

The North Korean Conundrum and the Deficiencies of
Western-Rational Social Theory

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An Introduction Regarding Methods and Objectives

For more than a decade debate has raged over how and when the oppressive and uncooperative regime in North Korea would fall with the foregone conclusion tacitly accepted

that it would fall, soon. The reasoning behind this ubiquitous assumption is clear and substantively more cogent than the wishful thinking of partisan politicians and cold-war hawks. North Korea is an antiquated, oppressive, rogue state, which has exhausted nearly all of its alliances at a time when its completely failed agricultural economy makes food aid a daily necessity.

Further, from a structural standpoint, North Korea is a final stalwart of Soviet era dictatorships, outlasting even the Soviet Union in its commitment to fighting western imperialists and their evil capitalist doctrines and advancing the causes of Socialism. One by one such states have collapsed and revolutionized their government structures especially as regards economic openness to international capitalist markets since the first steps of *Glasnost* were undertaken. The process has become familiar and the conclusion has become a given. It all makes perfect sense, and yet as more than a decade has passed since Aiden Foster-Carter and other experts and leaders in scholarship on North Korea, the fall has not come. In fact, the imminence of collapse seems no greater than it did when the first death pronouncements were being made.

This raises two related questions, one of which has received a great deal more attention than the other. The question which has gained a great deal of attention from experts of all stripes is "Why hasn't North Korea collapsed as it should have?" That is, why isn't North Korea

behaving as it should? The question which has gained considerably less attention, and which this paper will seek to address is "Why do we think collapse in North Korea is inevitable when it has shown little sign of instability to date?"

The answer to this latter question requires a twofold analysis. Our attention should not fall to amending the empirical understanding of North Korea, but rather we must reflectively understand and step out of the theoretical frameworks which, like blinders, make invisible the clearest and simplest reasons for the remarkable stability of the Kim regime. To do so, we must understand the arguments being made by scholars and policy experts alike regarding the DPRK as well as the theoretical and philosophical tradition within which they are working. This process will entail (a) a brief review of the proscriptions of relevant academics, experts, and policy makers regarding North Korea's Kim regime's stability, (b) a reflective analysis of the theoretical assumptions involved in their understanding—that is, of the culture within which they are couched, (c) a formalized theory regarding the necessary and sufficient conditions for revolution in North Korea distilled from this tradition, (d) a critique of the tradition and reformulation of its theory into a more useful set of necessary and sufficient conditions, and finally (e) an empirical analysis of North Korea in this new light.

The first step in this process will amount to the distillation, from extant theories regarding regime stability in North Korea, of what I will refer to as Western rational theoretical assumptions regarding individuality and the universality of its experience. Limitations on the time and space of this paper will not allow me to establish comprehensively the substance or the roots of this Western rationalism but rather to posit it as a definitional type of theoretical culture and to offer three bodies of socio-political theory as examples. The first of these will be Weberian theory. I will establish in Weber's logic a pandemic process in the Western rational tradition of what Gould (I know I need cites here) refers to as a conflation of structural and functional processes of legitimation and justification. Further, I will engage Habermas' universalism as a positive extension of the same logical conflation. Finally, I will show the way in which the dual assumptions of processes of rationalization and universal individualism have been formalized in Western rationalism in the positivist body of political economic theory.

This last body of theory, that of political economics, is the most formalized of the three I will explore, and it is also the closest formal body of theory to actual foreign policy and the opinions of policy makers regarding North Korea's regime stability for more than two decades. For these reasons, I will use political economic models regarding dictatorships as a means of creating a theory of

the necessary and sufficient conditions for a revolution in North Korea to overthrow the existing Kim regime. This set of necessary and sufficient conditions will satisfy the general assumptions of Western rational theories and will thus mirror the logic of academics, experts, and policy makers regarding the inevitability of North Korean collapse.

My critique of this conclusion will be couched in a more general critique of the Western rational assumptions of rationalization driven by positivist self-interest and the innate universality of the experiences of individuality. I will show that in North Korea, the state's *juche* ideology is so completely inculcated in its people as to comprise not simply a value system but a cultural logic which does generate a universal experience of individuality nor does it pit rational self-interest against the oppression of the Kim regime in a way that would lead to revolution even under conditions of tremendous strain. I will construct a theory of social disorder based on a notion of strain and ultimately contend that a revolution at the level of culture, or meaning, is required in order to generate a revolution against the Kim regime.

With the aim of establishing this point I will examine the role and dogmatic evolution of the *Juche* ideology in North Korea and examine the two aspects of the state which maintain its supremacy and totality as a structure of meaning generative of values which legitimate the actions of the state. The first of those being the educational,

military, and work programs, and the second being the strict system of security and harsh punishments offered to those who dissent in any way. The existence of these two mechanisms is solely a means of precluding the development of any cultural revolution, which might spur those who are no longer adequately provided for to revolt against the regime that keeps them in that position.

As stated above this process will begin with an examination of the current state of affairs in North Korea and the body of theory put forth unequivocally by the most relevant academics, experts, and policy makers regarding the stability of the North Korean state and the likelihood of its collapse. This account will give a sense of the academics' policy debates regarding the likely form of North Korea's demise and its causes as well as the official body of material describing the stances U.S. policy makers for more than two decades. In all of these works, the fall of the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea and its Kim Regime are judged inevitable for various reasons emanating from the same basic interpretation.

Chapter 1

Perspectives in Current Theory and Policy Regarding North Korean Stability

The preeminent body of academic and policy work regarding the stability of North Korea's Kim regime would suggest that its economy and the inherent and arbitrarily enforced institutional inequalities of access to opportunities destabilize the regime in untenable ways. While the latter affects the manifestation of the failure of the former, it is the inevitable failure of the economy in North Korea, which plays the causal role in the ubiquitous hypotheses of imminent collapse.

This chapter will outline the relevant sentiments of academics, experts, and policy makers regarding the destabilizing forces in the attempt to show that all such evaluations accept implicit notions of the primacy of the individual and individual goal attainment capacity in both individualized and communal action. We will establish that, without these assumptions in place, the predictions of the collapse of a state as the result of a bottom-up collapse of its economy does not a necessary and sufficient condition of collapse make. This chapter will thus be a survey of the work done by political economists and sociologists as well as published policy briefs reflective of the views of United States policy makers regarding North Korean stability over the course of the last decade. We will force ourselves and our readers to be reflective about seemingly self-evident

aspects of individuality and individual rationality in conditions of significant strain. In order to fruitfully engage this endeavor we thus turn first to the work of Nicholas Eberstadt and Anthony Mitchell as a means of establishing the extent of the strain on the economy. We will then engage the collapsist scenarios of Aidan Foster-Carter and the overt methodological assumptions in his works. Finally we will examine published policy documents, which suggest that U.S. policy makers have come to accept the general assumption of eventual collapse in North Korea.

The North Korean economy has, as Eberstadt tells us in *The End of North Korea*, collapsed. That is, its infrastructural mechanisms are no longer capable of ensuring the nutritional needs of broad sections of its populous (Eberstadt 1999: 10-15) . Estimates of the total casualties resulting from starvation during the 1990s are frequently above one million. Further, the decline and ultimately the failure of the North Korean economy are the products of stubbornly consistent economic policies geared much more towards the maintenance and furtherance of the state's 'socialist' ideological principles. As a result, the failure in which North Korea finds its economy is not remediable under the government as it exists today (Eberstadt 1999: 25-55).

Unlike several similar examples of widespread famine resulting from distortions in socialist economic policies, North Korea's distortions are clearly an institutionalized

byproduct of a socialist ideology, the abandonment of which the state leadership has obviously deemed more costly than famine and economic failure itself. Remarkable though this is, it is clear that economic failure and resulting famine in North Korea will be alleviated only insofar as the state can increase the level of aid, which it receives from the rest of the world. Both Eberstadt and Mitchell explain the inescapable economic crisis in which North Korea finds itself as the ultimate inevitable cause of its collapse (Eberstadt 1999: 45-68).

The state of the North Korean economy is one of total disintegration on several fronts. Eberstadt suggests that North Korea's economic collapse is similar to those facing modern wartime economies such as Nazi Germany, Russia in WWII, Japan, and Vietnam. It is on this basis that he establishes the notion of a state which functions and may even temporarily increase output after economic collapse. His prognosis is however grim in that he suggests that the period in which modern wartime economies have sustained such red-lining is relatively brief, whereas North Korea has maintained and worsened such a model for nearly a generation now (Eberstadt 1999: 45-49). He goes on to establish the infeasibility of maintaining current growth trends in the population involved in the military (Eberstadt 1999: 47-48).

Trade shocks are another serious difficulty facing regime stability in North Korea, as Eberstadt points out sanctions and more general displacement from the

international economy as determined by political or market mechanisms has proven in the past to severely destabilize governments. North Korea's capability of dealing with these trade shocks lessens each year as its food situation becomes more dire (Eberstadt 1999: 70-75).

Finally, the collapse of the North Korean economy is manifest most urgently in its agricultural shortfalls. While these problems of food shortages are a common experience of most command economies, North Korea's are different because they are manifest in a country with a strong party political mechanism which has dominated for more than half a century, whereas other command economies generally dealt with food shortages as a sort of nascent growing pain corrected by simple policy reversals. Neither the food shortages nor the strains of trade shocks or a growing military seem subject to such easy reversal in North Korea (Eberstadt 1999: 10-15).

