

“THANK YOU FATHER KIM IL SUNG”:

Eyewitness Accounts of Severe Violations of Freedom of Thought,
Conscience, and Religion in North Korea

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PREFACE

U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom

“Thank you, Father Kim Il Sung” is the first phrase North Korean parents are instructed to teach to their children. From cradle to grave, North Korean citizens are surrounded by the all-encompassing presence of the “Great Leader” and his son, the “Dear Leader” Kim Jong Il. The Kim dynasty is much more than an authoritarian government; it also holds itself out as the ultimate source of power, virtue, spiritual wisdom, and truth for the North Korean people. Heterodoxy and dissent are repressed, quickly and efficiently, with punishments meted out to successive generations of the dissident’s family.

In this environment, it is hard to imagine any independent religious belief or practice surviving openly unless it serves the government’s larger purpose. Documentary evidence of human rights violations in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK or North Korea) is scarce. Only recently are interviews with former North Koreans being undertaken in any systematic way. As a result of this new research, a horrific picture is emerging—one that has deep implications for policymakers, the international community, and human rights defenders.

The study that follows was commissioned by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, an independent, bipartisan U.S. government agency that monitors freedom of religion or belief abroad, as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international instruments, and that provides independent policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State and the Congress. Forty former North Koreans were interviewed extensively regarding conditions of freedom of religion or belief in the DPRK. The study was conducted by David Hawk, veteran human rights expert and author of the important study *The Hidden Gulag: Exposing North Korea’s Prison Camps*. The Commission also retained two respected academics, Jae Won Chun and Philo Kim, to manage the study’s progress in South Korea.

“Thank you, Father Kim Il Sung” reports on the forceful suppression of North Korea’s once vibrant religious and intellectual life, the establishment of a quasi-religious cult of personality centered on Kim Il Sung and his son Kim Jong Il, and the survival of very limited religious activity in North Korea. The former North Koreans offer trenchant testimony on the role and character of the Kim Jong Il government and the extent to which it controls the thoughts and beliefs of the North Korean people.

The international community is growing accustomed to stories of government imposed excess and horror from North Korea. Kwang Chol Hwan’s memoir, *Aquariums of Pyongyang*, provides information on the extensive prison camps, the arbitrary detention of dissidents extending to three and four generations of their families, forced abortions, and people beaten down by constant suspicion, propaganda, and violence. The thick veil of secrecy that has shrouded the “hermit kingdom” is thus gradually being pulled back by the testimony of former North Koreans. Numerous witnesses have provided evidence of a massive *gulag* system, drowning out those who objected that such claims were “exaggerated” or constituted “anti-North Korean propaganda.”¹

Still, concrete evidence about life in North Korea remains difficult to obtain, particularly testimony about violations of the freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief. This study allows the

voices of former North Koreans to speak openly about conditions in North Korea. It also offers historical and comparative analysis to help define the nature and scope of religious freedom abuses over the past 50 years.

From its inception, the brutal suppression of religious activity and rival systems of thought and belief was a systematic policy of the DPRK. In the early twentieth century, religious life flourished in North Korea. In fact, religious organizations provided the key organizational links in the fight against Japanese colonialism. Thus, it is not surprising that religious groups were viewed as one of the chief political competitors of Kim Il Sung's Korean Workers Party. When Kim Il Sung came to power, religious adherents and their families were labeled as "counter-revolutionary elements" and targeted for repression. Recalling his policies to diminish the power of religion in North Korea, Kim Il Sung reportedly admitted that:

We [could not] turn into a Communist society along with the religious people. Therefore, we purged the key leaders above the rank of deacons in Protestant or Catholic churches and the wicked among the rest were put on trial. The general religious people were...put into prison camps [and given a chance to reform].... We learned later that those of religion can do away with their old habits only after they have been killed.²

After Kim Il Sung consolidated his hold on power, North Korean officials stratified society on the basis of family background and perceived loyalty to the state. Religious believers who remained in North Korea, as well as their descendents, were eventually classified on the lowest strata of this complex system of 51 social categories, receiving fewer privileges and opportunities than others in such areas as education and employment. An extensive report by Amnesty International in 2003 details evidence that persons in lower categories have, in some cases, been forcibly relocated to remote and desolate areas of the country and then systematically denied access to food aid and left to starve. Those in the lowest strata were deemed the "irredeemables" who gained the implacable hostility of the state and unyielding harassment of the security forces.³ Thus, it is not surprising that only a few interviewees report first-hand awareness of religious activity in Kim Il Sung's DPRK. They may remember a few religious structures in Pyongyang and clandestine religious activity by a small remnant of believers—but these latter recollections are mostly of suspicion, fear, and death.

In the most unique and compelling part of the study, the persons interviewed testified to the total veneration of the Kim family and the institutionalization of the *Juche* ideology. Schooled as they were from birth to venerate Kim Il Sung and his son Kim Jong Il, these interviewees often expressed astonishment that anyone in North Korea would practice a belief-system challenging the reigning cult of personality. The religious cult around the Kims touches every individual and every province in the DPRK. Students are required to memorize the "Ten Principles for the Establishment of the One-Ideology System of the Party," and every North Korean is expected to attend one or more of an estimated 450,000 "Kim Il Sung Revolutionary Research Centers" at least weekly for instruction, inspiration, and self-criticism.⁴ In Kang Chol-Hwan's memoir even the notorious "Yodok" prison camp had a shrine to the Kim family where the inmates, despite wearing only tattered rags for clothes, were required to keep a special pair of socks for entrance to the shrine.

It is now known that every home in the country has a portrait of the "Great Leader" Kim Il Sung and the "Dear Leader" Kim Jong Il. Inspectors visit homes to hand out fines and admonishments if the

portraits are not well kept. Every government building and subway car displays the two portraits, and every adult citizen wears a button of Kim Il Sung. Movies and propaganda constantly repeat the blessings bestowed on them by the two Kims.⁵ The veneration required is so complete that the former North Koreans interviewed for this report did not believe that religious activity was permitted because, among other reasons, it would be perceived as a threat to the government's authority.

Religious activity survives nonetheless, whether in government approved religious organizations operating a handful of places of worship in Pyongyang or in more clandestine venues. In recent years, the government has formed several "religious federations" to interface with co-religionists abroad. Three churches, two Protestant and one Catholic, were opened in Pyongyang between 1988 and 1992. Only a few interviewees were even aware of these churches, and even those believed that these churches operated as showcases for foreign visitors. However, according to South Korean religious leaders conducting exchanges with North Korea, these religious venues are open weekly and some genuine religious practice takes place among North Koreans at the churches. Nevertheless, because there is no Catholic clergy in North Korea, mass cannot be celebrated and most sacraments cannot be performed. A Russian Orthodox Church has been under construction since 2003 but remains unfinished, though two North Koreans reportedly have been sent to Moscow to train as Orthodox priests. There are also reportedly three Buddhist temples and a Chondokyo shrine in Pyongyang. Although some of the interviewees had seen or were aware of Buddhist temples in North Korea, none had seen religious practice taking place at these temples.

The study provides interesting evidence that some North Koreans are testing prohibitions against religious activity. Fortune-telling, a remnant of Korean Shamanism, is re-surfacing. Several of those interviewed for this study claim that faith in the "Dear Leader" is not as strong as it was before the famine of the 1990s, having been shaken by the crushing economic and other deprivations in North Korea. This study reveals that Kim Jong Il fears that cross-border contacts will puncture the hermetic seal that he has tried, with considerable success, to place around North Korea – the seal that preserves the Kim dynasty and its "divinity." Anything that casts doubt on the beneficence or omnipotence of the "Dear Leader" has to be repressed. That is why there is renewed government interest in ensuring that North Koreans coming back from China are not "infected" either by South Korean democracy or any form of religious belief. As one interviewee explained after her experience with North Korean border guards, the DPRK government fears that "*Juche* will be toppled by Christianity."

That fear has impelled the government into action. This study provides eyewitness testimony of gruesome public executions for those possessing or importing Bibles or for groups discovered worshipping clandestinely. The Commission has learned from its earlier interviews with former North Koreans that students from the Religious Studies Department of Kim Il Sung University are drafting questions for security forces at border repatriation centers in an effort to weed out true believers from those who had simply attended a Chinese Christian church.

All of those interviewed left North Korea through China. They fled due to persecution, disillusionment, hunger, and severe deprivation. Refugees have flooded across the border with China for the past decade. Even after the famine eased a few years ago, an estimated 30,000 to 100,000 North Korean refugees still remain in China. Under the terms of an agreement with North Korea, the Chinese government considers all such refugees to be economic migrants who are subject to forcible repatriation. Moreover, the North Korean authorities consider migration illegal, and returnees are

subject to harassment, arrest, imprisonment, and often torture. New laws have eased penalties for “economic crimes,” but there is growing evidence that North Koreans repatriated from China are interrogated to determine if they have converted to Christianity or had contact with South Korean Christians. If they answer affirmatively, they may face lengthy prison terms with hard labor, among other punishments.

Given the mounting testimony offered by former North Koreans who have found asylum in South Korea, China’s contention that all North Koreans are “economic migrants” is increasingly difficult to sustain. China should allow North Koreans to be assessed as to their status as refugees, either because they have a well founded fear of persecution had they remained in North Korea, or because, although they may not have fled persecution in the first place, they nonetheless risk persecution upon return to their country of origin. Continued repatriation of North Korean asylum-seekers contravenes China’s obligations under international law.⁶ In addition, Chinese policy appears to violate a 1995 UN-Chinese Agreement stating that “UNHCR personnel may at all times have unimpeded access to refugees and to the sites of UNHCR projects in order to monitor all phases of their implementation.”⁷

Thank you, Father Kim Il Sung illustrates the need for concerted action to address the widespread denial of basic human rights in North Korea and to seek durable solutions for North Koreans seeking refuge in China. This study also confirms that the human rights and humanitarian disasters perpetuated by the DPRK government profoundly threatens security on the Korean peninsula. Therefore, as regional powers grapple with the DPRK’s nuclear aspirations, human rights objectives should not be given short shrift. Negotiations to end nuclear proliferation should include issues such as family reunification, abductions, rule-of-law development, market reforms, needs-based food distribution, economic development and protections for religious freedom and other human rights. Pursuing both nuclear and human security is not mutually exclusive. In fact, examples of dual-track diplomacy can be found in both Soviet-American and Chinese-American relations.

North Koreans have suffered through five decades of failed social, economic, and political policies, as well as grave human rights abuses. The extent of the depredation is staggering. This study provides compelling evidence of the systematic denigration of religious life in North Korea and of ongoing abuses of the freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief. It also shows how religious freedom concerns are linked directly to the other human rights and security concerns that have dominated international attention. This study will thus shed further light on the often perplexing situation in North Korea, offer some insight into the daily lives of ordinary North Koreans, and raise international awareness of the appalling human rights situation faced by North Koreans in the DPRK and in China.



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Religious Freedom

NOTES:

1 Kang Chol-Hwan and Pierre Rigoulot, *The Aquariums of Pyongyang: Ten Years in the North Korean Gulag*, (Basic Books, 2005).

2 Goh Tae Woo, *Bukhanui jonggyo jeongchaek* (North Korea's Policies on Religion), Minjokmunhwasa, 1989, pp79-80.

3 Kee Hang Gu "Bukhanui jonggyo tanapgwa sing-ang saenghwal," (Religious Repression and Religious Life in North Korea), in *Hyeonsil chojeom* (Reality Focus), 1990 Summer Issue, p. 111.

4 Philo Kim, "New Religious Policy and the State of Religious Freedom in North Korea," paper given at 5th International Conference on North Korean Human Rights & Refugees, February 29—March 1, 2004, Warsaw Poland.

5 Bradly K. Martin, *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader: North Korea and the Kim Dynasty*, (St. Martins Press, 2004).

6 The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol state that "no Contracting States shall expel or return ('refouler') a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion. See "The Status of North Korean Asylum Seekers and the U.S. Government Policy Towards Them," Report issued by the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration pursuant to section 301 of the North Korean Human Rights Act of 2004 (P.L. 108-333) (March 11, 2005).

7 Agreement Between the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on the Upgrading of the UNHCR Mission in the People's Republic of China to UNHCR Branch Office in the People's Republic of China (December 1, 1995), (United Nations Treaty Series Vol. 1899-1-32371).



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FINDINGS

North Korean Law and Practice Restricting Freedom of Religion

- Although the North Korean government has formally subscribed to international standards with regard to freedom of religion or belief through its accession to international human rights treaties, based on the information gathered for this report, it is evident that the DPRK government has committed—and continues to commit—severe human rights violations in this area.
- Article 68 of the DPRK Constitution states that “citizens have freedom of religious beliefs.” However, despite the DPRK government’s assertion to the UN Human Rights Committee that there are no limitations on religious practice, Article 68 also has provisions on drawing in foreign forces and harming the state or social order, provisions that could lead to potentially severe limitations that could easily result in the arbitrary application of the constitutional provision on “freedom of religious beliefs.”
- Article 67 of the DPRK Constitution provides for “freedom of speech, of the press, demonstration and association.” However, as is the case with “freedom of religious beliefs,” these freedoms are overshadowed and heavily, if not entirely, limited and circumscribed by other constitutional provisions, including that “the State shall adhere to the class line, strengthen the dictatorship of people’s democracy”; “the State shall oppose the cultural infiltration of imperialism”; and “the State shall eliminate the way of life inherited from the outmoded society and establish a new socialist way of life in every sphere.”
- Those interviewed for this study claimed that there are four mutually reinforcing reasons for the lack of religious freedom in North Korea:
 - the intensive and continuous anti-religious propaganda by the government;
 - the banning of religious activity, resulting in the fact that none of the interviewees was aware of any authorized religious activity inside North Korea;
 - the severe persecution of persons caught for engaging in religious activity, which most interviewees had either heard about or personally witnessed; and
 - the fact that *Juche*, the official state ideology of Kim Il Sung Revolutionary Thought, was the only officially permitted system of thought or belief in North Korea.

The Institutionalization of *Juche* Ideology: Anti-religious Propaganda and Veneration of the Kim Family

- Article 3 of the DPRK Constitution sets out the guiding role for *Juche* as an official system of thought or belief. Kim Jong Il, largely as prelude and/or precursor to his succession, merged the *Juche* ideology with the ideology of Kim Il Sung known officially as “Kimilsungism.” This merged ideology is presented by the state as a “monolithic” or “unitary” ideological system, and it is the basis for the cult of personality, pre-1945 Japanese-style “emperor worship,” or semi-deification that surrounds the memory of North Korea’s Great Leader, Kim Il Sung.
- According to those interviewed, North Korean propaganda continually portrays religion as “opium”—the term used by virtually all of the interviewees. Television programs also regularly denigrate religion. North Koreans are exposed to this anti-religious propaganda in youth groups, political education sessions, and neighborhood or workplace study groups where attendance is mandatory. These sessions included indoctrination on the principles of *Juche*/Kimilsungism as a religious ideology to the exclusion of other religious beliefs and practices.
- Virtually all interviewees described the life-long system of ideological propagation and indoctrination. This starts with children learning to say “Thank you father Kim Il Sung” when learning to talk, and continues

with ongoing, mandatory adult education classes in the workplace or in shrine-like “Kim Il Sung Revolutionary Idea Institutes,” “Study Halls,” or “Research rooms. The institutions are described as venues for education and for veneration of the Kim family and its political philosophy. Interviewees describe the experience as “solemn,” “divine,” and “holier than the churches of South Korea.” The interviewees also reported that the formal “studies” are supplemented by other forms of Workers Party control and education efforts, particularly Party-led weekly, obligatory small group discussions, held either at work or in residential neighborhoods through which the population would be kept on the correct path of revolutionary thought.

Awareness of or Participation in Religious Activities

- Most respondents said that they had never seen or encountered any religious activity, places of worship, religious literature, or clerical officials prior to fleeing to China. Some were aware of former Buddhist temples or shrines in the mountains that were preserved as “cultural relics,” but to their knowledge there were no Buddhist monks or worship practiced at these places. A few interviewees had knowledge of religion because their parents or grandparents had been believers, and they remembered it from their childhood. Many more knew of religion from the anti-religious propaganda at school or from the North Korean state-controlled media. Others knew of religious activity from witnessing or hearing about religious believers who were publicly executed for their beliefs.

Alternative Systems of Thought or Belief

- The interviews revealed the widespread re-emergence in North Korea of a remnant element of Shamanism, the ancient pan-Asiatic animistic belief system: “fortune telling,” or the belief that one’s destiny or fate is not under one’s own control (as in *Juche*), but lies in the stars or other natural phenomena. All described fortune telling as an illegal activity. However, all said it was much too widespread for the authorities to eliminate it, and that even North Korean officials utilized the services of fortune tellers. Many interviewees associated the re-emergence of fortune telling with the onset of the famine and the severe deterioration in social conditions in the mid-1990s.
- Only a handful of persons interviewed had ever heard about the three—soon to be four—Christian churches that operate in Pyongyang. Nor had any interviewees heard about or encountered any of the 500 “house churches” or home worship services that the DPRK has claimed in its reports to the UN are operational in North Korea. With one exception, the interviewees simply did not believe that such activities were permitted by the authorities.
- On the basis of the information obtained over the course of conducting this study, it is not possible to corroborate claims about the existence of a substantial underground Christian church in the DPRK. Fully half of the interviewees said simply “no” when asked if they had ever seen or encountered underground churches or non-recognized, unofficial religious activities in North Korea. Others also replied “no,” but then went on to describe acts of persecution against religious believers or those involved in presumed religious activity, such as the possession of a Bible. Only two interviewees said they were aware of an unofficial or underground church network.

Penalties for Religious Activity

- Two interviewees provided graphic and detailed eyewitness testimony of the summary executions of individuals accused of engaging in unauthorized religious activities. Another interviewee said that her brother was executed for involvement in such activities, but that she had not personally witnessed the execution. One additional interviewee had heard of executions of North Koreans involved in unauthorized religious activities, and as a police official had been involved in two separate cases resulting in the arrest of

eleven individuals accused of involvement in such religious activities. Of the eleven arrested, two died during interrogation; the interviewee believed that the other nine had been executed. Others mentioned executions they had heard about but had not witnessed themselves.

- Several interviewees described instances where possession of a Bible or other religious text was an offense punishable by imprisonment or execution. One interviewee, imprisoned following repatriation to North Korea, met a fellow prisoner who was imprisoned because a Bible had been found in his home.

Religious Persecution along the North Korean-Chinese Border

- Despite the provisions in international human rights documents that provide for the freedom to leave one's country of origin, leaving North Korea without the authorization of the DPRK authorities is a violation of the North Korean penal code. Despite the UN's contention that these North Koreans in China should be considered to be refugees, the Chinese police regularly apprehend large numbers of them and forcibly repatriate them back to the DPRK, in violation of Article 33 of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.
- Following sometimes extremely brutal interrogation by North Korean police officials, repatriated North Koreans are apparently sent in large numbers to the *jipkyulso* misdemeanor level provincial incarceration facilities, and to shorter-term small, local mobile labor detention facilities.
- From interviewee responses it can be determined that religion is a factor in the process of interrogation and meting out punishment. One interviewee reported that while detained following repatriation from China, six other detainees were sent to a prison camp for political prisoners after confessing that they were “followers of Jesus.” Another interviewee reported that he was severely beaten upon repatriation from China because, after repeated questioning, he admitted to studying in a Korean-Chinese church.
- Two-thirds of the interviewees had been forcibly repatriated from China. Virtually all of these interviewees report that after being asked the preliminary questions about how they had fled to China, where they had crossed the border, and where they went and what they did in China, they were specifically asked (1) if they had attended Korean-Chinese churches, and (2) if they had had any contact with South Koreans in China (some of whom are representatives of religious organizations doing charitable and humanitarian work in the border area). Contact with Korean-Chinese believers, and, more certainly, contact with South Koreans is considered a political offense. Several of the interviewees related tales of persecution as a result of their contacts with churches in China.

Existing Religious Life in North Korea

- By the 1960s, the Kim Il Sung regime had suppressed and eliminated virtually all public observance of religion, substituting *Juche*/Kimilsungism in its place. However, due to a changed international environment in the 1970s, the regime decided to allow the re-emergence of a highly circumscribed and controlled public religious practice. It is this revival of highly circumscribed and tightly monitored and controlled religious practice, organized and supervised through a series of religious “federations” for Buddhism, Chondokyo, and Protestant, Catholic and, most recently, Orthodox Christianity, that is cited by DPRK authorities to indicate that North Korea respects religious freedom.
- Religious believers inside North Korea today generally fit into one of three general categories: 1) People who participate in the officially sanctioned religious federations and who are described as “old society, pre-WWII” religious adherents and their children; 2) pre-WWII religious adherents who, along with their children, worship clandestinely outside of the officially sanctioned system; and 3) religious adherents who maintain religious beliefs in secret, but who acquired these beliefs from exposure to co-religionists in China,

either by crossing the border themselves or through correspondence with others who cross the border and return. Persons in category three are not tolerated.

- Information gathered for this study reveals that the two Protestant churches and one Catholic church in Pyongyang, while under tight control of the government, are able to conduct some genuine religious activities. Worshipers at these churches as of 2005 are mostly old society, pre-WWII Christians and their children who are taking advantage of the opportunity to profess their faith openly and worship in the presence of other believers. These churches have, at least since 1995, held activities regularly, although these activities are under consistent government monitoring. Membership in, and attendance at, the churches in Pyongyang are controlled by the Korean Workers Party, and there is reportedly a lengthy waiting list.
- South Koreans and others interviewed for this study reported on their visits to eight officially sanctioned “house churches” in North Korea, including five in Pyongyang, one in Kaesong, one in Sungchon, and one in South Hwanghae Province. Attendees at these gatherings were consistently identified as old-generation Christians and their children who gather to pray, read scriptures, and sing hymns, often from memory. The number of officially sanctioned house churches in North Korea could not be verified in the course of this study.
- There are no Roman Catholic priests in North Korea, and the one Catholic church in the country has no direct relationship with the Vatican.
- Leaders of the Chondokyo religion in South Korea state that while it is possible to study the religion at Kim Il Sung University, there is no freedom to propagate Chondokyo beliefs in North Korea. The number of Chondokyo adherents and “preaching rooms” could not be confirmed from the information gathered for this study.
- Many of the interviewees knew of the existence of some of the more famous mountain-top Buddhist temples in North Korea, but surmised that these temples were maintained as “cultural heritage sites.” None had seen a temple open for public religious activities or that housed Buddhist monks. The extent to which worship, study, and meditation is carried out at Buddhist temples could not be ascertained during the course of this study.
- Despite the assertions of the North Korean government that the state and religion are separate, it is clear that the religious activities that take place in the DPRK under the auspices of government-sponsored religious federations could more accurately be described as emanations of the North Korean party-state. The religious activity that is allowed takes place under the authority and control of the corresponding religious federation. The religious federations are members of, and controlled by, the National United Front for the Unification of the Fatherland, which is in turn controlled by the Korean Workers Party, the ruling arm of the regime. Under the federation structure, there is no apparent mechanism, procedure, or structure for allowing belief systems and forms of worship that are not covered by an appropriate federation.
- Interaction between North Korea federation churches and churches in South Korea is used as a medium of Korean reconciliation. Religious interaction between North Koreans and religious adherents outside North Korea that takes place outside of the supervision of the religious federations is not permitted.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

There has been a dearth of accurate information about the status of freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK or North Korea). This absence of first-hand observation has been noted by the UN and the U.S. government, as well as by many human rights organizations.

Upon reviewing the North Korean government’s report to the UN on the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the UN Human Rights Committee, in 2002, expressed doubt that the DPRK met the standards set forth in Article 18 on freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief. At the same time, the Committee noted with regret that it did not have enough information to come to any firm conclusions about, or make specific recommendations to, North Korea.¹

In 2004, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in the DPRK described freedom of religion or belief, along with the related freedoms of opinion, expression, and association, as one of six “human rights challenges” facing North Korea. The Rapporteur also noted that he had received conflicting information about the “liberalization” of DPRK policy toward religion and religious practices, along with other information questioning the “genuine[ness]” of the purported liberalization policy.²

The U.S. State Department’s 2005 *Annual Report on International Religious Freedom* recognizes that the government of North Korea does not allow freedom of movement to journalists and others to assess fully human rights conditions in the country and that “little is known about the day-to-day life of religious persons in the country.” The State Department report acknowledges that because of this lack of up-to-date information, it is “limited in detail” and based on information obtained over the course of a decade.³

Even though the regime of leader Kim Jong Il continues to restrict access to scholars and journalists, it is still possible to obtain detailed information on many areas of life in the DPRK from the increasing numbers of North Koreans who fled to China during the famine crisis in the mid to late 1990s or more recently, and who have made their way to South Korea, where they have obtained asylum and now live.

Based on extensive, in-depth interviews with 40 former North Koreans who recently fled to China and South Korea, this report of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom provides significantly more information than was previously available on the subject of religious freedom in North Korea. Even though the normal international monitoring capability does not exist with regard to North Korea, the information and analysis contained in this report will contribute to a more detailed understanding and awareness on the part of the international community of this particular “human rights challenge” in the DPRK. It is not surprising that the testimonies of the North Koreans interviewed indicate a wide discrepancy between what the North Korean government claims and what its citizens perceive and experience to be the case. The testimonies also show that official DPRK policies related to freedom of religion or belief affect not only the extremely small number of religious practitioners cited by the authorities, but also the entire population of North Korea.



SOUTH KOREAN FLAG



NORTH KOREAN FLAG

Despite the fact that North Korea formally contends that there is freedom of religion in the DPRK,⁴ the Commission can confirm the “doubts” of the UN Human Rights Committee that DPRK policy and practice meet the international standards for freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief. Although the North Korean government has formally subscribed to those standards through its accession to international human rights treaties, based on the information gathered for this report, it is evident that the DPRK government has committed—and continues to commit—severe human rights violations in this area. This report makes it possible to identify with considerable precision the measures that need to be taken by the North Korean government to bring DPRK policy and practice up to international standards.

The DPRK asserts that there are no human rights violations or other human rights problems in North Korea. If this were true, North Korea would be truly unique among UN Member States, since most countries admit to having human rights problems or concerns of one sort or another. North Korea maintains, however, whether or not its diplomats and spokespersons know otherwise, that it does not have human rights problems and that observations, accusations, and/or allegations of such human rights violations in the DPRK are part of a campaign to “isolate, suffocate, and destroy” North Korea.

Religious Practice in Korea: an Overview

During their millennia of recorded history, the Korean people have experienced a rich variety of thought and belief systems. Indeed, it can be said that Koreans have a unique tradition of philosophical and/or religious thought, which has had a much larger impact on Korean society and history, in both North and South Korea, than many outsiders may be aware.

Many systems of thought and belief observed by Koreans historically remain relevant to the religious freedom situation in the DPRK today. These include the pan-Asiatic, ancient animistic folk religion usually referred to as “Shamanism,” and a number of religious and thought systems that entered Korea from China, including Taoism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Neo-Confucianism, and Catholic Christianity. Korea, particularly in the north, later became one of the most successful mission fields for Protestant Christianity. In the late nineteenth century, Korea became the most “Christianized” nation in Asia, with the exception of the Philippines.

Another system of thought and belief that played a major role in Korean history was the syncretic, indigenous millenarian religion called *Tonghak* (“Eastern Learning”) or Chondokyo (“the Heavenly Way”) that took the Korean peasantry by storm in the 1870s and 1880s and set in motion the forces that altered modern Korean history.⁵ Immediately after WWI, Chondokyo leaders and Protestant Christian ministers organized a huge nationwide demonstration for Korean independence from Japan, one of the pivotal events of modern Korean history.

Throughout much of Korean history, these various systems of thought and belief have peacefully co-existed, or even been layered one on top of the other. For an entire millennium, Buddhism was the established state religion,

THERE HAS BEEN A DEARTH OF
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THE
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THOUGHT, CONSCIENCE, AND
RELIGION OR BELIEF
IN THE DEMOCRATIC
PEOPLE’S REPUBLIC OF KOREA

associated with the initial unification of Korea as a single political unit or nation, while Confucianism furnished the theory or model of social relationships: father to son, husband to wife, children to parents, friend to friend, and ruler to subjects.

From the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries, Korea could be characterized as among the most “Confucianized” societies in East Asia. Even today, nearly all Koreans, regardless of their present religious or anti-religious convictions, observe basically Confucianist approaches to social relations. Evidence of the enduring influence of this and other ancient traditions can even be seen in the public symbols of the two Koreas. The Republic of Korea (ROK or South Korea) bedecks its national flag with two sets of ancient Taoist/Confucianist philosophical symbols: the yin-yang⁶ bordered by four sets of “tribars.”⁷ In a similar vein, the DPRK, unique among Socialist bloc nations, in a nod to the continued belief in the importance of philosophical thought, added the scholar’s writing brush to the familiar communist symbol of hammer and sickle. Moreover, unlike Chinese communist leader Mao Tse Tung, who attacked Confucianism during the Chinese Cultural Revolution as one of the “four olds” to be smashed by the Red Guards, Kim Il Sung instead incorporated elements of Confucianism into the *Juche* Idea as the DPRK national ideology or religion.

At various times in Korean history, the state-supported system of thought vigorously repressed “heterodoxy” in the name of “orthodoxy.” One such period was the Chosun Dynasty from the late fourteenth to the early twentieth centuries. During this time, the guardians of Neo-Confucianist “orthodoxy” nearly totally suppressed Buddhism, confiscating lands owned and worked by Buddhist monastic orders, banishing Buddhist temples to remote mountain tops, severely limiting the number of Buddhist monks, closing Buddhist learning academies, and completely prohibiting Buddhist clergy from even entering the capital city of Seoul. Later, when Korean envoys to the Ming Emperors’ Court in Beijing converted to Catholicism and returned to Korea with this “new doctrine and learning,” the guardians of the Chosun dynasty’s Neo-Confucian orthodoxy executed the converts in periodic waves of massacres. Similarly, the scholars who developed the syncretic *Tonghak* (Eastern Learning) were also hunted down and executed.

In the twentieth century, among the secular philosophical systems that became important on the Korean peninsula was Marxism-Leninism, which was introduced by Korean students who had studied in Japan and Koreans who had lived in China and the Soviet Union. Marxism-Leninism supplied the basic political language that is still used by the current regime in North Korea.⁸

During his consolidation of power and in the ensuing decades, the North Korean government under leader Kim Il Sung developed its own thought and belief system known as the *Juche* Idea or Kim Il Sung Revolutionary Thought (referred to in the report as *Juche* or Kimilsungism), which was proclaimed to be quintessentially Korean while also applicable to developing countries around the world. According to almost all observers of North Korea, *Juche* has over the years taken on a highly religious, even cult-like character. Some Korea scholars interviewed for this report even describe North Korea as a veritable theocracy, with a regime that forcefully imposes the “religion” of *Juche* on the people.

Throughout the course of his regime, Kim Il Sung absorbed and/or harshly suppressed all systems of thought and religious belief other than *Juche* / Kimilsungism. By the 1960s, North Korea and Albania were the only two countries in the world where all religious practice was abolished and prohibited.⁹ Even after the DPRK government organized the construction of three churches in the capital city of Pyongyang in the late 1980s, executions continued of religious believers not affiliated with the state sponsored religious organizations. Former North Koreans interviewed for this report personally witnessed public executions of religious believers, which occurred at least through the late 1990s.

Today, as this report shows, conditions for religious freedom north of the 38th parallel are strikingly different than those found to the south. The number of people in the two Koreas officially reported to be religious adherents also diverges widely. Some 50 percent of the South Korean population is identified by the Republic of Korea government as claiming adherence to one of a large variety of belief systems. In the North, however, the number of religious believers in the five “permitted” religions amounts to only two-tenths of one percent (0.2 percent) of the population, according to the information provided by the DPRK to the UN. This report will describe how this dramatic decline in the number of officially recognized religious adherents came about under the regimes of Kim Il Sung and his son, Kim Jong Il.

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AS A VERITABLE THEOCRACY,
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FORCEFULLY IMPOSES THE
“RELIGION” OF *JUCHE* ON THE
PEOPLE.

CHAPTER TWO

OFFICIAL NORTH KOREAN GOVERNMENT DECLARATIONS ON FREEDOM OF THOUGHT, CONSCIENCE, AND RELIGION OR BELIEF

Before considering the testimony of the former North Koreans that is the basis of this study, the official pronouncements of the North Korean government regarding religious freedom should be examined. These include both what the DPRK government has said to the international community in its reports to the UN and what it prescribes for its citizenry in its own constitution.

North Korean Government Statements to the UN

Pursuant to its reporting obligations as a State Party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the DPRK officially informed the UN Human Rights Committee in 2000 that:

Article 68 of the Constitution states: “Citizens have freedom of religious belief. This right is ensured by the permission to build religious buildings and have the legal freedom to select any religious ceremonies.” Thus, people have the legal freedom to select any religious belief, to build religious facilities or structures, to have or refuse to have religious ceremonies individually or collectively in an open or closed way, to organize religious bodies and have activities, to teach religion....

Religionists have no limitations in organizing religious bodies and conducting religious activities....

