intellectuals and turning them into working class already appeared in Kim Il Sung's statements as early as 1960.<sup>34</sup> However, the rationale behind this new party policy was promulgated by Kim Il Sung's speech given to the intellectuals of Northern Hamgyeong Province in June 1968.<sup>35</sup> Here Kim argued that the old intellectuals did not form an independent class because they originated from heterogeneous groups of the small-scale propertied class — small-scale merchants and manufacturers, middle-class farmers, and rich farmers. Because of their social background, he continued, the old intellectuals were characterized by two conflicting tendencies under the Japanese occupation. On the one hand, they worked for the Japanese imperialists and capitalists that needed their talents. On the other hand, they were endowed with revolutionary potentials, because they suffered from the suppression and discrimination of colonial rule. Because of the latter tendency, the old intellectuals had participated in the movements of independence and communism. According to Kim Il Sung, therefore, the old intellectuals clearly did not belong to the exploitative class. He concluded

<sup>33</sup>To enhance the potential for revolution in South Korea, Kim Il Sung urged North Korean literary and artistic intellectuals to work on the theme of democratic struggle in South Korea such as the Student Revolution of April 19. Kim Il Sung, "Hyeongmyeongjeok munhak yesul eul changjak hal de daehayeo [On creating revolutionary literary and artistic works]" (Speech to literary and artistic workers, November 7, 1964), *Collection of Kim Il Sung's Works*, Vol. XVIII (Pyongyang: Korean Workers Party Press, 1982).

<sup>34</sup>Kim Il Sung, "Dangsaep gwa gyeongjae saep eseo naseoneun myeotgaji munje e daehayeo [On some problems involving party projects and economic projects]" (Speech to department directors and high-rank cadres of the Central Committee, Korean Workers Party, October 19, 1960), *Collection of Kim Il Sung's Works*, Vol. XIV, p. 422.

<sup>35</sup>Kim Il Sung, "Uri dang eui intelli jeongchaek eul jeonghwakhi gwancheol halde daehayeo [On precise implementation of our party's policy toward intellectuals]" (Speech to the intellectuals of North Hamgyeong Province, June 14, 1968), *Collection of Kim Il Sung's Works*, Vol. XXII (Pyongyang: Korean Workers Party Press, 1983).

that it was possible to revolutionize them so that they could serve the cause of the people and the working class.

With the passage of time, “Revolutionizing Intellectuals and Turning Them into Working Class” became a policy applied not only to the old intellectuals but also to the new intellectuals. Kim Il Sung stated, “Nowadays in our country, there is almost no difference between the old intellectuals and new intellectuals.”<sup>36</sup> In fact, because twenty years had already passed since the breeding of new intellectuals, it was not meaningful to make a distinction between them. The policy had to be applied to the new intellectuals as well, because they did not experience the suppression of Japanese imperialism and the hardships of the early days of the construction of socialism.<sup>37</sup>

More specifically, who were going to be subject to the policy of “Revolutionizing Intellectuals and Turning Them into Working Class?” Firstly, Kim Il Sung criticized writers and artists for their inability to produce works about working class people and their struggles. Kim noted that it was because the intellectuals did not understand the life of the working class. He maintained that only a rich, first-hand experience of labor could enhance the quality of literary works on class.<sup>38</sup> Secondly, Kim attacked university professors. To their complaints about heavy teaching loads — 1,000 hours per year — and low salary levels, Kim Il Sung responded that such complaints, incompatible with the necessity of technological advancement in North Korea, were rooted in egotism and lack of fervor for learning socialist realities.<sup>39</sup> Finally, Kim Il Sung argued that university students also had to be revolutionized to become true members of the socialist revolution. According to his observation, the brightest students who entered universities directly from high schools without military service or real-world experiences were likely to become “crippled intellectuals” or “*yangban intellectuals*” who were not revolutionized at all.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>37</sup>Kim Il Sung, “*Uri eui interi deureun dang gwa rodonggyejeup gwa immin ege chungsilhan hyeongmyeonggaga doeoya handa* [Our intellectuals must become loyal revolutionaries for the party, the working class, and the people]” (Speech to the university faculty of Hamheung, June 19, 1967), *Collection of Kim Il Sung’s Works*, Vol. XXI, p. 310.