Modern military states have accomplished for brief periods what North Korea seems to have accomplished for now more than a decade. Whereas North Korea's average expenditure on the military is around 25 percent of GDP full-scale war economies in the past have diverted from 40 to 60 percent of annual GDP to military expenditures. These countries however have done this for not more than two to four years before, absent the economic benefits of significant political and economic victories stemming from the war, their economies were in total collapse. This

collapse has often occurred prior to the collapse of the dominant governmental structure, however there is no historical precedent for the maintenance of such a militarized state for prolonged periods after the collapse of the economy. Essentially, a state organization, which can feed neither its people nor its military, has never managed to maintain legitimacy or power for prolonged periods. Eberstadt's proclamation of the collapse of the North Korean economy came in 1999 (Eberstadt 1999: 45-70).

Another of the serious problems affecting the North Korean economy is the set of exogenous trade shocks, sanctions, and embargoes that have crippled its ability to employ the time honored technique of import substitution as a means of economic subsistence. North Korea is not a competitive producer of goods for the world market, nor is it a candidate for most of the institutionalized forms of international financial aid as a result of its unacceptable political and economic policies over the course of the last decade. Eberstadt and Mitchell tell us that this situation is largely self-imposed in that North Korea need only normalize relations and gradually liberalize its economy in order to engage an, albeit costly, path towards development and revitalization (Eberstadt 1999: 70-86; Mitchell 1998: 146-155).

It is clear, and important for our purposes, that leaders in the Kim regime in the DPRK consider the instability that would result from necessary ideological

shifts in the processes of economic liberalization and political normalization more costly than the ravages of famine resulting from a failed economy. Although Eberstadt cites Cuba as a relevant example of a state, which has chosen a similar path, he suggests that Cuba's population is smaller, its economic woes much less severe (with a per capita consumption of more than triple that of North Korea), and which is not nearly as urbanized (Eberstadt 1999: 50-56). For all of these reasons, both Eberstadt and Mitchell believe that the Kim regime's cost-benefit analysis is wrong concerning normalization and liberalization in that they see it as a short-term stabilization policy, which in the long run will destabilize the existing governance structure. Backed by several modern economic case studies and a general assumption that famine combined with the collapse of an economy necessarily dooms the existing governmental structure in the long run, the two authors make the political economic case for existence of the necessary and sufficient conditions of the revolutionary collapse of North Korea's Kim regime (Eberstadt 1999: 10-15, 115-125; Mitchell 1998: 160-164).

This economic analysis is at the heart of the somewhat more textured sociological argument put forward by Aidan Foster-Carter with the same hypothesized endgame scenario. The collapse of the economy from a sociological point of view creates several sub-crises all of which ultimately lend themselves to a legitimation crisis of the state. Such is

the reasoning behind Foster-Carter's contention in his 1998 paper "North Korea: All Roads Lead to Collapse" (Foster-Carter 1998). Foster-Carter from the start rejects the notion that *Juche* ideology, or implicitly any ideology, could stabilize a state's governance system in the face of total systemic economic failure. Further, the overt and arbitrary discrimination that dominates the experiences of two-thirds to three-fourths of the North Korean population leads to what Habermas refers to as a motivation crisis. Foster-Carter is not an empiricist even to the degree of the two previously mentioned political-economists. He is a voluntarist, and we will later argue a universalist, who needs not engage historical examples of similar collapses of Stalinist states, compelling though he admits them to be. It is perhaps for this reason that his theories of unequivocal collapse in North Korea are so compelling and useful for the purposes of this paper. He is willing to acknowledge that his universalist-voluntarist assumptions are a priori while committing to them wholly (Foster-Carter 1998: 30-36). Thus we will address three components of his argument: a) the claim that *Juche* and *Kim Il Sung-ism* are not unique ideologies, which somehow insulate the political from economic strains because no such ideology can exist; b) that the unwillingness of the state to alter its policies results in its implication in the minds of its people in the economic crisis of the state; c) that institutionalized, arbitrary discrimination produces a motivation crisis.

Tying these three conditions into one, he suggests that they create a legitimation crisis in the North Korean state as described by Habermas.

Foster-Carter does not simply dismiss the notion that North Korea is ideologically dissimilar in critical ways from previously failed Stalinist states. In fact he presumes that no such difference can be established ideologically. He denies the notion that an ideology exists which could insulate the political aspect of the state from the failures of the economic aspect of the state. He sights such universals as the aphorism he calls the "Marley thesis—a hungry man is an angry man..." (Foster-Carter 1998: 34). He thus establishes from the beginning that in a situation of total economic collapse and famine, a response will be leveled at the political arm of society, especially in a society in which the political is so overtly involved in the economic. Having laid this initial contention as a basis for his further contentions, Foster-Carter thus goes about linking economic crisis to political or legitimation crisis.

As established above, the North Korean political elites are deeply involved and responsible for the economic woes of its society. Foster-Carter in fact pays respect to the work of Eberstadt as a primary theoretical resource in the establishment of the obvious implication of the government in North Korea's economic woes. Assuming that economic crisis will have political ramifications, Foster-Carter thus

posits that one of these ramifications will be what Habermas refers to as a crisis of rationality, which occurs in a system in which the government cannot or will not do anything to change systemic economic failures. The evidence we have cited above seems to lend empirical veracity to this contention. However, Foster-Carter cites another crisis in the process, which ultimately leads to a legitimation crisis of the state (Foster-Carter 1998: 30-36).

Using Habermas' central notion of motivation crisis, Foster-Carter suggests that there is evidence that people no longer invest themselves in the North Korean system, and passively oppose it for not accomplishing its goals of facilitating the fulfillment of their personal desires. Foster-Carter cites as evidence for this an increase in crime and a significant decrease in worker productivity. As we will discuss in succeeding chapters, Habermas notion of motivation crisis is the result of a fundamental contradiction between the culturally constituted standards regarding what a political-economic system should facilitate and how it should do so and the actual state of affairs. Foster-Carter uses this language as a link between a failing economy and an attenuated state apparatus in a way that we will later abandon (Foster-Carter 1998: 30-36). His use of the language and its conceptual link between the state and the economy will remain useful below in constructing a viable theory of capacities.

For now, we must turn our attentions briefly to what might be the most practically important body of literature, policy papers and briefings from within the U.S. State Department and intelligence agencies regarding a general approach to dealing with North Korea. A collection of, mostly brief, general policy analyses regarding the United States' position regarding North Korea, recently published by the National Security Archive reveals a consistent pattern of thinking regarding the stability of the North Korean state from the Regan administration on. Predictions of instability and the imminent collapse of the regime become much more openly and forcefully conveyed in the papers following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 . From 1992, as tensions rise regarding the nuclear capabilities of North Korea, the papers encourage an increasingly aggressive policy stance towards a regime that seems to be faltering. Finally, papers from the George W. Bush administration reflect a general approach of isolationism toward North Korea, which it views as having little in the way of options beyond complying with the wishes of the international community and the western world, based on the assumption that an economically crippled and isolated North Korea must be one with an unstable governmental regime.

Chapter 2

Western Rationalism

The previous chapter outlined three bodies of work specifically regarding North Korea's regime stability given its economic hardships and the oppressiveness of its regulations. These works were chosen both for their coherence and their importance in the academic and policy-making spheres concerning policies emanating from the West towards North Korea. Similarly, this chapter will deal with three bodies of material, which are both formative and representative of the type of scholarship produced in the West about economy, society, and the state. I propose that these bodies of material are representative of both ideological and methodological strains of an academic culture, which I will refer to as western-rational. This western-rational academic culture has been dominant in the West for more than a century, and it has shaped the way that strategic international policy decisions are made. I will

show that the earlier discussed material about North Korea falls within this broader culture as a means of justifying the use of the political economic Dictatorship constraint to exemplify the type of theory regarding the necessary and sufficient conditions for regime collapse produced by Western rationalism.

We will deal with typifying western rationalism through an examination of three broadly influential sets of material. First, Weber's notions of the mechanisms for securing, within a society, the solidarity of its people will be introduced in the manner that they are commonly understood (we will revisit this understanding critically in a later chapter). This theoretical framework is tremendously important in that it is one of the formative aspects of western rational theory regarding notions of legitimacy. It establishes in the tradition the natural supremacy of rationalism in the development of modern bureaucratic states.

Second, we will move to Habermas' notion of the moral universality of discursive reason. Habermas' work is relatively contemporary, and his specific contentions are not, as yet, mainstream. His theory is however widely recognized as among the most important work produced in his time, and more importantly it provides an ideological link between the nature and success of the economy and regime stability. I argue that Habermas' universalism is another fundamental aspect of western rationalism.

Finally, we will explore perhaps the most influential branch of western rationalism regarding economy, society, and state—modern political economy. The analytical simplicity and empirical testability of this body of work has made it the mode of choice for grounding policy decisions academically, and its underlying assumptions represent an empiricist reworking of the western rational tradition. Our look at Weber, Habermas, and political economy will underline the development of the assumption of universal rationality innate in the individual and the collectivity that has developed in the West to produce a culture of western rationalism.

