4 Kim Jong-un and the practice of Songun Politics

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The prevailing doctrinal paradigm when Kim Jong-un came to power with the death of his father on December 17, 2011, was that of *Songun*, or "military-first." If "military-first" politics (*songun jeongchi*) is the realist political framework that defines the way North Korea is ruled, then it also forms the rhetorical boundary within which state and party officials exercise whatever limited political freedom of movement they might at any specific time possess.[1] The entrenched nature of Songun in North Korean political culture was emphasised time and again in the months after Kim Jong-il's death; from commemorative speeches and political slogans to artwork and poetry surrounding the departed Kim Jong-il, Songun was placed in a dominant position.[2] In this chapter, we argue that Songun is the prevailing doctrine of the North Korean state and a key social and institutional ordering principal. It represents the principal position of the state and helps to determine what is and is not possible in domestic and foreign policy. In addition to defining national priorities, it also serves to organise society in congruence with the priorities of the state. Further to this, we posit that Songun represents both doctrinal and thus policy continuity from Kim Jong-il to Kim Jong-un. The North Korean military, the ostensible manifestation or beneficiary of the "military-first" policy, maintained its bureaucratic and apparently budgetary preeminence.

Since the 1960s and arguably as far back as the end of the Korean War in 1953, the DPRK has been for all practical purposes a garrison state,[3] but in particular since the mid-1990s the state has layered on artefacts, stories, narratives and events to add concrete meaning to Songun as a doctrine which structures the institutional environment in which political and economic decisions are made.[4] This process continued unabated into the nascent Kim Jong-un era, and became particularly apparent on August 25, 2013, when the DPRK officially celebrated for the first time the "anniversary" of the 18-year-old Kim Jong-il's 1960 visit with his father, national founder Kim Il-sung, to a tank corps best known for spearheading the North Korean invasion of Seoul in late June 1950.

North Korea introduces "Day of Songun"

The act of commemorating precocious Kimist militarism took centre stage in Pyongyang for the new national holiday, known officially as "Day of Songun." North Korean citizens were required to display the DPRK national flag and pay

attention to the example of visitors to Kumsusan Palace of the Sun, the mausoleum in Pyongyang that houses the embalmed corpses of both Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il. The DPRK state news agency recounted how soldiers and civilians visited the location as well as the "customary gifting of bouquets and visiting significant historical sites and monuments."[5] Amid the pageantry, state propaganda further backdated the political succession from Kim Il-sung to Kim Jong-il, suggesting that the younger Kim had been not simply been a child genius or the successor since 1980 but creating new lines for national policy as a college freshman, envisioning the Songun doctrinal transition.

As the foremost living symbol of politics in the DPRK, Kim Jong-un was certainly aware of the importance of "military-first" politics to the transitional regime, or we can be sure that his advisors made him fully aware. From the very beginning of his reign, Chinese analysts – themselves aware of the importance of theoretical treatises to reinforcing the rule of their own leaders – wondered aloud when Kim Jong-un would start notching up "achievements in theory." And indeed, he was and remains duty-bound to act as the state's foremost public theoretical exponent.[6] Within the transitional dictatorial governance structure, the young man had to be seen as being in unassailable control of the physical levers of state power and also adept in recognising their theoretical underpinnings.[7] An extended Day of Songun treatise allowed Kim to fulfill the necessary theoretician's role, giving strength to the public face of the new regime.

Published simultaneously by both the KWP (in its official publication, *Rodong Sinmun*) and the army (in its equivalent, *Chosun People's Army*) under the title "Let Us Forever Glorify Comrade Kim Jong Il's Great Idea and Achievements of the Military-First Revolution," this publication, which reproduces an alleged "statement" Kim Jong-un had with officials of the Central Committee of the KWP on April 6, 2012, provides a benchmark for assessment of Kim Jong-un's initial relationship with his predecessors in the theoretical realm and outlines the priorities of the party and the state.[8]

The statement posits Kim Jong-un's right to domination of North Korean political life in an equation. Songun leadership, the statement explains, is synonymous with the "splendid" revolutionary rule of Kim Jong-il. The core activities that defined the former leader's Songun leadership of the DPRK were overseeing the creation of a materially powerful and politically revolutionary military. Concretely, this was accomplished through two activities: the manufacture and launch of artificial satellites on the one hand and the development of the country's nuclear capacity on the other. This allowed the materially powerful and politically revolutionary military to fulfill its essential role as the defender of the Mt Baekdu bloodline against the challenges posed by imperialist aggressor states and preservation through the credible threat of coercive force, of the nation's autonomy and of so-called highest honour, which means the supreme leader. Only the last element of this equation changed with the death of Kim Jong-il, as Kim Jong-un rose to take the place of his father at the pinnacle of the ruling structure.