<sup>38</sup>Kim Il Sung, “*Uri eui munhakyeseul eul hangyedon deo nopi baljeon sikija* [Let’s develop our literature and art one more step]” (Talks with the workers in the fields of theater and movie, October 29, 1963), *Collection of Kim Il Sung’s Works*, Vol. XVII, pp. 480-1.

<sup>39</sup>Kim Il Sung, “*Godeung gyeoyuk saeop eul gaeseon haldae daehayeon* [On improving higher education]” (Speech at the party committee of Ministry of Higher Education, February 23, 1965), *Collection of Kim Il Sung’s Works*, Vol. XIX, pp. 193-6, 219.

<sup>40</sup>Kim Il Sung, “*Sahoejueui geonseol eui saeroun yogu e matge gisulinjae yangseong saeop eul ganghwahaja* [Let’s strengthen our education projects for technological personnel according to the new needs of socialist construction]” (Speech to the faculty and students of Kim Chaek University, October 2, 1968), *Collection of Kim Il Sung’s Works*, Vol. XXIII (Pyongyang: Korean

“Revolutionizing Intellectuals and Turning Them into Working Class” was initially meant to remove the remnants of petit bourgeois habits among the intellectuals and replace them with loyalty to the party, the proletariat, and the people, thereby turning intellectuals into a working intellectual class.<sup>41</sup> Due to this process, the final and total victory of socialism could be achieved. From the late 1960s, however, revolutionizing of the intellectuals came to be understood as a process of arming intellectuals with the monolithic ideology, *juche* idea. Therefore, the policy served the purpose of establishing the Kim Il Sung-centered political system based on the *juche* idea.

In North Korea, there are two methods of revolutionizing intellectuals. The first method is to enhance the ability of mutual criticism and self-criticism by participating in party activities. The second method is to acquire knowledge and teach technology in the pool of the workers and farmers — in the “furnace” that turns intellectuals into workers.<sup>42</sup> In addition to intellectuals, high-ranking cadres of the party and the government were also subject to the same methods. In some extreme cases, intellectuals who were not functionally fit for the personality cult of Kim Il Sung were sent to concentration camps.<sup>43</sup>

Workers Party Press, 1983), pp. 8-10.

<sup>41</sup>For North Koreans, “revolutionizing” and “turning intellectuals into working class” mean two different things, although both are complementary processes for the complete victory of socialism. Revolutionizing emphasizes ideological re-education, whereas turning someone or a group into a working class means elimination of all classes other than the working class. The point is that farmers and intellectuals must be revolutionized and become members of the working class and that workers also must be revolutionized. On the necessity of revolutionizing regardless of class background, Kim Il Sung said, “revolutionizing is for all members of society. The working class also must be revolutionized. A member of the working class is not automatically a revolutionary. Those who work in factories are not necessarily armed with a revolutionary consciousness. They are not necessarily armed with Marxism-Leninism and the principles and policies of our party.” Kim Il Sung, “*Uri dang eui intelli jeongchaek eul jeonghwakhi gwancheol halde daehaeyoe* [On precise implementation of our party’s policy toward intellectuals]” (Speech to the intellectuals of Northern Hamgyeong Province, June 14, 1968), *Collection of Kim Il Sung’s Works*, Vol. XXII (Pyongyang: Korean Workers Party Press, 1983). p. 369.

<sup>42</sup>Kim Il Sung, “*Joseon rudongdang jungangwiyonhoe je sagi je sipilcha jeonwonhoeui eseo han gyeollon* [Concluding remark at the 11<sup>th</sup> plenary session of the 4<sup>th</sup> Central Committee, Korea Workers Party]” (July 1, 1965), *Collection of Kim Il Sung’s Works*, Vol. XIX, pp. 396-8.

