

THE ROLE OF INSTITUTIONS IN THE LONGEVITY OF KIM JONG IL'S REGIME

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ABSTRACT

The Kim Jong Il regime in North Korea has been a policy concern for decades, due to the threats it poses to regional and international security. This regime has survived numerous crises and a moribund economy. How has Kim Jong Il been able to remain in power despite economic failure, natural disasters such as floods and crop failures, social catastrophe such as mass famine, and the enmity of the world's only superpower and many of his neighbors?

Jennifer Gandhi and Adam Przeworski offer a compelling explanation of regime survival in *Comparative Political Studies* (2007.) They argue that authoritarian leaders secure themselves by suborning opposition through legislatures and other institutions. Do Gandhi and Przeworski's findings successfully explain the longevity of Kim Jong Il in North Korea?

I propose to test their theory using an in-depth case study of North Korea during the time period from Kim Jong Il's appearance as an official in the regime in 1972 until 2009. This will contribute to the field both through a deeper understanding of the workings of the North Korean regime, but also through a strengthening or refinement of Gandhi and Przeworski's Institutionalization Theory.

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INTRODUCTION

. The North Korean regime has been a policy concern for decades, due to the threats it poses to regional and international security. The obvious threat of military conflict on the Korean Peninsula is compounded by North Korea's nascent nuclear arsenal and missile program.¹ War involving North Korea would have severe repercussions on all regional states, as well as the United States. The threat of North Korean state collapse is perhaps equally severe, with the entailing specter of refugee hordes, the crippling costs of rebuilding, and a scramble to account for the North's nuclear weapons. Some analysts such as Jasper Becker indicate that North Korea seems ripe for collapse due to its moribund economy, repressive political system, and the danger it poses to regional stability.² However, the regime of North Korean leader Kim Jong Il has proven more enduring than expected.³

How has Kim Jong Il been able to survive in power despite economic failure, natural disasters such as floods and crop failures, social catastrophe such as mass famine, and the enmity of the world's only superpower and many of his neighbors? Economic and diplomatic support from China is clearly a key factor, but even the Chinese leadership quietly favors reform within

¹ North Korea's nuclear and missile programs are detailed in Jonathan D. Pollack, "Kim Jong-Il's Clenched Fist", *The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 32, no. 4 (October 2009)

² Becker, Jasper, *Rogue Regime: Kim Jong Il and the Looming Threat of North Korea* (Oxford UK, Oxford University Press; 2005) pp. 249-265.

³ North and South Koreans anglicize names differently. The North generally separates and capitalizes the three syllables of an individual's surname and given name (Kim Jong Il,) while the South generally hyphenates the given name with the second syllable beginning in a lower case letter (Choi Eun-hee.) I have attempted to use the two conventions to anglicize names according to individuals' respective country of origin.

North Korea.⁴ So secure is Kim in power that he can apparently even defy his powerful Chinese benefactor on many occasions without serious risk to the structure of his regime.

Jennifer Gandhi and Adam Przeworski offer a compelling explanation of regime survival in *Comparative Political Studies* (2007.) They argue that authoritarian leaders secure themselves by suborning opposition through legislatures and other institutions. They find that authoritarian rulers who expand or strengthen institutions such as legislatures, political parties, and ruling elite cabals are better able to co-opt potential opposition, resulting in longer tenures of rule. Their conclusions were the result of a large-‘N’ study of 3,518 country-years of observations in 139 countries from 1946-1996. North Korea was included in their survey, largely during the tenure of Kim Il Sung, who died in 1994. Kim Jong Il did not formally assume power until 1997, and is therefore not officially included in their survey, although he was certainly running the country from 1994-96. Did he secure himself by relying on his father’s legacy of institutions, by “going it alone” as an absolute dictator and reduce North Korea’s institutions to mere window dressing, or did he engage in institutionalization of his own?

In addition, the very nature of their large ‘N’ study prevented a deep look at the unique aspects of the North Korean regime. These include the blurring of distinction between their delineated leader types, as well as the high degree of indoctrination and control exerted at all levels of North Korean society which make organized internal mass opposition virtually impossible. It also may not fully capture the changes within that regime, particularly during the late 1990’s and early 00’s. If there are aspects of the North Korean case that are unexplained by their theory, what would be a more accurate portrayal of the processes at work in that state?

⁴ That the Chinese want economic reform in North Korea is dealt with in Susan Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007) pp. 124-127.

I propose to test their theory using an in-depth case study of North Korea, officially known as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) during the time period from Kim Jong Il's appearance as an official in the regime in 1972 until 2009.⁵ This time period will include Kim Jong Il's early laurels crafting the *Juche* philosophy and other ideological endeavors. When Kim Jong Il succeeded his father in 1994, he faced the internal crisis of a growing economic debacle and a devastating famine even as he consolidated power. The new millennium brought a particularly hostile regime in Washington, as well as continuing external and internal crises. Kim's regime was tested in numerous face-offs with the United States over nuclear weapons, with South Korea over military provocations, with Japan over missile tests and the legacy of kidnappings from the 1970's, and with China for impeding regional stability. All these factors contributed to a near constant state of existential struggle that Kim and his regime have successfully navigated. Do Gandhi and Przeworski's findings successfully explain how North Korea was able to do this?

In my analysis, I situate the elite groups within the regime as the primary focus for potential institutionalization by Kim Jong Il. That he relies more on elite institutionalization rather than popular institutionalization is made clear by the regime's actions during the Great North Korean Famine of 1995-1997. In that instance, the population was essentially abandoned to live or die on their own, particularly in the undeveloped eastern provinces. Many available resources were reportedly funneled to the ruling elites and particularly to the military in an effort to secure the regime. It seems clear from this that Kim Jong Il does not place as great an

⁵ I have elected to cut off the data prior to 2010, in order to avoid issues involving Kim Jong Il's succession by his son, Kim Jong Un. This has no noticeable effect on this study's data; however, revisiting the methodology of this study with a focus on Kim Jong Un offers a fascinating opportunity for future research.

emphasis on the populace as a significant determinant of regime survival, while elites and the military are crucial. The regime's institutions oriented at the populace seem to consist primarily of propaganda and information control, backed by a powerful suppression and coercion apparatus. This study will focus accordingly.

I hypothesize that Gandhi and Przeworski's theory will largely explain the survival of the North Korean regime. I believe that decades of institutional strengthening within the core elite groups of the regime have enforced a "buy in" in which these elites perceive a high degree of benefit to cost in supporting Kim Jong Il. I also believe that Kim Jong Il will be revealed to operate largely as a "military" style leader, relying on military and security apparatuses to secure the regime in exchange for benefits, as opposed to a civilian style leader who would have to extend inclusionary institutions to co-opt the populace. An in-depth analysis of North Korea will certainly reveal myriad other factors which may indicate various refinements to Gandhi and Przeworski's theory, which could make it more applicable.

In testing this hypothesis, this paper will explore the origins and nature of data available on North Korea and the regime of Kim Jong Il. My research will contribute to the literature in two ways. By applying Gandhi and Przeworski's theory to the Kim Jong Il case study, that theory will be tested further and possibly strengthened or refined. This will assist in the study of other authoritarian regimes. In addition, whether or not their theory holds up to the empirics of this case study, the result will be a clearer understanding of the mechanisms of regime survival in North Korea. With the near certainty of future crises in that nation, this understanding may enable analysts to better predict North Korean actions under pressure.

The remainder of this thesis will be organized as follows. The following section will be a basic overview of the important events that framed the rise and rule of Kim Jong Il in North Korea. The second section will be an examination of the literature on Kim Jong Il and the North Korean regime will reveal the state of knowledge built upon this data. In the third section I will discuss the dubious nature of much of the data on the DPRK, and ways in which it can still be useful for scholarly analysis. The fourth section will consist of a careful case study analysis of the career of Kim Jong Il will test my hypothesis of Ghandi and Przeworski's applicability. Upon the completion of my analysis, I will examine my findings and their implications for both the field of scholarly research, as well as for political and security policy regarding North Korea.

