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### **Survival of the North Korean Regime and Changing Legitimation Modes**

by

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## **Abstract**

The paper attempts to approach the survival of the North Korean regime in the perspective of changing legitimation modes and ideological management by the leadership to fill in possible 'identity vacuum'. With a content analysis of *Rodong Sinmun*, the representative North Korean newspaper, this paper follows the reformulation process of the legitimising value and ideological rationality in North Korea between 1980 and 2004. It particularly looks at changes in the Party discourse, political rhetoric, and the emphasis of the Party policy focus during the analytical period in order to trace the leadership's effort to provide new goals, vision, and regime legitimacy as a way to overcome crises. On the basis of findings, the paper argues that the North Korean regime formulated new rhetoric at different times to rationalise its existence, which consequently transformed the nature of the regime from a 'Juche (self-reliant)' state to a 'military oriented' one where the 'Songun (military first)' ideology established itself as a dominating rhetoric. In the perspective of legitimation crisis, the paper further argues that the process of shifting legitimation modes, through ideological manipulation or propaganda management has served the purpose of preventing identity crisis and sustaining the North Korean regime thus far.

## **About the Author**

Dr. Soyoung Kwon received a Ph.D. degree in political science from the University of Cambridge and worked as a researcher at the East Asia Institute in Cambridge. Her research has been widely focused on the North Korean leadership and policy changes in North Korea through newspaper content analysis and profile analysis. Dr. Kwon was a Shorenstein post-doctoral fellow at the Asia Pacific Research Center at Stanford University between 2004 and 2005. She now works at the European Parliament as a Korea specialist and policy advisor to a British MEP.

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## 1. Introduction

For decades, *Juche* (self-reliance) ideology<sup>1</sup> had been a dominating rhetoric and guiding principle in North Korea. It has served as a systemic legitimating value and ideological platform whereby the ruling elites could rationalize their policies and authority structures. From the late 1980s, however, dramatic changes in the external environment and endogenous crises challenged the existing regime legitimacy in North Korea. The collapse of the communist bloc in the Eastern Europe, followed by the breakdown of the Soviet Union, and pursuit of market economy in China altogether threatened the survival of the North Korean communist regime. A series of crises continued with the death of Kim Il Sung (1994), the tension over nuclear issue between North Korea and the US (1993-1994), leadership change to Kim Jong Il, surmounting economic problems, and natural disasters which led millions of people to die of starvation. Facing the radically changing international environment, the North Korean regime needed to shift its legitimation mode as a means to rationalize regime continuation. This included creation of new rationality, replacement of the old guiding principle with new rhetoric, and providing an alternative vision.

The North Korean regime strived to search for a new legitimacy throughout the 1990s, particularly under the Kim Jong Il leadership. Constant shifts in the Party discourse and emergence of new rhetoric reflected in the North Korean publications substantiate this point. This paper aims to follow such a change through a content analysis of the Party newspaper (*Rodong Sinmun*) editorials from 1980 to 2004, and to discuss its implication in the context of regime survival. On the basis of the study, the paper argues that the North Korean regime formulated new rhetoric at different times to rationalise its existence, and in doing so, the nature of the regime transformed from a '*Juche*' state to a 'military-oriented' one where the '*Songun (military first)*' ideology established itself as a dominating rhetoric. In the perspective of legitimation crisis, the paper further argues that the process of shifting legitimation modes, through ideological manipulation or propaganda management, has served the purpose of filling in the possible ideological vacuum, therefore, preventing identity crisis and sustaining the North Korean regime thus far.

## 2. Legitimation Crisis

The legitimacy problem is a factor that is commonly pinpointed in explaining the breakdown of the communist system<sup>2</sup>. Legitimacy is an abstract concept, but relates to normative values/beliefs concerning the authority and the right to rule. One of the principal methods of exercising power in any political system is authority. Even in a state socialist system, leaderships do not entirely rely on coercion, but seek to rule on the basis of authority and political order. The term 'legitimation' refers to the process whereby they seek to acquire authority or legitimacy.<sup>3</sup> Legitimation can be sought in various forms depending on

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<sup>1</sup> The term *Juche* is commonly translated from the Korean language as 'self-reliance', but it does not lend itself to any single, precise definition. Depending on the context in which it is used it can mean national identity, self-reliance, national pride or national assertiveness. The four guiding principles of *Juche* are autonomy or identity in ideology, independence in politics, self-sufficiency in economy, and reliance on Korea's own forces in national defence.

<sup>2</sup> J.F. Brown (1991), Paul Kennedy (1993), pp.230-231; Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, (1996), pp.235-253; David Lane (1996), pp.152-187; V. Konotorovich (1993), p.42; G. Di Palma (1991), N.Robinson (1995); Steven Saxonberg (2001), pp.143-162. See the reference section

<sup>3</sup> Leslie Holmes, *The End of Communist Power*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), p.13 and p.39.

the source and means of acquiring legitimacy. According to Holmes' classification of legitimation<sup>4</sup>, ten dominant modes of legitimation are pinpointed to have been observed in various communist and post-communist societies. The domestic ones are listed as old traditional, charismatic, legal-rational, goal-rational (teleological), eudaemonic, official nationalist, and new traditional modes. For external modes, there are formal recognition, informal support, and existence of an external role model.

**Table 1. Ten modes of Legitimation**

Source of Legitimation	Modes of Legitimation
<b>Internal (domestic)</b>	1. traditional
	2. charismatic
	3. legal-rational
	4. goal-rational (teleological)
	5. new traditional
	6. eudaemonic
	7. official nationalists
<b>External</b>	8. formal recognition
	9. informal support
	10. Self-legitimation: existence of an external role model

The first three modes of legitimation represent Max Weber's three broad grounds for exercising power on which authority is based. In the *traditional* form of legitimation, a leader claims the right to rule on the basis of a long-established or widely accepted tradition.<sup>5</sup> A monarch and the church typically claiming their rights by reference to some superhuman agency (i.e. divine mandate of heaven) or in terms of family tradition are the examples. The dynastic succession from Kim Il Sung to Kim Jong Il in North Korea displays legitimation attempt along this line. In the *charismatic* mode, legitimacy is based on the charisma of a leader. This legitimation mode depends on a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or specifically exceptional powers or qualities.<sup>6</sup> The communist revolutionary leaders (i.e. Lenin, Mao, Ho Chi Min, Kim Il Sung, etc.) who have developed authority on the basis of heroism or other exceptional qualities highly esteemed pursued this type of legitimation. The ultimate mode of legitimation in the modern state, according to Weber, is the *legal-rational* form of legitimation. The political order is legitimated in terms of rules and laws that are binding on everyone, thus impersonal norms and a legal order give those in authority the right to rule.<sup>7</sup> Regular, free, secret, and competitive elections manifest under the legal-rational mode of legitimation. It constitutes the dominant form of legitimation in the post-communist societies or other advanced societies.

The term *goal-rational* (teleological) legitimation is used by T.H. Rigby (1982) to describe the dominant form of legitimation in many socialist states, in which the leaders or vanguard, seek legitimacy in terms of their ability to steer a given country to the distant end

<sup>4</sup> Leslie Holmes, *Post-Communism: An Introduction*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), pp.44-45.

<sup>5</sup> M. Weber (1947), *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, (New York: the Free Press), p.328

<sup>6</sup> F. Teiwes, *Leadership, Legitimacy, and Conflict in China*, (London: Macmillan, 1984), p.46.

<sup>7</sup> Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, Vol.3, (New York: Bedminster Press, 1968), p. 954.

goal of communism. The legitimation in terms of goal-rationality appeared in the earlier stages of communist revolution and socialist development, which relied on providing a new vision to the masses. The *new traditional* form is taken by the communist leaders who attempt to enhance their own authority by reference to an earlier phase of the communist era. This type of legitimation was practised by Gorbachev when he blamed the previous leaders, who distorted the original Leninist aims, for the problems in the Soviet Union, and argue for return to the true Leninist path. Deng Xiaoping often made reference to the early phase of Mao Zedong's leadership of communist China, which can be seen as an example of new traditional mode. Kim Jong Il tended to pursue this type of legitimation after the death of Kim Il Sung through constantly praising and reminding achievements and revolutionary heritage of the Great Leader.