The state respects the religious life and ceremonies of religionists. The people who believe in religion are free to construct various religious buildings and facilities and to have religious life and ceremonies in conformity with their own religious rules.

In the DPRK, religion is completely independent of the state and all religions are equal. No religion is either interfered in or discriminated against and people are free to believe in any religion according to their own choice.

Now there are such religious bodies in the DPRK as the Korean Christian Federation, the Korean Buddhist Federation, the Korean Association of Roman Catholics, and the Korean Central Guidance Committee of the Believers in Chondokyo, and the Korean Religionist Association.¹⁰

In a supplemental report, the DPRK provided the Human Rights Committee with statistics on the number of adherents or believers in the above mentioned officially-sponsored religious bodies as well as the number of religious buildings, ministers, and priests.¹¹ North Korean diplomats cited the total number of religious believers as 40,000 in a population of 22 million.¹² When questioned by the Committee about the small number of religious believers (less than 0.2 percent of the population), DPRK officials replied:

[M]any people who practiced religion had been killed during the Korean War. Religion was dying of old age and young people seldom showed an interest in religious worship....¹³

The North Korean diplomat went on to reiterate that “Religion was completely separate from the State, which in no way interfered with religious observance or discriminated against any religion.”¹⁴

These claims, as well as the statistics on the numbers of believers in the officially sponsored religious bodies in North Korea, will be examined in detail in Chapter 8 of this report.

The DPRK Constitution

There is a glaring omission in the formal DPRK declarations to the UN. When other provisions of the DPRK Constitution are taken into account, the picture is dramatically altered. Indeed, these provisions make clear that the limitations on and violations of freedom of religion documented in this report have an unambiguous source.

When the North Korean report to the Human Rights Committee quoted Article 68 of the DPRK Constitution of 1998, crucial qualifiers were deliberately omitted. In full, Article 68 of Chapter 5 “Fundamental Rights and Duties of Citizens” states:

Citizens have freedom of religious beliefs. This right is granted by approving the construction of religious buildings and the holding of religious ceremonies. *No one may use religion as a pretext for drawing in foreign forces or for harming the State and social order* (emphasis added).

Despite the DPRK assertion to the Human Rights Committee that there are no limitations on religious practice, the third sentence of Article 68, with its provisions about drawing in foreign forces and harming the state or social order, does in fact contain potentially severe limitations that could easily result in the arbitrary application of the constitutional provision on “freedom of religious beliefs.” What is more, the limitations regarding “foreign forces” and “harming the State” are not, in and of themselves, permissible grounds for limitations under the ICCPR.¹⁵ Further, the scope of the freedom expressed in Article 68 is much narrower than that provided under international standards.

Because of their history, Koreans both north and south of the 38th parallel may readily appreciate the provision that religion may not be “used as a pretext for drawing in foreign forces.”¹⁶ Nonetheless, it is a significant constitutional limitation on freedom of religion or belief, particularly in light of the fact that many if not most of the religions and major systems of thought historically found in Korea, including Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Neo-Confucianism, and even Marxism, are of foreign origin. Moreover, it will be later in this report that the omitted sentence of Article 68 in actual fact explains a good deal about contemporary religious persecution among North Koreans along the DPRK-China border.

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- DPRK CONSTITUTION.
ARTICLE 68

In addition to these broad constitutional limitations on religious freedom, the scope of the freedom as expressed in the constitution is quite narrow when held up to international standards. The state’s respect for “freedom of religious beliefs” is limited to “approving the construction of religious buildings and the holding of religious ceremonies.” This right as outlined in the North Korean Constitution is thus considerably narrower than the freedom to manifest religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching as expressed in the ICCPR and other international documents.¹⁷

It should also be pointed out that the DPRK constitutional provision on the “freedom of religious beliefs” contains an unusual formulation for a human rights guarantee. Article 68 states that this freedom is “granted” through permission to construct religious buildings and hold religious ceremonies. Under international law, the rights of citizens are not “granted” by governmental “approval.” Rather, rights are inherent in the dignity of men and women, and are to be “recognized” and “respected” by governments.

It is widely recognized that the freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief is closely bound with the associated freedoms of expression, assembly, and association. Article 67 of the 1998 DPRK Constitution provides for “freedom of speech, of the press, demonstration and association.” However, as is the case with “freedom of religious beliefs,” these freedoms are overshadowed and heavily, if not entirely, limited and circumscribed by other constitutional provisions. These include:

The State shall adhere to the class line, strengthen the dictatorship of people’s democracy and firmly defend the people’s power and socialist system against all subversive acts of hostile elements at home and abroad (Article 12);

In building a socialist national culture, the State shall oppose the cultural infiltration of imperialism and any tendency to return to the past, protect its national cultural heritage and develop it in keeping with the existing socialist situation (Article 41); and

The State shall eliminate the way of life inherited from the outmoded society and establish a new socialist way of life in every sphere (Article 42).

As will be seen in the perceptions and experiences of the former North Koreans interviewed for this report, the constitutional limitations and restrictions in fact completely override the “rights” that are set forth in the DPRK constitution.



*North Koreans Perform at the 2005
Arirang Festival*

CHAPTER THREE

THE EXPERIENCE AND PERSPECTIVES OF FORTY FORMER NORTH KOREANS

I. Background on the Study and the Interviewees

For this report, 40 former North Koreans were interviewed extensively on various aspects of freedom of religion and belief, including their knowledge of religious activities and the state’s enforcement of its official ideology.¹⁸

The interviewees were split almost evenly between males and females. However, there was no discernable correlation of responses by gender. The previous occupations of the interviewees included housewives, traders or sellers (small business operators), teachers, students, factory workers, soldiers, policemen, construction workers, office workers, and low-level state officials. Again, the responses of the interviewees to questions of interest for this report did not correlate with previous occupation and/or profession.

One respondent was 73 years of age, four were in their sixties, and one was 20 years of age, but the bulk of interviewees were in their early to mid thirties. One of the interviewees fled North Korea in 1989, two left in 1996, three in 1997, and three in 2003; the rest of the interviewees left North Korea between 1998 and 2001. Once again, the answers provided to interview questions showed little or no discernable variation by age or the year of departure from North Korea.¹⁹

It should be noted that the viewpoints expressed herein are based on experiences inside North Korea prior to 2003. That said, although the DPRK undertook economic adjustments or reforms in 2002²⁰ and in 2004 made a revision to its Criminal Code, it is not apparent that these or any other changes have made a difference in the government’s respect for the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief. In any case, DPRK authorities have been using the same figures and making the same assertions regarding religious freedom and religious observance in North Korea for the last decade. Thus, the experiences and viewpoints of the 40 North Koreans interviewed for this study fall within the same period as the claims about religious freedom currently made by DPRK authorities.

The one, most striking area in which an interviewee’s life experience appears to have had a significant impact on his or her answers is whether or not the interviewee had spent time in the North Korean capital of Pyongyang.²¹ Few knew of the existence of the three official churches in Pyongyang, and of those who did, one thought they were for foreigners, another thought they were for liaison with foreigners, and a third, despite never attending services at the churches, assumed that those could not be “real churches” like those in China and South Korea.

The Interview Questions

The 40 former North Koreans were asked a series of questions designed, from various angles, to elicit information on several aspects of respect for the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief in the DPRK. The first question was short but open-ended: Does freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief exist in North Korea? And, secondly, why, or why not?

Another series of questions asked if the interviewees had ever encountered or seen any (1) authorized or permitted religious worship places or activities; (2) religious literature such as texts from the Buddhist Tripitika or the Christian Bible; or (3) religious personnel such as priests, pastors, or monks. They were also asked about their awareness of the holy days of various religions, and whether they knew about religion at all before they had gone to China and South Korea.

The DPRK Constitution proclaims the *Juche* Idea or Kimilsungism as the country’s official ideology, and almost all observers note that this state ideology is itself highly religious in nature. Thus, a series of questions were asked about the implementation and propagation of *Juche*/Kimilsungism as the official “belief system.”

Questions were also asked about alternative systems of thought and belief.²² Interviewees were asked if they had ever encountered “underground,” illegal, secret, or unauthorized religious activity, and if so, of what kind.

Finally, interviewees were asked about any encounters they might have had with religion while residing without formal government approval in China. They were also asked whether there were any consequences to such encounters if they were caught by Chinese police and forcibly repatriated to North Korea.

II. The Experience of Religious Freedom

Overview

Virtually all interviewees responded to the first series of questions by indicating that there was no freedom of religion or belief in North Korea. They gave essentially four mutually reinforcing reasons. First, all cited the ubiquitous anti-religious propaganda by the state to which they had been exposed. Second, none had experienced, seen, or known of any authorized religious activity by North Koreans. As noted, the three exceptions who had heard about the three churches in Pyongyang thought they were for foreigners.²³ Third, all had heard about or had personally witnessed severe persecution of persons caught for engaging in religious activity, including executions and/or imprisonment. Fourth, all understood *Juche*, the official state ideology, to be literally the only thought system or religion allowed in North Korea.

In school, in Party or state-sponsored youth groups such as *Sonyeondan* (a boys’ group) or *Chongnyondongmaeng* (the Socialist Youth Union), and in mandatory adult political education lectures and/or study groups (called *hakseupban*) in neighborhoods or workplaces,²⁴ North Koreans were taught that religion was nothing more than “opium.” Virtually all interviewees used that very term. Although religion as the “opiate of the masses” is typically attributed to Karl Marx, numerous respondents attributed the sentiment directly to Kim Il Sung.²⁵

In addition, numerous interviewees referred to several drama programs that were shown repeatedly on North Korean television. The show *Seonghwangdang*



North Koreans pay tribute to their nation at the 2005 Arirang Festival.

depicted religion as “evil nonsense.” Another drama frequently mentioned by interviewees was *Choi Hak Sin Ilga* (Choi Haksin’s Family). Choi is a fictitious Christian pastor, ordained during the Japanese occupation, who refused to accept Communism and retained his Christian belief. His son, who had gone south to study and returned during the Korean war as a South Korean soldier, is portrayed as an agent of American imperialism. Choi’s mother was killed in the war, his wife went insane, and his daughter was raped by an American GI, thus demonstrating how the whole family suffered because Choi persisted in his Christian beliefs. Other anti-religious propaganda cited by the interviewees includes TV dramas such as *Eomeoni ui sowon* (Wish of the Mother).

The denigration of religious belief is apparently pervasive, even in common idiom. For example, *Yesujaeng-i* is a pejorative term for “Jesus practitioners,” with *Yesu* being the term for Jesus and *jaeng-i* the pejorative denigration. *Jungdaegari* is impolite, vulgar slang for Buddhist monk.

Specific Responses

The first question asked of the interviewees was simply, “Does freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief exist in North Korea?”²⁶ With possibly two exceptions over wording differences, all 40 persons replied “No,” or, more emphatically, “Impossible” or “It cannot possibly exist” with respect to North Korea.

The two possible exceptions were respondents who said, “While there is no religious freedom at the state level, you can have faith on a personal level,” and “You can believe in something other than *Juche* or Kimilsungism in secret.” However, both of these respondents went on to say, “The only thought one is allowed to think is Communism and Socialism. Religion is considered a big crime. If you believe in religion you are politically ostracized.” Although religious belief on a personal level was thought possible, “you are never allowed to express that belief. They say they have to cut the side branches to keep the Workers Party strong.”

The second question asked for an explanation to the answer to the first question. The range of responses provides insight into the perceptions of former North Korean citizens.

Interviewee 1: “Religion is considered an opium.”

Interviewee 2: “Only Kimilsungism can exist.”

Interviewee 3: “Having faith in God is an act of espionage. Kim Il Sung is a god in North Korea.”

Interviewee 4: “As long as the dictatorship exists, religious freedom cannot exist and people with faith will be punished.”

Interviewee 5: “North Korean ideology is the single leader system. The central theme of the ideology is *Juche*. Kim Il Sung is the center of things, so nothing else can exist.”

Interviewee 6: “I did not experience religious freedom in North Korea. I discovered it in China.... Religious freedom is not allowed in North Korea because it will ruin the deification of Kim Il Sung. If freedom of religion is allowed, it will ruin the control of people’s minds.”

Interviewee 7: “It is impossible to talk freely of religion because a Kim Il Sung directive says that religion is an opium.”

Interviewee 8: “Under the North Korean system, freedom of religion cannot exist. I never heard of it until I left North Korea.”

Interviewee 9: “The authorities do not allow it. With an *inminbanjang* (chief of a residential neighborhood unit) and a *jojang* (worksite foreman) who look into everything, it makes it impossible to hide anything.”

Interviewee 10: “As you learn how to talk, you learn to say, ‘Thank you father Kim Il Sung.’ North Koreans live in the tight frame of the society, and no one can think of other things.”

Interviewee 11: “Though it is allowed according to the Constitution, religion, in reality, is denied by means of ‘*Dang yoo il sa sang che ge 10 dae won chick*’ (the Ten Principles of the Party’s Exclusive Ideology), claiming that Kim Il Sung himself is the exclusive religious figure.”²⁷

Interviewee 12: “I never heard about religion.”

Interviewee 13: “North Koreans believe whatever the government says.”²⁸

Interviewee 14: “Religion is an opium... that paralyzes the ideology of the people. Religion was rooted out since the 4th Party Convention (*Dang Daehoi*) in 1958.”

Interviewee 15: “North Korean law doesn’t allow religious freedom. You cannot have religious activities legally. There might be underground religious activities, but if those activities are discovered, those participating in them must be executed.”

Interviewee 16: “We had been educated from elementary school that those who believe in religion were stupid and crazy people.”

Interviewee 17: “People are educated in school that religion is evil.”

Interviewee 18: “If you have a religion, you will be persecuted, even executed. *Juche* is the only religion North Korean people can have.”

Interviewee 19: “North Korea itself is the religious group.”

Interviewee 20: “Kim Il Sung himself is regarded as the absolute power.”

Interviewee 21: “In North Korea, religion is not acknowledged.”

Interviewee 22: “Any idol is strictly prohibited as an obstacle to national prosperity. We can only think of Kim Jong Il.”

“HAVING FAITH
IN GOD IS AN
ACT OF
ESPIONAGE. KIM
IL SUNG IS A
GOD IN NORTH
KOREA.”

Interviewee 28: “North Korea persecutes religion. *Juche* itself is a religion, therefore they worry that people might forsake *Juche* for another religion.”

Interviewee 29: “There is a set form given from the authorities for ideological education from elementary school. It is impossible to have freedom of thought or action. We have to live in a completely organized society.”²⁹

Interviewee 30: “We learned *Hyukmyeong Sasang* (the revolutionary idea) under the Kim Il Sung regime. Due to education in childhood, North Koreans naturally have a negative perspective about religion.”

“NORTH KOREA
PERSECUTES RELIGION.
JUCHE ITSELF IS A
RELIGION, THEREFORE THEY
WORRY THAT PEOPLE MIGHT
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ANOTHER RELIGION.”

Interviewee 31: “There is a section in the Constitution that allows religious freedom; however, the next section talks about freedom of persecution. Therefore when people are persecuted due to their religion, there is nowhere they can turn.”³⁰

Interviewee 32: “When I was in middle school, I learned that religion was a bad thing.”

Interviewee 34: “Communism and the belief in *Juche* are all that exist.... Religion is considered the biggest crime and is dealt with in the harshest manner. If you believe in religion you are politically ostracized.”

Interviewee 35: “In North Korea we call ourselves ‘Kim Il Sung people.’ The only ideology is Kimilsungism, and no other ideology is allowed.”

Interviewee 36: “People who believe in Christ are shot and executed.”

Interviewee 37: “The North Korean government teaches that religion creates a non-existing god which tries to eliminate communism. I learned that religion is a group of people who gather to create something that does not exist. North Korea wants to maintain its regime. In that sense it cannot let people know about religion and the true nature of the regime. If that happens, our society will collapse. In the army we are taught that if we believe in religion we will fall into the temptation of money, tempt others, and be reduced to thinking like a wolf.”

Interviewee 38: “I heard that religion paralyzes people’s minds like opium. Therefore it has to be completely blocked out.”

II. Awareness of or Participation in Religious Activities

Summary

In a second series of questions, interviewees were asked if they had ever seen worship or other religious activities in the cities and towns where they grew up or worked; met any monks, pastors, priests, or Chondokyo leaders; encountered any religious literature such as the Christian Bible or Buddhist Tritipika; or been made aware of any Buddhist or Christian holy days. If the answer to these questions was no, they were also asked if they had found out about religion

before going to China, where most had encountered Korean-Chinese (*Chosunjok*) or South Korean religious adherents.

Most respondents simply said no, they had never seen or encountered any religious activity, places of worship, religious literature, or clerical officials prior to fleeing to China. Some were aware of former Buddhist temples or shrines in the mountains that were preserved as “cultural relics,” but to their knowledge there were no Buddhist monks or worship practiced at these places. A few interviewees had knowledge of religion because their parents or grandparents had been believers, and they remembered it from their childhood. Many more knew of religion from the anti-religious propaganda they learned at school or from the North Korean state-controlled media. Others knew of religious activity from having witnessed or heard about religious believers who were publicly executed for their beliefs. (Two persons who had personally witnessed executions were re-interviewed in depth. Their accounts are described in Chapter 4.) Most simply had never seen or encountered authorized religious activity prior to fleeing the DPRK. None had encountered or even knew about the 500 “house churches” or “home worship” services that the DPRK claims to recognize formally under the jurisdiction of the North Korean Christian Federation.

Specific Responses

Interviewee 1 had never encountered any religious practice or activity in Gimchaek county, North Hamgyong province.

Interviewee 2 knew of no churches or Buddhist worship places in Hoeryong, although she was told that the Hoeryong cinema had once been a church. There was a Buddhist temple at Yeokpo district in the Mujin area which had no monk, though there was an old couple who maintained the empty house and a well.

Interviewee 3 had had never encountered or known of any Buddhist, Christian, or Chondokyo places of worship or religious activities in Musan, North Hamgyong Province.

Interviewee 4 knew of Christianity from her grandmother, who observed Christmas. She also had heard of “Underwood” (an early Christian missionary to Korea denounced in anti-Christian propaganda as an American spy) and knew that Kim Il Sung’s parents were Christian believers. She had not met other religious people but she knew of them, as she had witnessed the execution of persons who were discovered in possession of the “kiddokyo book” (referring to the Protestant Bible).³¹

Interviewee 5 knew of Christianity and Buddhism from his parents who had grown up in Japan. He had seen the negative references to religion in a 1986 movie called “The Wish of the Mother.” He had never met a monk, pastor, or priest in North Korea, but he had seen Pastor Mun Ik Hwan (Moon Ik-wan) on television.³² There were no Chondokyo meeting houses, Buddhist temples, or Christian churches in Seoncheongang, Hamhung, South Hamgyong province. The interviewee had attended university in Pyongyang and knew of Bongsu, Chilgol, and Changchung churches (the three churches then existing in North Korea) by name.³³

MOST RESPONDENTS
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RELIGIOUS ACTIVITY,
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RELIGIOUS
LITERATURE, OR
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PRIOR TO FLEEING TO
CHINA.



Building of the Central Committee of Korean Catholics Association

Interviewee 6 learned about Christmas from foreign films in the mid-1980s, but she had never seen any religious facilities in Onsong, North Hamgyong province.

Interviewee 7 also confirmed that there were no churches or temples in Musan. He knew of religion from the North Korean movie, *Seonghwangdang*, which portrays Christianity as a myth and tool for invasion, proclaiming missionaries, particularly the notorious Underwood, as spies. While still in North Korea, his interest in the Christian religion was stimulated by seeing a photograph of Leonardo Da Vinci's painting of the Last Supper. He knew of the Buddhist, Catholic, and Protestant Federations in Pyongyang, but thought they existed for the purpose of liaison with foreigners.³⁴

Interviewee 9 was born into a Christian family and attended church until 1947 (at age 6). Her older brother had been a pastor. She lived in Cheolsan, North Pyeong-an, and briefly, after her marriage, in Pyongyang. After her pastor brother was arrested and sent to “Oro Special Camp” in Hamhung, she was banished from Pyongyang and sent to Bukchungnodong jigu, Gyongseong, North Hamgyong to work in a factory. Except for her pre-Korean War youth, she neither saw nor knew of any religious or worship facilities in Cheolsan, Pyongyang, or Bukchungnodong jigu.

Interviewee 10 knew of a Buddhist shrine near Chongjin designated as a “cultural property,” but, to his knowledge, there were no Buddhist monks there. He never knew of any churches or pastors.

Interviewee 14 said there were no religious meeting facilities in Onsong, North Hamgyong province. However, he had learned of Buddhism and Christianity in the anti-religious movies *Seonghwangdang* (a Shamanistic prayer place), and *Choi Hak Sin Ilga* (Choi Hak Sin's Family).

Interviewee 15, a former lieutenant colonel in the *Gukgabowibu*, the National Security Police, replied, “Of course I saw no pastors, priests, or monks or places of worship in either Nampo or Pyongwon-gun, South Pyong-an Province, as according to the law, we are not allowed to have religion except for *Nodongdang* (the Workers Party).”

Interviewee 16 knew of no places of worship in Hamhung, South Hamgyong province, although the interviewee was aware that there had been arrests of religious believers in that place.

Interviewee 17 was a 65 year old woman who was born into a Christian family in Pihyeon county, North Pyong-An province, and attended church until 1947. In recent times there were no places of worship or religious personnel in Pihyeon county, though she recognized the *sun jeon sil* (propaganda building) as a former red brick church. She also reported that there had once been many Christian residents in Pihyeon county, but after the Korean War many were exiled. Those who remained were discriminated against in that they had to work in factories and were not allowed to attend university.

Interviewee 18 never saw any places of worship in either Musan or Hyesan, North Hamgyong province, though she had heard on television about a Buddhist

shrine on Mount Myohyang that was on “historic remains.” She had heard of, but did not herself witness, executions in Hyesan in May 1999 of persons caught importing Bibles.

Interviewee 19 lived in Saebyul county, North Hamgyong province. He did military service in Hoiyang county, Gwangwon province for five years and went to college in Pyongyang for two years. He had never seen any places of worship in any of those places. While in the military, he witnessed the public execution of five persons for their religious affiliation.³⁵

Interviewee 21 knew of no Buddhist temples, churches, or Chondokyo meeting halls in Gowon county, South Hamgyong province.

Interviewee 22 knew of no churches, temples, or Chondokyo meeting halls in Chongjin, North Hamgyong province.

Interviewee 23 did not recall ever having seen any Chondokyo meeting halls, churches, or Buddhist temples in either Suncheon, or Kaechon in South Pyongan province, or Wonsan in South Kangwan province. The interviewee knew of religion from the *Sunghwangdang* play which juxtaposed Christian and Buddhist belief with the *Juche* idea that “your destiny belongs to you.” He learned that the Christian religion has pastors from the televised meeting of South Korean Rev. Mun Ik Hwan with Kim Il Sung. This meeting caused the interviewee to wonder why the Great Leader would meet with a pastor, since they had been taught that religious believers were foolish and cowardly.

Interviewee 29 said there was a Buddhist temple in the mountains in Eun Duk county, North Hamgyong, but since no monk had been there since the early 1960s, he thought it impossible to say that Buddhism existed there. He thought that there were secret Christian believers in North Korea.

Interviewee 30 knew of no Buddhist temples, churches, or Chondokyo meeting halls in Onsong, North Hamgyong province.

Interviewee 34 said that there were no religious worship places in Musan, North Hamgyong province. She had seen a Buddhist temple in the mountains near Gyeongsong, North Hamgyong province, but reported that “ordinary people like me could not go inside it.” She had also heard about Geumbul Sa Temple on Mt. Chilbo.

Interviewee 37 said he saw some people secretly go to a Buddhist temple in Wonsan, South Kangwon province, “which was preserved as a cultural asset.” He continued, “[o]ld people know better about those things. Even if you believe, you still can’t express your beliefs.” Still, he said, the situation was improving. “When I was in the army in 1987,” he continued, “I used to pass by a house when I was walking in Kangryong, South Hwanghae province. One day, the house was torn down and the family who lived there was gone. I asked people why. They said that the father of the family was discovered to be a Christian, so everybody in the family was taken to the political prison camp. I think that nowadays the situation is getting more relaxed. One refugee who was carrying a Bible was captured, but he was released because he said he just picked it up off the street. If that had happened before, he would have been killed right away.”

III. The Official State Ideology

Summary



Pohyon Buddhist Temple, a North Korean ‘cultural relic’

Article 3 of the DPRK Constitution sets out the guiding role for *Juche* as an official system of thought or belief, just as Article 11 of the Constitution confers a “leading role” on the Korean Workers Party (KWP). Kim Jong Il, largely as prelude and/or precursor to his succession, merged the *Juche* ideology with the ideology of Kim Il Sung known officially as *Kimilsung Hyukmyeong Sasang* (Kim Il Sung Revolutionary Thought) or Kimilsungism. This merged ideology is presented by the state as a “monolithic” or “unitary” ideological system; it is referred to in Korean as “*Yuil* (only one) *Sasang* (ideology) *Chegye* (system).”³⁶ It is understood by the former North Koreans interviewed for this report as being the only thought and belief system allowed in North Korea, to the exclusion of all others, as well as the highly elaborate basis for the cult of personality, pre-1945 Japanese-style “emperor worship,” or semi-deification that surrounds the memory of North Korea’s Great Leader, Kim Il Sung.³⁷

The interviews included a series of questions designed to ascertain the interviewees’ perceptions of *Juche*/Kimilsungism and how it is propagated and understood. Virtually all interviewees described the life-long system of ideological propagation and indoctrination. This starts with children learning to say “Thank you father Kim Il Sung” when learning to talk, and continues with ongoing, mandatory adult education classes in the workplace or in religious shrine-like “Kim Il Sung Revolutionary Idea Institutes,” “Study Halls,” or “Research rooms” (*Kim Il-sung Hyukmyeong Sasang YeonGuSil*). The main variations in the interviewees’ responses to these questions were the different days of the week the interviewee was required to attend the ideological meetings, and the variety of short hand or slang expressions for the study halls.³⁸ There was also some variation in the frequency with which attendance was required. What was common to all the descriptions, however, was that these places were not just secular and educational, but spaces for veneration.

The interviewees also reported that the formal “studies” are supplemented by other forms of Workers Party control and education efforts, particularly Party-led weekly, obligatory small group discussions, held either at work or in residential neighborhoods that were called “Summation of All Daily Life” (*Saenghwal Chonghwa*) and “mutual [or reciprocal] self-criticism” (*Hosang Bipan*), through which the population would be kept on the correct path of revolutionary thought.

Specific Responses

The following responses are indicative of the interviewees’ experiences and perceptions of *Juche*/Kimilsungism.

Interviewee 2: “*Kim Il-sung Hyukmyeong Hakseupgwan* is like a religious shrine and attendance is compulsory.... One cannot escape from it: a study session on Tuesday, Wednesday lecture and *Saenghwal Chonghwa* on Saturday. And we get question and answer verbal tests on the subjects.”

Interviewee 3: “On the subject of *Juche* and Kim Il Sung revolutionary ideology, on Tuesday we have study at *Hakseup Dang*, Thursdays were lectures at the workplace, and ‘mutual criticism’ every Friday at work with the work team.”

Interviewee 5: “Every Wednesday, each district went to Kim Il Sung Revolutionary History Institute to learn about *Juche*.... For example, when a child is learning to speak, he is taught to say ‘Thank you father Kim Il Sung.’ The child hears nothing but Kim Il Sung and his son in the system, so nothing else can get in.”

Interviewee 6: “The housewives need to attend the Kim Il Sung revolutionary ideology institute near Juwon, Onsong during the day every Wednesday.... It is compulsory to attend at the given time.... The atmosphere inside is nothing like a library and in fact is like a very solemn and divine religious shrine.... To show their loyalty, people wake up early in the morning to clean the statue of Kim Il Sung, the slogan signboard, and the paintings, as well as to bring flowers.... Cleaning the picture of Kim Il Sung and the books and photographs all count as a method of showing loyalty.... Those who do not follow Kimilsungism cannot come out in the open. They know exactly what to expect. Any dissidents disappear without a trace. Those who do not follow the directives well are put in front of a large gathering of the comrades to be attacked ideologically.... Also, there is the Wangjesan Museum of the Revolution about three kilometers away from Onsong, which people must visit six times in total every year.”

Interviewee 11: “Religion in reality is denied by means of ‘*Dang yoo il sa sang chaegae sip (10) dae won chick*’ (The Ten Principles of the Party’s Monolithic Ideology), which claims that Kim Il Sung himself is the exclusive religious figure.... [In Musan] there is a study room called *Kimilsung Dongji Hyukmyeong Yuksa Yeongusil*. It looks like a religious hall. You have to enter the hall solemnly. You have to dress up, clean your shoes, and keep silent in the hall.... There is a portrait of Kim Il Sung hanging on the wall in front, and also a plaster figure of Kim Il Sung on a platform. There are pictures of him from his childhood hanging on the walls.... There is a storage area called ‘*Jung Sung Ham*’ for dust cloths and soap to clean the portrait of Kim Il Sung. Once a week we have a lecture and discussion. It is impossible not to follow it. We had to think of Kim Il Sung only and be faithful to Kim Il Sung only. You have to clean his bronze statue, *Mansoo Moo Gang Tap* (tower), and *Mal Ssum Dan* (monument) every day.”

Interviewee 14: “There is a ‘study hall for revolutionary thought’ in rural communities where most farmers study on the farm. And there is also the place the place called *Chuldo Hyukmyeong Sasang Yeongusil* for railroad workers and *Gwangsan Hyukmyeong Sasang Yeongusil* for mining workers. I had class two times a week, on Tuesday and Thursday from 5:30 until 7:00 pm. There was a question and answer book saying: ‘Let’s pass on the great achievements of *Juche* ideology to the next generation.’ We were required to write down all the answers in our own writing. We also had a quiz contest once every two to four weeks. According to the Party covenant, Article 1 Section 1, all people of North Korea are required to worship Kim Il Sung with all our heart and might, even after his death. We have to venerate the pictures and statues of Kim Il Sung....

“I never thought that *Juche* or Kimilsungism was a closed or oppressive ideology, but I simply believed it as truth. I thought it was right to say that human beings should make the decisions on all things. I also thought Kim Il Sung is the greatest man who created such a great ideology. I believed that Kim Il Sung provides for all of our needs. Therefore, I could not even imagine being disloyal to Kim Il Sung. When he died, I was sad as much as when my father died. Maybe, most of the North Korean escapees in South Korea were also like me. During all my life, I was brainwashed, believing that Kim Il Sung was the only reason I was happy. I learned to say ‘Thank you father Kim Il Sung’ even when I was a baby. Therefore it is impossible to think of anything else but Kimilsungism.”

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Interviewee 18: “I was required to go to *Kim Il Sung Hyukmyeong Sasang Yeongusil* once a week or every two weeks. You could not go there freely. It is the place where I had to go with courtesy and solemnity like a religious place. I brought the book called *Kim Il Sung Dong-ji Hak Seup Ron* (Comrade Kim Il Sung Study Theory). I had to wear tidy clothes and take off my shoes when I entered the room. There were pictures explaining the story of the Kim Il Sung revolution on the wall, and we had to bow in turn before the statue and portrait of Kim Il Sung. Every school and workplace had such places of different size.

“It was not allowed not to follow Kimilsungism. If you did not follow it, you were regarded as a traitor and became the subject of criticism. If you were absent from the *Juche* class, you were asked: ‘Why were you absent? What is the reason for your absence?’

“In order to show loyalty to and belief in Kimilsungism, people would do such things as answer questions well in class, work hard in the workplace, sing a song praising Kim Il Sung, and worship at the Kim Il Sung statue early in the morning. There are people who study Kimilsungism at home. When I was a middle school student, Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il visited a paper factory in my home town [of Musan]. People in town erected a monument after their visit. My friends cleaned the road which the Kims had used, cleaned the monument, and placed flowers in front of the monument.”

Interviewee 19: “There are [*Juche*/Kimilsungism] study rooms in every district. Maybe there are 30,000 places in the whole country. The places are called *Hak Seup Sil* (thought study room), *Yeongusil* (research room), *Seon Jeon Sil* (propaganda study room). I had Monday and Tuesday study in *Hak Seup Sil*, and Wednesday and Friday study in *Yeon-gusil*. I had *joo gan chonghwa* (weekly reflection meeting) in *Yeongusil* also....

“We learned *Juche* from 2nd grade in middle school. The title of the class was the ‘Philosophy of *Juche*.’ I never thought that *Juche* was the reason that North Koreans were suffering.... I never had a doubt about Kim Il Sung or Kim Jong Il until I escaped from North Korea. I believed Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il were criticized because of corrupt party officials.”

Interviewee 20: “There is the Kim Il Sung Institute of Revolutionary History, which is like a religious shrine. There is also the Kim Il Sung Counsel Room, which is very solemn and also like a religious shrine. The city and county

teach very comprehensive knowledge about Kim Il Sung to the people. In North Korea, *Juche* is justifiable and people believe their destiny belongs to them. Philosophy originated from *Juche*. I thought *Juche* is justifiable and right without any doubt.... It is not allowed not to follow Kimilsungism. It seemed that Kimilsungism replaced any other belief system. People have to participate in *Juche* meetings or Wednesday *Chonghwa* to show their belief in and loyalty to Kimilsungism. Any class which is against the ideology is unimaginable. The spread of famine and poverty in North Korea cannot be explained without mentioning the problem of the ideology. Nevertheless, it cannot be spoken.”