Weber's Mechanical and Organic Solidarity and the Stability of a Society

Max Weber, in his broad and sweeping look at the development of economy and society, created in one fell swoop the underpinnings of modern sociology of the economy and of the state. The mechanisms of solidarity within a society are constitutive of the society in Weber's sense of them. Thus, while they need not exist in any specific way for any given society they must exist in some form or another. Without functioning mechanisms of solidarity, a society is made tremendously less stable and thus unlikely to be reproduced. This is why, for Weber, societies do not exist without functioning mechanisms of solidarity. Weber

explains two separate mechanisms of solidarity. He called the first traditional-hierarchical legitimacy, which is ensured by the subsumption of norms under values. He called the second rational-legal legitimation, however for the purposes of this paper, we will acknowledge the link made by Gould (1993) between Weber's rational-legal legitimation and what Gould calls justification. Justification is secured by a procedural norms to which all involved agree (Gould 1993; Weber 1978: 217-241). We will examine both, and explain why Weber's discussion of the process of securing justification by means of organic solidarity is so important to the development of western rational thought regarding the state.

The process of legitimation as presented in Weber's seminal work *Economy and Society* involves the subsumption of norms under societal values, which are communally held. For Weber, at the societal level, legitimation is important for stabilizing the rule of law and for organizing the actions of people and collectives in acceptable ways. One can extrapolate from this model that the values acknowledged in the process of legitimation are, to some degree, constitutive of the society. The breadth of application of the concept of legitimation in Weber however is somewhat limited as regards contemporary application (Weber 1978: 227-241).

Weber provides a specific sort of example of the process of legitimation, and the example is definitive of its boundaries. Perhaps because he wrote when and where he

did, Weber saw the process of legitimation, i.e. the securing of the stability of the state by way of appeal to specific values, as inherently traditional. This seems to have been the intermediate step to the adjoining conclusion that he drew defining the nature of the specific values as hierarchical. Thus, Weber connects the notions of Traditional-hierarchical societies and legitimation in a way that bound the processes to a specific manifestation of them. This left the problem of transcending the traditional as a means of entering the modern, and Weber had an answer to this in his notion of rational-legal legitimation, which we refer to as justification (Gould 1993).

As societies modernized in many ways including a shift from feudal economic relations to capitalist ones, Weber says that the means by which they maintained stability shifted along similar lines. Obligation in Weber's modern society is no longer grounded on specific traditions and traditional-hierarchical values, but rather makes a move toward the consenting cooperation of individual actors. Durkheim frequently alludes to the importance of the development of the contract as a regular means of governing individuals' actions in modern societies. It is this emphasis on the development of the legally stated intent of actors to cooperate in a certain way as a means of ensuring obligation to norms, which lays the groundwork for the development of processes of justification. In Weber's terms, justification is achieved when an action or norm is

the predictable outcome of an agreed upon set of procedures. Weber suggests that at the societal level, increasingly complex modern societies are forced to develop advanced rules for governing all aspects of interaction and bureaucracies bound by those rules and charged with their execution. He refers to these societies as rational-legal societies, again making reference to the processes of stability maintenance by which they are constituted (Gould 1993).

Weber's rational-legal society is an important and formative model of how modern societies are reproduced in the western rational theoretical tradition. Its assumption of a zero-sum progression from non-rational value orientations to rational-legal procedural imperatives representing the consenting cooperation of equals suggests that there is a natural progression in societies towards the empowerment of the individual through universalist procedural incorporation (Gould 1993). The general acceptance of this notion in the West has been supported over the years by the development of modern constitutional states and their accompanying legal systems. More recently, the process of *glasnost* leading to *perestroika* in the Soviet Union has provided solid evidence supporting this natural progression. Weber's theoretical establishment of the connection between universalism and modernism is crystallized in the important works of Habermas as we will see below.

Jürgen Habermas' Discursive Rationality

This paper will briefly outline the recurrent themes from a broad and diverse body of work as a means of elucidating the inherently rational and universalist assumptions present in Jürgen Habermas' discursive ethics. These assumptions are present in his work regarding forms of crisis facing a regime, and they have influenced sociologists of every focus (including, as shown above, some of the most important sociologists writing about North Korea's regime viability). Habermas' idea of a universal morality bound up in the construction of discursively viable interactive procedures allowing the possibility of truth claims places the individual at the center of an ethics guided by universalist assumptions (Habermas 1990:21-41). Habermas' universalism empowers individuality in a way that suggests that it is always the lowest reduction of social action systems. This is an important assumption inherent in western-rational theory regarding the stability of a state.

In *Legitimation Crisis* Habermas takes on the capitalist mode of production along moral lines. He suggests that the fundamental contradiction inherent in the existence of the capitalist mode of production within modern states is actually a moral one rather than one rooted in diminishing returns on the investment of labor power. For Habermas, in modern states, the claims to power of the state (or the

ruling class) are legitimated based on moral claims, which have some link to truth. They are thus rational claims, which may be evaluated discursively (Habermas 1973: 86). This discursive evaluation of capitalist claims to the equality of opportunity create, for Habermas, a motivation crisis which ultimately leads to a failure of the system as labor power is no longer extracted efficiently. Insofar as this crisis of motivation and subsequent economic downturn is related back to a state which seeks to legitimate itself in terms of representing the collectively held values of the society, Habermas says that a legitimation crisis develops (Habermas 1973: 68-94).

An obstinate universalism rests at the heart of all of Habermas' arguments, be they related to the stable reproduction of societies, the morality of discourse, or the collective search for truth. The central tenet, which defines his universalism is the notion that all communicative action rests on truth claims. The drive to create these truth claims creates a universal morality, which is defined by a set of norms set out to facilitate the discourse through which truth claims are evaluated. Habermas suggests that in modern societies, the realization of this rational universal morality imposes its values upon the state for realization. The economic organization of the state is imputed to the state, and insofar as the state does not organize production in a way that conforms to the universalist discursive morality, members of society no

longer participate or actively seek to institute a government that does ensure universalist norms (revolt). Thus, in Habermas' writings, in a modern state, the legitimacy of the government is bound up in its ability to actualize the collective desire for universalist relationships which facilitate discursive evaluation of truth claims (Habermas 1973: 86-92). This theory is as powerful as it is textured, and it is among the most important bodies of social theory in its time. Its power rests in part on the simplicity of its fundamental assumption (that of a universal, communicative morality), and the same will be said of the final body of material, which is perhaps the most prevalent manifestation of western rationalism.

Political Economy and The Rational Actor

Political economics, like neo-classical economics, is the product of the confluence of the two great ideological currents in western rational social theory. It is both fundamentally rational, as are the theories above, and it is also fundamentally empiricist. The specific implications of both of these contentions will be discussed below. First however I must explain that political economics is, from the point of view of active decision making grounded in academic work, the most prevalent and the most influential body of social theory. The simplest explanation for this would be

that political economic theories provide easily digestible models whose implications are both powerful and, to some extent testable. This simplicity and testability would seemingly make political economic theory preferable to more textured theoretical analyses, which take into account social constructs in meaningful and explanatory ways. The active disuse of this latter type of work in both policy-making and academic circles (e.g. Parsons' fall from grace) belies an active movement away from voluntarist theories of human behavior into empiricist ones. If such a shift is happening, it is a sign that western rational values of equality and the individual have validated the universal assumption of rationality and the active exercise of the individual will over that of the community and communally held values. It is this important trend, which I believe links political (and all other types of) economics to the voluntarist theories stated above within the development of western rational societies.

The theoretical framework, on which political economics is based, is the same as that grounding neo-classical economics. Parsons dubs this theoretical framework positivist-utilitarianism. He so names it because it is characterized by a single, positively stated normative orientation—that of instrumental rationality. This is one half of the fundamental premise of the rational actor models used in political economics. It is important to note that the fundamental unit of action occurs in this model at the

individual level. In fact, the theory is atomistic in that all actions committed by any collective may be reduced to the unit actions of the individuals involved in the collective. It is crucial to the purposes of this paper to see these fundamental assumptions as somewhat extreme manifestations of the influence of western rational culture on social theory. This is an extreme example of the primacy of both rationality and the empowerment of individuality¹ (Gould 1992: 1517-1578).

The other characteristic extreme manifest in neo-classical economic theory is its empiricism. Empiricism, in Parsons' sense, assumes that the observation of phenomena exhausts all knowable information about them, and that since this is the case ends must be random. Gould rearticulates this in a more accurate way pointing out that ends are simply exogenously determined (Gould 1992: 1517-1578). The adherence to empiricism in economic disciplines, including political economics and rapidly spreading through the fields of other social sciences, is again sanctioned by western-rational culture as it further sanctifies the indestructibility of individuality and fundamental

¹Note here that I use the term individuality rather than 'the individual.' Western rationality has bred egalitarian movements, which have sought to empower the individual, however the culture has existed in times and places where this was not its primary focus. Rather the western rational culture assumes the existence of individuality and the importance of its ability to function in all of its manifestations. For example, in theorizing about an oppressive regime, political economics (as a product of western rational culture) assumes that experience of oppression is mediated by individuality in real ways.

rationality. It does so by denying constructs, which seek often to demystify individuality and to impute to it fundamental orientations emanating from outside of it that might affect its rationality. The adherence to empiricism has also been rewarded for its particular conduciveness to the marketplace of ideas facing policy makers. The strict adherence to empiricism in research is the way in which social theorists most often adhere to Occam's razor. This simplicity creates powerful conclusions, which often lend the greatest power and legitimacy to the actions of policy makers. It is in large part this simplicity and power to which political economics owes its privileged place among social scientific theory regarding the state, politics, and stability.