The *eudaemonic* mode of legitimation refers to attempts by political leaders to legitimate their rule in terms of the political order's performance, especially in the economic sphere. Under the eudaemonic mode, leaders appeal to support of the masses on the basis of impressive growth rates, better quality and more widely available consumer goods, and stability. This may explain how China's economic success contributed to the continuation of the socialist system and dominance of the communist Party. The eudaemonic form of legitimation is closely related to economic performance, thus it becomes problematic when economic reforms fail to produce tangible results.

The *official nationalist* form of legitimacy relies on nationalism. Communist leaderships who believe that they are failing to legitimate their rule by other modes resorted to official nationalism. Leaders may seek the right to rule by locating themselves in a tradition of national hero-leaders or colonial experience. Nationalism is not a true ideology, nevertheless, it provides a framework for many who have lost their usual reference or who fear losing their own identity as a consequence.<sup>8</sup> The official nationalist and charismatic legitimation forms tended to be more obvious in those countries where the communists had taken power largely or exclusively by their own efforts than in those where the communists had come to power with considerable external, usually Soviet, assistance.

The *formal recognition* by external powers such as by other states or international organizations may also impose legitimacy. In this case, the leaderships may emphasize the fact that they are being admitted to the United Nations (or other international organizations) or the leaders' image as an international statesperson (i.e. Gorbachev). This mode of legitimation generally coexists with other forms of legitimation already identified, more likely with the charismatic legitimation. The *informal support* for a regime and policies by external agents can also give a leader certain legitimacy. Symbolic gesture of popularity abroad, for instance, encouraged Gorbachev to push forward his policies and reforms in the late 1980s. The *self-legitimation* mode is sought by the leaders who are aware of their unpopularity and lack of authority among their own population. These leaders continue to believe in their own right to rule by clinging onto direct or indirect external (informal) support and their faith in regime of another country that they are emulating. This is also linked to the existence of an external role model. This mode is evidently observed in the Eastern European countries during the heydays of the USSR. The formal recognition and

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<sup>8</sup> On the relationship between nationalism and the ideological vacuum, see J. Hall (1995), pp.86-88

self-legitimation modes were more salient in countries in which communism was virtually imposed from outside.

Legitimacy problems arise when the dominant legitimation mode fails to have a desirable effect. Legitimation crisis is generally induced by differing factors depending on the dominant mode of legitimation pursued. For instance, economic decline and economic reform failure impose a crisis on the eudaemonic form of legitimation. Death of the revolutionary leaders threatens the charismatic form of legitimation. A rise of an opponent group or a new elite or class engenders crisis in a new traditional mode of legitimation. Erosion of original and founded ideology generates a crisis in the goal-rational mode of legitimation. External factors, such as Gorbachev's reforms in the USSR and the Soviet leadership to legitimate criticism of the regime, provoked a crisis in Eastern European socialist countries that depended on the existence of an external role model and informal support. The collapse of self-legitimation among the communist leaderships of Eastern Europe came about when the Soviet leadership itself appeared to have lost its way to continue the ruling based on socialist organisational principles.

The factors that threaten the existing legitimacy may cause the leaders to lose faith in its ruling or the masses to discredit the system. However, the legitimation crisis does not necessarily lead to system collapse. The crisis can be overcome in different ways to ensure system prolongation.<sup>9</sup> Firstly, presence of another group that has sufficient faith in the system opens a possibility of leadership change. When a given leadership team either loses faith in itself or resigns, this new group can take over and maintain the system. If the masses believe that such a change will bring genuine improvements, then the overall system's legitimacy gets reinstated. This may have been observed in the case of a relatively closed communist system such as Poland in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968. Secondly, reversion to coercion as a mode of exercising power can provide an emergency means to crisis management. When the leadership perceives that legitimating the system to the masses is failing to an extent that it endangers continuation of the regime or even the system, it may consider reverting to coercion over the masses. In this case, the leaders have not yet lost faith in their capacity to rule despite recognition of their failure to legitimate themselves or the system. The regime in Czechoslovakia from 1969, the imposition of martial law in Poland in 1981, and the Tiananmen incident in Beijing in 1989 are the exemplary cases of employing the coercive form of overcoming legitimation crisis.<sup>10</sup> Thirdly, system collapse can be prevented by shifting dominant legitimation modes upon recognising the problematic nature of a given form of legitimation. When the legitimation crisis occurs because those running a system lose confidence in the capacity of a particular dominant legitimation mode, this type of crisis can be managed as long as they believe they can enhance legitimacy by switching to another dominant mode. The very act of more or less explicitly moving to another is observed in many communist countries. The form of legitimation gradually evolved from obtaining popular support to fulfilling goals under the communist leadership. The goals varied over time; the leaders dropped their visions of world revolution and switched to non-revolutionary goals such as superior economic performance. A change from teleological to eudaemonic form of legitimation in Eastern Europe in the 1970s with market

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<sup>9</sup> These are summarised from different scenarios suggested by Holmes (1997), pp. 52-58

<sup>10</sup> L. Holmes (1997), *Ibid*, pp.52-54.

socialist reforms and to self-legitimation mode in the 1980s is one example. A constant switch from charismatic to goal-rational, new traditional, coercive, and eudaemonic modes was the case in China. According to Holmes, an act of switching to another mode of legitimation provides a regime some 'breathing space'.<sup>11</sup> The process, therefore, can divert the attention of the masses from problems of the existing legitimation mode, and renew people's faith in the system.

Legitimation crisis leads to a system collapse if the leaders fail to overcome legitimacy problems by one of the means mentioned above. The system collapse also occurs if attempts to enhance system legitimacy fail over time by internal and external factors and/or if the capacity of leaderships to keep switching to new forms of legitimation is limited. Due to the nature of top-down legitimation in a communist system, ruling elites' loss of confidence in the legitimacy of its own domination and faith in the system is especially fatal. When the leaders are exposed to identity crisis<sup>12</sup>, they are deprived of willingness to seek an alternative legitimation mode. Failure to re-establish legitimacy due to an "identity vacuum"<sup>13</sup> in the ruling bloc inevitably generates system collapse.

To conclude, some generalizations can be drawn within the legitimation crisis context. Firstly, the legitimation crisis occurs when the dominant mode of legitimation is threatened by certain economic, political, social, and external factors. Secondly, the legitimation crisis can possibly be overcome either by reverting to coercion or by shifting to another mode of legitimation. Thirdly, the system collapses when the leaders fail to manage legitimation crisis successfully because they lose faith in what it is doing and in the very system it is supposed to maintain. Survival of the North Korean regime may be understood in this context.

### **3. The North Korean Case – Crisis management and Legitimation under Kim Jong Il**

The North Korean regime was largely founded upon charismatic and official nationalist modes of legitimation. The historical background of regime formation, in which Kim Il Sung was regarded as national liberator from the Japanese colonisation, endowed the North Korean regime with strong popular support in the early years of communist development. These modes of legitimation persisted throughout the Kim Il Sung's reign with

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<sup>11</sup> L. Holmes (1997), op.cit.