<sup>43</sup>For instance, Yi Na-yeong, a historian who is the author of *Joseon minjok haebangsa* [History of Liberation of the Korean People] was purged in 1967 on the charge of the crime of hindering Kim Il Sung’s anti-Japanese armed struggle and was sent to a concentration camp. Choe Eun-heui and Sin Sang-ok, *Kim Jeong Il wangguk, ha* [The kingdom of Kim Jung Il, Vol. II] (Seoul: DongaIlbosa, 1988), pp. 34-6.



*Mobilization of the Intellectuals and Stagnation of Knowledge*

In the late 1960s, the Kim Il Sung-centered political system was firmly entrenched, and the personality cult supported by the theory of his revolutionary leadership was reaching its apogee. Kim Il Sung's *juche* idea became the monolithic ideology of the party. Under these circumstances, it was not surprising that anti-Japanese guerilla fighters who accompanied Kim Il Sung dominated the Politburo and the Central Committee of the party during the 5th Congress of the Korean Worker's Party held in November 1970. The Socialist Constitution adopted in December 1972, made Kim Il Sung the president, concurrently holding the posts of supreme commander and chair of the defense committee. Thus, Kim Il Sung's total control of the party, the government, and the military was officially recognized.

Now, the succession issue was a top priority of North Korean agenda. In September 1973, the 7th plenary session of the 5th Central Committee of the Korean Worker's Party appointed Kim Jong-il as the "secretary of organization and agitprop." In February 1974, Kim Jong-il was appointed as a member of the Politburo by the 8th plenary session of the Central Committee. Thus, the preparatory work to turn Kim Jong-il into the successor was completed.

A new slogan, "Continuous Revolution by New Generation," appeared to strengthen Kim Il Sung's leadership position and to consolidate Kim Jong-il's status as his successor. In this context, "Work Team Movement for Three Great Revolutions" began in full-scale in 1974, in the fields of ideology, technology, and culture. About 90% of the members of the work teams — the so-called young intellectuals who were going to lead the three revolutions — were graduates from universities. In other words, the new generation of young intellectuals, most of whom were university graduates, were mobilized to maintain the Kim Il Sung-centered political system and to prepare for Kim Jong-il's succession.

Unfortunately, the work team movement that mobilized intellectuals for political purposes caused a deterioration of North Korea's science and technology and impeded the production and acquisition of new knowledge. There were two reasons. First, many university graduates were deprived of the chance to apply their knowledge in workplaces for two to three years after graduation. A majority of the graduates vied for work team experience because along with military service, it was a ladder of success leading to party membership and appointment as party cadre.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, they were engaged in activities that were unrelated to their majors. Their task was to

rectify the old cadres' conservatism, over-reliance on experience, organizational egotism, and bureaucratization.<sup>45</sup> Ironically, this resulted in a denial of the original intent of the policy — the combination of theory and practice — and this brought stagnation to the progress of science and technology. Further, considering that the development of science, technology and knowledge in general depends on university education, the meddling of the work teams that were dispatched to the universities had negative impacts. The work teams prohibited autonomous administration and independent research at the universities. They were not engaged in activities for technological revolution such as improvement of facilities and technical advance. Instead, they concentrated their efforts on the ideological and cultural revolutions on campus.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, universities saw the quality of education further deteriorate due to the supervision and control of the work teams.

