

# Analysis of the Dynasty Rule in the Modern World: Reference to North Korea

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## Abstract

The following paper analyzes the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), the dynasty of the modern international world. The paper will try to focus on the type of rule functioning in the country leading to either a breakdown or a stable form of governance which will further help us comprehend the idea of good governance. The study will reflect on the hardliners and their policy in the 21st century with certain key developmental factors in the International realm. It takes into account the periphery of countries that are Japan, Russia, China and USA and reflects on the kind of East International Policy establishment of DPRK.

**Keywords:** dynasty - North Korea - Juche - isolationist policy - authoritarian - nuclear power.

## Introduction

The word dynasty comes from the Greek and Latin word *Dunasteir* and *Dynastia* meaning ability to rule, lineage rule, lordship or power. It is usually seen in the form of the monarchical system but unusually in republics as well. Every corner of the world has witnessed dynastic rules beginning from Indus Valley Civilization in India to the beginning of the historical period in Egypt with Menes as their first King to the current times of the Japanese Imperial family - the Yamato Dynasty, one of the oldest dynasties functioning since 660 BCE with 126 monarchs (Kiley, 1973) along with Kim dynasty in North Korea.

Dynasty rule is often categorized as a family rule since times immemorial who may constitute the modern electoral system but the power is highly concentrated within the successive generations. There is no concept of checks or balances, separation of power or the flow of power from inward to outward. It has left indelible marks on the societies causing their fate to be positive or negative.

A lot of political scholars and thinkers have contributed to the thought and concept of Dynasty rule to help us get a comprehensive understanding of the form of governance.

Starting with Machiavelli who in his very famous book *The Prince* explained the role of hereditary rule. He said for the rule to succeed, the ruler needs to install the feeling of both fear and love in the minds of the common man (1532). According to Montesquieu, his book *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748) signifies the importance of Republics and calls the Dynasty rule as the oppressive system and a source of despotism if the power is not balanced by a proper system of checks and balances. Another very famous political thinker Rousseau has highly criticized the idea of dynasty rule. He was a flagbearer of sovereignty and said that political will should come from the people's will. John Locke's *Two Treatise of Government* (1689) directly questions the legitimacy of the dynasty rule and advocates the idea of limited government and social contract.

As the paper primarily focuses on North Korea, the dynasty in their case is strongly represented by the dominance of the Kim family which has flourished an unparalleled kind of authority for several decades.

### **Origins of the Dynasty Rule**

Dynasty in North Korea began as early as the 4th century under the Gojosen kingdom in Manchuria and the Korean peninsula ( including both the territories above and below the 38 degrees latitude). Then as early as the 668 BC Korea began to unify under the kingdom of the Silla before it broke and which further unified in the 918BC under the Goryeo ; also where it derived its name . Onset of the 14th century brings in the Mongolian dynasty in both Korea and China by influencing the Goryeo dynasty. In 1388, Goryeo was dethroned by the Joseon dynasty's Yi-Seong-Gye who was known to be great in the field of administration, economic and social reforms till the 1450 .

Following this in 1592, Japanese invasions began in Korea which came to a stop post the military stalemate . A treaty was then signed between the two nations under the name of Japan Korea Treaty of 1876 which forced the Koreans to open its door for Japanese trade. The treaty also under Korea as the protectorate of China and becomes Japan's protectorate in 1905 and further in 1910 became Japan's colony till 1945. Post World War II, Japan's monopoly over Korea ends after Soviet Union occupied the North of 38 degree latitude passing the peninsula and USA occupying the south of it.

This divide was supposed to be a temporary footnote in the history of Korea, however the cold war under the Yalta Conference did make it a permanent line of division. USA and USSR , trying to dig their niche quite deep, installed their leaders of their ideology and as there was mistrust in the air , nobody actually questioned the legitimacy of an imposed non-democratic leadership . Instead in an ideal situation , a pan peninsula leader should have been chosen . USA planned Syngman Rhee while USSR made Kim II Sung take control over North Korea. Kim II in 1948, declared the North Zone as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in Pyongyang and claimed the jurisdiction of Korea.

June 25, 1950, Kim II tried to unite the two Koreas by his military force resulting in a Korean War. It was one of the most disastrous events in the entire Korean history. It is USA's South Korea versus North Korea allied with China and USSR. The United States under the command of the United Nations aimed at neutralizing the zone which however resulted in tragic loss of human life. Historians claim that the US dropped napalm on the urban centers of North Korea (North Korea 101).

The war ended with the signing of an armistice on 27th July 1953 establishing demilitarized zones and a demarcated border between North Korea and South Korea. Kim II-Sung completely took over North Korea's command .