Technically, Songun is referred to as an "ideology" (*sasang*) and might reasonably be compared to North Korea's foundational ideology, Juche. A somewhat amorphous concept, loosely translated as "self-reliance" and reflecting a

postcolonial sense of autonomy, Juche represents North Korea's foundational state identity as it was originally articulated and is officially attributed to Kim Il-sung.

We argue here, however, that the two concepts are significantly different. Indeed, we posit that classifying Songun as ideology serves only to further muddy the turbid waters. Conceptually speaking, ideology, in the study of North Korea as elsewhere, tends to be overused.[9] Giovanni Sartori has lamented the concept's loss of cogency due to just this trend in the literature. "Ideology [is]," he says, "a concept deprived of all heuristic validity, let alone testability, by having been stretched to a point of meaninglessness."[10] Calling Songun an "ideology" and leaving it to vacuum up the ideational detritus left behind by the structural inequalities of daily life in North Korea only hinders us in explaining how it actually functions in practice. The state of affairs calls to mind both Brian Barry's rejection of Albert Hirschman's "seriously defective" notion of "loyalty" as a residual of "exit" and "voice" in cases of response to organisational decline and Xavier Marquez's long overdue conceptual deconstruction of "legitimacy" ("there is little reason to believe that . . . this residual is often large or important").[11] To be sure, using ideology as a catch-all term dramatically undermines its heuristic value. It is exceedingly easy to simply say ideology matters – after all, why would it not? Ideas obviously matter. But it is far more difficult to draw causal inference from intangible things, and attempts to do so often result in verbose, unwieldy explanations of limited value. It is with such critiques in mind that we classify Songun as not an ideology but a doctrine defined here as an articulation of state policy that guides the formulation of domestic and foreign policies and priorities.

Traditionally understood, doctrine may refer exclusively to foreign policy, but we do not see such a clear divide. Indeed, as the North Korean case makes quite clear, the two kinds of policies are intractably linked. A priority on defending from foreign invasion, for instance, will lead to a greater proportion of a state budget devoted to national defense – or, in the case of the DPRK, nuclear weapons development.[12] This, in turn, means less capital and other resources allocated for the development of what might be called the "people's economy" (see Chapter 7 in this volume). Songun also, as will be shown, orders society around revolution. Whether people actually internalised and reproduce in their own minds the revolutionary objectives of Songun does not concern us here; we are strictly concerned with a pro forma understanding of its sociological importance.[13]

The Songun equation is, then, the foundation of Kim Jong-un's right to rule. Thus, Songun is, by extension, the doctrinal foundation of the current North Korean state. In this chapter, we review this equation as it is explained by the North Korean state itself. And in the absence of alternative, substantive sources which cover the contemporary significance of this doctrine, we find the statement published in both the *Rodong Sinmun* and *Chosun People's Army* as worthy of further explication, exegesis and analysis. In so doing, we seek to elucidate the significance of Songun – as doctrine – to North Korean domestic politics and foreign relations. The objective of the rest of this chapter is to deconstruct Songun for the purpose of expounding on its constituent parts.

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Kim Jong-un's speech begins by describing the Day of Songun as a milestone "when General Kim Jong Il started his leadership of the Songun revolution," an event which is newly described as equivalent in meaning to the founding of the KPA. Here, the ideas and the notion of continuity are explicitly evoked; Kim Jong-il is praised for assuring that both Juche and Songun "could be carried forward continuously." Doctrinal and family continuity are seen as even more important than present institutions in the North Korean state.

Songun, as it is posed by Kim Jong-un, is intimately linked to the birth of the North Korean state in terms of things about the world which Kim Il-sung came to realise when he was young and which he then passed on to his firstborn son. As noted by Heonik Kwon, Byung-ho Chung and Adrian Buzo, among others, the North Korean state is legitimised by the way it links to the founding logic of Kim Il-sung as a partisan and/or that logic which is attributed to him.[14]

Kim Il-sung is described by his grandson as follows:

> By relying on the arms of the revolution, he wisely led two revolutionary wars, two stages of social revolution and socialist construction, and thus built on this land socialism of our style centred on the masses of the people and demonstrated the dignity and honour of the country.

