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North and South Korea: Division by Constructions

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Departmental Honors Thesis

The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

Political Science

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## Introduction

In late 2019, Han Seong-ok and her son, defectors from North Korea, died of starvation in their apartment in *Seoul*, South Korea. In the aftermath of this tragedy, the neighborhood vegetable stand owner said, “if only she had asked” noting that social safety nets would have helped them (Bicker 2019). Through this tragedy, many have asked who is to blame for this death. Rather than focus on blame, I suggest that it is worthwhile examining key differences between North Korea and South Korea that may have made it difficult for Han Sung-ok to voice her need and to adjust to life in South Korea. While not all stories of a lack of belonging for North Korean refugees are so severe, it raises questions about the depth of the divide between the North and the South and the extent to which it may be more than just a political divide.

Unfortunately, the ever-looming threat of nuclear weapons often overshadows and colors the way that the international community characterizes the division between the people in the Republic of Korea (ROK; also known as South Korea) and the people in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK; also known as North Korea). Scholars see the division as a security issue and an economic issue, which is what influences the policy choices taken by the international community and the governments of the DPRK and the ROK. A large body of literature has amassed that has spoken to this issue through the Realist lens of international relations and the Institutionalist lens of international relations. This literature has framed the issue of division as either a problem of weapons, a problem of economics, or a problem of structural institutions. The scholars that focus on economics either point to the division between the two areas as a problem of communism versus capitalism or as a problem of a lack of ability to reunify due to the war stalemate the region is in. Others see it as a problem of institutions such as the way the government functions that differ between the two. While all these issues do

contribute to the divide of the peninsula, they fall short of explaining division in its whole which I will argue is a product of social constructions that differ between North and South. A social construct is an idea that has no meaning outside of what the community gives it and is generally built up and accepted over time. Ignoring the social differences has led to a lack of understanding of the difficulties of division at many levels. In other words, it is identity-based factors that can shed light on the historical and contemporary context of the Korean division.

In this paper, I will focus on aspects of social identities that have been constructed over time in the different regions and their implications on the division. This extends to divisions that persist after individuals from the DPRK defect to the ROK, which I will refer to as micro-reunification. Examining this will allow for a clearer understanding of the challenges that exist when individuals from each area are trying to communicate, when individuals defect into the ROK, and when considering macro-unification, which is the reunification of the entire peninsula. While it is not within the scope of this research to explore all social cleavages that affect division, it is a starting point, and it desires to highlight the importance of understanding the social constructions that divide Koreans.

The sustained division through the Korean Peninsula was an unexpected result of the rift caused by the Korean War as, historically, unified Korea was seen as unified both through nationalism and tradition which would seem to allow for an easy reunification (Barry 2012, 37-38). Myoung-Kyu Park acknowledges the abnormality of this by stating "While the Soviet Union was dismantled and Eastern Europe transitioned into a reunified German regime, the structural division of the Korean peninsula has since remained unchanged" (2015, 28). Germany and many other countries that were torn apart by World War II and other conflicts were able to successfully reunify. However, this has not been the case on the Korean Peninsula, which should raise

questions of why we see lingering difficulties. This thesis suggests that there may be a division that pre-existed the war that sustained the rift. Some of the discourse within the two regions have been built of age-old ideas and principles which has allowed this to be sustained. Discourse as defined by Charlotte Epstein, international relations and political theory scholar, “is a cohesive ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categorizations about a specific object that frame that object in a certain way and, therefore, delimit the possibilities for action in relation to it” (Epstein 2008, 2).

When researchers evaluate the division between the DPRK and the ROK, they mainly attribute the division to material factors, using Realist or Institutionalist theories of International Relations to offer explanations. Observing the division in this way leads to an incomplete understanding of the division because it ignores many of the social and cultural level divisions that persist between the DPRK and the ROK, which may be attributable to longstanding historical and linguistic divides. This project seeks to answer the question of how social groups and individual dynamics differ between the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the Republic of Korea (ROK) with special attention to the experience of division? And, how these differences structure the dynamics of formal division and the larger politics of reunification?

I argue that Constructivist explanations can better explain the dynamics of division and the dynamics of reunification, both micro and macro, because they look at both the history and the social dynamics within states as the deciders of political outcomes. The oversimplified focus on material factors by Realists and Institutionalists will lead to a misunderstanding between the divided peninsula, by not considering the deeper roots of contemporary divisions. This extends to misunderstandings between defectors and natives, the governments of each state, and useful

policy for each state. These divisions, as will be argued in this paper, are deeply embedded within the individuals of the DPRK and the ROK and can be traced back to the 19th century. These divisions must be considered when looking at the prospect of successful relations because, without a proper understanding of the social groups and dynamics embedded in individuals in both areas, any steps forward will fall short.

This research seeks to explain the role of social, cultural, and identity factors by first giving a brief historical background. Then, it will analyze the current explanations of division, namely Institutionalism and Realism exploring how they look at nuclearization and economics as factors in the division. I then lay out my theoretical approach to the subject, drawing on Constructivist theory. Following this, I explore two examples to illustrate the insight that can be gained by a Constructivist approach: the ideology of *Juche* and the evolution of linguistic divisions. I will begin by explaining what *Juche* ideology is and its history in the DPRK. Through *Juche*, I will show how the ideas were constructed through history and discourse, and then how it is reinforced in the discourse of the DPRK. Then, I will explain the implications of the ideology and how it affects division between the DPRK and the ROK. While there are contrasting ideologies in the ROK to *Juche*, these are more difficult trace as there is more diversity of input both domestically and internationally so the primary focus will be on *Juche*. In the next section, I will explain the language differences between the DPRK and the ROK and how they came to exist. It is clear that the language differences are not simply a divergence of time but brought about through the conscious effort of the two societies. At the end of this section, I will offer some explanation on how this affects micro- and macro-reunification, to explore the larger policy implications. This will show not only that there is an identity-based division that must be considered to achieve viable options in addressing reunification or peaceful

coexistence but that these differences are deeply ingrained in social communities. I will conclude by wrapping up my findings, offer some insight into what this means for division and unification, and raising further questions that need to be answered.

### **Background: History of the Great Divide**

The Korean peninsula has been divided into the DPRK and the ROK since 1945. For most people living in the two countries, they may not have known a time when the peninsula was not divided. Since the study of division is so deeply embedded in the war that occurred on the Korean peninsula, it is important to have a base knowledge of the events that brought this to be. This section will begin with a brief history of foreign influence in the Korean peninsula. The foreign influence is important for many future arguments of the paper. Then, given the historical nature of the project itself, it is important to also know which actors were involved in the political division and the Korean War as it will inform later discussions. While Korea has gone through many transformations over the past eight centuries, this history will be limited to the most important events that are pertinent to this paper.

Korea has experienced outside influence in its politics and culture that has affected the way that they have decided policy in the present from states near and far. In the time between 1368 until 1566, Korea was a tributary state, which is a state that sends some form of compensation, in this case, traded goods, to a more powerful state, to the Ming dynasty in China (Nakajima 2018, 141). During this time, Neo-Confucianism became the most influential religion within Korea which was the predominant religion in the Ming dynasty and emphasized self-cultivation (Lipman et al 2012, 30-31). After the fall of the Ming dynasty, it was replaced by the Qing dynasty and Korea still maintained tributary status to them until 1882 (Song 2019, 11).



In the late 1800s, Korea faced multiple struggles including low crop yield and conflict internal and external (Lipman et al 2012, 196). Between 1866 and 1871, Korea began to be pressured by the west to open its country to trade. France attempted to force entry in 1866 followed by the United States attack on Korea with the General Sherman naval vessel. Both expeditions ultimately failed in their original mission (Lipman et al 2012, 197). Japan also began to increase pressure by sending its navy up in down Korea's coastline without actively engaging. This culminated in them demanding their first unfair trade treaty in 1876 called the Kanhwa Treaty. After this treaty, Korea began to enter into many other unequal treaties with other Asian countries and many western countries as well such as the treaty with the US in 1882 (Lipman et al 2012, 198, 202). With many conflicting interests invested in Korea, Korea was caught in the middle of many quarrels between China and Japan (Lipman et al 2012, 201). This eventually led to the Sino-Japanese War from 1894 till 1895, in which *Joseon*, the dynasty in Korea that lasted from 1392 AD till 1910, and Japan were allies against the Qing culminating in conflict primarily between Japan and Qing (Lipman et al 2012, 203). This conflict concluded in a ceasefire signed in 1895. This allowed Japan to solidify its influence in Korea.