I have, in this chapter, suggested an important link between three important bodies of theoretical material as a means of establishing the broad significance of western rational culture in determining fundamental assumptions underlying the ways in which modern academics and policy-makers approach the stability of the state. I suggest that western rationalism has placed at the heart of each of these, otherwise quite divergent, sets of theory the universal autonomy of individuality and its inherently rational organization. Weber's notion of the zero-sum progression from non-rational value-based legitimation to rational procedural justification is based on his experience with the development of western rational culture. So too is

Habermas' idea that universal morality exists in the procedural imperatives involved in facilitating discursive truth-claims. Political economy, as a representative extension of neo-classical economic theory, takes to an extreme its inherited assumptions of the indestructibility of individuality and the primacy of rationality. In later chapters I will attempt a reflexive analysis of this western theory oriented as such by modern western culture. Prior to that however, I will use political economic theory as a means of analytically modeling the currently dominant view of North Korea's Kim regime as an unstable totalitarian dictatorship whose collapse is inevitable.

Chapter 3

The Political Economic Model of Totalitarian Dictatorship

I have contended thus far that the theoretical framework most influentially guiding foreign policy towards North Korea is that of political economics. The framework is a positivist utilitarian one, in which actors within a society seek to maximize their quality of life, or income, as against profits against systemic constraints. I will reconstruct a common political economic model for the constraints on totalitarian dictatorship. I will do this in

the interest of determining the conditions under which a totalitarian regime would be expected to collapse. Finally I will attempt to relate this theory to relevant policy decisions made by the United States regarding North Korea as a means of establishing a correlation between the assumptions about regime stability grounded in political economics and the specific strategic policies enacted by the United States. In order to sufficiently reconstruct the contentions of political economic theory, we must first set out the assumptions of positivist-utilitarian theory.

Positivist-utilitarianism is the fundamental framework underlying modern economic theory and its offshoots. It is so named because it has a single, positively stated normative orientation, specifically instrumental rationality. Within this framework, actors act in a way that maximizes their ends against their situational constraints. Actors are conceptualized atomistically, that is to say all collective actions are aggregative and can be reduced to the individual unit acts of all actors involved. Actors in this model may affect another actor only insofar as they alter the actor's situation. The framework is empiricist in that it allows only such theoretical concepts as can be derived directly from observable phenomena, and it exhausts all knowable information about the actor and the actor's situation. As a result of the empiricism embodied in this framework, ends are conceptualized in two ways. First, they are exogenous to the theory and cannot be

determined from within it, second they are transitively ordered. These basic assumptions comprise the fundamentals of all positivist-utilitarian theories, and, while providing relatively simple theoretical models to problems, they limit these theories in important ways.

A single, positively-stated normative orientation does not allow for the notion of adherence to ideological, legal, or religious norms in any way other than as they are manifest as preferences (tendencies to pursue given ends) or as aspects of the actors situational constraints toward which they must take a calculating attitude. Further, atomism does not allow for the concept of collective action motivated by value commitments constitutive of the collectivity, and is rather forced to look at all collectivities as the aggregate of complementary interests. Empiricism can neither conceptualize personality systems nor the role of communal values in governing both what is desired and, more importantly, what is desirable. Further, and this will be fundamentally important later on, it can neither be used to understand the role that a set of value commitments can have in legitimating the actions of a revolutionary subculture nor to conceptualize the role of a structure of meaning in defining cultural limits for creating legitimizing revolutionary values. Rather, it is forced to impute a single normative orientation on actors without any notion of the generative structure from whence it emanates. The greatest and most consistent shortcoming

of positivist-utilitarian theory is thus its inability to conceptualize the development of communal values, which actors see as obligatory and allow to regulate their interests and actions (Gould 1992: 1517-1578). This will be evident in a reconstruction of political economic theory with regard to social disorder.

Political Economy and the Conditions for Revolution

Armed with a positivist-utilitarian framework as outlined above, political economists construct their theory of society as though it were a market, in which power is seen to be exchanged through the medium of money and all actors remain economically rational units in an atomistic theory. Individual actors have a certain degree of influence over the economic situations of a certain number of other actors, and this is the extent of their political power. This conceptually spare notion of the mechanisms for the solidification of power within a society produces a similarly spare set of theoretical equations regarding the conditions for a revolution. This paper will seek to employ the model, which is the most recent established contribution to the field regarding dictatorships and revolution constraints. Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson, in their work *The Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, employ a Downsian probabilistic voting model counterfactually as a means of discovering a revolution

constraint on dictatorships via backward induction. While this analysis remains procedurally spare, in accordance with the rest of the work done in this field, it incorporates previous models more within economic theory and in so doing makes notions of loyalty and repression clearer². Thus, we will describe the model constructed by Acemoglu and Robinson, discuss North Korea's place in the model and compare this analysis to the policies enacted for the last two decades by the United States regarding the hermit state.

The political economics model of power distribution in society splits it simply into two groups: the elites and the poor. At the outset this gives some notion of the general focus of the model of power and equality as functions of the economy. Given that actors are rational income maximizers, their interactions with the institutionalized power structure of their society, the government, regards the main monetary interaction that involves the two agents: the system of taxation and redistribution. Within the political economics model, all individual actors seek to maximize their final income (actors are assumed to consume to their maximum ability) after taxes. In a class-wide sense final income is normalized by averaging production, subtracting average production multiplied by the tax rate, and adding the average redistribution. This "workhorse model" is the

²For a comprehensive overview of previous political economic models regarding dictatorship, see Mueller (2003: 406-424).

foundational means by which Acemoglu and Robinson describe the distribution of enfranchisement within the society (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006: 104-112). Essentially, inequality is defined by the share of total income in the society acquired by the rich. Since the relationship of the fractions of total income divided between rich and poor is zero-sum, the model suggests that as the share of total income of the wealthy increases so does inequality. The theory posits as a counterfactual to the current situation the rewards gained by revolution in the short run less the costs of revolution. Since, in a successful revolution, the wealth of the rich is divided evenly among the poor, there is a definite equilibrium tax rate above which elites may not raise taxes on the poor without risking a revolution. Armed with this indicator, the authors are capable of constructing what they label a "revolution constraint," (Acemoglu and Robinson: 2006 120-122) which acts as a limit on the power of the elite to construct tax policies as a means of maximizing their redistribution at the expense of the poor.

As seen above, the measure of inequality within a political economics model is given by the relative difference between the elite and the poor in terms of the relationship between the final incomes of each group after taxes. The more unfavorable this relationship is for the poor relative to the elites, the greater is the measure of inequality within societies. After the collapse of the

Soviet Union, Stalinist states have been thought, in the long run to succumb to revolution as a result of the inequality within their society exacerbated by strains imposed upon the economy by exogenous forces. Failure of the mode of production, economic and political competition and sanctions from outside forces, and natural disasters are several of the exogenous strains that the theory predicts would likely result in greater inequalities in terms of final income after taxes. As this inequality grows, its ratio to the cost of a revolution similarly increases, and thus makes the rewards for inciting a revolution higher (Acemoglu and Robinson: 10-15). With that conclusion in mind, we shall apply the notion of the revolution constraint within the theory as a means of evaluating its accuracy with regard to North Korea and its prevalence in the policy decisions made by the United States concerning it.

The revolution constraint is the theoretical model of a calculation on the part of a member of the disenfranchised within a non-democratic society as to whether his total income after a revolution would rise above that before a revolution. As stated above, the theoretical model for final income is average production less taxes plus redistribution. Given the assumption that a revolution within a state against a non-democratic government is undertaken with the aim of wresting power from the elites and more favorably distributing it, an ideal (or frictionless) revolution will be undertaken when total final

income prior to the revolution is less than that following a revolution. This is qualified in several ways in the theory.

First, the model acknowledges and endogenizes the destructiveness of a revolution. Final income less the destruction of the revolution must thus exceed final income prior to the revolution. Further, and this is one of the most important aspects of the political economic theory of revolution, the model must deal with the collective action problem. Factoring in the expectation of sanctions if a revolution fails, and acknowledging that all members of the poor group will receive an equal share of the payoff, no individual actor in the poor group should according to the simpler model be enticed to engage in revolutionary activity.

The authors thus recognize that final income after the revolution must be supplemented either by ideological indoctrination, individual monetary incentives, or the exclusion of those who choose not to revolt from the eventual redistribution of the wealth of the elites. Dealing first with the two latter methods, the revolution constraint is simply modified to add either immediate rewards for those who participate in the revolution or potential opportunity costs to those who do not. So long as these incentives counter-balance the negative sanctions in the case of a failure, and people expect others to participate in the revolution (in game theoretical terms,

that the best response function of a sufficient number of actors is to revolt) the revolution will occur (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006: 123-133). These essentially are simple modifications of the conditional constraints. They are significant in determining sub-game perfect equilibria in which one expects a revolution to occur.

The role of ideological indoctrination necessarily implies a role for ideology within the theory. Its inclusion in the model we are presented is interesting both in the interpretation of its role and in the lack of attention that it receives relative to the two aforementioned methods of overcoming the collective action problem. Acemoglu and Robinson briefly acknowledge and describe a process whereby ideological incentives are added to the existing economic incentives as a means of overcoming the risk of negative sanctions should the revolution fail. They cannot however endogenize the development of ideological commitment into the theory, and they are thus left with a situation in which ideological indoctrination becomes a tautologous catchall variable in situations that do not otherwise accord with their numbers. They can only endogenize the impact of ideology by decreasing the cost, but this again is arbitrary and impossible to operationalize. The reason for this odd acknowledgement *sans explication* of the role of ideology in revolutions is that the theoretical framework within which the theory is grounded, *positivist-utilitarianism*, does not allow for the

inclusion of ideology as the basis for motivation in a given situation. That role is reserved solely for the calculation of instrumental rationality.