Chapter I: Overview of Kim Jong Il's North Korea

A case study of the rise and rule of Kim Jong Il will offer an in-depth view of a highly authoritarian regime during a time of increasing challenge. North Korea had once been an industrial nation with a larger economy than its southern rival, an important member of the communist bloc, and a key player in the cold war.⁶ Kim Il Sung, the “Great Leader” and founder of the North Korean state, ruled with absolute authority built on his patriarchal charisma, his credentials as a guerilla fighter, and his ruthless construction of an entire state apparatus solely around himself. His son, and chosen successor, Kim Jong Il, was groomed for power for over two decades, and the personality cults of the two men were inextricably linked. However, things began to go steadily and irreversibly wrong for North Korea beginning in the 1980's.

Years of economic decline and isolation compounded by the collapse of the Soviet Bloc lead to severe economic contractions, a loss of agricultural productivity and constant food shortages in North Korea. This was compounded by a lack of capital to purchase imports. As early as 1992, the “Lets All Eat Two Meals A Day” campaign was put in place in an effort to ease the shortfall in food production.

With the death of Kim Il Sung in 1994, his son Kim Jong Il began the process of succeeding to the position of Leader of North Korea. While undergoing this transition, his regime's legitimacy and durability of was tested as floods and crop failures inflamed the ongoing food shortages into full-blown famine that may have killed over 1 million North Koreans.

⁶ Bertil Lintner, *Great Leader, Dear Leader: Demystifying North Korea under the Kim Clan* (Chaing Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 2005.) pp. 4.

In addition, development of long range ballistic missiles and a nuclear weapons program led to a heightened state of conflict with external powers, including the United States. A lot of heated rhetoric led to the Six Party Talks and culminated in the Agreed Framework of 1994. United Nations inspections under Hans Blix and periodic missile tests kept the crisis simmering for the rest of the decade. The nuclear issue roared back in 2002, with resumption of nuclear development followed by nuclear tests. Although North Korea faced the more truculent Bush Administration, the DPRK was able to navigate the crisis without igniting a war and without giving up their nascent nuclear arsenal.

A series of other crises threatened the peace during this time period. These included the abortive insertion of North Korean special operations forces by mini-sub in 1996, as well as naval clashes in the West Sea, including the recent sinking of the ROKS Cheonan in 2010. Not only was the regime able to survive these crises, but they often appeared to instigate them as a means to extort aid from the outside world.

Internal stresses on the North Korean political and social model became slowly but convincingly apparent during this time period, especially in the years after the Famine eased in 1998. The near total failure of the state food distribution system had led both to low-level entrepreneurship, as well as officials who generally turned a blind eye to such activity. In addition, widespread movement of migrants back and forth across the Chinese border, and the presence of foreign aid workers within the DPRK in unprecedented numbers, began to erode the hermetic control of information that had existed in North Korea for decades. The regime alternated between limited acceptance and retrenchment on these and other grass-roots deviations from the policies of the Kim Il Sung era. These efforts to coopt and control these

forces that are slowly at work in North Korean society include the legalization of markets in 1998, the reversal of this legalization in 2002, re-legalization of markets in 2003, and botched currency reform in 2009, as well as haphazard economic reforms and projects undertaken and abandoned over the past decade.

Internal stresses are indicated by the continuing flow of refugees crossing the border into China. The regime's system of social controls is not able to prevent them from leaving, nor are the punitive measures taken against those who are caught able to dissuade them. An array of sources including these refugees, as well as foreign visitors report that outside information is slowly trickling into the DPRK. Bootleg South Korean dramas are quite popular, and more North Koreans are obtaining and hiding tunable radios and other contraband that comes across the Chinese border with returning refugees.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Jennifer Gandhi and Adam Przeworski's article "Authoritarian Institutions and the Survival of Autocrats" in *Comparative Political Studies* (v.40, no.11, Nov 07) posits that autocrats maintain institutions such as legislative bodies to defend themselves against internal threats and solicit cooperation. In this way, they secure their tenure in power. Gandhi and Przeworski base their conclusions on 3,518 country-years of observations in 139 countries from 1946-1996. In addition to the three broad types of authoritarian leaders they identify: monarchs, military, and non-royal "civilian" leaders, their variables include mineral resource endowments, institutions and opposition that is inherited from the previous regime, the number of past leaders within a regime, and external pressure from outside states and institutions.

Gandhi and Przeworski test two propositions: 1) *Rulers who institutionalize sufficiently should survive in power longer than those who under-institutionalize*, and 2) *Rulers who institutionalize optimally should maintain power for similar lengths of time regardless of the severity of the threat they face*. Their results back up their first proposition well. For the second proposition, they discover that authoritarian leaders who have a single political party have significantly longer reigns than those with either multiple or no political parties.

Of these propositions, it is primarily the first with which this thesis is concerned. Gandhi and Przeworski postulate that authoritarian leaders who institutionalize to at least the optimal degree will be more likely to survive challenges and enjoy a longer tenure in power. They define "institutionalization" in a broad way, including such nominally democratic bodies as legislatures, as well as political parties, military juntas, royal councils, and elite cabals. Simply

put, authoritarian leaders who share power with others are more resilient, because they are more able to co-opt potential opposition into the regime.

If Gandhi and Przeworski's theory is correct, the case study should reveal an increase in institutions intended to mobilize popular support for the regime, or a strengthening of existing institutions. Numerous strong institutions existed in North Korea prior to Kim Jong Il's assumption of power. However, these institutions were shaped in many ways by the personality cult of the highly charismatic leader, Kim Il Sung. The institutions he established were created in a time of relative plenty. Kim Jong Il lacked many of the credentials that legitimized his father's absolute authority, and he assumed power in a time of crisis. Yet, Kim Jong Il has been a model of authoritarian longevity. The institutions he inherited were uniquely tailored to his father, and would not have been sufficient to his situation. This would indicate that he used institutionalization to secure himself by altering or bolstering existing institutions within the North Korean government apparatus. Therefore, hypothesis #1 is *Kim Jong Il engaged in formal institutionalization within the regime to secure himself in power.*

Further evidence in support of Gandhi and Przeworski would be that Kim Jong Il established or strengthened some form of collegial body to incorporate key elites as stakeholders in the regime, rather than as potential rivals. As stated above, Gandhi and Przeworski include such groups as juntas and cabals in their definition of these collegial bodies. Although Kim Il Sung's personal narrative had been highly embellished and distorted by 1992, there is no denying his significant personal role in the creation of the North Korean state, as well as the personal loyalty owed to him by many of the senior North Korean elite leaders, some of whom fought

alongside him as guerillas in the 1930's and 40's.⁷ Kim Jong Il's own personality cult was over two decades old at the time of his ascension to power, but he lacked his father's guerilla credentials and links of personal loyalty with the most senior leaders.⁸ To what extent did Kim Jong Il have to "buy" the loyalty of elite groups, such as the military leadership, through concessions and other incentives? It seems likely that Kim used a variety of informal incentives and inducements to create a loyal "inner elite" to tie key groups and organizations to him, and secure his tenure in power. Therefore, hypothesis #2 is: *Kim Jong Il used informal institutionalization to form an "inner elite" through which he could secure the loyalty of key elite groups.*

Finally, there could be evidence that the communist party apparatus co-opted as well as coerced the populace, and served as a means of resolving or suppressing intra-elite disputes. Gandhi and Przeworski have a heavy focus on the number of parties, including opposition parties, that authoritarian leaders must incorporate or suppress. The DPRK has no organized internal opposition of any kind, and so in a crisis would not have the option to co-opt or incorporate such a group. However, the extent to which the regime directly coerces and controls the populace suggests it does feel the need to completely stymie any grass-roots opposition or dissent. No greater internal dissent has arisen in North Korea than the system of underground "farmers markets" that sprang up as a survival mechanism during the Great Famine. The regime as it exists would be confronted with a choice: attempt to crush the markets through coercive mechanisms, or attempt to co-opt them into the system. If Kim relied on institutionalization,

⁷ Lintner, (2005) devotes an entire chapter to an in-depth exploration of the origins of Kim Il Sung and the ways in which they affected the formation of the North Korean state apparatus and the Kim Clan's personality cults.