From 1910-1945, Japan colonized Korea, but with the collapse of the Japanese empire after WWII, Korea was liberated by the Soviet and United States forces (Lipman et al 2012, 304). The Soviets and the United States governments designated an arbitrary line referred to as the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel to establish a division of Korea. The US occupied the southern region of the peninsula and the Soviets occupied the north. While the two occupants tried to come to an agreement on the reunification of the peninsula, this failed in the end with neither side, including Koreans, being willing to compromise their political agenda (Herd 2015). In place of reunification, the United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea (UNTCOK) planned to

supervise national elections across the entire peninsula in 1948, but the Soviet Union blocked elections in the northern region and set up their own elections instead. By August of the same year, the Republic of Korea (ROK) was established in the south with Syngman Rhee as the elected president followed by the establishment of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) with Kim Il Sung as the appointed leader in the north. Both leaders claimed sovereignty over the entirety of Korea (Edwards 2006, xx-xxi). Since both the north and the south had elected leaders in place, the United States and the Soviets withdrew most troops in their respective regions during this time; however, the United States left supporting forces to assist the new governments. The group of 500 men, called Korean Military Advisory Group (KMAG), was left to assist the newly found government in the south (Edwards 2006, 13).

With the withdrawal of troops from the ROK, the United States' attention shifted towards other political interests leaving a window of opportunity for the DPRK government in 1950 (Edwards 2006, 13). Due to the United States supposed aversion to intervening in Korea and the factions of communists in the ROK, the DPRK troops, with loose support from China and the Soviet Union, moved south of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel in June of 1950. A few days after the beginning of the invasion, the United States reaffirmed its support of the ROK, setting up a stronghold in Pusan called the Pusan Perimeter. The DPRK advanced deep into the ROK region. By September 10 of 1950, they had beaten the ROK back to the Pusan perimeter (Edwards 2006, 14). On June 27<sup>th</sup>, 1950, the UN decided to send troops to aid in the efforts alongside the ROK and the US. The tide of the war shifted when the United Nations began its counterattack on September 15 of 1950. As the UN neared the border of China, the Chinese began their military progression to counter the threat on November 26 taking back *Seoul*. In January of 1951 with the addition of more troops, the UN made the push to the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. Once reached, both groups

stayed put creating a stalemate, and then on July 27, 1953, both sides agreed to a cease-fire marked at the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel (Edwards 2006, xxiii). This armistice has been in place since this time. Since 1953, the two states have had little relationship with minimal interaction both economically and politically. Many families were separated into the North or the South with those in the DPRK unable to leave and those in the ROK having difficulty visiting. In the 1980s, the ROK transitioned to a democracy holding its first peaceful election and transition of power in 1992 (USDOS 2018; Lee 1993, 41). In the 1990s, DPRK began to develop its nuclear weapons program; finally conducting its first nuclear weapons test in 2006. Since then, the DPRK continues to develop its nuclear program despite international pressure to denuclearize.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Division Through the Realist Perspective**

The realist theoretical framework argues that the Korean division can be explained by political and strategic factors and is due to factors such as the build-up of military and economics. The realist framework argues that states are inherently self-interested and motivated by the desire for survival and security (Slaughter 2011, 1-2). While some have drawn attention to the role of historical memory in modern Korean division, this realist narrative emphasizes the military history of the Korean war era in both ROK and DPRK populations. The literature deals with the division within the different populations, focusing on the differences between the state powers that intervened in the Korean War and how these differences dictated their trajectory thereafter. Many scholars who adopt this line of thinking maintain that the division through the peninsula is largely based on the strategic decision-making surrounding outside intervention, or the larger geopolitical considerations. The DPRK characterizes the ROK as under the power and control of the US who made them do its bidding as a type of colonial power (Lee 2013, 102).

Lee, a scholar of government and law, maintains that they also believe that the continued influence of the United States means that the ROK is under its control. The DPRK sees this relationship as a threat as they view the US as attempting to gain control also of the DPRK. According to realist scholars, this US influence is why the DPRK continues to remain separate from the ROK, stockpile weapons, and build up a nuclear arsenal. According to these theorists, the DPRK wants to remain sovereign and militarily strong, emphasizing the significance of state power in this theoretical approach. In contrast, the ROK characterizes the war as a civil war that was throttled into action by the communist invasion in the north and mainly focuses on the interference of both the Russians and the Chinese (Lee 2013, 102). From this perspective, the ROK wants to remain sovereign and remain in power as they believe that their form of government is the right form. Some researchers in this framework claim that the remembering of the war has extended the division between the two states (Lee 2013, 102).

Realists have done much research on the prolonged division and how it was facilitated by the DPRK and the ROK. A dominant argument within this analysis is that the nuclearization of the DPRK is one of the reasons that the peninsula stays divided. Eunice Lee, an international law scholar, represents this claim but also claims that this is one of the main factors in driving the reunification talks forward due to the threat that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) poses to the Republic of Korea (ROK) (2010, 261-262). He argues that it both facilitates reunification talks and debilitates the reunification of ROK and DPRK. This argument is not unique and is held by many. In the current policy on the Korean Peninsula set by Moon Jae-In, peaceful resolution hinges on denuclearization (Ministry of Reunification 2017). Two of the four strategies to meet the goals for the Korean Peninsula, which are “resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue and establishment of permanent peace”, “development of sustainable inter-Korean

relations”, and “realization of a new economic community on the Korean peninsula”, have to do with denuclearization of the DPRK (Ministry of Unification 2017). While President Moon does not deny that there are other factors to consider, this does highlight the overemphasis of nuclear weapons in the Korean Peninsula policy coming from the ROK. The focus on denuclearization asserts that if the DPRK denuclearized the peninsula would reunify with little hindrance. While this may seem like a clear answer to why Korea remains divided upon further examination it misses out on many factors that perpetuate division. Those who view nuclearization as the main cause of division between the DPRK and the ROK seek to solve the problem of division by removing nuclear weapons. This view assumes that denuclearization would allow the peninsula to reunify.

Another threat that Myoung-Kyu Park, director of the Institute for Peace and Unification Studies at Seoul National University, sees as a dividing factor is the cybersecurity threat that the DPRK poses to the ROK (2015, 27-28). This is a relatively new threat under the realist theory as it only really developed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This is the idea that the threat of warfare using cyber networks, warfare includes hacking into energy sources and cutting off power, is a contributing factor to the division between the ROK and the DPRK. This puts the two countries at odds with one another because they both perceive threat from the other in this area, which keeps them divided because they exist in a state of defense.

There is another realist view that claims that the division can be traced to diplomatic neglect by the United States and the global community (Miller 2003, 20). This is a view of realism which believes that the state of the US is what determined the trajectory of the DPRK and the ROK. In this application of realism, the groups within Korea never had a legitimate divisionary impact in the war; it came into being because of the war between the US and the

Soviets. This view states that if the US set up a policy or withdraws from the region then peace would ensue. This view assumes that there would have been no division across the 38th parallel if the US and the Soviet Union had not intervened. While the US certainly served as a catalyst to the divide, this perspective ignores the possibility that division already existed that allows the division to persist.

In the realist framework, scholars assume that the intervention of superpowers, such as the Soviet Union and the US, can best explain the division of the peninsula. For them, the division is solely political, stemming from the strategic goals of countries such as the US. For these scholars, they believe that the solution to division is solved by a shift in policies such as the removal of nuclear weapons, the removal of other threats, and a change of government policies. This falls short in explaining the reasons that North Korean defectors struggle with their miniature reunifications with the ROK, does not explain many of the cultural divisions, and assumes these cultural factors are not essential to reunification. Realism ignores that the division has been entrenched by the social constructions that differ between the ROK and the DPRK.

#### Division Through the Institutional Perspective

The institutionalist theoretical framework focuses on the regime type, economic type, and outside relationships of the states with global institutions (Jonson & Tallberg 2009, 6). Institutionalists believe that the division between the peninsula can be explained by the institutions which are in place economic and political structure and how the international community interacted with these states. This is a perspective held by South Korea's Former Minister of Unification Hyun In-taek who said in his 2010 speech that "The Government hopes to build a process that draws upon the participation of the public so that we can discuss and consider a broad set of unification issues, not only those related to the financial costs of

unification” (Ministry of Unification 2010). This speech shows that he believes that unification can only exist through government policies and the changing of how they operate. This is a major defining feature of the institutionalist frame of thought.

Political science scholar Uk Heo and national security scholar Terence Roehrig argue that the regime and economy of the ROK have influenced the division between the ROK and the DPRK. They argue that since the ROK has been able to change to a democratic regime and grow economically that the aid policies that they have made with the DPRK have softened animosity between the two states (Heo & Roehrig 2018, 125). They argue that economic growth has led to reformed foreign and international policy including their policy with the DPRK which have softened the regimes towards each other (Heo & Roehrig 2018, 137). While this does not explain the division explicitly, it does imply that the division can be fixed by economic policies.