The development of a political economic theory of revolution, and in fact of all political action within society, is grounded in the assumption that all actors seek to maximize their final income. Power within society is thus correlated and described within this model in terms of the relative ratios of final income after taxes for each individual actor. The government mediates the tax rate and system of redistribution and thus inequality is also indicated according to the same ratio. The probability of revolution is directly proportional to the level of inequality in the society, and thus non-democratic states are subject to a constraint on the extent of the inequality present in their system. The revolution constraint states that when the total inequality of income between rich and poor becomes larger than the total cost of a revolution a revolution will occur, provided that a revolutionary force overcomes collective action problems (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006: 120-122).

We will try to operationalize this regarding North Korea, acknowledging that we can only do so relying on the shakiest of numbers combined with a qualitative knowledge of the extent of inequality. In North Korea, the most likely center of a revolutionary force would be the military. This is in part because the physical and human overhead already

invested into the military make the costs that they face for revolution the lowest of any group. Further, the sheer size of the North Korean enlisted military is so monumental that there is a significant dichotomy between nearly all enlisted North Korean soldiers and the very few military officers who enjoy privileged treatment from the regime. The average North Korean is allotted a purchasing power equivalent to \$200 USD per year. They live, work, and train in squalid conditions in all but the most privileged jobs, and they are aware of the grandeur in which the small North Korean political elite live their lives (Hunter 1999: 129-159). As even soldiers begin to reach starving rations of food allotted to them, the level of perceived inequality relative to the cost of revolution must increase sharply and increase into infinity. There should thus not be any cost too great for the incitement of a revolution in North Korea. It should, as Foster-Carter suggests, be a foregone conclusion that the system must be revolutionized. As we have stated above, Acemoglu and Robinson acknowledge the effect of international economic pressures and sanctions for worsening the situation. Thus, we can explain the ubiquity of the prediction of regime collapse in North Korea throughout the western world as well as the expectation that isolationist policies and economic sanctions would be effective against a regime that should need the favor of the international economic community to remain in power. Thus the predictions of this political economics model mirror those of academics

and policy makers regarding the stability of the North Korean regime, and both seem to have drawn erroneous conclusions thereof. In the following chapters we will seek to explain the sources of this error present in the culture in which these theories have developed and in subsequent deficiencies in the way that the theory conceptualizes collective action and social movements.

Chapter 4

Critique of Western Rationalist Theoretical Assumptions and Viable Model of Necessary and Sufficient Conditions for Revolution in North Korea

The theories thus far reviewed have led to the contention across academic fields and policy spheres that the collapse of the North Korean economy and its oppressive governmental structure create the necessary and sufficient conditions to expect collapse of the society from within and revolution of the existing governmental structure. That this has not yet happened is no coincidence nor a matter of patience. Rather the expectation of this collapse is the result of an inappropriate application of western rational assumptions regarding both individuality and rationality, which do not apply to North Korean society. This assertion will be filled out further in the following chapter.

The purpose of this chapter is to look critically at the effects of western rational culture and its mediation of the experiences of western theorists writing about the state and political stability. We will conduct this reflection by

revisiting Weber's and Habermas' theories according to Gould's model, which distinguishes between the functional and the structural levels of analysis in social theory. We will show that the functional reworking of structural analyses provided by Weber and Habermas illuminate important, often overlooked, areas of society important to the maintenance of regime stability within a state. Systematizing these areas of analysis viably into a theory regarding the necessary and sufficient conditions for revolution in North Korea will require a slight modification to the model of social disorder proposed by Gould. This modification will focus this theory oriented towards strains on strains at the level of meaning or culture. This complete functional model of social disorder will provide conclusions regarding the necessary and sufficient conditions for revolution in North Korea, the probability of which will be examined in the final chapter's examination of life in the North Korean state.

Gould's theory of the analytical distinction between structural and functional levels of theoretical analysis, is particularly important to his rearticulation of Weber's theory regarding the respective realms of processes of legitimation and justification, which we will adopt as a more viable theory of the maintenance of social order (the counterpoint to our theory of social disorder). The functional analysis of a social phenomenon, according to Gould, regards the specific aspects of it, which are

definitive of it in the most abstracted sense. They are the aspects, which must be present in any manifestation of the phenomenon for it to be recognized for what it is. The functional order of a phenomenon defines the boundaries of its meaning in the most generalized sense. Functional theory of a phenomenon thus regards the specific aspects of the phenomenon tied to a general structure of meaning. Functional analysis is in a sense more general than structural theory in that structural theory examines the specific social structures within which a phenomenon exists. The structural order of a phenomenon thus deals with the specific characteristics of a specific manifestation of the phenomenon which are constitutive of that specific manifestation. The clearest and most useful exemplar of this distinction is Gould's rearticulation of Weber's theory of legitimation and justification (Gould 1987: 3-5).

Gould says that Weber's zero-sum analysis of the relationship between traditional-hierarchical legitimation and the rational legitimation we have called justification conflates a functional analysis of two mechanisms for the maintenance of stability within a society with structural analyses of two specific manifestations of the mechanisms. Gould suggests that, in modern societies, the process of subsuming norms under societally held values continues. He says that the values in modern western societies are universalist, egalitarian values such as notions of inalienable rights of men. Further, he suggests that non-

rational procedural norms were present in ancient and patriarchal societies. Thus, Weber's distinction between legitimation and justification is of structural significance as regards the difference between manifestations of modern states, but not of functional significance as regards the mechanisms necessary for the stable reproduction of any state structure (Gould 1993). This is important for the purposes of this paper in two critical ways. First, the assumption of a zero-sum progression from mechanisms of legitimation to those of justification as traditional, non-rational societies advance into modernity and rationality is maintained in later works in the western-rational tradition. Weber's assumption of the elimination of the role of value orientations in the modern world is thus a watershed in the progression of western-rational intellectual culture. Secondly, Gould's application of structural and functional analyses to theoretical frameworks which obfuscate the distinction between the two will be useful in analyzing Habermas' discursive ethic and his notion of legitimation and motivation crises.

Habermas' discursive morality eliminates the need for values in legitimation in an interesting way that is nonetheless complementary to Weber's conceptual progression. The clear line of derivation to Weber's assumptions in Habermas' theory suggests that a similar application of functional and structural analysis of his constructs might be fruitful for the reflexive analysis, which must precede

our amendment of the political economic totalitarian revolution constraint. Habermas eliminates values, which are for him the residue of relativistic tradition and miss the universal morality underlying all forms of communicative action. The demands of intersubjectively transmissible communication create a universal normative procedural standard, which must allow people the ability to construct truth claims. This micro-sociological standard has macrosociological implications in that it requires the implementation of norms to organize society in a way that people are capable of engaging as equals in discourse and equally capable of making rational claims whose relationship to truth may be logically ascertained through discourse. Habermas' universalism suggests two significant assumptions about the individual: a) that the individuality of an individual always exists in at least a fundamental form, and b) that communicative action requires that the social individual possess a fundamentally rational imperative of communicative assertion. One can plainly see the similarities in the basic assumptions and final conclusions of this voluntarist theory and those of positivist economic theories of action. These similarities are not coincidental, but are rather both the effect of a structural boundedness mediated by western-rational culture.

To examine the specific impact of Habermas' culturally-bound conflation of a structural and functional analyses of communicative orders one must understand that Habermas does

not eliminate values in a way, which suggests that norms are arbitrarily formed without recourse to judgement of their justification, but rather that he suggests that actions must conform to normative standards meaningful to the cultural imperatives of discursive relationships. This appeal to a universal structure of meaning (universal culture of communicative experience) comes as a result of Habermas' culturally-mediated *a priori* assumption of the destruction of value orientations in the transition to modernity. This assumption is grounded for Habermas as for Weber in a specific historical and philosophical tradition in western-rational culture, that of the transcendence of reason over religious dogma. The elimination of non-rational, traditional-hierarchical values as the main source of normative orientation in western-rational societies led to the assumption that values had been eliminated and replaced by rational procedures. We have established that this understanding is not viable, however this amendment to Habermas' theory misses the functional significance of his conclusions. His theory is additive to Weber's in that it suggests that at the functional level actions must be justified in their adherence to legitimate norms, the value orientations of which must be meaningful in terms of a common cultural logic. This cultural imperative of meaningfulness adds an important final aspect to the necessary and sufficient conditions for the generation of a revolution in a society, which we must now explain

systematically adhering to Gould's theory of social movements.

Gould's theory of revolutions suggests that social movements begin with the impetus produced by an anomic reaction to contradictions between current arrangements at various levels of experience and the way that these arrangements should be. Gould relies on the theoretical models of loci of strain advanced by Parsons and Smelser in his theory for the categories or levels of strain observable in a given society. In this theory strain is manifest at the level of values, norms, goals, and facilities. Unlike Smelser, who suggests that strain manifests as an amorphous anxiety whose direction is random, Gould suggests that specific strains create specific orientations of reaction (Gould . Strains at the level of goals involve the inability of the group to achieve its ends, and reactions are oriented towards the administrative ordering of the group, that is the collectivity itself. Strain at the level of facilities involves the ability of individuals within the group or society to achieve their individual ends (Gould 1987: 74-78). For the purposes of this paper, we will extrapolate from the logic of Gould's theory on the grounds of the revelation in Habermas' theory of the importance of actions to be meaningful. That is, actions must appeal to a communally accepted structure of meaning or culture.