### **Onset of Kim's Dynasty**

In 1953, North Korea was identified as the most developed and successful state (Sook Suh , 1998). He was one of the extraordinary personalities in the 20th century . The leader was the only one to enjoy the longest dictatorship in modern times . He commanded over all aspects of North Korea's economic , cultural and political life and discovered his ideology of "Juche" which means self-reliant ( Seth ,2002) resulting in a cult personality across the globe. Although he guarded his people towards looking West ,the West

however had all eyes upon his success and ideologies .

Kim II Sung worked towards the centralization of powers and made strict rules to gather obedience from people. Pyongyang in his rule was in complete isolation due to its ruthless elimination of rivals. The details will be elaborated further in the paper. The state took control of the media , foreign travel of its citizens and one of the most unprecedented acts of getting rid of the internal opponents by perpetual purge which is even followed till today in 2023. Full efforts to make North Korea a stalinist state started . The state even took control of private organizations and properties . It rebuilt Pyongyang as the socialist capital and also erected Kim II's statue for people to follow the cult .

In July 1994, Kim II Sung died and his son Kim II Jong became the successor in rule. Also known as the Kim era, he became the chairman of the Korean Workers Party in 1997 following which in September he acquired the country's highest position as the Chairman of National Defense Commission . He continued to rule till December 2011 where his son Kim Jong Un took over the leadership and still continues to do so till date.

### **GeoPolitics surrounding Kim Dynasty**

The Korean peninsula comprises the 3 major interlinked arrays of security. First is China versus the United States. China and the USA's rivalry is clearly visible on the Korean peninsula .

China perceives that the United States is impetus in changing the balance of power in the region by containing China resulting in regions mistrust, uncertainty and instability. Their main argument is that the absence of balance of power leads to the rise in the probability of conflict (Nye,1997-98). On the other hand Americans believe that whatever they do solves the purpose of universal good and they only stop China from becoming a hostile power in the region. China has had the North half of the peninsula as its buffer zone for more than 1300 years now(Kim,1993).The Pyongyang is strategically important for China and thus Washington's closeness leads to rivalry between China and the USA.

Second is Russia which has always been active in the region over its enmity with Japan, the unresolved territorial dispute causing instability and hindering the security cooperation. Russia has had its own set of Diplomatic ties with North Korea . However, the reason behind the closeness is Seoul along with Washintong that together rejected the Russian model of construction of the Light Water Nuclear Reactor project under the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) (Wit,1999). Moscow also seems to be angry over Seoul's increasing espionage activities and thus siding with North Korea's Pyongyang gives Russia a prominent position in the Peninsula.

Third is China versus Japan . Beijing's views Japan's ties with the United States as leading to a strong establishment of Japan's military base and capability . Japan sees itself as the politico-military superpower with the alliance of the United of America (May,1993-94). Its uneasiness towards China's claims over Taiwan and its missile testing over the Taiwan Strait has made the situation worse in an already tense strategic zone. Continued sovereignty disputes over the Gulf of Tonkins, Senkaku Islands, South China Sea islands are among the many conflicted regions around the Peninsula.

### Isolationist Policies under the Kim Dynasty

The Kim dynasty till now has formulated numerous policies catering to socio-economic and most importantly political needs of the country. Majorly founded by Kim II Sung, the ideology still continues to exist and shape the country's political, social and economic landscape.

Beginning with the most prominent ideology / policy by the Sung was the *Juche* translated as self-reliant. The political ideology became the real official autarkic philosophy of Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) in 1972. Kim II Sung explained his theory of *Juche* as Master of revolution and reconstruction in one's own country. It means to hold to an independent country, zero dependence on others and thus solving own problems by one's own responsibility under all circumstances. (Lee, 2014).

The DPRK believes that the ideology of *Juche* is the creative use of Marxist Lennist principle in modern political North Korea (Sa-Li, 1972). Both the father and son Kim II Jong have very well wielded the ideology of *Juche* as a political shibboleth to generate a strong feeling of Nationalism for North Korea and justified the famine and stagnation in the name of *Juche*. Kim II Sung envisaged 3 applications of the theory 1) *Chaju* : Political and ideological independence 2) *Charip* : Economically independent 3) *Chawi* : Strong Defense system.

**1.1) Chaju :** This principle holds the center position in the entire theory of *Juche*. *Juche* says that every nation has the right to self determination in order to attain happiness and security for its people. The factors of full sovereignty and zero intervention builds a foundation for a strong nation. Parallely it was important to build a strong domestic political regime. He wanted people to remain united throughout and swear by the leader.