While institutions explain some elements of the divisions such as the lack of implementation of better economic policies or differences in regime type, they do not offer information on how the differences in discourse and social constructs contribute to the division. This is important to discuss as it would increase the understanding of the division between the peninsula by tracing how these accepted ideologies came to be. The social dynamics, ideas, and identities that are found amongst individuals and affect their behavior are ignored by the institutionalist framework. Institutionalism fails to explain the experience of division.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Previously, this thesis discussed how the theories of realism and institutionalism fall short in explaining the division between the DPRK and the ROK. I will focus on analyzing the division through the constructivist lens of international relations. Constructivism argues that socially constructed verbal or substantive narratives and identities influence policy outcomes, not

just institutions and state interests (Nau 2007, 31). Social construction is an idea or object that does not have meaning outside of the collective meaning that has been decided about that idea or object. An example of this is legal tender such as the US dollar which has no value outside the value that has been accepted over time through government policies and collective decision making. In other words, we all agree that money has value, but this value only exists because of shared meanings and understandings. Social constructs are important because they show researchers how most people think and make decisions and what weight elements of life carry in the mind of individuals. In this view, material realities are a physical outcropping of the ideas which have been constructed over time. The construction is accomplished by concepts that have been accepted by a vast majority of society: an example of this construction is social classes which has no meaning outside of the meaning given to it by society. The point of constructivism is to illuminate the social constructions that influence a certain issue.

Throughout this paper, idea is defined as a concept that is developed over time through an intersection of material, historical, and institutional factors. Ideas differ between societies. This means that an idea is itself a social construction. Ideas that have been constructed may contribute to new social constructions. Ideology is also an important term within this paper. Ideology is defined in this research as the drawing together of ideas into a map for how a person or group of people functions and makes decisions (Freedon 2006, 20). The map is manufactured by a group of individuals and consumed by a group of individuals. While ideologies are designed by a group, they are fundamentally social constructions as they are derived from ideas.

This research will identify a couple of social constructions that contribute to the division between the DPRK and the ROK and cause challenges for reunification at both the micro and the macro levels. I use micro-reunification as the lower level unifications of individuals to the



country they did not originate from. I use macro-reunification as the higher-level unification between the states of the DPRK and the ROK. This is mainly seen in North Koreans defecting to South Korea which has maintained a rate of more than a thousand individuals per year since 2001 (Ministry of Unification 2019). Ideological discourse has developed the idea of the “other”, the person or group of people another individual or group of people think of as outside of themselves, which is essential for the division imaginary between the DPRK and the ROK (Son 2015, 47-49). This research specifically looks at the *Juche* ideology constructed through history, discourse, and policy that differentiates the “us” from the “them” necessary for division in the DPRK (Nau 2007, 32). This study then analyzes the difference in language and how that constructs the division through distinct markers of dialects, lack of common words, and the ideation of uneducated dialect.

This research is not claiming that constructivism explains every aspect of division because there are components of states and institutions that contribute to the division. They do not explain the whole discourse of division which was catalyzed by social constructions. My perspective shows the challenges that will potentially lie ahead that have not yet been considered fully in research. Social constructs that will continue to reinforce divisions between the individuals from the two societies even if weapons are removed, state structures are changed, and institutions are developed and reformed. The discourse around these constructs represent challenges that must be considered. This research argues that a consideration of these constructs along with the perspectives on reunification analyzed before gives a clearer picture of the issue of division between the ROK and the DPRK. This constructivist analysis also reveals why the institutions and state issues divide the nations. Much like in Jutta Weldes’ discussion of national interests in *The United States and the Cuban Missile Crisis*, this study asserts that the division

between the DPRK and the ROK is socially constructed through cultural and intersubjectively established meanings that are different within the two countries (1999, 10). Intersubjectivity is the sharing of an idea by multiple individuals. It is, in short, a collective way of thinking that imbues something with meaning. Weldes looks at how the idea of a country being a nuclear threat is constructed through the discourse within the society. She examines the Cuban Missile Crisis and how the United States responded to this crisis. She talks about how the discourse within the society led to intersubjective understanding within the United States to see Cuba as a threat whereas they did not see places like the United Kingdom as a threat. She argues that discourse and social construction leads to this intersubjectivity within the United States.

In the following pages, this study will argue that there are social constructs in both the DPRK and the ROK that contribute to the division between the two countries. This will be done by looking at how *Juche* permeates the DPRK society, how *Juche* was derived from history, how *Juche* is in the discourse of the DRPK citizens, and how *Juche* presents challenges when considering unification. This will show that the *Juche* concept has been constructed over time and through society and culture. I chose *Juche* as it is a predominant ideology in the DPRK and the way it has been accepted there. This study will show that *Juche* is an essential explanation of the division of the peninsula. In the following section, I will explore the development and divergence of language in the DPRK and the ROK. Since discourse drives construction and language is one primary way in which groups of people differentiate each other, this section will focus on these divergences to show how this contributes to the division between the two Koreas. This study chose language because of the long history of languages being used as markers to identify different peoples. This analysis is essential to the divisionary discussion as language has been used for centuries to divide people. This is not different on the Korean peninsula. Another

reason for focusing on linguistic analysis is because of the way linguistic divergences have developed which has not been just a process of time but of many other social and ideational factors, a key argument made by constructivists, who focus on the role of language and discourse. These sections will bring light to the fact that there are many social constructs within the discourse and collective practice within the DPRK and the ROK that further deepen division.

## ***Juche* and the Division**

### Introduction

The purpose of this section is to show why ideas matter by using the concept of *Juche* as a case study and by observing how *Juche* has contributed to the division between the DPRK and the ROK. *Juche* is one of the primary differences between the DPRK and the ROK and therefore is important to the study of how division has developed. This section will show how *Juche* has become an ideology that has been integrated into the discourse of the DPRK's society. It will also show how the *Juche* ideology was constructed through history and shows how the Korean peninsula has diverged over time. It will begin by explaining the history of how it evolved into its current form. Then, it will explain the features of *Juche* and how it corresponds to those tenets of eastern thought. Finally, it will analyze how this ideology became deeply engrained in the discourse of DPRK society. *Juche* is a form of nationalism that has been developed through social construction and is a source of identity for the people. While I am not interested in the state itself, this research is more interested in the kind of ideas and nationalism within the population that are reinforced through everyday social constructions. This is exactly what *Juche* shows in the DPRK.

While there are contrasting concepts and ideologies in the ROK, *Juche* will be explored in this section with only brief references to the contrast in the ROK. This is because there are

multiple levels of influence both coming from within the ROK and outside the ROK by the global community. The ROK due to the free flow of ideas in and out of the country creates some difficulty in tracing how concepts were constructed. While it can be done, that is outside of the scope of this project and will be examined in a future project.

### *Juche* Genealogy

Many scholars have debated the exact origins of *Juche* ideology; however, the leadership of the DPRK touts it as the original thought of Kim Il Sung (Lee 2003, 107). Contrary to the claims of leadership, this study and a few other scholars find the most supporting evidence in the claim that *Juche* was derived from history, including outside intervention by many surrounding territories, and ideas such as Confucianism and Marxist-Leninism. The word *Juche*, while constructed from age-old principles, was first used in 1955 in a speech by Kim Il Sung (Kurbanov 2005, 298). The consensus around the claim that *Juche* was constructed over time is based on the information that *Juche* ideology pulls from each of these historical events and ideologies that have developed it.

While the *Juche* ideology began as an adaptation of Leninism that would be suitable for the special case of the DPRK, it has evolved and often serves to disavow the linkage to the former Soviet Union (Park 2014, 6). *Juche* is the ideology that emphasizes self-reliance. However, this concept is difficult to define as it has several ramifications and some inconsistencies. The self-reliance aspect of *Juche* means that they should be able to provide for themselves from their own resources without the need for outside assistance (Alpay 2012, 34). This aspect of *Juche* was used to lessen influence from the Soviet Union and China in the DPRK (Lee 2003, 108). As time went on *Juche* ideology developed. It put man as the center of the universe thus showing the emphasis in man as the primary master within *Juche* (Kurbanov 2005,

297). *Juche* emphasized filial piety placing the mother as the state itself and the father as the leader of the DPRK (Armstrong 2005, 389). This claim backs up the idea that it is necessary for leaders to come from the same lineage. The leader is also perceived to be benevolent, fighting for the people and for revolution, which means reunification instead of equality in the case of the DPRK (Alpay 2012, 35). The leader and the people are one. In other words, the leader being the head and the people being the other functional parts of the body thus emphasize how they must function together (Alpay 2012, 35). While the material self will die, *Juche* emphasizes that the political self is immortal (Alpay 2012, 35).