Interviewee 21: “It has never been allowed not to follow Kimilsungism. Everyone must follow.”

Interviewee 23: “We were educated often in the deification of Kim Il Sung.... We were taught *Juche* beginning in the primary school. During middle school, we learned about Kim Il Sung’s revolutionary history. Intensive study on ideology was provided in college. From the moment they learn to speak, children are taught to say ‘Thank you Kim Il Sung, *wonsunim* (Venerable Great Leader).’ Parents help children learn to say this well. We were educated to clean the portraits of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il every day. Through this education we had no doubts about Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il, or the Party. We learned that there were two lives: one is the physical life and the other is the political life. We were taught that the political life was forever along with the leaders and the Party. Therefore, I believed that my political life was more important than my physical life....

“Each institution had its own Kim Il Sung research center. Our work began at 8:30 a.m., but someone was there at 6 a.m. to clean the research center. Under the ‘devotion business’ we were assigned to clean the center. However, people who were not even assigned went and did the work voluntarily. I cleaned around the center, rest rooms, and portraits, and shoveled the roads when it snowed.”

Interviewee 30: “There is a Kim Il Sung *Yeongusil* in every plant or business.... It was not like a library, but we had to dress and not make any noise. Women had to wear a skirt. In the plant we had to attend a meeting once a week. The place was located next to the plant. There was *Yeongusil* in schools too. I remember that when I was five or six years old, when I was attending kindergarten, I explained the meaning of the picture of Kim Il Sung to my parents.... We must hang his pictures; if we did not, we would be in big trouble. The pictures indicate that Kim Il Sung is god, and we hang the pictures for the purpose of reminding ourselves that we depend on him.”

Interviewee 31: “There are research centers on the historical revolution. These research centers are also present at schools and workplaces. They are built from a sense of obligation. They are holier than the churches of South Korea....”

Interviewee 34: “There are Kim Il Sung Revolution History Research Centers at our workplace. We would go in groups to study. No one was allowed to be absent. We had to wear our best clothes and go in with a pious mind. No

talking was allowed. We listened to lectures and took notes. The atmosphere was extremely serious and pious.”

Interviewee 35: “There are Kim Il Sung Revolutionary Thought Study Institutes and Revolutionary History Institutes in even the smallest unit of administration or organization. Everybody is forced to attend there once a week at the assigned time. [There were] no exceptions....

“The atmosphere is very solemn. Everyone has to be very quiet and get dressed up. Women have to wear skirts, and men have to wear suits. Also, everyone has to wear the Kim Il Sung badge on the left chest....

“You can believe in something else other than *Juche* or Kimilsungism in secret, but you can never express that belief. They say that they have to cut the side branches to keep the Workers Party strong.

“Hanging portraits of Kim’s family is compulsory for every household. If a man and woman get married, the Party provides the portraits.... The portraits must be hung on the best wall in every home, and nothing else can be hung under the portraits.... Families with high loyalty to the Party bow down under the portraits even when nobody is watching....

“People bring flowers and clean up around the public statues and portraits of Kim Il Sung. There is a box in which there are cleaning goods, such as velvet cloths, soap, brushes, and perfume, though they only use perfume when officials come to check....”

Interviewee 36: “Kim Il Sung visited Songrim many times because of its steelworks; as a result, there are a lot of *Sajeok Gwan* (revolutionary history study rooms and revolutionary thought study rooms). We learn about *Juche* and memorize passages. It is mandatory and held once a week.... It is totally impossible not to follow *Juche*. It is compulsory. We go to an extra large portrait of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il to offer flowers and bow down. If the frame is discolored, people repaint it. If it snows, the snow is swept away. The lawn is always trimmed in front of the memorial places.”

Interviewee 37: “In Wonsan, Kangwon province there is a special place. We go there as a group and it looks like a Catholic church. The atmosphere is more solemn than a church. Everyone wears their finest clothes and is on their best behavior. There is no smoking or joking. We take off our shoes. An official will share thoughts about Kim Il Sung and then we sing songs together. We start by singing ‘Song of Marshal Kim Il Sung’ and finish with ‘Long Life for the Great Leader.’”

“There is no other ideology except for *Juche* Idea. In other words, *Juche* Idea is like a religion.”

IV. Alternative Systems of Thought and Belief

The Widespread Re-emergence of a Shamanistic Remnant

A number of questions in the interviews sought to explore the existence or non-existence of unofficial systems of thought and belief outside of the official *Juche*/Kimilsungist ideology. Interestingly, the interviews revealed the widespread re-emergence of a remnant form of Shamanism, the ancient pan-Asiatic animistic belief system.³⁹ Several interviewees reported the re-emergence of “fortune telling”—the belief that one’s destiny or fate is not under one’s own control (as in *Juche*), but lies in the stars or other natural phenomena. Further, one’s fate can be “divined” by persons having special powers.

Some interviewees explicitly associated fortune telling (*gunghap*) with Shamans (*Mudang*), though most did not. The practice of fortune telling is not a casual thing in North Korea, and it is reportedly not cheap. Often, the fortune telling sessions were described as being conducted in rooms devoid of furniture except for a bowl of water. The fortune teller would ask many questions about the person and his or her family, and sometimes shake and speak in unintelligible syllables before rendering the fortune. The fortune teller would be paid in kind (e.g. animals or rice) or in cash, sometimes the equivalent of a month’s salary.

All described fortune telling as an illegal activity.⁴⁰ However, all said it was much too widespread for the authorities to eliminate it, and that indeed, even North Korean officials utilized the services of fortune tellers. Many interviewees associated the re-emergence of fortune telling with the onset of the famine and the severe deterioration in social conditions in the mid 1990s. Many interviewees had themselves visited fortune tellers, and everyone described the phenomenon as widespread.

Specific Responses

Interviewee 3: “I knew about fortune tellers from the time I was 12. I went there with my mother.... There was nothing in the room except for the person [fortune teller] because it was illegal to set up a fortune telling house, though many high-ranking officials went there to find out more about their future.”

Interviewee 5: “My mother went to [a fortune teller]. I was told that many high level officials’ wives have been to one. I think [fortune telling] occurred spontaneously as the society got worse.”

Interviewee 6: “[T]here was a lady that ‘piggy-backed a spirit.’ She correctly predicted that I would get caught when conducting business enterprise activities. I consulted a similar person before leaving for China, and I did exactly as he told me to do.... Fortune telling is not legal, but in reality the authorities turn a blind eye to it. Even the *Gukgabowibu* (national security agency police) consult [fortune tellers] when they are stuck in their investigations.”

Interviewee 7: “... as society became more difficult, people’s minds were dried up of hope, and one looked into palm reading and fortune telling.”

Interviewee 8: “North Korea’s fortune telling houses are an open secret now. There were one hundred houses where I lived and two of them were fortune telling houses....”

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Interviewee 9: “It was very hard economically, so more and more people were into fortune telling. There are books from the South [on fortune telling].”

Interviewee 10: “It is not legally allowed, but many people go to [a fortune teller]. My sister believed in it, so we used to go to the fortune teller.”

Interviewee 12: “[Fortune telling] is not freely allowed, but it is not strictly prohibited either. There was one old lady in my town who did fortune telling. She told us about our past history, and she also did acupuncture for those who were sick....”

Interviewee 13: “*Mudang* and fortune tellers are very active in North Korea, but they are still illegal. However, even when their activities are disclosed and they are arrested by the authorities, they are released right away. North Korean authorities are making an effort to obliterate Christianity only....”

Interviewee 15: “Fortune telling has become very common, but people still do it in secret. If it is disclosed to the authorities, people hear abusive language, and sometimes people are arrested. I also went to a fortune teller, prompted by curiosity, when I had economic problems.”



Kim Il Sung Portrait adorns a Grand Hall in Pyongyang

Interviewee 19: “There was a fortune teller in my town. She was around 50 years old. When people went to the fortune teller, people brought rice or 300 *won* to her. When I entered her house, she sat in front of a small table, and asked me why I came to her. She asked about my family in detail. Then she talked about my family. Most of what she said was correct. In the middle of the conversation, suddenly her body shook and then she began to talk in someone else’s voice. It was an old person’s voice. She began to move her arms unconsciously. After 15 to 20 minutes, she dipped a writing brush in water and then began to write something. It was very strange. I think the government did not allow fortune telling until 1997-98, but after that time the government overlooked fortune telling.”

Interviewee 28: “When we started to go through real tough times, and because so many people started to visit fortune tellers, enforcement [of the prohibition against fortune telling] became more lax.”

Interviewee 32: “It is not allowed to read someone’s fortune in North Korea. However, because the violation regards superstition, the punishment for fortune telling is lighter than that for Christianity.”

Interviewee 34: “The state does not permit [fortune telling], but everyone does it. Even state officials visit fortune tellers.”

Interviewee 35: “There are many fortune tellers who are called *mudang* or *sinupeunsasam* (someone who is possessed by a spirit).”

Interviewee 36: “Fortune tellers are supposed to be arrested, but in reality, they are not because even government officers, military officers, and police officers go to fortune tellers. I believe you can find a fortune telling house

every two kilometers. I myself have been to a fortune teller, who said I would be successful if I would go outside of my hometown.”

The Re-emergence of Unofficial or Underground Protestantism: a Mixed Picture

The information provided by the interviewees on the possible re-emergence of Protestant Christianity in North Korea is not conclusive. Assertions have been made by those outside of North Korea that there is a large “underground” Protestant church movement inside the country, fueled by South Korean and Korean Chinese missionaries operating from the China-North Korea border and comprised of North Koreans who convert while in China and then return to North Korea to propagate their faith. Interviewees were asked explicitly if they had ever encountered any unauthorized, unofficial, or underground religious practice.

As previously noted, only a small handful of persons interviewed for this report had ever heard about the three—soon to be four—Christian churches that operate in Pyongyang. Nor had any interviewees heard about or encountered any of the 500 “house churches” or home worship services that the DPRK has claimed in its reports to the UN are operational in North Korea.⁴¹ With one exception, the interviewees simply did not believe that such activities were permitted by the authorities.

On the basis of the information obtained over the course of conducting this study, it is not possible to corroborate claims about the existence of a substantial underground church in the DPRK. Fully half of the interviewees said simply “no” when asked if they had ever seen or encountered underground churches or non-recognized, unofficial religious activities in North Korea. Others also replied “no,” but then went on to describe acts of persecution against religious believers or those involved in presumed religious activity, such as the possession of a Bible. Only two interviewees said they were aware of an unofficial or underground church network. One was a former North Korean who converted to Christianity while in China and returned to North Korea to do missionary work. The other interviewee was a former *Gukgabowibu* policeman, whose duties included looking for illegal worshipers. These responses are evidence of some unauthorized religion-related activity, but also of the success of the authorities in stamping it out.

The following are a series of answers from interviewees who replied “no” to knowledge of “underground churches,” but went on to tell about encountering unauthorized religious activities, often in the form of knowing about the repression thereof.

Specific Responses

Interviewee 4 never encountered any underground church, but she personally witnessed the public executions of two persons caught with Bibles in 1997.⁴²

Interviewee 9 attended church as a child until 1947, and her brother was a pastor. She once attended a secret church service in Heoryong in 1998. This

occurred when a Korean Chinese missionary visited Heoryong, a town on the Tumen River which borders China, while doing business in North Korea. Otherwise, she had heard of no other underground church activity.

Interviewee 10, from Musan, another town on the Tumen river border with China, never encountered any underground or unofficial church activity, but she herself brought back a Bible from China, which she and her mother secretly read at home under a blanket. She also listened to the Christian radio station from South Korea and “told her older sister and her husband about the Gospel.”

Interviewee 11, a former *Gukgabowibu* policeman, thinks that “there are Christian missionaries in North Korea nowadays,” but he had never met any.

Interviewee 13 is a young woman from a pre-Korean War Christian family. Her mother and her mother’s friends continued to gather to worship secretly in Hamhung, an industrial city near the East Sea (Sea of Japan), where many old Christian families had been exiled after the Korean War (1950-1953).



Portrait of the ‘Great Leader’ towering over North Korea people

Interviewee 15, a former soldier, had never seen any underground Christian activity but had heard about the executions of Christian believers in 1997 from a friend in the *Gukgabowibu* police.

Interviewee 16, a woman in her sixties, also from Hamhung, knew of eight persons who were Christians who met secretly in groups of three and four to read handwritten Bible verses.

Interviewee 17, from North Pyong-an Province, had a Christian mother who attended church until 1947 and who kept her Bible. She had a friend in Pihyeon-goon (near Sinuiju), also near the border with China, who listened to Far Eastern Broadcasting (a South Korean Christian radio station).

Interviewee 18, from Musan, also had a pre-Korean War Christian mother who continued to worship in secret with two relatives, using a Bible that her grandfather had brought back from Japan years ago. This interviewee had also lived in Hyesan, a town on the Yalu River border with China, and was aware of two persons who were executed in May of 1999 for bringing Bibles back from China.

Interviewee 19 was in an army unit that accidentally found names of an underground church group. After an investigation, twenty five persons were arrested and the five leaders were publicly executed just north of Nampo on December 20, 1996.⁴³

Interviewee 22 was imprisoned in Hamhung in 2002 following forced repatriation from China, where she had been trafficked (i.e. sold to a Korean Chinese man for approximately US \$700). She never saw any organized worship, but in prison there was a “crazy woman” in her sixties who kept praying to God to save her. Another fellow prisoner, from Namyang, Onsung county, was in jail for a year because a Bible had been found in his house.

Interviewee 32 was from Musan. She participated in an underground church of 12 members, all relatives, who received missionaries from China, just across the river.

V. Conclusion

The extensive testimony by the 40 former North Koreans interviewed for this study paints a very different picture regarding the exercise of freedom of religion or belief than the official North Korean statements on this issue. From the perspective of those interviewed, there is no respect for religious freedom by the North Korean authorities. The state does not permit and severely represses independent religious activity, whether conducted individually or collectively, and in public or in private. In addition, during the time the interviewees were resident in North Korea, the state also actively promoted a negative view of religious belief and adherence among North Koreans through the state controlled education system and media. At the same time, the state requires displays of adherence to an official ideology, *Juche*/Kimilsungism, that is understood by those interviewed for this study as the only system of thought and belief allowed in North Korea, to the exclusion of all others.

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SECRETLY READ AT HOME UNDER
A BLANKET.

CHAPTER FOUR

PERSECUTION: EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS

This chapter presents interviewee testimony on: (1) severe human rights violations, including execution, of persons caught, or presumed to be engaging in, religious activity outside of the party-state sponsored religious federations,⁴⁴ or even meeting with practitioners of religion; and (2) the punishments meted out to North Koreans who encountered religious believers while in China.

I. Public Executions of Christian Believers

In the course of interviewing for this report, evidence of the present day persecution of religious believers emerged. Two interviewees mentioned, initially in passing, that they had personally witnessed the execution of persons because of their religious beliefs, affiliation, or practices. Another mentioned that her brother, a pastor, had been executed. A fourth interviewee named two persons that he knew to be believers who were executed, and others mentioned executions they had heard about but had not witnessed themselves.

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In response to a question about knowing any persons sent off to a *gwalliso* (political penal labor colony) or *gyohwaso* (prison camp or penitentiary), Interviewee 4 said, “No, but I saw an old man and his daughter executed because the daughter had dropped a Bible while washing clothes.” In response to a question about whether the person had ever met a Christian pastor, Buddhist monk, or Chondokyo religious figure, Interviewee 17 said, “No, I never met any religious figures, but I witnessed the executions of one pastor, two *chondo-sa* (assistant pastors), and two elders (a common Presbyterian Christian designation for a lay church official who helps lead the congregation).” On a return trip to Seoul, the present author re-interviewed these former North Koreans to obtain more details. The stories of the two eyewitness accounts are told below.

Public Execution for Bible Possession, Musan, North Hamgyong Province, Summer 1997

The account of the execution was straight forward.⁴⁵ A young woman, in her twenties, was washing clothes in a tributary to the Tumen River (the border between China and North Korea). When packing up the clothes, she dropped what was believed to be a small Bible. The actual words used by the North Korean authorities were “Christianity book” (*kiddokyo chaek*). Another washerwoman reported the girl to the police. According to Interviewee 4, the informer may not have known that the book was a Bible, but all suspicious activity had to be reported to the police. The young woman and her father, looking to be roughly sixty years old, were arrested and held by the local *Gukgabowibu* police for some three months. During that time, the woman and her father were presumably investigated and interrogated. Apparently, they were deemed guilty of a capital offense.

On a summer morning in 1997, the two were taken to a market area near where the Seong Cheon River runs into the Tumen River. The two were accused of trafficking and condemned as traitors to the nation and Kim Jong Il. Interviewee 4 was unaware of any other judicial procedures prior to the announcement of the crime, verdict, and sentence in an extremely brief public “show trial,” which

consisted of no more than announcements of the charges and verdict immediately prior to the execution.

Teachers and students from elementary (4th grade and up), middle, and high school were assembled, along with persons who had been sent over from the nearby market. Seven police fired three shots each into the two victims, who had been tied to stakes a few meters from the “trial” area. The force of the rifle shots, fired from fifteen meters away, caused blood and brain matter to be blown out of their heads. Interviewee 4 was in the fifth row. She sketched from memory a schematic drawing of the execution scene.

Public Execution of Five Christians, Yongkang county, South Pyongan Province (near Nampo) November 20, 1996

This execution was rather more complicated and unusual than the previously described execution, as it was carried out by the army rather than either of the two local police forces, *Inminboanseong* (People’s Safety Agency) or *Gukgabowibu*, (National Security Police). While Interviewee 17 was in the North Korean Army, his unit was dispatched to widen the highway between Pyongyang and the nearby port city of Nampo. They were demolishing a vacated house in Yongkang county, Yongkang district town, when in a basement between two bricks they found a Bible and a small notebook that contained 25 names, one identified as pastor, two as *chon-do-sa* (assistant pastors), two as elders, and 20 other names, apparently parishioners, identified by their occupations.

The soldiers turned the Bible and notebook over to the local branch of Department 15 of the Korean Workers Party (KWP), but the Party officials said it was up to the military police unit, *Bowisaryungbu gigwan won*, to investigate. Tracked down at their place of work through the listing of occupation in the notebook, the 25 persons were picked up without formal arrest by the military *bowibu*. The interviewee was not aware of any judicial procedures for those seized.

In November 1996, the 25 were brought to the road construction site. Four concentric rectangular rows of spectators were assembled to watch the execution. Interviewee 17 was in the first row. The five leaders to be executed—the pastor, two assistant pastors, and two elders—were bound hand and foot and made to lie down in front of a steam roller. This steam roller was a large construction vehicle imported from Japan with a heavy, huge, and wide steel roller mounted on the front to crush and level the roadway prior to pouring concrete. The other twenty persons were held just to the side. The condemned were accused of being *Kiddokyo* (Protestant Christian) spies and conspiring to engage in subversive activities. Nevertheless, they were told “If you abandon religion and serve only Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il, you will not be killed.” None of the five said a word. Some of the fellow parishioners assembled to watch the execution cried, screamed out, or fainted when the skulls made a popping sound as they were crushed beneath the steam roller.

Interviewee 17 thought, at the time, that these church people were crazy. He thought then that religion was an “opiate,” and it was stupid for them to give up their lives for religion. He heard from the soldiers who took away the other

twenty prisoners that they were being sent to a prison camp. He sketched from memory a drawing of the execution scene.

A 1999-2000 Crackdown in Onsong county

A former *Gugkabowibu* agent interviewed for this report in Seoul reported a campaign to crack down on persons suspected of having religious affiliations in North Hamgyong province in 1999. He was personally involved in the arrests of three women in Onsong, two of whom died during interrogation and one of whom was subsequently executed in private. He was also involved in the arrests of eight men at the Dong Kwan coal mine whose fathers were known from *Songbun*⁴⁶ and police records to have been believers and who were accused of complaining about the regime. The former officer thought that the evidence against some of the eight was particularly weak, so the *Gugkabowibu* officers exaggerated their offences. They were executed by local *anjeonbu* police.

II. Religious Persecution along the North Korean-Chinese Border

Despite the provisions in international human rights documents that provide for the freedom to leave one's country of origin, leaving North Korea without authorization from the DPRK authorities is a violation of the North Korean penal code.⁴⁷ Meeting with South Koreans in China is considered by the North Korean authorities to be a political offense. The UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in the DPRK, as well as numerous international human rights organizations, have made the case that North Koreans in China should be considered to be refugees, either as persons who have a well founded fear of persecution had they remained in North Korea, or as *refugees sur place*, persons who may not have fled persecution in the first place but who nonetheless risk persecution upon return to their country of origin. Nevertheless, the Chinese police regularly seize large numbers of North Koreans who have entered China without proper authorization and forcibly repatriate them back to the DPRK, in violation of Article 33 of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.

In the 1980s and even the early 1990s, leaving North Korea was considered by the DPRK authorities as an intended “defection” to South Korea. A North Korean caught in China and repatriated would likely be sent to North Korea's notorious *gwalliso* political penal labor colonies or to the *gyohwaso* felony level penitentiaries. During the height of the North Korean famine crisis of the mid to late 1990s, scores of thousands of North Koreans fled to China searching for food or employment to send money back to their families in order to avert starvation. The North Koreans in China aimed to live and work quietly among the roughly two million ethnic Korean-Chinese that reside in Northeastern China. Nevertheless, arrests and repatriations of North Koreans soared accordingly. Following sometimes extremely brutal interrogation by North Korean police officials, repatriated North Koreans were sent in large numbers to the *jipkyulso* misdemeanor level provincial incarceration facilities, and to shorter-term small, local mobile labor detention facilities termed *nodong danryeon dae*.⁴⁸

A large number of North Koreans who are repatriated and punished during interrogation and post-interrogation detention conclude that they are “marked” by DPRK authorities and therefore have no future in North Korea. They flee to China a second or third time, often with a view to making it to South Korea.

Two-thirds of the North Koreans interviewed for this report had fled to China, been caught by Chinese police, and forcibly repatriated to North Korea, where they were detained and interrogated by North Korean police. From what was said by the interviewees, it is clear that religion is a factor in the process of interrogation and meting out punishment. Virtually all interviewees report that after being asked the preliminary questions about how they had fled to China, where they had crossed the border, and where they went and what they did in China, they were specifically asked (1) if they had attended Korean-Chinese churches,⁴⁹ and (2) if they had had any contact with South Koreans in China (some of whom are representatives of religious organizations doing charitable and humanitarian work in the border area).⁵⁰

Contact with Korean-Chinese believers, and, more certainly, contact with South Koreans is considered a political offense. While some interviewees testified that because so many North Koreans go to Korean-Chinese churches as a matter of course, the North Korean police no longer treat this, at least in some places along the border, as cause for additional punishment in and of itself, the majority of interviewees related tales of persecution as a result of their contacts with churches in China.

Specific Responses

Interviewee 14 told of his interrogation in the Onsong *Gugkabowibu* jail in 2001. The interrogators told the 68 persons being held in this small jail that all “followers of Jesus” were to stand up. Six did and were immediately taken away. The guards said that the six had been executed. However, the detainees later learned that the six had been taken to a *gwalliso* political penal labor colony at Jongsung.⁵¹ Interviewee 14 himself, after being deprived of food and sleep through seven long interrogations, finally gave up and confessed to belief. He was offered the opportunity to renounce his faith, pledge his loyalty to the Party, and be sent to a *nodong danryeon dae* labor training camp or mobile labor brigade.

The second time interviewee 19 was forcibly repatriated from China in 1999, he was fettered, hung from a window from which he got severe frostbite, and severely beaten in the Onsong *bowibu* detention facility because he admitted, after prolonged interrogation, to having studied at a Korean-Chinese church.

Following repatriation in 2002, Interviewee 22 was detained initially in a *Gugkabowibu* jail in Hoeryong. With her was an old women in her sixties who prayed constantly “for God to save her.” Other prisoners thought she was crazy. The old woman was released, and Interviewee 22, who at that point was not herself a believer, thought nonetheless that the old woman’s release must have been “God’s will.” Interviewee 22 was subsequently sent to Hamhung

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for more interrogation. She noted that there was a man jailed there who had been found with a Bible. After a year, the man was released after his family bribed the police.

Interviewee 29, a former *Gugkabowibu* police official who became disillusioned and fled to China and subsequently to South Korea, reported that North Korean officials are anxious to catch believers because they fear “Christianity will defeat *Juche*.” In his experience, if a repatriated North Korean admits to having gone to a church, he or she may be sent to political prison. If a repatriated North Korean admits to having met South Koreans, he or she may be sent to political prison or executed.

Interviewee 32 was a twenty-one year old young woman who converted to Christianity while in China. She went back to North Korea voluntarily in 2000 and was arrested by the *Gugkabowibu* in 2002 for evangelizing. She sought to convert her jailers. She convinced the police that she prayed for North Korea because she loved her country and the Korean people, and that this could not be a crime. According to this interviewee, her jailers told her, “You have committed a crime related to religion, but the general forgives you and you can go free.”

A fellow prisoner of Interviewee 35, who was forcibly repatriated to a Musan police station in 1998, admitted going to a church in China. He was taken out of the police station and never heard from again.

CHAPTER 5

SYSTEMS OF THOUGHT, VALUES, AND BELIEF IN KOREA PRIOR TO KIM IL SUNG'S ACCESSION TO POWER IN THE NORTH

In order to provide contextual background to various points raised by the interviewees, this chapter presents an overview of Korea’s systems of thought and belief on the eve of Kim Il Sung’s rise to power north of the 38th parallel. Upon his consolidation of control, Kim immediately came into conflict with two prominent belief systems—Protestant Christianity and an indigenous faith called “Eastern Learning” (*Tonghak*) or “the religion of the Heavenly Way”(Chondokyo)—that were larger, better organized, and better known than the Korean Communist Party, which, prior to 1945, essentially did not exist inside Korea. In addition, there were four other belief systems present in North Korea that had played prominent roles in shaping Korean history: Shamanism, Buddhism, Confucianism/Neo-Confucianism, and Catholicism. In order to grasp the scale of the decline of religious freedom under Kim Il Sung and his successor, Kim Jong Il, it is necessary to understand the status of religious practice at the time the country of North Korea was established.

I. Shamanism

Shamanism, a commonly used term for the earliest system of thought and belief on the Korean peninsula, is a pan-Asian, animistic folk religion. It posits that virtually all objects (animate and inanimate), beings, and natural phenomena possess spirits, many of which are regarded as deities, such as “house spirits,” “village spirits,” or “mountain spirits.” The spirits existing in natural and supernatural phenomena are held to determine human destiny, especially where uncertainty prevails.⁵² Special significance is found in obvious natural phenomena such as the sun or star formations, and also geographic and topical formations commonly associated with geomancy.

Gifted persons, often women, called Shamans (*Mudang*), can communicate with these spirits, sometimes summoning them with drums, chants, or emotional utterances. Shamans also are deemed to possess special powers of divination—foreseeing or foretelling future events or discovering hidden knowledge. Communicating with the diverse spirits and deities is held to yield immediate practical benefit: previously unknown knowledge, recovered or prolonged health, or improved fortune or prosperity for an individual, a collective such as a family, a village, or an event such as a harvest.

Shamanism has no written canon, set doctrine, or official catechism but is an oral tradition centered on Shaman-led rituals, often focusing on family or village life. Shamanism is formally recognized as a religion in present day South Korea, where indeed, elements of it flourish, often in the form of ritual celebrations of seasonal events such as spring plantings or autumn harvests or rural village commemorations, sometimes sponsored by local governments. Some Shaman houses are self-identified with white pennants.

It is difficult to gauge the extent of the continued loyalty to Shamanism among North Koreans on the eve of the Korean War. Yet, its general underlying influence is described this way by one historian,

The primal religion of the ancient period [Shamanism] did not disappear with the advent of Buddhism in the fourth century. Rather, it became the substratum of all Korean

religions and philosophies which have been transmitted to Korea, including Buddhism, Confucianism, and Roman Catholic and Protestant Christianity.⁵³

II. Buddhism

Buddhism spread from China into the Korean peninsula during the fourth century, several hundred years after the faith had spread from India to China.⁵⁴ At that time, Korean society was evolving from disparate tribes or clans into larger political entities, during a period of Korean history (from 55 BCE to 668 CE) known as the Three Kingdoms.

In contrast to Shamanism, Buddhism seemed to offer a more universalistic world view, in that Buddhism placed human destiny not in the natural or supernatural order but in the ability of sentient beings to master their own destiny or achieve their innate potential in the form of enlightenment and compassion—if properly nurtured and cultivated by meditation on and/or the mastering of a learned canon. Buddhism also introduced a moral law of cause and effect, again reinforcing the idea that human beings are responsible for their own condition and fate, along with a much more systemic and cosmic view of “afterlife.”⁵⁵

In 668, Buddhism became the state religion identified with the initial formation of a united Korean kingdom called “United Silla.” Having “provided the socio-political ideology for national integration,”⁵⁶ Buddhism became thereafter identified with the original unification of Korea and the initial flowering of Korean art, architecture, and literature.⁵⁷

Buddhism remained the state and popular religion for 1,000 years. Subsidized by a very long succession of royal and aristocratic families, Buddhist temples and monastic orders became wealthy, with a variety of monk orders acquiring and holding vast tracks of land farmed by slaves whose product was exempt from taxation. Perhaps unsurprisingly, after 1,000 years as the established state religion, a certain amount of doctrinal calcification and ecclesiastical corruption was inevitable. Toward the end of the Koryo dynasty (918-1392) in the late fourteenth century, Buddhism came under sustained intellectual attack by reformist intellectuals and office holders associated with the doctrines of Neo-Confucianism.

Confucian ideas came to Korea from China about the same time as Buddhism. Buddhism as a religious philosophy and Confucianism as a theory of social relations and good governance coexisted for a millennium. However, first in China and later in Korea, Confucianism eventually acquired a rigorous “Neo-Confucian” metaphysic—doctrines and principles about human and physical nature, linked to ideas about dynastic decline and social-political reformation—that were profoundly hostile to Buddhism.

In 1392, when the Chosun dynasty (also termed the Yi dynasty⁵⁸) replaced the 300 year old Koryo dynasty, Neo-Confucianist officials were able to institute a gradual, though extremely thorough, suppression of Korean Buddhism. Royal subsidies to the monasteries were ended. The position of Buddhist advisor or



A North Korean statue depicting symbols of the hammer, the sickle, and the scholar's brush

royal preceptor to the King along with the other royal Buddhist post termed “teacher to the nation” were terminated. The Buddhist examination system, designed to ensure the quality education of Buddhist leadership, was abolished and the leading Buddhist temples were closed.⁵⁹

In 1659, edicts were promulgated to prevent persons from leaving their families to join monastic communities, on the grounds that doing so was an offense to filial piety. Though the edicts against young men joining the Buddhist priesthood were not completely enforceable, the status of monks in the Chosun dynasty’s rigid class system was reduced to that of butchers, prostitutes, and slaves. Monks were prohibited from even entering the capitol city of Seoul. Most of all, the number of monasteries—banished from population centers in cities and towns to isolated mountain tops—was reduced to 242, and later down to 36 institutions of any significance.

According to one historian, “By the end of the Chosun dynasty, less than a hundred years ago, most contemporary observers felt that Korean Buddhism was a spent force and would shortly disappear.”⁶⁰ Nevertheless, there was some Buddhist recovery in the nineteenth century following the establishment of formal religious freedom with the French-Korean Treaty of 1886, when Buddhist learning academies were reopened and monks were again allowed to enter the capitol city of Seoul. Buddhist monks wrote and published the treatises that would subsequently lead to the regeneration of the monastic orders and Buddhist practice generally in Korea.

During the Japanese occupation (1910-1945), Buddhist monastic orders were reorganized by the Japanese authorities, which caused Korean Buddhist monks to seek to counter-organize in opposition to this effort. Japanese authorities also introduced the Japanese practice of a non-celibate (married) Buddhist clergy, who were also allowed to eat meat, and affect modern clothes and hair styles. Some efforts were made during this period by Japanese Buddhists to revive the Buddhist beliefs of their Korean counterparts, but most efforts by Japanese Buddhists in Korea were aimed at the some 600,000 Japanese citizens who had settled in Korea during the occupation. Japanese colonial authorities may have welcomed the revival of Buddhism as a potential check on the growth of Catholic and Protestant Christianity, but it was actually Shinto Emperor worship, not Buddhism, that the Japanese authorities attempted to impose on their Korean subjects.⁶¹

The gravely diminished state of Korean Buddhism by the early twentieth century can be seen in the relatively low level of Buddhist participation in a seminal event in modern Korean history: there were only two Buddhists signatories to the March 1, 1919 Declaration of Korean Independence, compared to 16 Protestant Christians and 15 Chondokyo followers. Generally speaking, in the area that is now the DPRK, Buddhism never recovered from 500 years of Neo-Confucianist repression.⁶² It was not until the experience of religious freedom and material prosperity in the Republic of Korea in the latter half of the twentieth century that Buddhism genuinely recovered—at least in the southern portion of the peninsula—from the Chosun dynasty suppression.⁶³

III. Confucianism/Neo-Confuciansim

Confucianism entered Korea from China about the same time as Buddhism, though less as a religion and more as an ethical theory of social relationships

between father and son, husband and wife, ruler and subject, elder and junior, and friend and friend. Primarily concerned with social order and statecraft, Confucianism co-existed with Buddhist spirituality, with its search for enlightenment and compassion.