⁸ This is referenced at length in Scobell (2006,) Breen (2004,) Mansourov (1995,) Becker (2005,) and Reese (1998)

then he would choose to co-opt. So, hypothesis #3: *Kim Jong Il co-opted the grass-roots economic and social institutions that developed in North Korea during the Famine.*

On the other hand, a decrease in institutionalization within the regime in response to the various pressures of the 1990's would indicate that Gandhi and Przeworski's theory does not adequately explain the case of North Korea. Increased self-reliance and autonomy in leadership on the part of Kim Jong Il would indicate that he was able to navigate the crisis atmosphere of that time period without the aid or support of elite groups or the party infrastructure. This could also be indicated by a weakening of communist party institutions, and a weakening or lack of relevance of an inner group of elites who would have significant clout in supporting or undermining the regime. These phenomenon would not be well explained by Gandhi and Przeworski, and so hypothesis #4 is: *Kim Jong Il did not weaken the power of existing institutions or elite groups, and did not decrease the role of institutions as a whole within the regime.*

Gandhi and Przeworski define three leader types - monarch, military, and non-royal civilian. The monarch is defined as a leader of royal blood who rules primarily due to social norms. Military leaders are defined as having served actively in the armed forces, typically rely overwhelmingly on repression, and frequently rule as part of a junta or cabal. By this definition, Kim Jong Il is not a military leader and so should not have been able to rely mostly on repression. Gandhi and Przeworski use the third category, non-royal civilian or just "civilian," as a catch-all for the remaining authoritarians who came to power from some other background. Gandhi and Przeworski find that civilian leaders must rely most heavily on institutions to secure themselves against threats. This would indicate that Kim Jong Il, as a civilian leader, could have been

expected to go this route when confronted by a crisis situation. To what extent was this true, and does Kim Jong Il actually fit any of Gandhi and Przeworski's leader templates? Again, North Korea was included in their survey, largely during the tenure of Kim Il Sung, who died in 1994. Kim Jong Il did not formally assume power until 1997, and is therefore not officially included in their survey, although he was certainly running the country from 1994-96. The nature of the Kim clan's role in the North Korean regime defies strict definitions of monarch, civilian, or military. To what extent would this affect Gandhi and Przeworski's outcomes when applied to the North Korean case?

Overview of Literature on North Korea's Regime

There is no shortage of literature on North Korea and the Kim regime. However, the North Korean regime is highly opaque, particularly to outsiders. The reliability of primary sources regarding North Korea is often suspect, and many works are focused more on the abberant excentricities of Kim and his regime than with a sober analysis of the inner workings of the regime. In short, while relatively shallow writings on these states are plentiful, it is more challenging to find meaningful research material.

There are, however, numerous data sources available to aid research into this regime. Scholarly journals provide the most current and accurate information on North Korea, in which developments continue to change. While North Korea is famously difficult to gather reliable information on, particularly the internal workings of the Kim regime, it is a primary scholarly and security pursuit in South Korea. The Institute for North Korean Studies at Seoul's Dongguk University, as well as the *North Korean Review* and *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* provide

some of the best assessment of the workings of North Korea and its elite groups. Books by journalists and diplomats who have made frequent sojourns into North Korea will also prove helpful, as will some of the more recent works based on interviews with North Korean refugees in China and South Korea. Among these works are books by Michael Breen, Bertil Lintner, Lim Jae-Cheon, and Charles Tarrington.

Analysts of North Korea in general and Kim Jong Il in particular are divided to a degree on the question of Kim's thinking and decision making process. In other words, why does he do the things he does? While the overwhelming majority of serious analysts agree that Kim is not crazy, they find a variety of possible influences, tendencies, psychoses, and leadership traits that they believe may explain the workings of the darkest portion of the North Korean "black box." Some analysts see Kim Jong Il as discreetly struggling to remain in control, contending with powerful elite groups at home and powerful, bullying enemies abroad.

Among these, Alexandre Mansourov sees the strong, even deliberate adherence to both confucianism and the historical precedent of the Choson Dynasty in the policies and survival strategies of Kim Jong Il. He contends that Kim's activities are shot through with deep veins of filial piety, not only to his late father, but also to elder female relatives such as his step-mother Kim Song Ae, in a manner highly reminiscent of the Choson kings of the 19th century. These displays of filial loyalty are an important prerequisite for Kim's legitimacy, particularly early in his rule in the mid-1990's. Kim must do this, he contends, in order to pacify and reassure senior leaders in the regime elite as well as his complicated family.⁹ James Hoare and Susan Pares

⁹ Alexandre Y. Mansourov, "In Search of a New Identity: Revival of Traditional Politics and Modernisation in Post-Kim Il Sung North Korea," *Department of International Relations Working Paper No. 1995/3* (Canberra, ACT: Australian National University, 1995) pp. 15-17.

would potentially disagree, finding that North Korean historical depictions are highly critical of the Choson Dynasty for a number of reasons, including its close ties to Ming and then Qing China, as well as its inability to cope with outside pressures that began to beset the nation in the 19th century.¹⁰ Although Choson's deep and abiding influence on the Korean psyche and culture can be detected in the "worker's paradise" and its leader, it is unlikely that Kim is deliberately turning to the Yi Kings for precedent in crisis management.

Tim Beal also finds that Kim, as well as the DPRK as a whole, are being buffeted about by powers beyond their control, particularly by a hostile and hypocritical United States. Beal attempts to systematically deflate virtually every accusation leveled against the Kim regime by the U.S, South Korea, the U.N., NGO's, and others. He concludes that if the U.S. and its allies would just stop menacing and bullying the DPRK, that genuine reform in the North would surely follow. In this attempt, he provides some intriguing followup to well-known anecdotes, and cites much hard data that reveals a far more nuanced and complicated DPRK than is normally depicted in western media, but indulges in leaps of logic as well as baseless conspiracy theories. One of Beal's major premises is that the threat posed by the United States and other powers constitutes the primary factor holding North Korea back from reforms. Among other assertions, he states that the system of checkpoints and controls that prevent freedom of movement within the DPRK are justified by the legacy of "10,000 southern agents" and U.S. special operations infiltrators that menace the country, and that part of the reason that the military is such a preponderant presence in North Korea is due to the supposed threat of invasion by the U.S. or

¹⁰ James E. Hoare, and Susan Pares, *North Korea in the 21st Century: An Interpretive Guide* (Folkstone, Kent UK: Global Oriental Ltd, 2005) pp. 34-35.

even unilaterally by the South.¹¹ North Korea, of course, has justified itself many times using just such rationale, but to then suppose that they would greet a massive drawdown in ROK-US military forces with a program of meaningful internal reforms is naïve at best.

Far more common are works that portray Kim Jong Il as a very savvy and capable politician who is able to manipulate people and events around him. Michael Breen and Bertil Lintner each find that Kim has blended traditional Korean management techniques, keen survival instincts, and a cold-eyed awareness of his situation to construct a loyal inner elite and government bureaucracy. In *North Korean Review* (Spring 2007,) Jin Woong Kang examines the changes in the use of nationalist imagery in North Korean propaganda and ideology in the 1990's under Kim Jong Il. With the need to consolidate power and survive the famine, Kim appealed to a sense of defensive war nationalism,

Andrew Scobell takes this even further, calling Kim “the hardest working man in showbusiness.” Scobell remarks at length that Kim has long been engaged in staging, scripting, and presenting a believable, credible, and appealing - but deceptive - storyline of himself to his father, to his regime, and to the outside world.¹² Kim's keen awareness of the power of images and information is reflected in his personal past, in which he exerted enormous energy on film, literature, music, and visual arts, as well as in the ways in which he rigorously managed his image during both the long preparation for succession. This manipulation is heavily apparent in the way in which Kim has cemented the loyalty of his inner elite. Hoare and Pares find that Kim relies on personal relationships and informal channels of communication far more than his father,

¹¹ Tim Beal, *North Korea: The Struggle Against American Power* (London, UK: Pluto Press, 2005) pp. 165.

¹² Andrew Scobell, *Kim Jong Il and North Korea: The Leader and the System* (Carlisle PA: U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2006) pp. 8.

often almost completely ignoring established constitutional procedures in the DPRK.¹³ Lim Jae-Cheon also notes many of these aspects, including use of music, arts, and literature for political purposes in a role as ‘director,’ the theatrical use of disguise and deception, the use of tradition and filial loyalty as a basis for legitimacy, and an informal, ‘hands-on’ personal approach to leadership.¹⁴

On the far fringes are works such as *The True Story of Kim Jong Il*, by the Institute for South-North Korea Studies, and *Great Leader Kim Jong Il*, by Tak Jin, Kim Gang Il, and Pak Hong Je – a trio of pro-North Korea *Chongryong* Koreans living in Japan. Both are wholly works of propaganda. Kim is portrayed in the former as a debauched and demented man-child with his finger on the trigger of war. He is portrayed in the latter as the “ideal leader” who walked hungry and barefoot over mountains and across rivers to bring a personal lesson of *Juche* to the individual doorsteps of North Koreans.