<sup>12</sup> Legitimation crisis theory was originally developed primarily with reference to capitalism. The German Marxist, Jürgen Habermas, and a leading member of the Frankfurt school, identifies four possible crisis tendencies: economic crisis, rationality crisis, motivation crisis, and legitimation crisis. The former two are defined as system crisis and the latter two as identity crisis. His conceptualisation draws inferences that system crises could be potentially contained when the economic system can develop an independent dynamic and can take the lead with endogenously produced system, whereas identity crises are fatal in maintaining the existing political legitimacy, thus often result in the collapse of the entire system. Applicability of his legitimation crisis theory to another system (i.e. socialist system) follows a similar logic. See J. Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, (London: Heinemann, 1976)

<sup>13</sup> For the discussion of this concept, see G. Di Palma (1991), pp.49-80. Di Palma has maintained that the regime change occurred when the ruling elites lost their will to rule. Since the socialist regimes in the Eastern European countries were imported products, the self-legitimation or legitimation from the top eroded when the ruling elites felt the loss of global partnership by the collapse of neighbouring regimes.

enhanced personality cult and ideological indoctrination of the masses. Though some coercive measures accompanied, the regime legitimacy based on charismatic leadership and anti-imperialist nationalism continued for decades. In the 1960s and 1970s, Kim Il Sung also enjoyed the goal-rational and eudaemonic modes of legitimation when the mass-mobilized economic campaigns resulted in superior economic performance to the capitalist south. A conviction of ‘superiority of the socialist system over alternative systems’ and recognition of its ‘*Juche*’ state from the international community increased the regime legitimacy.

With declining economic performance in the 1980s, the eudaemonic mode of legitimation began to fade. With the collapse of the socialist bloc, the goal-rational and external recognition modes of legitimation were at stake. With the death of the Great leader, the charismatic mode of legitimation was lost. The North Korean regime inevitably faced a situation in which it had to seek a new mode of legitimation, or create one, if necessary. One of the ways to follow the process of the North Korean leadership searching for rationality is through scrutinizing the North Korean publications.<sup>14</sup> *Rodong Sinmun*, published by the Workers’ Party Central Committee, is one useful material in tracking down the Party’s political orientation, policy lines, ideological propagandas and important issues that concern the regime. Its editorials, in particular, function to guide the Party members and persuade the North Korean people to follow the Party’s intentions. Therefore, they explicitly reveal the direction of Party policy, present the view of the official position of the Party and the regime, and notify important Party decisions to the public.

A content analysis of *Rodong Sinmun* editorials is designed to show how the emphasis of the Party’s policy focus has changed over time and to outline the change in the Party discourse and political rhetoric in North Korea, which may mirror the reformulation process of the legitimising value and ideological rationality. The analysis also attempts to identify relative prominence of selected political symbols in remoulding the unitary ideological framework and to delineate the kind of discourse the Party uses to rationalise the socialist regime in North Korea. The total number of editorials studied is 3,364; every editorial printed in *Rodong Sinmun* from 1 January 1980 to 31 December 2004 is considered for the analysis for greater accuracy and more validity. The Party newspaper is published daily but carries editorials<sup>15</sup> three to four times a week. As displayed in table 2, the total number of editorial varied from year to year.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> The centrally-controlled press in communist states can reflect the attitudes of the elite, at least indirectly, in order for it to be used to mobilise support and set the general policy line. Therefore, content analysis of communist documents can be a fundamental tool for analysing and predicting the policies of communist states. See W. DeB Mills (1985), pp. 81-92.

<sup>15</sup> The editorials usually appear on the front page, exceptionally being on the second page. They are relatively easy to identify because they appear with a fixed format with the word “sasul (editorial),” appearing on the upper left corner of an editorial headline.

<sup>16</sup> The number of editorials significantly decreased from 1994 as a result of some changes in the editing style. This change, however, did not cause major problems to the main objectives of the analysis since important policy directives continued to be discussed exclusively in the editorials.



**Table 2. Number of Editorials Studied<sup>17</sup>**

<b>1980s</b>		<b>1990s</b>		<b>2000-2004</b>	
Year	Number of Editorials	Year	Number of Editorials	Year	Number of Editorials
1980	177	1990	209	2000	59
1981	169	1991	189	2001	56
1982	164	1992	181	2002	102
1983	197	1993	138	2003	81
1984	190	1994	75	2004	84
1985	201	1995	78		
1986	210	1996	66		
1987	178	1997	76		
1988	182	1998	52		
1989	184	1999	66		
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,852</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>1,130</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>382</b>
<b><i>1980-2004 Total: 3,364 editorials</i></b>					

Editorials discuss the most important issues the Party wishes to bring to people's attention and to propose new policy directives.<sup>18</sup> The first step of the analysis is categorization of the editorials depending on the dominant issue discussed in the content.<sup>19</sup> The editorials are classified into six broad categories: politics, society, economy and sciences, military, inter-Korea relations, and foreign relations. These are again divided into 34 sub-categories, which are defined in the table below:

<sup>17</sup> From 1994, a significant decrease in the number of editorials is noticeable. This is partially due to changes in the editing style. Since the collapse of the socialist bloc, *Rodong Sinmun* designated the whole of its last page to denunciation of South Korea, the U.S., and the imperialists as well as cynically reporting the misery bestowed upon people of the former socialist countries consequent on abandoning socialism. Additionally, since the death of Kim Il Sung, *Rodong Sinmun* dedicated the second page to commemorate great achievements of the supreme leader and the teachings left behind by the Great leader. The whole page was filled with praise and memories of the Great leader and glorification stories about Kim Il Sung.

<sup>18</sup> All North Koreans are obliged to study the *Rodong Sinmun* editorial thoroughly everyday and be acquainted with new policies and decisions of the Party and the state. Under the guidance of a Party cadre from the Party direction & control sector, a political study session is organised every morning in every workplace and organisation for all the people to study the editorial. For details of the political study session at workplace, see Helen-Louise Hunter (1999) chapter 13.

<sup>19</sup> The editorial headings explicitly summarize and specify the major theme of the content, which helps the categorization procedure.

**Table 3. Categorization Scheme**

Main categories	Sub-categories
<b>1. Politics</b>	1.1. Idolization of the top leader; Personality cult; praise of leadership ability and achievements
	1.2. Superiority of the Party and Party leadership.
	1.3. Superiority of the socialist system and the regime; Defense of our (the North Korean) style of socialism
	1.4. Loyalty, Solidarity, and Unity
	1.5. Ideology; Ideological Learning
	1.6. Political tasks, Party policy propaganda, Party policy realization
	1.7. Role of the Party organization and the cadres
	1.8. Political Participation
<b>2. Society</b>	2.1. Social morals; Socialist Life style; Collectivism
	2.2. Revolutionary spirit; Optimism; Mass-line.
	2.3. Social welfare system, healthcare
	2.4. Class (workers; intelligentsia); class consciousness
	2.5. History, culture, art, sports
	2.6. Education; Youth
	2.7. Women; Family
	2.8. Mass Media
<b>3. Economy and Science</b>	3.1. Economic Development; Economic Tasks, Economic Policy; Planning
	3.2. Industry and Energy
	3.3. Communication and Transportation
	3.4. Construction and Land development
	3.5. Agriculture; Farming; Livestock Raising; Fishery
	3.6. Foreign Trade
	3.7. Role and attitude of workers and directors
	3.8. Mining and Forestry
	3.9. Science; technological development
<b>4. Foreign Relations</b>	4.1. Ties of friendship with other nations
	4.2. Anti-imperialist struggle; Anti-American struggle
	4.3. Anti-nuclear peace
<b>5. Military</b>	5.1. Importance and Superiority of the People's Army
	5.2. Military Events
	5.3. Military Line; Self-Defense Policy
<b>6. Inter-Korea Relations</b>	6.1. Reunification issues
	6.2. Nationalism
	6.3. Propaganda against the South

*Note: In case of 4.1 and 4.2, specify the country mentioned and the attitude towards:*

1. United States 2. South Korea 3. Japan 4. USSR (Russia) 5. China  
6. Eastern Europe 7. Africa and Latin America 8. Western Europe (E.U.)  
9. Vietnam and Cuba (other survivors) 10. Imperialists  
(attitude: ①negative ②positive ③neutral)