In China, when the Mongol horsemen began encroaching on the Sung dynasty in the twelfth century, a group of Confucianist scholars attributed the decline of Sung rule to the excessive devotion to Buddhism. Centered around a Confucian scholar named Chu Hsi (1130-1200), these thinkers sought revitalization and reform via a restoration of what was proclaimed to be the ancient wisdom.

In the process, Confucian ethics on social relationships and governance acquired a metaphysical component, such as theories about human nature and physical reality, that became known as “Neo-Confuciansim.” In the words of one scholar of Korean religion, “...Chu Hsi gave Confucianism a formalized metaphysical, cosmological system linking together grand concepts about the nature of the universe, moralality, and the potential of individual persons.”⁶⁴ Chu Hsi married social ethics and ultimate religious/philosophic concerns. In moral philosophy, “sincerity” became the basis of man’s moral nature and the means to discern good and evil through the balance of “principle” (*yi*, the reality and universality of things) and “material force” (*ki*, coming into being or universal transformation and change). The Neo-Confucianists charted and elaborated complicated schema and diagrams on the relationship and balances between various states of mind, emotions, and material forces.

Neo-Confucianism, or what was called Substantial or Great Learning (*Chujahak*), became the state ideology of the new Chosun dynasty, which began in 1392. “The founders of Chosun were fully committed to Neo-Confucianism as their guiding creed and endeavored to transform Korea into a Confucian state.... Initially, for the scholar-officials of early Chosun, Neo-Confucianism was above all a political philosophy that... provided them with reliable and efficient patterns for reforming state and society.”⁶⁵

Neo-Confucianism put enormous stress on filial piety, father-son relations and male/family descent lines, and ancestor veneration or worship, which carried over into a kind of family-state political theory. “The political ethic it expounds lays stress on the mutual relationship of ruler and subject, and it is an intolerant doctrine, quick to reject all other teachings.”⁶⁶ In the nineteenth century, these scholar-officials encapsulated their intolerance in the slogan “fight [or reject] heterodoxy; maintain orthodoxy” (*wijong choksa*). Neo-Confucianist scholar-officials initially criticized the wealth and corruption in the Buddhist monastic orders; subsequently, Buddhist doctrine and belief were attacked directly. Over time, Chosun dynasty officials closed the Buddhist monasteries and confiscated their property, and, to the extent it was possible, suppressed Buddhism as a religion in Korea. Other religions were also dealt with harshly.

In the end, scholar-officials, with the support of the state apparatus, accomplished what is famously called “the Confucian transformation of Korea.”⁶⁷ This was achieved through the control of the curriculum at the academies for the education of aristocratic youth, the suppression of competing systems of thought, and the widespread employment of Confucian rites,

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including religious rituals, the observance and practice of which reinforced the social practices, orderings, and relationships expounded in the Neo-Confucianist doctrine. Centuries later, when other Korean envoys brought Catholicism back to Korea from Beijing, those converts were executed. Another century later, toward the end of the Chosun dynasty, when a visionary scholar developed a new philosophical synthesis called *Tonghak* or “Eastern learning,” its adherents were executed also.

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A number of Korea scholars have suggested that Neo-Confucianism has enormous contemporary relevance for North Korea. Even though Confucianism is not today recognized by the regime as a religion⁶⁸ and no formal public Confucian rites or rituals are practiced or observed, a description of the current situation can be found in the words of a leading South Korean scholar:

What has happened in North Korea for the last quarter of a century may be summarized as a transformation into a new Confucianist society or family state that is well integrated as an extension of filial piety, expressed through strong loyalty to its leader. To some extent, then, it may be said that the society Chu Hsi had dreamed about has materialized in Communist North Korea.⁶⁹

Following the Korean War (1950-1953), when Kim Il Sung set out to “Koreanize” the social, political, and economic organization bequeathed to North Korea by the Soviet Union, Kim grafted onto Stalinism numerous elements of Chosun dynasty feudalism that were originally found in Chu Hsi’s Neo-Confucian doctrines. Just as the Chosun dynasty’s Neo-Confucianists had done, their successors in the DPRK suppressed all competing thought, belief, and value systems, and elaborated a new set of rites and religious rituals that had to be repeatedly performed.

IV. Catholic Christianity

Like Buddhism and Confucianism, Catholic Christianity came to Korea from China. A group of Jesuit missionary scholars, centered around Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), resided in Beijing as honored guests of the Ming Dynasty Court. The Jesuit scholars thoroughly mastered the Chinese language and the classics of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Neo-Confucianism. “They published hundreds of scientific works in classical Chinese and introduced astronomical instruments, clocks, prisms, maps of the world and Euclidian geometry.”⁷⁰ Their Renaissance-based calendar was welcomed, as it eliminated some of the shortcomings of the Chinese lunar system. These Jesuits hoped that the technological superiority the West had gained in particular fields would carry over into other fields as well. “In particular, they hoped that Confucian recognition that westerners were experts on the heavens would lead Confucians to believe that westerners were experts on Heaven as well. Those missionaries named their teachings ‘Heavenly Learning,’ in an effort to link theology with astronomy and to have the accuracy of their statements about the stars lend credence to their statements about the spiritual realm.”⁷¹

The Jesuits treated Confucianism as the Asian equivalent of Greco-Roman natural law that the early Catholic theologians had incorporated into Roman Catholic Christianity, and argued that Confucianism had originally incorporated belief in a personal God. The Jesuit scholars “claimed that Neo-Confucianism, with its denial of the existence of a personal deity, had betrayed the beliefs, values, and teachings of the earliest Confucians and that Catholicism...represented a return to the spirit of original Confucianism.”⁷² Importantly for the future of Catholic Christianity in Korea, the Jesuits interpreted Confucian funeral rites for the veneration of ancestors as civil rites.

Within Korea, a group of scholars became disenchanted with the metaphysical abstractions of Neo-Confucianism and gravitated to what became known as *Sirhak* (practical learning). “The emphasis of their inquiries was not on [Chu Hsi’s] theories on the primacy of formative principle (*yi*) and energizing force (*ki*), but on social science, natural science and technology.”⁷³ A southern-based political faction of *Sirhak* scholars, called *Namin* (southern), took particular interest in the Chinese language writings of the Jesuits that had been brought back from Beijing and become known in Korea as *Sohak* (western learning). When in 1777 a patron of *Sirhak* scholarship ascended to the Korean throne, a group of these *Namin* Confucianist scholars retreated to a secluded mountain Buddhist temple for concentrated examination of the writings of the Beijing Jesuits. After some debate, these scholars decided that “the truth they were seeking lay in Catholicism.”⁷⁴

These scholars persuaded a member of the Korean diplomatic delegation to the Ming Court in Beijing to approach the Catholic priests and seek baptism. Upon return to Korea, this convert baptized, in turn, the scholars who had encouraged him. Catholic doctrine found immediate appeal, particularly among a faction of the aristocratic *Namin* scholars termed *Sip’a* and a sub-aristocratic but educated middle class grouping termed *Chungin*. “What they sought in Catholicism was the means to correct the distortions in the social and political order caused by concentration of political authority in the hands of a few families.... The acceptance of Catholicism constituted a challenge to the oligarchic nature of *yangban* [the hereditary, landed Korean aristocracy] society, and the intellectual rigidity of Neo-Confucianist orthodoxy.”⁷⁵

In 1795, there were some 4,000 Korean Catholics. By 1800, there were 10,000 followers,⁷⁶ clustered in settlements in what are today the North Cholla and South Chungcheon provinces of southwest South Korea.

In China, the original Jesuit missionaries had been followed by other missionaries from the Dominican and Franciscan orders who came to China from the Philippines. These Catholic missionaries regarded the Confucian funeral rites for the veneration of ancestors to be idolatrous forms of worship and incompatible with monotheism. The Vatican sided with the Franciscans and Dominicans against the Jesuits and issued a Papal decree, *Ex Illa Die*, declaring that Confucian ancestor funeral rites were incompatible with Catholicism. In 1790, aware of the growing number of Korean Catholics, the Bishop in Beijing wrote to the Koreans informing them that the Pope had forbidden Catholic participation in traditional Confucian funeral mourning

rituals. After a Catholic *yangban* aristocrat in North Cholla declined to prepare an ancestral tablet for his deceased mother, he was arrested and executed for conduct contrary to Neo-Confucian moral and ritual obligations.

The orthodox Neo-Confucianists had been alarmed by the growth of this new heterodox belief system, and when the patron King of *Sirhak* scholarship died in 1800, the toleration of the *Namin* movement ended. Catholics were arrested and those who would not renounce their faith were executed in what is called the Sinyu Persecution of 1801, the first of four large waves of violent suppression of Korean Catholics in the nineteenth century.

The Sinyu Persecution resulted in a profound change in Korean Catholicism. The *yangban* aristocratic scholars left their privileged positions and residences and hid out in small villages in mountainous areas of southern Korea (largely between modern day Taegu and Wonju), often posing as potters in order that they could travel from village to village posing as small time itinerant merchants. Converts to Catholicism increasingly came from the lower social orders, including “peasants, craft artisans, women, orphans and outcasts.”⁷⁷ In 1815, there was another wave of persecutions seeking to eliminate those who had fled to the mountains, followed by another wave of persecution in 1827, called the Chonghae Persecution.

After foreign missionaries were discovered on Korean soil in 1839, another wave of executions, called the Kihae Persecution, took place, followed by yet another in 1846. In 1866, Neo-Confucianist orthodoxy made its final attempt to eradicate Catholicism in the “Great Persecution” from 1866 to 1871. By the time the self-imposed isolation of the “Hermit Kingdom” ended, some eight thousand Korean Catholics had been killed in these severe persecutions.⁷⁸

In 1876, the first modern style trade treaty was signed between Korea and Japan. In 1886, a treaty was signed with France that stipulated respect for freedom of religion. No longer driven underground, Catholicism began to expand with the assistance of French, German, and other missionary orders sent to Korea. In the 1890s, Myongdong Cathedral was constructed in Seoul and a seminary opened to train Catholic priests. On the eve of the Japanese annexation of Korea in 1910, there were 73,517 Catholics throughout Korea.⁷⁹

In the twentieth century, Korean Catholicism, still reacting to the previous century’s suppressions, avoided involvement in nationalist political movements. There were no Catholic signatories to the Chondokyo- and Protestant-led March 1919 Korean Declaration of Independence, and minimal Catholic participation in the ensuing mass protests against Japanese occupation, which provoked executions and large scale arrests by the Japanese colonial authorities.⁸⁰ Nor, following Vatican rulings, did Catholic Koreans refuse to participate in Shinto Shrine Emperor veneration ordered by the Japanese authorities, a bitter controversy that roiled Korean Protestantism. In the words of one Catholic historian, “At the official level, the Church exhibited a very passive attitude in order to protect the faith communities.”⁸¹

At the end of WWII, there were upwards of 52,000 Korean Catholics north of the 38th parallel.⁸² According to official DPRK figures, presently there are only 800 Catholics in North Korea.⁸³

V. Chondokyo, the Religion of the Heavenly Way.

Chondokyo, originally known as *Tonghak* (Eastern Learning), is Korea’s most important syncretic religion, and one that played a major role in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Korean history.

Founded by the son of a Confucian scholar in Cholla Province, Choe Cheu (also Choe Je-u, 1824-1864), who was prohibited from taking the civil service examinations because, since his mother was a remarried widow,⁸⁴ he was considered an illegitimate child. Choe thereafter became an itinerant seeker after truth, studying various philosophies during his wanderings. Choe had a mystical experience, after which he proclaimed a new religious doctrine, largely based on Confucianism but which also prominently incorporated elements of Taoism, Shamanism, Buddhism, and Catholicism. Promulgated as Eastern Learning in contrast to Western Learning (*Sohak*), i.e. Catholicism, *Tonghak* taught that God was in human beings, heaven could be made on earth, and history could be driven by common people as opposed to the *yangban* aristocratic elite. *Tonghak* also included “communion”-like pure water rites and shamanistic health and injury or wound preventing practices.

Choe was arrested and executed in 1864 for his heterodox teachings, as was his primary disciple, Choe Si-hyeong, some thirty years later. Nonetheless, this millenarian, radically egalitarian faith grew rapidly, even underground (illegally), particularly among the distressed rural poor in southwestern Korea.

Tonghak adherents publicly protested their leader’s execution and sought his posthumous exoneration. Demonstrations swelled, focusing on corrupt, exploitative, and oppressive local officials, and the western and Japanese intrusions into Korea. However, these petitions were rejected. In 1893-94, a conflict between a corrupt local official in Cholla province and a *Tonghak* congregation grew into a full scale peasant uprising. Provincial government forces were initially beaten back by the *Tonghak* rebels, at which point the *Tonghaks* seized control of the provincial capital at Chongju and paused to consider a march on Seoul. The central government in Seoul asked China to send a military expedition to Korea to suppress the *Tonghaks*, but a Chinese military presence in Korea was unacceptable to Japan, which sent Japanese forces to defeat the Chinese in the 1894 Sino-Japanese war over Korea. The *Tonghak* peasant army proceeded then to attack the modern-armed Japanese forces, but lost. After this defeat, some *Tonghaks* moved from the southwest to the relatively less populated and much more remote northeastern area of Korea, and even later into Manchuria to continue to fight against Japanese colonial power in Korea.

In 1905, *Tonghak* church leaders changed the name of their religion to Chondokyo, translated variously as Church of the Heavenly Way, or alternatively, Religion of the Cosmos. In 1919, Chondokyo church leaders in Seoul, in conjunction with Protestant Christians (*Kiddokyo*), took the initiative to organize the March 1, 1919 Korean Declaration of Independence, signed by some 15 Chondokyo ministers, 16 Protestant ministers, and two Buddhist monks. Immediately thereafter, demonstrations in support of Korean

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independence, organized initially through Chondokyo and Protestant Christian church networks, came to include some two million participants. The demonstrations sparked by Korea's religious leaders were suppressed by the Japanese colonial authorities, involving, according to Japanese police records, 46,948 arrested, 7,509 killed, and 15,961 injured, with some 715 houses, 47 churches, and two schools burned or destroyed.⁸⁵

Chodokyo followers, like Protestant Christians, challenged Kim Il Sung's policies in the North immediately after WWII. Chondokyo officials claim to have had three million adherents in Korea and among ethnic Koreans in Manchuria immediately after WWII.

VI. Protestant Christianity

Protestantism (*Kiddokyo*) came to Korea in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, a century later than Catholicism and under greatly changed circumstances on the Korean peninsula. The "Hermit Kingdom" had been opened by Japanese, European, and American commercial and military pressures, at a time when the 500 year old Chosun (Yi) dynasty was in terminal disarray.

The first Korean Protestants were converts in China and Japan who returned to Korea with their new version of Christianity. Korea would later become known as the most successful Protestant mission field in Asia because of the propagation efforts of Presbyterians and Methodists from Great Britain, the United States, Canada, and Australia.

One of the first missionaries⁸⁶ was a doctor, Horace Allen, who saved the life of the nephew of Queen Min, who had been wounded in a coup attempt against the Korean Monarchy. Allen became surgeon to the royal family, and was also allowed to open a clinic to treat common people. This grew into Korea's first "modern" or western medical hospital and medical school. Since it was not possible to evangelize directly, other of the earliest Protestant missionaries established schools. At a time when education in Korea was mainly for the sons of aristocrats who memorized Confucian classics in the Chinese language, the Protestant missionary schools offered Korean language education in modern subjects such as math and science. Protestant mission schools also opened up educational opportunities for girls. For example, Methodist missionaries in Seoul established Ewha Hakdang (Pearl Blossom High School), which grew into Ewha University, one of the largest and most prestigious women's universities in the world. The "missionaries in Korea initiated modern education,"⁸⁷ and the emerging middle classes in Korea's cities and towns sent their children, including Kim Il Sung, to mission schools. Korean Protestant converts proceeded to form many additional schools.

To avoid competitive overlap or duplication, the different Protestant churches divided the peninsula into various zones for concentration of effort. The Protestant missionary churches also adopted a methodology named after a missionary in China, John Nevius, that included the "three self" principles—self-governing, self-supporting, self-propagating—that 50 years later were to be made famous by the Chinese Communist government when it imposed the

“three self” movement on Protestants in that country. In combination, these two approaches led to the rapid growth of Protestantism in Korea.

In 1907, throughout the peninsula but particularly in the north, a series of waves of mass conversions began, referred to as the “Great Revival” that is compared to the “Great Awakenings” in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century England and America. “This revival undoubtedly had its roots in the unstable political and cultural circumstances of the time. The power released in this unusual event became the energy for the evangelization of the nation by the Koreans themselves.”⁸⁸ Within the first generation of Protestant missionary efforts, Korean cities and towns throughout the peninsula acquired sizeable Christian populations that included numbers of the growing Korean modernizing middle class. Pyongyang, the center of the Great Revivals, became known as the “Jerusalem of the East.”

The missionaries that went to Korea came from the segments of society that, in America, had contributed to the anti-slavery, temperance, suffragette, and settlement movements. In contrast to the rigidly hierarchical and patriarchal nature of late Chosun dynasty feudalism, Protestantism brought different values. In the words of Korea historian Ki-Baek Lee, “Protestantism was warmly welcomed not only as a religious creed but also for its political, social, educational, and cultural ideals and activities.”⁸⁹ Other historians state, “By spreading Western liberal ideas, missionaries also played an important role in arousing a national consciousness among the Korean people.”⁹⁰

In addition, the Korean “national consciousness” promoted by Protestantism was infused with Korean nationalism. Ironically, while late nineteenth century western imperialism was consolidating colonial rule throughout Asia, Korean sovereignty and independence were more immediately threatened by rising powers closer to the peninsula, particularly Japan. As Japan forced protectorate status over Korea and later annexed Korea directly, Korean Protestant Christianity became avowedly nationalistic. As noted above, sixteen of the 33 signers of the March 1, 1919 Declaration of Independence were Protestant religious leaders.⁹¹ Within four months of the Declaration and the pro-independence demonstrations that followed, 3,800 Korean Presbyterians were imprisoned and forty-five Presbyterian leaders were executed or beaten to death.⁹²

Korean Protestant churches remained a leading force within Korea in opposition to ongoing Japanese rule. This became acute in the mid-1930s, when Japanese colonial authorities required all schools, including Korean Christian schools, to engage in Shintoist shrine ceremonies. Many Christian schools closed rather than submit to a practice regarded as idolatrous. When, during World War II, Korean Protestants were ordered to drop their denominational affiliations and join the Japanese-controlled Korean Japanese Christian Church (*Nihon Kirisuto-kyo Chosen Kyodan*), many Korean Christians refused. Some three thousand Korean Christian leaders were arrested, fifty of whom died in prison.⁹³

At the end of WWII, there were approximately 200,000 Protestants north of the 38th parallel. As noted by Kim Il Sung’s most comprehensive biographer, “One of Kim’s most difficult tasks after the establishment of the state was the

KOREA WOULD LATER BECOME KNOWN AS THE MOST SUCCESSFUL PROTESTANT MISSION FIELD IN ASIA BECAUSE OF THE PROPAGATION EFFORTS OF PRESBYTERIANS AND METHODISTS FROM GREAT BRITAIN, THE UNITED STATES, CANADA, AND AUSTRALIA.

handling of Christians.”⁹⁴ Conflicts between Korean Protestants and the Communist regime installed in the north after WWII led to Protestantism’s total suppression by the 1960s.⁹⁵

CHAPTER SIX

THE SUPPRESSIONS (1945 - 1960): THREE PHASES IN THE GOVERNMENT'S COMPLETE SUPPRESSION OF RELIGION IN NORTH KOREA

When Kim Il Sung was selected by the Soviet Union to organize a Soviet-leaning regime in Pyongyang, there was no existing Korean communist political party.⁹⁶ By that time, two of Korea’s religions that had achieved considerable followings in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Protestant Christianity and Chondokyo (The Religion of the Heavenly Way),⁹⁷ were strong presences and the Protestants, in particular, were highly organized. Both religious communities were recognized as leading Korean nationalists, and both had aspirations to shape a new Korea corresponding to the ethics of their religious doctrines. Yet, between 1945 and the start of the Korean war in 1950, Kim Il Sung had co-opted and suppressed these political rivals, arrested their leaders and executed some of them, and initiated the exodus of religious believers to the separate country taking shape south of the 38th parallel.

BY THE 1960s, THERE WERE NO CHURCHES, BUDDHIST TEMPLES, OR CHONDOKYO PLACES OF WORSHIP OPERATING IN NORTH KOREA, WHICH BECAME ONE OF ONLY TWO COUNTRIES IN THE WORLD WHERE RELIGION WAS FULLY PROHIBITED.

The Korean War (1950 -1953) dramatically accelerated the flight of religious believers to the south, along with the staggering brutality, destruction, and loss of life that occurred throughout the peninsula as a result of the war. Following the war and the death of Stalin in 1953, and after eliminating his rivals for power within the Korean Workers Party (KWP), Kim Il Sung went in a direction different from the post-Stalinist Soviet Union and instituted a series of inter-related policies that historians have termed “national Stalinism.” One of the elements of this policy was the elimination of all public religious practice in North Korea. By the 1960s, there were no churches, Buddhist temples, or Chondokyo places of worship operating in North Korea,⁹⁸ which became one of only two countries in the world where religion was fully prohibited (the other was Albania).⁹⁹ This turn of events came about in three discernable stages that are outlined below.

I. Phase One (1945 – 1950): North Korea as a “People’s Democracy”

Between the end of the Japanese colonial occupation and the onset of the Korean War, with the northern part of the peninsula under Soviet occupation, North Korea experienced the same fate as the “people’s democracies” in Eastern and Central Europe, where the Soviet army had defeated the Nazis. Judging that these “people’s democracies” were years if not decades away from the conditions required to achieve socialism, the Soviet template in northern Korea included, in early 1946, a sweeping land reform that confiscated not only Japanese landholdings but those of the Korean aristocrats as well. This land reform “destroyed the basis of landed wealth that had existed in Korea for centuries”¹⁰⁰ and was in fact very popular among the country’s peasant farmers. Other liberal, genuinely democratic, and generally popular measures that were instituted included labor reforms such as the eight hour day, social security insurance, pay raises, and equal pay for equal work. In addition, laws were promulgated prohibiting concubinage, prostitution, and female infanticide.¹⁰¹

The Soviets and Kim Il Sung Against the Protestants and Chondokyo Adherents

The Soviet blueprint for northern Korea also included the subordination of all other social-political forces and organizations to the KWP. During this period, the Party was quickly pasted together from various factions of Soviet Koreans

(ethnic Koreans who had earlier fled or migrated to Siberia and the Soviet maritime province), Korean leftists returning from China, domestic Korean leftists who were fleeing to the north after 1945, and formerly Manchuria-based anti-Japanese guerilla fighters, including Kim Il Sung, who had fled to the Soviet Union when Japan occupied Manchuria. This process would bring the Soviet-supported KWP into direct conflict with the Protestant Christians and Chondokyo followers, both of whom were, at least initially, considerably more numerous and much better organized in the north of the Korean peninsula than were communist-leaning leftists.

Toward the end of WWII, as it became clear that Japan would lose, in a rare moment of unity, left-leaning, rightist, and centrist Korean nationalists came together to form the Committee for the Preparation of Korean Independence (CPKI *Chosun Konguk Chunbi Wiwonhoe*). “Branches of the CPKI, called ‘people’s committees’ (*inmin wiwonhoe*), sprang up all over the country almost overnight and assumed control of the local administrative apparatus.”¹⁰² The CPKI developed rapidly from a preparatory committee into an aspiring governmental structure, the Korean Peoples Republic (KPR-*Chosun Inmin Konghwaguk*).

Initially, rightists and moderates had cooperated with the CPKI/KPR, since it was assumed that the Soviet Union would come to occupy all of the Korean peninsula as required for the Soviet-American joint invasion of the Japanese islands. When that invasion was no longer required and the United States was preparing to occupy the south of the Korean peninsula, conservatives and moderates south of the 38th parallel dropped out of the CPKI, leaving only leftists. North of the 38th parallel, except for Hamgyong province, all of the provincial committees of the CPKI/KPR were headed by Protestant Christians. The most important committee—which governed the area around Pyongyang—was headed by a Christian educator named Cho Man Sik. In the south, the U.S. military eschewed the CPKI/KPR and instituted direct military rule. In the north, the Soviets worked through the CPKI/KPR, which left them dealing with Presbyterian Elder Cho Man Sik, one of Korea’s most popular indigenous nationalists.

Elder Cho was sometimes referred to as the Korean Gandhi, because he promoted Korean craft production and manufacture and the consumption of Korean-made products rather than imports from Japan. Cho wore simple Korean garments rather than western business attire, and when, toward the end of WWII, Japan made Koreans adopt Japanese names, Cho pointedly and successfully refused. Cho had taken a moderate, gradualist approach to Korean liberation from Japan, as he would to the social revolution the Soviets and Kim Il Sung had in mind for Korea.

Cho led the organization of the Korean Democratic Party (KDP-*Chosun Minju Dang*) almost entirely through Protestant church networks, including a Christian Social Democratic Party organized in Sinuiju by two leading Presbyterian ministers a few months earlier.¹⁰³ As the leader of the CPKI north of the 38th parallel, Cho had no choice but to cooperate with the Soviet occupation authorities, and they prevailed on him to appoint his former pupil, Choe Yong

Gon, who later joined Kim Il Sung’s guerillas in Manchuria, as the deputy KDP leader.¹⁰⁴ Shortly thereafter, in January 1946, following the arrest of Cho and other of his Christian nationalist associates, the communists were left in control of the KDP.

Unlike Kim Il Sung’s KWP and Cho’s KDP, both of which were quickly organized immediately after WWII, the Chondokyo followers had organized a political party back in 1923, the Young Friends Party (*Chondokyo Chang Udang*).¹⁰⁵ By 1925, the Young Friends Party claimed 30,000 members in some 120 local branches. Under Japanese pressure, the party went underground in 1934 but re-emerged in 1945 and claimed in 1947 to have more than a million and a half members concentrated in the villages and among the farming peasantry. The Young Friends Party maintained the populist, radically egalitarian politics that had informed the *Tonghak* rebellion in the previous century. They strongly supported the 1946 land reform, for example, which had the political consequences of leading many formerly landless farmers and Chondokyo followers to support the Workers Party. The Young Friends Party remained ardently nationalist, pro-independence, and anti-division.

As was the case in other countries occupied by Soviet armed forces after WWII, a “united front” was set up, in this case the North Korean Democratic United Front (KDUF, *Puk Chosun minju-juui minjok tongil chonson*), “an apparatus for both inclusion and control – a means by which the ‘broad masses’ [represented by political parties, and women’s, youth, labor, and religious cultural and academic organizations] could be brought into a political process under communist leadership.”¹⁰⁶

It did not take long for tension between the communists and the Protestants and Chondokyo followers to escalate. Already in 1945, Christian students in Sinuiju organized demonstrations against Soviet occupation, which were put down. As part of the land reform project noted above, church properties were confiscated. Chondokyo leaders and Protestant Christians, who had together organized the March 1, 1919 Declaration of Independence demonstrations, tried to organize a “Second March 1st” movement, which led to counter-rallies organized by the communists in support of the incipient, Soviet-backed Kim regime. Elections, organized by the KDUF, were held on Sundays, which led to Christian election boycotts.

The Workers Party started to send agents to observe and monitor Protestant worship services.¹⁰⁷ Kim had his uncle (his mother’s brother), a graduate of Pyongyang Theological Seminary and an ordained Presbyterian minister, set up a pro-regime Korean Christian Federation (*Kiddokkyo Kyodo Yonmaeng*), which Protestant parishes were pressured to join. One Korean church historian notes, “... North Korean authorities arrested and imprisoned those Christian leaders who did not join the Christian Federation. As a result, many North Korean Christians fled to South Korea and some went underground.”¹⁰⁸

Ironically, the most important breaking point between the Protestant Christians and the Soviet supported-regime in Pyongyang was the American-Soviet plan for “Korean trusteeship.” In December 1945, at the Moscow Conference, the Americans and Soviets—following up on the decisions and declarations of the

famous Yalta and Potsdam Conferences—proposed a five year “trusteeship”¹⁰⁹ for Korea under an American and Soviet Joint Commission to establish a unified provisional government.

However, the Christians, led by Cho Man Sik and cognizant of Korea’s millennium of national independence prior to Japanese colonial occupation (1910-1945), adamantly and publicly opposed trusteeship. Fortright opposition to Soviet policy was, of course, non-permissible. As noted above, Cho and other of his Christian colleagues were arrested. Cho was never heard from again and would be executed at the beginning of the Korean War in 1950. In the words of a leading Korea historian, “Christian churches remained open until the [Korean] war, and worship was allowed, but Christian political activities were stamped out.”¹¹⁰

Chondokyo leaders had also opposed the American-Soviet plan for “trusteeship,” and their breaking point came shortly thereafter. At U.S. instigation, the UN was tasked to undertake elections both north and south of the 38th parallel. The Soviets, however, refused to allow the UN to organize elections in the North. Realizing that this would lead to the division of the country, Chondokyo leaders supported the UN elections, and prepared to organize demonstrations to demonstrate that support. This the Soviets would not permit, and, according to Chondokyo sources, some 17,000 Chondokyo adherents were arrested.¹¹¹ In response, the Chondokyo followers in the North saw the futility of opposing Kim Il Sung and the Soviet authorities, causing their leadership there to pledge support to the Workers Party.

Catholics and Buddhists

Unlike the Protestants and Chondokyo followers, the Catholics and Buddhists were not organized politically in the areas north of the Korean peninsula. However, both were adversely affected by the land reform of 1946, which took possession of Catholic and Buddhist properties, and by the onset of the Cold War, during which the Catholics, in Korea as in Eastern Europe, were considered to be anti-communist and anti-Soviet.

The Vatican had previously recognized ethnic Korean Catholics, centered in Yanji (or Yenki, as it was formerly called) in Northeast China, as part of the Korean church. In 1946, the Soviets arrested the Catholic Bishop of Yanji, Manchuria, a German national, and some 26 German priests and monks, two German nuns, and one Italian nun. Six months before the outbreak of the Korean War, the Tok-wan Abbey, a center of Catholicism in North Korea, was cordoned off, and both German and Korean were priests arrested. Foreign and Korean priests were also arrested in the Hamhung Vicariate, and seminaries were seized in Wonsan and Sariwon and the seminarians dispersed. The Bishops of Pyongyang and other priests in Pyongyang and Sinuiju were arrested, as were lay Catholics, leading many other Catholics to flee to South Korea. On the eve of the Korean War, fewer than two dozen Catholic priests remained in their parishes in North Korea.¹¹²

The 1946 land reform resulted in the confiscation of Buddhist monasteries and properties in the North. Moreover, the DPRK proved disinclined to support,

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by the provision of food, the meditations of Korean Buddhist monks. Buddhism, which at this time was not strong to begin with, was further weakened.¹¹³

II. Phase Two in the Suppression: The Korean War (1950- 1953)

As opposing armies fought their way up and down the peninsula starting in June 1950, and with large scale aerial bombing, the Korean War brought enormous destruction to Korea and the Korean people, irrespective of belief or affiliation.