Here, the piece translates "*chongdae*" as "the arms of the revolution," but this is a creative interpretation. Heonik Kwon revises our understanding of the term, explaining it as the entirety of North Korea's social forces, which in the North Korean idiom, are united in the scared task of defending the core revolution.[15] As the metaphysical equivalent to Songun, *chongdae* provides both a raison d'etre for North Korea and a clear path towards what, according to the prevailing state narrative, is the ultimate goal for the state and its citizenry: a militarised struggle for the revolution and a continuation of the partisan heritage.

The optimal question then is: in what way does Songun as a social ordering principle matter? Sociological work on, and in, North Korea is extremely difficult, but answers to this question are available. Using the official documents, diaries and autobiographies of ordinary people held in Record Group 242 at the National Archives in College Park, Maryland, Suzy Kim explores how the North Korean revolution transformed the everyday lives of ordinary North Koreans, focusing on the ways in which revolution altered fundamental understandings of everyday life. In her 2013 book, Kim finds that "During the North Korean Revolution, everyday life became at once the primary site of political struggle and the most important area for experiencing the revolution in progress. . . . Life after liberation was variously described as a new life (*sinsaenghwal*), a happy life (*haengbokhan saenghwal*), and ultimately a total "revolution in life" (*saenghwal hyongmyong*)."[16] Kim finds in the archival documents what Kwon and Chung read in the revolutionary landscapes of the Revolutionary Martyr's Cemetery and state-produced text on *chongdae*: the overarching state priority on "revolution" could and did affect life in the early years of the North Korean state. This revolutionary affect continues to this day.

By explicating how life was redefined by the revolutionary period, Kim "challenges the strict separation of state and society, examining the degree to which state-society relations are actually fluid and interdependent."[17] She argues that the overarching state priority on "revolution" could and did affect life in the early years of the North Korean state and, by extension, today. For Kim, "Juche was representative of socialist modernity and, as such, Juche was . . . a defining feature of North Korean socialist modernity."[18] We find this link most appropriate and argue that Songun effectively brings forward the revolution of yore and reproduces it in the present.[19]

The assertion made in DPRK propaganda that the Kim Jong-il era was an essential step in ensuring the survival and development of the North Korean revolution may seem an obvious one. Yet it also prevents the Kim Jong-il years from being interpreted by in many ways what they actually were, as a distortion of the Kim Il-sung era. In the doctrine, the state which Kim Il-sung is said to have single-handedly brought to pass is carried forward in his charismatic absence. Note that in this context the statement does not avoid mention of the Arduous March (*gonanui haenggun*), the North Korean famine of the 1990s, but characterises it in terms of imposed hardship.

Whereas the English version of the speech describes Kim Jong-il's tactical acumen as "unique," in fact "ingenious" better conveys the supposedly extraordinary nature of the leadership involved, although by definition the impossibility of replacing the leader is present within the statement, too. The meteorological terminology involved is also more evocative than its English companion, conveying as it does the stoic sense of a nation weathering a most unpleasant and persistent storm thanks to the perspicacious leadership of the day.[20]

The key moment being celebrated in the propaganda is as follows:

> His visit to Seoul Ryu Kyong Su Guards 105th Tank Division of the KPA on August 25, 1960 was a historic event that proclaimed his succession of the cause of the Songun revolution and the start of his Songun-based leadership.

Interestingly, the Korean version uses the term "*sae chulbal*," meaning "new beginning," but this notion of newness is lost in the English copy. Songun is then described as "the General's [Kim Jong-il] revolutionary idea, his practice in the revolution, his political ideal and his political mode." Thus, at least on the Day of Songun, if not on every day, the North Korean state wishes to portray Kim Jong-il as a man whose one and only guiding goal, principle and success was to ensure the security and succession of the "military-first" state. Implicit in this claim is the idea that the manifest economic and social failings of the Kim Jong-il era were, although unfortunate and not to be taken lightly, not the point and purpose of Kimist rule at the time. It is further worth noting that Kim Jong-il's preoccupation with national security and, later, loyalty to Kim Il-sung are far more prevalent than his interest in living standards – again justifying the sacrifices of the Songun era.

