

"A NATION'S VIBRANT AND TRIUMPHANT INCARNATION IN A MAN":
PERSONALITY CULTS AND ISOLATION IN NORTH KOREA AND CUBA

by

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ABSTRACT

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This paper argues that Kim Il-Sung of North Korea and Fidel Castro of Cuba established personality cults of differing degrees of intensity due to the relative degrees of historical and political isolation present in each state. Although both states followed a similar pattern of dominance, resentment, nationalism, and socialism in their recent histories, their differing overall histories dictated the intensity of their leaders' personality cults. Korea's long history of self-imposed isolationism in combination with xenophobia was continued in Kim's self-reliance ideology and allowed for a fanatical personality cult to develop. Cuba's only experience with isolation was that imposed by the United States through its embargoes, and the resulting hostility between Cuba and the United States actually helped legitimize Castro's regime and personality cult.

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"A Nation's Vibrant and Triumphant Incarnation in a Man": Personality Cults and Isolation in North Korea and Cuba

I. Introduction

The totalitarian regimes of Kim Il-Sung in North Korea and Fidel Castro in Cuba have perpetuated their authority through rigid personality cults. A cult of personality essentially creates an idealized public image of a ruler through unquestioning flattery and praise found in mass media and propaganda, whose rule extends into the very culture of the state. While the personality cult of Kim Il-Sung, is undoubtedly the most infamous, extreme, and imposing personality cult seen in history, the personality cult of Fidel Castro is no less crucial to the latter regime.

Several factors allowed for both rulers to successfully establish their personality cults. The repercussions of colonial exploitation in both North Korea and Cuba created a feeling of urgency to adopt a national identity, and nationalism was a crucial tool in fending off threats from nations of greater cultural and economic influence, especially the United States. By the end of World War II, the Korean peninsula was desperate to regain its national identity after half a century of subjugation under the Japanese Empire, and Cuba had toiled in years of independence struggles against Spain only to become subject to U.S. cultural, political, and economic hegemony. The desire alone for nationalism and creating a national identity, however, may not have ensured the creation of personality cults. The degrees of isolation of North Korea and Cuba within the international community is what allowed for the personality cults to grow and take power.

The different manner by which North Korea and Cuba experienced isolation affected the severity of each nation's personality cults. I distinguish isolation from isolationism in one important way: one or more states may choose to isolate another state, causing *isolation* of that state. *Isolationism* is self-imposed isolation, in which a state chooses to opt out of the international community entirely. North Korea under Kim Il-Sung was isolationist, while Cuba under Fidel Castro was politically and economically isolated by the United States.

The Korean peninsula spent nearly all of its thousands of years of history as an isolationist state. Its reclusiveness earned it the title "Hermit Kingdom" (Kim and Park, 2005: 247), which it bears to this day. Unlike Korean history, Cuban history spans relatively few centuries and is characterized by constant interaction with greater powers and a markedly heterogeneous population. The most important characterization of Korean history is the ceaseless struggle of a single population intent on retaining, displaying, and celebrating its uniqueness in the face of hostile foreigners. Despite, or perhaps because of, its countless invasions and accounts of internal strife, the Korean peninsula fought intensely to maintain the uniqueness of its culture and to differentiate itself from its more powerful neighbors, China and Japan. Cuban history, on the other hand, cannot be recounted without the acknowledgement of the Spanish Empire and the United States. Moreover, Cuban culture cannot be described as isolated from its Spanish and U.S. influence. Cuba was inextricably intertwined with the superior powers of Spain and the United States, and the interactions between these three states comprise Cuban history.

Granted, geographical location also plays an important role in this difference. The Korean peninsula shares most of its border with China, with a small section shared with Russia, and Japan lies several hundred miles east in the Sea of Japan. Its relative physical isolation allowed for a completely homogenous people and culture to thrive and develop over thousands of years. Cuba, because of its proximity to the United States, Central America, and Hispaniola, served as a hub connecting all activities in the New World since its founding as a Spanish colony. Its only period of relative isolation occurred in the Pre-Columbian era, and remnants of this era in the form of indigenous peoples were almost entirely wiped out by the sixteenth century. The remaining indigenous peoples shared a Cuban identity with creoles of various descents as well as the descendants of African slaves and immigrants from all over the world, including China.

In recent history, both the Korean peninsula and Cuba faced a similar process of events. Dominance by a foreign power led to resentment, which in turn generated a strong, urgent sense of nationalism. Socialism emerged violently in both states' post-dominance period, and the ultimate result were two regimes run by unique combinations of nationalism and socialism, and legitimized in part by resentment. Korea's encounters with the outside world since the late 19th century, especially with the West, were largely negative. Korea faced severe subjugation and dominance under Japanese colonial rule, followed by the Korean War, which devastated the peninsula. Kim Il Sung would base his entire ideology, *juche* (self-reliance) on his country's historical isolationism, arguing that interaction with the outside world could yield no benefits— with Japanese colonial rule and the Korean War as his evidence. He sought to revive the peninsula's glorious past, defined by dynastic succession and general prosperity resulting wholly from self-

reliance and homogeneity. He legitimized his rule by claiming descent from ancient kings, and manipulated Korean history in all regards to mold his personality cult.

Cuban history, unlike Korean history, spans a relatively short number of centuries and is characterized by Cuba's reluctant dependence on superior foreign powers. The island was crucial to the commerce between Spain and its territories in the New World, and remained the most important asset of the Spanish colonial empire until its decline in the early 19th century. Its prominent role in early-New World commerce created a diverse Cuban populace, ranging from Afro-Cubans to indigenous peoples and descendants of Spaniards. While Spanish influence was decreasing, U.S. interest increased. The United States had considered annexation of the island, but eventually enacted the Platt Amendment in 1901 after the Spanish-American War. The amendment granted Cuba autonomy, though it allowed the U.S. to intervene in the country at will. It came to symbolize U.S. control over the island. Nationalism in Cuba and the desire for true independence began to brew as resentment towards Spanish colonial rule and U.S. hegemony also increased.

The economic, political, and cultural hegemony that the United States held over Cuba actually served to feed popular support for Fidel Castro's revolution in 1959. Once he rose to power, Castro manipulated American hostility towards his regime, using it to justify his growing personality cult and increasing domestic repression, and also to bolster the revolution's popularity among the masses. The economic sanctions of the U.S., along with its attempts to isolate Cuba internationally, actually helped strengthen Castro's regime considerably rather than topple it. Furthermore, while US-Cuban

relations worsened, Castro continued to receive popular support from all around the world, and ensured that Cuba remained involved with the international community.

This paper will argue that the personality cults of Kim Il-Sung in North Korea and Fidel Castro in Cuba were a direct result of the similar sentiments of nationalism and resentment that each state harbored after dominant and repressive periods in their respective histories. It will further argue that North Korean isolationism and Cuban isolation caused each personality cult to differ in terms of degrees of severity and absoluteness. I begin with a discussion of the rise to power of Kim Il-Sung and Fidel Castro and analyze how each personality cult was established. Following that, I analyze unique aspects of each regime, including the influence of Confucianism on North Korean policies and the role of Cuban exiles in the counterrevolution against Castro. I conclude with a discussion of how the personality cults functioned in terms of isolationism and isolation, respectively.

II. Kim Il-Sung

Seth (2011) argues that the Korean nationalist movement, although it occurred in conjunction with many other nationalist movements spawning in the first half of the twentieth century, was embraced more widely and passionately because of the "strong sense of Korean cultural identity, the homogeneity of Korean society, and the intrusive and intense nature of Japanese colonial rule" (Seth 2011, 299). Japanese rule over Korea in the first half of the twentieth century was harsh, destructive, and extremely debilitating to the Korean people (Kim 2012, 321). In the first decade of rule, the Japanese, through a highly centralized system, relied on an intense military policy to quell any and all Korean resistance, and stripped Koreans of their civil liberties such as free speech, suffrage, and representative government (Kim 2012, 322). The peninsula was exploited by Japan to serve solely Japanese purposes, and Japanese people viewed Koreans as a weak, conquered, and culturally inferior people. Koreans, conversely, saw themselves as culturally superior to the Japanese, and thus never paused resistance attempts against Japan.

Despite unrelenting Japanese efforts to destroy the Korean national consciousness, as Robinson (1988) observes, it was relatively easy for Koreans to resist them: "The Korean masses were... unified and culturally homogenous, sharing a well-developed folk culture closely tied to their long history as a tightly knit agrarian society—a fact that eased the process of developing a strong national consciousness in the twentieth century" (Robinson 1988, 17). The most important resistance movement, the March First Movement, began on March 1, 1919. Both peaceful and violent demonstrations took place with nearly two million participants (Seth 2011, 269). The

Japanese retaliated harshly, killing and arresting thousands, and eventually suppressed the demonstrations. However, the movement was a success in uniting the Korean people under the shared desire for independence. The March First Movement is considered the birth of Korean nationalism, or the consolidation of several small nationalist groups into one large and inclusive movement (Seth 2011, 269). In the years leading up to the movement, independence groups formed by exiles appeared in Manchuria and Vladivostok.

In the years following the March First Movement, the Korean nationalist movement witnessed an ideological split. While most Korean nationalists at the time were moderate nationalists who placed more emphasis on culture than politics and looked to the West for intellectual inspiration, radical nationalist groups existed as well. The first Communist organization was founded by exiles in Russia (Seth 2011, 277). The Soviet Koreans', as they would be known, influence on the general nationalist movement during the Korean colonial period was minimal, but they were crucial to the creation of the North Korean state after 1945.

Conditions in Korea worsened and resentment towards the Japanese grew as World War II loomed over Asia. Japan reorganized the Korean peninsula to aid in its wartime mobilization and adopted intense assimilation policies, prohibiting Koreans from speaking Korean and writing in the Korean alphabet *hangul*, and forcing them to adopt Japanese names and Shinto worship (Kim 2012, 350). Unskilled Korean laborers were forced into heavy manual labor to create military supplies, young Korean men were drafted into the Japanese army, and young women were recruited as "comfort women," or

sexual slaves, for soldiers at the front lines (Kim 2012, 349). Korean culture and identity was completely suppressed on the Korean peninsula during this period.