Of course, the work team movement was not the only cause of decay in knowledge production, particularly in education and science. There were more structural constraints behind the decline of education and science in North Korea.<sup>47</sup> First, since the *juche* idea was the only officially recognized ideology, it was almost impossible for intellectuals to adopt scientific theories that might conflict with it. The intellectuals were afraid of making mistakes in adopting foreign ideas that were incompatible with the propositions of the *juche* idea and party principles. They were even more reluctant to create knowledge through their own efforts. Second, being alienated from those in foreign countries for decades, North Korean intellectuals were engaged in a sterile reproduction of knowledge without stimulation and verification involving the outside world. Even for purely academic activities, the North Korean authorities reserved the right of controlling foreign travels of scholars. In the case of academic travels, scholars had to be accompanied by supervisors. In addition, North Korean scholars did not enjoy free access to foreign publications, but relied upon a scanty body of academ-

<sup>44</sup>Interview with Kim Gwang-uk (a former member of work team of North Korea's three revolutions movement), April 13, 1995.

<sup>45</sup>Kim Il Sung, "*Samdae hyeongmyeong eul himitge beollyeo sahoejueui geonseol eul deouk dageuchija* [Let's hasten the construction of socialism by working harder for the three revolutions]" (Speech to workers in industries, March 3, 1975), *Collection of Kim Il Sung's Works*, Vol. XXX (Pyongyang: Korean Workers Party Press, 1985), p. 105.

<sup>46</sup>Kim Il Sung, "*Gyoyuk bumun e samdae hyeongmyeong sojo reul pagyeonhalde daehayeo* [On sending three revolutions' work teams to the field of education]" (Speech to the members of the work teams for the three revolutions, December 11, 1973), *Collection of Kim Il Sung's Works*, Vol. XXVIII (Pyongyang: Korean Workers Party Press, 1984), p. 611.

<sup>47</sup>Interview with Kim Jeong-min (former president of North Korea's Daeyang Trading Company), May 17, 1995; Interview with Im Jin-ho (Vice Dean, School of Physical Science, Yanbian University), May 31, 1995.

ic resources. This impeded development of knowledge in general and introduction of new technology in particular. The lack of scientific knowledge in North Korea due to lack of exposure to the outside was often illustrated by the poor quality of papers presented by North Korean scholars participating in international academic conferences.

North Korea's power elite was well aware of the country's academic and scientific lag. As early as 1976, Kim Il Sung remarked that North Korea lacked the scientific and technological base necessary for the construction of socialism, although intellectuals had expanded to number one million, and the new intellectuals were in their forties and fifties. Therefore, Kim called for an improvement of educational standards. In particular, he argued that graduates from the colleges of agriculture were so poorly educated that they could not properly manage agricultural farming because of their unfamiliarity with the composition of pesticides, agricultural chemicals and biological characteristics of fertilizers.<sup>48</sup>

To overcome the scholarly and technological deterioration, North Korea began to emphasize foreign languages education and Chinese characters instruction. North Korea also looked to their reliable ally, the General Association of Korean Residents in Japan (GAKRJ: *Zainichi Chosenjin Sorengokai*), as a source of foreign technology. In 1980, Kim Il Sung urged one million North Korean intellectuals to translate million foreign publications housed in the Grand People's Study Hall. In addition, he made it a policy to teach about 1,000 Chinese characters that appeared in the texts of South Korean high schools.<sup>49</sup> He also called for devotion and commitment from GAKRJ for the development of science and technology in North Korea.<sup>50</sup> Kim's exhortation reflected the fact that North Korea needed to

<sup>48</sup>Kim Il Sung, "Minjok ganbu yangseong saeop eul deouk gaeseon ganghwa hal de daehayeo [On further improving of education of national cadre]" (Speech to the faculty of Kim Il Sung University, November 28, 1976), *Collection of Kim Il Sung's Works*, XXXI (Pyongyang: Korean Workers Party Press, 1986), pp. 462-6.

<sup>49</sup>Kim Il Sung, "Gyoyuk bumun chaekim ilgun hyeopeuihoe eseo han yeonseol [Speech to the workers responsible for educational affairs]" (April 9, 1980), *Collection of Kim Il Sung's Works*, XXXV (Pyongyang: Korean Workers Party Press, 1987), pp. 116, 118; Kim Il Sung, "Gwahak yeongu saeop eseo saeroun jeonhwan eul ileukil de daehayeo [On making new transition in the science research projects]" (March 23, 1983), *Collection of Kim Il Sung's Works*, Vol. XXXVII (Pyongyang: Korean Workers Party Press, 1992), pp. 409.