In discussing "the strengthening of the KPA as the most important of affairs in the Songun revolution," Kim Jong-un offers a specific challenge to interpreters of the contemporary North Korean state. Taken literally, his words do not leave room for the army to be shifted away from the centre of power under any circumstances. Yet there are political events (prominent among them the removal of Ri Yong-ho from his position as chief of the general staff of the KPA and Central Military Commission in July 2012) that offer circumstantial evidence of such a shift.[21] The army may also be seen as a vital element in economic construction, a source of reliable labour to be used in a period of economic improvement (*gaeseon*; this being the word used by the government to describe changes to the DPRK economic structure). Indeed, buried in this polemical essay is the clear idea that the socialist constitution is subordinated to the role of Songun in the revolution:

> [Kim Jong-il] saw to it that the First Session of the Tenth Supreme People's Assembly of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea adopted the Socialist Constitution that embodies the idea and principles of the Songun revolution and established a new state administration structure, whose backbone is the National Defense Commission, and led all state affairs to be conducted on the principle of giving precedence to military affairs.

Here the National Defense Commission (NDC) is legitimised as the preeminent organ of state by its leadership in interpreting Songun. Thus, the NDC led not simply by dint of Kim Jong-il having been chair of it as a pro forma structural analysis of the North Korean power structure might suggest.[22] It is the role of Songun in North Korean narrative history that leads to Brian Myers's conclusion about the state as being in need of a constant stream of victories to legitimise its centralisation and prioritisation of military affairs.[23]

In describing the doctrine's "pushing ahead with the overall revolution and construction with the revolutionary army as the core force," there is a reaffirmation of the army's priority in all official matters. Power and influence in the North Korean state, which can be understood as a trifurcated entity consisting of the military (the KPA), the party (the KWKWP), and the cabinet (state administrative organs such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) are *not* distributed equally. Contrary to the Patrick McEachern's theory of a "decentralized, post-totalitarian, institutionally plural state," Kim Jong-un's own words suggest that the military holds a disproportionate amount of power over policy and decision-making.[24] Ken Gause writes: "[Songun] has been used to signify the privileged status the KPA holds throughout North Korean society and to stress that the regime's sovereignty rests upon the military's shoulders."[25]

Indeed, the text *Questions and Answers on the Songun Idea*, published by the Foreign Languages Publishing House and retrieved from a Pyongyang bookstore by one of the authors in spring 2012, makes the claim that "[t]he Juche idea is the root of the Songun idea." This leaves no possibility for the KPA *not* to be at the forefront of national affairs if the nation wishes to succeed in accomplishing its goals. Discussion of Kim Jong-un trying to reassert party primacy over national

politics is tantamount to saying that he actively seeks to undermine Songun itself. This may or may not be the case in practice, but politically speaking it is highly problematic and should serve as a blunt, if inconvenient, reminder that Kim Jong-un cannot be a "reformer" within the institutional frame defined by the "military-first" political order.[26]

Consolidation in the North Korean context, much like the former Soviet one, can be taken as a euphemism for (often violent) disagreement over how power should be distributed among the political class or what Svolik calls "authoritarian power-sharing."[27] In personalist-authoritarian fashion, from 1994 Kim Jong-il began to purge most of those who threatened his role as supreme leader.[28] As in the post-war power struggle of his father, Kim faced a regime divided into factions; to ensure his uninterrupted and eventually complete control, he rid it of potential rivals. In so doing, the authority of the NDC was elevated to a position above that of the party. In 1998, at the time of the 10th Supreme People's Assembly, Kim Jong-il was elected chairman of the NDC, and this is considered to be the true start of the Songun era, despite competing interpretations to the contrary.

Kim promotes the idea that the revolutionary army, the foremost political institution in North Korea, is responsible for maintaining the revolutionary zeal which encompasses all; there is no distinction between civil society and the military. The military represents the vital mediating link in the "quintessential equation" between the ruling elite and everything and everyone else. Relegation of the military to a status any less than this would necessitate an alteration in the decision-making calculus and fundamentally alter the personality of the state.[29]

Scholars such as Charles Armstrong point to North Korea as one in which politics, ring-fenced by the correct mode of thinking and acquiescence, are predominant.[30] As Kim Jong-un is credited (probably incorrectly) with saying, "Ideologies and principles are realised in practice through politics, and the destiny of both the masses and the revolution is influence by the foundational political method."[31] In the case of Songun, it is said to defend three things: (1) autonomy, (2) the revolution, and (3) our-style socialism. Ergo, this is also what the People's Army is duty-bound to protect. Songun co-opts and inflects Juche as the official doctrine of the state and, as such, entrenches a highly militarised approach to the political.