At the outset of the Korean War, numerous religious adherents previously arrested in the North were executed. “All Catholic priests in North Korea still at large were arrested.”¹¹⁴ During the initial days and weeks of the war, as the North Korean forces drove south to the “Pusan perimeter” in the southeast corner of Korea where the North Korean advance was halted, the North Koreans arrested various religious leaders in Seoul and the other cities of South Korea that they briefly occupied. These included the Methodist Bishop Yang Ju Sam, Catholic Bishop James Byrne, and another 95 foreign and 52 Korean Catholic priests.¹¹⁵ When, following U.S. General Douglas MacArthur’s dramatic Inchon landing, U.S. and ROK forces drove north, the retreating North Koreans took the Protestant and Catholic leaders arrested in South Korea back to the North, where many of the prisoners died enroute or thereafter.¹¹⁶

When U.S.-led forces later drove north across the 38th parallel and captured Pyongyang, they were reportedly welcomed openly by Christians in Pyongyang. After Chinese troops crossed the Yalu and drove U.S. and ROK forces back to and below the 38th parallel, many North Koreans, including large numbers of religious believers, were evacuated south from Pyongyang and from the port cities on the East coast of North Korea.¹¹⁷ According to one Korea scholar, between 10 and 14 percent of the North Korean population fled or was evacuated to South Korea between 1945 and 1953.¹¹⁸

When, nearly 50 years later, DPRK diplomats at the UN Committee on Human Rights were asked about the small number of religious believers in North Korea (some 0.2 percent of the population according to the DPRK statistics provided to the UN), the DPRK representative responded that “...many people who practiced religion had been killed during the Korean war. Religion was dying of old age and young people seldom showed an interest in religious worship.”¹¹⁹

III. The Third Phase: Complete Suppression (1953 to the early 1960s)

The complete suppression of religious worship and belief achieved in North Korea by the early 1960s did not take place in a social or political vacuum, but as part of a “total mobilization... the total transformation of politics, social relationships, economy, culture and everyday life.”¹²⁰ The Soviet Union under Stalin had selected Kim Il Sung to lead North Korea and Stalin gave Kim the approval and support necessary to initiate the Korean War.¹²¹ Although deemed a not-yet-ready-for-socialism “people’s democracy” before the war, after the war and the death of Stalin, rather than following the “revisionist” path of the post-Stalin Soviet Union,¹²² North Korea, like Romania, Albania and China, embarked on what has been termed a path of “national Stalinism.”¹²³

For North Korea, “national Stalinism” included a forced draft rush to heavy industrialization to be accomplished in 4-5 years rather than decades. This would be driven by an ideological campaign termed *Chollima* or “flying horse,” the Korean equivalent of the Chinese “Great Leap Forward,” which involved the suppression of private commerce and the defacto collectivization of agriculture.¹²⁴ Kim also purged his potential opposition within the Korean Workers Party.¹²⁵ Initially, real, suspected, potential, and imagined opponents within the KWP were subjected to show trials, with death sentences common, in which many life-long communist revolutionaries confessed to, or were convicted of, spying for the Americans and South Koreans. Subsequently, the show trials were dispensed with, and suspected dissenters were simply abducted and deposited in the North Korean gulag.

In 1957, with the immense project of classifying the entire North Korean population into 51 sub-categories of “core” (*haeksim kyechung*), “wavering” (*tongyo kyechung*), or “hostile” (*joktae kyechung*) classes or “loyalty groups,” North Korea’s notorious hereditary “*songbun*” class system was initiated, though it took more than a decade to complete.¹²⁶ It was “One of the most successful and intensely coercive social engineering feats of modern times.”¹²⁷ Membership in this hereditary class system substantially determines access to residence, employment, education, travel, health benefits, and food distribution, all of which are based on a family’s class affiliation or ideological inclination in 1945. Religious adherents—Protestants, Buddhists, Catholics, and Confucianists—were designated as “hostile” subgroups 34, 35, 36, and 37 respectively.

In 1958, the “five household responsibility system” (*o ho tamdang che*) instituted a “people’s group” (*inminban*) structure in which all North Koreans had to belong to a neighborhood group responsible for ideological education and politically reliable behavior, and which also served as a conduit for various mobilization campaigns.¹²⁸ According to the former North Koreans interviewed for this report, this “five household system” makes it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to express religious beliefs or engage in worship beyond very close family members, since the “people’s group” is expressly tasked with reporting deviance.

Resolution 149 of the North Korean Council of Ministers initiated the forced relocation of “unreliable elements” to remote mountains in various parts of the country.¹²⁹ Large scale purges were extended to common people, in what has been termed the “greatest witch hunt in North Korean history,” when, during nine months between 1958 and 1959, more people were persecuted for political crimes than in the previous thirteen years, including during the Korean War.¹³⁰ This process included the forcible transfer of religious families from Pyongyang to industrial cities on the east coast.¹³¹ Subsequently, other groups, including the families of executed religious believers, were sent to the Yongpyong-ri district for “total control zone” lifetime administrative detention at forced labor camp (*gwalliso*) No. 15 at Yodok.¹³²

By this time, the local organizations of the non-proletarian parties (Cho Man Sik’s original KDP and the Chondokyo Young Friends Party) were completely suppressed. This left only the small “central committees” run by KWP loyalists for “overseas propaganda and United Front policy to attract some social groups

(IN THE MID 1950s) REAL, SUSPECTED, POTENTIAL, AND IMAGINED OPPONENTS WITHIN THE KWP WERE SUBJECTED TO SHOW TRIALS, WITH DEATH SENTENCES COMMON, IN WHICH MANY LIFE-LONG COMMUNIST REVOLUTIONARIES CONFESSED TO, OR WERE CONVICTED OF, SPYING FOR THE AMERICANS AND SOUTH KOREANS. SUBSEQUENTLY, THE SHOW TRIALS WERE DISPENSED WITH, AND SUSPECTED DISSENTERS WERE SIMPLY ABDUCTED AND DEPOSITED IN THE NORTH KOREAN GULAG.

in the South [Korea] to the democratic [i.e. pro-Communist] forces,” as explained by the head of the Organizational Department of the Korean Workers Party Central Committee, Kim Il Sung’s younger brother Kim Young Ju, to a Soviet diplomat in 1959.¹³³

Also in 1958, the Kim Il Sung personality cult intensified, as Kim’s title “Prime Minister” (*Susang*) was changed to “Great Leader” (*Suryong*). By mid-1959, “rooms for the study of Great Leader, Marshall Kim Il Sung’s revolutionary activity (*Kim Il Sung Wonsu hyukmyeong hwaldong yeongusil*) were established at almost all government agencies, factories, agricultural cooperatives, and schools throughout our country,” state the official North Korean history books.¹³⁴ These were the worship-like study halls attended by virtually all of the former North Koreans interviewed for this report.

Part and parcel of the “totalizing ambitions” of the regime that pervaded social organization, regulation, surveillance, and propaganda was a campaign against alternative ideologies, especially the Christian religion.¹³⁵ As described recently by a Russian Korea scholar:

In the 1950s anti-Protestant propaganda reached a hysterical pitch. All kinds of religious worship was banned, but Protestantism was particularly signaled out as a “wicked teaching of the US imperialists.” All churches were closed by the mid 1950s, and those Protestant leaders who were unlucky, naive or foolish enough to stay in the North after the Korean War were purged in the late 1950s as “American spies.” Even those who renounced their faith, though doing so usually saved their lives, were not completely off the hook; under North Korea’s elaborate system of hereditary groups, such people became members of hostile group No. 37 and remained branded until the end of their days.

Meanwhile, the official media bombarded North Koreans with ranting anti-Protestant propaganda. The educational efforts of the early missionaries were explained as part of their scheme to pave the road for the long-planned US invasion. Pastors and activists were portrayed as spies and saboteurs on the payroll of the US Central Intelligence Agency, or as sadists killing innocent and naïve Koreans with their own hands. Works of fiction depicted how missionaries were killing Korean children in their “clinics” – in order to sell their blood, eyes, or body parts (very improbable in the era before body-part transplants, but good propaganda anyway). The “regeneration” of a Korean Christian was another favorite topic of North Korean fiction of the late 1950s. A protagonist of such stories was initially misled by scheming missionaries and their willful collaborators and foolishly became a Christian, but then some incident or bitter personal experiences helped him or her to discover the depraved nature of the Christian teaching. Of course, he or she rejected the “imperialist ideological poison” and led others to eventual enlightenment.

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REGULATION, SURVEILLANCE,
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CAMPAIGN AGAINST
ALTERNATIVE IDEOLOGIES,
ESPECIALLY THE CHRISTIAN
RELIGION

Even nowadays, in Sinchon Museum, a propaganda center dealing with US atrocities (largely invented), one can see a collage of photos of all prominent American missionaries active in Korea around 1900, accompanied by the captions: “the American missionaries who crawled into Korea, hiding their daggers in their clothing.

By the mid-1950s not a single church was left functioning. As usual the Korean Stalinists outdid Stalin himself....¹³⁶

It is to this campaign against religion that virtually all of the North Koreans interviewed for this report referred.

In the words of another Korea scholar, “By the 1960s North Korean ideologues had transformed communism into an apologia for the ethnic-state. By the 1970s the adulation of Kim Il Sung had become a civic religion without competition. In the absence of other religious/political foci, the cult absorbed symbolism from Confucianism, State Shinto, and even Christianity until Kim had become a Korean Messiah.”¹³⁷ This exclusive, cultish civic religion is outlined in the next chapter of this report.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE REPLACEMENT: JUCHE, KIMILSUNGISM, AND THE MONOLITHIC IDEOLOGY SYSTEM

To fill the spiritual and intellectual void created by the suppression of the existing Korean thought and belief systems in the late 1950s and 1960s, the North Korean regime constructed and substituted an esoteric belief system that has acquired many of the characteristics of a religious cult. The former North Koreans interviewed for this study were very familiar with this monolithic official ideology system, the rites and rituals of which they, like all North Koreans, were required to participate in on an almost daily basis for all of their lives until they fled North Korea. This system is called variously, “the *Juche* Idea” (*Juche* or *chuch’e sasang*), Kimilsungism, Kim Il Sung Revolutionary Thought, or “the monolithic ideology system,” (*yuil sasang chegye*—also translated as “the one and only ideology system”), with these terms being used tautologically and almost inter-changeably.¹³⁸



Statue of Kim Il Sung

Literally, *Juche* is a combination of two words (*Ju* or *Chu*) which translates as “lord, master, owner, ruler, the main and so forth” and (*che* or *ch’e*) which translates as “the body, the whole, the essence, the subject.”¹³⁹ Usually translated as “self-reliance” in the sense of being in charge of one’s own destiny or being the “subject” rather than the “object,” *Juche* does not mean economic isolation or autarchy,¹⁴⁰ a policy of eschewing imports, aid, or investment from other countries, as it is sometimes mis-cast.

The Secular and the Mundane

In its most mundane and secular usage, *Juche*, understood as self-mastery, gave Kim Il Sung a platform to criticize his rivals within the Workers Party who leaned too much toward China or the Soviet Union, Korea’s giant communist neighbors, and to castigate his arch-rivals in South Korea for their “flunkyist” admiration for the United States. *Juche* also became a platform that allowed Kim Il Sung to set himself apart from post-Stalinist Soviet “revisionism” or Chinese “dogmatism,” a reference to Maoism as proclaimed during the Cultural Revolution, and allowed Kim and North Korea to remain independent during the worst periods of the Sino-Soviet dispute. “Kimilsungism,” a term supposedly coined initially by Kim Jong Il and not used by Kim Il Sung himself, gave Kim Il Sung an “ism” that allowed him, as the leader of a small country, the stature necessary to stand on his own in the political environment of Stalin and Mao, both of whom, of course, had “isms” of their own.

Also at the secular level, *Juche* or Kimilsungism was proffered as a theory of socialist revolution and construction, as Kim Il Sung became the heir to Marx and Lenin. In this rendering, Marx was the theoretician of capitalism, who provided the insights and keys to the revolutionary mobilization of the working class. Lenin was the theoretician of imperialism, the highest stage of monopoly capitalism, and the strategist and engineer for the revolutionary seizure of state power, but he died before he could engineer the “construction of socialism.” It was Kim Il Sung, “under the banner of Marxist-Leninism and *Juche*,” who became the theoretician and engineer of “socialist revolution *and construction*” (emphasis added). Thus, the writings on *Juche* published in Pyongyang under the name of Kim Il Sung are compilations of Kim’s speeches proclaiming and explaining the policies, programs, and campaigns, identified in the previous chapter of this report as “national Stalinism,” which were utilized and

implemented to “construct socialism” in North Korea following the Korean War.¹⁴¹

Aspirations More Sacred

However, Kimilsungism, the monolithic, one-and-only ideological system based on *Juche*, as it was elucidated in the DPRK during the 1960s and 1970s hardly remained at the level of the secular or mundane. In the hands of Kim Jong Il, whose first job after graduation from Kim Il Sung University was with the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the Korean Workers Party, with a theoretical assist from Hwang Jang Yop, a North Korean academic who had studied philosophy at leading universities in Japan and the Soviet Union, *Juche* acquired a patina of philosophic universalism, and an exceedingly heavy gloss of ethnocentrically Korean messianic religiosity.

Some scholars of *Juche* contend that Kimilsungism substitutes “national consciousness, a militant, even Jacobin nationalism,”¹⁴² for what classical Marxism posed as “class consciousness.” The “self” (*Ju* or *Chu*) in *Juche* is highly ethnocentrically Korean, and means much more than independence or self-reliance. As described by a leading *Juche* scholar, “It is claimed that world civilization originated on the Korean peninsula and that Koreans are a chosen people with the sacred mission to rescue humanity from capitalist materialism, decadent culture and moral decay. This ethnocentrism was even further emphasized following the collapse of European socialism. Thus, when asked, children in North Korean public schools almost habitually define the purpose of their study as carrying out the sacred mission of saving humanity from the evil forces of imperialism, a belief reinforced by the notion that they are a chosen people.”¹⁴³ Through *Juche*, in Kim Jong Il’s words, “Kim Il Sung is indeed the savior who revived our nation and led [the Korean people] in sacred revolutionary struggle.”¹⁴⁴ Kim Jong Il goes on, “We are conducting the revolution... for the future of mankind ... Our struggle [‘against US imperialism’] is a noble struggle for the security and prosperity of mankind.”¹⁴⁵

According to Kim Il Sung’s major academic biographer, “[*Juche*] started out as a fairly simple platform for Kim Il Sung to establish a measure of independence from his giant communist backers in the Soviet Union; it was extended to enable Kim Il Sung to promote himself as a thinker and leader of the third-world, non-aligned nations. As his personality cult reached messianic proportions, it was extended further enabling [Kim] to preach his ideas as universal truth.”¹⁴⁶ As explained by a *Juche* theoretician at Kim Il Sung University, *Juche* is an “eternal truth” (*yongsaeng pulmyol ui chilli*), the same phrase used by South Koreans for points of Christian theology that cannot be fully comprehended, but have to be taken on faith.¹⁴⁷

In the words of one North Korea scholar, *Juche* became “not an ordinary political ideology but a complex system of values utilized for the purpose of political mobilization and regime legitimacy ... [T]he way people are inculcated into that system is similar to... a religious community.”¹⁴⁸ In the words of another Korea specialist, “*Juche* was transformed from a nationalistic ruling ideology to a cult ideology making a break between political persuasion and religion.”¹⁴⁹ The rites and rituals by which ordinary Koreans are inculcated into the cult of

*Juche Statue towers over
Pyongyang*



the Kims—the memorization and recitation of precious texts, the portrait cleaning ceremonies—are precisely those described by the former North Koreans interviewed for this report.

Aspirations Even More Sacred: Fictional History and Miraculous Accounts



“Great Leader” and “Dear Leader” depicted in a painting

According to Kim Il Sung’s major scholarly biographer, Kim first mentioned *Juche* in 1955 and did not mention it again until 1963. However, under Kim Jong Il’s direction, Korean history was re-written. In the 1970s, Kim Il Sung’s speeches purportedly dating back to the 1930s were published for the first time. These previously unpublished and unheard of speeches have Kim Il Sung lecturing on *Juche* to Korean anti-Japanese partisans in Manchuria in 1930 at the age of 18.

Kim Il Sung’s entire family, going back five generations—an important marker in the Confucianist ancestor veneration system—was endowed with hallowed revolutionary credentials. In the early 1980s, a new version of the official North Korean *Complete History of Korea (Chosun chonsa)* was published. According to a Columbia University Korea scholar, more than half of its thirty-three volumes are devoted to the life and family of Kim Il Sung. Moreover, the transition from medieval to modern Korea was no longer marked by the transition from feudalism to capitalism (or the fall of the Chosun dynasty), but by the emergence of resistance to foreign imperialist aggression in the nineteenth century. Specifically, “modern Korea began ... with the attack by an enraged Korean mob on the crew of the American merchant ship the USS General Sherman, which sailed up the Taedong river toward Pyongyang in 1866...”¹⁵⁰ This attack led to the killing of all on board, including a British national representing the Scottish Bible Society. The enraged mob was, according to this official account, led by Kim Ung-U, Kim Il Sung’s great-great grandfather. Thus, as noted in one scholar’s account, “The emergence of a modern Korean nation, which naturally reached its apotheosis in the form of the DPRK, was ... inseparable from anti-imperialist resistance and from the hereditary leadership of the Kim family.”¹⁵¹



Sept. 19, 1945 - Kim Il Sung and his wife Kim Chong Suk return to Korea from Siberia.

Major North Korean newspapers began to carry stories of North Korean sailors on storm-tossed seas calming the ocean by gathering on the open deck to sing praises to Kim Il Sung. Kim Jong Il was proclaimed to have been born on Mount Paektu, the sacred mountain from which, according to legend, the Korean people first emerged. Carvings were said to have appeared on trees and the sign of a double rainbow appeared in the sky heralding his birth—magical phenomena associated with Shamanism. More mundane histories have Kim Jong Il being born in a Soviet army camp near Khabarovsk.

In a rather more cynical summary by an Australian Korea specialist, “From 1973, when he became the anointed heir to his father, Kim Jong Il had to find some way to compensate for his lack of personal charisma or any record of service to the revolution or the state. His chosen path was to deify his father and elevate his entire family to godlike status. At his hands (and with Hwang Jang Yop’s help), ‘Kimilsungism’ and *Juche* became quasi-religious doctrines.”¹⁵²

[HTTP://WWW.KIMSOFT.COM/KOREA/JP-HIST5.HTM](http://www.kimsoft.com/korea/jp-hist5.htm)

A leading *Juche* theoretician in North Korea explained to a Korean-American scholar, “*Juche* will not be perfected as a philosophical system without being “religionized.”¹⁵³

According to a leading Korea historian, the terms North Koreans translate “to hold Kim Il Sung in high esteem” (*uroro potta*) is literally the same term used religiously to “look up and receive” Christ... [suggesting] a conscious attempt to present [Kim] as a secular Christ or Christ-substitute.”¹⁵⁴ In the words of a Korean-American *Juche* scholar, “Whether Kim Il Sung can be compared to a truly religious figure such as Jesus Christ defies common wisdom, but the fact that Kim has acquired a status of immortality in the belief system of *Juche* is undeniable.”¹⁵⁵

The Elevation of Humanity and Ideological Indoctrination

Several other aspects of Kimilsungism are important to the present consideration of *Juche* as a monolithic system of thought and belief in North Korea. The first is its projection of the supremacy of humanity as religious doctrine. In this aspect of *Juche*, by virtue of Workers Party ownership of both “state power” and the “means of production,” Kimilsungism “reactivated” and “rehabilitated the conscience of man,” which heretofore in Marxist theory had been materialistically mired in the “modes of production.”¹⁵⁶ Notwithstanding explicit references to Prometheus in the *Juche* literature published in Pyongyang, the claim is made by Kim Jong Il that “[t]he respected Comrade Kim Il Sung discovered the philosophical principle that man is the master of everything and decides everything.”¹⁵⁷ This is repeated over and over again in the *Juche* literature. Further, according to Kim Jong Il, this discovery enabled Kim Il Sung to “explain a new law, the movement of the motive force, and he thus put socialism on a new, scientific basis.”¹⁵⁸

According to Kim Jong Il, “[F]or the first time in history, the *Juche* idea has given a scientific definition of man’s essential qualities.... Man is a social being with independence, creativity and consciousness.”¹⁵⁹ The end result, however, of this new socialism that puts “man at the center”—in which man’s consciousness determines man’s physical and material environment—is massive, intensive, and unremitting ideological indoctrination. In Kim Jong Il’s words “absolute precedence must be given to the struggle to take the ideological fortress before the struggle to take the material fortress.”¹⁶⁰ The “transformation of man” is to be achieved through “the ideological re-molding of the masses.” The North Koreans interviewed for this report have described their own experiences in these campaigns to ideologically re-mold the masses.

Collectivism and Leadership Theory in Juche.

The aspect of *Juche*/Kimilsungism that has the most obvious importance to the lives of most North Koreans is the *Juche*-derived “leadership theory” that endows Kim Il Sung, and also Kim Jong Il, with super-human, semi-divine attributes. This theory bestows on Kim Il Sung even more veneration than that due to the founder of a Korean dynasty. It also results in the many thousands of busts and portraits of Kim Il Sung in altar-type settings throughout North

Korea, and enables Kim to be the DPRK President for Life, even though physically deceased.

Starting from man’s nature as a social being and the maker and determiner of all things, in a series of “talks” to senior officials of the Central Committee of the KWP, Kim Jong Il—or whoever is speaking or writing in his name—lays out what is termed the “socio-political body or organism,” and the “socio-political community,” which strives for “socio-political integrity” and “socio-political immortality.”

The North Korean socio-political body is familial. According to Kim Jong Il:

It is a true feature of our society that all its members form a large harmonious family.... In our country, everyone regards and supports the leader as they would their own father. They trust and follow the Party, regarding its embrace as that of their own mother. The leader, the Party and the people form one socio-political organism, and share the same destiny. The whole of the society overflows with communist morality.¹⁶¹

The North Korean socio-political body is also avowedly collectivist. Again, according to Kim Jong Il:

Collectivism, as an ideal of socialism, has developed continuously. The establishment of Marxism was of great significance in the development of the concept of collectivism. The Great Leader Comrade Kim Il Sung authored the *Juche* idea and, on this basis, has developed the socialist idea and brought it to perfection, thus developing the concept of collectivism at a higher level.¹⁶²

Indeed, one Korea scholar notes that “Nowhere in the history of political theory has this level of rationalization for collectivism been articulated.”¹⁶³ Another Korea specialist provides a notable example of Kimilsungist collectivism: the *Arirang* stadium spectacles or “mass games” in which tens of thousands of participants march and twirl in precise harmony. Scores of thousands of persons lining the stadium bleachers become “human pixels” as they lift color coded placards in perfectly timed unison, displaying symbols of praise to Great Leader Kim Il Sung and images of North Korean military prowess.¹⁶⁴

Under this highly collectivist conception of social life, the leader is likened to the brain and/or heart of an individual person. The leader’s organization, in this case the Korean Workers Party, is likened to that of the “backbone,” and the populace to that of the “body.” In Kim Jong Il’s words:

Great Leader Kim Il Sung clarified for the first time in history that there is socio-political integrity distinct from the physical life of the individual.

Just as a man’s brain is the center of his life, the leader is the top brain in the socio-political community because he is the focal point which directs the organism in a unified manner....

The relationship between the leader and the people must not be understood as a mere relationship between the man who leads and the men who are led.... We must understand that and *believe* that the leader is the center of life of the socio-political community and it is only when we are linked to the leader organizationally, ideologically, and as comrades can we acquire immortal socio-political integrity (emphasis added).

Uniting around the leader into one organization with a single ideology...the masses form a socio-political organism which is immortal as an independent being. The physical life of a person is finite, but the integrity of the masses rallied as an independent organism is immortal.¹⁶⁵

In the words of one Korea scholar, “*Juche* came to embody in some near mystical and fuzzy way a fusion of ‘moral essence’ and ‘bloodline’ of genetic and moral superiority that could only be articulated by the leader.”¹⁶⁶

Orthodoxy “in extremis”

Another element of *Juche*/Kimilsungism that is important to religious freedom is its status as “the one-and-only ideology system.” *Juche* is proclaimed by the state as a monolithic value system whereby diverse interpretations of social phenomena or political events are strictly prohibited.¹⁶⁷ “The ideological system was defined as monolithic, with the regime insisting that it possessed the absolute truth on any subject and had the right to define that truth and then demand obedience to it.”¹⁶⁸

Kim Jong Il himself explicitly juxtaposes monolithic Kimilsungism to “pluralism” which he says can “never be tolerated in socialist society.”¹⁶⁹ The vigorously monolithic approach of *Juche* can be seen directly in two documents that appear in the Appendix of this report: the Preface to the 1998 DPRK Constitution and the complete text of “The Ten Great Principles of the Unitary Ideology System,” proclaimed in April 1974, two months after Kim Jong Il had been designated to succeed his father. The monolithicity of Kimilsungism is clearly understood by virtually all the North Koreans interviewed for this report.

A Cautionary Note

As long as the Kim dynasty rules North Korea, *Juche*/Kimilsungism is likely to remain the official state orthodoxy. This theocratic ideology is the thought and belief system that, at work and school, was drummed into the heads of the former North Koreans interviewed for this report, to the exclusion of all other systems of thought and belief. However, in the classical Confucianist political system, natural disasters and political calamities were signs that a dynasty was

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE LEADER AND THE PEOPLE MUST NOT BE UNDERSTOOD AS A MERE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE MAN WHO LEADS AND THE MEN WHO ARE LED.... WE MUST UNDERSTAND THAT AND BELIEVE THAT THE LEADER IS THE CENTER OF LIFE OF THE SOCIO-POLITICAL COMMUNITY AND IT IS ONLY WHEN WE ARE LINKED TO THE LEADER ORGANIZATIONALLY, IDEOLOGICALLY, AND AS COMRADES CAN WE ACQUIRE IMMORTAL SOCIO-POLITICAL INTEGRITY.

- KIM JONG IL

losing its “mandate of heaven”—its legitimacy. The floods and droughts, the dreadful famine, and the economic implosion of North Korea in the mid-1990s may well have taken a toll on *Juche*, or at least Kim Jong Il’s place in it. It is impossible to know how fervently the North Korean people—either those in the privileged political elite in Pyongyang or among the malnourished population outside the capital—truly believe the full corpus of Kim Jong Il’s *Juche* orthodoxy any longer or if, in fact, they ever did. The light of *Juche* may also have dimmed somewhat following Hwang Jang Yop’s defection to South Korea in 1997. More certainly, the *Juche* Academy in Pyongyang closed following Kang’s defection.

The monolithic doctrine of Kimilsungism leaves little room for freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief. The extent of the small space that may have been allowed to open since the late 1980s is examined in the next chapter.

CHAPTER EIGHT

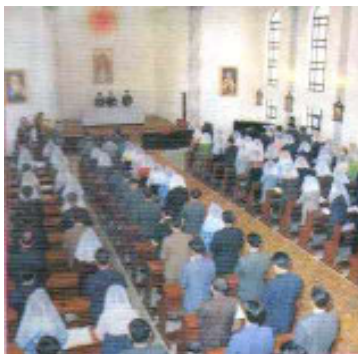
CONTEMPORARY STATE POLICY AND PRACTICE IN NORTH KOREA

By the 1960s, the King Il Sung regime had suppressed and eliminated public observance of Korea’s historic systems of thought and belief, substituting in their place the monolithic belief system of *Juche*/Kimilsungism. Nonetheless, owing substantially to a changed international environment in the 1970s,¹⁷⁰ the regime at that time decided to allow the re-emergence of a highly circumscribed and controlled public religious practice as part of its “united front” strategy to reach out to potential friends and supporters among religious constituencies outside North Korea. Kim observed, as he noted often to foreign visitors, that in the 1960s and after, various religious organizations and movements were prominent among “progressive forces,” both in South Korea and around the world. Reaching out to them required counterparts in North Korea, and thus, the religious “federations” that had been used in the mid-1940s to co-opt, absorb, and suppress religious belief and activity outside the control of the Korean Workers Party were revived.

It is this revival of highly circumscribed and tightly monitored and controlled religious practice, organized and supervised through a series of religious “federations” for Buddhism, Chondokyo, and Protestant, Catholic and, most recently, Orthodox Christianity, that is cited by DPRK authorities to indicate that North Korea respects religious freedom. This chapter will examine this controlled re-emergence of minimal religious activity in North Korea and the current state of religious practice within the limited confines permitted by the government.

I. Christianity

In examining current policy and practice toward freedom of religion or belief in the DPRK today with respect to Christianity, it is important to keep in mind that there are three quite distinct categories of Christian believers in North Korea. The first are those persons who are members of the Party/state-sponsored Korean religious federations or worshipers at the recognized churches and home worship centers, who are described as old society, pre-WWII Christians and their children. The second category contains those individuals who were also pre-WWII Christian believers and who, together with their children, have personally maintained their faith while not practicing their beliefs openly, and who may not even know about the small, state-sponsored church structure. Some may know about the latter, but may have chosen not to reveal themselves or affiliate with the state-organized structures. The third category involves “new” converts who have had contact with the Korean-Chinese churches in Northeast China or the organized efforts of South Korean and Korean-American Protestant groups along the China-Korea border.



North Koreans at one of Pyongyang’s three sanctioned churches

Persons in the third category, North Koreans who acquired religious beliefs while in China, largely since 1995, are not tolerated. Two former members of the North Korean political police (*Gukgabowibu*) who defected to South Korea and who were interviewed in Seoul¹⁷¹ for this report, stated that their work included hunting down such Christians. Identifying North Koreans who have been in touch with such mission enterprises is reportedly the aim of the brutally

coercive interrogations of North Koreans who have been forcibly repatriated from China to North Korea.

The fact that there is such a category as the second one described above—pre-WWII believers and their children who privately and quietly maintain their beliefs while hiding to the best of their ability their religious identity—is an indication that the North Korean constitutional provision for “freedom of religious beliefs” is apparently not known of or believed, or else is belied by the actions of local authorities. (Several persons from this category were interviewed for this report.)

Information about the situation for the first category of persons and the recognized religions in North Korea today remains very limited. North Korea does not provide such information and foreigners, including South Koreans, have access to only very small official or authorized segments.¹⁷² Moreover, as is seen in the interviews with North Korean refugees conducted for this report, many North Koreans have had little or no contact with authorized religious activities, and know next to nothing about it.

House Churches/Home Worship Centers

Beginning in 1974, the DPRK allowed some Christian believers to meet in home worship centers,¹⁷³ although not without the presence of Workers Party members or police during the worship services. The earliest statistics obtainable on this matter date from 1981, when an official of the Korean Christian Federation (KCF),¹⁷⁴ Pastor Ki-Joon Koh, told a group of Korean-Americans and South Koreans residing in Europe that there were about 500 house churches and 5,000 practicing Christians in North Korea.¹⁷⁵

In 1988, KCF representatives informed a visiting delegation of Canadian church officials that “about 6,000 of an estimated 10,000 Protestants were members of the KCF.” The membership sections of the KCF were described as “house churches,” 50 of which were located in Pyongyang. The KCF was described as having sections in all the provinces and 50 cities and counties.¹⁷⁶ In 2002, the DPRK informed the UN Human Rights Committee that there were 500 house churches or family worship sites and 12,000 Christian believers.¹⁷⁷ In December 2002, the KCF claimed that there were 12,300 registered Christians and 513 family service locations.¹⁷⁸

It is possible that the differences in numbers over a 20 year period reflect imprecision in translation between the estimated number of believers and the “membership” of the KCF, rather than increasing numbers of Christian believers, as the KCF states that they do not “evangelize.”¹⁷⁹ It appears that the proclaimed number of house churches has remained rather constant during the 25 year period for which statistics have been available.

South Koreans and others interviewed for this report have visited eight house churches: five in Pyongyang and one each in Kaesong, Sungchon, and South Hwanghae provinces. The worshipers are consistently identified as “old Christians,” persons who were Christians prior to the liberation from Japan

following WWII and their children, who gather to pray, read scripture, and sing hymns, often from memory or from written pages without musical notes.

Although the number of former North Koreans interviewed for this report is not large enough to be definitive, none of them had had any contact with or had even heard of the “house churches” or the national, provincial, or local structure of the KCF. Information about the way in which home worship centers were reestablished after the mid-1970s is not available. One Korean-speaking expert, who travels to North Korea regularly, expressed doubt about the claim that there were 500 such home worship centers in North Korea.

The Four Churches in North Korea

Between the late 1950s and late 1980s, there were no open and functioning Protestant or Catholic church buildings in North Korea. In November 1988, Bongsu (also transliterated as Bongsoo) church, named after the neighborhood in which it is located on a hill in the outskirts of Pyongyang, was inaugurated. Reportedly, some 250 to 350 persons worship there.

Also in 1988, the Changchung Catholic church opened. The DPRK informed the UN that there are currently 800 Catholics but no priests in North Korea. Changchung has no direct relationship with the Vatican, which does not consider Catholics in North Korea to be a church, but rather a “community of believers” under the jurisdiction of the Catholic Archdiocese of Seoul. This jurisdictional designation by the Vatican would not be acceptable to the DPRK government.

Various reasons have been suggested to explain the opening of these two churches when none had been allowed to operate before. One Korean-American church official interviewed for this report attributed this, first, to requests by foreign visitors to attend services, and second, to the influence of Chinese policy where, in 1977-78, church buildings that had been confiscated during the Cultural Revolution were returned to the officially recognized church bodies.¹⁸⁰ North Koreans had visited China often enough to be aware of this evolution of Chinese policy in the post-Mao era. Another former North Korean interviewed for this report, a high-level defector, attributed the policy change to North Korean hopes of hosting an International Youth Festival in 1988, in competition with Seoul’s hosting of the 1988 Olympic games, during which many foreigners would come to Pyongyang and the total absence of any church or Buddhist temple would be obvious.



Changchung Catholic Church in Pyongyang

A second and smaller Protestant church, called Chilgol, was opened in 1992 in the middle of a large apartment complex in Pyongyang. This church was constructed, on Kim Il Sung’s orders, on the site of the church where his mother had worshiped. There are roughly 90 Christians who worship there in a setting that is, reportedly, rather less formal than that at Bongsu. The reasons for opening a second Protestant church in Pyongyang, as opposed to one of the other cities in North Korea, other than filial loyalty on the part of Kim Il Sung, is not presently known.