<sup>50</sup>Kim Il Sung, "Urinara gwahak gisul eul baljeon sikigi wihan jaeilbon joseonin gwahakja, gisulja deuleui gwaep e dahayeo [On the tasks of Korean scientists and engineers in Japan for the development of science and technology in our country]" (Talks with the representatives of Korean scientists in Japan and representatives of Korean residents in the fields of livestock industry and biotechnology, April 13, 1979), *Collection of Kim Il Sung's Works*, Vol. XXXIV (Pyongyang: Korean Workers Party Press, 1987), p. 164.

import technologies in the fields of precision machinery industry, electronics industry, biotech industries, etc. in the process of implementation of the Second Seven-year Plan (1978-1984). These efforts, however, failed to induce the GAKRJ scholars to relocate to North Korea, but simply resulted in publication of translations of Japanese books imported through GAKRJ.

That North Korean knowledge was undergoing serious retardation under the Kim Il Sung-centered political system was reflected in the new slogan at the 6th Party Congress held in October 1980: "Revolutionize and Intellectualize Whole Society and Turn All People into Working Class." As previously mentioned, it was Kim Il Sung's policy as early as the 1960s to revolutionize intellectuals and turn them into working class citizens. Kim was now calling for the intellectualization of the entire society. The new policy meant much more than negating the existence of the intellectuals as a separate social class. Kim believed that as the intellectuals were subjugated to the party, it was now necessary to enhance the overall standard of knowledge of the entire North Korean population. The following statement by Kim Il Sung reflected that improvement of the standard of science and technology was the most immediate task of the era:

Communist society is not only a society in which all people dress and live well, but also a society where all people work less and produce more material wealth. In our society, there still exists differences between heavy and light labor and between physical and mental work. To remove all such differences and to make people work less, we have to improve productivity and automatize production. For this, we need a dramatic improvement of people's standard of technological knowledge. In other words, the whole society has to be intellectualized.<sup>51</sup>

Under the slogan of intellectualization of the whole society, North Korea's new policy intended to enhance the level of higher education for productivity improvement. Along with regular universities, on-site colleges — such as factory colleges, farm colleges, and fishery colleges — were expanded to improve productivity and to reeducate the people.

In sum, because of the mobilization of intellectuals for the regime legit-

<sup>51</sup>Kim Il Sung, "*Sahoejueui gyoyuk teje reul cheoljeogi gwancheol hayeo gyoyusaeop eoseo saeroun jeonhwaneul ireukija* [Let's make a new transition in education project by completely applying the thesis of socialist education]" (Speech to the meeting of nationwide education workers, October 1, 1978), *Collection of Kim Il Sung's Works*, Vol. XXXIII (Pyongyang: Korean Workers Party Press, 1987), p. 439.

imization, North Korea faced several issues related to the low level of science and technology. The primary role of new intellectuals continued to serve the consolidation of the existing political structure and the personality cult of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong-il. Furthermore, intellectuals were subjugated to the ideological authority of the *juche* idea, and this caused continuous decay of knowledge. In response, the North Korean power elite made it a party policy to improve the intellectual level of the general public. However, the new policy was ineffective in stemming the regression.

## DECAYING SOCIALISM AND CONTROL OF INTELLECTUALS

The collapse of the East European socialist bloc in 1989 was a shock to the power elite in North Korea. As time passed, the decline of socialism was considered an irreversible reality, although the power elite had continuously insisted on gaining the ultimate triumph of socialism through the policy of "Revolutionize Whole Society and Turn All People into Working Class."