The history of Korea has been extremely tumultuous. The peninsula has been invaded, occupied, and leached of resources primarily by Japan and China. From 1368 until 1882, Korea was a tributary state to China. In this type of relationship, the weaker state is to pay the stronger state with gifts of trade. This allows the weaker state to minimize the risk of invasion of the stronger country, but it does come with a price (Swope 2002, 780-781). Between 1910 and 1945, Japan occupied Korea and drained many of its resources, including humans. Koreans were forced to grow food for the Japanese military and complete other hard-labor tasks, in which many did not survive, under Japanese occupation (Min 2003, 943). During the wartime period (1937-1945), the Japanese subjected the people of Korea to slave-like conditions, including forcing girls and young women to become “comfort women”, women who were forced into military sexual slavery to mainly military officials of the Japanese imperial army (Min 2003, 938). Some comfort women never found their way back to the motherland as they were “stationed” at many different areas in the Asia and Pacific region (Soh 2000, 64). The history of colonization is one reason that the leaders of the DPRK chose to develop the ideology of *Juche*. In *Juche*, one of the primary desires is to maintain independence from foreign powers. This is

largely based on history with their neighbors and the intervention from both China and Japan in their history.

The history of Korea also contributed to the construction of the ideas of independence and protection from outside powers' influence in the *Juche* ideology. From 1392 to 1910, Korea took on extreme isolationist policies, except to trade with China and limited trade with Japan, earning it the name the "hermit kingdom" (Lee 2003, 108). After several Western incursions and much debate on whether to open ports to the outside world in the mid-nineteenth century, the peninsula began to open ports to the outside world after signing unequal treaties with major regional and Western powers (Lipman et al 2012, 198). Up until the division between the DPRK and the ROK, there was continued disagreement on whether opening to trade was beneficial for the Korean state. After the Korean War, this debate was settled for the DPRK with the institution of *Juche*, which asserts that independence from outside actors is of utmost importance. While this ideology is not consistently applied in aid reception, it remained as an ideology that the leaders reinforce within the populace using isolationist rhetoric and in their international policy.

Confucianism is arguably the ideology in Korean history and society that contributes the most to the overall idea of *Juche*. Confucianism is a well-known and well-practice worldview in Eastern Asia. Credited to Confucius (551-479 BCE) in China, Confucianism was transmitted to Korea from China, but it was a specific interpretation developed by Zhu Xi (1130-2000), which combined Confucianism with Taoism and Buddhism, that was brought to Korea from Yuan China (1279–1368) (Koh 2003, 62-63). Referred to as Neo-Confucianism, this worldview began its rise in Korea in the late 1300s and evolved during the *Joseon* Dynasty (1392-1910). During different periods within this dynasty, various elements of Neo-Confucianism were emphasized by the different rulers. Filial piety is to pay high respect for one's elders and ancestors, especially

parents, in the home and outside of the home by serving them obediently (Lipman et al. 2012, 32). Filial piety led to people making decisions and performing tasks to bring pride and honor to their families. Filial piety maintains social order as it ensures that respect and obedience are shown to elders. Filial piety is one of the elements of Confucianism that helped in the social construction of the *Juche* ideology. Similar in its use in history, filial piety is important in *Juche*, allowing leaders to mobilize the masses during times when duty to each other and to the leader needed to be reinforced (Armstrong 2005, 389). The benevolent government, or “kingly way”, which emphasized people-based politics and benevolent leadership is another element of both Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism that was implemented during the *Joseon* time period. The “kingly way” maintained that the ruling class was the moral model for the society underneath them (Lipman et al 2012, 51). The main goal and use of this ideal ensured political loyalty and respect. This is a major constructive feature of *Juche*. Neo-Confucianism during the *Joseon* time period also emphasized self-reliance, humans as the center of the universe and highest being derived from “wise governing” tenant, and social classism (Kurbanov 2019, 298 & 302).

#### Social Construction of *Juche*

There are many features of *Juche* that make it so ingrained in the society of the DPRK that was constructed and can be traced through the history of Korea and discourse. This discussion will begin by explaining the importance of the historical element of *Juche*. Next, it will explain the daily reinforcement tools used by the people that help reinforce the ideology. Finally, this section will explain the discourse within the society that reinforce *Juche* ideology. This discussion will show how the ideology of *Juche* has served as a major factor in the division paradigm and show the process of how an idea becomes intersubjective and influential in the discourse within society.

As is seen throughout the previous analysis of historical ideas that shaped *Juche*, it is easily recognizable that the ideology was constructed from previously established concepts. The example of filial piety is one that is dominant within *Juche* and within the history of Korea, although more significant in the DPRK than in the ROK. In the DPRK, the concept of filial piety made it easier for the leaders to construct the *Juche* idea of having the state as the mother and the leader as the father. This allowed the leadership to justify why the subjects must respect and support the leader in a more familial style than in an oppressive nature. Faithfulness to the leader was also not a new concept as this was an expectation toward previous rulers. The isolationist tendencies of the past and the rhetoric of outside countries being a threat to the DPRK also made the self-sufficiency policy easy for the populace to accept. The threat of other states came from when Korea was a tributary state of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) and then the Qing dynasty (1644-1881) of China. A tributary system allows for the stronger state to impose trade, policy, and specific leadership on the weaker state with the promise that the stronger state will not attack the weaker (Swope 2002, 780-781). Then, Japan warred with China and gained control of Korea from 1910 till 1945 (Lipman et al 2012, 53-54). Isolationism, as previously stated, was a highly debated topic leading up to the Korean War and became solidified by the idea of self-sufficiency in *Juche*. In other words, the discourse of *Juche* generated a common understanding of the national interest surrounding these facets of Korean identity, something which came even more to the fore after partition in 1945.

With a long history of the ancestral spiritualism that still dominates Korean culture in both the DPRK and the ROK, the idea that the political self exists forever was not a difficult transition in the minds of the people in the DPRK. The area in which the DPRK diverges from traditional ancestralism is where they believe in political eternalism. The political eternal spirit



implies the ancestor's political commitment can follow the family so the individual must perform well because it not only affects their status but the status of their descendants within the DPRK. Due to this, *Songbun*, the political caste system within the DPRK related to *Juche* which will be discussed further in the next section, is salient in the culture and an institutional outcropping of *Juche*. Political eternalism also legitimized the idea that Kim Il Sung lives forever through his descendants and his political legacy which is why leaders of the DPRK all come from the Kim family.

In the DPRK, *Juche* permeates social discourse. Many of the daily tasks that people perform and recite throughout their lives reinforce *Juche*. These tendencies are not considered strange to those who live in the DPRK as they have been engaged in them since a young age and serve to remind them of who they are and where they are from. It is easy for people from different cultures to think that these elements of society are overtly oppressive; however, people who live within the context rarely recognize that the activities they engage in are any different from anywhere else. For many in the DPRK, the aspects of daily life that will be discussed may not even receive a second thought despite it being mandated that they behave in such a way. These practices contribute to the nationalist identity of the people in the DPRK. To begin the most obvious reinforcement of *Juche* are the many celebrations that they have in reverence of the leader and their success as a society. The most glamorous and lengthy are those celebrating Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Il, and Kim Jong Un's birthdays. These events are used to celebrate, reinforce the supremacy of the leader, and to show the extravagance of the leaders and the country to the people so that they may see how far they have come. This discourse reinforces the idea of the paternalism of the leader who throws a celebration for them to attend, helps reinforce the idea of unity within the community, reinforces nationalism among the populace, and reinforce the

strength and independence within the country. The debate of whether these celebrations are misrepresenting the country's wealth and power is a discussion for another paper, but this is how they serve to construct *Juche* and establish the ideology within the discourse of the people in the DPRK (Choi 2018).



**Image 1:** Day of the Sun celebration in Pyong'yang in 2017 to celebrate the birth of Kim Il-sung. "North Korea marks late leader's 105<sup>th</sup> birthday" Aljazeera, Accessed March 24, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/inpictures/2017/04/north-korea-marks-late-leader-105th-birthday-170415141923126.html>.

Respect for all things bearing the image or rendering of the country's leaders is mandatory for all citizens (U.S. Department of State 2019). This means that in many hallowed places of the leader, people are required to bow to leaders' images and to keep a neat appearance around these images. This act reinforces the supremacy of the Kims and is a regular event in their daily lives to participate in. However, this is not necessarily an odd thing for the people of

the DPRK to participate in becoming an almost automatic activity since this respect for the leader was required since infancy. Bowing, which shows respect especially to elders and leaders, and respect is prolific in Korean history and still exists in the ROK as well; however, it is not mandated that people bow, while it is considered rude to not greet someone, especially an elder, with a bow. In ROK, people engage in bowing to ancestors or others of their own free will as a sign of respect, which has been constructed from a long history of practicing the Confucian tradition. After the deaths of their leaders, the leadership attributes it to the leader's deep concern for the people who suffer within the DPRK. This explanation is successful in influencing the way that the individuals within the DPRK view the leadership as exemplified in this statement, "North Hamgyong suffered most severely. As you know, the Dear Leader Kim Il Sung worried so much about the people's livelihoods in North Hamgyong and passed away due to a heart attack... People think that everything's the fault of mid-level bureaucrats" (Choi 2013, 668). This leads to the populace believing that those who are corrupt are those who are in lower levels of power and not the supreme leader of the country. This allows for whatever hardship that is experienced by the people to be blamed on the mismanagement of the bureaucrats thus reinforcing *Juche* as they believe the supreme leader always has the interests of the people at heart and is a benevolent leader.