As of mid-2005, an Orthodox Christian church is nearing completion. Religious adherents interviewed for this report surmise that Kim Jong Il saw a Russian

Orthodox church in Khabarovsk on one of his train trips through Russia,¹⁸¹ and thought that if Pyongyang had such a church it would assist in promoting relations with Russia. The construction of this church is being supported by the Greek Orthodox Church of South Korea.¹⁸² Oddly, however, as noted by a Russian Korea scholar, “...nothing has been heard about North Korean Orthodox believers for six decades (and even in 1945 they hardly numbered more than [a] few hundred).”¹⁸³ Nonetheless, the Korean Orthodox Federation (also translated as the “Orthodox Committee of the DPRK”) has contacted Russian Orthodox authorities in Moscow, and several North Koreans are either now studying Orthodoxy there or soon will be.

While pointing to numerous difficulties, problems, and anomalies in Pyongyang’s churches, several persons interviewed for this report also commented on a striking feature of considerable symbolic importance: these churches are said to be the only buildings in all of North Korea where the place of prominence on the central wall of the main room is not dominated by a photograph of Kim Il Sung in an altar-type setting. Instead, the main room is dominated by a cross.

Religious Practice at the Existing Churches

Exactly who among North Koreans attends services in Pyongyang churches has been called into question. For example, one non-governmental organization in South Korea has asserted that “the people at Bongsu and Chilgol [churches] are non-believers, Communist Party members who are directly put in [to attend the services].”¹⁸⁴ It is also reported that “local citizens are strictly barred from entry [in the churches] and that services are only convened when foreigners come for visits.”¹⁸⁵

Information obtained for this report does not sustain these assertions. It does appear that membership in, and attendance at, Bongsu and Chilgol are controlled by the Workers Party, and there is, it is reported, a years’ long waiting list.¹⁸⁶ Other residents of Pyongyang would be unlikely to attend services out of curiosity, since association with the Christian religion remains a social-political liability.¹⁸⁷ However, the information currently available indicates that, as is the case with attendees at the house churches, worshipers at the three existing churches as of 2005 are mostly old society, pre-WWII Christians and their children who are taking advantage of the opportunity to profess their faith openly and worship in the presence of other believers.

Decisive testimony on this issue comes from Prof. (Rev. Dr.) Syngman Rhee, a native of Pyongyang and son of a Presbyterian pastor, who came to the United States after the Korean War. During his first visit to Bongsu church, Prof. Rhee recognized persons from church youth groups before the Korean War.¹⁸⁸ Clearly, some of the members are persons who had previously worshiped together in Pyongyang’s house churches. (According to relief workers in Pyongyang, some former house church members preferred the closeness and informality of the home worship center and withdrew from Bongsu to continue the practice of home worship in small groups.)

A supporting, but also cautionary, observation comes from a former South Korean official of the World Council of Churches who has also visited

Pyongyang many times. This official confirms that most worshipers are from pre-WWII Christian families, but also advises that there are other attendees who are there on assignment by the Workers Party or police.¹⁸⁹ In his words:

Of course, one must be realistic; because of the current political situation in North Korea, there are bound to be a few non-Christian infiltrators, however we must not let the Communist Party’s security arrangements prevent us from recognizing true Christian sentiment in North Korea. The churches are trying to proclaim the Gospel from within the midst of a communist regime and to find ways of surviving with their own wisdom and uniqueness.¹⁹⁰

Perhaps it may have been the case in the past that services at Bongsu and Chilgol were sporadic. However, international humanitarian aid workers resident in Pyongyang after 1995 report that they have attended Bongsu and Chilgol regularly and that the churches have worship services every Sunday. Bongsu church reportedly has multiple pastors, whose sermons focus on both theology and Bible stories. A significant difference, however, is apparent when visiting foreign delegations are present and when they are not. When foreigners are present, political messages are included; in the absence of foreigners, the political messages are reportedly dispensed with favor of sermons exhorting the congregation to lead a Christian life.

II. Chondokyo (the Religion of the Heavenly Way)

As noted in Chapter 5, Chondokyo was an outgrowth of the powerful, millenarian, populist peasant *Tonghak* (Eastern Learning) rebellions of the mid-1890s. Although the number of believers throughout Korea has reportedly declined dramatically since WWII, a South Korean Chondokyo leader interviewed for this report, Mr. Choi In Gook (also transliterated as Ch’oe In-gook), claimed that Chondokyo currently has 150,000 believers and 27,000 practitioners of the “five duties” in South Korea.¹⁹¹ The DPRK government asserts that there are only 15,000 Chondokyo believers, and 800 “preaching rooms in apartments” in North Korea, which nevertheless still makes Chondokyo the largest officially recognized religion in North Korea.¹⁹² Chondokyo leaders in South Korea cannot confirm the number of co-religionists or the number of “preaching rooms” in North Korea.

Following the radical land reform of 1946, Korea scholars suggest that in the north of Korea, many Chondokyo farmers and villagers were absorbed into the Korean Workers Party. In the south, Chondokyo believers were absorbed into the expansion of post-Second Vatican Council Catholicism, as villagers migrated to the cities to become the industrial workforce of the expanding South Korean economy. Chondokyo leaders, on the other hand, attribute their numerical decline in both areas of Korea to the division of the peninsula into North and South. They believe, further, that the Chondokyo doctrines, set forth originally in *Tonghak*, correspond to the mentality of the Korean people, and that Chondokyo will therefore play a major role in the country’s eventual reunification, after which Chondokyo will revive.

“BECAUSE OF THE CURRENT
POLITICAL SITUATION IN NORTH
KOREA, THERE ARE BOUND TO
BE A FEW NON-CHRISTIAN
INFILTRATORS, HOWEVER WE
MUST NOT LET THE COMMUNIST
PARTY’S SECURITY
ARRANGEMENTS PREVENT US
FROM RECOGNIZING TRUE
CHRISTIAN SENTIMENT IN
NORTH KOREA.”

- FORMER SOUTH KOREAN OFFICIAL
FROM THE WORLD COUNCIL OF
CHURCHES

In many ways, Chondokyo remains rooted in the pre-modern Confucianist moral-political order of their martyred founder. Chondokyo followers not only reject the division of Korea into North and South, but they also reject the political division between “right” and “left,” communism and anti-communism, and urge the two political forces to join together to pursue reunification.¹⁹³ A recent Chondokyo leader has occupied high positions in both North and South Korea. Currently, a leader of Chondokyo in South Korea is the son of the Chondokyo leader in North Korea.

Chondokyo as a religious belief remains highly nationalistic. Rather than abjuring the growing North Korean nuclear arsenal, there is Chondokyo sentiment in favor of developing North Korea’s nuclear weapons, so that after the merger of North and South, a reunited Korea can be geopolitically strong among the great powers that surround the Korean peninsula. Chondokyo leaders in the South admit that while it is possible to study about Chondokyo at Kim Il Sung University, there is no freedom for them to propagate their beliefs in North Korea. However, like other South Korean religious adherents, Chondokyo followers in Seoul contend that North-South reconciliation will lead to more freedom in the North.

III. Contemporary Buddhism

According to the official statistics provided to the Human Rights Committee, there are 60 Buddhist temples, 200 monks, and 10,000 Buddhist believers in present day North Korea.¹⁹⁴ A website on North Korea based in Japan asserts that 70 percent of the 10,000 Buddhist believers are women.¹⁹⁵

With several exceptions, such as the Kwangpop temple in Pyongyang, most of the temples are located in North Korea’s picturesque mountains, where the monks were driven during the centuries of Buddhist suppression during the Chosun dynasty, and are not easily accessible to the general population. Prior to the Korean War, there were some 500 such Buddhist temples. North Korean officials claim that most of these were destroyed by U.S. bombing during the Korean War, and that “many Buddhist priests were killed then.”¹⁹⁶ There is no mention of the intended or unintended effects of the 1946 land reform on the Buddhist orders, the disinclination of the North Korean Public [food] Distribution System (PDS) to provide food to persons whose occupation was religious meditation, or the official government policy preventing religious worship beginning in the 1960s.

Many of the former North Koreans interviewed for this report knew of some of the more famous mountain-top temples, such as the Myohyangsan Pohyon temple on Mount Myohyang in North Pyongan Province. These persons believed, though, that the temples were maintained as “cultural heritage sites,” with elderly couples living on the grounds as temple keepers. The extent to which Buddhist worship, study, and meditation is carried out at these temples could not be ascertained during the course of this study.¹⁹⁷ The temple at Mt. Myohyang, where South Korean Buddhist monks interviewed for this report state that the monks do wear the Buddhist robes, reportedly has a copy of the extraordinary Tripitaka Koreana (*Palmantaejanggyong*), the collection of

Buddhist scripture carved into some 80,000 wooden printing blocks, dating to the thirteenth century.

There is a program of Buddhist study in the Religion Department of Kim Il Sung University, which opened in 1989. Reportedly, there is also a three year post-graduate education program administered by the Buddhist Federation. It takes eight years of study to become a professional “full brown [i.e. advanced level] Buddhist monk.”¹⁹⁸

The Korean Buddhist Federation was initially founded in December 1946. After its re-emergence in the 1980s, the Federation was recognized by the World Buddhist Federation in 1986. In Pyongyang, the Chairman of the Buddhist Federation is Park Tae Hwa, who, like the Vice Chair and Secretary, was ordained as a qualified Buddhist monk during the Japanese occupation, though all are now married and wear secular clothing.

Both of the major South Korean Buddhist orders, Chogye and Chuntaejong, are involved in reconstructing Buddhist temples in North Korea. The most famous of these temples, at Mt. Kumgang and Shingye, are essentially sites for visiting South Korean tourists and are currently fenced off from access by North Koreans. Another North Korean temple being reconstructed is at Kaesong, a special industrial zone financed by South Korea just across the demilitarized zone (DMZ) near Incheon, where South Korean companies are setting up factories.

IV. The Approved Organization of Religion in the DPRK: the Religious Federations

In North Korea, each recognized religion is organized into its own Federation (the Korean words used for the organization can also be translated into English as “League” or “Association”): the Korean Christian (Protestant) Federation (*Chosun Grisdokyo Ryunmaeng*)¹⁹⁹, the Korean Buddhist Federation; (*Chosun Bulgyokyo Ryunmaeng*); the Korean Catholic Federation (*Chosun Katolikyo Hyuphoi*)²⁰⁰, the Korean Chondokyo Federation (*Chosun Chondokyo Joongangjidowiwonhoi*); and, most recently, the Korean Orthodox Association (*Reosia Chunggyohoi*), as well as an inter-religious group made up of leadership elements from all the Federations. In the mid-1940s, at the outset of the North Korean regime, there had also been a Korean Confucianist Federation. All but one of these federations had existed earlier in Korea but were virtually defunct by the late 1950s, until they were slowly revived (except for the Confucianist Federation) beginning sometime after the mid 1970s. The Orthodox Federation is not known to have existed previously.

Independence from the State and Party?

North Korea formally informed the UN that “State and religion are definitively separated from each other and the State neither interferes in nor discriminates against any religion.”²⁰¹ Despite this assertion, it is clear that the religious activities that take place in the DPRK under the auspices of government-sponsored religious federations could more accurately be described as

emanations of the North Korean party-state. The religious activity that is allowed takes place under the authority and control of the corresponding religious federation. Like women’s groups, youth associations, and trade unions, the religious federations are members of, and controlled by, the National United Front for the Unification of the Fatherland (United Front) (*Choguk tongil minjuui chonson*).²⁰²

The United Front in turn is controlled by the KWP, which also controls the various sectors of the North Korean state apparatus. Although the DPRK may no longer be an orthodox Marxist-Leninist political system,²⁰³ it still basically operates as a party state. To use the political formulations of *Juche*’s “political-social body,” if the Workers Party is the “backbone” that connects the heart and brain (Kim Il Sung and Kim Jung Il successively) with the “body” of the Korean people, then the social unit components of the United Front are the arms and fingers.

A German church official returning from a visit to Pyongyang notes that the head of the Korean Christian (Protestant) Federation, Rev. Kang Yong Sop, was a former ambassador to Romania and Malta as well as a former Chairman of the highest North Korean court. This German church officer writes, “Certainly [the North Korean Christian Federation] is not independent. It functions as one of the channels through which the North Korean Government operates diplomatically.”²⁰⁴

Structure and Function of one North Korean Religious Federation

A description of the organization of the KCF provides a useful example of the workings of these federations. The KCF reportedly has “Provincial Committees” for the provinces, 50 “County Committees,” and a membership base of the attendees at the 500 (sometimes more precisely rendered 513) home worship centers and two churches. It meets in a General Assembly and in the interim is governed by a “Central Committee” and Executive Committee with a General Secretary and Secretariat. The Secretariat has departments for mission, organization, finance, and international relations. Little information could be gathered for this report about the KCF’s organization below the level of the Central Committee.

The present General Secretary is Rev. Kang Yong Sup, who is usually described as the son of the founding General Secretary Rev. Kang Yang Uk, Kim Il Sung’s uncle, though Rev. Kang Yong Sup has explicitly denied this to persons interviewed for this report.²⁰⁵ The Secretariat offices are located next to Bongsu church, as is the Pyongyang Theological Seminary, which operates under the jurisdiction of the KCF Central Committee.

In 1988, KCF officials described their main functions to a visiting delegation of Canadian church officials. These included: (1) encouraging Christians to participate in the development of the country; (2) defending the rights of believers; (3) promoting friendly relations with political parties and social organizations; and (4) contributing to “the struggle for peace and national reconciliation.”²⁰⁶



Lay Persons lead mass in North Korea’s only state approved Catholic Church

One Function of the KCF: Defending Rights?

The assertion by KCF officials that “defending the rights of believers” is one of the functions of the federation may refer only to those believers who are members of the federation, and does not apparently extend to North Koreans who came in contact with Protestants over the border, or those who have converted to Protestant Christianity while attending Korean-Chinese churches or upon meeting South Korean or Korean-American Christians while in China. The plight of these North Koreans, upon forced repatriation to the DPRK, is described earlier in this report. When reportedly asked about punishments meted out to North Koreans caught with Bibles brought back from China, KCF officials described such importation as a needless breaking of the law.

Still, as far back as 1981, the KCF has publicly called for “stopp[ing] the suppression of human rights and immediatly release[ing] all political prisoners.”²⁰⁷ This call, however, was apparently directed primarily at the Republic of Korea rather than religious believers or purged and imprisoned political dissidents in the North. In 1994, the KCF addressed an appeal to the World Council of Churches for assistance in securing the release from long term imprisonment in South Korea of three named and described elderly North Korean prisoners of war who had not been allowed to return to North Korea, and whose imprisonment was described as an “inhumane violation of human rights by the South Korean authorities.”²⁰⁸

Another Function of the KCF: Ecumenical Outreach for Peaceful Reunification

Comparatively more information is available on the KCF’s outreach to other social organizations and the Federation’s participation in the “struggle for peace and reunification.” The earliest example of ecumenical outreach on behalf of peace and reconciliation appears to be a series of meetings in 1981 at the Albert Schweitzer House in Vienna between KCF representatives and South Korean religious groups living in Europe and North America.²⁰⁹ These meetings continued almost annually either in Vienna, Helsinki, or Arnoldsheim (near Frankfurt, Germany) at least until 1991.²¹⁰

Beginning in 1984, these apparently ad hoc meetings were superceded by regularized ecumenical consultations, usually termed, the “Tonzanso process,” named after the city in Japan where officials from the Geneva-based World Council of Churches and the Christian Council of Asia obtained the support of their South Korean affiliate, the National Council of Churches of Korea (KNCC),²¹¹ for a series of ecumenical consultations involving European, North American, South Korean, and North Korean Protestants. In 1985, Protestants from various national units within the World Council of Churches began visiting their counterparts in Pyongyang. In 1986, a series of ecumenical consultations were held in Glion, Switerland; additional inter-denominational meetings, often explicitly promoting inter-Korean reconciliation and reunification, have taken place in Tokyo, Washington, New York, and cities in Germany.

With the North Korean famine and food crisis of the mid-1990s, South Korean religious groups from many religious communities began to provide assistance, often via their North Korean counter-parts. By 1997, inter-religious meetings

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THE LAW.

between North and South Korean religious believers were frequently taking place in Beijing, Mount Kumgang (Diamond Mountain, the Hyundai-developed tourist resort on the east coast of North Korea, just north of the DMZ), and Inchon, the west coast port city in South Korea. Such inter-Korean ecumenical and inter-religious meetings now occur, with some interruptions, on a regular basis, usually on specific dates to commemorate significant historical events: the June 2000 summit between Kim Dae Jung and Kim Jong Il, the mid-August liberation of Korea from the Japanese occupation, and, usually, the March 1, 1919 date of the Protestant and Chondokyo organized Korean Declaration of Independence.

V. Religions Without a Federation

One of the many problems with a federation structure for religions in North Korea is that there is no apparent mechanism, procedure, or structure for allowing belief systems and forms of worship that are not covered by an appropriate federation. There is no federation for Shamanism, for example, which is not formally recognized or tolerated in the DPRK as a system of thought or belief. In present day North Korea, elements of Shamanism, particularly the idea that human destiny or fate is preordained or determined by natural phenomena, conflict with the core element of *Juche*: that man is the master of all things and determines his own destiny. Similarly, there is no longer a federation for Confucianism. Thus, it is not possible for believers in Shamanism (who might well include some of those who practice the divination of the future) or those who and want to perform the ancient rites and rituals of Confucianism to do so.

Without a federation, a variety of Korean groups and unorthodox offshoots of traditional Korean religions such as Won Buddhism or the Unification Church are precluded from proclaiming their belief system.

There is in Korea south of the 38th parallel a religious community termed Daejonggyo—the worship of Daejong (also transliterated Tangun), the mythological founder of the Korean national group or race. In the Korean creation myth, the heavenly father, who is the God of creation, sent his son to the Korean peninsula where he met on a northern mountain a bear who wanted to become a human female. After eating garlic and an herb called mugwort, the she-bear became a human, who then mated with the son of God and bore a son, Daejong (or Tangun), who became the first king of Korea in the year 2457 BC.²¹²

There are some 7,000-11,000 believers of Daejonggyo in South Korea who practice their religion in some 109 worship halls. Despite the fact that the DPRK officially claims to have discovered in 1993 not only the grave but the actual “remains” of Daejong or Tangun,²¹³ the practice of this religion is prohibited there. A similar situation exists for another small religious group found in South Korea called Jeungsangyo, which is an offshoot of *Tonghak* (Chondokyo). There is also an offshoot of Buddhism, called Won Buddhism, which dispenses with Buddha images, substituting instead a circular symbol of perfect enlightenment called *Irwonsasang*.²¹⁴ This group has some 85,000-

90,000 believers in South Korea, practicing in some 500 temples and guided by 2,500 Won Buddhist monks.²¹⁵

It is not known if there are North Koreans who would practice Shamanism, Confuciansim, or the religions of Daejonggyo, Jeungsangyo, or Won Buddhism, but there appears to be no mechanism or procedure to allow them to be practiced in North Korea.

ENDNOTES FOR CHAPTERS 1 - 8

Chapter 1:

1 *Concluding Observations of the Human Rights Committee: Democratic People’s Republic of Korea*. 27/08/2001. UN Doc. CCPR/CO/72/PRK. Para. 22.

2 *Situation of human rights in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea: Report submitted by the Special Rapporteur, Vitit Muntarbhorn*. E/CN.4/2005/34, 10 January 2005, p.16, para. 58.

3 U.S. Department of State, *2005 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom*, “North Korea,” (www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2005/51515.htm). Since 1999, the State Department has designated North Korea a “country of particular concern,” or CPC, for the government’s severe violations of religious freedom.

4 *Second periodic report of the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea on its implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*. UN Doc. No. CCPR/C/prk/2000/2. para. 111.

5 It was to defeat the “Tonghak rebellion” that late Chosun dynasty rulers called Chinese forces into Korea, a foreign intervention unacceptable to Japan, which sent troops into Korea to fight and defeat the Chinese forces. Japan shortly thereafter fought Russia for control of Korea. In 1910 Japan annexed Korea entirely.

6 The yin-yang is a symbol displaying, generally speaking, the harmonious balance of opposing, usually cosmic or universal, forces.

7 The “tribars” symbolically represent the four universal “elements”: heaven (upper left), earth (lower right), fire (lower left), and water (upper right).

8 As recently as 2004, in the usually secular assembly halls of the UN, North Korean officials proclaimed their determination to preserve and protect their “sacred socialism.”

9 Prof. Andrei Lankov, “North Korea’s Missionary Position,” *Asia Times Online.*, March 16, 2005.

Chapter 2:

10 *Second periodic report of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea on its implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*. UN Doc. # CCPR/C/prk/2000/2, 4 May 2000, paras. 111-12, 114-15. The Human Rights Committee is the body established under the ICCPR to assess the compliance of the State Parties to their obligations under the Covenant.

11 *Replies Submitted by the Government of the DPRK ... in response to the concerns identified by the Committee in its Concluding Observations*, UN Doc.# CCPR/CO/PRK/Add.1, 5 August 2002.

12 It was on the basis of the low number of religious believers as a percentage of the total population, in addition to other material available to the UN Committee on Human Rights, that the Committee expressed its “serious concerns” that ICCPR standards on freedom of religion and belief were not being met (CCPR/CO/72/PRK/Add.1, 5 August 2002, Para. 22).

13 *Summary record of the 1946th meeting [Human Rights Committee]: DPRK*, 30/10/2001. CCPR/C/SR.1946 (Summary Record).

14 Ibid.

15 Article 18(3) of the ICCPR permits restrictions on the freedom to manifest religion or belief only if the limitations are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health or morals, or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.... [R]estrictions are not allowed on grounds not specified [in Article 18(3)]. See UN Human Rights Committee, General Comment on

No. 22: The Right to Freedom of Thought, Conscience, and Religion (Art. 18), UN Doc. CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.4, July 30, 1993, para. 8.

16 See Chapter 5.

17 See Appendix 1 for a statement of relevant international norms and standards.

Chapter 3:

18 For a description of the methodology used for this report, see Appendix.

19 Several interviewees fled North Korea more than once. These people were caught by the Chinese police and forcibly repatriated to the DPRK. Their treatment by North Korean police authorities upon their forced return to North Korea is described in Chapter 4. The present calculations are based on their subsequent departure from North Korea prior to obtaining de facto asylum in Seoul.

20 Economic steps include allowing some markets for a variety of goods and permitting market forces more of a role in determining the price of food.

21 Internal travel in North Korea is restricted, and residence in the capital Pyongyang is reserved for political elites and privileged workers.

22 International norms and standards do not prohibit an official state religion or ideology. The issue is whether such a state religion or ideology precludes the practice of alternative systems of thought, religion, or belief, or results in discrimination against those who do not subscribe to the official state belief system or ideology.

23 One person knew about the Bongsu church because the interviewee had a friend in Pyongyang who was assigned by the Party to attend church services there, where he reportedly became convinced that the Bible was the truth.

24 These lectures or groups typically were named according to the day attendance was required, such as *Suyo Hakseup* (Wednesday class) or *Mokyo Hakseup* (Thursday class).

25 It appears on p. 174 of Vol. 5 of the *Collected Works of Kim Il Sung* [Korean edition].

26 The interviewees had all encountered freedom of religion in South Korea.

27 Interviewee No. 11 is a former officer in *Gukgabowibu*, North Korea's political police agency. See Appendix for the “Ten Principles.”

28 Interviewee No. 13's mother was a Christian believer who secretly taught her daughter her faith.

29 Interviewee 29 is also a former *Gukgabowibu* official.

30 This is a garbled reference to the DPRK Constitution, which is better translated as setting forth “freedom of anti-religious propaganda” and not “anti-religious persecution.” However, it is interesting that the former North Korean conflated anti-religious propaganda with religious persecution, as the latter existed and may well not be unrelated to the former. The freedom of anti-religious propaganda has been removed from the most recent DPRK Constitution.

31 See Chapter 4 for details.

32 Rev. Mun Ik Hwan is a famous South Korean minister who violated South Korean law by visiting North Korea and meeting with Kim Il Sung. Upon return to the ROK, Rev. Mun was imprisoned under South Korea's notorious National Security Act. Rev. Mun's meeting with Kim Il Sung was repeatedly rebroadcast on North Korean television and seen by several of the interviewees.

33 See Chapter 8 for descriptions and photographs of these churches.

34 This is one of the purposes of the state sponsored religious federations in Pyongyang. See Chapter 8.

35 See Chapter 4 for details.

36 See Chapter 7 for details.

37 As an illustration of this treatment of Kim Il Sung, see the Preface to the DPRK Constitution reprinted as an Appendix to this report.

38 These terms included *Sasang Yeongusil* (Thought Research Room) and *Hakseupdang* (Party Thought Study Hall).

39 See Chapter 5 for a brief description of Shamanism in Korea.

40 While conducting research for *Hidden Gulag*, the author of this study interviewed a woman convicted and imprisoned for fortune telling, though she believed that this was an “add-on” charge by the state prosecutors in addition to her primary crime of “disturbing the socialist order,” because she was overheard singing a South Korean song. See *Hidden Gulag*, pp 46-48.

41 See Chapter 8.

42 See Chapter 4 for this eyewitness account of the execution.

43 See Chapter 4 for this eyewitness account of the execution.

Chapter 4:

44 See Chapter 8 for a description of the state-sponsored religious federations.

45 Interviewee 4 had personally witnessed two other public executions unrelated to religious activity: one in 1995, which was particularly gruesome, and the other in 1999. She knew the names of those persons. She did not know the names of the father and daughter she saw executed in 1997.

46 *Songbun* refers to North Korea’s rigid hereditary citizen classification system.

47 Universal Declaration of Human Rights Art. 13; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights Art. 12.2.

48 For further information on the situation of North Korean refugees in China and their treatment upon repatriation see, *Invisible Exodus: North Koreans in the Peoples Republic of China*, Human Rights Watch, 2002; *Hidden Gulag*, US Committee on Human Rights in North Korea, 2003; and most recently, *Acts of Betrayal: The Challenge of Protecting North Koreans in China*, Refugees International, 2005.

49 There is considerable religious activity in the area of Northeast China populated by ethnic Koreans. Korean-Chinese churches are plainly evident in many cities and towns, and the North Koreans fleeing to China go to these churches for help.

50 There are large numbers of South Korean businessmen, students, and tourists in Northeast China. Additionally there are faith-based South Korean NGOs that go to Northeast China precisely to help the North Koreans looking for food and/or refuge. There are also South Korean missionaries who go to this part of China to evangelize both Korean-Chinese and North Koreans who have fled to China.

51 Former repatriated prisoners interviewed for *Hidden Gulag* also reported being told by guards that prisoners had been taken away for execution, and there are former North Koreans who believe this to be the case. While there are public executions in some of the prison camps, and much larger numbers of deaths in detention from the combination of starvation and forced labor, it is not known if anyone has directly eye-witnessed the execution of repatriated prisoners for reasons connected with religious belief. This is not to say it has not happened, only that there is no eyewitness confirmation available.

Chapter 5:

- 52 *Religious Culture in Korea*, ROK Ministry of Culture, Hollym, Seoul and Elizabeth NJ, 1996, p. 45.
- 53 James Grayson, *Korea: A Religious History*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1989, p. 270.
- 54 The form of Buddhism that spread through China to Korea, Japan, and Vietnam is known as Mahayana Buddhism, as distinct from the form of Buddhism that spread from India through Sri Lanka to Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar (Burma), which is referred to as Theravada Buddhism.
- 55 See Jyung Byung-jo, “Buddhism” in *Religion in Korea*, Korean Conference on Religion and Peace/ Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Seoul, 2003, pp. 37-38.
- 56 *Religious Culture in Korea*, op. cit., p. 40.
- 57 Korea was to remain a single political unit, or unified nation-state, from 668 until the “temporary” division of the peninsula at the 38th parallel following the defeat of Imperial Japan in 1945.
- 58 The name comes from the family name of the founder of the dynasty, Yi Song-gye. (The Korean family name Yi is now familiarly transliterated as Lee or Rhee.)
- 59 Grayson, op. cit., p. 153.
- 60 Grayson, *ibid.*, p. 221.
- 61 See Wi Jo Kang, *Religion and Politics in Korea under Japanese Rule*, Edwin Mellen Press, New York, 1987, pp. 45-59.
- 62 As discussed in Chapter 8, there are, the DPRK claims, only 60 Buddhist temples in North Korea, 200-300 temple keepers or attendants, only some of whom can be qualified as monks, and 10,000 Buddhist believers out of a population of twenty-two million.
- 63 According to ROK figures, in 1995 in South Korea there were 12,000 Buddhist temples and 25,000 Buddhist monks and nuns in some 36 separate Buddhist orders. Reportedly 23 percent of the South Korean population consider themselves Buddhists.
- 64 Grayson, op. cit., p. 102.
- 65 Yongho Choe, Peter Lee, William de Bary (eds.) *Sources of Korean Tradition*, Vol 1 Columbia University Press, New York, 1997, p. 279.
- 66 Ki-baik Lee, *A New History of Korea*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1967, p. 166.
- 67 This is the title of a well known study of society and ideology by Marine Deuchler, *The Confucian Transformation of Korea*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1992.
- 68 Indeed, Confucianists themselves are recognized in North Korea’s rigid hereditary class structure (*songbun*) as “hostile class” subgroup number 37. Kongdan Oh and Ralph Hassig, *North Korea Through the Looking Glass*, Brookings Institution Press, Washington, 2000, p. 134.
- 69 Lee Moon Woong, *Rural North Korea Under Communism*, Rice University Special Studies, 1976, p. 120, as cited in Bruce Cumings, *North Korea: Another Country*, The New Press, 2004, p. 134.
- 70 Eric O. Hanson, *Catholic Politics in China and Korea*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY, 1980, p. 15.
- 71 *Sources of Korean Tradition*, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 124.
- 72 *Ibid.*
- 73 Ki-baik Lee, *A New History of Korea*, op. cit., p. 232.
- 74 Hanson, op. cit., p. 26.
- 75 Ki-baik Lee, op. cit., p. 239.

76 Hanson, op. cit., p. 27.

77 Hanson, op. cit., p. 27; see also Ki-baik Lee, op. cit., p. 256 (though Lee notes that Catholicism was still not primarily a religion of the villages).

78 Grayson, p. 184. The “Hermit Kingdom” was a moniker given to Korea by westerners, not one proposed by the Koreans themselves.

79 Figures as cited in Hanson, op. cit., p. 27.

80 By June 1919, 1,461 Presbyterians, 465 Methodists, 207 members of other Protestant denominations, and 57 Roman Catholics were arrested. Wi Jo Kang, *Religion and Politics in Korea under Japanese Occupation*, op. cit., p. 25.

81 Seong Youm, “Catholicism,” *Religion in Korea*, ROK Ministry of Culture and Tourism/KCRP, Seoul, op. cit., 2003, p. 70.

82 There were an additional 17,000 Catholic Koreans living on the Chinese side of the Tumen River in and around Yanji who were regarded as being under the care of Korean Catholic authorities.

83 In a fashion similar to that of Korean Buddhism, Korean Catholicism did not come into its own until the establishment of the ROK. As of 1995, there were some three million Catholics in South Korea. Recovering from the repression of the Chosun dynasty and the social-political quiescence of the colonial era, Korean Catholics today contribute to efforts to promote reconciliation between the North and South.

84 Orthodox Neo-Confucianism did not allow widows to remarry, as this was considered to show a lack of veneration toward the first husband, even though deceased.

85 Ki-baik Lee, op. cit., p. 334.

86 In 1832, a Protestant missionary seems to have visited several west coast port cities in Korea, but did not stay. A missionary, Rev. Robert Thomas representing the Bible Society of Scotland, had been on the ill-fated General Sherman, an armed American commercial ship that disregarded Chosun dynasty prohibitions on entering Korean ports and sailed up the Taedong River, where it ran aground near Pyongyang in 1866. The ship was set afire and all the passengers and crew executed. The official DPRK multi-volume history of Korea (Chosun Chonsa) claims that this first Korean victory in a century of struggle against American imperialism was led by Kim Il Sung’s great-grandfather, Kim Ung U, and was the seminal event signaling the beginning of Korea’s modern history. (Charles Armstrong, “A Socialism of our Style: North Korean Ideology in Post-Communist Era,” *North Korean Foreign Relations in the Post-Cold War Era*, ed. Samuel S. Kim, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 32.)

87 Lee Jung-bae, “Protestantism” *Religion in Korea*, op. cit., p. 97.

88 Grayson, op. cit., p. 198.

89 Ki-baik Lee, op. cit., p. 335.

90 Carter Eckert, Ki-baik Lee, Young Ick Lew, Michael Robinson, Edward W. Wagner. *Korea Old and New: A History*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1990, p. 249.

91 Wi Jo Kang, *Christ and Caesar in Modern Korea: A History of Christianity and Politics*, SUNY Press, Albany, 1997, p. 52.

92 Ibid., p. 53.

93 Wi Jo Kang, *Religion and Politics in Korea under Japanese Rule*, op. cit., p. 43.

94 Dae Sook Suh, *Kim Il Sung: The North Korean Leader*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1988, p. 399.