The proportion of editorials in each category in each year is put together to pinpoint the issues that were most important to the North Korean leadership at different times (see table 4). The changing proportion of issues discussed in *Rodong Sinmun* editorials is more clearly illustrated in graph 1 along with a time scale of significant internal and external events. It is noticeable at first sight that there was a major shift in the policy focus from economy to politics in the 1990s. Though the proportion of editorials on the issues of economy and foreign relations increased slightly between 2000 and 2002, discussion of

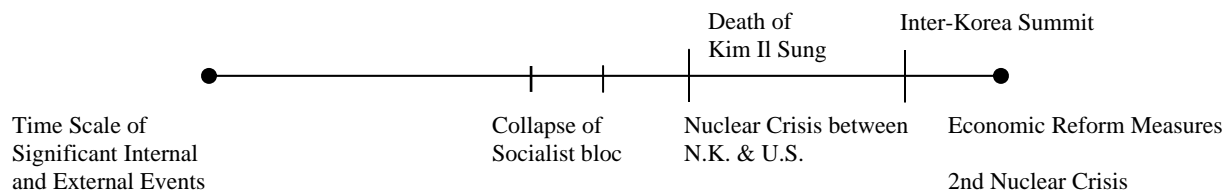
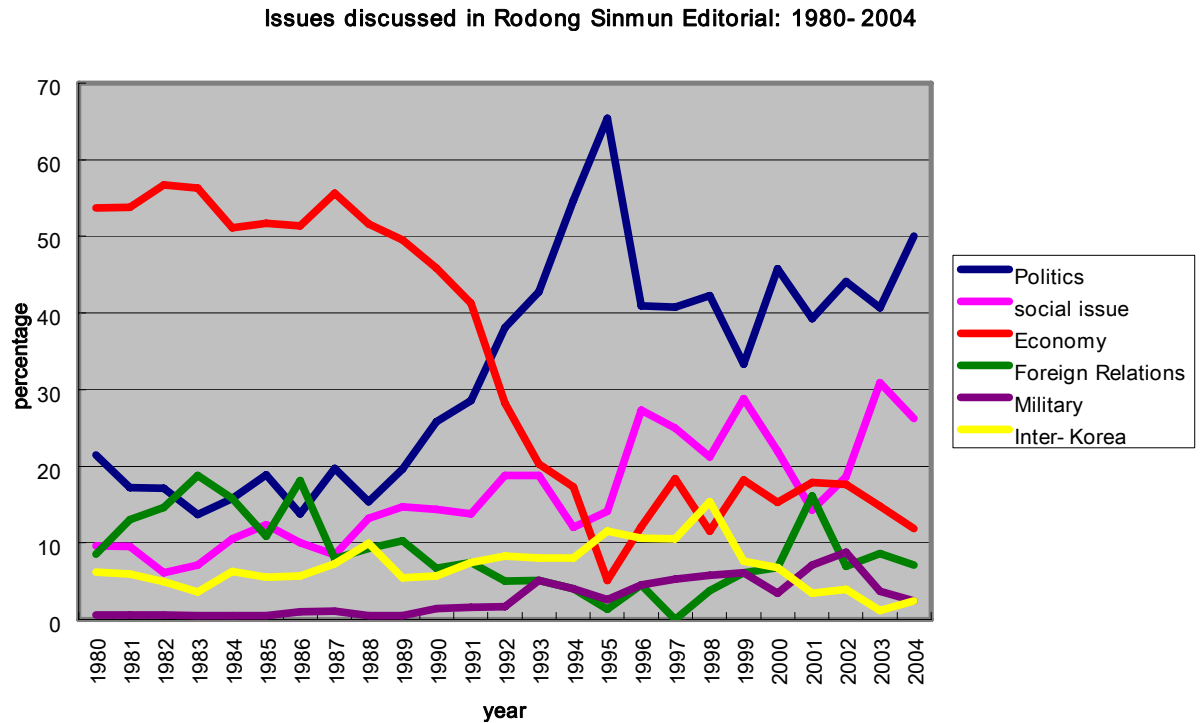
political issues remained dominant in the new century. Such a change tends to reflect internal and external events that affected the North Korean regime and also a shift in the legitimization mode the regime pursues.

**Table 4. Categorisation of the Editorials: by issue and by year**

**\*The highest percentage of each year is highlighted.**

Year	Politics	Society (%)	Economy (%)	Foreign Relations (%)	Military (%)	Inter-Korea (%)
1980	21.5	9.6	53.7	8.5	0.6	6.2
1981	17.2	9.5	53.8	13	0.6	5.9
1982	17.1	6.1	56.7	14.6	0.6	4.9
1983	13.7	7.1	56.3	18.8	0.5	3.6
1984	15.8	10.5	51.1	15.8	0.5	6.3
1985	18.9	12.4	51.7	10.9	0.5	5.5
1986	13.8	10	51.4	18.1	1	5.7
1987	19.7	8.4	55.6	7.9	1.1	7.3
1988	15.4	13.2	51.6	9.3	0.5	9.9
1989	19.6	14.7	49.5	10.3	0.5	5.4
1990	25.8	14.4	45.9	6.7	1.4	5.7
1991	28.6	13.8	41.3	7.4	1.6	7.4
1992	38.1	18.8	28.2	5	1.7	8.3
1993	42.8	18.8	20.3	5.1	5.1	8
1994	54.7	12	17.3	4	4	8
1995	65.4	14.1	5.1	1.3	2.6	11.5
1996	40.9	27.3	12.1	4.5	4.5	10.6
1997	40.8	25	18.4	0	5.3	10.5
1998	42.3	21.2	11.5	3.8	5.8	15.4
1999	33.3	28.8	18.2	6.1	6.1	7.6
2000	45.8	22	15.3	6.8	3.4	6.8
2001	39.3	14.3	17.9	16.1	7.1	5.4
2002	44.1	17.6	18.6	6.9	8.8	3.9
2003	40.7	14.8	30.9	8.6	3.7	1.2
2004	50.0	11.9	26.2	7.1	2.4	2.4
<b>1980s</b> (1980-1989)	<b>17.2</b>	<b>10.2</b>	<b>53.1</b>	<b>12.9</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>6.0</b>
<b>1990s</b> (1990-1999)	<b>38.1</b>	<b>18.0</b>	<b>27.4</b>	<b>5.0</b>	<b>3.1</b>	<b>8.4</b>
<b>21<sup>st</sup> Century</b> (2000-2004)	<b>44.2</b>	<b>22.8</b>	<b>15.4</b>	<b>8.6</b>	<b>5.5</b>	<b>3.0</b>
<b>Year</b>	<b>Politics</b>	<b>Society (%)</b>	<b>Economy (%)</b>	<b>Foreign Relations (%)</b>	<b>Military (%)</b>	<b>Inter-Korea (%)</b>

**Figure 1. Issues discussed in *Rodong Sinmun* Editorials 1980-2004**



As shown in the figure, editorials on economy-related subjects were constantly and significantly stressed in the 1980s; other issues were less frequently discussed and military issues were seldom discussed. The 1980s was the period in which the North Korean regime mainly concentrated on economic and industrial developments through mass mobilization. The most important agitation work done by the newspaper was in connection with the acceleration of production and development of the socialist economy. More than half of the editorials from 1980 to 1989 were concerned with economic matters, stressing the role and attitude of workers in accomplishing the proposed economic tasks. It appears that goal-rational set the dominant mode of legitimation during this period of time. North Korea also actively engaged in diplomatic affairs with African socialist countries, Eastern European countries and the Soviet Union in the 1980s. Friendship ties with these countries were frequently and positively mentioned in the editorials, and the unity and solidarity of the socialist camp and mutual cooperation with new independent countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America were repeatedly stressed in the Party newspaper. Frequent reports of receptions of foreign visitors and visits of Kim Il Sung to Eastern European countries and to the USSR in the newspaper signalled vigorous diplomatic activities of the North Korean regime and pursuit of foreign recognition mode of legitimation.