If Juche – in the incarnation understood by ordinary people rather than in the philosophically detailed form proposed by Hwang Jang-yop[32] – is premised on the concept of "self-reliance," the best way to ensure the continuation of the North Korean state is through a military capable of defending its territorial integrity. Songun is how Juche is actually realised, or as put more floridly by Kim Jong-un: "The Juche idea is the root of the Songun idea and the Songun idea is the brilliant embodiment of the Juche." Is this coagulation capable of serving as a guiding principle through which policy is made? Certainly. If Kim Jong-un's description of DPRK history of the 1990s is worth anything, it would appear to validate the idea this ideology impacted or was created out of both domestic and foreign policies:

> The 90s of the last century, when the reckless anti-DPRK moves of the allied forces of the US and other imperialists to check the victorious advance of our

> revolution and stamp out our socialism went to extremes, was a period of the severest ordeals for our revolution. When our army and people were at the crossroads whether they would remain an independent people and guards to become victors or be reduced to the imperialists' colonial slaves again, Comrade Kim Jong Il determinedly held up the banner of Songun, and defended the Juche-oriented socialism with honour and achieved brilliant victories. This was a miracle of history which only our General could bring about.

"Severest ordeals" is a euphemism for famine, the collapse of the world socialist economic system and a state of conflict with the United States that reached its contemporary zenith in 1994. Whereas Kim Il-sung's credentials were earned fighting the Japanese imperial enemy in Manchuria, Kim Jong-il acquired his by preventing the regime from collapse when the chips were stacked heavily against him. Whereas the work accomplished by North Korean propagandists in the 1990s inflated the case severely, the reality of Kim Jong-il's political survival and that of the DPRK remains. There is a difficulty – but necessity – of positioning not only Kim Jong-il but also Kim Jong-un within the Mt Baekdu bloodline and thus the guerrilla tradition, which is the justification used by the North Korean people to protect themselves from recolonisation.

One new construction in the Kim Jong-un era has been the unwieldy but perhaps unsurprising locution of *Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism*. At this point the reader may be asking if this term has any meaning whatsoever, beyond the simple assertion of double-barreled legacy to which North Koreans must be loyal. However, a long quote from Kim Jong-un serves as a frame:

> A fundamental principle which the great General consistently adhered to in the building of our Party was to build it into the party of the leader. He defined imbuing the entire Party with *Kimilsungism* as the ultimate objective of its building and wisely led the effort for firmly establishing a monolithic ideological system and a monolithic leadership system across the Party. As a result, our Party could be developed into a revolutionary party which is unfailingly faithful to the ideology and guidance of its leader and possessed of a strong sense of organization and discipline and into an ever-victorious party with solid mass and military bases, and could discharge its mission and role as the guiding force in implementing the cause of the Songun revolution.

Getting the party in a straight line behind the leader is what distinguishes North Korea, a state ruled over by a "charismatic leader" cloaked in the tradition of a revolutionary past *and* a revolutionary party, from an autocratic state ruled over by a revolutionary party. Using the categories provided by Barbara Geddes, North Korea might simply be categorised as a personalist-party hybrid regime, but then what would become of the military?[33] Hazel Smith argues, in effect, that North Korea is a military state, where "the military assumed executive authority over the political sphere," but minimizes the interdependence of the party and the military. Within the frame of a long-lived revolutionary party, the KWP, there is no practical distinction between the two.[34]

Moreover, Songun, as previously elucidated, affirms again what Wada Haruki said of North Korea some 30 years ago: that it is a "garrison state.[35]" And so it remains. The regime holds to a fluctuating state of emergency, providing itself with just cause to coerce people into periodic "marches" and "battles" such as 2016's "70-day battle" in the run-up to the country's first Workers' Party Congress since the Sixth Congress of 1980, when Kim Jong-il was publicly anointed as his father's successor. This is rhetorically justified with recourse to external and existential threats to the country's sovereign autonomy.