95 See Chapter 6 for details.

Chapter 6:

96 There were ethnic Korean communists in China and Russia, but they would have been members of the Chinese and Russian Communist Parties. There were a variety of Korean Marxists in Korea, concentrated in the southern part of the peninsula, but they remained largely scattered and submerged during the Japanese occupation to avoid arrest and incarceration by the Japanese colonial officials.

97 See Chapter 5 for brief descriptions of their introduction and growth in Korea.

98 Suh, *Kim Il Sung*, op cit, p. 399.

99 Lankov, *Asia Online*, op. cit., March 2005.

100 Eckert, et al, *Korea Old and New*, op. cit., p. 336.

101 Ibid., p. 336.

102 Ibid., p. 330.

103 Wi Jo Kang, *Christ and Ceasar in Modern Korea*, op. cit., p. 156.

104 Cho’s KDP in the north should not be confused with an unrelated and much more conservative southern party (*Hanguk Minjudang*) also translated in English as the Korean Democratic Party.

105 Chondokyo literature transliterates this as *Cheongudangundong*, which it translates as the Pure Friends Party, Chondokyo, op. cit., p. 138.

106 Charles Armstrong, *The North Korean Revolution: 1945-1950*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca NY, 2003, p. 112.

107 This is a policy that would be revived in the 1970s, when state-directed worship was again allowed, and one that continues to this day.

108 Kang, *Christ and Caesar*, op. cit., p. 158.

109 Multilateral “trusteeships” were President Franklin Roosevelt’s visionary concept for replacing colonial empires following World War II. The British and French, preferring to hold on to their colonies, would have nothing to do with ‘trusteeships.’ However, the Soviet Union was willing to give “trusteeship” a try in Korea, though, in retrospect, it was highly unlikely that Soviet-American cooperation in Korea could survive the escalation of the Cold War.

110 Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, Vol II, Princeton University Press, 1990, p. 319.

111 *Chondokyo: Religion of the Cosmos*, Central Chondokyo Headquarters, Seoul, 2002, p. 138.

112 Father Joseph Kim and John Chung, *Catholic Korea: Yesterday and Today*, Catholic Korea Publishing, Seoul, 1964, pp. 341-342.

113 It should be noted that while religious adherents were being absorbed and suppressed in the area north of the 38th parallel between 1945 and 1950, Marxists and other leftists south of the 38th parallel were being suppressed in larger numbers and with considerably more violence, particularly in the southwest provinces (the Chollas) and on Cheju Island.

114 Kim and Chang, *Catholic Korea*, op. cit., p. 343.

115 Kang, *Christ and Ceasar in Modern Korea*, op. cit., p. 158.

116 *Catholic Korea: Yesterday and Today* has a full accounting of the fates of the Roman Catholics marched up to North Korea, including Bishop Byrne. See pp. 341-560.

117 Author’s interview with a North Korean defector, Fort Lee, NJ, April 2005.

- 118 Lankov, *Crisis in North Korea*, University of Hawaii Press, 2005, p. 214.
- 119 Mr. Kim Hong Il, UN Doc. DRPK, 30/10/2001, CCPR/C/SR. 1946, Summary Record.
- 120 Armstrong, *North Korean Revolution*, op. cit., p. 243.
- 121 See Alexander Gonsharov, John Lewis and Xue Litai, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao and the Korean War*, Stanford University Press, 1993, p. 213.
- 122 Soviet “revisionism” is usually held to include, *inter alia*, peaceful co-existence with the West, denunciations of the “cult of personality,” and “deviations from “socialist legality” (the euphemism for arbitrary arrests and imprisonment).
- 123 Lankov, *Crisis in North Korea*, op. cit..
- 124 “Resolution 102” of 1957 barred private trading of cereals and required agricultural produce to be sold to the state. See Lankov, op. cit., p. 101.
- 125 These included the “domestic faction” – the indigenous leftists – many of whom had fled the ROK to the DPRK before the war and whom Kim scapegoated for not having provided a South Korean uprising as the North Korean forces poured over the 38th parallel; the “Yanan group,” who had spent much of WWII in China with Mao and who Kim suspected would be too subject to ongoing Chinese influence; and the “Soviet-Koreans,” Russian-speaking ethnic Koreans who had been living in the Soviet Union and who Kim thought might be influenced by Soviet “revisionism.”
- 126 This occurred as a result of the May 30, 1957 Special Decision of the KWP Standing Committee, “On Transforming the Struggle Against Counter-revolutionary Elements into an All-Party, All Peoples Movement.” See Lankov, op. cit., p. 181.
- 127 Helen Louise Hunter, *Kim Il Song’s North Korea*, Praeger, Westport, Conn., 1999, p. 5. For more general descriptions of the *songbun* system, see pp. 3-13.
- 128 Lankov, op. cit., p. 181.
- 129 Ibid., p. 182.
- 130 Ibid., p. 182.
- 131 The family of a prominent Korean American religious leader interviewed for this report was transferred from Pyongyang to Hamhung. Author’s interview with Prof. Syngman Rhee, Richmond, April 2005.
- 132 Author’s interview with former Yodok prisoner, Mrs. Kim Young Sun, Seoul, April 2005.
- 133 Lankov, op. cit., p. 199.
- 134 *Chosun Chonsa*, vol. 29, p. 171, as cited in Lankov, op. cit., p. 200.
- 135 Armstrong, *The North Korean Revolution*, op. cit., p. 242.
- 136 Andrei Lankov, *Korea Times*, May 16, 2005.

Chapter 7:

- 137 Stephen Linton, *Patterns in Korean Civil Religions*, Ph.D. thesis, Columbia University, New York, 1989, p. 382.
- 138 Several quotes from Kim Jong Il illustrate this. For example, “...the Juche idea is the monolithic ideology of our [Workers] Party,” and “...we call Comrade Kim Il Sung’s ideology, theory and method, the Juche idea,” both found in Kim Jong Il, *On Carrying Forward the Juche Idea*, Foreign Language Publishing House, Pyongyang, 1995, pp. 149 and 117, respectively. “With deep understanding of the scientific and universal significance ... of the integral system of ideology theory and method of Juche...it is only natural to call this original idea in combination with the august name of Comrade President Kim Il Sung,” found in “Declaration of the International Scientific Seminar on the

- Juche Idea,” Antananarivo, Democratic Republic of Madagascar, September 30, 1976, cited in *Juche: the Banner of Independence*, Foreign Language Publishing House, Pyongyang 1977.
- 139 Dae Suk Suh, *Kim Il Sung*, op. cit., p. 301.
- 140 Charles Armstrong, “A Socialism of Our Style: North Korean Ideology in a Post Communist Era” in Samuel Kim (Ed) *North Korean Foreign Relations*, op. cit., p. 33.
- 141 See *Juche! The speeches and writings of Kim Il Sung*, edited by Li Yuk-Sa, Grossman, New York, 1972.
- 142 Dae Suk Suh *Kim Il Sung*, op. cit., p. 304.
- 143 Han S Park, *North Korea: Politics of Unconventional Wisdom*, Lynne Rienner, Boulder, 2002, p. 47.
- 144 Kim Jong Il, “On Establishing the Juche Outlook on the Revolution,” Kim Jong Il, *On Carrying Forward the Juche Idea*, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Pyongyang, 1995, p. 203.
- 145 Ibid., page 211.
- 146 Suh, *Kim Il Sung*, op. cit., p. 301.
- 147 So described to Prof. Han S. Park by a *Juche* theoretician at Kim Il Sung University, as cited in Oh and Hassig, *North Korea through the Looking Glass*, op. cit., p. 16.
- 148 Park, *North Korea: the Politics of Unconventional Wisdom*, op. cit., p. 41.
- 149 Oh and Hassig, op. cit., p. 21.
- 150 Charles Armstrong, “A Socialism of Our Style: North Korean Ideology in a Post-Communist Era” in Kim (ed) *North Korean Foreign Relations*, op. cit., p. 32.
- 151 Ibid., p. 32.
- 152 Gavin McCormack, *Target North Korea*, Nation Books, New York, 2004, p. 68.
- 153 Park, op. cit., p. 36.
- 154 Cumings, *Korea’s Place in the Sun*, op. cit., p. 410.
- 155 Han S Park, op. cit., p. 46.
- 156 *Juche: the Banner of Independence*, op. cit., p. 314.
- 157 Kim Jong Il, “Socialism is a Science,” cited in Kim Jong Il, *On Carrying Forward the Juche Idea*, op. cit., p. 388.
- 158 Ibid. This new scientifically socialist law “strikes Korean scholars who read it in the Korean language as Neo-confucianism in a communist bottle. Chu His in a Mao jacket.” For an explanation of *Juche* according to the Neo-Confucianist metaphysical categories of “principle” (*i* or *li*) versus “material force” (*ki* or *chi*), see Cumings, *Korea’s Place in the Sun: A Modern History*, Norton, New York, 1997, pp. 404-413. On Confucianism within *Juche* thought, see also Park, *North Korea: Politics of Unconventional Wisdom*, op. cit., pp. 64-68.
- 159 “Socialism as Science” *Carrying Forward the Juche Idea*, op. cit., pp. 309-391.
- 160 Ibid., p. 389.
- 161 Ibid., p. 409. (Korea scholars see in this a more modern recasting of the Neo-Confucianist “family state.”)
- 162 Kim Jong Il, “Abuses of Socialism Are Intolerable,” *Carrying Forward the Juche Idea*, p. 378.
- 163 Han S. Park, *North Korea: The Politics of Unconventional Wisdom*, op. cit., p. 47.
- 164 McCormack, op. cit., p. 71.

165 Kim Jong Il, “On Some Problems of Education in the Juche Idea,” Kim Jong Il, *On Carrying Forward the Juche Idea*, op. cit., pp. 156-157.

166 McCormack, op. cit., p. 71. The “organic” and “leadership theory” aspects of Kimilsungism led some scholars to think that “corporatism,” a theoretical variant of fascism, is a more apt tool for analysis of North Korea than the more standard communist “totalitarian” analysis. See Cumings, *Korea’s Place in the Sun*, op cit, pp. 398-402.

167 Park, op. cit., p. 171.

168 McCormack, op. cit., p. 67.

Chapter 8:

169 “The Historical Lesson in Building Socialism,” Kim Jong Il, *Carrying Forward the Juche Idea*, op. cit., p. 299.

170 In the 1970s, notwithstanding communist victories in Southeast Asia, the United States had formed a defacto alliance with Chairman Mao and Zhou Enlai, while simultaneously pursuing détente with the Soviet Union, North Korea’s previous great power patrons. On the Korean peninsula, other than occasional attempts to decapitate the ROK leadership—the North Korea commando raid on the Blue House in 1972 or the Rangoon bombing of 1983—Kim Il Sung had no great power backing for large scale revolutionary armed struggle against the American-backed Korean government south of the 38th parallel. Korean reunification would have to be achieved by peaceful means.

171 This occurred in April/May 2005.

172 Foreign delegations taken to Bongsu Church – one of the three existing churches in North Korea – and allowed to address the congregation, are nonetheless generally not allowed to engage in any personal conversation with the Bongsu worshipers except for the pastor and the official representatives of the Korean Christian Federation.

173 “House churches” in North Korea should not be equated with “house churches” in China, where the term refers to worship places outside of the officially recognized church structure. In North Korea, “house churches” are part of the official Korean Christian Federation. Worship services outside of the KCF do not appear to be tolerated.

174 For more information on the KCF, see below.

175 *Christian Century*, January 20, 1982, p. 48 as cited in Kang, p. 131. It should be noted that in Korean literature, Protestants are referred to as Christians while Catholics are referred to as Catholics; thus a reference to “Christians” usually refers to Protestant Christians.

176 Report of the Canadian Council of Churches Delegation to the DPRK, 4-13 November 1988, in *Currents*, January 1989, a (now defunct) periodical of the ecumenical Canada-Asia Working Group, p. 5.

177 UN Doc. No. ICCPR/CO/PRK/Add.1, 5 August 2002.

178 As cited in the 2005 KINU White Paper on Human Rights.

179 *Currents*, op. cit., p. 6.

180 Interview with Prof. Syngman Rhee, Richmond VA, April 2005.

181 Reportedly, Kim Jong Il is adverse to air travel.

182 The extent of this support can be seen in the shipping from South to North Korea of a mobile crane to lift the bell into the steeple.

183 Prof. Andrei Lankov, *Asia Times Online*, Seoul, March 16, 2005.

184 “Interview with North Korean Defector, Part Two” email newsletter published by NKGulag, May 11, 2005.

185 KINU White Paper 2005.

186 Statement by a high-ranking North Korean defector, Washington DC, July 2005.

187 Interview with Prof. Syngman Rhee, Richmond, VA, April 2005.

188 Prof. Rhee’s father had been arrested and executed by the Communists prior to the Korean War. While many of his family remained in Pyongyang, Rhee fled to South Korea, joined the ROK armed forces, came to the United States for seminary, became, like his father before him, a Presbyterian minister, obtained a Master of Divinity from Yale and Doctorate from Chicago Divinity School, and rose to become, in 2000, the first Asian-American Moderator (the highest ranking office) of the Presbyterian Church, USA. He has returned many times to North Korea for family reunions, to provide humanitarian famine relief, and to promote reconciliation. Prof. Rhee presently teaches at the Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, VA. He was interviewed for this report in April 2005.

189 Former North Koreans interviewed for this report also relate that some of those so assigned have come to believe that “the Bible is the truth,” though, obviously such conversions cannot be verified.

190 Park Kyung Seo, *Reconciliation/Reunification: The Ecumenical Approach to Korean Peninsula*, Christian Conference of Asia, Hong Kong, 1998, p. 26.

191 This interview was held in April 2005. Choe, Lee and du Barry, in *Sources of Korean Tradition*, suggest that there are 100,000 Chondokyo households in South Korea (vol. II, p. 377.) The ROK 1995 census counts 28,000 Chondokyo adherents, *Religion in Korea*, op. cit., p. 170.

192 *Replies Submitted by the Government of the DPRK...in response to the concerns identified by the [Human Rights] Committee in its Concluding Observations*, UN Doc # CCPR/CO/PRK/Add 1, 5 August 2002.

193 *Chondokyo*, op. cit., p. 144.

194 “Replies Submitted...,” op. cit., UN Doc. ICCPR/CO/DPRK/Add 1, 5 August 2002.

195 “The Peoples Korea,” 104th issue (www.korea-np.jp.pk).

196 Ibid.

197 Non-celibate Buddhist clergy, who marry and wear secular style clothing rather than the traditional monks robe, were introduced into Korea during the Japanese occupation, and are the norm among the Chuntaejong Buddhist Order in South Korea. Whether the personnel at the temples in North Korea are better considered monks or property custodians would depend on the extent of Buddhist practice and worship actually performed at these temple sites, which is not ascertainable under present conditions.

198 “The Peoples Korea,” (www.korea-np.jp.pk).

199 Before February 1999, this Federation was called the *Chosun Kiddokyo Ryunmaeng*.

200 Before June 1999, this Federation was called the *Chosun Cheonjugyoin Hyuphoi*.

201 *Replies submitted by the Government of the DPRK... in response to the concerns identified by the [Human Rights] Committee in its Concluding Observations*. UN Doc. # CCPR/CO/PRK/Add.1, 5 August 2002,

202 This organization is a continuation of the original National Democratic United Front (*Puk Chosun minju-juui minjok tongil chonson*), which was renamed following the creation of the separate North and South Korean states. The original National Democratic United Front, while centered in and controlled

from Pyongyang, pertained to and covered the entire Korean populace and peninsula.

203 Workers Party Congresses reportedly no longer meet regularly, and it is suggested by Korea scholars that the National Defense Commission (chaired by Kim Jong Il) is a more powerful body than the Standing Committee of the Central Committee of the Korean Workers Party. In orthodox Marxism-Leninism, the Party retains control of the military.

204 Lutz Drescher, “Threatening Gestures as Cries for Help? Questioning an Overly Fixed Image of North Korea,” Nautilus Institute, Policy Forum Online, September 21, 2004 (http://www.nautilus.org/fora/security/0434B_ReligionII.html).

205 If, however, this is the case, then the younger Rev. Kang would also be a relative of Kim Jong Il.

206 *Currents*, op. cit., p. 5.

207 Cited in Kang, *Christ and Caesar in Modern Korea*, op. cit., p. 131.

208 The full text of the “KCF Appeal” on behalf of Kim In-so, Ham Se-Hwan, and Kim Yong-Thae can be found in Park, *Reconciliation and Reunification*, op. cit., pp. 91-93.

209 *Christian Century*, January 20, 1982, p. 48, as cited in Kang, *Christ and Caesar*, op. cit., p. 131. In addition to the resolution on human rights cited above, this meeting also called for the withdrawal of U.S. forces from South Korea and an end to all U.S. interference in Korean politics, as well as opposition to UN membership for the two Koreas, which had been the DPRK political line prior to the Chinese and Soviet decision not to oppose ROK membership in the world organization.

210 Kang, p.131.

211 This is one of two inter-denominational, ecumenical Protestant church associations in South Korea. The other ecumenical Protestant grouping is the Korea Council of Churches (KCC), although the two bodies tentatively plan to merge in or by 2007.

212 *Religion in Korea*, op. cit., p. 124.

213 Armstrong, “A Socialism of Our Style: North Korean Ideology in a Post-Communist Era” in Kim, *North Korean Foreign Relations in the Post Cold War Era*, op. cit., p. 44.

214 *Religion in Korea*, op. cit., p. 135.

215 *Ibid.*, p. 170.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom

Conclusion

Clearly, it is not possible to assess fully conditions for freedom of religion or belief in North Korea based on interviews with 40 persons, an admittedly small sample out of a population of 22 million. Moreover, the very fact that these 40 individuals have had the opportunity, tenacity, and courage to complete the dangerous flight to China and eventually to South Korea suggests that they are not completely representative of the average person in North Korea.

Nevertheless, as noted at the beginning of this report, though there are numerous unconfirmed reports about the harsh realities of life in North Korea, there is a dearth of concrete information about conditions inside that country. North Koreans are prevented from communicating with foreigners; foreign journalists, human rights investigators, and others have not been granted access to the country. Thus, while this report cannot offer a complete picture, the information provided by these 40 persons provides at least a window into a closed society. It is hoped that other studies will further open that window.

Indeed, it is urgent to provide tangible material and first-hand evidence. Otherwise, the North Korean government, in some cases, has evaded international scrutiny of its human rights practices and the fulfillment of its obligations under international law. In the past, international bodies have been reluctant to reach firm conclusions that are otherwise conventionally accepted by most observers of North Korea. In other words, the North Korean government has been so successful in its efforts to isolate the country that it has avoided a public airing of the severe human rights violations reported by so many North Korean refugees, including those interviewed for this report.

Without a doubt, DPRK policies and practices, as described in the interviews of the former North Koreans and other information in this report, constitute systematic and egregious violations of international standards on the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief.

The coercive propagation and enforced adherence to the official ideology of North Korea, *Juche*/Kimilsungism, perceived by all North Koreans interviewed for this report as the sole permitted system of thought and belief in the DPRK, is not only a violation of the right to freedom of religion, but also results in discrimination and other human rights violations of those who subscribe to other systems of thought and belief.

In contrast to North Korean government claims that the state does not restrict or interfere with the practice of religion and that the DPRK Constitution protects freedom of religion, this report shows that the government severely limits religious practice to highly circumscribed activities regulated by state created and controlled religious federations.

The government imposed system of four, soon to be five, religious federations does not provide for public worship for religions or belief systems other than or independent of those federations. Thus, because there is no federation for Shamanism or other indigenous Korean belief systems, and because there is no longer a federation for Confucianism, adherents of those systems cannot manifest their religion or belief. Further, the federation structure appears to preclude the recognition of different Protestant Christian denominations or orders of Buddhist monks, as is typically found in other countries. The federation system also contributes to the lack of formal relations between North Korean Catholics and the Vatican, which in turn precludes the presence of Catholic priests in the country.

Based on the information presented in this report, the activities engaged in by the religious federations are presumed to be the extent of activities permitted by the state. These limits fall far short of the standards for

freedom of religion or belief as set forth in international treaties to which North Korea is a state party. International law provides for the freedom to manifest religion or belief through a broad range of acts including worship, observance, practice, and teaching.

There are, as of mid 2005, only three places of public Christian worship in the entire country, all in Pyongyang, although Pyongyang has a population of two million out of the DPRK's 22 million people. Indeed, several North Korean cities had substantial Christian populations before the Korean War. Although the DPRK government claims that there are some 60 Buddhist temples in the country, none of the 40 North Korean interviewees had seen a temple open for public religious activities or that had housed Buddhist monks. Instead, to their knowledge, these temples existed only as "cultural relics."

Other religious activities, specifically protected under international standards, are apparently not permitted in North Korea, even for those adherents in the religious federations. These activities include organizing religious education for children, publishing and distributing religious literature, and engaging in other forms of public religious expression outside of the church structures themselves.

Persons who engage in religious activities or whose religious affiliation is independent of the national federations or permitted federation activities are subject to severe violations of their human rights, including execution, torture, detention, and imprisonment. Several interviewees had seen or were otherwise aware of such violations. Persons subject to this treatment – which constitutes severe violations of the freedom to have or to adopt a religion – include those who were religious adherents prior to the Korean War and North Koreans returning from China who have had contact with Korean-Chinese or South Korean religious groups while in China.

Under international law, the state may recognize religious communities and provide a mechanism to grant such communities legal status. However, limiting religious activities only to those engaged in by officially recognized groups runs counter to international standards. Indeed, as recently noted by the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, recognition by the state or joining a state-organized religious group "should not be compulsory, i.e. it should not be a precondition for practicing one's religion...."¹

Many of the former North Koreans interviewed for this report described stridently hostile anti-religious propaganda they were taught in school and heard on DRPK state radio and television.² Such state-sponsored anti-religious propaganda is not in accord with the international obligations of states to combat discrimination and intolerance.³

Based on the interviews with former North Koreans and other information in this study, it is clear that freedom of religion or belief does not exist in North Korea in accordance with recognized international standards, notwithstanding official North Korean assertions to the contrary.

Footnotes

1 Para. 58, Report submitted by Asma Jahangir, Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, UN Doc. E/CN.4/2005/61, 20 December 2004.

2 The political context of this anti-religious campaign is examined in Chapter 6.

3 Under Article 4 of the 1981 UN Declaration on the Elimination of all Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, states shall take all appropriate measures to combat intolerance on the grounds of religion or belief. Under Article 26(2) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, education shall promote understanding, tolerance, and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups. Moreover, pursuant to Article 20 of the ICCPR, states themselves shall refrain from any advocacy of national, racial, or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence. See UN Human Rights Committee General Comment No. 11 on Article 20 of the ICCPR, para. 2.

Recommendations

The Commission recommends that the U.S. government should:

- use all diplomatic means to urge the North Korean government to undertake the following measures that would help bring the DPRK into compliance with its international legal obligations with respect to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief:
 - ending the severe human rights violations, including imprisonment and execution on account of religion or belief, against individuals not affiliated with the state sponsored religious federations or those North Koreans having contact with foreign religious groups in China;
 - releasing administrative detention in *kwan-li-so* political penal labor colonies, such as those reported to be in certain villages in the “total control zone” at Camp No. 15 (“Yodok”), as well as those who remain detained in other facilities for exercising and rehabilitate remaining religious adherents held in lifetime their right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief;
 - ending the coercive enforcement of the official ideology, *Juche*/Kimilsungism, that results in discrimination and other human rights violations against adherents of other religions or belief systems;
 - enabling adherents of systems of thought and belief not covered by the existing federations, such as Confucianism, Shamanism, and other indigenous Korean belief systems, to practice their religion or belief without government interference and to form organizations for that purpose;
 - implementing the existing Constitutional provision allowing for the construction of places of worship outside the capital city of Pyongyang, including for religious groups who are not affiliated with the state sponsored federations or for which there is no applicable federation;
 - ending prohibitions and punishments for importing religious literature from abroad;
 - allowing individuals and religious groups to engage in public expression of their religion or belief and to inform others of their belief systems;
 - allowing religious groups to operate religious education programs for young persons and adults;
 - allowing clergy or religious leaders to travel abroad for higher education and/or training, and allow the residence of foreign clergy where there are shortages; and
 - distributing widely Korean language translations of and other information on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the international human rights treaties to which North Korea is a party.
- work with regional and European allies to fashion a comprehensive plan for security concerns on the Korean peninsula—modeled after the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe—as suggested in Sec. 106 of the North Korean Human Rights Act and

- consider, with this model, expanding the Six-Party talks on nuclear security to include separate discussions on issues related to human rights and human security, using ongoing security negotiations to press North Korea for improvements in areas of mutual concern, including monitoring of humanitarian aid, resettlement of refugees, family reunifications, abductions, and other pressing human rights issues, including religious freedom;
- ensure that the Special Envoy on Human Rights in North Korea, as appointed by President Bush and according to the Envoy’s mandate in the North Korea Human Rights Act of 2004, retains full authority to move forward on assistance to North Korean refugees, new human rights and democracy programming, and expanded public diplomacy programs;
- urge the Chinese government to uphold its international obligations to protect asylum seekers, by (1) working with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to establish a mechanism to confer at least temporary asylum on those seeking such protection; (2) providing the UNHCR with unrestricted access to interview North Korean nationals in China; and (3) ensuring that any migrants who are being returned pursuant to any bilateral agreement are not potential asylum seekers refouled in violation of China’s obligations under the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol;
- in bilateral relations with China, Russia, Mongolia, and other countries in the region, place a higher priority on working to provide safe haven, secure transit, and clear resettlement procedures for North Koreans;
- promote further cooperation among the Department of State, the Department of Homeland Security, and regional allies, including South Korea, to resolve quickly the remaining technical or legal issues surrounding the resettlement of North Koreans in the United States and other countries;
- urge the Chinese government to allow international humanitarian organizations greater access to North Koreans in China, to address growing social problems experienced by this vulnerable population, including child and sexual trafficking and forced labor;
- encourage nations with diplomatic relations with North Korea to include religious freedom and other human rights in their talks with North Korea, and to urge the North Korean government to invite UN Special Rapporteurs and other appropriate UN bodies to assess the human rights and humanitarian situation, to monitor the delivery of humanitarian assistance, and to recommend reforms and technical assistance programs;
- continue to use appropriate international fora to condemn egregious human rights abuses in North Korea and seek protections and redress for victims, including by co-sponsoring and working for passage of a resolution on North Korean human rights practices at appropriate UN bodies; and
- expand radio, television, Internet, and print information available to the North Korean people through:
 - the expansion of appropriations to the Broadcasting Board of Governors earmarked to allow Radio Free Asia and Voice of America to increase shortwave and medium-wave broadcasting to North Korea to provide a total of twelve original hours of daily broadcasting; and
 - the funding of programs through the National Endowment for Democracy and the Department of State Human Rights and Democracy Fund that disseminate information on

human rights, including religious freedom, inside North Korea in the form of written and electronic materials, DVDs and digital programming.

In addition, Congress should: (a) continue to appropriate funds authorized in the North Korea Human Rights Act for public diplomacy, refugee assistance, and democratization programs; (b) establish a congressional caucus to focus specifically on North Korean human rights and refugees and to explore new ideas for establishing an “Helsinki Option” for security talks on the Korean Peninsula; and (c) urge congressional delegations that visit North Korea to seek access for international monitors to North Korean prisons as promised by Vice-Premier Gew Yan-un to a visiting Senate Foreign Relations Committee delegation in 2004.

Appendices

APPENDIX 1- INTERNATIONAL NORMS AND STANDARDS ON FREEDOM OF THOUGHT, CONSCIENCE AND RELIGION OR BELIEF

This document sets forth the relevant provisions of international instruments, as well as further information concerning international standards concerning the protection of freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief.

A. EVERYONE HAS THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF THOUGHT, CONSCIENCE, AND RELIGION

◆ **Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 (UDHR), Art. 18:**

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

◆ **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1966 (ICCPR), Art. 18:**

1. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.
2. No one shall be subject to coercion, which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.
3. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.
4. The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.

- ◆ In general, according to the UN Human Rights Committee (HRC), The treaty body that reviews compliance with the ICCPR, Article 18 of the ICCPR protects:

theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief. The terms "belief" and "religion" are to be broadly construed. Article 18 is not limited in its application to traditional religions or to religions and beliefs with institutional characteristics or practices analogous to those of traditional religions. The Committee therefore views with concern any tendency to discriminate against any religion or belief for any reason, including the fact that they are newly established, or represent religious minorities that may be the subject of hostility on the part of a predominant religious community.

—*Human Rights Committee (HRC) General Comment No. 22*

◆ **UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief 1981 (UN 1981 Dec.), Art. 1:**

- (1) Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have a religion or whatever belief of his choice,

and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching. (2) No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have a religion or belief of his choice. (3) Freedom to manifest one’s religion or belief may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.

◆ **1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol,**

Art. 4 (1951): *Religion*: The Contracting States shall accord to refugees within their territories treatment at least as favourable as that accorded to their nationals with respect to freedom to practice their religion and freedom as regards the religious education of their children.

Art. 33 (1951): *Prohibition of expulsion or return (‘refoulement’)*:

(1) No contracting State shall expel or return (‘refouler’) a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion...

Components of the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief include:

1. Freedom to Change One’s Religion or Belief

[UDHR, Art. 18]

2. Freedom to Have or to Adopt a Religion or Belief of One’s Choice

[ICCPR Art. 18(1)]

- ◆ Necessarily entails the freedom to choose a religion or belief, including the right to replace one’s current religion or belief with another or to adopt atheistic views, as well as the right to retain one’s religion or belief;
- ◆ No limitations permitted on this freedom; and
- ◆ No individual shall be compelled to reveal his or her thoughts or adherence to a religion or belief.

—HRC General Comment No. 22 (paras. 3, 5)

3. Freedom From Coercion Which Would Impair an Individual’s Freedom to Have or To Adopt a Religion or Belief of His or Her Choice

[ICCPR, Art. 18(2) and UN 1981 Dec. Art. 1(2)]

- ◆ No limitations are permitted on this freedom.
- ◆ The same protection is enjoyed by holders of all beliefs of a non-religious nature.
- ◆ Examples of impermissible coercion that would impair the right to have or adopt a religion or belief include:
 - (a) The use of threat of physical force or penal sanctions to compel believers or non-believers to adhere to specific beliefs and congregations, to recant their religion or belief, or to convert; and
 - (b) Policies or practices having the same intention or effect, such as, for example, those restricting political rights protected

under article 25 of the ICCPR or access to education, medical care or employment
– *Human Rights Committee (HRC) General Comment No. 22 (para. 5)*

4. Freedom to Manifest Religion or Belief in Worship, Observance, Practice, and Teaching

[UDHR, Art. 18, ICCPR, Art. 18(1), UN 1981 Dec., Art. 1]

- ◆ This freedom may be exercised in public or in private, individually or in community with others.
- ◆ This freedom, at a minimum, encompasses the following freedoms:
 - (a) To worship or assemble in connection with a religion or belief, and to establish and maintain, including the building of places of worship, freely accessible places for these purposes;
 - (b) To establish and maintain appropriate charitable or humanitarian institutions, and seminaries or religious schools;
 - (c) To make, acquire and use to an adequate extent the necessary articles and materials related to the rites or customs of a religion or belief, including the use of ritual formulae and objects, the display of symbols, observance of dietary regulations, the wearing of distinctive clothing or head coverings, participation in rituals associated with certain stages of life, and the use of a particular language customarily spoken by a group;
 - (d) To write, issue and disseminate relevant publications in these areas;
 - (e) To teach a religion or belief in places suitable for these purposes;
 - (f) To solicit and receive voluntary financial and other contributions from individuals and institutions;
 - (g) To organize, train, appoint, elect, designate by succession, or replace appropriate leaders, priests and teachers called for by the requirements and standards of any religion or belief;
 - (h) To observe days of rest and to celebrate holidays and ceremonies in accordance with the precepts of one's religion or belief; and
 - (i) To establish and maintain communications with individuals and communities in matters of religion and belief at the national and international levels.¹

5. Permissible Limitations on the Freedom to Manifest Religion or Belief

[ICCPR, Art. 18(3) and UN 1981 Dec., Art. 1(3)]

Freedom to manifest religion or belief may be subject to only such limitations as are prescribed by law and are *necessary* to protect public safety, order, health or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.