The generation of a significant strain at any one or more of these levels may create what Gould refers to as a

revolutionary sub-culture. This sub-culture is comprised of a group of people who experience significant strain at one or more of these levels, and they create a group whose constitutive purpose is to eliminate the perceived source of this strain. A revolutionary sub-culture must itself fulfill the requirements of legitimation, and in order to do so, its actions must be meaningful to those involved in order to maintain the solidarity required to overcome the collective action problems involved in any revolution (Gould 1987: 88-90). In addition, an apathy to the deviance, which Gould calls a neutralizing belief must be present to justify deviance in the eyes of a broader group within the society, which may not actively revolt but may do so passively, called a sub-culture of revolution. Thus, strains manifest at any number of the aforementioned levels, the reaction to these strains oriented towards a specific organization or structure of the group, and the subsequent creation of a legitimate deviant subculture whose revolutionary value orientations are meaningful to those who comprise it and those who comprise a broader subculture of revolution are necessary and sufficient conditions for revolution within society.

North Korea, as examined under this framework is a revolutionary society in name (and propaganda) only. An examination of the role of the North Korean *Juche* ideology, the expansion of the mechanisms for its inculcation into the broader society, and its significant effects on life in

North Korea shows why revolution against the existing regime is precluded within the society. *Juche* evolved from a political propagandist tool into the ideological underpinnings of a cult of personality and finally expanded with mechanisms of social control into a *Weltenshauung*, out of which a revolutionary subculture cannot meaningfully define itself. I believe that previous theories have not identified this deficiency, because of the culturally specific assumptions of the existence of rationality and individuality that they inappropriately imposed upon notions of the North Korean lifeworld.

Chapter 5

The Juche Ideology and its Stabilizing Effect in North Korea

The development and maintenance of the pervasive juche ideology in North Korea seems to defy modern explanation. In the decades after its founding in 1948, the DPRK was seen by many scholars to be simply another product of the east bloc, Soviet dictatorship model (Armstrong 2001: 39-45). At the end of the Cold War era experts watched expectantly, waiting for the North Korean dictatorial Kim Regime to topple like its Soviet analogues. Again when the Berlin Wall fell, many thought that the DPRK would be the next to

go. In fact, even in the wake of the death of its beloved leader, Kim Il Sung, the Kim dynasty defied expectations by remaining afloat amidst a nasty economic crisis and an increasingly hostile international realm under its new *suryong* (leader), Kim Jong-Il (Waldenstrom 1997: 1). Since Kim Il-Sung's death in 1994 the state has maintained its *Juche* ideology-driven political system in the face of massive food shortages and an impending economic crisis. I have explained in previous chapters that academics and policy makers working with theories created within what I have referred to as western-rational cultural assumptions, have developed erroneous conclusions from deficient theoretical frameworks regarding the mechanisms and catalysts of social movements. I have posited that in order for a revolution to occur in North Korea, a specific strain must be identified and a revolutionary subculture must form in the interest of coordinating a reaction to that strain orientated towards the political system. This revolutionary sub-culture must appeal to culturally meaningful collective values to legitimate its existence to those who make up its ranks and to those in a broader subculture of revolution, which will allow them to function. I will explain below why there is reason to believe that the remarkably successful inculcation of the *Juche* ideology into the lives of North Koreans has created a *Weltenshauung* generative of a culture out of which revolutionary values of the necessary sort cannot be meaningfully constructed.

In light of its surprising tenacity in a seemingly uninhabitable environment, North Korea has been given special status, and its infamous *Juche* ideology has become, in the minds of many scholars, remarkable for its incredible power to afford control over the North Korean masses to Kim Jong-Il (Waldenstrom 1997: 3). A closer look at the history and development of the *Juche* system and its role in stabilizing and reinforcing the Kim dynasty in North Korea shows that North Korea is not somehow exogenous to modern socio-political theory.

The key to North Korea's longevity has been its remarkable ability, through the use of various media to be explored later in the paper, to inculcate its *Juche* ideology into the lives of its people and create a singular and unequivocal structure of meaning to keep them essentially unable to generate legitimating revolutionary values. This will lead to the ultimate conclusion that the maintenance of the Kim regime within North Korea rests principally on the strengths of two conditions: the ubiquitous acceptance of *Juche* ideology as a legitimizing force amongst the masses and the total control exercised by the Kim regime over the legitimizing value formation, which occurs in the experience of a specifically constructed *Weltanschauung*.

The Construction of a *Weltanschauung*

The construction of a *Weltanschauung* involves the creation of a universal collective experience within society. This experience must involve a significant enough proportion of the common daily experiences that it constitutes a deep structure. This common experience is partly cognitive and partly psychosocial, that is it contains a conscious element but for the most part it contains the aspects of experience, which create a fundamental framework for non-cognitive aspects of interaction. The common social experience in a society, like any experience generally evolves autonomously from the will of a set of individuals as a combination of objective events which have occurred within or about the society and mediation of that experience through the existing culture. While this is generally the case, nothing inherent in the theoretical definition of the evolution of the *Weltanschauung* precludes the wresting of control over its development. This would however involve taking control over virtually all interactions and methods of interaction in the daily life of the society. An actor or agent would have to so control the social experiences of everyone in the society that it could come to define the cognitive development of the individual and the society as a whole. Were a group to attain this sort of control it could conceivably shape and delimit the lifeworld and thus the cultural structure of the society. It might in this way delimit the range of values that could possibly be meaningfully generated for the

legitimation of social actions. I will show below that the North Korean Kim Regime has so wrested control of the development of North Korean culture. It has used this control and the inculcation of its *Juche* ideology into the minds and lives of its people in order to create a culture within its borders that cannot generate meaningful values that would legitimate revolutionary action carried out by the state. In order to establish this point I will outline the development of the *Juche* ideology from an anti-imperialist value system to the basis for the cult of personality, which secured Kim Il Sung's dictatorship and perhaps more importantly the dynastic succession of his middle son, Kim Jong Il. I will then discuss the methods of social control, which have secured the complete inculcation of the *Juche* ideology and thereby wrested control of the North Korean culture to create a *Weltanschauung* that stabilizes the existing political regime from within.

The Development of *Juche*

The *juche* ideology, which began as an anti-imperialist doctrine and unifying doctrine for the creation of a national party and stable order, now co-generates a structure of meaning that denies individuality in all except a mystical sense and a religious commitment to the rule of the late founder and his dynastic legacy Kim Jong-Il. The development of a system of meaning which institutionally

denies the individuality of the North Korean people creates a situation in which strains at the level of facilities as are perceived in the Western world to create a serious legitimation crisis are rather manifest in very different ways, which do not generate responses to the strains aimed at the state. In order to make this case, we must first understand the development and nature of *Juche* as a structure of meaning. In so doing we will establish that the absence of a notion of the fundamental rights of the individual allows a situation to develop in which fundamental human needs and rights may be denied without the generation of a strain that results in a legitimation crisis.

Juche has passed through five distinct stages, according to Han S. Park in *North Korea: The Politics of Unconventional Wisdom* (2002: 20). These phases show the regression of North Korea from a more rational governmental ideology within a Soviet-modeled socialist state to a completely non-rational world-view, which focuses on the divine right behind the leadership power of Kim Il-Sung and his legacy Kim Jong-Il as well as the importance of the subsumption of its people's personal goals under the goals of the overarching North Korean society, as dictated by the leader (Park 2002: 20-29).

At the birth of the DPRK after the partition of the two Koreas at the 38th parallel, the fate of the northern half of the peninsula seemed to be under the control of Soviet

Russia (Waldenstrom 1997: 16-17). Thus, although it was not the development of a liberal democracy, in earnest, which seemed the most likely prospect for North Korea, a working three party socialist system at the top of a highly centralized, but still procedurally justified system founded upon the principles of socialism seemed very likely to take hold (Park 2002: 21). Indeed for the first decade of the DPRK's existence, there seemed to be a relatively functional modern system in place (even if it did have a strong leadership oriented bent). In fact, it was not until 1958 that Kim Il-Sung was able to cast out the remaining contestants for power in the state, altering the *Juche* ideology slightly to do so (Waldenstrom 1997: 25-26). It was this purge of any real dissent within the political power structure in North Korea, which marks the sharp descent into non-rationality in the mechanisms of social order in the state. However, at the outset, while by no means a democratic state in earnest, North Korea was much more recognizable as a modern state than it would eventually become.

Juche ideology began as anti-Japanism, a sort of pseudo-ideological negatively defined nationalism. At this early stage of the development of *Juche*, Kim Il-Sung used rampant anti-Japanese sentiment, along with stories of his heroic guerrilla battles against Japanese colonialists to begin building his charisma within the state (Park 2002: 22). He is said to have been the creator of the *Juche*

ideology, but as one can plainly see, at its earliest stages, Kim's *Juche* was no more than the rearticulation of a commonly held hatred for Korea's former colonial dictators (Park 2002: 22). Kim would, as the Japanese threat to his state's power waned, turn the focus of *Juche* toward anti-colonialism and from there anti-hegemonism.