This trend shifts in the 1990s where the proportion of editorials on the issues of politics and society drastically increased while those on economy and foreign relations decreased significantly. Interestingly, the political issue line and economic issue line intersects in 1992, the year following the disintegration of the USSR, reflecting the regime's effort to avoid the regime collapse by diverting its focus from economic to political issues. It signifies the beginning of shift in the legitimation modes, recognizing limits of the existing legitimation modes in the changing environment. Discussion of political issues reached its climax in 1994, which can be explained by two critical events that took place in this year: death of the Great Leader Kim Il Sung and heightened tension over nuclear issues between North Korea and the U.S. In dealing with this particular time of crisis, the political issues were discussed to the greatest extent, accentuating unity and loyalty in safeguarding the North Korean socialist system. Perception of external threats, particularly from the U.S., was largely employed to rationalize actions of the leadership.

Idolization of both Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il increased after the death of Kim Il Sung in 1994, but more significantly during the period of leadership change. Kim Il Sung's achievements and revolutionary struggles are constantly praised while Kim Jong Il's extraordinary traits and capability are lauded. A strong emphasis on the greatness of Kim Jong Il may have been intended to legitimize the leadership succession based on the new traditional mode and to consolidate people's loyalty to the new leader. Pursuit of the new traditional mode of legitimation is apparent in the North Korean Constitution that was amended in September 1998 on the occasion of Kim Jong Il's official succession to power. It was entitled "Kim Il Sung Constitution", intending to perpetuate the late Kim Il Sung's legacy (see the preamble of the 1998 constitution). It elevated Kim Il Sung posthumously to the rank of "Eternal President" and thus perpetual head of state, "Suryong". Accordingly, the basis of legitimacy of the Kim Jong Il leadership was to continue and complete the revolutionary cause Kim Il Sung has carried out throughout his life time. The official nationalist mode of legitimation is additionally sought by the North Korean leadership

through emphasizing its socialist revolutionary heritage and extensively calling for revolutionary spirit and nationalist sentiment of the people.

Also evident from the newspaper is that North Korea isolated itself in its international relations since the collapse of the socialist bloc. The number of editorials that dealt with foreign relations drastically declined in the 1990s. The USSR, Russia and the Eastern European countries were hardly mentioned in the editorials after 1991. China was mentioned relatively frequently in 1991 and 1992, perhaps intending to accentuate another surviving socialist state. The number of editorials on China, however, decreased continuously from 1993. Vietnam, Cuba and China were occasionally mentioned in the editorials throughout the 1990s possibly to assure North Korea's friendship ties with these countries. Yet, the editorials ceased to express strong favoritism towards these countries or articulate resolute political-economic solidarity with these countries. Interesting to note is that the newspaper editorials never mentioned the reforms that were taking place in Eastern Europe, Russia, or China up to 2000. It appears that the North Korean regime has firmly adhered to its closed-door policies, sealing itself off from the rest of the world to prevent any outside ideology and culture from infiltrating into North Korean society.

From 2000, all the lines in the graph fluctuate (see figure 1), implying changing emphasis and policy goal in the new century. Although political issues were still dominantly discussed, the emphasis has shifted from "safeguarding the North Korean style socialism" to "Party policy propaganda" and "the role of the Party organization and cadres in directing important political tasks." The proportion of economic issues increased from 2000, and overtook that of social issues in 2001. This coincided with Kim Jong Il's proposal of new economic development in North Korea, which stresses practicality, IT industry, science and technology. The so-called "renovation in thinking" in building an economically prosperous country first appeared in the *Rodong Sinmun* editorial on January 4, 2001, in which Kim Jong Il called for "solving problems from a new perspective and a new height." Since then, the need for "fundamental change in the way of thinking and the working style" has been constantly emphasized in the editorials. The newspaper began to mention China more frequently from 2000, and even started to praise its remarkable economic developments.<sup>20</sup> Achievements of the economic building in China and success stories of Chinese economic reforms were reported regularly in an assigned special column in the newspaper from January 2001. Considering that the newspaper never before reported the reform in China, it was surprisingly a new phenomenon. It was clear that the North Korean leadership attempted to bring the attention back to reconstruction of the economy based on a new strategy of development in the new century. Such a drastic shift of the regime focus coincided with North Korea's bold economic reform measures in July 2002.

Another noticeable feature in the graph is a considerable increase in the discussion of foreign relations issues, particularly in 2001. Many significant events took place between 2000 and 2002, which marked a turning point in North Korea's foreign affairs: the historical North-South Korea summit in June 2000; the visit of the U.S. secretary of state, Madeleine

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<sup>20</sup> It is evaluated in the North Korean publication that "China has achieved a unique socialist development with social unity and stability under the leadership of the Communist Party, and as a result, the status of China is continuously elevating in the international stage." See *Rodong Sinmun* January 23, 2001.

Albright, to Pyongyang in the same year; Putin's visit to North Korea in 2000; the chairman Kim Jong Il's visits to China in May 2000 and January 2001; Kim Jong Il's visit to Russia in July 2001; the Chinese leader Jiang Zemin's visit to Pyongyang in September 2001; visit of senior officials of the European Union to Pyongyang in May 2001; the president Kim Young Nam's visit to Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos in May 2002; and the Japanese prime minister Koizumi's visit to Pyongyang in September 2002, in which the Japan and North Korea Pyongyang declaration was signed. Compared to the 1990s, North Korea noticeably concentrated on improving its relations with South Korea and China, and on expanding its diplomatic ties with other western countries and the EU member states<sup>21</sup>. North Korea's changed attitude and active engagement in the international community signalled pursuit of foreign recognition in the new century.

The new trend, however, was short-lived. An attempt to return to economic issues and foreign relations was taken over by reemerging security concerns and perception of threat surrounding another nuclear tension between the US and North Korea from 2002. The Bush administration's rhetorical hostility towards the Kim Jong Il regime provided an excuse for the North Korean leadership to place its top priority back to regime survival and security. From 2002, emphasis on "military-first politics" and "military-oriented thought" was greatly intensified as political rhetoric.<sup>22</sup> The inclination of prioritizing the military and building a militarily strong state becomes evident when one considers specific rhetoric the North Korean regime promotes in the new century. This subject is considered more in detail in the next section. Apparent in the analysis of newspaper editorials of 2003 and 2004 is the typical pattern the North Korean regime shows when it perceives external threat: first, discussion of socio-political issues dominates over economic and foreign issues. Second, the military is prioritized as a means to crisis management. The present North Korean regime appears to rely heavily on perception of threat as a new type of legitimation mode.

#### **4. Change in the Party Discourse in North Korea: Editorial Heading Analysis**

Repetitively and frequently used terms and rhetoric in the Party publication at a particular time may reveal the regime's instrumental rationality for legitimation. The analysis of editorial headings attempts to identify such repetitive and significant propagandistic themes and political symbols. In the absence of standardized schemes of classification, the terms that are repetitively and frequently found in the editorials headings from 1980 and 2004 are selected and counted (see table 5). The analysis delineates certain words that the regime stressed and utilized at different time period in a chronological order. This is outlined in figure 2.