Korean resistance still refused to cease, however. Revolutionary nationalist movements abroad in Manchuria and Russia became the main theater for the independence struggle once Korean identity and nationalism was silenced on the peninsula. Revolutionary attempts were led by mostly communist groups, who had always believed the road to Korean independence was a violent one (Seth 2011, 286). The guerrilla struggle began in the early 1930s and was ultimately thwarted by Japanese forces in the early 1940s. Remaining guerrilla fighters either fled to Russia or retreated deeper into China to fight alongside the Chinese Communist Party.

Japanese colonial rule over the Korean peninsula stifled any calls for independence or public nationalist movements, preventing any members of the Korean professional class from gaining the reputation and credibility needed to serve as a national leader. Therefore, the men that did eventually become national leaders in 1945 were exiles with unblemished reputations— Syngman Rhee in the south, and Kim Il-Sung in the north.

Little is known about Kim Il-Sung's life before his return to Korea in 1945. He was born Kim Song-Ju in 1912 to a peasant family near Pyongyang, who attempted to escape poverty by moving to Manchuria (Suh 1988, 3). He attended formal education until middle school, and, having spent most of his youth in China, spoke very little Korean. He became involved in various anti-Japanese struggles in Manchuria, (controlled by the Japanese and called Manchukuo from 1933-1945), joining Korean nationalist groups and the Northeast Anti-Japanese Army in 1935 (Seth 2011, 310). He led several

invasions of Japanese outposts along the China-North Korea border in the late 1930s. Around the same time, Kim changed his name to Il-Sung, meaning "one star" (Suh 1988, 11). His education in Chinese schools and fluency in the language helped him establish rapport with high-ranking Chinese guerrillas. Kim became a notable guerrilla fighter and was well-respected by other guerrilla fighters and members of the Chinese Communist Party, of which he was also a member. Japanese forces eventually crushed the guerrilla activity occurring in Manchuria, and Kim fled to the Soviet Union from 1940 -1945.

The United States began to ponder the future of the Korean peninsula in 1943, on the eve of the conclusion of World War II. After Japan finally surrendered in 1945, the United States hastily decided to split the Korean peninsula at the 38th parallel to prevent further Soviet and leftist expansion. Although Korea was free of Japanese rule, it had not achieved the independence it so strongly desired; conversely, Korea had no role in its own fate, and for the first time in its history, it was a divided peninsula.

The Manchurian guerrilla groups residing in the Soviet Union were incorporated into the Soviet Far Eastern Command. Kim Il-Sung was elected by fellow guerrilla leaders to represent Korean communists' (the Soviet Koreans, as mentioned earlier) interests in this new military organization, and was highly recommended to Soviet forces (Lim 2009, 15). Korea was liberated of Japanese rule in 1945. When Kim and other Korean guerrillas returned to North Korea, they were not received as heroes by the Korean people; rather, they were greeted as one of many anti-Japanese factions (Quinones and Tragert 114). Although he was unknown to the Korean people and was not particularly well-versed in the Korean language at this time, Kim faced little competition in Pyongyang. He was central in the development of the Korean People's

Army, which granted him the support of the entire military— too powerful to be challenged. The Soviet Union chose Kim as North Korea's leader under the pretense that he was cooperative and pro-Russian. However, Kim immediately broke away from Soviet orthodoxy and sought to establish a North Korean Workers' Party that included the masses rather than solely elites. Kim spent much of his time in farms and factories, providing "on-the-spot guidance" to the masses, and his Party's membership exceeded 800,000 by 1948 (Kim 2012, 393). The Soviet Union helped create a centralized government with branches on all local levels as well as promoted Kim Il-Sung as a leader, placing his picture in public places next to that of Stalin, and naming the main university in North Korea Kim Il-Sung University in 1946 (Seth 2011, 314). Despite his initial low standing in the state, Kim amassed fierce loyalty in North Korea in only one year.

While the Soviet Union helped establish Kim as leader, his popularity derived from his strong nationalist ideology rather than a Marxist-Leninist socialist ideology. Kim's idea of *juche*, (literally "autonomous subject"), or self-reliance, was appealing to Koreans still recovering from harsh Japanese colonial rule. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea declared its statehood in 1948, with Kim as leader. His role was strengthened further when the North Korean Workers' Party and the South Korean Workers' Party united to form a single communist party, the Korean Workers' Party in 1949. Kim was elected chairman of the party. In the words of official North Korean history, "Comrade Kim Il Sung, the national hero of the Korean people, was elected Premier of the Cabinet and the Head of State of the DPRK" (Founding of the DPRK, 2011). Kim enacted a large amount of reforms from 1948-50, nationalizing major

industries and most importantly, confiscating and redistributing large plots of land. The peasant farmers who received these lands, on top of being welcomed as Party members, provided a powerful basis of support that helped legitimize Kim's rule early on.

Both North Korea and South Korea had declared themselves states in 1948, and both believed they ruled the entire peninsula. By early 1949, Kim had already begun planning an invasion of the south, lobbying for aid from the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union backed the proposal, and convinced the People's Republic of China to back it as well. North Korea invaded South Korea in 1950, and the resulting Korean War lasted until 1953. North Korean history, which calls the Korean War the Fatherland Liberation War, recounts its details quite differently from fact. North Korean history claims the war originated in 1945 with the division of the Korean peninsula, and the original North Korean invasion was a response to prior South Korean invasions (Kim 2012, 407). North Korean forces appeared to succeed in their efforts in the beginning, claiming Seoul. However, South Korea received support in the form of U.S. and U.N. troops, who were intent on unifying the peninsula. The forces crossed into North Korean territory, and China sent its troops to support North Korea. Conflict would continue on territory borders for a full year with great losses to both sides until it reached a stalemate. The United States realized reunification of the peninsula was impossible and began truce talks with the Soviet Union and North Korea. The Korean Armistice Agreement was signed in 1953, establishing a border between the two Korean nations. A staggering loss of both military and civilian life was attributed to the Korean War, and the Korean peninsula remains at war to this day until a peace treaty is signed.

North Korea lost the Korean War and Kim Il-Sung struggled with regaining his hold over the state. However, North Korean history memorializes the Korean War differently, with one source stating that "The three-year-long Korean War ended with a great victory of the Korean people" (Founding of the DPRK, 2011). To maintain his position of power, Kim began ruthless purges of potential opponents, publicly executing former communist leaders as scapegoats for his failure to achieve his aims in the war. By the end of the 1950s, Kim was exercising complete dominance over North Korea and faced no further challenges or opposition. *Juche* ideology became state policy, and North Korea began to focus exclusively on heavy industrialization. Kim used the destruction from the Korean War to mobilize the masses into rebuilding the military. The Korean War served as an example of the terrors of U.S. imperialism and foreign intervention. In a 1960 speech celebrating what Kim called the liberation of the Korean people, he said "So long as an aggressive army of foreign imperialism exists in his territory, no one can speak of his national independence nor can the people live in peace" (Kim 1975, 2). Kim and his *juche* ideology dictated that socialism and nationalism could not be expressed properly if foreign aggression existed in a society. Thus, Kim began to distance himself from the Soviet Union and China, emphasizing his *juche* principle of self-reliance. *Juche* became the absolute ideology of North Korea and began to dictate all affairs in the state. Although Kim already maintained tight control of the state since its founding, the implementation of *juche* allowed for his personality cult to grow.

III. Fidel Castro

Benjamin (1977) defines economic hegemony of one state over another by examining foreign economic presence in four areas: trade, raw materials, agriculture, and infrastructure and industry (Benjamin 1977, 13). He notes that the United States became dominant in all four economic areas of Cuba after 1902. The complete hegemony stems from the Platt Amendment, enacted by the U.S. in 1901, which essentially allowed the U.S. to intervene in Cuba at will "for the preservation of Cuban independence" (Pérez 2003, 110). This policy in particular gave way to a branch of anti-U.S. nationalism and antihegemony among Cubans whom would eventually turn towards socialism.

The mid-twentieth century saw a rise in resistance to U.S. dominance. Nationalist, anti-U.S. and anti-imperialist thoughts rose in popularity, with Cubans realizing their original desire for independence. The historiography of the war for independence, promoted in Cuba as the Spanish-American War, was disputed and rejected, granting Cuba a greater role in its own struggle. Hostility towards U.S. economic hegemony and the Platt Amendment continued to grow. Pérez (2003) notes that U.S. intervention in Cuba required more intervention and caused more problems than it solved (Pérez 2003: 166). Local government began to take a stand against foreign intervention in the 1920s, and the U.S. felt pressure on its previously-undisputed hegemony. The Platt Amendment was nullified in the Treaty on Relations between Cuba and the United States in 1934, and a new Cuban constitution was written in 1940 under the rule of Fulgencio Batista. The United States privately detested the new Cuban constitution, but, as Benjamin (1977) notes, "found it difficult to criticize openly a document that Cubans heralded as the fulfillment of long-standing goals" (Benjamin 1977, 97). According to the United States,

Cuban legitimacy established by its new constitution came at the cost of the stability and moderation with which the United States had become accustomed. Benjamin (1977) observes that Cubans who were involved with the United States and openly conformed to U.S. wishes could now be accused of ignoring basic Cuban principles, so that cooperation between Cuban and U.S. officials actually reduced instead of augmented the Cuban side's legitimacy.

Cuban discontent culminated in the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista, who ruled both directly and indirectly from 1934 to 1952. He continued strengthening economic and security ties with the United States during World War II, but the economic opportunities presented to Cuba by the war were underdeveloped (Pérez 2003, 205). Continued corruption and mismanagement brought about few beneficial changes to the economy, and Cuba's close import linkage with the United States resulted in mass shortages of wartime goods on the island. Batista officially turned over power in 1944, though he maintained power and influence in Cuban politics. Political upheaval characterized the years that followed, and corruption by way of Cuban locals and U.S. gangsters became commonplace in Havana. Matters worsened when Batista launched a successful military coup in 1952 and regained power, eliminating constitutional rule in Cuba along with political competition and freedom of expression.