**1.2) Charip :** According to Kim, building an autonomous nation with economic freedom will ensure zero dependency on the other powers existing in the world (Kim, 1990). The concept of *Charip* depends on the idea of *Chaju* giving strength to establish independence. *Charip* is seen as the material side of *Chaju*. Food production was seen as a very important part of economic independence because the Agro based industries would provide people with self-sufficiency and stability in the living conditions. North Korea runs on a command economy which is very common in any of the communist countries. The command economy includes all the decision making power of what to be produced, sold, purchased; the entire planning is done by the central government.

**1.3) Chawi :** To get a powerful sovereign state, *Juche's* last and most important application is *Chawi*, which is the autonomy of defense. Kim once said that we don't want war, nor are we scared of it, nor do we want peace from the Imperialists stressing the importance of strong establishment of defense in the country (Kim, 1990). Their approach towards any imperialist move was war, aggression and confrontation which made them choose *Chawi* as the most important factor securing the sovereignty of the nation. The force would involve the mobilization of the entire country and complete injection of ideology in their minds.

When it comes to foreign policy, the entire family till now has followed the isolationist foreign policy. Everyone in their family believed that imperialists could no longer dictate their country. However, Kim II

sought to balance relations between the Soviet Union and China . While having a confrontational stand towards the United States and South Korea. Its policy primarily focused on the regime's survival and political independence.

Beginning with the Anti-imperialist stance , post cold war Kim Il Sung wanted to signify on the devastation the Imperialists have made across the globe and committed towards liberating North Korea from any further rule of that sort . He thus aligned with the Non Alignment Movement . Then under the Sino-Soviet relations, North Korea made its stance very clear as an independent nation . It did initially rely on the Soviet and China by building personal diplomatic relationships with them but soon navigated itself towards an independent relationship ( Haggard,1965). He honored figures like Mao Zedong, Stalin and also had connections with Soviet's Khrushchev (Jasper ,2005).

As part of strengthening their national security, North Korea did come up with the nuclear establishment . For most of the American observers ,the nuclear programming post cold war or around the time of 1980s,however it began long back in 1948 with North Korea's awareness of nuclear science and technology. Kim Il Sung, witnessing the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, learned the importance of atomic bombing which forced an empire that stretched across East Asia to capitulate.

The capital of the country Pyongyang started to actively engage in the nuclear research programming in the early 1950s fearing South Korea to supersede them.

North Korea along with the Soviet Union initiated the peaceful development of nuclear infrastructure. The USSR helped to build and set up a reactor at Yongbyon which would later become a point of concern for America.

The onset of the Cold War made the Soviet Union withdraw their Missiles from Cuba and made North Korea fear abandonment from the Superpower. . However in 1970, the North Korean regime finally initiated a Nuclear programme. North Korea joined the International Atomic Energy Agency in 1974 and sent their scientists to stations at Geneva ( The US-Korean Agreed Framework). In 1985, North Korea joined the Non Proliferation Regime and built its first nuclear programme. In 1992, both the Koreas decided to Denuclearize the peninsula and use the energy only for peaceful purposes.

In the year 1994, post Jimmy Carter's visit , bilateral relations established between the two counties over the Pyongyang Nuclear Programme wherein North Korea committed to freeze all its illicit plutonium programmes along with halting the development of nuclear reactors in Geneva . In return the US promised to do away with the sanctions and supply of fuel oil to the country. In order to fulfill the deal , a Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organisation was formed ( Wit, 1999) with United States , South Korea and Japan.

In 1999 and till 2000, North Korea established relations with Washington . However, post Bush coming to power , North Korea withdrew itself from the Non Proliferation Treaty and accepted the execution of the secret Uranium Programme to power the nuclear weapon ; violating all the agreed framework ,NPT etc (North Korea 101) .

The Six Party Talk played an important diplomatic role . Despite again and again refusing to accept the allegations, North Korea agreed to abandon and stop all its nuclear activities as the US now froze their 25 million dollars share in the Macau based Banco Delta Asia Firm. While doing the negotiations , USA claimed of not attacking the North Korea making it easy for the country to completely give up the weapons of mass destruction.

In 2006, the news flashed saying that North Korea carried out its first Nuclear test underground, making the UNSC impose sanctions. With this came the Byungjin policy translated as parallel progress (Hyun ,2021). It is a dual pursuit of both economic and nuclear development curated by Kim Jong Un in 2011.

Another most enduring policy made by Kim II Sung and is being followed till now is the **one man rule and dynastic succession** . He completely limited dissent and allowed no decentralization of power thus solidifying his authority (Kim,1990).