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<sup>21</sup> By 2004, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) has diplomatic relations with 24 out of 25 EU member states. France is the only member state that has not established formal diplomatic relations with the DPRK

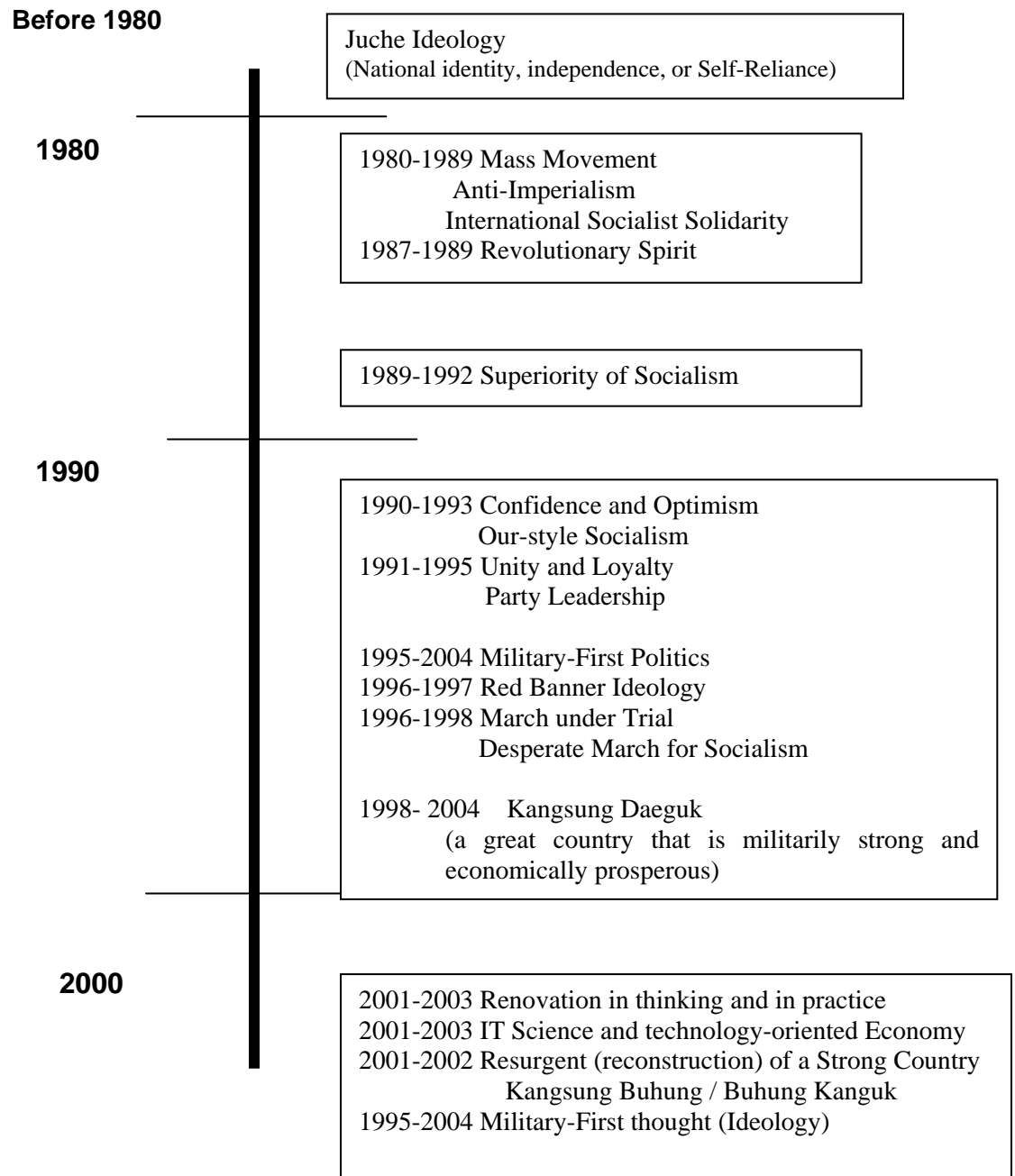
<sup>22</sup> The military-oriented rhetoric was largely discussed as a part of political and social matters, therefore, it contributed to increasing discussion of political and social issues rather than the military issues.

**Table 5. Selected Prominent Terms and Symbols in editorials headings**

Category	Terms	Code
Politics and Ideology	Unity	1
	Loyalty	2
	Party and Leadership (Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il)	21 (19+20)
	Juche Ideology	6
	Marxism Leninism	22
	Self-reliance and Independence	8
	Propaganda	3
	Our-Style Socialism	9
	Red Banner Ideology	13
	Strong & Prosperous Nation Building	14
	Military-first Ideology	18
Economy and Development	Economic Construction	24
	Building Socialism	23
	Mass movement and economic campaign	25+26
	Self-reliant Economy	7
	New Thinking and Science	28
Society and Social Attitude	Revolutionary	12
	Confidence & optimism	16
	Desperate (painful) march	17
	Superiority of Socialism	15
International	National unification	4
	International solidarity	5
	Anti-imperialism	10
	war	11



**Figure 2. Change in Regime Legitimacy and Rhetoric 1980-2004**

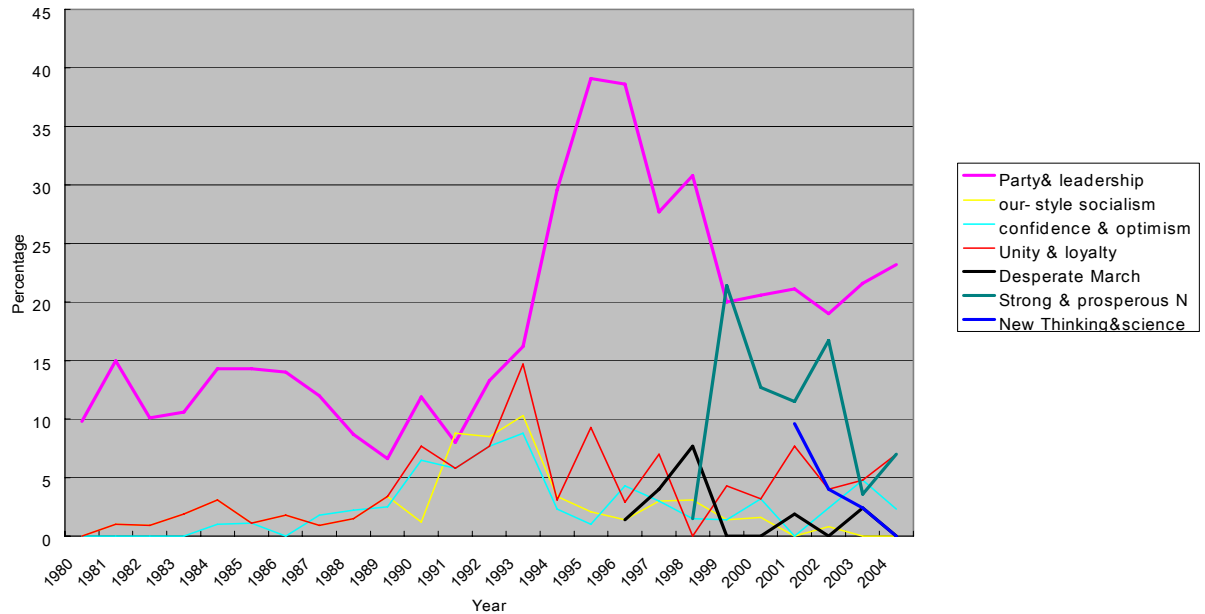


Throughout the 1980s, the phrases which most frequently appeared in the editorial headings were “mass movement,” “international solidarity,” and “anti-imperialism.” Mass movement was encouraged greatly throughout the 1980s as a mobilization measure, intending to spur production and to drive people towards the construction of socialism and economic development of the nation. Anti-imperialism along with international solidarity were strongly emphasized in the early 1980s, representing the attitude of North Korea during

the Cold War. *Rodong Sinmun* editorials put strong emphasis on an “uncompromising” struggle against imperialists in order to heighten the anti-imperialist attitude of the people and to justify various policies and practices with reference to the social goals of the time. Using the term “international solidarity,” the North Korean regime repeatedly called for unity of the socialist camp and for the solidarity of international communism in this particular time of East-West conflict. Between 1987 and 1989, the “revolutionary spirit” of servicemen, workers and people was called for to complete the economic tasks and to safeguard North Korean socialism. The term “revolutionary spirit” was used in this period primarily to encourage people to meet the set plan target and to complete economic tasks.