The *Juche* calendar, which begins on Kim Il Sung's day of birth, is the calendar that people in the DPRK follow. It reinforces the discourse on both the prominence of the leader and the individualism and self-sufficiency to the extent that the calendar has been changed (Wood & Terry 2016, 507). One of the more important products of *Juche* is the use of *Songbun*. *Songbun* is the system by which citizens of the DPRK are ranked according to their families and their record of perceived loyalty and fulfilled duty to the government. It affects what jobs an

individual can have, what school kids can go to, and social mobility (Robertson 2016). This record can go back as far as World War II which has been a problem for some individuals whose grandparents may have been a supporter of Japan during that time (Robertson 2016). This reinforces the *Juche* idea of the political self being eternal and the importance of state and leader loyalty as the ultimate morality.

*Juche* is also reinforced by monuments within the DPRK. Many monuments are dedicated just to the idea of *Juche* and ones that are related to elements of *Juche*. The first is the *Kumsusan* Palace of the Sun. This is the former palace of Kim Il Sung and now serves as the resting place for both him and Kim Jong Il. They are both embalmed and on display for mourners and tourists. It is required that visitors dress nicely and show proper respect (Tongil Tours 2019). Throughout the mausoleum are pictures of the leaders and signs of grandeur such as marble pillars and floors. In the rooms of the leaders, there are rows of live military officials showing their dedication. Many Koreans come to grieve the great leaders or show remembrance. This reflects the idea of *Juche* as it encourages the reverence that citizens have for their deceased leaders and reminds them of how well these leaders have led them through the pictures, statues, and the preserved bodies of their leaders Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il. Another monument that serves a similar purpose in reminding the people of their great leaders' guidance is Kim Il Sung Square. This is where mass holiday celebrations and military parades take place. This is an important ode to *Juche* as it holds many military parades, which through the strength allows the country to remain sovereign and independent of outside forces, and the celebrations of holidays such as their leaders' birthdays, independence days, and other such holidays.

Another monument that reinforces *Juche's* ideas and practice is the *Mansudae* Grand Monument. It is a set of two statues: one is of Kim Il Sung and the other is of Kim Jong Il. This

area also requires much respect and it is important for observers to dress appropriately and to bow to the two leaders. This again reminds the people of the leaders' importance. When tourists come to observe the spot, they are told that the two leaders would have never desired that these monuments made because they were humble, but the people insisted that they are made (Wood & Terry 2016, 509). This discourse reinforces the idea that the Kims are benevolent and selfless leaders of their people which coincides with *Juche*. Below the statues there are also small pictures of people contributing to the development of Korea are present showing how important the people are to the success of the leader and vice versa. Many *Pyong 'yang* residents are encouraged to mark special events at this monument, such as weddings (Wood & Terry 2016, 510).

Outside of leader appreciation, there is the Tower of the *Juche* Idea, pictured below. This is a highly symbolic structure that is the tallest granite tower in the world. It has a torch that is lit within it and does not go out. It also has several figures around it to reinforce the ideas of *Juche*. As the highest granite tower in the world, this statue symbolizes their self-sufficiency. It also symbolizes the centrality of *Juche* ideology within the DPRK because of the prominence of the tower. A final display to reinforce the social construction that is *Juche* is the display of the USS Pueblo. It was a United States vessel which the DPRK captured that the government accused the crew of spying in domestic waters in 1968. After the capture of all but one of the crew members, the government tortured and threatened death in order to get a confession (Wood & Terry 2016, 513). This navy ship has been used to show the great power that the DPRK has in overcoming, as they would call them, infiltration by imperialists like the United States. They also connect this incident back to their long history of invasion by outside countries including going so far back as the USS General Sherman which was sent to Korea in 1886 to force open the ports of Korea. The

DPRK claims that the *Pyong'yang* villagers attacked the ship and killed the crew (Wood & Terry 2016, 514). This narrative again reinforces the long history of Korea having to resist outside powers which is an important part of *Juche*.



**Image 2:** Tower of the *Juche* Idea. “Tower of the *Juche* Idea” Lonely Planet, Accessed March 24, 2020, <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/north-korea/pyongyang/attractions/tower-of-the-juche-idea/a/poi-sig/435034/357182>.

### Conclusion

*Juche* is a clear example of a constructed ideology that has contributed to the division between the DPRK and the ROK. Through time, it is seen that the *Juche* concept was developed by Confucianism, foreign intervention, tradition, and old domestic and foreign policy. The longstanding social constructions have allowed the DPRK to easily establish and transition into *Juche*. Along with the historical construction of *Juche*, there has also been the ever-present discourse of *Juche* in the daily lives of the people of the DPRK. The use of parades, the monuments and decorum around them, and the discourse of the government all reinforce public discourse to establish *Juche*.

The tenets of *Juche* pose significant reinforcement of division. The most obvious is the self-sufficiency and isolationist policies and the discourse in the populace of the DPRK. This divides them from the ROK as the two countries are not seen as one currently, and therefore the DPRK sees ROK as an outside, hostile power. The individuals and the state have great aversion to outside interference, which is an idea embedded in *Juche*. This perspective stands in stark contrast to the government and people in the ROK who are extremely open to globalization and have a high level of US military presence within their borders. What deepens the division is that the ROK does not mandate any type of respect or loyalty around leaders and also holds free and fair elections for the people to be in power. This system is very different from the *Juche* ideology in which lineage is considered the reason why the Kims remain in power and why they are revered even after death. All of these factors contribute to the division between the DPRK and the ROK.

## **Language and the Division**

### **Introduction**

While natural divergence in a language is expected to an extent between a divided area, what is seen on the Korean peninsula is an interesting case. In this case, the language difference has been exacerbated given the policy, economic, and ideological differences between the DPRK and the ROK. The divergence of language has been discussed since the 1970s, approximately twenty years since the geographic and political division between the DPRK and the ROK. Chin-Wu Kim noted in the 70s that there would be greater language divergence due to social progressions and policies already being implemented (Kim 1978, 169). Kim's argument suggests that this has not only been a natural progression but also a divergence that has been accelerated by multiple factors. The divergence was visible to the public in the joint 2018 Olympic Hockey

team of Korea who had difficulty communicating with one another (Hamad 2018, 23). While the divergence may seem insignificant, it carries much weight as it affects how the individuals of both countries relate to one another, including how they identify themselves, how they communicate, and how they are socially classified. This section will examine language as one social construction of identity differences on the Korean Peninsula. It will begin by tracing the historical evolution of language on the peninsula in general and then look at the DPRK and the ROK individually. This discussion will offer evidence on the significance of linguistics and ideational divisions in order to properly understand the division of the two Koreas.

### History of Language in Korea

Due to the vast overlap between several languages in the region, the Korean language has close relationships with other languages such as Japanese and Chinese (Song, 2012, 9). Korean's origins are highly debated with many maintaining it is from the Altaic family of languages. While Chinese is often used in the form of loanwords and words built on Chinese roots, some linguists have surmised that Korean is more evolutionarily related to Japanese. Over the years of the existence of two Koreas, the Korean language has seen several changes to language policy and the imposition of other languages as national languages on the Korean peninsula. Before 1443, Korean was written in Chinese characters. However, due to illiteracy rates and the difficulty of learning the Chinese characters, King Sejong developed the writing system that is now used throughout most of Korean text called *Han-geul* (Song 2005, 164; Asia Society, n.d.). However, after its inception, *Han-geul* was generally only used by the lower class and women while Chinese writing began to only be used by elites (Park 1989, 565). Most history in this period was recorded in classical Chinese (Park 1989, 564). It was not until the 19<sup>th</sup> century that *Han-geul* became the predominant mode of written communication due to nationalism prompted