- ◆ No derogation² may be made from freedom of thought, conscience and religion, even during “time of public emergency which threatens the life of the nation.” (*ICCPR, Art. 4(2) and UDHR, Arts. 29 & 30*)

- ◆ Limitations must be established by law and must not be applied in a manner that would vitiate the rights guaranteed in article 18.
- ◆ Paragraph 3 of article 18 is to be strictly interpreted: limitations are not allowed on grounds not specified there, even if they would be allowed as limitations to other rights protected in the Covenant (for example, a limitation based on national security is impermissible).
- ◆ Limitations may be applied only for those purposes for which they were prescribed and must be directly related and proportionate to the specific need on which they are predicated.
- ◆ Limitations may not be imposed for discriminatory purposes or applied in a discriminatory manner.
- ◆ Limitations on the freedom to manifest a religion or belief for the purpose of protecting morals must be based on principles not deriving exclusively from a single tradition or religion.
- ◆ Persons already subject to certain legitimate constraints, such as prisoners, continue to enjoy their rights to manifest their religion or belief to the fullest extent compatible with the specific nature of the constraint.
—*HRC General Comment No. 22 (para. 8)*
- ◆ Nothing in the UDHR shall be interpreted as implying for any State, group, or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth therein.
— *UDHR Art. 30*

B. PERSONS BELONGING TO RELIGIOUS MINORITIES SHALL NOT BE DENIED THE RIGHT, IN COMMUNITY WITH OTHER MEMBERS OF THEIR GROUP, TO PROFESS AND PRACTICE THEIR OWN RELIGION

[ICCPR, Art. 27, UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious or Linguistic Minorities, Arts. 1-2 and 4]

- ◆ In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language
—*ICCPR, Article 27*
- ◆ States shall protect the existence and the national or ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity of minorities within their respective territories, shall encourage conditions for the promotion of that identity, and shall adopt appropriate legislative and other measures to achieve those ends.
—*UN Declaration on the Rights of Minorities*

C. EVERYONE HAS THE RIGHT TO EQUAL AND EFFECTIVE PROTECTION AGAINST DISCRIMINATION ON THE BASIS OF RELIGION OR BELIEF

[ICCPR, Arts. 2(1) and 26]

This right includes the following components:

1. States Undertake to Respect and to Ensure for All Individuals Within its Territory and Subject to its Jurisdiction the Rights Recognized in the ICCPR Without Distinction of Any Kind, Including Religion
[ICCPR Art. 2(1)]

2. All Persons Are Equal Before the Law and Are Entitled Without Any Discrimination to the Equal Protection of the Law.
[ICCPR, Art. 26]

3. The Law Shall Prohibit Any Discrimination and Guarantee to All Persons Equal and Effective Protection Against Discrimination on Any Ground, Including Religion.
[ICCPR, Art. 26]

- ◆ The application of the principle of non-discrimination contained in article 26 of the ICCPR is not limited to those rights which are provided for in the Covenant, and extends to prohibit discrimination in law or in fact in any field regulated and protected by public authorities;
- ◆ The term “discrimination” as used in the ICCPR should be understood to imply any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference which is based on any ground such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status, and which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by all persons, on an equal footing, of all rights and freedoms;
- ◆ The enjoyment of rights and freedoms on an equal footing, however, does not mean identical treatment in every instance;
- ◆ The principle of equality sometimes requires States parties to take affirmative action in order to diminish or eliminate conditions which cause or help to perpetuate discrimination prohibited by the ICCPR; and
- ◆ Not every differentiation of treatment will constitute discrimination, if the criteria for such differentiation are reasonable and objective and if the aim is to achieve a purpose which is legitimate under the ICCPR.
—HRC General Comment No. 18 (paras. 7, 8, 10, 12, 13)

4. Protection Against Discrimination by Any State, Institution, Group of Persons or Person on the Grounds of Religion or Other Belief
[UN 1981 Dec., Arts. 2(1) and 4]

- ◆ States shall take effective measures to prevent and eliminate discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief in the recognition, exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms in all fields of civil, economic, political, social and cultural life.
- ◆ States shall make all efforts to enact or rescind legislation where necessary to prohibit any such discrimination.
- ◆ States shall take all appropriate measures to combat intolerance on the grounds of religion or other beliefs in this matter.
—UN 1981 Dec., Arts. 4(1) and 4(2)
- ◆ Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance, and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups

—UDHR Art. 26(2)

D. STATES SHALL PROHIBIT BY LAW ANY ADVOCACY OF NATIONAL, RACIAL OR RELIGIOUS HATRED THAT CONSTITUTES INCITEMENT TO DISCRIMINATION, HOSTILITY OR VIOLENCE

[ICCPR, Art. 20]

- ◆ No manifestation of religion or belief may amount to propaganda for war or advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination; hostility or violence... [and] States parties are under the obligation to enact laws to prohibit such acts.
—*HRC General Comment No. 22 (para. 7)*
- ◆ State parties should take the measures necessary to fulfill the obligations contained in article 20 of the ICCPR, and should themselves refrain from any such propaganda or advocacy.
—*HRC General Comment No. 11 (para. 2)*
- ◆ Article 20 does not authorize or require legislation or other action by the United States that would restrict the right of free speech and association protected by the Constitution and laws of the United States.
—*United States reservation to ICCPR Art. 20*

E. THE RIGHTS OF PARENTS IN RELATION TO FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF

[ICCPR Art. 18(4)]

- ◆ State Parties undertake to respect the liberty of parents and legal guardians to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.
—*ICCPR Article 18(4)*
- ◆ The liberty of parents and guardians to ensure religious and moral education cannot be restricted.
- ◆ Public school instruction in subjects such as the general history of religions and ethics is permitted if it is given in a neutral and objective way.
- ◆ Public education that includes instruction in a particular religion or belief is inconsistent with ICCPR Art. 18 (4) unless provision is made for non-discriminatory exemptions or alternatives that would accommodate the wishes of parents and guardians.
—*HRC General Comment No. 22 (paras. 6 & 8)*
- ◆ Parents or legal guardians have the right to organize family life in accordance with their religion or belief and bearing in mind the moral education in which they believe the child should be brought up.
- ◆ Every child shall enjoy the right to have access to education in the matter of religion or belief in accordance with the wishes of his parents or legal guardians, and shall not be compelled to receive teaching on religion or belief against the wishes of his parents or legal guardians, the best interests of the child being the guiding principle.
- ◆ The child shall be protected from any form of discrimination on the ground of religion or belief.
- ◆ In the case of a child who is not under the care either of his parents or of legal guardians, due account shall be taken of their expressed wishes or of any other proof of their wishes in the matter of religion or belief, the best interests of the child being the guiding principle.
- ◆ Practices of a religion or belief in which a child is brought up must not be injurious to his physical or mental health or to his full development, taking into account article 1(3) of the present Declaration.
—*UN 1981 Dec., art. 5*

F. FURTHER ELABORATION ON SELECTED TOPICS

1. **Obligation to Ensure Rights/Provide Remedies for Violations**

[ICCPR Arts. 2(2) and 2(3), UDHR Art. 8, UN 1981 Dec. Art. 7]

The ICCPR requires State parties to adopt such laws or other measures as may be necessary to give effect to the rights recognized in the Covenant. This obligation includes ensuring:

- ◆ effective remedies for any person whose rights or freedoms are violated;
- ◆ that such remedies are determined by competent judicial, administrative or legislative authorities; and
- ◆ that such remedies are enforced when granted.

2. **Relationship Between Religion and the State**

- ◆ The fact that a religion is recognized as a state religion or established as official or traditional, or that its followers comprise the majority of the population, shall not result in any impairment of the enjoyment of any of the rights under the ICCPR, nor in any discrimination against adherents to other religions or non-believers.
- ◆ In particular, measures restricting eligibility for government service to members of the predominant religion, or giving economic privileges to them, or imposing special restrictions on the practice of other faiths are not in accordance with the prohibition of discrimination based on religion or belief and the guarantee of equal protection under ICCPR article 26.
- ◆ If a set of beliefs is treated as official ideology in constitutions, statutes, proclamations of ruling parties, etc., or in actual practice, this shall not result in any impairment of the freedoms under article 18 or any other rights recognized under the ICCPR nor in any discrimination against persons who do not accept the official ideology or who oppose it.

—HRC General Comment No. 22 (para. 9)

3. **Registration/Recognition of Religious Communities or Organizations**

[Paragraphs 56 and 58, United Nations Commission on Human Rights, *Civil and Political Rights, Including the Question of Religious Intolerance – Report Submitted by Asma Jahangir, Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief*, E/CN.4/2005/61, 20 December 2004)

56. The Special Rapporteur has noted...that registration appeared often to be used as a means to limit the right of freedom of religion or belief of members of certain religious communities;...

58. Some main points to take into consideration with regard to registration are that:

- ◆ Registration should not be compulsory; i.e. it should not be a precondition for practicing one's religion, but only for the acquisition of a legal personality and related benefits;

- ◆ In the latter case, registration procedures should be easy and quick and not depend on extensive formal requirements in terms of the number of members or the time a particular religious group has existed;
- ◆ Registration should not depend on reviews of the substantive content of the belief, the structure, the clergy, etc.;
- ◆ No religious group should be empowered to decide about the registration of another religious group.

(Footnotes)

1 See Para. 4, UN HRC General Comment No. 22; Art. 6, UN 1981 Dec.

2 Derogation of rights is different than a limitation. Under the ICCPR, a state can, in a case of war or serious public emergency, take measures that limit the applicability of certain rights for the period of the emergency. Such measures could go well beyond the scope of limitations to rights that are permissible at any other time.

APPENDIX 2: DPRK DOCUMENTS

SOCIALIST CONSTITUTION OF THE DEMOCRATIC PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF KOREA (EXCERPTS)¹

Preface

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea is a socialist fatherland of Juche which embodies the idea of and guidance by the great leader Comrade Kim Il Sung.

The great leader Comrade Kim Il Sung is the founder of the DPRK and the socialist Korea.

Comrade Kim Il Sung founded the immortal Juche idea, organized and guided an anti-Japanese revolutionary struggle under its banner, created revolutionary tradition, attained the historical cause of the national liberation, and founded the DPRK, built up a solid basis of construction of a sovereign and independent state in the fields of politics, economy, culture and military, and founded the DPRK.

Comrade Kim Il Sung put forward an independent revolutionary line, wisely guided the social revolution and construction at various levels, strengthened and developed the Republic into a people-centered socialist country and a socialist state of independence, self-sustenance, and self-defense.

Comrade Kim Il Sung clarified the fundamental principle of State building and activities, established the most superior state social system and political method, and social management system and method, and provided a firm basis for the prosperous and powerful socialist fatherland and the continuation of the task of completing the Juche revolutionary cause.

Comrade Kim Il Sung regarded "believing in the people as in heaven" as his motto, was always with the people, devoted his whole life to them, took care of and guided them with a noble politics of benevolence, and turned the whole society into one big and united family.

The great leader Comrade Kim Il Sung is the sun of the nation and the lodestar of the reunification of the fatherland. Comrade Kim Il Sung set the reunification of the country as the nation's supreme task, and devoted all his work and endeavors entirely to its realization.

Comrade Kim Il Sung, while turning the Republic into a mighty fortress for national reunification, indicated fundamental principles and methods for national reunification, developed the national reunification movement into a pan-national movement, and opened up a way for that cause, to be attained by the united strength of the entire nation. The great leader Comrade Kim Il Sung made clear the fundamental idea of the Republic's external policy, expanded and developed diplomatic relations on this basis, and heightened the international prestige of the Republic. Comrade Kim Il Sung as a veteran world political leader, hew out a new era of independence, vigorously worked for the reinforcement and development of the socialist movement and the nonaligned movement, and for world peace and friendship between peoples, and made an immortal contribution to the mankind's independent cause.

Comrade Kim Il Sung was a genius ideological theoretician and a genius art leader, an ever-victorious, iron-willed brilliant commander, a great revolutionary and politician, and a great human being. Comrade Kim Il Sung's great idea and achievements in leadership are the eternal treasures of the nation and a fundamental guarantee for the prosperity and efflorescence of the DPRK.

The DPRK and the entire Korean people will uphold the great leader Comrade Kim Il Sung as the eternal President of the Republic, defend and carry forward his ideas and exploits and complete the Juche revolution under the leadership of the Workers' Party of Korea.

The DPRK Socialist Constitution is a Kim Il Sung constitution which legally embodies Comrade Kim Il Sung's Juche state construction ideology and achievements.

Chapter 1 Politics

Article 3

The DPRK is guided in its activities by the Juche idea, a world outlook centered on people, a revolutionary ideology for achieving the independence of the masses of people.

Article 11

The DPRK shall conduct all activities under the leadership of the Workers' Party of Korea.

Chapter 3 Culture

Article 41

The DPRK shall develop a truly popular, revolutionary culture which serves the socialist working people.

In building a socialist national culture, the State shall oppose the cultural infiltration of imperialism and any tendency to return to the past, protect its national cultural heritage, and develop it in keeping with the existing socialist situation.

Article 42

The State shall eliminate the way of life inherited from the outmoded society and establish a new socialist way of life in every sphere.

Chapter 5 Fundamental Rights and Duties of Citizens

Article 67

Citizens are guaranteed freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, demonstration and association.

The State shall guarantee conditions for the free activity of democratic political parties and social organizations.

Article 68

Citizens have freedom of religious beliefs. This right is granted by approving the construction of religious buildings and the holding of religious ceremonies.

No one may use religion as a pretext for drawing in foreign forces or for harming the State and social order.

Article 81

Citizens shall firmly safeguard the political and ideological unity and solidarity of the people.

Citizens must value organizations and collectives, and must demonstrate the spirit of devoting themselves to the work for the society and the people.

Notes

1 The excerpted text is from an *unofficial translation of the amended and supplemented socialist constitution of the DPRK, which was adopted on Sept. 5, 1998 by the first session of the 10th Supreme People's Assembly. The People's Korea* (<http://www.korea-np.co.jp/pk/>, accessed November 10, 2005).

Ten Great Principles of the Unitary Ideology System

1: Struggle with all your life to paint the entire society with the one color of the Great Leader KIM II Sung's revolutionary thought.

- 1) The implantation of unitary ideology must be constantly strengthened in connection with the principles.
- 2) Strengthen the Party of glorious Leader KIM II Sung, for the Great Leader KIM II Sung who founded our Party.
- 3) Fight with devotion to protect and make solid foundation of the authoritarian rules of proletariat and socialist system established by the Great Leader KIM II Sung.
- 4) Dedicate everything in fight to maintain the great revolutionary value of Juche Ideology, for unification of our motherland and revolutionary victory of the whole country, for our nation's socialism and accomplishment of communism.
- 5) Fight till the end for the victory of Juche Ideology in the whole world.

2: Respect and revere highly and with loyalty the Great Leader KIM II Sung.

- 1) The Great Leader KIM II Sung is a genius of revolution, the sum of the people and the legendary hero and we must respect endlessly, revere eternally and treat the Great Leader with greatest happiness and glory.
- 2) Even in a short life live only for Great Leader, devote our youth and life for him and keep loyal minds toward the Great Leader even under unfavorable circumstances.
- 3) Believe firmly in the way pointed out by our Great Leader KIM II Sung, entrust our fate to the Great Leader and devote our bodies and spirits for revolutionary fight driven by the Great Leader, having strong belief that there is nothing impossible on our way if we are under leadership of the Great Leader.

3. Make absolute the authority of the Great Leader KIM II Sung.

- 1) Have a firm position and perspective that no one else has the knowledge, but only the Great Leader KIM II Sung.
- 2) Protect through the political thought and defend 'till the end of life the Great Leader KIM II Sung.
- 3) Propagate inside and outside the greatness of our Dear Leader KIM II Sung.
- 4) Protect the Great Leader from attacks and criticism of every possible revisionism and enemy and defend the power and authority of our Dear Leader KIM II Sung.
- 5) Treat it as an emergency situation and pursue unyielding fight with even the smallest factor that could damage authority and power of the Great Leader KIM II Sung.
- 6) Respectfully worship our beloved Leader KIM II Sung's sculptures, gyps works, bronze statues, badges with portraits, art developed by the Great Leader, board with Great Leader's instructions, basic mottos of the Party.
- 7) Respectfully manage and thoroughly protect the records and sites of revolutionary fight and revolutionary history of our Beloved Leader KIM II Sung and the Party's Unitary Ideology stronghold (Research Institute of Leader KIM II Sung's Revolutionary Thought).

4: Accept the Great Leader KIM II Sung's revolutionary thought as your belief and take the Great Leader's instructions as your creed.

- 1) Our Great Leader KIM II Sung's revolutionary thought and Juche ideology must be realized through our unite belief and in everyone's flesh and bone.
- 2) Our Great Leader KIM II Sung's instructions must be adopted through steadfast belief and firm principles in all enterprises and everyone's life.
- 3) Unconditionally accept, treat as a ground and decide everything based upon our Great Leader KIM II Sung's instructions and act thinking only about the greatness of thought of our Leader.
- 4) Systematically and fully master the Great Leader KIM II Sung's laborious works, guidelines and his splendid revolutionary history.

- 5) Participate without absence more than 2 hours in the study groups, lectures and collective studies devoted to revolutionary ideas of Great Leader KIM Il Sung, create discipline for studies and make studies habitual part of the daily life, at the same time fighting with any contrary manifestation and neglecting attitude toward such studies.
- 6) The system of delivering the Great Leader KIM Il Sung’s guidelines must be created and the Leader’s instructions and Party goals have to be communicated exactly without misinterpretations or usage of one’s own words.
- 7) Use considerately the guidelines of Great Leader when preparing reports, discussions, lectures or printed materials and eliminate any words or writing that is contrary to his instructions.
- 8) There must be strict distinction between Great Leader KIM Il Sung’s guidelines and individual party executives instructions and it must be investigated if individual official’s instructions are matching the Great Leader’s ones. In the situation that they are even slightly must see it as a problem and fight with it.
- 9) Fight with provocative calumnies directed against our Great Leader KIM Il Sung’s guidelines and Party policy or with anti-Party policy.
- 10) Strongly fight against anti-Party and anti-revolutionary thinking trends that have its origin in capitalistic ideas, feudal Confucian ideas, revisionism, dogmatism, toadyism and are contrary to the revolutionary thought of Great Leader KIM Il Sung. Hold on to purity of revolutionary thought and Juche idea of the Great Leader.

5: Observe absolutely the principle of unconditional execution in carrying out the instructions of the Great Leader KIM Il Sung.

- 1) Great Leader KIM Il Sung’s instructions must be viewed as a legal and supreme order and unconditionally realized without excuses or trivial reasons, but with endless loyalty and sacrifice.
- 2) Regard as a holy duty and supreme glory reducing the concerns of our Beloved Leader KIM Il Sung and fight for it with the whole dedication.
- 3) To realize the guidelines of Great Leader KIM Il Sung, bring creative ideas and if Great Leader presents his conclusion on some issue it must be accurately executed according to the centralism principle.
- 4) Once Great Leader KIM Il Sung’s instructions and Party policy is accepted, it must be collectively discussed, the right policy implemented, concrete plan established and with creation of organized political work, pursue it in a Speed Battle Campaign.
- 5) For the execution of the Great Leader KIM Il Sung’s instructions the registrar must be made, implementation of them must be standardized, taught to others and implementation without any break.
- 6) Fight against those who accept our Beloved Leader KIM Il Sung’s instructions only by words and sabotage their implantation, show irresponsible or not proper for owner attitude and oppose unhealthy situations that have its root in formalism, self-protectionism and neglect.

6. Rally the unity of ideological intellect and revolutionary solidarity around the Great Leader KIM Il Sung.

- 1) Defend the unity of ideological intellect around the Great Leader KIM Il Sung like one’s eyes and consolidate it more firmly.
- 2) At all localities and all guard posts, strengthen the solidarity of ideological intellect of the columns through revolutionary fight based on the loyalty to the Great Leader.
- 3) Evaluate and treat all people as a rule using the degree of loyalty to the Great Leader KIM Il Sung as the yardstick and struggle against livelihoods that are at odds with the sole ideological system of the Party regardless of one’s position and distinctions.
- 4) Strictly oppose the situation of having illusions about or idolizing or advocating through flattery individual officials and eradicate the situation of giving gifts to each other.
- 5) Resolutely struggle in opposition to anti-Party elements such as factionalism, regionalism, and nepotism that could destroy the uniform solidarity of the Party and never connive at their slightest expression and completely overcome it.

7. Learn form the Great Leader KIM Il Sung and master communist dignity, the methods of revolutionary projects, and the people’s work styles.

- 1) Possess high disposition to the Party, the working class, and the people that puts the interest of the Party, the working class, and the people in the first place and sacrifice everything for them.
- 2) Fight on tenaciously with uncompromising combative spirit, firm revolutionary principle, indomitable revolutionary spirit, and faith in certain victory against the enemy class.
- 3) Handle all works frugally and boldly with responsibility and overcome the barrier that one runs up against one's own power by assuming the attitude of a revolutionary master and highly exercising the revolutionary spirit of self-reliance.
- 4) Oppose senility and stagnation, indolence and slackening and remain awash with flourishing fighting spirit and passion to always work militantly excited and reject passivity and conservative tendency and embark in all undertakings boldly and grandly.
- 5) Solidly establish revolutionary crowd point of view, thoroughly carry through the Cheongsan-ri spirit and Cheongsan-ri method, and penetrate deep into the crowd to teach them and study from them and live together with them.
- 6) Exhibit highly revolutionary character of setting an example for others and always take the lead in doing difficult and hard work.
- 7) Always be humble and unceremonious in undertakings in life.
- 8) Thoroughly reject old undertaking methods such as bureaucracy, subjectivism, formalism, and dogmatism.

8. Preserve dearly the political life the Great Leader KIM Il Sung has bestowed upon you, and repay loyally for the Great Leader's boundless political trust and considerations with high political awareness and skill.

- 1) Consider the political life as the first life, never bend one's political beliefs and revolutionary integrity, and learn to throw away one's physical life for political life like bits of straw.
- 2) Value the revolutionary organization, subordinate personal interests to organizational interests, and highly display collective spirit.
- 3) Consciously participate in organizational life to standardize and normalize the undertakings in life.
- 4) Faithfully execute the organizational decision and mandate notification.
- 5) Actively participate in two-days and weekly organizational life summing up to self-actualize the Great Leader's teachings and Party policy and to sum up one's undertakings and life on the high politico-ideological level, to embark in an ideological struggle by the method of criticism and continuously train and reconstruct oneself through the ideological struggle.
- 6) Engage in the execution of the revolutionary task and faithfully participate in labor and bring near the completion of the revolution through revolutionary practice process.
- 7) Display high political fervor and elevate the level of political theory and technical administration to handsomely execute the revolutionary mission to repay the Great Leader's great political trust and care of granting the most precious political life.

9. Establish a strong organizational discipline so that the entire Party, the entire people, and the entire military will operate uniformly under the sole leadership of the Great Leader KIM Il Sung.

- 1) Execute the revolution and construction with the Great Leader KIM Il Sung's revolutionary ideology as the sole guiding principle and thoroughly establish the Great Leader's sole leadership system that makes the entire Party, country and military move in unison according to the teachings and orders of the Great Leader.
- 2) Establish a strong revolutionary order and rules that organize and advance all undertakings according to the Great Leader's sole leadership system and handle policy question solely through the teaching of the Great Leader and conclusion of the Party.
- 3) Firmly secure the Party's leadership on revolutionary struggle and construction undertakings in all parts and units and the state economic apparatus and labor group workers ought to organize and advance all undertaking according to the Party and under the Party's lead.
- 4) Accurately execute the decisions and orders of the Party and State to carry through the teachings of the Great Leader KIM Il Sung; struggle robustly against the situation of wrongly interpreting or altering them, and strictly abide by the law and rules of the State.
- 5) Do not allow any non-organizational phenomena such as individual cadre officials arbitrarily summoning an organized meeting of the lower-level Party, state apparatus or labor groups or

- arbitrarily reaching a “conclusion” in the meeting or bringing out an organization for social movement without organizational approval.
- 6) Oppose and actively struggle against the abuse of power or authority by individual cadre.
 - 7) Evaluate and position the cadre using the loyalty to the Great Leader KIM Il Sung as the basic yardstick, and robustly struggle against and thoroughly apply the order and Party rules established by the Leader’s undertakings on handling problems with favoritism and acquaintance of relatives, friends, region, school and teachers and individual leaders arbitrarily firing or hiring each other.
 - 8) Oppose and sharply struggle against the situation of leaking Party, State and military secrets.
 - 9) Timely report to the Party organization the non-organizational and disorderly situations that violate the Party’s unitary ideological system and sole leadership constitution whether it is big or small

10. The great revolutionary accomplishments pioneered by the Great Leader Kim Il Sung must be succeeded and perfected by hereditary successions until the end.

- 1) Firmly establish the sole ideological system over the Party and whole society and firmly establish the central Party’s sole leadership constitution under the lead of the Great Leader to succeed and brightly complete the revolutionary accomplishment cultivated by the Great Leader.
- 2) Adhere to and forever succeed and develop the glorious revolutionary tradition accomplished by the Great Leader KIM Il Sung during the anti-Japanese revolutionary struggle period and oppose and resolutely struggle against even the smallest expression of anti-Party activities that try to defame or obliterate the revolutionary tradition.
- 3) Do not continue at the slightest phenomenon or element that depart from the Party’s sole leadership system and struggle against it.
- 4) Make all of your family and posterity as well as yourself look up to the Great Leader and fulfill loyal duty to him and remain endlessly faithful to the Party’s sole leadership.
- 5) Secure the authority of the Party through all means and defend the Party with your life.
All Party members may become like the Great Leader KIM Il Sung by firmly establishing the Party’s unitary ideology system and must complete the revolutionary accomplishment to the end, following the path pointed by the Great Leader

This translation of the “Ten Great Principles of the Unitary Ideology System” is taken from Joanna Hosaniak, *Prisoners Of Their Own Country: North Korea in the Eyes of the Witnesses*, Citizens’ Alliance for North Korean Human Rights, Seoul, 2005, pages 58-64. As noted in the report, The Ten Great Principles were published in 1974, co-incident with the announcement that Kim Jong Il would succeed his father, Kim Il Sung. (The 10th Principle establishes dynastic succession for the DPRK.)

APPENDIX 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Methodology

Forty former North Koreans presently residing in South Korea were interviewed for this study on the basis of a detailed questionnaire prepared by David Hawk and reviewed by Commission staff. The interviews, which were carried out in Korean, were conducted under the direction of two South Korean professors, Professor Won, Jae Chun of Handong International Law School in Pohong, and Professor Kim, Byoung Lo of Ashin University in Seoul, following a training program for the interviewers – graduate students in law, sociology and North Korea studies. The interviews were carried out over the period from November 2004 to April 2005. Each interview was conducted in person and usually lasted several hours. Five interviews were conducted by David Hawk himself.

After translation into English, the completed interviews were forwarded to David Hawk, who collated and analyzed the responses. The English language interview notes and results were carefully reviewed in Seoul with Professors Won and Kim to ensure that responses were not missed or confused on account of translation errors or misinterpretations.

Most of the interviewees agreed to be questioned only on the basis of assured anonymity. Flight from North Korea is considered a traitorous act. Thus, interviewees feared that if their residence in South Korea became known, the North Korean government would punish family members who remain in the DPRK. The interviewees are therefore identified only by number. The Commission retains the names of the interviewees, since it was decided not to rely on persons who would refuse to give their names even under condition of guaranteed anonymity.

A preliminary review of the data was conducted after the first twenty interviews, after which it was decided to carry out an additional twenty interviews. Upon review of the second group of twenty interviews, it was determined that a clear pattern of interviewee responses had emerged.

The interviews do not constitute a statistically random survey. There is no central registry of former North Koreans now resident in South Korea; thus, North Koreans now living in the Republic of Korea were identified for this study through a number of South Korean human rights organizations. Other former North Koreans were identified through the refugee groups that assisted them in their flight from North to South Korea, largely via an “underground railroad” or escape route that runs from Northeast China, through Southeast Asia and then to South Korea. Other North Koreans were located through various self-help or advocacy associations set up by the former North Koreans now resident in South Korea. The interviewees were drawn from these networks without any form of pre-screening.

Like the community of North Koreans in South Korea as a whole, the former North Koreans interviewed for this report come disproportionately from the provinces of North Korea along the Chinese border, from which escape to China is easiest, and from the provinces in the northeast quadrant of North Korea that were most severely affected by the famine crisis in the mid 1990s.

Substantive information about the interviewees is found at the beginning of Chapter Three. To obtain addition information on such subjects as the religious “federations” in North Korea and the

circumscribed religious practice centered in Pyongyang, interviews were also conducted with Buddhists, Christians and Chondokyo followers from South Korea, Europe, and North America, including those who have visited North Korea and have had, in some cases extensive, contact with their North Korean counterparts. Like the former North Koreans, most of these persons would agree to be interviewed only on condition of anonymity.

RESEARCHER BIOGRAPHIES

DAVID HAWK

A prominent human rights investigator and advocate, David Hawk directed the Cambodia Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in 1996 and 1997. In the early and mid 1980s Hawk investigated and analyzed the Khmer Rouge genocide in association with the Columbia University Center for the Study of Human Rights. In the late 1980s and early 1990s Hawk established and directed the Cambodia Documentation Commission (New York) which sought an international tribunal for the Khmer Rouge leadership, and human rights provisions and mechanisms in the 1991 Cambodia peace treaty and the UN transitional peacekeeping operation.

In August 1994 Hawk traveled to Rwanda to investigate that nation's massacres for the US Committee for Refugees, and in 1995 he returned to Kigali on mission for Amnesty International. A former Executive Director of Amnesty International/USA, he has served on the Board of Directors of that organization and on the Advisory Board of Human Rights Watch/Asia. In 2003 Hawk researched and authored *Hidden Gulag: Exposing North Korea's Prison Camps – Prisoner Testimony and Satellite Photographs* for the US Committee for Human Rights in North Korea.

JAE CHUN WON

Mr. Jae Chun Won teaches criminal law and procedure and international human rights law at Handong International Law School, Pohang, South Korea. Prof. Won received a Bachelor of Arts and MBA degrees from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, and his JD from Brooklyn Law School. He is admitted to the Bar in New York and New Jersey. Prior to taking up an academic career in South Korea, Prof Won was an Assistant District Attorney in King's County (Brooklyn) New York, specializing in domestic violence. Prof. Won consults with many NGOs and the Seoul Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

BYOUNG LO (PHILO) KIM

Philo Kim is an Assistant Professor of North Korean Studies at Ashin University in Kyungki Province, South Korea. Professor Kim received his Bachelor of Arts Degree from Kung Kyun Kwan University in Seoul, his Master's Degree from Indiana State University and his Ph.D. from Rutgers University. All of his degrees are in sociology. From 1993 to 2003 Prof Kim was Senior Research Fellow and Director of North Korean Studies at the Korea Institute for National Unification (KINU). He has visited Pyongyang, North Korea three times.

APPENDIX 4: ABOUT THE COMMISSION

ABOUT THE COMMISSION

The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom was created by the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (IRFA) to monitor violations of the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief abroad, as defined in IRFA and set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and related international instruments, and to give independent policy recommendations to the President, Secretary of State, and Congress.

The Commission is the first government commission in the world with the sole mission of reviewing and making policy recommendations on the facts and circumstances of violations of religious freedom globally. The Commission's impact and success in accomplishing its mission is achieved through its efforts to bring advice and accountability to U.S. foreign policy in the promotion of religious freedom abroad. By providing reliable information and analysis, and careful and specific policy recommendations, the Commission provides the U.S. government and the American public with important tools necessary to promote this fundamental freedom throughout the world.

The Commission, which began its work in May 1999, is not a part of the State Department and is independent from the Executive Branch.

The Commission is composed of 10 members. Three are appointed by the President. Three are appointed by the President *pro tempore* of the Senate, of which two are appointed upon the recommendation of the Senate Minority Leader. Three are appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, of which two are appointed upon the recommendation of the House Minority Leader. The system of appointments thus provides that leaders of the party in the White House appoint five voting members, and leaders of the other party appoint four. The Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom within the Department of State serves *ex officio* as a non-voting member.

Commissioners bring a wealth of expertise and experience in foreign affairs, human rights, religious freedom, and international law. The membership also reflects the religious diversity of the United States.

In carrying out its mandate, the Commission reviews information on violations of religious freedom as presented in the Department of State's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* and its *Annual Report on International Religious Freedom*. The Commission also consults regularly with State Department and National Security Council officials, U.S. Ambassadors, and officials of foreign governments, as well as with representatives of religious communities and institutions, human rights groups, other non-governmental organizations, academics, and other policy experts. It visits foreign countries to examine religious freedom conditions firsthand. The Commission also holds public hearings, briefings, and roundtables.

The Commission has met with President George W. Bush and senior members of his Administration, including the Secretary of State and the National Security Advisor, to discuss its findings and recommendations. The Commission also briefs Members of Congress, U.S. Ambassadors, and officials from international organizations. In addition, the Commission testifies

before Congress, participates with U.S. delegations to international meetings and conferences, helps provide training to Foreign Service Officers and other U.S. officials, and advises the Administration and Members of Congress and their staff on executive and legislative initiatives.

The Commission raises issues and brings its findings and recommendations to the American public through its public speaking activities, press conferences, other public events such as roundtables and briefings, its publications, Web site, and media outreach. During this reporting period the Commission’s activities were covered by the *Christian Science Monitor*, *International Herald Tribune*, *Miami Herald*, *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Washington Times*, the news wire services, National Public Radio, and PBS, to name a few.

Commissioners reside throughout the United States, and the Commission has traveled around the country to hold public hearings, public meetings, and other activities to inform the American people of its work. Although the work of the Commission is conducted year round, the Commission compiles an annual report of its policy recommendations in May to the President, the Secretary of State, and Congress.