The development of *Juche* as an anti-hegemonic, nationalist ideology arose for three main reasons, all of which contributed directly to the further centralization of power under Kim Il-Sung as the North Korean state became less rational and more founded upon a belief in its charismatic leader. Following the devastation, which wracked North Korea in the wake of the Korean War, there has always been a significant fear of the United States attacking (Oh and Hassig 2000: 9). Thus, anti-American ideology, which sought to emphasize the national and military strength of the DPRK was particularly popular among its people. Further, the Sino-Soviet dispute threatened North Korean security as it threatened to force it into a choice between two extremely powerful communist block nations. Anti-hegemonism allowed Kim to take an official policy of equidistance from the two states as a means of self-reliance, and at the same time to effectively cast its lot with China (Park 2002: 22).

China was the best choice for Kim Il-Sung's designs at consolidating his power within North Korea for two reasons. First, Mao Tse-Dong's development of a personality cult in

China was just the sort of charismatic leadership role Kim needed within the DPRK in order to solidify his grasp over all functioning aspects of its government (Armstrong 2001: 45). Second, criticism of Soviet expansionism allowed Kim to push remaining factions within his government loyal to a Soviet system out as traitors to the policy of self-reliance, or *Juche* (Waldenstrom 1997: 25-26). By 1958, Kim had used this ideology as a tool to cast out all legitimate competition for his power from the government (Park 2002: 23). This marks the point from which each subsequent evolution of the *Juche* ideology was followed by remarkable leaps towards a non-rational social order founded on the authority of a government led solely by Kim Il-Sung.

Juche's next evolution was from negatively defined nationalism, useful for the initial rallying of support and purge of dissent for Kim Il-Sung and his ruling Korean Workers Party, to nationalism proper, which focused internally on consolidating the ideology among the North Korean masses through political education (Park 2002: 23). *Juche* now focused on political sovereignty, economic subsistence, and military strength. Political sovereignty policy meant that only states, which the government felt were ideologically correct could be interacted with. Limiting the number of states to a very few Soviet bloc states, Kim both entered a battle for ideological superiority with South Korea and limited obligations with

states that might force compromise from his ideological stance.

Economic subsistence policy virtually closed off international trade for all industries except the military, as North Koreans were supposed to provide for themselves from the North Korean land (Yoon 2003: 10). This strategy was crippling to the economy and remains today the most serious threat to economic security in North Korea. It focuses the objectives of the North Korean people on an ideology dictated by Kim Il-Sung as opposed to their rational self-interest. This is, in the modern world, fatal to an economy and thus ordinarily to the stability of a regime.

Finally, military first politics played the role of ensuring, in Kim Il-Sung's mind, the DPRK's ability to defend itself against the U.S. and its allies, and it provided a platform for nationalist self reliance around which his people, most of whom had spent much of their lives under the rule of militarily superior colonialist powers, could rally. This evolution of *Juche* ideology saw a significant turn inward in policy matters as well a drastic move away from an increasingly active international marketplace in favor of a self-sufficient economy, which contravened rational self-interest for the sake of commitment to the commands of Kim Il-Sung and his governmental hierarchy. Coincidentally, it saw the

beginning of political education in North Korea (Park 2002: 23).

As the DPRK turned increasingly inward, and was governed increasingly upon the merit of its charismatic leader, Kim Il-Sung, the leader's age began to raise questions as to how power would succeed after his death. The next evolution in the *Juche* ideology was one towards what Park calls paternal socialism (2002: 23). From a Weberian perspective however, it was a further regression in the mechanisms of social order within the state, as its principle purpose was the establishment of the divine right of Kim Il-Sung to rule, and beyond that the establishment of his family's divine right to dynastic ascent. Kim announced his son heir apparent in 1980 at the Sixth Party Congress. Kim Jong-Il's sole authority rested in the acceptance of his father's authority to rule, and the belief that his authority was derived divinely. Many thought that, when the time came for the young Kim to take his father's place, the regime would not hold in the face of the suffering and crises within the state. The solidification of the *juche* ideology however was complete enough in the state to ensure Kim Jong-Il's legitimization on the grounds of his inherited divine right to rule. Park points out that this evolution in North Korean mechanisms of social order meant that regime legitimacy in the state "has nothing to do with the theory of social contract, thus giving Kim Il-

Sung the *natural* right to rule" (emphasis added) (Park 2002: 26).

The final evolution of the *Juche* system is likely the one, which allowed the dynastic succession of Kim Jong-Il without a serious objection. Park calls the final evolution of the ideology, the ideology as it exists today in North Korea, a *Weltanschauung*. That is to say, the ideology, which began as a political tool for Kim Il-Sung's rise to power in the midst of a particularly hostile international environment, has become so deeply inculcated in the lives of the people and the political and social order within North Korea that it is best termed a worldview (Park 2002: 26). It is in fact the only way in which the population in North Korea is taught to view the world. It is the only perspective from which they can see the world, and it is thus not subject to notions of right or wrong. It is the basis upon which things are judged right or wrong, and it is, as much as anything could possibly be, life for the citizens of the DPRK. The final *Juche* evolution subsumes the rational self-interest, deemed physical life, of the people under the interest of the state, deemed political life, as communicated through the incredibly centralized government system from the lips of Kim Jong-Il. Kim decrees on everything from pig farming to nuclear weapons policy, and all is dictated as his direct words (Oh and Hassig 2000: 18). The evolution of the *Juche* ideology in North Korea marks the regression of the mechanisms of social order

within the state to an amazingly primitive point. Indeed, the *suryong* system, as it is called in North Korea is probably as ancient as that of the Koryo dynasty from which it is named.

The Juche ideological system and its evolution have been the tools of change within the North Korean society from a Soviet monitored socialist dictatorship, quite common in the years just after the end of World War II, to the most extreme form of traditional-hierarchical government of its size in the world today. Rational contract is absent in any significant role in the state, which revolves completely around an all encompassing world view centering upon Kim Il-Sung and, by virtue of his inheritance, Kim Jong-Il.

It requires little discussion for one to understand why in a world now so driven by international economics and rational diplomatic cooperation, a state without even a hint of concepts of rational contract, either in its economy or its diplomacy, should be expected to fail. The Kim regime hangs on in North Korea in the face of incredible hardship, and never shows signs of any open dissent. While this is remarkable and even unique in the post-WWII world, it is not as a result of the *Juche* ideology itself, but rather the incredible means by which it is inculcated into the lives of every North Korean. Extensive ideological education, through every possible medium, along with strict social control, which allows Kim complete sway over the image of the outside world which his people see as well as the image

that the outside world sees of North Korea, allow the Kim regime to remain stable where other, much less extreme, dictatorships have fallen.

Inculcation and the Development of a *Weltanschauung*

The inculcation of the *Juche* ideology in North Korea has become the *raison d'être* of nearly every administrative aspect of life within the state. From birth, North Korean children are cared for fabulously by the state in the name of the Great and Dear Leaders. The *songbun* system for determining hierarchy surrounds them from the time they are conscious of such mechanisms. It is all that they know and the elimination of meritocratic expectations deals a significant blow to the formation of individualism and rationality. As students, children are constantly taught to praise the Kims for all that they have, to strive to show their loyalty to the Kims, and to reject their individuality replacing it with a collective sense of responsibility to the existing regime. As children grow into adulthood their lives remain constantly monitored and they are completely bound, virtually until death, by state imposed work responsibilities. Men generally spend much of their working years in the military, where they are kept separate from their families and further indoctrinated. Further, the constant barrage of media promoting the cult of the Kims provides an important psychological factor in creating a

lifeworld oriented towards the rejection of individuality in favor of collective responsibility to leaders deified by their cult of personality. These factors combine to create a perceivable effect on the ability of North Koreans to rationalize. The lack of this moral development within society precludes the construction of values oriented toward a counterfactual outside of the Kim regime. This in turn precludes the development of meaningful values, which might legitimate the formation and action of a revolutionary subculture within North Korea. We will examine the processes of inculcation in the educational process (the lives of children) and North Korean daily life (the lives of adults), and we will establish qualitative evidence of the effects of these processes.

The primary reinforcements to the Kim regime's traditional-hierarchical legitimization are the comprehensive use of media for *Juche* indoctrination and the remarkable extent of social control that the central government is able to employ in North Korea. The educational system works to ensure the security of the Kim regime. The comprehensiveness of this system of indoctrination within North Korea provides an adequate defense of the *Juche* ideology and thereby the stability of the existing regime's legitimizing agent.

Juche education is a constant part of North Korean life from birth to grave. Beginning with the constant sound of *Juche* propagandist songs, young Korean children are exposed

to the *Juche* ideology from the moment they can remember sensory input, and it is likely the first aspect of life that they know outside of their families (Park 2002: 51). There are five main socialization agents, which provide comprehensive and pervasive *Juche* education in North Korea. Education begins logically in schools, continuing at home in the mass media as well as mandatory exhibitions of performing arts, following North Koreans into their jobs through the KWP's influence, and culminating in frequent and spectacular mass rallies.

School begins with preschool and daycare facilities for very young North Korean children, in which they are taught about the benevolence, heroism, and greatness of both Kim Il-Sung and Kim Jong-Il. Children are expected, by the end of preschool to have a complete adoration for their Great and Dear leaders. They associate all aspects of their livelihood including clothes, food, and other necessities to Kim Il-Sung and Kim Jong-Il while being told that the rest of the world is without such basic necessities (Park 2002: 52-53). This pattern of building up the Kim regime while denigrating foreign enemies is continued into primary school. Children are ceremoniously given all of the supplies that they need on the first day of school, from the benevolent leadership. While at school they study *Juche* doctrine and all educational materials are uniform. Books use illustrations and stories to glorify the Kim family and at the same time even mathematical problems are worded in

ways to create enmity towards imperialist powers, specifically the U.S. and its allies.