The discourse of the Party changed considerably in the 1990s, the period of struggle for regime survival. The slogans and propagandistic themes that were associated with national economic development and socialist construction appeared less. Instead, various forms of rationalisation appeared in the 1990s from “a socialist system in our own style” to “Kangsongdaeguk - building a strong and prosperous nation”. Whereas ideological learning of ‘*Juche*’ set a dominant political discourse till the 1980s, constant changes in the propagandistic themes characterized the 1990s. The period between 1989 and 1995 was the most critical time for the North Korean regime since it faced the task of safeguarding its socialist system from a domino-like collapse of socialism elsewhere. This meant creating a persuasive discourse to sustain the regime and the status quo at the time of crisis. North Korea managed to do this in three ways: by differentiating its socialist system from that of other failed state socialist states; by stressing the superiority of North Korean socialism; and by appealing to stronger social and ideological integration. Slogans that were frequently emphasised in this period were “superiority of socialism,” “our-style socialism,” “confidence and optimism,” and “unity and loyalty to the Party and the leadership.” A sudden rise of these terms as political rhetoric is clearly displayed in the graph below.

**Figure 3. Propaganda and Rhetoric in *Rodong Sinmun* editorials**



Subsequent to the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, the North Korean regime proclaimed the supremacy of “socialism in our own style” (Urisik Sahuijuyui). Serving as an ideological base to safeguard the North Korean regime, this new concept represented a unique brand of socialism based on the independent line and isolation policy that was immanent in the *Juche* thought, which differentiated itself from the socialism of other countries. The downfall of socialism elsewhere was explained as “a result of imperialists infusing the values of bourgeois liberalisation into the socialist countries...” Therefore, the leadership argued that “propagated socialism of our style as the original and superior system based on the most sophisticated *Juche* thought alone can guarantee independent and creative lives of people.”<sup>23</sup> The leadership further urged people to “struggle till the end to protect the socialist system and complete the socialist cause with unity among the leader, Party and people.” Confronting the changing environment, the North Korean regime managed to persist not by adaptation to these changes but through an emphasis on the superiority and particularity of the North Korean regime, under the name of “socialism of our own style” and “the supremacy of the Korean nation.” Following the collapse of the socialist bloc, the leadership also concentrated on strengthening the unity and cohesion of society. Between 1990 and 1995, the supremacy and legitimacy of the Party and the leadership was unceasingly stressed in the editorials, and the regime persistently called on its people to have “confidence and optimism” in the “victorious our-style socialism” and urged “unity and loyalty to the Party and the leadership.”

<sup>23</sup> Kim Jong Il, in May 1991, proposed the term and further developed the slogan in an address delivered before members of the Central Committee of the Workers’ Party. Kim Jong Il, “Socialism of Our Style, Centered on the Masses, is always Victorious and Invincible,” *Rodong Sinmun*, 27, May 1991.

From mid-1990s, new concepts appeared and replaced the political rhetoric employed in the early 1990s to prevent the regime collapse. This marked the beginning of a new ideological remoulding process. For instance, the concepts of “military-oriented thought,” “army-centered politics”, and “military first politics” began to prevail following Kim Jong Il’s inauguration as the supreme commander of the People’s Army and chairman of the National Defence Committee. The “military-first (Songun) politics” imply politics that put priority on the military and on strengthening the People's Army as the “main pillar” of revolution and the “driving force” of the North Korean brand of socialism. Although the term “military-first politics” first emerged as a way to rationalize the role of the military in defending the regime from the external threat, it later developed into an ideology that legitimizes a significant increase in the role and influence of the military over general affairs in North Korea. The rising representation of the military in the ruling elite and the ascendancy of military generals in the power hierarchy were also rationalized by the military first rhetoric. As the Kim Jong Il leadership relied dominantly on military power in managing the crises, the North Korean regime transformed into a military oriented state in which the “military-first” thought provided a substantial rationality for its actions and changing political procedure. As shown in figure 4, the military-first rhetoric became intensified after the accusation of North Korea being a rogue state and a part of the “axis of evil” by the Bush administration in January 2002. The drastic rise of the ‘military-first’ rhetoric and the intensified tone of anti-imperialism in the newspaper in 2002 and 2003 appeared to be the consequence of the Bush administration’s hard-line policy towards North Korea. The ‘military-first’ ideology continued to dominate over the North Korean society and political rhetoric throughout 2004; its prevalence in all aspects of the present North Korean regime parallels the ‘Juche’ ideology in the 1970s.

The “Red Banner ideology” was another new concept, which was intensively emphasized for rather a short period of time (between 1996 and 1997 – see figure 4). The red banner symbolises the fundamental principle of the Korean revolution for socialism based on consistent unity, integrity and faith. Facing the regime crisis generated by the worsening economic situation, the leadership highlighted the “red banner” slogan as the logic of safeguarding the system. Considering that North Korea was preparing for Kim Jong Il’s formal succession to power around this period of time, presenting the red banner philosophy as the governing ideology was intended to call for unconditional loyalty to the new leader and to legitimise the leadership succession. The emphasis on the term “red banner,” however, drastically decreased from 1998. North Korea introduced another slogan called “Painful March for Socialism,” which was in full swing between 1996 and 1998. In the emergency situation following the death of Kim Il Sung, North Korea launched a campaign called the “march under trials,” the march referring to Kim Il Sung’s hardship during the anti-Japanese struggles. The slogan “arduous march for socialism” was a variation of “march under trials,” which was designed to overcome urgent economic difficulties and to encourage people’s morale. The fact that the frequency of this slogan reached its height in 1998 reflects the extremely difficult situation in North Korea created by severe economic hardship and natural disasters. The desperate effort of the leadership to rationalise the situation and appeal to people’s patience is reflected in this particular catchphrase.

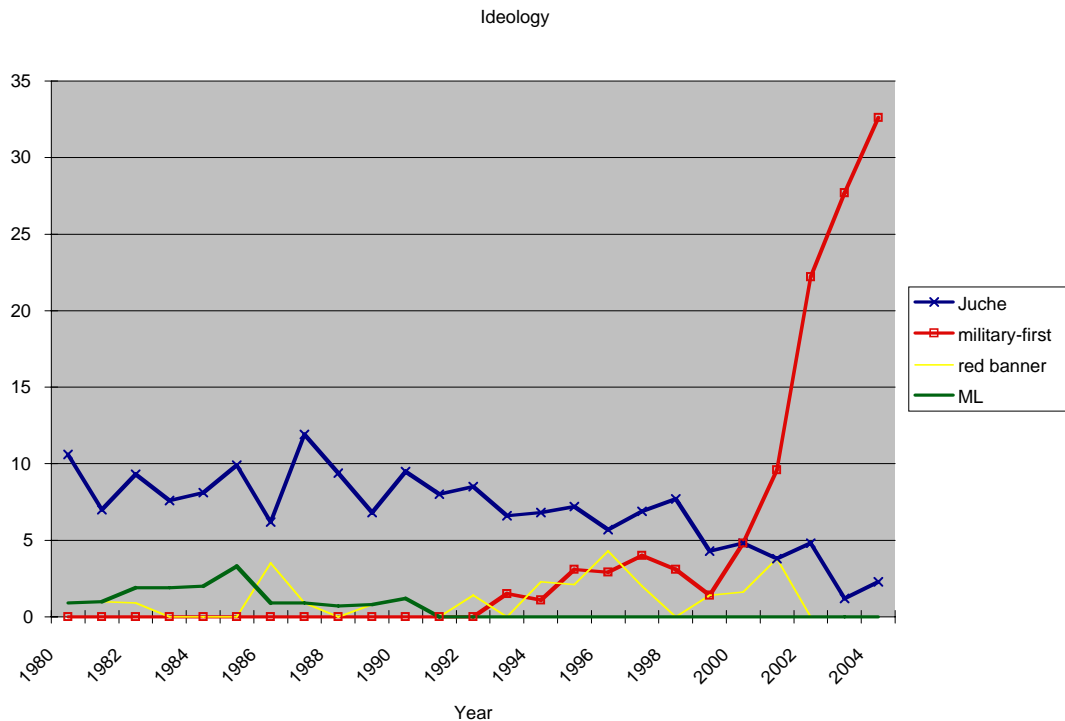
From 1998, the North Korean leadership came up with a brand new slogan “Kangsong Daeguk.” The term literally means “a powerful and prosperous nation,” but implies turning North Korea into a great country that is militarily strong and economically prosperous. The term first appeared in an editorial in September 1998 under the heading of “Let’s construct Kangsong Daeguk as led by the great leadership of the Party.” As figure 3 demonstrates, the term became a dominant rhetoric in the North Korean regime, particularly in 1999. The North Korean leadership’s call for turning North Korea into Kangsong Daeguk came at a time when its economic circumstances remained extremely adverse, with serious food shortages and lacklustre industrial activities. By proposing a new task of building North Korea into an economically and militarily strong country, the North Korean leadership may have attempted to give hope, new goals, and alternative visions to the people, turning to the goal-rational mode of legitimation. The “Kangsong Daeguk” slogan prevailed even in 2001-2002, though its synonyms “Buhung Kangguk” and “Kangsong Buhung” (resurgence of a strong country) were employed interchangeably.