This bunker mentality has long justified both the regime's militaristic orientation and the fact that a great many military officers are billeted with key political institutions – a trend that, according to Stephan Haggard and Luke Herman, has increased markedly since 1996. The composition and outward orientation of the state are a natural reflection of the preeminence of the Songun political line that governs domestic and foreign policy priorities. Whereas some of the threats regularly cited on the pages of KCNA and *Rodong Sinmun* are real, prioritising the military is mainly a domestic concern: keeping tension high thwarts potential challengers to the regime and justifies clamping down on the societal spread of external information.[36]

As the bureaucratic inertia and momentum of early Kim Jong-un era purges continue, something else has occurred. The purge reinforces above all the one dynamic upon which all the others rest and have rested for many years: the inheritance and permanence of the Songun political line. This singular preference for the "military-first" line has been reflected most recently in intense calls to remain loyal to Kim Jong-un. Kim is the "exemplary centre" of the Korean revolution: the leader who transcends Workers' Party and state, and sets, or is claimed to set, the boundaries of what is, and is not, acceptable policy.[37]

This is not a new theme; rather, it represents the acceleration of an old one. It is continuation, not change. The emphasis is, as it always was, on the hereditary system and the vital need to justify the bloodline basis of the supreme North Korean office. If Jang Song-taek were to have cast doubt upon the necessity of a bloodline succession, he was inviting a massive weight down upon himself – and anyone who might have thought to join him.

Notes

1 Chris Green, "World Must Face Down Byungjin Line," *Daily NK*, September 14, 2013.
2 Adam Cathcart and Pekka Korhonen, "Death and Transfiguration: The Late Kim Jong-il Aesthetic in North Korean Cultural Production," *Popular Music and Society*. DOI:10.1080/03007766.2016.1158987. This is the online version of record published before inclusion in an issue.
3 Haruki Wada, *Bukjoseon: Yugyeokae Kukgaeseo Jeongkyugun Kukgaro* [NorthKorea – Garrison State Today] (Seoul: Dolbegae, 1998).
4 Some scholars see the process of reproducing Songun as being in contrast with the process that surrounds Juche, the philosophical concept created by former KWP International Secretary Hwang Jang-yop in the late 1960s. According to Brian Myers, for instance, Juche is a nebulous concept and linked only in the loosest sense to the reality experienced by North Korean citizens. For more on this perspective see: Brian (B.R.) Myers, *The Juche Myth* (Seoul: Sthele Press, 2015).

5 Matthew McGrath, "NK Media Watch – Aug 21 to 27," *NK News*, August 28, 2013.
6 "Chaoxian Jinru Jin Zheng'en shidai," (North Korea Enters the Kim Jong Un Era), *Nanfang Renwu Zhoukan*, April 23, 2012.
7 As the inner flap of one pamphlet collections of Kim's speeches published in Pyongyang put it: "In 2012, Kim Jong Un, busy as he was leading to victory the building of a thriving country by dint of Songun-based revolutionary leadership, made public many works." See Kim Jong Un, *Towards Final Victory* (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Press, 2013).
8 That which Kim Jong-un communicated to party members can also be described or translated as a "talk." "Let Us Forever Glorify Comrade Kim Jong Il's Great Idea and Achievements of the Military-First Revolution," *Rodong Sinmun*, August 25, 2013. See also: Kim Jong-un, "Let Us Brilliantly Accomplish the Revolutionary Cause of Juche, Holding Kim Jong Il in High Esteem as the Eternal General Secretary of Our Party: Talk to Senior Officials of the Workers' Party of Korea," In *Toward Final Victory*, edited by Kim Jong Un: 1–32.
9 This is not to say that ideology does not matter; it does. And Juche matters, too. For more on Juche's explanatory value and conceptual overstretch, see Steven Denney's critique of Charles Armstrong's *Tyranny of the Weak*: "A Roundtable Review of Charles Armstrong's Tyranny of the Weak: North Korea and the World, 1950–1992," *Sino-NK*, October 3, 2013. See also Armstrong's response to Denney's criticism: Charles Armstrong, "Author's Response to Sino-NK Roundtable on Tyranny of the Weak: North Korea and the World, 1950–1992," *Sino-NK*, November 25, 2013.
10 Giovanni Sartori, "Comparing and Miscomparing," *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (1991): 243–257.
11 Xavier Marquez, "The Irrelevance of Legitimacy," *Political Studies* (2015): 1–16. DOI: 10.1111/1467–9248.12202. This is the online version of record published before inclusion in an issue. Also see: Brian Barry, "Review Article: Exit, Voice, and Loyalty," *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (1974): 79–107.
12 On the rationale put forward by the North Korean state for acquiring a nuclear deterrent, see: Steven Denney, "His 'Other' Legacy: Kenneth Waltz's Defense of Nuclear Proliferation," *Sino-NK*, May 21, 2013.
13 For more on the formal sociological importance of broader doctrinal and ideological structures in the North Korean context, see: James Burt, "Challenges to Reform in North Korea: Structure, Agency and the Constitution of the Selectorate," *Yonsei Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (2013): 73–81.
14 Heonik Kwon and Byung-ho Chung, *Beyond Charismatic Politics* (Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield, 2012): Chapter 3. See also Sean Nelson, "Negotiating Away the Bloodline: North Korean National Identity and the Implications for Reunification," In *SAIS US-Korea 2012 Yearbook* (Washington, DC: Johns Hopkins: 2013), pp. 85–98, and Adrian Buzo, *The Guerilla Dynasty: Politics and Leadership in North Korea* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999).
15 Kwon and Chung, *Beyond Charismatic Politics*, Chapter 3. See also Nelson, "Negotiating Away,": 85–98.
16 Suzy Kim, *Everyday Life in the North Korean Revolution, 1945–1950* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2013): 14–15.
17 Kim, *Everyday Life*, 12.
18 Ibid., 69.
19 One would be right to question the *actual* impact that state discourse has on everyday life. Close watchers of North Korea and visitors to the country will, however, notice the extent to which life in the capital and outside it are significantly impacted by the state's effort to constantly reproduce revolutionary sentiment. Scale varies significant – from Saturday morning party lectures to countywide mobilisation for party conferences – but the impact is real and observable. In March and April 2016, the authors were in North Korea (mainly Pyongyang) and witnessed a number of small-scale mobilisations for the