What of the literature on the North Korean regime at large? Taken together, the literature paints a picture of a regime that was tested nearly to the breaking point during the famine of the late 1990's, and has been steadily dropping nuts and bolts ever since. Kim Jong Il relied on the backing of the North Korean military to carry the regime through such a loss of credibility, and was forced to cede substantial power to his armed forces in return. Kang points out that the ascendance of the North Korean military was reflected in variety of institutional changes, such as the arming of the populace. Additional economic programs were tried in a haphazard manner, but seem to have been stymied by lack of support from the newly powerful military leadership.

¹³ Hoare and Pares (2005) pp. 16-17.

¹⁴ Lim Jae-cheon, *Kim Jong Il's Leadership of North Korea* (London, New York: Routledge, 2009.)

Ultimately, even the rigid institutions of North Korean society were forced to bend in ways that have never truly been undone.

Kim Jong Il's changes to the institutions within the North Korean administration are a matter of record. Kim Il Sung was posthumously appointed President for eternity, and Jong Il's position as head of the National Defense Commission was morphed into the 'head of state' position. This of course was part and parcel of the "Military First" *Songun* policy, making the state and party synonymous with the military.¹⁵ Hoare and Pares point out that contrary to popular belief, the *Songun* Policy does not really mean the military gets first choice in everything; rather it means that the rest of society should follow the example of the military.¹⁶ The military, or Korean People's Army (KPA) became to most dominant of the three main branches of the North Korean regime. Of the other two, the Korean Workers Party (KWP) continued to enjoy clout in theory, but this was largely due to the dual membership of senior military leaders in senior party organs. Robert Scalapino finds that while the assigned task of the KWP is to integrate policies and eliminate "special interests," it is possible that three separate channels of communication with Kim Jong Il exist: military, party, and administrative, with the system built to be hugely dependant on the decision making of the Leader.¹⁷ The state administration apparatus, the DPRK itself, ground forward of its own momentum but was largely bypassed by Kim Jong Il's informal networks, and was relegated to carrying out directives.

¹⁵ Jin Woong Kang, "Historical Changes in North Korean Nationalism," *North Korean Review*, vol. 3, no. 1, (Spring 2007), pp. 102.

¹⁶ Hoare and Pares (2005) pp.12.

¹⁷ Robert A. Scalapino, "North Korea at a Crossroads" *Hoover Institution Essays in Public Policy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Press, 1997) pp. 4-6.

This was the state of the Kim regime as it negotiated famine, internal breakdowns, and nuclear standoff between 1994 and 2010. Much information on the social impact of these crises can be found in Stephan Haggard and Marcus Noland's article "Reform from below: Behavioral and Institutional Change in North Korea" in the *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization* (2010.) Haggard and Noland conducted a survey of 300 North Korean refugees living in South Korea in 2008. Their aim was to document changes in North Korea's economy in response to the Famine, especially those that developed from the bottom up. Their research goes on to document the various aspects and extent of this nominally illegal economy during periods of reform and retrenchment in the years since.

Haggard and Noland find that entrepreneurial behavior and market activity became very widespread during the famine years, as many small scale social units – households, work units, local party organs, government offices, and even military units – resorted to this coping behavior to secure food.¹⁸ The regime, faced with a choice of ratifying these changes or trying to re-establish the tattered system of socialist control as the famine eased, attempted a series of clumsy adjustments that culminated in a reform program in 2002 that legalized many of the coping behaviors. Haggard and Noland show that although government policy has veered back and forth in the years since, entrepreneurial marketization has remained a relative constant in North Korea ever since.

Another excellent overview is William J. Moon's article "The Origins of the Great North Korean Famine" in *North Korea Review* (Spring 2009.) Moon's goals are twofold: he studies

¹⁸ Stephan Haggard and Marcus Noland, "Reform from Below: Behavioral and Institutional Change in North Korea," *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, vol. 73 (2010) pg. 134.

the ways in which the regime was able to survive the famine, as well as normative implications of these methods from both an economic and ethical standpoint.

Moon details the *Songun*, or “military first” policy implemented by Kim Jong Il, and finds that it was an example of the North Korean regime’s attempt to significantly clamp down on illegal entrepreneurial activity. Moon claims that the regime actually exacerbated the effect of the famine on the populace by directing what food and resources were available away from the population at large and toward the military and elite groups, a claim disputed by David Reese, and strongly by Beal.¹⁹ In this respect Moon is probably correct, but I find that he overlooks the extent to which local cadres, military units, and security forces turned a blind eye to marketization. If the regimes intent was to consolidate support among the elite, then they were successful. However, the extent and persistence of small-scale marketization does not seem to support a conclusion that party, security, and military forces used their extra food rations to enforce adherence to North Korean economic and travel restrictions with any vigor.

The building blocks of regime power in North Korea are the focus of Jonathan D. Pollack’s article “Kim Jong Il’s Clenched Fist” in *The Washington Quarterly* (Oct 2009.) His particular focus is on the role of nuclear weapons in securing the regime’s longevity. More relevant to this review’s topic, it deals extensively with the growing role of the North Korean military in the inner workings of the DPRK, and fleshes out several of the shadowy characters surrounding Kim Jong Il. The North Korean military has driven a significant shift away from (admittedly limited) economic liberalization with a renewed emphasis on security from its

¹⁹ William J. Moon, “The Origins of the Great North Korean Famine”, *North Korean Review*, vol. 5, no. 1, (Spring 2009), pg. 109-110; and David Reese, *The Prospects for North Korea’s Survival* (Oxford UK: Oxford University Press, 1998) pp. 30.

neighbors, a rationale that Beal carries forward in his work. This is ironic, as North Korea's primary security risk is clearly of internal instability resulting from its severely damaged economy and society. Kim Jong Il finds himself in an increasingly precarious position having to maintain a very delicate balance between his military, his populace, and his international neighbors with their disparate agendas.

Literature Review Conclusion

These texts provide a solid initial understanding of the challenges that faced the North Korean regime between 1994-2010, as well as the ways in which the regime of Kim Jong Il took steps to secure itself during this time period. It is illuminating to observe the degree to which expert analysts differ on the exact nature of the North Korean regime and its actions, reflecting the lack of empirical clarity that poses the greatest problem to any research into North Korea. However, through careful analysis of what is known through such sources as refugees, defectors, military and diplomatic sources, visiting journalists, and the North's own propaganda and documentation, it is possible to gain significant insight into the workings of this system and its leaders.

Chapter III: Examination of Data and Methods

North Korea is often referred to as a “black box” that no one can see clearly into. No outside analyst of North Korea can responsibly claim to have more than a pinhole-view into events in that opaque state. Even the most respected scholarly and policy conversation on North Korea consists largely of careful speculation and guesswork based around the kernels of information that originate from the sources detailed below. Andrew Scobell writes that Kim Jong Il himself, although savvy and informed, may have significant misperceptions about his own country, due primarily to the “Potemkin village” effect.²⁰ He quotes journalist Bradley Martin, who strongly suspected that the full-time job of some North Koreans was to ride the Pyongyang subway all day in what Michael Breen calls “the country of the lie.”²¹ Similarly, during a visit to Pyongyang airport in 2002, I witnessed a single working passenger jet taxiing up and down the runway, in an apparent attempt to make the airport seem busy to visiting American officials.

Data on North Korea: Strengths and Weaknesses

Data on North Korea almost always originates from only a few sources. These include official North Korean media and other sources affiliated with the North Korean regime, as well

²⁰ Named after Russian minister Grigory Potyomkin, these are fake or artificially improved settlements, factories, farms, etc. set up to deceive a visiting dignitary with a false positive impression of an area that actually has significant shortcomings. These are almost always set up by officials attempting to curry favor and/or avoid punishment by an authoritarian leader, and have been known to be effective in the Soviet Union, China, and other authoritarian states.

²¹ Scobell (2006) pp. 12-13.;and Breen, Michael, *Kim Jong-il: North Korea's Dear Leader* (Singapore, John Wiley & Sons; 2004) pp. 111.

as high-level defectors and refugees. Other sources of information include foreigners who have visited or even lived in North Korea, including journalists, diplomats, and businessmen. In addition, all of North Korea's neighboring governments (including, in a manner of speaking, the United States,) gather information on goings-on in the DPRK through a variety of covert means that vary significantly in their effectiveness.

The Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) is the DPRK's state news organization and, along with *Rodong Sinmun*, the official newspaper of the Central Committee of the Korean Workers Party (KWP), functions as its mouthpiece to speak to the world. North Korea's bombastic verbal broadsides during international crises, so familiar to those who follow international news, emanate from KCNA. Some of this overwrought phrasing is due to the translation from Korean to English and other languages. These news releases are useful to gauge the general direction of North Korean policy on particular issues, as well as the regime's general level of vehemence. However, the ham-handed propaganda of the KCNA is useful for little else when one is in need of detailed data.

High-level defectors from the North such as former KWP secretary Hwang Jang Yop, as well as North Korean refugees in China, South Korea, and other parts of Asia, are the sources of the bulk of the open-source data upon which much scholarship and analysis of the DPRK is based. Both are generally considered to be only moderately reliable at best, and highly biased at worst. These problems of bias were considered to be more severe in the past than they are today.

This was the result of the nature of defection itself, in which highly placed members of the regime would escape to the South, usually via some third country. Most defectors made their escape when they felt they were about to be arrested or purged, as the guarantee that a defector's

family will be punished in their place discourages most officials who may be secretly disgruntled. Further embittered by these circumstances, these defectors were prone to tell their South Korean debriefers what they thought they wanted to hear, in many cases richly embellishing both their own backgrounds and the information they provided, in order to make themselves seem more important and therefore secure themselves a more affluent degree of exile. Many of the more outlandish stories about Kim Jong Il's personal lifestyle are based on such defectors accounts and are suspect in their veracity, although patterns of similar allegations across various defectors' stories can reveal the approximate truth in many cases.

A rather unique source of information that may be more reliable, if narrower in scope than regime defectors, comes from former kidnapping victims, such as South Korean film director Shin Sang-ok and his actress ex-wife Choi Eun-hee. This couple – especially Choi – spent extensive time with Kim Jong Il, and offer a view into his personal life and outlook that is at once intriguing and bizarre. Unfortunately, they were not able to observe Kim at the business of statecraft, and so mainly provide grist for a moderately clearer psychological profile of Kim at home and at leisure.

Refugees provide another source of information on North Korea. Refugees are much less likely to be able to provide a supposed insider's view directly into the workings of the Kim regime. However, they are more useful than defectors in portraying the actual pattern of life inside the DPRK, in terms of regime policy and its effects on the populace.²²

Prior to the 1990's, refugees and defectors were almost interchangeable, and information they provided suffered from the same sources of bias. The Great Famine of the late 1990's

²² For a significant data set compiled from over 300 NK refugees, see Haggard and Noland (2010.)

began a large exodus of refugees that has been sustained in the years since. This relatively large group of refugees, living primarily in northern China and in South Korea, is accessible to researchers who have been able to compile fascinating data. They now offer a much larger sample size than the defectors to cross-compare information to reduce bias, and they often have less cause to embellish what they tell an interviewer.

Many of the biases involved in the North Korean refugee population stems from demographic and geographic factors. Beginning in the 1990's, and continuing to the present day, the majority of North Korean refugees originally hail from North Hamgyong or South Hamgyong provinces, or Yangang Province. Not only are these regions adjacent to China, providing an escape route not easily available to North Koreans in other provinces, but these regions have the dubious distinction of being the poorest, least developed areas in North Korea. They were by all accounts the hardest hit during the famine, and also tend to have higher incidence of smuggling and other illicit economic activity oriented on the Chinese border. There may be a notable degree of bias in data collected from refugees hailing from these provinces, as they may differ from their countrymen in other, relatively better off provinces in both the degree to which they have grievance with the North Korean political and economic system, and the degree to which they have access to and are influenced by the outside world.

Another source of data on the DPRK comes from foreigners who have spent time there in some capacity. Although North Korea is famed as the most closed society on earth, a surprising number of westerners have visited or even lived there. These include diplomats stationed at missions in Pyongyang, as well as businessmen from Europe, China, or South Korea who are trying to establish an economic foot-in-the-door. Journalists often visit for shorter periods, but

may by nature be more attuned to observe and analyze what they see. Even foreigners such as weapons inspectors, or collection teams excavating for the remains of U.S. servicemen buried in North Korea in 1950, can provide useful and interesting observations about a range of issues.

However, as these foreign sojourners will readily admit, the true scope of what they see and observe is quite narrow. Their movements and access are monitored and controlled to an almost comical degree. Local North Koreans with whom they interact are either in the employ of the state or are unwilling to provide candid information, or both. In fact, the regime often goes to great lengths to showcase all that they consider the best of their nation, with ostentatious displays of food in an empty banquet hall, or the unique spectacle of the *Arirang* mass gymnastics. This tends to particularly be the case with visiting journalists; a reflection, perhaps, of Kim Jong Il's background and lifelong fascination with information media in propaganda.

Military intelligence gathered by the DPRK's neighbors is also a source of data on the North. Much of this is classified and beyond the purview of this study. Much of the rest is focused on concrete matters of security, such as North Korean military disposition, activities at the Yongbyon nuclear site, or departures of ships from North Korean ports. Intelligence that does deal with the workings of the regime tend to be highly unreliable – especially those from South Korea – and are themselves often drawn from other sources listed above, and then passed along as analyzed intelligence.²³ There is also a pronounced tendency to overly demonize Kim Jong Il in South Korean government reporting, as exemplified by *The True Story of Kim Jong Il*, by the Institute for South-North Korea Studies (1993.) This work portrays Kim as an epileptic,

²³ Many of the contents of *The True Story of Kim Jong Il (1993)* are drawn from such intelligence, which is in turn drawn from breathless accounts of defectors and similar.

frenzied party animal who is “irrational.. bellicose and narrow minded,” and falls into the unhelpful cliché of Kim as ‘crazy.’

Given the numerous problems and biases inherent in data on North Korea in general and the Kim Jong Il regime in particular, it is possible to gain a reasonably clear view of general trends and specific events. Particularly in cases where a large sample population exists (as in the case of refugees) some fairly solid conclusions can be drawn that can be reasonably applied to the DPRK as a whole. The key to analysis of North Korea is constant recognizance of the margin of bias inherent in any data, as well as the necessary degree of educated guesswork based on consideration of both the data set and precedent.

Under enormous pressure from both within and without, how did Kim Jong Il and his regime elites institutionalize to face these challenges and protect the leader and regime? I will systematically study the manner in which Kim Jong Il and the North Korean regime succeeded in weathering the various crises of the past 16 years. The regime did ultimately survive. Do Gandhi and Przeworski's conclusions explain in whole or in part how the North Korean regime was able to do this? If they do not, then what does explain this regimes survival?

The data I will use will be drawn primarily from English-language journal articles and books. These in turn primarily draw their data from defectors, refugees, and kidnapees on one hand, and from foreign individuals and organizations that have visited or worked in North Korea. They treat the defectors with appropriate skepticism, drawing subdued and logical conclusions from analysis of the tales told by these embittered former regime-insiders. In addition, the pool of refugees is now large enough that researchers such as Haggard and Noland can use a sample size that helps to mitigate inherent biases.

Many South Korean articles and pamphlets are useful as a source of organizational and statistical data on North Korea. Entire scholarly and governmental organizations, such as the Korea Institute for National Unification, and the Institute for South-North Korea Studies exist there to watch and analyze North Korea and they collect a significant amount of raw data. How this data is presented is often quite biased, but the pure numbers, dates, and lists of who replaced whom on the National Defence Council are still useful if one is aware of the spin.

Finally, it is worth acknowledging that there will be an unavoidable degree of conjecture involved in this study, as it is in any work on North Korea. The key will be to minimize the conjecture through use of comparative analysis of sources. North Korean data is an area in which the “truth lies somewhere in the middle” and through the use of a large pool of sometimes disagreeing sources, I should be able to identify this with a fair degree of accuracy.

Methods

I will conduct this analysis through careful examination of the case study of Kim Jong Il. I will examine Kim’s career in two periods: his rise to power from 1972-1994, and his tenure as both unofficial and official Leader of North Korea from 1994 to 2009. Using the known historical record, as well as the general consensus on Kim’s personality, priorities, and leadership style, I will look for examples within this narrative that support or undermine my four hypotheses:

1) *Kim Jong Il engaged in formal institutionalization within the regime to secure himself in power.*

2) Kim Jong Il used informal institutionalization to form an “inner elite” through which he could secure the loyalty of key elite groups.