Upon setting a goal towards which the country should move, a new direction of change in the economy was proposed as a means to transforming the country into a “strong and prosperous country”. Phrases such as “renovation in thinking and in practice” and “IT industry, science and technology-oriented economy” make sudden appearances in the newspaper from 2001. In January 2001, Kim Jong Il urged, for the first time, that “we should transcend the old working style and fixed economic framework of other countries in old times” and that “there must be fundamental renovation in our way of thinking, ideological stance and work style to meet the demand of the new century”<sup>24</sup> In the same month, Kim Jong Il made an observational tour to the Shanghai and Fudong areas which are the representative showcases of Chinese economic reform, and proposed an alternative way to renovate North Korea’s backward economy through rapid development of science and technology. The newspaper constantly stressed development of Information Technology (IT); development of the industrial structure to meet the demand of the IT era; pragmatic and innovative economic activities; and modernisation of the economy. The role of scientists, technicians, computer specialists and intellectuals were concurrently emphasized. The newly defined goal, building “Kangsong Daeguk”, however, was mentioned less frequently from 2003, as focus of the regime shifted to security matters vis-à-vis the nuclear tension and the hard-line stance of the Bush administration.

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<sup>24</sup> *Rodong Sinmun* editorial, Jan 9, 2001

**Figure 4. Changing Ideology in North Korea**



The figure above illustrates the overall change of ideology and legitimating value reflected in *Rodong Sinmun* between 1980 and 2004. It clearly shows that Marxism-Leninism is long gone as an ideological reference for the North Korean regime. The ‘*Juche*’ ideology is on the declining mode. The red banner ideology appeared for a short term, but it was not sufficient to rationalize regime continuation in the rapidly changing environment or provide ideological platform for Kim Jong Il’s military-oriented ruling style. The ‘military-first’ ideology, on the other hand, is sharply rising as a dominant rhetoric from 1999. The ‘military-first’ rhetoric no longer represents a mere political slogan or a strategy for crisis management. It has been promoted to set a system of value, social norm, and effective system of authority under the Kim Jong Il leadership. It is premature to conclude whether the military-first ideology can successfully replace *Juche* ideology, which has been playing the backbone of the North Korean regime since 1960s, in providing a new alternative value. Facing security threat, however, the North Korean ruling elite would find the ‘military-first’ ideology useful to justify the changing nature of the regime for the time being.

## 5. Conclusion

Following the breakdown of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, some North Korea watchers predicted North Korea’s imminent collapse. They continuously talked about crisis in North Korea and questioned its regime sustainability throughout the 1990s. North Korea, however, has managed to avoid the fate of other socialist countries until the present. One way to approach the North Korean regime’s survival is to look at the leadership’s capacity to remould formal rationality and to switch dominant legitimating mode.

The study of *Rodong Sinmun* editorials between 1980 and 2004 clearly shows that important issues and policy subject that concerned the regime varied over time and that the leadership carried out constant changes in its political rationality to provide legitimacy to the surviving North Korean regime. It also shows an interesting changing pattern of policy focus, depending on the degree of threat North Korea perceives from various internal and external circumstances. For instance, the newspaper editorials largely discuss socio-political and military issues when North Korea feels under threat. When the regime feels relatively secure, on the other hand, the editorials tend to focus more on improving economy and foreign relations.

The 1980s was a period of economic development and international socialist solidarity. Economic issues were dominantly discussed in editorials throughout the 1980s, and subjects concerning foreign relations were frequently discussed in the early part of the 80s. It was evident from the analysis that the main concerns of the regime rested mainly on economic development, socialist economic construction through mobilisation and building diplomatic ties with other socialist countries. The eudaemonic and goal-rational types were the dominant modes of legitimation under the relatively stable Kim Il Sung leadership.

The 1990s was a period of struggle for regime survival. Desperate efforts of the North Korean leadership to sustain the socialist system and to avoid any political instability were clearly reflected in a variation of rhetoric appeared in this period of time. Discussion of safeguarding the “our-style socialism” followed the disintegration of the socialist bloc, in which unity and loyalty to the Party and the leader as well as the revolutionary spirit of the people were constantly stressed. The newspaper concentrated on ideological indoctrination, calling for unity and loyalty to the Party and the leader, and highlighted the uniqueness and superiority of the North Korean style of socialism. After the death of Kim Il Sung in 1994, the leadership propagated various symbols and slogans in search for new identity based on the official nationalist and new traditional modes of legitimation. New political rhetoric was constantly created and that different slogans were stressed at different times, which suggests that the North Korean ruling group unceasingly attempted to renew and renegotiate official rationality in the midst of transitory period of leadership change. Emerged were new slogans such as “red banner philosophy,” “painful march for socialism,” “military-first politics,” and “building a strong and prosperous nation.” These slogans not only mirrored the direction of political development in North Korea, but also provided a new type of justification and goal for the North Korean regime.

If safeguarding the socialist system and maintaining regime stability were the top priority in the 1990s, the regime relatively loosened up the tension in the new century. Upon securing some stability in his leadership, Kim Jong Il initiated a radical shift in the policy directives in 2001 such as proposing innovative economic development focusing on science and technology and improving foreign relations. A new goal of building a strong country (Kangsong Daeguk) was brought forward by the leadership along with the idea of “practicality and renovation in thinking”. North Korea’s active engagement with other countries, including South Korea, China, Russia, Japan and the E.U. member states, put an end to its closed-door policy of the 1990s. It was apparent that Kim Jong Il attempted a form of goal-rational and foreign recognition legitimation at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. This

trend, however, discontinued when the increasing friction between North Korea and the U.S. brought back the regime's attention to security. Reacting to the external threat, the present North Korean regime seems to be utterly dependent on its survival strategy of building a military-oriented state on the basis of the 'military first' ideology and using the nuclear card.

Every political system has a legitimating value system whereby the regime structure, the structure of authority relations between the political leaders and the people, is rationalized. The legitimating value in the socialist regime, as Chalmers Johnson has pointed out, is usually initiated and rationalized by the ruling elite.<sup>25</sup> Successful "top-down" legitimation is thus possible when the ruling group is unified and when the elite feels a strong identity with the regime. Political stability is often the artificial product of shrewd decisions made by a cohesive elite that share basic agreement and consensus about the desirability of a politically stable system, in its current form, and the nature and goals towards which the system is ostensibly moving. Therefore, regime survival and disintegration very much depends on whether the ruling elite is capable and willing to shift the legitimating mode to ensure regime continuity and prolong its rule. Legitimacy has ideological foundations and beliefs, which are subject to change. All the substitute supports, such as nationalism, promise for a better future and new propaganda can sustain the system for a time. Following this logic, it may be argued that survival of the North Korean regime owes to successful "top-down" legitimation at the time of crises by a unified ruling elite who is willing and capable of ideological manipulation and propaganda management.

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<sup>25</sup> Chalmers Johnson, *Change in Communist Systems*, (Stanford University Press, 1970), pp.9-10



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