Not only did the North Korean power elite begin to explore ways to justify and consolidate their regime; they also tried to closely analyze the causes leading to the breakdown of the socialist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Kim Jong-il devised a concept for explanatory purposes: the frustration of socialism. Furthermore, he noted the existence of the so-called internal enemy in explaining the frustration of socialism:

The collapse of socialism was an outcome of a series of reasons: conspiracy by imperialists and anti-revolutionary forces, ideological and cultural infiltration by imperialists, and rightist opportunism. Betrayers' plot from inside the socialist regime was the decisive factor that caused the breakdown. While imperialists directly took resolute actions as diverse as invasion, oppression, containment, engagement, and other destructive acts to suffocate socialists, they have also used backsliders, turncoats of revolution, as a tool. The betrayers appeared at the upper and lower levels of communist and labor movements. Throughout the history of international communism, ideological frustrations and vicissitudes that occurred in the socialist movement were all closely related to the emergence of betrayers at the upper level of revolution.<sup>52</sup>

According to Kim, the existence of disloyal actors — internal enemies, betrayers, and turncoats of revolution — was responsible for the breakdown of the regimes. The internal enemies emerged from two groups — The

<sup>52</sup>Kim Jong-il, "*Sahoejueui e daehan huebangeun heoyong doeuil su yeobda* [Interference toward socialism cannot be allowed]," *Korean Central Broadcasting* (March 1, 1993).

power elite and intellectuals. An important reason Kim Jong-il regarded intellectuals as a possible threat to the socialist regime was that "the intellectuals are easily affected by current thoughts of imperialists and their free mind can produce serious negative impact on the continuance of revolution."<sup>53</sup>

Remarkably, there is a striking similarity between Kim Jong-il's and Western scholars' analyses of the role of social groups in the process of breakdown of socialist regimes. First, the power elite committed "crimes" which encroached upon the public sector by using illegal means to accomplish legal goals dictated by the regime. For example, managers of factories and companies bribed party cadres to acquire raw materials and resources necessary to maintain facilities and produce goods.<sup>54</sup> Second, in the latter stage of totalitarianism, the intellectuals began to disseminate universal values through unofficial channels. They insisted on eliminating the state's intervention in private sectors by forming independent forums to fight for the expansion of civil rights, and their activities ultimately had a critical influence on the revival or formation of civil society. In particular, those intellectuals who were not integrated as supportive forces in the regime-building process in Eastern European countries including Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia became social groups that created an ideology of resistance to overcome the languor created by socialist regimes. At any rate, the betrayal of the power elite and intellectuals had a lethal impact on the fate of socialist regimes. Based on this observation, Kim Jong-il and his associates in North Korea devised measures to justify the tightening control of intellectuals.

In September 1990, Kim Jong-il expressed his opinion on the measures to be taken towards intellectuals before the members of the Central Committee of the Korean Worker's Party.<sup>55</sup> He emphasized the party's guidance of intellectuals. The rationale for his policy was that the intellectuals were originally made up of diverse groups and did not possess a firm class-con-

<sup>53</sup>Kim Jong-il, "*Hyeokmyeong gwa geonseoleseo interieui yeokhaleul deouk nopija* [Let us uphold the role of intellectuals for continuing revolution]" (The Speech before leading workers of the Central Committee, Korean Workers Party, September 20, 1990), *Great Leader Kim Jong-il's Literature*, p. 275.

<sup>54</sup>Vladimir Shlapentokh, *Public and Private Life of the Soviet People: Changing Values in Post-Stalin Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 190-202; For the derailed acts by North Korean government officials since late in the 1980s, see Sung Chull Kim, "Bureaucratic Corruption and Its Social Effects in North Korea," *Nonviolent Sanctions Seminars Synopses* (Center for International Affairs, Harvard University, Fall 1994), pp. 7-14.