3) Kim Jong Il co-opted the grass-roots economic and social institutions that existed in North Korea outside the purview of the regime.

4) Kim Jong Il did not weaken the power of existing institutions or elite groups, and did not decrease the role of institutions as a whole within the regime.

The first period should provide evidence in support or opposition to hypotheses 2 and 3, and possibly 4. In his decades waiting in the wings, Kim would probably not have been in a position to officially institutionalize or deinstitutionalize, but would have been able to begin to conduct informal institutionalization to gain influence and loyalty among critical elites such as military and security forces. The second period should provide evidence in support or opposition to all four hypotheses.

If all four hypotheses are correct, then Gandhi and Przeworski’s theory will be found to explain Kim Jong Il’s longevity in power. If one hypothesis is incorrect, the theory will be only partially explanatory, and possible refinements to the theory may be suggested. If two or more of the hypotheses are incorrect, then Gandhi and Przeworski’s theories will not be explanatory of Kim Jong Il’s long reign. It will then be necessary to find an alternate explanation that does effectively explain this phenomenon.

Chapter IV. Application of Institutionalization Theory to Kim Jong Il

An examination of Kim Jong Il's political career over the periods of 1972-1993 and 1994-2009 will reveal narrative accounts that specifically address my four hypotheses. Kim's grooming for succession from 1972-1993 will be relevant to informal institutionalization (hypothesis 2) and co-optation of non-regime institutions (hypothesis 3.) Kim's tenure as leader of North Korea from 1994-2009 will be relevant to all four hypotheses.

Preparation for Succession from Kim Il Sung: 1972-1993

Kim Jong Il's leadership style and tendencies can be observed as far back as his debut on the North Korean political scene. He graduated in 1964 from Kim Il Sung University and was promptly appointed as the second highest official in the KWP propaganda department. Kim already had a predilection for information and artistic endeavors. North Korean propaganda at the time waxed extensively about his intellect, creativity, and innate understanding of the uses of the creative arts in the revolutionary struggle, even as a schoolchild.²⁴ In his capacity as a high-ranking propaganda official, Kim worked on formulation of *Juche*-“Kimilsungism” ideology. A huge bulk of the propaganda that formed the basis for Kim Jong Il's personality cult is built around his work in this area, praising not only his intellectual faculties in developing this turgid ideology, but spinning extensive yarns about his passionate efforts to spread this knowledge to the North Korean people,. Hwang Jang Yop, who later defected to the South, in fact did much of

²⁴ Breen (2004,) ch 4 is all about Kim Jong Il's school days. Extensive coverage is also given to this in Tak, Kim, and Pak, (1985).

the leg work on this endeavor, but it seems credible that Kim did some work in this area. He certainly wrote several books on *Juche* and a variety of topics dealing with various arts.

Kim Jong Il's endeavors to take credit for the development of *Juche* had several related effects, all of which certainly helped his cause as the future successor. Such energy and devotion to fleshing out and spreading the ideology first laid down by his father was an important demonstration of filial piety, with Kim Il Sung being the primary audience for this display. It also establish connections and respect within North Korean elite and propaganda circles. It established Kim Jong Il as the expert on *Juche* and his credentials to interpret and eventually sideline it as it suits his designs. In this regard, Kim was establishing himself as the arbiter of the national philosophy, and of his father's overall intent whenever that was not made clear by the Great Leader himself.

Kim Jong Il was officially designated as successor by Kim Il Sung in 1972. However, as Jong Il was no doubt well aware, his actual eventual succession was not guaranteed. His half-brother, Kim Pyong Il, shared many of the traits with their father that Kim Jong Il did not. He was charismatic, photogenic, a military veteran, and the spitting image of Kim Il Sung. He also had the backing of his mother Kim Song Ae, Kim Il Sung's wife and Jong Il's step-mother, who reportedly wanted Pyong Il to succeed to the Leadership.²⁵

Kim Jong Il found himself in the "successor's dilemma"- he needed to build his own resume and experience to prepare for leadership, but if he appeared too ambitious, or upstaged Kim Il Sung, he would very likely be passed over for succession, or worse.²⁶ Part of this involved not embarrassing or displeasing his father. Kim Jong Il, by all accounts, hosted many drinking

²⁵ Mansourov (1995) pp. 16-18.

²⁶ Significant analysis of Kim Jong Il's "successor dilemma" can be found in Breen (2004) pp 66-76.

parties to build and reinforce loyalty among his close associates, but went to significant lengths to keep the most excessive partying under wraps from Kim Il Sung.²⁷ In addition to his drinking, Kim Jong Il apparently tried to keep his sexual activities out of view of his father as well. Breen records the testimony of Sung Hae Rang, whose movie star sister Sung Hae Rim was Kim Jong Il's first great love. Kim and Sung may have been secretly married, but in any event they lived together through much of the 1970s and 1980s, and had a son, Kim Jong Nam. Kim Jong Il supposedly went to almost absurd lengths to keep the extent of the relationship hidden from his father, including a time when Jong Nam had to be smuggled out a hospital window when Kim Song Ae and Kim Pyong Il showed up for a surprise inspection.²⁸

Throughout the period prior to succession, Kim Jong Il was notable for his lack of public appearances and speeches. This appeared to stem from both his scrupulous attempts to avoid upstaging his father in any way, as well as an apparent genuine aversion to public speaking. Kim no doubt realized that if he were to attract too much notice as a charismatic speaker and leader, he might begin to be seen by Kim Il Sung as a threat rather than an understudy. Leaving the public spotlight to his father, Kim Jong Il instead followed his example in undertaking many trips around the DPRK to give "on-the-spot-guidance." In keeping with the propaganda theme of Kim Jong Il as the "Dear Leader," his on-the-spot-guidance was always described in terms of benevolence and caring, while Kim Il Sung's activities were always described in militaristic language.²⁹

²⁷ Breen (2004) pp. 67, documents a story where Kim Jong Il had one of his friends kill his wife when she threatened to complain to Kim Il Sung about her husband's excessive partying with Kim Jong Il.

²⁸ *ibid* pp. 72.

²⁹ *ibid* pp. 71.

Kim Jong Il's activities throughout the entire period prior to succession were characterized by deception, image management, and manipulation. To reflect a point made above, it appears that even as early as the 1970's, Kim Jong Il knew he would not be able to rule through force of personality and a record of machismo, like his father had done. Even to this day, Kim Jong Il lacks the depth of authority that Kim Il Sung wielded in North Korea. Early in his rule, Kim Jong Il reportedly came up against elements of the regime made up of his father's old guerilla cronies, who disputed any reinterpretations or deviation from the dictates of Kim Il Sung.³⁰ Both high-level defectors and desperate refugees routinely say that while they still admire and revere Kim Il Sung, they are indifferent or contemptuous of Kim Jong Il.³¹

How does Kim Jong Il deal with this? Obviously, ideological and propaganda chops, as well as a personality cult founded upon benevolence, caring, and filial duty are factors, but are not sufficient in themselves. The same goes for drinking parties to bond with core supporters. Perhaps the key lies in who was invited to those parties.

After working his way through the 2nd ranking position on the KWP's military commission, and being promoted to Marshall and head of the Korean People's Army (KPA) Kim Jong Il was made chairman of the National Defense Commission (NDC) in 1993. Although he had no actual military experience, his position and the authority of his father who appointed him to it, allowed him to manipulate and co-opt the generals who did. Kim reportedly keeps his military friends close and enemies closer by energetically micro-managing military affairs.³² Generals, such as Cho Myung Rok and Lee Eun Sol, were quickly elevated into the top positions within the regime,

³⁰ Mansourov (1995) pp. 6.

³¹ Scobell (2006) pp. 15.