Fidel Castro hailed from a generation of disgruntled Cubans who had tired of corruption and exploitation at the hands of U.S.-backed dictators. Castro had dabbled in revolutionary struggles in the late 1940s, which only fueled his desire to witness change in Cuba. He became involved in a plan to overthrow the Trujillo dictatorship of the Dominican Republic in 1947, but withdrew at the last minute. He also joined a riot in

Colombia in 1948 which attempted to rally protestors and soldiers around leftist ideas (Sweig 2012, 20). His first revolutionary movement in Cuba occurred on July 26, 1953, and would become known as the 26th of July Movement. Castro, along with his brother Raul Castro and 135 others, staged an attack on the Moncada army barracks on the eastern side of the island. Much of the group was killed, and Fidel and Raul were arrested. A campaign for amnesty two years later freed the brothers from prison, and they fled to Mexico to plan a second Cuban initiative.

In late 1956, the Castro brothers, along with sympathizer Ernesto "Che" Guevara and 80 men, landed their boat, *Granma*, on the eastern side of Cuba. Most of the men were lost, but the survivors progressed into the Sierra Maestra and began their insurgency against Batista (Sweig 2012, 22). Castro and the 26th of July Movement became the forerunners of the anti-Batista sentiment brewing on the island. Several revolutionary groups already existed on the island, and they aided Castro's insurgency, providing his "Rebel Army", or *sierra*, weapons, political exposure, and other necessities. Castro and the 26th of July Movement were immensely popular on the island, and it was clear even before their victory that the guerrillas would dominate post-Batista affairs on the island (Sweig 2012, 23).

When the revolutionary efforts of the Castro brothers and Guevara succeeded in early 1959, there existed very little political consensus among the various insurgent groups. Expectations for the future of the revolution were at the time uncertain, because the rebel leaders intentionally expressed their objectives vaguely in a manner that appealed to the broadest possible audience. The leaders also avoided formalizing any political institutions during the insurrection to ensure they maintained strength on the

ground. Although they promoted "national unity" throughout their guerrilla struggles, Castro and the 26th of July Movement intended to exercise hegemony over all revolutionary groups once in power (Sweig 2012, 26). Before he had officially come to power, his secretary Celia Sanchez noted that Fidel Castro had already become *nuestro caudillo*— a term that translates to "our leader," with very strong connotations (Sweig 2012, 37). Castro had the popularity and, as commander in chief of the Rebel Army, title necessary to quickly become the center of revolutionary power. Indeed, Castro enjoyed enormous popularity: "[He was] viewed as the embodiment of Cuba's long national quest for unity, independence, liberation from corruption, and an end to dirty politics (*politiquería*)" (Sweig 2012, 40). The entire island, regardless of race or class, was virtually united in its support for Castro. Not long after the success of the revolution in 1959, Castro began a symbolic march of triumph across the country. His personality cult was already brewing. Similarly to Kim Il-Sung's "on-the-spot guidance" tours, Castro visited every province of Cuba, kissing babies and meeting with all manners of the Cuban population. He used this tour to reinforce the idea of "national unity" stressed during the revolutionary struggle, which really meant his own hegemony over revolutionary power.

Castro strategically consolidated his power after the revolutionary triumph. The *Directorio Revolucionario* was one of the main anti-Batista groups that continued to contend with Castro for power well into the 1960s. Castro neutralized the threat of the *Directorio* by sending its two top leaders to the Soviet Union as diplomats, which essentially cut them off from Cuban domestic affairs. He also refrained from adopting the highest position in the new government structure of Cuba, instead maintaining his powerful position as commander in chief of the Rebel Army. Castro assigned mostly

civilian members of the 26th of July Movement to government positions, projecting an image of a moderate, middle-class revolution rather than a radical one.

Castro completely reorganized Cuban society. After years of corruption of the electoral democratic and party systems, a one-party state was established with Castro as the absolute, uncontested authority. Most land, sugar mills, utilities, small businesses, and private properties were nationalized. Discriminatory laws were abolished in an attempt to promote equality, and educational programs directed at the poorest parts of the population were implemented. The state initially attempted rapid industrialization, but having Che Guevara as minister of industries, president of the National Institute for Agrarian Reform, and president of the Central Bank led to mismanagement and inefficiency (Sweig 2012, 46). The regime also immediately implemented strong restrictions on free speech and the press, and severely limited civil rights, in order to maintain hegemony and protect itself against internal and external threats. Mass organizations such as the Cuban Workers Federation became tools of political control.

IV. Personality Cults

A personality cult is not a dictatorship. A personality cult distinguishes itself from a dictatorship in that the propagator of a personality cult transcends political dominance. Hunter (2012) notes that a personality cult is born when the figure at the center of the personality cult becomes the absolute authority on all aspects of society. A personality cult does not merely affect, but dominates the daily lives of every citizen in the state and every decision that is made. Ravine (2011) observes the importance in culture to the success of a personality cult: "Controlling the culture gives a person control over the people's mindset by giving his people a pride and national identity on which each person defines him or herself" (Ravine 2011, 6).

The figure at the center of a personality cult portrays himself as a venerable father, a paternal figure who gives life to every individual of the state. Once a personality cult has instilled itself in the identity of a people, the people will act in accordance to what the figure at the center of the personality cult decrees. Aguirre (2014) describes the paternal aspect of the personality cult as such: "People operate in light of their identity, that is to say, of their system of values... and if these values gravitate in the direction of the Fatherly Protector... who rescues us from fear, the people will consequently respond under this motto: 'That which is good for everyone, is good for me. And who says which things are good for everyone? Father.'" (Aguirre 2014, 131). The paternal figure, the object of the personality cult, indisputably knows what is best for his state and for his children.

Paradoxically, Aguirre also observes that this same larger-than-life figure is portrayed as a humble, approachable, and simple man. He notes that the fatherly figure is one characterized by an unbreakable spirit of sacrifice, someone who gave his entire life to the well-being of the people. This grand modesty and sacrifice, in turn, demand equally grand sentiments of gratitude from the people.

V. *Juche* and Kimilsungism

Kim Il-Sung's personality cult is the quintessential personality cult. The *juche* ideology gave way to Kimilsungism, in which Kim's words became law. North Korea was founded as a socialist state which prioritized the Korean Workers' Party before all else, but *juche* and Kimilsungism converted the state into Kim's domain. Absolute obedience to Kim and *juche* became the norm as dissidence transformed from unacceptable to unimaginable. All mass media, including art, literature, cinema, and music, became state propaganda promoting the infallibility of Kim, who adopted the title "Supreme Leader". His other titles included "Ever-victorious iron-willed brilliant commander," "sun of the nation," and "the red sun of the oppressed people of the world" (Suh 1988, 322). While he continued his "on-the-spot guidance" tours to connect with all levels of his society throughout the years, these tours demanded a huge display of grandeur, including large-scale choreographed demonstrations. The places he visited then became sacred. The personality cult expanded in profundity and became its most extreme in the 1970s. For his sixtieth birthday in 1972, a massive bronze statue of Kim was erected in Pyongyang along with a marble museum recounting his heroism in ninety-two exhibitions (Seth 2011, 359). All North Koreans were required to wear a badge with his photo emblazoned on it, and photos of him were placed in every room of every building. Eventually, as Seth (2011) notes, statues, shrines, and other dedications to Kim littered nearly all of North Korea.

The image of a "fatherly leader," as mentioned by Aguirre (2014), was central to Kimilsungism. North Koreans were taught to believe that natural life came from their

biological parents, but social life came from the Great Leader, Kim Il-Sung (Kim 2012, 457). North Korean propaganda promoted the idea of Kim as a paternal figure, often showing him in scenes surrounded by smiling children. The scenes symbolized Kim's rule over the people: the omniscient father wholly committed to the needs of his grateful, loyal, obedient, and happy children. Citizens bowed before his portrait and gave thanks to him instead of actual parents. The media emphasized the idea that Kim was a humble, simple, and doting father, saying: "Comrade Kim Il-Sung, a genius of revolution... has lived his entire sixty years only for our people's freedom and happiness and the victory of the Korean and world revolutions" (Cumings 1997, 411).

Kim Il-Sung's personality cult eventually encompassed his entire family and created the "Kim dynasty." To ensure his larger-than-life image would prevail even after his death, Kim Il-Sung named his son, Kim Jong-Il, successor to rule of North Korea. Aguirre (2014) notes that leaders of personality cults "Attempt to transcend death... by way of the perpetuation of the revolutionary myth and the attainment of political utopia which they embody" (Aguirre 2014, 249), and Kim Il-Sung perpetuated his own revolutionary myth through the addition of his family. Kim Il-Sung's mother and father were celebrated as national heroes and participants in the anti-Japanese struggle. Statues and shrines of the Kim family joined those of Kim Il-Sung throughout the country.

The personality cult dictated a complete rewriting of Korean history. Modern Korean history became a celebration of the Kim family's achievements. North Korean historians attempted to rewrite all of Korean history to fit the current ruling ideology, following the tradition established by Confucian historiographers centuries earlier. As Ch'oe says, North Korean history was specifically written to "Glorify the uniqueness of

Korea's historical legacies in order to satisfy the particularistic ego of nationalism" (Ch'oe 1981, 503). Suh (1988) notes that North Korean historians traced Kim's ancestry back twelve generations and added a great deal of embellishments and exaggerations to feats that may or may not have been carried out by members of the Kim family (Suh 1988, 5). Kim's own history, which as mentioned is vague at best, has been filled with rich details. Contrastingly, historians omit Kim's Chinese education to bolster the idea of a purely Korean leader who never had to rely on foreigners. North Korean historians view the modern period as a national struggle against foreign aggression, and members of Kim Il-Sung's family have played the predominant role. One instance is a particularly important example of the Korean people's resistance to U.S. imperialism: the sinking of the U.S. merchant ship *General Sherman* near Pyongyang in 1866. North Korean scholars inserted Kim Ung-u, Kim Il-Sung's great great grandfather, in that history, claiming he led the attack on the ship. Burdick (2010) notes that Kim Ung-u's role in sinking the ship was not added to North Korean official history until the 1980s, and was inserted to prove Kim Il-Sung's merit as a revolutionary leader through heredity and genetics— not coincidentally around the same time that Kim Jong-Il was preparing as his father's successor. North Korean historians later insert Kim Il-Sung's father, Kim Hyong-jik, in the March First Movement of 1919, evident in a North Korean history textbook: "The great and eminent leader of our nation's anti-Japanese people's movement..." (Hart 2000, 153), and claim that six-year-old Kim Il-Sung also participated. Ch'oe argues that these claims "Are totally new and unfamiliar to the outside world" (Ch'oe 1981, 520).