lead up to the Seventh Workers' Party Congress, including lectures of Democratic Women's Union groups near Kim Il-sung Stadium, musical performances by agit-prop groups at construction sites in western Pyongyang and youth groups near Pyongsong preparing for deployment.

20 Eric Gibson, "Why Dictators Love Kitsch: Kim Jong-il-Clinton Photo Op Highlights a Style That Has Long Glorified Tyrants," *Wall Street Journal,* August 10, 2009.
21 Nicholas Hamisevicz, "Ri Yong Ho Out: North Korean Leadership in Sickness or in Health?" *KEI: The Peninsula*, July 16, 2012.
22 For background on Kim Jong-il's work with the NDC that interprets it as nothing short of a coup, see Young Hwang Kihl and Hong Nack Kim (eds.), *North Korea: The Politics of Regime Survival* (Oxford: Routledge, 2005): 61.
23 It is enervating to note that on November 24, 2013, the North Korean media celebrated the third anniversary of the "victory in the Yeonpyeong Island shelling battle" with a number of events.
24 Patrick McEachern, *Inside the Red Box: North Korea's Post-Totalitarian Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).
25 Ken E. Gause, *North Korean Civil-Military Trends: Military-First Politics to a Point* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute [US Army], September 2006): vi.
26 Ibid.
27 Milan Svolik, *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
28 Ibid.
29 Political changes publicised through the Seventh Congress of the KWP in May 2016 do not ipso facto indicate that the power of the North Korean military in the national political structure is being ameliorated. Reallocating power within the political system, such as by reinforcing the Standing Committee of the Politburo, is important; however, access to various economic rents is arguably more important still, and the military is still in a strong position in this respect.
30 Charles Armstrong, *The North Korean Revolution, 1945–1949* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002).
31 "*Songunjeongchi-neun sahoejuui kibonjeongchi bangsik"* [Military-First Politics Is the Fundamental Socialist Political Method], *Rodong Sinmun*, October 23, 2013.
32 Hwang Jang-yop, *Naneun yeoksaeui jinrireul boattda* [I Have Seen the Truth of History] (Seoul: Zeitgeist: 1998): 165.
33 Barbara Geddes, "What Do We Know about Democratization after Twenty Years?," *Annual Review of Political Science*, No. 2 (June 1999): 115–144.
34 Hazel Smith, *North Korea: Markets and Military Rule* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015): 235. For an outline of the debate over the real scope of military rule, see: 257–258.
35 Wada, Haruki, *Bukjoseon: Yugyeokae Kukgaeseo Jeongkyugun Kukgaro* [North Korea – Garrison State Today] (Seoul: Dolbegae, 1998).
36 Stephan Haggard and Luke Herman, "Mapping the Succession II: The Role of the Military," *Witness to Transformation* (PIIE blog), July 13, 2012.
37 This point is made in Kwon and Chung, *Beyond Charismatic Politics*.

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