<sup>55</sup>Refer to Kim Jong-il, "Let us uphold the role of intellectuals for continuing revolution," p. 279.

sciousness, thus failing to form an independent class of their own:

Since the intellectuals do not form an independent class of their own, they also do not possess a class necessity and ideology reflecting their interests, which the working and capitalist classes usually have. If the intellectuals arm themselves with revolutionary ideology of the working class, they would struggle for them standing by the side of revolution. If they equip themselves with the bourgeois ideology, they would struggle only for the capitalists — the exploitative class. Under the guidance of the party, the intellectuals should accept revolutionary ideology of the working class, stepping forward to accomplish workers' liberation and independence.<sup>56</sup>

This argument was in line with Kim Il Sung's policy toward intellectuals proposed in 1968. While Kim Il Sung's policy was mainly intended as a warning against the vestiges of old intellectuals and their influences, Kim Jong-il's policy attempted to caution the intellectuals who could still be characterized by a certain level of duplicity, although a generation change between the old and the new intellectuals had already occurred.

By strengthening the policy of "Revolutionizing Intellectuals and Turning Them into Working Class" continuously pursued by Kim Il Sung since the early 1960s, Kim Jong-il intended to heighten the control of the intellectuals through the party mechanism, while not even allowing their existence as a separate social group. This control measure taken by Kim Jong-il was based on his argument of the necessity to integrate intellectuals according to the developmental stages of socialism. According to him, the first phase is the period of struggle against the capitalist class before the party's power takeover. In this period, the intellectuals have to take a stand for the working class. In the second phase, the working class has to educate the intellectuals after workers seize power in the party. The final phase is the one in which intellectuals have to be eliminated as socialism is deepened.<sup>57</sup> The current policy toward the intellectuals in North Korea corresponds to the final stage as indicated by Kim Jong-il. This stage became particularly important since the collapse of the socialist bloc.

After the fall of socialist regimes, the contents of education for intellectuals presented by Kim Jong-il have included faith in socialism, collectivist value, nationalism, loyalty toward the Party and the Leader, strengthening group activities, struggle for action, and the idea of superiority of the Korean nation.<sup>58</sup> In addition, another control target was the student body

<sup>56</sup>*ibid.*, p. 281.

<sup>57</sup>*ibid.*, p. 293.

studying abroad. Kim Jong-il not only summoned the students back to North Korea immediately after the collapse of the Eastern socialist bloc, but also stigmatized them as “people who have studied abroad” and inscribed the information on their official documents.<sup>59</sup> Such a harsh measure stemmed from the assumption that these students tend to compare European life with that of North Korea. Similarly, North Korea has tightly controlled overseas business trips of the intellectuals, compared to those of other social groups.

One of the most noteworthy measures made by Kim Jong-il was to hold a nation-wide intellectuals meeting in December 1992, for the first time since the establishment of the North Korean socialist regime. This meeting was intended to impose new duties upon the intellectuals in order to overcome domestic and overseas crisis in North Korea. In the meeting hosted by Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong-il, high-ranking government officials and the party cadres, and about 6,000 intellectuals from various sectors such as science, art, and literature participated. The discussions during the meeting were about the role of intellectuals in safeguarding the regime centered on the Korean Worker’s Party. After the death of Kim Il Sung, propaganda has focused on loyalty toward Kim Jong-il as a duty of the intellectuals, as promulgated in the intellectuals meeting. Based on this, an editorial of the *Rodong Shinmum* on June 17, 1995 stated that, “the most important thing for the intellectuals in becoming loyal revolutionaries endlessly carrying out the great achievement of the Party is to have an absolute trust in Kim Jong-il and to follow the Great Leader.”

## CONCLUSION

From the Korean liberation in 1945 to the transitional period in the second half of the 1950s, North Korea implemented a series of policies toward intellectuals that corresponded to the revolutionary societal change. From the dualistic policy of accommodating old intellectuals and cultivating new intellectuals, Kim Il Sung gradually moved toward a policy of suppressing old intellectuals through purges and indoctrination. The reason for this change was that North Korea, unlike other socialist countries, was carrying out a “revolutionary war of national unification” amid deepening enmity among different factions such as Kim Il Sung’s faction, the Soviet faction

<sup>58</sup>*ibid.*, p. 295.