³² Reese, (1998) pp. 19.

while generals or officials who stepped out of line or wavered in their loyalty were ruthlessly purged.³³ As older generals of his father's generation have aged and retired, Kim has replaced them with generals of his own generation and his own choosing, each one owing his position and loyalty to Kim Jong Il. Family members, such as brother-in-law Chang Song Taek, were also promoted. Senior military leaders were given apartments and luxury cars, and were invited to Kim Jong Il's drinking parties. The goings on at these parties conformed to a common pattern of management bonding techniques used frequently in Korean political, business, and criminal circles. They involved ritual humiliation and hazing. In an archetypical episode of this calculated humiliation, Kim ordered a tee-totaling KWP secretary Hwang Jang Yop to drink, pouring the man a glass himself. Hwang promptly consumed the drink, finding that Kim had given him colored water. In this way, everyone at the party witnessed Kim's dominance and the official's obedience, but Hwang also knew that Kim had secretly respected his aversion to alcohol.³⁴

Kim continued to rely on secrecy and deception to give himself options. He shifted the blame when things went wrong, to foreign threats or domestic sabotage, or simply denying that a particular failure was part of his job description - all of which he did during the Great Famine. Kim would, however, invariably accrue the credit when things were back under control. Further in line with his constant attempts at deception and misdirection, Kim deliberately tries to keep

³³ Rumors of a coup in 6th Corps in 1995 can be found in Reese (1998) pp. 22.

³⁴ Park and Lee (2005) pp. 11-14 details the steady rise in position of senior military leaders such as Cho Myung-rok and Lee Eul-sol. Breen (2004) comments on how partying and ritual humiliation form bonds between superior and subordinate .pp. 93, 101-104. Scobell (2006) also points out the use of drinking parties as a management and loyalty tool in Korean culture pp. 13, and apartments and cars for military brass pp. 24.

people guessing about his next move. This has the effect of making him appear “formidable and even dangerous,” in both a domestic and international setting.³⁵

Kim also uses his father’s legacy to legitimize himself. All members of the North Korean elite would agree that the Great Leader’s wishes should be followed, and who better to guide this interpretive process than the filial son, and the very architect of the Great Leader’s *Juche* philosophy? Along similar lines, Kim Jong Il’s communication to the North Korean people has shown an increase of terms associated with Confucianism, without any overt mention of this officially proscribed philosophy. This subtle appeal to very deep Confucian cultural roots sets the stage for Kim Jong Il to appear filial and virtuous, in line with his cult as the benevolent and caring leader.³⁶

How do these narratives support or undermine the relevant hypotheses? Hypothesis 2 is that *Kim Jong Il used informal institutionalization to form an “inner elite” through which he could secure the loyalty of key elite groups*. In this case, Kim Jong Il built informal institutions in the form of a loyal inner circle of elites that Kim relentlessly tried to bind to him as closely as possible. He did this through personal relationships and the use of bonding through both shared enjoyment and ritual hazing of subordinates. His official placement and natural affinity for information, propaganda, and ideology allowed him to effectively frame the ideological environment within the state and the regime, and to more effectively co-opt elites and mass-mobilize the society. This may appear to contradict Gandhi and Przeworski in that Kim was accruing power that would reside in himself, rather than expanding institutions. However, I find this is well accounted for by Gandhi and Przeworski’s theory, in which they state that

³⁵ Scobell (2006) pp. 13.

³⁶ Mansourov (1995) pp. 7-21.

authoritarian leaders will secure themselves through the co-optation of elites. Kim did not have his father's guerilla credentials or charismatic personality, and was effectively building his own credentials through which he could agglomerate an inner core of loyal elites. He also rejuvenated, in a very subtle manner, societal institutions of Confucian values in an effort to reinforce his legitimacy among both the elites and the populace, thereby co-opting a very deeply ingrained social tradition for his own security. In this we also see support for Hypothesis 3: *Kim Jong Il co-opted the grass-roots economic and social institutions that existed in North Korea outside the purview of the regime.* Kim's regimen of informal institutionalization, co-optation of societal values, and manipulation of the propaganda and ideological apparatus set the stage for more formal, official institutionalization after the death of Kim Il Sung.

Succession, Crisis, and Longevity: 1994-2009

Kim Il Sung died in 1994, accompanied by a few rumors that Kim Jong Il had "eased" him out by intervening to prevent medical care when he suffered a heart attack.³⁷ More veiled Confucianism occurred in the long mourning period of over three years.³⁸ Kim Jong Il was assuredly in charge this whole time; he had been largely running the state behind the scenes for several years according to the accounts of high level defectors such as Hwang Jang Yop. He used this period to sort out a few nagging family issues, such as with his step mother. This time period also enabled him to consolidate his informal power structures, while providing cover for administrative failures.

³⁷ Becker (2005) pp. 124-125.

³⁸ Mansourov (1998) pp. 7-22.

This administrative absence to “mourn” coincided with the Great Famine from 1995 to 1997. As Kim was not officially “in charge” he was able to dodge blame for the catastrophic failure of the Public Distribution System (PDS) for food. Instead, he made statements deploring the administrative failures of lower level officials that had allowed this to happen (as well as, of course, blaming the weather and the US, etc.) “In a socialist society, even the food problem should be solved in a socialist way, and officials should not tell the people to solve it on their own. Telling the people to solve the food problem on their own only increases the number of farmers’ markets and peddlers.”³⁹

There is considerable controversy over whether Kim Jong Il and his regime in fact worsened the effects of the Famine by redirecting food and other aid away from the starving people and toward the military and other key elites to “buy” their loyalty. On one hand are those such as Beal and Reese, who discount the credibility of these claims. They point out that the actions of the army do not indicate that it received significant aid, relative to the rest of the country, and that no NGO’s ever reported systematic redirection of aid.⁴⁰ Authors such as Breen, Lintner, Becker, and Scobell disagree. They cite numerous anecdotes from refugees and defectors, speaking of never having seen any of the aid, or of having witnessed the misappropriation of aid trucks first hand. Quite a few of the more outrageous stories have subsequently been debunked.⁴¹ However, the stories are so pervasive that there must be a degree of truth there.

While it does not ultimately appear that international aid was misappropriated wholesale because

³⁹ Lintner (2005) pp. 54.

⁴⁰ Beal (2005) describes mutinies, increased desertions, and KPA units foraging for food in the countryside; Professor Hazel Smith of the WFP stated in Beal pp. 157 that “..no international aid agency that has been involved in the regular delivery and distribution of food aid to North Korea has ever reported systematic diversion of food aid.”

⁴¹ Lintner (2005) pp. 52-53.

a lot of aid did make it to hungry North Koreans, it also seems plausible that the regime would reallocate what it needed to the military and other elites that it depended upon for security and stability.

Kim Jong Il individually and the regime at large likely viewed the famine deaths as casualties in a war – regrettable, but certainly secondary to victory which in this case would be the survival of the regime.⁴² What is clear is that supplies for Kim Jong Il and his core elites were ample enough during this time. A discriminating foodie, he had Italian chefs hired to make pizzas and gourmet meals at one of his palaces. One of these chefs, Ermanno Furlanis, writes about an occasion where they were strongly reprimanded because Kim had complained that the rack of lamb was “too salty.”⁴³ Kim’s doctors repeatedly advised him to cut back on the drinking and lose weight. While he was trying to moderate his consumption of hard alcohol, starving North Koreans were eating tree bark and wood pulp, and dying by the roadside.

With their government regime having abandoned them, what did everybody else in North Korea do to survive? One of the most prominent survival mechanisms was the emergence of open “farmers’ markets” or *jangmadang*; there are now between 350-500 of them, including several in Pyongyang.⁴⁴ There are also unofficial “frog markets” (so named because the vendors are prepared to jump up and run away) in many cities. In 2005, it was estimated that half the population used some form of these markets daily, and this percentage has almost certainly increased since then.⁴⁵ Given the tales of food aid diverted to the military, it is ironic that there have also been reports of food diverted from the army to be sold in the *jangmadang* by

⁴² Scobell (2006) pp. 26-29.

⁴³ Breen (2004) pp 144-146, Becker (2005) pp. 41-42.

⁴⁴ Lintner (2005) pp. 55.

⁴⁵ Hoare and Pares (2005) pp. 61.

unscrupulous officers and soldiers.⁴⁶ Kim tried to crack down on these markets in July 1994, and the reaction was so severe that he was forced to backtrack. There were reportedly open demonstrations against this crackdown, unheard of in North Korea before that time.⁴⁷ In addition, strict controls on personal movement were abandoned by large segments of the provincial administration. Hordes of migrants, known as “wandering swallows” roamed the country searching for work or food.⁴⁸

Kim was, of course, in a position where the degree of reforms that would have been necessary to truly alleviate the Famine would essentially amount to a change in the form of government, and hence a change of regime. To whatever extent Kim even considered and rejected reforms on these grounds, he certainly intuited the underlying realities. Being unable and unwilling to undertake reforms that might have kept North Koreans alive through the famine, Kim chose to secure himself by embracing the KPA. It is likely he would have done this anyway – indeed, the process had begun years earlier - but the need to survive the stresses of the Famine made the embrace all the tighter.