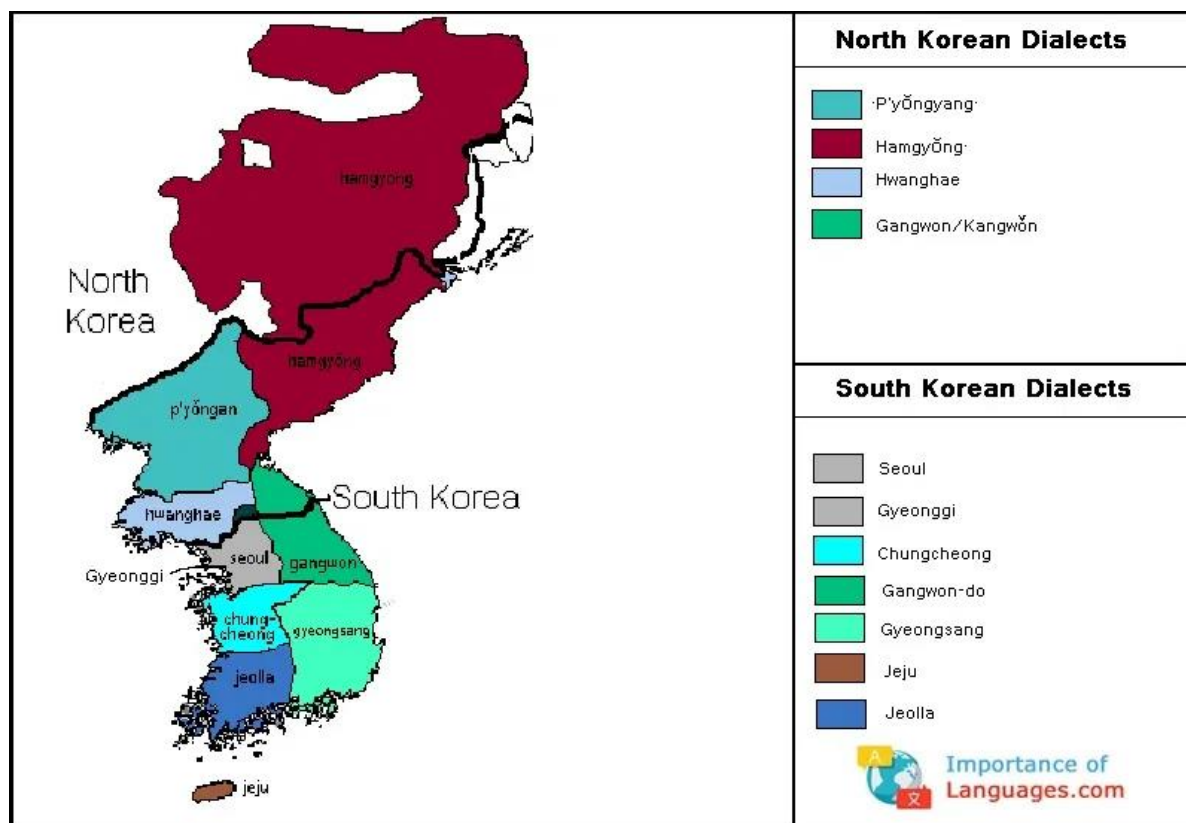


by Russian and Japanese occupation (Song, 2005, 164). *Han-geul* continues to live by that name in South Korea; however, in North Korea, it is called *Joseon-geul*. Korea had its first encounter with English in 1797, and, in 1894, many students began to learn English in order to raise job prospects and raise status (Paik 2018, 124).

As mentioned previously, Korea experienced several colonization incidents. The most brutal of which was the Japanese colonization from 1910-1945. In 1935, Japan instated that only Japanese be used within Korea, both in school teaching and in daily communications (Lipman 2012, 312-313; Park 1989, 565). The Japanese colonial rulers even mandated that people begin to change their names to Japanese-based names during the wartime period (Lee 2018, 27). Korean usage was also used to mark who was Korean and who was not Korean during this time, which allowed Koreans to be identified and targeted for violence carried out by Japanese leaders (Song 2005, 165; Lee 2018, 27). Japanese language policy completely backfired and contributed to an overall feeling that the Korean language has been under attack in both the DPRK and the ROK following the colonization and the sense that nationalism is tightly connected to the Korean language (Park 1989, 566). As will be seen in later discussion, the two countries dealt with this fear in different ways.

Before 1945, Korea had many dialects with the primary dialect being the *Seoul* or *Gyeonggi* dialect. The *Seoul* dialect became the official dialect of Korea in 1912 as defined by the Japanese government (Song 2012, 8). There has been more than one dialect for centuries, which differentiated the peoples by region and at times by education level. There have been nine dialects across Korea including *Hamkyong*, *Pyongan*, *Hwanghae*, and *Pyong'yang*, *Seoul* dialect or *Gyeonggi*, *Kyonsang*, *Chungchong*, *Cholla*, *Cheju* island (Asia Society, n.d.). An image is included below of the division of dialects. Some of these dialects have been used to identify

people who were then discriminated against throughout history including many that are now used in the DPRK.



**Image 3:** Map of dialects across the Korean peninsula. “Korean Language Dialects List/Map” Importance of Language, Accessed March 24, 2020, <https://www.importanceoflanguages.com/common-korean-language-dialects/>.

### External and Internal Constructors of Language

Both the DPRK and ROK have had multiple societal and cultural factors that have catalyzed the divergence of languages in the respective regions. While the DPRK would maintain that they adhere to *Juche* self-reliance even when it comes to language and linguistic evolution, this is not necessarily the case despite the greatest efforts by the government of the DPRK. This section will discuss how the language policies and language divergence developed and how outside languages shaped the language divergence. This section will begin by talking

about the DPRK and then the ROK. While many external actors influenced both regions, the response of the DPRK and the ROK have been different.

### **DPRK's Language Development**

At the beginning of the division, Russian loanwords and phrases became highly influential within the DPRK because the Soviet Union was its occupier (Hamad 2018, 23; Song 2005, 172). Despite this influence, the DPRK government maintains that these words and phrases are original to the Korean language, which is in line with *Juche* ideology (Marino, n.d.). The DPRK is an interesting case of the divergence of language because of the importance that *Juche* plays in the development of linguistic policies (Song 2005, 169). In the DPRK, there have been large sweeps of language reform when they tried to implement *Juche* policies. *Juche* policy is a policy of linguistic purity and self-reliance as it is with all other policies of the DPRK (Lee 2018, 23). Kim Il Sung believed that language was the most powerful tool to redeveloping people's thinking and to promote ethnonationalism (Lee 2018, 23 & 26). As mentioned previously, the tie between language and nationalism is strongly linked to the Japanese colonization as the language was both stripped from Koreans in an attempt to make them more placative to Japanese rule and used to identify Koreans when the Japanese military would "suppress rebellions" (Song 2005, 165; Lee 2018, 27). As a legacy from the colonial period, the DPRK responded by strongly tying the idea of language as a symbol of nationalism in a desire to remove outside influences and put in place these purification policies. Purification discussions show that language is not just words alone but an expansion of identity and how things are interpreted. This is important to the identity discourse of a nation and also in creating intersubjectivity among the inhabitants.

At the end of the Korean War, the estimated illiteracy rate within the DPRK was 2.3 million which was one-fourth of the population at the time (Kim 1978, 167). In 1945 in response, the DPRK government implemented an anti-illiteracy campaign throughout the region. The campaign was launched in 1946 and was all-encompassing including adult learning and youth learning in all demographics from rural to urban areas (Song 2005, 169). After the campaign in 1949, the DPRK touted a 100% literacy rate (Lee 2018, 30-31). While they had naturally progressed towards purification, the government implemented a comprehensive and extremist plan for purification in 1964 (Kim 1978, 167). According to the policy, all Sino-Korean, Chinese Orthography (*Hanja*), Sino-Japanese, and loanwords were eliminated, and replaced by native Korean words, and, if there was no replacement, these words were transformed to follow *Joseon-geul* syntax (Hamad 2018, 21; Song 2005, 169). Politics and science were two areas that Sino-Korean remained due to the lack of replacement words and the complication of changing these words (Lee 2018, 38). The importance of this decision is that it displays the level of importance put on language in order to maintain national unity. This shows the degree of limitation of external influence within the DPRK from outside influences, especially former occupiers such as Japan and, to an extent, Russia. During this time, 50,000 words were purified and published in the *Native Korean Dictionary* in 1968 (Song 2005, 169; Lee 2018, 39). *Joseon-geul*-only policy is still carried out until today, the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Following this policy, the *Pyong'yang* dialect became the official dialect in the DPRK in 1966, replacing the former *Seoul* or *Gyeonggi* dialect (Song 2005, 164).