<sup>59</sup>Jae Jean Suh, *Tohanaeui bukhansahoewi* [Another North Korean Society] (Seoul: Nanam, 1995), p. 178.



and the Yen-an faction. During the Korean War, all of the potential political forces became targets of purges by the Kim Il Sung faction. The North Korean case was significantly different from that of Germany, another divided country. Although East Germany carried out a rapid transition to socialism, it did not wage a war against West Germany and did not have various foreign-origin factions. Therefore, the “defeat guilt” question — who were responsible for the defeat in the war and who were internal accomplices — did not emerge in East Germany.

The policy of “Revolutionizing Intellectuals and Turning Them into Working Class” implemented in the 1960s was intended to negate the existence of intellectuals — old or new — as a pseudo-class as stated by Lenin. Such a policy hardly existed in socialist countries in Eastern Europe: neither in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland with a strong tradition of intelligentsia, nor in Romania with a history of weak intelligentsia. In the Romanian case, the leadership was dissatisfied with the COMECON and tried to remove itself from the Soviet Union’s sphere of influence in the early 1960s. In doing so, Romania tried to promote intellectuals’ nationalism in order to adapt itself to drastic changes in international situations. In sharp contrast, although North Korea established the *juche* idea as a principle of self-reliance amid the Sino-Soviet conflict, it used the ideology as a tool to deny the existence of intellectuals.

In the early 1970s, North Korea began preparation for the power succession from Kim Il Sung to Kim Jong-il, which was unique in socialist regimes. In general, gradual retirement of revolutionaries of the first generation and power shifts at the top level were accompanied by many changes of knowledge and culture in socialism. In the cases of post-Stalin Russia and post-Mao China, new leaders were not as ideologically oriented as those revolutionaries of the first generation, and then empowered the intellectuals to some extent in order to revitalize the system. Unlike those countries, however, North Korea did not significantly change its policies toward knowledge because of the unique father-son power succession. North Korea succeeded in mobilizing the newly educated intellectuals through work team movements for the Three Great Revolutions. In particular, this social mobilization of new intellectuals led to the decline in the knowledge system, and this became one of the main elements that caused overall stagnation in the regime along with the inefficiency of the socialist economy.

The role of the intellectuals as agents of change shown in the process of the breakdown of socialist regimes was a shock to Kim Jong-il. It is remarkable that the political role of the intellectuals in each regime was different. Intellectuals in Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia assumed a leading

role during their systemic transformation, while those in the remaining socialist countries in Eastern Europe did not. Nevertheless, intellectuals have one thing in common; unlike other social groups, they all possess the ability to think critically and creatively. Knowing this fact, Kim Jong-il attempted continuously to transform the class status of the intellectuals, while persuading them to function as vanguards in defending the regime. Given this situation, it has been very difficult for the North Korean intellectuals to transform their creativity into critical attitudes toward its regime because of their uncertain status of existence. Like other social groups, North Korean intellectuals might have been discontent with the rigid rule of the existing regime. However, their discontents have not yet developed into criticisms toward the existing socialist regime.<sup>60</sup> Such a qualitative change will occur only if the North Korean intellectuals were given political space to voice their independent role. That, however, is unlikely to happen.

Because of their uncertain social status and their traditionally passive role, North Korean intellectuals are not likely to become the main agents of social and political change in the near future. If the power elite initiates gradual reform and opening from above, the intellectuals may be able to promote their social status by making intellectual contributions. By adapting *juche* idea to the new era of reform and by justifying gradual changes in the regime, North Korean intellectuals in the field of social science and those working in state-owned enterprises could enhance their social status. The intellectuals in these two fields will become beneficiaries of new policies supported by the power elite, only if they succeed in theoretically justifying reform and opening due to their creativity and technical expertise.

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<sup>60</sup>Young-Hwa Lee, *Pyongyang bimil jipoewi bam* [Night of secret assembly in Pyongyang] (Seoul: Donga Publishing Company, 1995), p. 259.

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