The *Songun* Policy was institutionally enshrined when then the NDC was made the highest governing authority in the constitution of 1998; in the 1992 constitution it had been below the Supreme People’s Assembly (SPA,) SPA Presidium, and the Central People’s Committee.⁴⁹ Control of a loyal military gives Kim paramount coercive power within the regime. The military

⁴⁶ Lintner (2005) pp. 54.

⁴⁷ Ibid pp 53.

⁴⁸ Lintner (2005) pp. 36.; and Park and Lee (2005) pp. 18-19.

⁴⁹ Park and Lee (2005) pp. 9.

also provides Kim with a labor pool to undertake construction and development projects, such as dams, tunnels, bridges, factories, and farming facilities, among others.⁵⁰

Kim also institutionally co-opted the underground *jangmadang* economy, at least to a degree, by legalizing it. Tolerance of the *jangmadang* is apparent in the constitutional changes of 1998. Market reforms of 2002 included wage increases, and abolishing of some subsidies, although there was some official retrenchment on tolerance of the *jangmadang* economy. *Jangmadang* markets were finally legalized in 2003.⁵¹ This provided the regime with both actual and apparent control over these markets, and would enable it to take credit for their utility and to prevent the simmering marketization from developing too far and too fast for the regime's purposes. This also probably reflected the realization that it would take fewer security resources to watch and control the nascent market economy than it would to ban it; in fact, Kim may have reason to believe that such a task is now beyond the abilities of even North Korea's coercive apparatus. By 2005, the agricultural situation had improved enough that an attempt was made to reactivate the PDS; aid agencies were asked to stop food shipments and switch to development assistance, or else leave.⁵² This reactivation was ultimately a failure; the populace had become too dependant on the market economy.⁵³

During this period, Kim appears to have engaged in perhaps his most extensive program of institutionalization. In support of Hypothesis 1- *Kim Jong Il engaged in formal institutionalization within the regime to secure himself in power* - he significantly altered the

⁵⁰ Park and Lee (2005) pp. 21.

⁵¹ Extensively covered in Hoare and Pares (2005) pp 60-64.

⁵² Scobell (2006) pp. 36-37.

⁵³ Haggard and Noland (2010) pp. 141-142.

constitutional structure of the highest levels of the North Korean regime, in order to facilitate a dominant role for the military with him at its head.

Kim also continued the pattern of informal institutionalization relevant to Hypothesis 2: *Kim Jong Il used informal institutionalization to form an “inner elite” through which he could secure the loyalty of key elite groups.* He engaged in institutional change within the KPA, using parties, patronage, promotions, and purges to secure the loyalty of top generals, while gradually filling the general officer ranks with hand-picked loyalists of his own. The North Korean military was preserved from the Famine’s worst ravages by whatever means, and emerged as the bedrock of Kim’s personal and regime security. Also preserved were key resources of the regime, such as North Korea’s ballistic missile program.

During the Famine, it is telling that Kim refrained from expending resources to even appear to make serious attempts to help the people. His public involvement was largely limited to clucking about administrative failure and those regrettable farmers markets. Although he certainly gave the go-ahead to request international aid and allow it into the DPRK, his regime’s biggest material contribution was a slew of “Arduous March” propaganda. The eastern provinces were largely abandoned to die. It was after the worst of the Famine was over that Kim busied himself institutionalizing at the popular level in accordance with Hypothesis 3: *Kim Jong Il co-opted the grass-roots economic and social institutions that existed in North Korea outside the purview of the regime.*

Faced with a grass-roots marketization in the form of the *jangmadang*, Kim acted to co-opt these markets into the official economy. This would enable the regime to watch and regulate a potentially dangerous social force that may have already exceeded the coercive

capacity of the North Korean state. He did this through early tolerance, and later by full legalization. Although there have been periods of retrenchment on the markets, it appears that the *jangmadang* and their ilk are now fully institutionalized in the DPRK.

It could be said that there is evidence that undermines Hypothesis 4: *Kim Jong Il did not weaken the power of existing institutions or elite groups, and did not decrease the role of institutions as a whole within the regime.* Kim de-elevated the SPA, and made the CPC an empty rubber-stamp. This would seem to indicate that Kim was weakening the power of institutions to constrain him, and there is some merit to this view. However, in reality Kim was de-elevating these institutions in order to secure his ability to rule through the institution of the NDC, upon which he relied for both legitimacy and coercive muscle. Therefore, this constituted an institutional reorganization, rather than a de-institutionalization.

Chapter V: Conclusions

In conclusion, Gandhi and Przeworski's Theory of Authoritarian Institutionalization appears to successfully explain Kim Jong Il's longevity in power through several crises and the increasing failure of his state. Kim was able to manipulate and modify existing North Korean institutions, including the regime's constitutional structure, and the composition of the economy. He was also able to create a series of informal institutions to solidify control over key elites, and to a lesser degree, the populace.

Kim Jong Il's "official" efforts at institutionalization were largely in support of his co-optation of the KPA. By elevating the NDC over the Central Committee and the SPA, he altered the organizational structure of the highest levels of the North Korean regime, in order to facilitate a dominant role for the military. He solidified his position as head of the military in fact as well as in title by securing the loyalty of senior leaders, promoting his own candidates into senior vacancies, and constantly undertaking activities intended to tighten the bonds binding the generals to Kim Jong Il himself. In the process of doing this, Kim effectively transitioned from a "civilian" type authoritarian to a "military" type, regardless of his lack of actual military background. This enabled him to rely more heavily on coercion and repression than a civilian-type leader is able to in Gandhi and Przeworski's model.

The preservation of North Korea's ballistic missile program, as well as the development of a small nuclear arsenal, were also seen as crucial guarantors of security for the regime. In both cases, they provided at once a degree of deterrence against foreign attack, a useful tool with

which to extort concessions and aid, and a potent symbol of Kim's strength to his internal military and elite audience.

Kim also acted to co-opt the underground institutions of the *jangmadang* economy into the auspices of the regime once the figurative dust had settled in the wake of the Great Famine. This institutionalization took the form of gradual legal changes, giving the regime at least nominal control over the simmering forces of marketization. This is a powerful example of Gandhi and Przeworski's theory in action, as the regime had successfully identified a movement that left unmolested could potentially pose an existential challenge to the regime itself. Rather than ignore it, or try to crush it, Kim institutionalized to co-opt it, and by doing so, hopefully render it less dynamic and threatening. Whether this effect was or can be successfully achieved by the Kim regime remains to be seen.

Kim Jong Il's informal institutionalization was intended to overcome the fact that he was not Kim Il Sung. Kim Jong Il did not have his father's guerilla credentials or charismatic personality, and instead relied on his familiarity with propaganda and deception to frame the ideological environment within the state and the regime, and to more effectively co-opt elites and mobilize the society. One way he did this was through his association with the *Juche* ideology, but another was his resurrection of the very deeply internalized institutions of Confucianism. He also rejuvenated, in a very subtle manner, societal institutions of Confucian values in an effort to reinforce his legitimacy among both the elites and the populace. It is unknown to what extent Kim Jong Il was consciously aware of the Confucian resonances of many of his actions. He certainly has never specifically evoked Confucius, who remains officially proscribed in the DPRK. However, in many instances Kim has appeared to go to great lengths to appear the very

model of filial devotion and virtue. Even his own personality cult emphasizes his scholarly and artistic background, eerily paralleling the traits of the traditional ruling Korean *Yangban* class of scholar-officials. Perhaps the master stroke was the appointment of his father, the late Great leader, as President for Eternity. Not only was this a deeply powerful act of filial respect, but it removed the largest single organizational impediment to his desired constitutional restructuring, enabling him to elevate the NDC while freeing Kim from many of the ceremonial and other duties related to the position of president.

Kim Jong Il is often thought of as an absolute dictator, the sole decision maker and embodiment of his state. These characterizations are all largely true, but nonetheless, even Kim has gone to enormous effort to institutionalize within his regime elites and within his state. It is clear that his motivation in doing so was his security and longevity in power. It is also clear, as he nears a likely death in bed and the succession of his son Kim Jong Un, that his endeavors in this regard were successful.

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