The personality cult of Kim Il-Sung and his family was successfully established and reached extreme levels of profundity because it catered to a uniquely Korean

worldview, which had been shaped by Korean history and rocked by Japanese colonial rule and the Korean War. All aspects of the personality cult are reminiscent of aspects of Korean culture and history. As Seth (2011) notes, "...[Self-sufficiency in] North Korea was carried out with such a particular urgency that, coupled with the country's isolation, its authoritarian ruthlessness, and its ultranationalism, gave it a unique quality" (Seth 2011, 357). The urgent need for *juche*- self-sufficiency and nationalism- in the eyes of Kim Il-Sung stems from negative experiences with foreigners dating back hundreds of years in Korean history. Korea, which had fought to distinguish its culture from its neighbors of Japan and China for most of its history, was completely subjugated by both states in its recent history.

The principle of *sadae*, or serving the superior China, adopted by the Joseon dynasty (1392-1897), its various conflicts with Japan and the Western world, and the period of Japanese colonial rule were especially humiliating to Koreans in the mid-twentieth century. Koreans saw these events as past weaknesses and collective national failure. Perhaps also from a Confucian perspective, Koreans viewed these events as examples of poor governance, similarly to the Confucian tradition of viewing prior rulers' actions as a mirror for current governance (Schultz 2004). The discontentment and humiliation from these historical episodes was only amplified by the destruction brought about in part by the United States during the Korean War. *Juche* as an ideology grew in power and influence in the years following the Korean War because North Koreans did not wish to repeat the errors of their past.

Kim Il-Sung's regime was able to enforce extreme isolation, without which the personality cult could not maintain its rigidity, for the same reasons that North Koreans

accepted *juche*. The Korean peninsula, beyond being geographically isolated, spent most of its history in relative cultural and political isolation from the rest of the world, and experienced general growth and well-being during these periods. The fact that North Korea is called "The Hermit Kingdom" today is perhaps an unintentional compliment linking it to the isolationist policies of the Joseon dynasty, with which North Korea also shares its Korean name. *Juche* has been described as "a doctrine of markedly xenophobic character" (Aguirre 2014, 1926) and a "racial-nationalist history" (Seth 2011, 357) because of its portrayal of the Korean people as racially pure and virtuous and all other peoples as inferior and threatening. The xenophobia present in *juche* ideology is another extreme representation of the Korean people's discontentment with the rest of the world as well as their pride of maintaining ethnic homogeneity for thousands of years (Kim 2012, 442).

The complete rewriting of Korean history to suit the *juche* ideology was also possible because of the longstanding Korean tradition of historiography. Hart (2000) argues that Korean national identity is based on two ideas: "National history is both eternal (history is an unfolding story with today as the logical arrival point) and natural (we are who we are because it is our essential character to be)" (Hart 2000, 138), and Korean historiography has always catered to these ideas. Therefore, rewriting history from a *juche* perspective automatically justifies it as the only logical step in the continuing history of Korea. Even before Japanese colonial rule, the Korean peninsula had seen many versions of its own history written and rewritten to suit the needs of the current ruling dynasty. Korean historiography was important to reaffirming the uniqueness of the Korean people, especially during times of struggle and subjugation.

After Japanese colonial rule had ended, various versions of Korean history existed. The Japanese version stressed the Koreans' cultural inferiority and limited the vastness of its ancient dynasties (Kim 2012, 353), while nationalistic histories from the same period sought to refute and discredit Japanese historiography and stress the importance of the struggle for Korean independence. With such a large array of historiographies existing in Korean history, especially in the period directly before Kim Il-Sung's rule, it is not difficult to understand how North Korea was able to completely rewrite Korean history with relative ease.

Moreover, as Confucian historiographers of the ancient dynasties used historical accounts to bolster the power of the current ruler and reflect on the errors of past rulers, North Korean historiography also utilizes Korean history to legitimize its regime. North Korea, despite calling itself Joseon, actually denounced the Joseon dynasty for its weaknesses, mainly its feudalistic class structures and poor interactions with the outside world. It emphasizes a stark difference between the feudal era of Joseon (called the Ri or Yi dynasty in some cases, including official North Korean accounts) and the modern period of Joseon, which is North Korea under *juche*.

Despite North Korea's official denouncement of the Joseon dynasty, much of Kim Il-Sung's ideology may find its roots in Joseon thinking (Kim 2012, 320). The idea of the "Kim dynasty" in itself draws from the long dynasties of Korea's past, Joseon being the longest, and the Confucian social order present in Joseon is present in North Korea, especially in loyalty to a single ruler of the state. North Korea may have adopted the Joseon name for several reasons. Since the dynasty ruled for nearly five hundred years before falling to Japanese colonial rule, the North Korean government was able to assert

its legitimacy by claiming to be a direct continuation of Joseon and erasing the period of Japanese colonial rule. Moreover, through its name, Joseon celebrates its ancestry in the very foundation of the Korean people—the Gojoseon—and the North Korean regime, in turn, asserts its legitimacy by connecting itself to the ancient history of the peninsula.

The absolutism of the *juche* ideology and Kimilsungism, as Kim (2011, 458) notes, bears a striking resemblance to a fanatical religious cult. Religion and philosophy undeniably influenced Kim Il-Sung in his youth, as he lived in a Confucian society and belonged to a Christian family. To this day, Kim Il-Sung is essentially a god in North Korea; he is the country's "Eternal President" who guided his people along the "road to paradise" (Cumings 1997, 411) and through *juche* is said to have achieved one of the greatest examples of modern thought. Kim Il-Sung may be thought of as a Christ-like or god-like figure to North Koreans, or his followers, and it is possible that aspects of Christianity were intentionally incorporated into the Kim personality cult. It is impossible to prove, however, because Christianity, as a prime example of foreign influence (it is called *Sodhak*, or Western Learning, in Korean) does not exist in North Korean history and society.

The idea of the "fatherly leader" as seen in Kimilsungism is reminiscent of Confucianism and can be seen as an extreme version of filial piety. Seth (2011, 369) observes that leadership in North Korea was portrayed in a markedly Confucian way: Kim Il-Sung was a benevolent ruler, and society was one large family exercising constant reciprocal love. The philosophy of Confucianism could be applied to governing a country as well as familial relations, and it was always "deeply embedded in the fabric of Korean society" (Kim: 2012, 65). Therefore, it would not have been difficult for Kim, as a

product of this Confucian society, to modify aspects of Confucianism and apply it to *juche*, because North Koreans may have been more willing to accept the extremity of Kimilsungism when it carried some familiar Confucian aspects of leadership.

VI. *Fidelismo* and the Revolution

The personality cult of Fidel Castro in Cuba differs quite drastically from that of Kim Il-Sung. Castro never had to resort to the extreme measures of Kim to promote his absolute authority, and Cuba, unlike North Korea, is not characterized by elaborate and ornate dedications to its leader that appear as absurdities to the outside world. However, Castro indeed cultivated a powerful personality cult and maintained an omnipresence in the lives of all Cubans. According to Aguirre (2014), "[Castro was] one of the most skilled manipulators of public opinion in the modern era of communication. He took up radial microphones, monopolized television cameras to speak for hours upon hours consecutively, inspired a filmography that catapulted his mythical aura, broke up the Cuban journalistic culture - of strong democratic tradition - and implanted a system of governmental propaganda that serviced his words, journeys, and occurrences, regardless of how fictitious and ridiculous these may have been" (Aguirre 2014, 2457).

In terms of the extremity of personality cults, Aguirre places Fidel Castro's personality cult in the middle of the spectrum (Aguirre 2014, 2444). Castro's personality cult could never reach the extremes of Kim's personality cult, and Castro seemingly did not desire it. He vocally denounced the idea of his personality cult several times: "No such cult for any living revolutionary exists here [in Cuba], like statues, official photos, and names of streets or institutions. Those who rule are people and not gods" (Aguirre 2014, 2460). Aguirre argues that Castro vehemently denied "excessive personalization" of his regime to avoid the dooming characterization of a *caudillo* regime, which had seen many rises and falls throughout Latin American history. However, paradoxically, it may

be argued that Castro's regime is far more representative of a Latin American *caudillo* regime than the personality cult-driven regimes of Kim in North Korea, Mao in China, or Stalin in the Soviet Union. As Kapcia (2008) notes, labeling Castro a *caudillo* implied certain "Cultural assumptions [which] meant less need to define a system or philosophy" (Kapcia 2008, 632). Despite his negations, Castro's regime became synonymous with Cuba.

Castro tightened his grip on Cuba in the 1960s. Dissent was not tolerated, and suspicious figures were either exiled, jailed, or sent to labor camps. Castro aimed to provide all Cubans with material and social dignity, at the expense of political and civil freedom. He, like Kim Il-Sung, garnered the support of the peasant class by improving health, literacy, and living conditions. The regime conducted mass rallies in the Revolution Square in Havana, where Castro "mesmerized crowds" (del Aguila 2011) with his speeches and mobilized the population with inspiring words on Cuban nationalism. Castro regularly visited schools and interacted with the Cuban population, cultivating the image of a simple, humble man, while simultaneously projecting a larger-than-life image through state-run media and propaganda, as is necessary to create a personality cult.