While the policy has continued into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it has allowed for certain unrefined language to be learned. An example of this break from purification is the inclusion of English as a foreign language. It is taught from the fourth grade as a tool for trade and tourism within the

DPRK (Paik 2018, 128). Although it is taught, the English language instruction generally focuses more on grammatical functions and less on discourse and, after the years that the students spend studying it, which they can choose to learn as a foreign language from elementary school till high school and in university, there is much loss of language skill due to lack of use and confrontation with the language. An exception to this is in the tourism industry, foreign relations, and international trade companies (Paik 2018, 129). As time has gone on, the English programs in rural areas have reportedly been phased out, leading to a further deficit (Paik 2018, 129). While Chinese was not taught for some time in the DPRK, since the ROK still used *Hanja*, Chinese characters that were incorporated into the Korean language, the DPRK decided to reinstate *Hanja* into school learning in hopes to reunify with the south. Much like the ROK, the DPRK desires to reunite under their ideology and governmental institutions. They see the inclusion of *Hanja* can make sure that the Korean language used in both countries does not diverge too much. While the citizens are taught *Hanja*, the understanding of the characters is lacking since it is not used outside of school in the DPRK (Song 2005, 170).

In sum, the DPRK remains rather closed off even when it comes to language use. The policies in place leave little room for outside languages to be used regularly within the nation while continuing to desire as much purism as possible within the Korean language. The national dialect is also *Pyong 'yang* dialect (Lee 2018, 47). They have allowed for the people to learn languages such as English in hopes of growing on the global scale; however, this policy has had little impact as English is only in use in school and students mainly focus on grammar. While *Hanja* is also taught in the DPRK, it is not in use in daily life and has similar problems to those of learning English.

## ROK's Language Development

The ROK had a different experience with their language development than that of the DPRK. From the onset of the division, the English language was highly influential in the region. During the United States' occupation of the ROK, English became the official language to remove miscommunication and help organization efforts (Lee 2018, 29-30). While English has remained influential throughout the history of the ROK, the place of other influential languages such as Chinese and Japanese has been a little less stable. There have been several campaigns by interest groups to purify the Korean language in the ROK by returning to *Han-geul*-only policy with a similar desire by purists to remove and replace difficult *Hanja* (Chinese characters), Sino-Korean, and foreign loanwords (Park 1989, 569-572; 564). The main target for most of these interest groups was Japanese by pushing to remove Japanese words from the ROK lexicon due to the history of colonization and the shared grievances against Japan among the people of the ROK. The initiative to remove and replace as many Japanese words as possible with native Korean words was carried out by the US military government in 1948 (Lee 2018, 40). In 1976, Park Chung-hee implemented the most drastic language policy that required Korean purification, which mainly focused on foreign words to increase nationalism and remove English's influence that had been on the rise in the 1970s. The policy only lasted until 1979 and had very little influence on the people in the ROK (Lee 2018, 42-43, 45).

Despite purification efforts, Chinese and English have played important roles in the ROK society. Since 1972, 1,800 *Hanja* characters, remaining from a time when Chinese was the primary written language, have been taught in school to be used in addition to the *Han-geul* (Song 2005, 167). Over half of the ROK's lexicon is derived from Chinese and not natively derived, which was why the purification movements never caught hold (Hamad 2018, 23;

McClintock 2012, 21). Between 2008 and 2017, there has been a significant rise in students who desire to learn Chinese due to the influential nature of China in the region (Paik 2018, 130). Along the same lines, English language learning has been pursued heavily by both the ROK government and the people as a form of globalization. Beginning in 1991, the Korean Scholastic Ability Test includes an English listening section (Paik 2018, 126). English language courses have been compulsory for middle school and high school students since 1998; however, it was offered as a foreign language before this (McClintock 2012, 22).

The implementation of both *Hanja* and English has gone beyond just the schools. Public and road signs throughout the ROK are written in *Hanja*, *Han-geul*, and romanization (Song 2005, 167). English and *Han-geul* are used in signs and businesses often use English to enhance their advertising campaigns (McClintock 2012, 23). Along with multi-language road signs, many people in the ROK have adopted English names in addition to their Korean names (Lee 2018, 44). English is ubiquitous throughout the ROK. The desire to learn English is so strong that there are twenty-one English villages where Koreans can practice English in an immersive situation with foreigners from various English-speaking countries (Song 2012, 15).

For people in the ROK, English serves as a sign of globalization, modernization, and success in the global market (Paik 2018, 127). There is also great accessibility to outside travel in the ROK and students often study for a period outside of their home country (McClintock 2012, 23). To further the inclusion of English in the ROK, five of their global and most prosperous companies, including LG and Samsung, conduct business in English and use English advertising (Paik 2018, 127). These different factors have all contributed to the ubiquitous presence of English within the ROK and it is no wonder that it has become an integral part of their lexicon. It is estimated that up to ninety percent of the new borrowed words in the ROK are derived from

English (McClintock 2012, 22). They borrow, compound, and derivate many words from English to the extent that English speakers who can read *Han-geul* can learn some words without any difficulty because of their English roots (Paik 2018, 127). This was not something that the government passively observed happening. Many initiatives were begun by the government, not only in schools but in everyday life, to build up English understanding within the region. One such initiative was Lee Myungbook administration's 2008-2013 push for English emersion programs such as villages where individuals can go and have conversations with native English speakers for a day (Paik 2018, 124). In recent years, there has also been discussion of making English an official language in addition to *Han-geul*; however, as of 2020, *Han-geul* is still the only official language of the ROK (Song 2012, 16).

While English is prolific in the ROK, many other languages remain influential within the lexicon of the state and English is far from being the primary language spoken within the ROK. 52.1% of the words in the ROK are Sino-Korean which still shows the influence of the Chinese language within the ROK. 45.5% of the words are pure Korean. Finally, only 2.4% of the words are loanwords, of which most of those are from English but far from a degrading of Korean language by the English language (Song 2012, 9). Unlike the DPRK, the ROK uses the original official dialect of Korea from 1912, which is the *Seoul* dialect (Song 2012, 8). The English language remains influential within the ROK; however, *Han-geul* is still the main form of communication within the region. The differences between the ROK and the DPRK are undeniable with the ROK having full use of *Hanja*, English, and *Han-geul* in not only the schools but in daily life. This is in stark contrast to those in the DPRK who only learn it in school unless they are in an international affairs position. The purification efforts in the ROK have also been limited compared to those in the DPRK leaving many words in the ROK lexicon that are



derived from Chinese, English, and Japanese. There is also a difference in the causes of these two divergences. For the DPRK, a major cause was *Juche* ideology and Korea's history with outside forces stripping the identity of the Koreans by imposing language restrictions. In the ROK, the evolution of language has primarily been driven by the globalization of the region and the historic diversity of the language. These factors have led to gaps between the two languages that are evident through a brief examination of the two dialects.

### Linguistic Differences Between the ROK and the DPRK

Throughout both languages, many markers remind Korean speakers that they are different. While accent is one identifier of people from the two different regions, the most obvious and challenging area of differentiation is the words with no equivalents in the other region and words that have a different meaning in the respective regions. There are many examples of these differences, which will be emphasized in this section. First, this section will discuss the difference between the name for written Korean within the DPRK and the ROK. In the DPRK, it is called *Joseon-geul* harkening back to the *Joseon* era while in the ROK it is called the *Han-geul* (Song 2005, 170). *Joseon* and *Hanguk* are how they respectively refer to the peninsula of Korea. In the ROK, the word *tongmu*, which is the word for friend in the DPRK, has been replaced by other words for friend such as *chingu* since the word began to mean comrade in the DPRK (Marino, n.d.). Many words also have a different meaning in the DPRK and the ROK. Another word is *nodong*, which means all labor in the DPRK but means exclusively physical labor in the ROK (Song 2005, 173). Many words are spelled differently, which can lead to confusion between the written language in the two regions (Song 2005, 174). Finally, due to the high use of English loanwords within the ROK, words such as those for shopping, which is not truly necessary in the DPRK, ice cream, and others have different roots in the DPRK (Hamad

2018, 24). 55,000 words used in daily language have been recorded to differ between the DPRK and the ROK.

### Significance of the Language Divide

It is important to look at the implications that language divergence has on these two societies. First, it impacts the way that the two states see each other. The separation of the language also shows a divergence in culture and social structures. For one, the DPRK's policy on purism is largely due to *Juche* ideology, which emphasizes national individualism and self-reliance. In the ROK, much of the difference in language is due to its desire to enter the global market and be competitive economically. However, there are still some in the ROK who see purism as a desired goal due to the history of colonialism and stripping of Korean identity. Despite the similarities between the two languages, the differences are telling of the trajectories of the two countries as can be seen in the example of the word used for friend. The intentional switching of official dialect in the DPRK to the *Pyong'yang* dialect shows how the state is separate from the ROK.