Throughout their formative school years, North Korean children are rewarded or punished according to their *songbun*, essentially the status of their family's loyalty to the regime, and not according to their performance. It is qualitatively documented that those who have good *songbun* need do little more than avoid embarrassing themselves in school, while those with middling to poor *songbun* can do little or nothing to improve their situation within the hierarchy. Since school remains the major commitment in the lives of North Koreans well into their teens, this non-rational system of rewards works against the development of individualized cognitive rationality. Such rationality plays a major role in the creation of a counterfactual for the meaningful legitimation of revolutionary activities.

Colleges and universities are divided into three types. The first and foremost "comprehensive university" is Kim Il-Sung University in Pyongyang. Nearly all political leaders have come from Kim Il-Sung University, and of all entrance qualifications, most important is *songbun*. This is incidentally, evidence of the cooperation of education and security working in tandem in the North Korean system, to keep any threat to the absolute maintenance of the *Juche* ideology and Kim regime at bay. Perhaps the most competitive area of study in Kim Il-Sung University is the study of the Great Leader's works. In both the second and

third types of institute of higher education, technical school and factory colleges, the inculcation of *Juche* ideology, regardless of the curriculum in which a student is enrolled, is the primary focus of education. Thus, from the time that a child is able to enter preschool until they finish higher education, a mandatory time span of at least 11 years, his primary focus is the understanding of *Juche* ideology and no other (Lee 2002: 56-58).

Outside of school, the only information about the world around them comes to North Koreans through two forms of mass media: The *Rodong (Nodong) Sinmun*, the only newspaper in North Korea, and three television channels which only run in the evening. The newspaper is the official Party publication, and the government thus heavily controls it. It is generally six pages long. The first two pages are usually reprinted congratulations for Kim Il-Sung or Kim Jong-Il for some great deed. The third page is generally economic news, usually praising the agricultural industry or some outstanding work group. The fourth page usually heralds the bravery of the party and its leadership. The final two pages are devoted to bashing the U.S. and South Korea for the most part. Thus the primary purpose of the paper is to elevate the existing leadership from whom orders come down to the people, to deny the existing economic crisis, which is the most prevalent threat to the Kim regime, and to discount countries seen as the antithesis of the *Juche* ideology (Park 2002: 56).

Similarly, although relative to the average North Korean worker's yearly wage they are very expensive, televisions play an integral role in every day of most North Koreans' lives. Typically only two of the three channels play, and the programming consists of messages from the KWP and Kim Jong-Il, songs and other artistic endeavors done for the glorification of the Great leader and the Dear leader, and documentaries about the history of the Kim family, which are often fantastical stories meant to further establish an almost divine right to rule. These programs provide the platform for discussion and contemplation about the Juche ideology in social settings outside of school or workplace, such as within the family unit. They are also important to see, as public discussions of them will often follow the next day in the workplace. Radios are prohibited in North Korea, because of the constant stream of material coming from South Korea, which is much harder to scramble or jam than television signal. Thus these two forms of mass media are the only ones through which most North Koreans shape their views of their world (Park 2002: 56).

The performing arts and various other forms of entertainment are vital to the cultural indoctrination of the North Korean people. Enormous theatres and venues of other sorts exist all around the country, where music and other performing arts are designed to work as further agents of socialization. Shows are generally both free and mandatory for North Koreans to attend. At these

performances, the existence of *Juche* as *Weltanschauung* is clear, as it extends its grip into *Juche music* and *Juche dance* (Park 2002: 56-57). Even leisure activities for North Koreans are both heavily structured and oriented towards the inculcation of the *Juche* ideology.

The Korean Workers Party is the only party with access to the power structure within Korea, and it consequently enjoys an extremely high membership rate relative to the top parties in other socialist dictatorships. About one in seven North Koreans is a member of the KWP, and its benefits are immense. The party is very active in the constant reinforcement of the *Juche* ideology into its members. It holds frequent meetings and delegates jobs and responsibilities to each of its members. It also assigns great powers to the branch secretaries over the lives of those under them, and punishment can be severe. It is a party of the people, and thus many of its members were poor when they were first taken into the party. The relative benefits that membership in the party creates make many of its members extremely loyal. Further, the Socialist Youth League, through which new members of the party are initiated, is a highly selective group which uses two to three years of extensive indoctrination including manual labor training and the organization of demonstrations as a means of further subsuming individualist thought within the members under the party's rule (Park 2002: 57-58).

Mass rallies are the most spectacular evidence of the North Korean government's commitment to the indoctrination of its people under the tenets of *Juche* ideology (Park 2002: 58-59). Rallies are held on the leaders' birthdays, the anniversary of the inauguration of the state, and Labor Day to name a few. They are staged in grand fashion all over the country and work is interdicted. Every rally is followed by the mass games, which are spectacular displays of gymnastics and other athletic endeavors centered on the glorification of Kim Il-Sung, Kim Jong-Il, and the *Juche* ideology. Major sporting arenas bespeckle the country, and are used to house these mass games. Outsiders are amazed and the scale and coordination of these games, just another measure of the extent to which the Kim regime spares no expense in the effort to fill every aspect of North Koreans' lives with the study of and commitment to the *Juche* ideology upon which their authority is founded.

When the years of education end, North Koreans move from the relative abundance lavished upon the society's children into a life of toil until death. Even for those privileged few who enjoy the perks of good *songbun* are taught through state mandated 'volunteer work' to relinquish the desires of the self and to seek to accomplish the goals set before them by the regime. For both men and women alike this has come to mean a life of hard labor and continued ideological training with no standard retirement age. Men may spend much of their young lives in the military. Years

ago this meant that they would be afforded relative luxuries such as a diet that regularly include meat as well as a ration of cigarettes, but recently information gleaned from defectors suggests that many in the military face only slightly less dire starvation fears than non-military civilians (Hunter 1999: 83-95). The military commitment for so many men pushes much of the labor burden onto the women and solidifies the relatively weak family life characteristic of the common North Korean household. The state thereby manages through the imposition of harsh labor commitments, long military service, and subsequently a family life that would seem oddly uninvolved for the norm in the West to destroy institutions that might generate notions of individual identity and the rational ability to impact one's surroundings while further indoctrinating people into a celebration of the two leaders who have held total power in the state for the entirety of most people's memory (Hunter 1999: 95-99).

The comprehensive system of inculcation of the *Juche* ideology and personality cult of the Kim regime involves the shaping of a worldview for North Koreans from birth. This specific *Weltanschauung* denies the importance of rationality and individuality from the earliest experiences of North Korean children, while it constructs an image of divine benevolence, wisdom, and courage for the leaders of the state. It is my contention that this process is directly related to the deficiency most poignantly described by

Michael Harrold, a Briton who lived and worked in North Korea for nearly a decade. Harrold says of North Koreans that asking them any question phrased in the 'why' form is the most confounding thing one could do to them. They simply do not encounter the type of question, and they will only be able to answer it partially with the answer to a more descriptive rather than explanatory inquiry (Harrold 2004: 315). This, it seems to me, is apt evidence of the effect in North Korea of the creation of a culture, which does not include notions of individual experience or rationality. Such a culture cannot make meaningful values, either created or appealed to, for the legitimation of a revolution in North Korea against the Kim regime.

Conclusion

The world has evolved into modernity, in nearly every case, under a Western model of development. This has meant the dissemination of Western universalist, egalitarian values. These values originate in a structure of meaning ubiquitous in the West, and often thought of as synonymous with modernity, which assumes an indestructible individuality and its inherently rational nature. These cultural assumptions have influenced both the normative spirit of the West and its academic spirit, which strives for objectivity. The influence of these assumptions on the seminal works which have shaped the Western notion of the state, its function, and fundamental responsibilities, is clear in the works of Weber and Habermas. These theorists, working within a voluntarist theory nonetheless managed to destroy the role of values by way of universalizing notions of culture. Both of these errors have made the application of Western voluntarist social theory to North Korea difficult, but the problem posed by the assumption of the universal experience of individuality is the most fundamental error. So much so, that most of the Western

social-scientific community cannot conceptualize an individual experience absent inherent rationality. Political economics, as a representative of positivist-utilitarian theory is even less equipped to conceptualize the true mechanisms of stability within North Korea. Unfortunately its ability to make powerful, and straightforward conclusions regarding the stability of non-democratic regimes, make it the favorite tool of policy makers.

North Korean society has been constructed almost completely since the founding of the Kim regime 59 years ago. The Kim regime masterfully employed methods of strict social control to dominate every aspect of the experience of its constituents in a way that fundamentally precluded the development of cognitive rationality that could problematize the legitimacy of the state. Without the ability to link the strains that they feel in meaningful ways to the legitimacy of the ruling power in their country, North Koreans will not generate a revolution from within. Evidence of the breakdown of strict social control does not represent the first step towards the implosion of the Kim regime, but rather the desperation of a people whose experience of anomy might be the closest empirical example to Smelser's notion of amorphous anxiety. Since this is the case, political economic models and models of legitimation crisis emanating from the West are simply not applicable to North Korea. The isolationist policies which these theories

might promote in the mind of a strategically oriented foreign power must be resisted. The only hope for the ultimate destabilization of the Kim regime from within lies in the cognitive capacities of the North Korean society. While recognizing that no run-of-the-mill engagement policy will amend the problem which I raise, absolutely no form of isolationist policy can ever affect the change that the conscientious and humanitarian in the West seeks for the North Korean people.

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