Hunter (2012) notes the significance of Castro's guerrilla uniform, which he wore in all public appearances. Castro wore a guerrilla uniform to differentiate himself from the highly-decorated leaders of Cuba's past, and to further cultivate the image of a modest man who could relate to the peasant classes (Hunter 2012, 33). Aguirre notes the presence of his uniform in a celebratory passage from state-run newspaper *Granma* likening him to the sun: "The Greeks believed the sun was transported by a chariot; the

Egyptians imagined that it traveled in a chariot with the sails of the wind. We Cuban patriots firmly know that the sun wears olive-green clothing, has the soul of a guerrilla of stern ideals, and the boots of a tireless climber of mountains and dreams" (Aguirre 2014, 2509). The idea of Castro sacrificing himself for the good of the people has also been emphasized. In a 1961 essay, Che Guevara celebrates Castro's personality, saying "He has the qualities of a great leader, added to which are his personal gifts of audacity, strength, courage, and an extraordinary determination always to discern the will of the people — and these have brought him the position of honor and sacrifice that he occupies today" (Guevara 1961).

Furthermore, the personality cult of Fidel Castro dictated that the people had every reason to be happy and grateful under his rule. Horowitz and Suchlicki (2003) observe that Castro "In general behaved as if all were well in the best of all possible worlds, i.e. socialist Cuba" (Horowitz and Suchlicki 2003, 87), very much like Kim Il-Sung in his North Korean paradise. While it appeared that Castro had solved Cuba's problems on a superficial level, in reality, the population faced regular shortages of necessities, was under strict control at all times, and racial discrimination still abounded. Regardless, Castro was praised and celebrated ceaselessly, with common phrases being S (Aguirre 2014, 2484).

The most important aspect of Fidel Castro's personality cult is the idea of the Revolution, which has also been connected to the idea of *fidelismo*. The idea of the Revolution differentiates itself from the Cuban Revolution, which was the actual occurrence of 1959 that placed Castro in power. The Revolution is the governing state of mind of Cuba since 1959, and the ideal towards which Cuban policies theoretically strive.

In Cuba, the Revolution is sacred, and Fidel Castro is a living symbol of the Revolution. The reverence of the Revolution begins with the revolutionary struggle itself, the Cuban Revolution, which has been mythologized in Cuba. Anything linked to the Revolution was celebrated— for example, the province on the eastern side of the island on which Castro landed his boat at the onset of his insurgency, Granma, is now also called Granma. The state-run newspaper was called *Periodico Granma*. Although the revolutionary struggle triumphed with the cooperation of various revolutionary groups, the Revolution claims Castro's Rebel Army, the *sierra*, were the sole victors of the struggle (Sweig 2012, 22). Those who were involved in the overthrow of Batista came to view the experience as the essential formative period of what Sweig (2012) calls "The "new Cuban man," that near-superhuman individual, free of material wants and bourgeois false consciousness" (Sweig 2012, 24). Che Guevara would attempt to impose this ideal onto all of Cuban society, and eventually, internationally.

VII. Similarities

Although North Korea and Cuba have distinctly different histories, the states share an important pattern in the events that led up to the establishment of the respective personality cults. Both North Korea and Cuba experienced a period of dominance, which led to bitter resentment and feelings of antagonism. North Korea experienced dominance and subjugation under Japanese colonial rule, while Cuba was dominated by a period of political corruption and unrest caused in part by the United States. The periods of dominance and resulting resentment fueled powerful nationalistic sentiments in both states which then manifested as violent forms of socialism. It is important to stress the unique nature of these forms of socialism, as neither state adhered strictly to the tenets of Marxist-Leninist Communism, instead utilizing a mixture of socialist ideas and nationalism catered to the interests of Kim and Castro.

As mentioned earlier, Castro and the 26th of July Movement maintained vague political goals for Cuba in the time immediately following the revolution's triumph in order to appeal to a broad audience. Castro was hesitant to reveal his political affiliation, and he regarded the Popular Socialist Party (PSP) as a remnant of past dirty politics in Cuba. Castro actually named his affiliation as a reaction to hostility from the United States, especially in the days leading up to the failed Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961. He declared himself a "Marxist-Leninist until the last days of my life" (Ramonet 2007, 200) and created a political party that would eventually become the Cuban Communist Party, or PCC. In the context of the Cold War, Castro's declaration was seen as aligning himself and Cuba with the Soviet Union. The reality of the situation, however, is more nationalist

than anything: "Cuban revolutionaries explicitly and repeatedly related the creation of the Cuban Communist Party not simply to ideological alliance to the Soviet Union, but rather to Cuba's long quest to secure true independence from imperial powers" (Sweig 2012, 43). Since then, Castro has referred to himself as a "utopian Communist" (Ramonet 2007, 259) on several occasions, and generally utilized ideology as a means to garner support abroad rather than to serve as the driving factor of his regime.

Kim Il-Sung identified with Marxist-Leninism from a young age, but would distance himself from the ideology as he distanced North Korea from the Soviet Union. As a guerrilla youth in Manchuria, Kim aligned with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in their anti-Japanese struggle. In 1945, the Soviet Union appointed Kim as chairman of the northern branch of the Korean Communist Party, which later became the Workers' Party of North Korea. In 1949, the party merged with its southern counterpart to become the Workers' Party of Korea, of which Kim was chairman. Although originally a Communist party, the party began to change once the *juche* ideology was introduced. Kim claimed *juche* was applying the "universal principle of Marxism and Leninism and the experiences of other countries to suit the national characteristics of one's own country" (Suh 1988, 302), but Marxist-Leninism eventually became irrelevant to the ideology as it grew increasingly nationalistic. *Juche* became the leading ideology of the Workers' Party of Korea, the sole party in North Korea.

Both North Korea and Cuba were reluctant, at best, to align with the Soviet Union and were indeed ashamed of their dependence on the state. For North Korea, public admiration for the Soviet Union was quickly silenced as *juche* began to take hold as the ruling ideology. In Cuba, although the Soviet alliance appeared to make sense from an

outside, superficial perspective, dependence on the Soviet Union directly conflicted with Cuba's desire for independence and the two states rarely agreed on any decisions. Kim Il-Sung sought to distance North Korea from the Soviet Union almost immediately upon his rise to power, while still benefitting from its economic support. After the introduction of *juche* in the 1950s, North Korea began altering its history to align with the ideals of self-reliance and sovereignty—at least domestically. While meeting with Soviet officials, Kim abstained from referencing *juche* in hopes of ensuring continued economic support, (something to which he would never admit officially), although his first official speech on *juche* in 1955 was essentially an anti-Soviet tirade (Suh 1988, 306-307). Once the Soviet Union had curtailed its economic and military support to North Korea in the early 1960s, Kim Il-Sung ordered the removal of any mention of the Soviet Union from North Korean official history and began to publicly promote *juche* with great fervor.

Cuba was forced to depend on the Soviet Union after the U.S. embargoes of 1962 prohibited the state from accessing the-American made materials necessary for maintaining its infrastructure. Cuban-Soviet relations were largely forced and unnatural (Sweig 2012, 119), although Soviet economic and military support allowed Cuba to enact domestic social programs and foreign policy decisions. Cuban dependence on the Soviet Union fundamentally conflicted with Cuban nationalism and its longstanding desire for independence.

The Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, known as the Crisis of October to Cubans, was especially humiliating to Cuba. The United States set up a naval blockade around Cuba to prevent the arrival of more Soviet missiles onto the island, and Castro saw this as an act of war by American imperialists. However, Castro's point of view went completely

ignored. The United States and the Soviet Union negotiated privately, leaving Cuba entirely uninformed. The Soviet Union made certain demands regarding U.S. aggression against Cuba, to which the United States agreed, but neither state acknowledged Castro's own demands to prevent another crisis. Both states considered the negotiations a success, but Castro had realized that Cuba was simply a tool in the Cold War. He likened the events of the Missile Crisis to the struggles for Cuban independence in 1898, when Cuba had no voice in the negotiations between Spain and the United States (Pérez 1995). Cuba was excluded from the Treaty of Paris signed by the U.S. and Spain in the same year. While the treaty granted Cuban independence, the U.S. flag was raised over Havana, and the U.S. installed a military government on the island. Once again, during the Cuban Missile Crisis, Cuba found itself in the position of dependency it so strongly detested, but was incapable of modifying the situation significantly, for it could not function successfully without Soviet aid.

VIII. Differences

Hunter (2012) observes that the creation of most personality cults in history utilizes the idea of inheriting rule from an important leader in the state's history. Kimilsungism may not fit into this category because Kim Il-Sung did not revere any one ruler; however, North Korean history does indirectly link his family to ancient rulers to legitimize his rule. As mentioned earlier, North Korean history was specifically written to imply that Kim, as a supposed descendent of a family of heroic nationalists, was destined to rule with the *juche* ideology. The fabricated history of North Korea extends to the very foundation of the Korean identity: in 1993, North Korea announced its "discovery" of the bones of Dangun, the mythical founder of the Gojoseon dynasty, at a site near Pyongyang. Though Dangun is a legendary figure, he has long symbolized Korean antiquity and uniqueness— and North Korea has further stressed his importance by linking this discovery to the discovery of the bones of a distinct line of human, suggesting that all Koreans are descended from this unique and special line of human (Seth 2011, 383).

Further still, North Korean history claims Dangun was born on Mt. Paekdu, a mountain traditionally sacred to Koreans and the supposed birthplace of Kim Jong-Il, son of and successor to Kim Il-Sung. Kim Jong-Il, however, was actually born in the Soviet Union during the time that Kim Il-Sung and his wife had spent there as refugees; the fabrication of his birthplace is simply another way to connect him with the greatness of the past and the idea of being uniquely Korean (Lim 2009, 10). Therefore, although Kim

Il-Sung never directly praised or celebrated past Korean leaders, he legitimized his rule by indirectly connecting himself and his family to the legendary rulers of ancient Korea.