The impacts on individuals is one of the more important aspects of divergence in language. The individuals within the DPRK and the ROK are separated by language which causes them to recognize each other as the other. Otherness is interesting in this case as many people in the ROK view the *Pyong'yang* dialect speaker to mean that the speaker is impoverished, uneducated, and lacking in social adeptness. This coupled with the emotional toll of the political division and the animosity of the history of conflict has a compounding effect on the creation of the other. There is also the issue of miscommunication in general that leads to greater frustration between the populations of the DPRK and the ROK. A famous example of this frustration was the joint hockey team in the 2018 Winter Olympics. While the occasion was

important in showing a desire to once again be unified, it played out much differently as many miscommunications happened on the team and the members had trouble understanding each other's lives due to the lack of shared experience or the lack of a word for a concept that may exist in the respective members' dialects. There has also been a project within the ROK to alleviate some of the difficulties this language barrier causes by an app. Univoca is an app that allows people who are originally from the DPRK to translate commonly used ROK words into a DPRK word that is synonymous or as close to the original as possible. This was developed due to the approximately 3,600 words that are used daily in the ROK that are different from those used in the DPRK and linguists have recorded approximately 55,000 words that are different (Lee 2018, 52; Hamad 2018, 24).

The problem caused by language divergence is most visible in the experiences of defectors from the DPRK who must adjust to not only life in the ROK but also the language. Upon entry into the ROK, they are required to participate in language classes for 12 weeks during integration training (Ministry of Unification 2019). This is done to assist them in getting jobs, finding their way around the new environment, and getting used to new discourse. While this program does help with the transition, most defectors say that it takes around one to three years for them to adjust to the significant inconvenience in conversation and 21% were very inconvenienced by the linguistic differences (Lee 2018, 52). Another issue outside the simple divergence in the Korean language is the issue that many people in the ROK are well-versed in English and many high-level jobs require at least intermediate English knowledge. This puts the defectors at a great disadvantage as many of them do not possess the same level of knowledge as most Koreans from the ROK. Many defectors are limited to low-level jobs with little upward mobility. Defectors also have increasingly struggled with discrimination because they are easily

marked by their accents. As mentioned previously, the accent is equated with being uneducated, socially inept, poor, and as the other (Hamad 2018, 25). This causes complications for defectors in work, school, and daily life. Focusing on defectors as a case study, the divergence in language reveals itself as having a significant impact on the discussion of reunification, which includes economic and social difficulties; however, this discussion should be saved for later research. Language is considered the greatest social barrier to reunification (Hamad 2018, 24).

### Conclusion

Due to policy, social, and cultural differences, there has been a divergence between the DPRK and the ROK. In the DPRK, they have largely adopted a Korean purism movement within the nation based on *Juche* ideology while the ROK has adopted a policy that has allowed them to open to globalism and lack the desire to implement extreme policy to eliminate non-pure Korean. The two countries also have different dialects, thus separating them further. This has delineated the two areas as separate since their language use shows them that they are different not only in place of origin but in ideology, social background, and culture. It has also led to miscommunications between individuals of these separate countries because of the high volume of words that are different in the DPRK and the ROK. This is extremely important in the division between the DPRK and the ROK because it allows for identifying the other. This can lead to discrimination as there is animosity between the people of both regions. It leads to an inability to communicate properly which does not allow the individuals to get jobs that are more economically and socially advantageous as they cannot communicate properly. It also causes a lack of cultural and social unity.

The defectors from the DPRK feel the effects of this difference the most as they are attempting to transition to life in the ROK. They are often at a disadvantage in the job market

because of their lack of language skills in both ROK Korean and English. This creates a dangerous cycle for them as they can experience more poverty and lack of connections. The defectors can also experience discrimination as many have a different accent that is considered to mark less-educated individuals and lack of language expertise. Given the long history of conflict many in the ROK have negative feelings towards these groups. This shows some of the difficulties that language differences also cause complications for reunification policy as the reunified nation would have to train the integrating society in the language that they speak in order to even begin reunification. Language has major implications in the livelihoods of defectors, leads to miscommunication, solidifies division, and has major implications on reunification. Reunification is made more politically difficult by language because there can be miscommunications between the leaders engaged in a discussion. Political reunification is more difficult because there needs to be a proper way to integrate when considering language differences between the two regions which go beyond simple words to social constructions and identities.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

Through this research, it is clear that division is not a simple issue of state policy, state action, regime type, or economic system, but an issue of the social construction of identity such as the divergent identities of the ROK and the DPRK. This is particularly salient in the case of the ROK and the DPRK as both seemingly want to reunify but cannot come to a workable plan as their societies have diverged. This is due to the fact that these intersubjective points such as language and ideas such as *Juche* have been developing and diverging through policy, different views of history, and different discourses within the DPRK and the ROK. This has been seen through *Juche* ideology in how it has been developed in the DPRK through historical

experiences such as Confucian ideals, old isolationist policies, and the view on imperialism and outside forces on the Korean peninsula. In addition, there have been public displays, etiquette, and monuments to reinforce *Juche* discourse within the DPRK society. This allowed the *Juche* ideology to become an intersubjective view within the DPRK society giving it an important role in the division.

Language, too, has shown the importance of social construction a divided Korean peninsula. One important aspect of this division is how the DPRK seeks to keep linguistic purity in order to strengthen the discursive nature of nationalism and reinforce self-sufficiency. While it does not work consistently within the DPRK's Korean language, it shows that language is not simply words but ideas. This outcome is also seen in the ROK as they did not follow the extremes of linguistic purism because of the desire to be more open to outside markets. The ROK also began to adopt outside language as they began to emphasize globalism in public discourse. English as the primary language of globalization became more intersubjectively important in the ROK and then began to be integrated into their lexicon. This again shows that the linguistics show more than just words but what has been socially constructed within the region as words are themselves social constructs.

Due to their importance, it would be irresponsible of people to ignore the social factors that influence the continued division of the ROK and the DPRK. Moving forward scholars looking at the division between the DPRK and the ROK need to pay attention to these details, which are not limited just to *Juche* and linguistics, as they are important in understanding how the two regions interact, how to help defectors integrate into a different society, and how to begin thinking about reunification talks. These cases show that there will be difficulty in reunifying as these divisionary social constructions have been developed over time and become intersubjective

within society. The incongruence of *Juche* found in the DPRK and a globalized, democratic society that is found in the ROK have contributed to the persistence of the divided peninsula. For defectors to the ROK, it is a challenging transition going from a mindset that is closed off to the outside world to one that will allow others in and lives in coexistence with many other nations. In reunification policy, the incongruence will make finding a middle ground in policy as well as finding intersubjectivity of the nation thereafter difficult. A lack of intersubjectivity still allows for the divide to persist and factions to break off.

Linguistic differences not only make it difficult for defectors to integrate into the ROK or DPRK because of communication but because, as discussed earlier language gains meaning from social construction that has developed through years of use. Without the years of practical use, defectors find it difficult to truly connect with the meaning of a word similar to how it is when learning a new language. This challenge causes there to be increased social division along with the differences in dialects, which also carry social meaning such as education levels and social status. This will have significant implications for reunification as there will have to be a rethinking of how the government confronts languages as this may be used to disadvantage some individuals through biases or hate.

Social construction and division are not limited to this case only but have large scale implications for other areas of the world that have divisions. This research shows that there is more to be observed in these areas such as ideology and how it came to be. This will assist in a better understanding of the full problem and may present better tactics to be used in these situations in order to minimize divisions and their impacts. Scholars researching division must increase attention to social factors similar to *Juche* that contribute to the divisions of other groups. The discourse around *Juche* shows that social constructions can reinforce nationalism,

division, disconnection, and otherness. This is important to observe as this can help inform other research by illuminating the importance of social constructions. Language is also an important factor for scholars researching division to consider as it is a social construction that reinforces ideas within the population such as globalism or isolationism of a society. It also shows how social constructs influence how different groups perceive each other such as intelligence level or otherness. Social constructions are important factors to consider in the division in any case.

These social constructions present many interesting questions that need to be examined further. One such question is what other influential social constructs exist within the DPRK and the ROK that reinforce their division? This study has only presented two cases here, but others exist, such as religion. An important question for political advisors to the ROK and the DPRK to answer is in light of the social constructions presented here, how do the people in power proceed? What policies help defectors integrate more easily into society in light of these findings? Does this change the way that the governments confront reunification talks? Outside of the case of Korea, scholars could research whether the public discourse is influential in the division in other areas that are divided.

The social constructions that influence division in the DPRK and the ROK are important to take into account moving forward. Differences between the DPRK and the ROK are not going to be easy to reconcile; however, that does not mean that efforts should not be taken to understand how to confront it. If these issues are taken to account more viable solutions may present themselves, and social and cultural understanding may ensue thereafter. Proper knowledge of how these differences came to be may allow for there to be more mutual understanding across the board and may provide unique, innovative solutions.



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