Fidel Castro associated himself much more directly with an important figure in the struggle for Cuban independence, and would use this association to mobilize support for his cause. José Martí was a figure central to the Cuban independence movement and a national hero. He was born in Havana in 1853, and lived as an exile for most of his life due to his opposition to colonial rule. He lived in New York from 1881-1891, during which he actively worked as an essayist, poet, political thinker, and organizer. He was crucial to fueling the desire for independence for Cubans both on and off the island. His demand for Cuban independence was based on humanistic values, and he denounced U.S. imperialism, argued for equal rights between races and classes, and believed education was the key to development in all of Latin America (Sweig 2012, 6-7). Martí founded and led the Cuban Revolutionary Party (PRC) out of New York and sought to create a united independence movement under Cuban nationalism. Martí was killed in battle in Cuba during the independence struggles of 1895 that would eventually escalate into the Spanish-American War in 1898.

Martí's influence on Cuba cannot be understated. He was, and to this day remains, the central figure of Cuban identity and national pride. It is understandable, thus, that Fidel Castro would depict himself as Martí's heir or successor. Martí's social ideas, rich with mythical unity, passion for the poor and ex-slaves, and emphasis on class harmony coincided well with Castro's budding Marxist-Leninist ideas, and several authors (Hennessey 1963, Santí 1985, and Sweig 2012) emphasize this connection. Indeed, Fidel Castro channeled Martí in nearly every aspect of his regime and personality cult.

Hennessey (1963) notes that "The moral fervor of the revolution was more Martían than Marxist," best displayed in the revolutionary slogan "*De José a Fidel*,"— "From José to Fidel," implying direct linkage and succession, and that Castro saw himself as a "romantic hero figure" in Martí idiom (356). It is interesting to note, moreover, that Castro's personality cult may have been heavily inspired by the cult of Martí himself. Santí (1985) argues that a "national cult of Martí" (Santí 1985, 1818) exists in Cuba, and he bears various titles that are all too familiar to a personality cult: "the Saint of America," "the American Christ," "mystic of duty," and "The Apostle" (Santí 1985, 18). Although Fidel Castro enjoyed various laudatory titles as well, none were as blatantly religious as those of Martí. Martí is so highly revered in Cuba that he may well be likened to a religious figure, and by linking himself to Martí, Castro assumes some quasi-religious elements of his own. Santí (1985) notes another religious connection to Martí: "Following in a tradition that began after his death in 1895, Cubans in and outside the island revere Martí as the very spirit of their national identity, and they search in his works, as they would in a sacred text, for the keys that either justify the current revolutionary government or make sense of the reality of exile" (Santí 1985, 14). Through the "sacred texts" of Martí, both Castro and Cubans could find a way to justify the actions of the regime.

Martí's nationalistic sentiments are powerful enough to have lent themselves to the formation of Castro's personality cult. In his influential essay *Nuestra America* (Our America), written in 1891, Martí said "A man does not make a nation, but the nation at times... may find its vibrant triumphant incarnation in a Man" (Martí and Pérez 2012). This may be applied directly to Fidel Castro, who has come to embody the idea of Cuba.

Martí also said "Such leaders must be held sacred and the errors they commit forgiven them" (Hennessey 1963, 355), which serves Castro's personality cult well in terms of justifying his actions. Santí (1985) discusses the teleological interpretations of Castro and Martí, noting the common thoughts among Cubans that Castro was a reincarnation of Martí and that Martí, the ideal, is fulfilled by Castro, the action (Santí 1985, 21). He also notes that Martí, either through his name or his words, is present in virtually every political speech and policy of the Castro regime (Santí 1985, 14). Martí is crucial to the legitimacy of Castro's regime and may have been the inspiration behind his personality cult.

Diversity of the population is perhaps the most important difference between North Korea and Cuba. As has been discussed, Korean homogeneity was crucial to Korean identity and nationalism, since the Korean people had existed as one united ethnicity speaking one language for thousands of years. The ethnic uniformity of the Korean peninsula allowed for nationalism, and eventually *juche*, to blossom with relative ease.

The Cuban population, on the other hand, has always been markedly diverse and heterogeneous. As mentioned earlier, Cuba functioned as a crucial asset to the Spanish Crown during the colonial period, especially in the cultivation of sugar. The labor behind the sugar and other industries was supported by African slaves, since the indigenous population had been all but wiped out (Franklin 1997, 1). Black slaves were brought to the island as early as 1513, and by the mid-1800s, more than half of the entire island's population was comprised of free and enslaved blacks (Sweig 2012, 2). The rest of the population was comprised of *criollos* and descendants of laborers who had come to Cuba

from a variety of different backgrounds. Discrimination against Afro-Cubans, descendants of black slaves, abounded in Cuba during the prerevolutionary period. Racial tension, as Hennessey (1963) notes, hindered Cuba's ability to foster a strong spirit of nationalism until well into the twentieth century and contributed vastly to political corruption and violence. Cuban politicians throughout the early twentieth century attempted to "whiten" the population of Cuba by promoting Spanish immigration to the island and opposing Haitian immigration (Sweig 2012, 31-32). Afro-Cubans also faced regular prejudice in the labor market, among other hardships.

In 1959, 40 percent of the Cuban population was comprised of Afro-Cubans (Sweig 2012, 53), and Fidel Castro made an effort to tackle racial anxieties as one of the first tasks of his new regime. He warned the Cuban population that racial tensions would threaten the survival of the Revolution, and immediately prohibited all forms of discrimination. The Revolution may have claimed to have abolished all explicit forms of discrimination, but implicit racism still abounded in Cuba even under the socialist premise of equality. Afro-Cuban organizations, along with virtually all other independent organizations, were disbanded under pretense of potential threat to the Revolution, and Afro-Cubans in general were sorely underrepresented in political leadership (Sweig 2012, 53).

Racial tensions and discontent on the island lent itself to another important aspect of the Cuban regime which North Korea never faced: a large exile population. Beyond economic and cultural ties, Cuba and the United States were bonded further by the vast number of Cuban expatriates and exiles living in the United States, especially in Florida. Cubans in the United States had a say in Cuban domestic affairs as early as the struggle

for independence in the late nineteenth century, and would prominently symbolize the counterrevolution to Castro's Revolution.

The conclusion of the Ten Years' War (1868-78) brought about the first major wave of Cuban emigration in its history (Pérez 1995, 25). A large number of Cuban workers relocated to Florida, especially Key West and Tampa, to reestablish and reorganize the tobacco industry. The proximity of Florida to Havana allowed for the industry to function as one in two locations. Cigar factories rose in Tampa "almost simultaneously with the resurgence of *independentista* sentiment" (Pérez 1995, 28) heralded by José Martí. Martí enjoyed overwhelming support in Tampa and Ybor City, where he announced the creation of the Cuban Revolutionary Party (PRC) in 1892. Local *juntas* became the foundation of the PRC and cigar workers wholly dedicated themselves to the notion of *Cuba Libre*, or Cuban independence. In fact, the initial push for Cuban independence came from exiles in Florida, not Cubans on the island (Hennessey 1963).

Cuban exiles played a very dynamic role in the legitimacy and strength of Fidel Castro's Revolution. Many Cubans in the elite classes who had close ties to U.S. businesses in Cuba fled the island immediately following the success of the Revolution in 1959. The passivity of these classes, who believed their departure from Cuba would be temporary, actually served to fuel the fire of Castro's Revolution. Those who supported the Revolution saw the rather casual emigration of elite classes as an example of "the demonstrated impotence" (Pérez 2003, 246) of the prerevolutionary period in Cuba. Those who fled believed the United States would eventually overthrow the Revolution, and they planned to return to the island once Castro was ousted. Fidel Castro allowed these disgruntled Cubans to leave the island freely, seeing their departure as an

exportation of the counterrevolution and an elimination of any internal challenges to the regime (Pérez 2003, 247).

Another large exodus of Cubans occurred in 1980. At this point, zealous support for the Revolution was on the decline (Sweig 2012, 96). The Cuban economy was suffering greatly under the inefficient centralized bureaucracy and the continued pressures of the U.S. embargoes. Visits from large numbers of Cuban expatriates and U.S. citizens to the island around this time also contributed to general discontent, as the visitors provided Cubans with new perspectives and realizations of how Castro's regime had projected an overtly negative image of the United States and Cuban exiles (Sweig 2012, 97). Castro recognized that many Cubans wished to leave the island. He allowed Cubans to leave via the port of Mariel, and the exodus became known as the Mariel boatlift. Nearly 125,000 Cubans departed the island during this period (Sweig 2012, 97), which is in itself a commentary on the success of Castro's regime. The Mariel boatlift was also the first episode of Cuban emigration marked by significant numbers of Afro-Cubans, which suggests Castro's inability to solve racial tensions on the island, even after twenty years in power. However, the Mariel boatlift was also a strategic move by Castro, as it flooded Miami and South Florida with more refugees than could be handled, and had served as an opportunity for Castro to rid the island of internal opposition once again.

Cuban exiles in the United States may have had the potential to function as a major proponent in defying Castro's regime and personality cult, because the exiles were indeed intense opponents of Castro. However, in the end, the exile population (of over one million people) only served to strengthen Castro's rule in certain paradoxical ways. The literal transfer of potential political opposition from the island to the United States

justified the defense of the Revolution, as the regime now claimed to be defending its national sovereignty from outside threats (Pérez 2003, 247). As mentioned, Cuba's national sovereignty was of the utmost importance to Cubans and was the central idea of Cuban nationalism; therefore, this claim helped to revitalize support for the Revolution in a time of economic decline. Moreover, Cuban exiles willing to partake in the counterrevolution had to depend on funding from the CIA. The CIA, in turn, had its own plans for the exiles, and they "became instruments of North American policy" (Pérez 2003, 247). North American policy was often misguided and attempts to organize Cuban exiles into an opposition force against Castro resulted in such disasters as the Bay of Pigs invasion, which, as discussed, enhanced the legitimacy of the Revolution on the island.

IX. Isolationism and Isolation

In summary, the regimes of both Kim Il-Sung and Fidel Castro ascribe to certain requirements for a personality cult. Both leaders clearly exhibited a degree of megalomania without which a personality cult could not exist, and built their regimes on hybrid concepts of nationalism and socialism. Both regimes depended on the Soviet Union, albeit reluctantly, and utilized an anti-American sentiment to legitimize their rule. The main difference between North Korea and Cuba, and the main reason why their personality cults differ in extremity, is isolationism and isolation, in terms of both history of the states and during the rule of Kim and Castro. As I have said, I distinguish isolation from isolationism in one important way: one or more states may choose to isolate another state, causing isolation of that state. Isolationism is self-imposed isolation, in which a state chooses to opt out of the international community entirely. North Korea was isolationist, while Cuba was politically and economically isolated by the United States.

In reviewing the extensive history of the Korean peninsula, we have seen that the Korean people had maintained virtually complete homogeneity and unchanging traditions for thousands of years. The Korean peninsula remained isolated— and isolationist— to the world for most of its history because of its geographical location and out of a desire to cultivate its uniqueness in face of its more powerful neighbors, China and Japan. Turku (2009) acknowledges that certain regimes adopt isolationism as the core of their rule and ideology rather than a simply a foreign policy, and as an "expression of intense and long periods of foreign invasion" (Turku 2009, 11). As has been discussed, North Korean isolationism as propagated by *juche* was a direct reaction to Japanese colonial rule.

Additionally, Kim Il-Sung utilized various important elements from Korean history, including nationalism, Confucianism, Christianity, xenophobia, and isolationism to create his *juche* ideology and legitimize his absolute rule. He was able to continue a long tradition of isolationism, completely cutting off North Korea from the world. According to Kim, *juche* represents "the independent stance of rejecting dependence on others and of using one's own powers, believing in one's own strength and displaying the revolutionary spirit of self-reliance" (Kim 1975, 117). *Juche* was, at its core, isolationism. He created an environment in which his personality cult could evolve to its most extreme form without any foreign influence.

Turku (2009) defines isolationist foreign policy as combining "a non-interventionist military posture with an ideological, social, and political agenda of state-centric economic nationalism and protectionism" (Turku 2009, 6). Protectionism is perhaps the most important aspect of the *juche* ideology. Indeed, *juche* existed to protect the Korean people from foreign aggression and can be considered a form of domestic isolationism, dedicated to preserving the "purity" of the Korean people. Granted, North Korea has also upheld international isolationism in terms of political self-reliance and a lack of participation in the international field. However, North Korea has maintained diplomatic relations with many states, including China, which has been its biggest ally and trade supporter since North Korea's foundation as a state in 1948. Kim Il-Sung had alliances with several socialist rulers throughout Eastern Europe and Southeast Asia, and his leadership style inspired Nicolae Ceaușescu, communist dictator of Romania, to adopt his own personality cult. North Korea even joined the United Nations in 1991. Therefore, domestic isolationism was always more crucial than international isolationism to Kim Il-

Sung, and this is also evident in his treatment of the Soviet Union: while claiming complete economic self-reliance in domestic speeches, Kim visited the Soviet Union countless times in the late 1950s with the hopes of receiving more desperately-needed economic aid from the state. However, with the fall of the Soviet Union and the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe from 1989-1991, North Korea found itself with no allies, and entered a period of economic hardship due to Kim's refusal to modify isolationist *juche* policies and initiate economic reforms.

Cuba, on the other hand, could hardly be considered isolationist in any way. Since its foundation as a Spanish colony in 1492, Cuba was in constant contact with the rest of the world, functioning as a hub of commerce linking the New World to the Old World. It had a diverse population comprised of Spanish *criollos*, descendents of African slaves, and descendents of laborers of various ethnicities, as well as an indigenous heritage. Its culture, economy, and politics became increasingly tied to the United States, and U.S. hegemony was felt on the island well before its independence from Spain in 1898 up to the Cuban Revolution in 1959. The 26th of July Movement revolutionaries never sought to completely cut off ties with the United States; they certainly desired to modify Cuban dependency, but eradicating Cuba of U.S. influence would have been a virtually impossible task. In fact, U.S. influence was felt personally for most of the revolutionaries: many had been educated at U.S. universities and had spent their youths surrounded by U.S. name brands and culture (Sweig 2012, 26). Instead of cutting off ties with the United States, the revolutionaries readily used negative imagery of their northern neighbor to mobilize support for their cause.

Even after the Cuban Revolution, Cuba and the United States maintained a hostile but important relationship. In fact, U.S. isolation of Cuba throughout the 1960s was essentially the only isolation Cuba ever experienced, and this isolation along with U.S. attempts to overthrow Castro during this period actually served to bolster his popularity and personality cult on the island. The United States severed diplomatic relations with Cuba in January 1961, and by early 1962 had enacted a total economic embargo on Cuba. The embargo had drastic consequences in Cuba, since the Cuban economy had always been deeply integrated with that of the United States and the vast majority of its infrastructure was constructed with American-made parts (Sweig 2012, 89). The embargo banned Cuba from purchasing any product containing more than 5% of U.S. material, thus forcing Cuba to depend on inadequate replacement parts from the Soviet Union and leading to a general deterioration of Cuban infrastructure.

In 1961-1962, the United States also sought to isolate Cuba from the rest of Latin America by excluding it from the Organization of American States (OAS). In 1964, the U.S. pressured states in the OAS to sign a resolution requiring all member states to break diplomatic and trade relations with Cuba. However, in 1975, member states of the OAS voted to renew ties with Cuba, and the United States removed its subsidiary trade ban on Cuba. Although U.S. capital was once again flowing into Cuba, hostilities between the two states only worsened. The disastrous Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961 was the U.S.' first failed attempt to overthrow Fidel Castro. The United States had erroneously underestimated Castro's massive political support on the island and believed the Cuban people could be easily inspired to revolt against him (Sweig 2012, 82). Despite the utter

failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion, the United States continued covert and not-so-covert operations against Cuba and Castro throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

The United States' policy towards Cuba during this time existed as a message to the rest of Latin America. The policy was highly punitive in nature to transform Cuba into an example, as Pérez (2003) observes: "Cuba was thus to become an example of the cost of revolution: a state of siege in the form of political, economic, and technical isolation... to make the cost of revolution so unbearable as to deter and discourage others from emulating the Cuban model" (Pérez 2003, 258). The United States refused to normalize relations with Cuba to avoid "legitimizing" a socialist government in Latin America and granting Fidel Castro the satisfaction of another revolutionary triumph. Although this route may have served to delegitimize the Castro regime on a broad Latin American scale, from Castro's perspective it granted his Revolution legitimacy in terms of protecting the island from U.S. hostility.

Ironically, the United States' continued attempts to debilitate Castro's regime continued to strengthen it. Sweig (2012) notes that the United States' measures against Cuba and Castro "provided the context for, if not directly motivated, a number of domestic measures within Cuba that further radicalized the revolution and increased the Cuban government's authority over its citizens" (Sweig 2012, 87). In the weeks leading up to the supposedly-covert Bay of Pigs invasion, Castro prepared a new national militia and new Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs), which were neighborhood watch groups meant to track down potential counterrevolutionaries. As mentioned earlier, Castro only labeled the Revolution as Socialist and himself as Marxist-Leninist as a reaction to the Bay of Pigs invasion. Castro himself said in his biography,

"Girón [the Bay of Pigs invasion] accelerated the revolutionary process" (Ramonet 2007, 279). Domestically, Castro's "success" against the Bay of Pigs invasion and other forms of U.S. imperialist threats bolstered his popularity and the legitimacy of his Revolution. Castro was able to justify the increasingly repressive measures of his regime as necessary for survival against the omnipresent enemy to the north.

It is necessary to note, as an aside, that Kim Il-Sung created a similar sense of urgency in North Korea following the Korean War. He justified his own absolutist rule, repressive regime, and the regime's emphasis on heavy industrialization as necessary preparation against U.S. (and all foreign) imperialism, which had so devastated the country during the war and ruined the possibility of an independent, unified Korean state. However, his regime, unlike Castro's, was not bolstered by countless failed U.S. overthrow attempts, but by the opposite. Turku (2009) argues that North Korea was isolationist partly because it chose to be isolationist, and partly because the international community, led by the United States, chose not to interact and cooperate with it due to its totalitarian nature (Turku 2009, 15).

Beyond U.S.-Cuba relations, Cuba maintained a distinct international presence in the 1960s largely heralded by Che Guevara. It is important to first acknowledge the role of Che Guevara in the Revolution before delving into Cuban foreign policy. Che played an integral role in the Cuban Revolution and in cementing the idea of the Revolution and *fidelismo* into the minds of Cubans. Che was the quintessential revolutionary, participating in several revolutionary struggles throughout Latin America before aiding in the success of the Cuban Revolution. In the early days following the success of the revolution, Che and Fidel's brother Raul Castro actively promoted *fidelismo*. They

oversaw the execution of nearly 160 Batista officials (Sweig 2012, 39) in 1959, which took place in Havana's main sports stadium and was broadcast on national television. The executions, controversial outside of the island, actually served to bolster the popularity of the revolution for a Cuban population that had previously been victimized and repressed by the Batista regime.

While Castro said he focused "fundamentally on the political and ideological battle against imperialism and counterrevolution" (Ramonet 2007, 259) as the framework of the Revolution, Che never abandoned the guerrilla mindset he and the rest of the *sierra* utilized during their time in the Sierra Maestra. He promoted the idea of the perfect revolutionary *hombre nuevo* (new man) both domestically and abroad (Sweig 2012, 40). He believed moral rather than material incentives would augment worker productivity and that the guerrilla was the key to all successful revolutions. He created a myth of the Revolution centered on the guerrilla which he attempted to impose internationally. Harris (2009) states that Che believed the only way to maintain the Revolution domestically was to ensure similar revolutions and regimes existed elsewhere in the world (Harris 2009, 32), and Che made it his personal mission to see these revolutions come to fruition.

Under Che, Cuba became involved in several independence and revolutionary movements. Cuba's first international mission occurred in Africa, where Cuba played an important role in Algeria's independence from France in 1962. Castro and Che established close ties with the new socialist government of Algeria (Sweig 2012, 108-109; Harris 2009, 31). In Latin America, Cuba provided support to socialist groups and leftist governments in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, and Venezuela throughout the

1960s and 1970s (Harris 2009, 32). From 1964 to 1965, Che toured Africa and met with a variety of independence leaders. Cuba's largest deployment abroad was sent to the Congo to establish the guerrilla strongpoint of which Che had long dreamed, but the mission failed. Che continued to attempt to impose the revolutionary model he developed in Cuba onto other states with consistently negative results until he perished in Bolivia in 1967. Castro steadfastly defended all of Che's decisions (Ramonet 2007, 303-318) and delivered a powerful eulogy that elevated Che to the status of national hero and martyr in Cuba (Sweig 2012, 111).

While Castro, despite his claims, refrained from identifying too strongly with Communism, Che embraced it. In his biography, Castro calls Che "A revolutionary, a true Communist, and an excellent economist" (Ramonet 2007, 258), and he goes on to laud Che's Communist spirit: "Che gave great value to the Communist consciousness and example" (Ramonet 2007, 259). He also calls Che an "Extraordinary human... a person of high culture and of grand intelligence" (Ramonet 2007, 185) and says "Our Revolution was very interested in fighting against illiteracy and for the development of education, so that everyone could be like Che" (Ramonet 2007, 318). It is interesting to consider their close relationship in the context of personality cults: it would appear that Che had enough influence and support in Cuba to challenge Castro and establish his own personality cult. However, despite Castro's admiration for him, and his influence in Cuba, Che never sought hegemony over Cuba or any single state. Castro, as his personality cult may dictate, sacrificed himself to the good of the Cuban people and the cause of the Revolution. Che, conversely, was wholly dedicated to the idea of Marxist-Leninist Communism and liberating the oppressed people of the world; Cuba happened to be the

state in which he had the most success, and the fact that he, as an Argentine, could influence the Cuban outcome in such a manner inspired him to expand his horizons internationally (Harris 2009, 34). Regardless, Castro's personality cult may not have existed without Che's influence; contrastingly, in North Korea, Kim's personality cult may not have reached such extremes had another important actor been intimately connected with Kim. Kim wiped out any trace of camaraderie, while Castro praised it, but both means served the same end: their personality cults. The difference between Che on one hand, and Castro and Kim on the other, stresses the importance of their ideologies. As I have discussed, Castro and Kim utilized a mixture of socialism and nationalism to legitimize their rule and their personality cults. Che lacked the nationalism necessary for a personality cult due to his unwavering attachment to communism.

Cuba's armed internationalism was met with slight discontent from the Western Hemisphere. The United States was too deeply involved in the Vietnam War during this period to worry about Cuba's actions, but most Latin American states saw Cuba as an interference in their domestic affairs (Sweig 2012, 112). Cuba's international efforts also coincided with, as mentioned, the OAS resolution requiring Latin American states to break diplomatic and trade relations with Cuba. Mexico was Cuba's only resolute ally, and the two had preserved a close relationship since the colonial period. Although the OAS resolution mandated isolation of Cuba, most Latin American states maintained some commercial ties with Cuba (Sweig 2012, 112) and most states restored official diplomatic and trade relations once the formal ban was lifted in 1975. In general, Cuba's affairs, especially in Africa, garnered international attention, highlighting it as an individual international actor rather than a mere shadow of the Cold War.

Another important aspect of Cuba's international presence, and something that North Korea lacks entirely, is the enormous amount of genuine respect and admiration that exists for Castro throughout the world. Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, a Nobel Laureate in Literature, wrote a famous poem for Castro called "A Fidel Castro" (To Fidel Castro) when he visited Cuba in 1962, and this poem has been celebrated in Cuban media ever since (Aguirre 2014, 2509). Cuba played an important role in the struggles of southern Africa in the 1970s, helping Angola and Namibia achieve independence and stopping the advancement of white South African troops into the states. At his presidential inauguration in 1994, South African Nelson Mandela thanked Fidel Castro for his help, saying "You made this possible" (Sweig 2012, 115), and Castro was greeted as a friend and savior when he toured Africa in 1998. Argentinean soccer player Diego Maradona has notably praised Castro for years. Upon introducing Castro onto his show in 2005, Maradona said "For me he is a god" (Maradona 2005). The international praise Castro had received was important to the legitimacy of his rule and his personality cult.

X. Conclusion

In this paper, we have seen how and why Kim Il-Sung and Fidel Castro were able to establish their personality cults in North Korea and Cuba, respectively. Both states experienced the similar pattern of dominance, which led to feelings of resentment and powerful nationalism which were then absorbed into a growing socialist regime. There are several reasons that explain why, despite this shared pattern, Kim's personality cult was far more extreme, fanatical, and absolute than Castro's personality cult.

The main difference between the regimes is isolation. Kim adopted isolationism, or self-imposed isolation, in North Korea, while Cuba faced economic and political isolation from the United States. Each state's history plays an important role in explaining why these forms of isolation contributed to the growth of a personality cult. The Korean peninsula was largely isolationist for thousands of years as a reaction to the superior, imposing powers of China and Japan. North Korea became isolationist in a similar manner, as a reaction to the harsh subjugation of Japanese colonial rule and the devastation brought about by foreign aggression during the Korean War. Cuba, as a colony, was heavily involved in the trade of the New World and quickly became tied to the United States. As their economies became more intertwined, the U.S. began to exercise economic, political, and cultural hegemony over Cuba. Fidel Castro utilized nationalist sentiments to build up his popularity, and used U.S. hostility towards his regime to justify the increasingly repressive measures of his Revolution. The U.S. embargo and its isolation of Cuba served to further justify Castro's actions.

The makeup of each state's population also played a major role in the establishment of the personality cults. The Korean people have been ethnically united for their entire history, and Koreans have always celebrated their uniqueness and unity in face of centuries of foreign threats. Because of the population's homogeneity, Korean nationalism was able to grow with relative ease during the years of Japanese colonial rule, especially when the Japanese attempted to forcefully assimilate Koreans into Japanese culture. Kim Il-Sung elevated Korean nationalism into hypernationalism through his *juche* ideology. *Juche* promoted the purity of the Korean people and xenophobia towards any other peoples. The Cuban population, conversely, was comprised of criollos, descendents of Spanish settlers and laborers from a variety of countries, and Afro-Cubans. The diversity and racial tensions on the island proved to be a difficult breeding ground for Cuban nationalism during its struggle for independence, and nationalism actually grew initially among Cuban exiles living in South Florida. Even under the tenets of equality promoted by socialism, Castro could not completely resolve racism on the island. Racial tensions among many other problems prompted the mass exodus of Cubans to South Florida throughout Castro's rule, creating a literal population of opposition abroad which Castro then utilized to bolster his popularity.

Another important factor distinguishing the personality cults is the examples of leadership. Although Kim and Castro were megalomaniacs who exercised absolute rule over their constituents, Cuba had several important figures that drew attention away from Castro. Castro channeled José Martí to gain legitimacy throughout his rule, as Martí was a national hero to Cuba and seen as the ultimate martyr for Cuban nationalism and independence. Castro never claimed to surpass Martí; rather, he was the embodiment of

the ideals which Martí had originally established, but had never seen come to fruition. Castro's personality cult involved its own cult towards Martí, which had already existed in Cuba. Castro also had the friendship of Che Guevara, who was essential to the victory of the Cuban Revolution and pioneered Cuba's international exportation of its Revolution. Castro celebrated Che and elevated him to martyr and hero of Cuba once he died. North Korea did not have several important figureheads like Cuba. Although Kim Il-Sung did promote the celebration and worship of his family members, it was ultimately done to legitimize his own rule and strengthen his lineage so that he may pass power onto his son, Kim Jong-Il. Kim ruthlessly purged North Korea of any perceived opposition, including those to whom he was allied during the anti-Japanese guerrilla struggle. His personality cult decreed him as god of North Korea, and no other figure could command any amount of respect even comparable to what Kim received.

Finally, we must consider the role of the United States in creating these personality cults. Both regimes utilized antagonism towards the United States to justify their rule. Kim Il-Sung blamed the United States entirely for the devastation of the Korean War, and justified his regime's emphasis on heavy industrialization as preparedness for the U.S.' next inevitable attack on the peninsula. The U.S. embargo on Cuba, as Castro's regime promoted, was demonstrative of the U.S.' general malicious intent towards the island. U.S. hostility towards Cuba, especially in its active attempts to overthrow Castro, justified the protection of and mobilized the population in favor of the Revolution. The U.S. forced isolation of Cuba and its attempts to overthrow Castro only served to build up his personality cult on the island. Paradoxically, the United States also aided in maintaining the personality cult of Kim in North Korea by harboring the

opposite approach. North Korea's isolationism was greatly enhanced by the U.S.-led international community's decision to ignore and not cooperate with the state. Kim's personality cult, therefore, grew without any interruption from the outside world.

Given these facts, it is difficult to say how the creation of these personality cults could have been stopped, or how the United States could have acted differently. I call for further research on this topic, to postulate the next "best" step the United States and the international community may take in their relations towards North Korea and Cuba, both of which are still run by regimes fueled by Kim's and Castro's personality cults.

Isolationism and isolation are, as Turku (2009) argues, impossible to maintain in today's interconnected and interdependent world. Considering these were the main factors driving the intensity of Kim's and Castro's personality cults, the world is not likely to see the rise of any similar personality cults in the near future. However, understanding the communicative aspects of these personality cults, especially in terms of the relationships the rulers sought to establish with the populations of their states, may help shed light on the formation of certain populist and personalistic regimes in the current international community. Moreover, in terms of communication, the available technology in the mid-twentieth century was crucial to the growth of Kim's and Castro's personality cults, but current technology may spell the end of both regimes as isolation becomes more unfeasible and impractical. A focus on how populist and personalistic regimes may instead utilize current technology to their advantage may help to stress the importance of communication in today's age and in the age of personality cults.

XI. Bibliography

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