### **Impact of the Dynastic Rule on Society**

- **Human Rights**

North Korea though, acknowledged to be a successful State Bank in the 1960s, soon, the massive inequalities began to emerge in the society. The dynastic rule is only the elitist rule. Calling itself a socialist country, North Korea explicitly showcases class discrimination under the policy of Songbun which exists even today. The regime under this system filters its population on the basis of their class and loyalty towards the regime. Only the ones with higher rank get permission to live in the rich city of Pyongyang while others are shifted to the poor countryside. At the time of Kim II Sung , almost a quarter of the population was asked to leave the capital. Anyone who opposed it was suppressed.

Free speech was not allowed and if caught in any such activity, it was either a lifetime imprisonment or death. It was worse that if one was arrested, the entire three generations of the family would end up in the political prison camps. Violation of human rights is maximum when it comes to North Korea under the Dynasty rule. It includes arbitrary and unlawful killings by the central government. There are also significant restrictions on the freedom of movement, religion, fate, and coerced abortion. One cannot frame any unions in the country. In short, there is no respect for an individual's integrity.

With political intentions in the center, everything is justified for a country like North Korea. The law is not supreme but the leader is. There is a death penalty for extreme crimes. One of the recent incidents in 2018 where army lieutenant general Hyon Ju was executed for abusing the authority and engaging in anti party acts by giving soldiers some extra food ( Joycee,2018) . Along with this, North Korea's defense minister, Hyon Yong Chol has been killed for showing disloyalty to the leader (BBC,2015).

However, low crimes like leaving the country without permission, theft, fraud, kidnapping also account for the same. Forced abortions and infanticide is a normal affair inside the country's political prison camp.

According to the Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, the state is responsible for causing mental illness to its people (2014) . Continuous torture, exposure to punishments like beating, electrical shocks, hung publicly naked, confinement in extremely small prison cells where one cannot even stand up straight

, no food and water without zero facility of trials in the court. - all this is common for the people living in the Kim dynasty

- **Economy and International Relations**

North Korea adopted the model of centrally planned, socialist governance and economics which is well evident in the theory of *Juche*. The model adopted heavily focuses on the development of core industries like iron, steel and cement and tool machinery. As the research proceeds, it's been observed that the policies adopted by the North Korean government post intra Korean War, has been a complete obstacle in the building of economy in the country.

Primarily the invention of *Songun* policy which translates as military, first, ignored the other sectors of development like agriculture, manufacturing and service industries. The policy of *Charip* which is for building a nation's strength only by retaining nuclear powers completely ignored the people that were dying from hunger and subsequently the country had to see a famine. No nuclear power retention could save them. It resulted in the stagnation of the output in the coming years. The country had two phases of stagnation and almost collapsed in the 1990s. The disintegration of the USSR plus the above mentioned food crisis along with natural disasters like hailstorms, flooding and droughts in 1997, completely pushed the economy of North Korea into crisis.

Further when North Korea unilaterally withdrew itself from the Non Proliferation Treaty in 2003, and began conducting several missile tests and long range nuclear tests, the United Nations Security Council generated a list of sanctions which were imposed on the country. Before 2016, the sanctions covered conventional weapons of mass destruction and armament. However it intensified the scope to include economic cooperation and general trade transactions as well (Koen and Beom,2020) . These sanctions directly affected the inflow of foreign currency and consequently the country's economy. The import of crude oil was put under the ceiling of 4 million barrels annually along with refined oil imports up to 0.5 million barrels( Bank of Korea) .

Not just the United Nations but countries like the US, Japan, European Union, Australia, South Korea imposed sanctions of their own. In 2016, US congress implemented the North Korea Sanctions and Policy Enhancement Act ( Koen and Beom , 2020) . The act boycotted all the transactions, provisions of technologies, goods and services with North Korea. It's tagged North Korea for sponsoring terrorism in 2017 along with the primary money laundering concern. To lift the sanctions, North Korea would need to be accountable for both the concerns (Do,2018) . The US under the act also boycotted the secondary source of transactions with North Korea, which later affected the firms with third party relations with the US. For example, Chinese and Singaporean companies were imposed with the sanctions on having illegal transactions with North Korea.Repeated state sponsored terrorism by North Korea , sudden disappearances of the South Koreans tourists and most importantly the bombing of Korean Cheonan Warship and Yeonpyeong Island made South Korea impose and ban the inter-Korean trade. In 2016 it shut down the very important Gaeseong Industrial Complex (Ministry of Unification,2016).

Also because of the sanctions imposed, we also see trade deficits. Total exports decreased by 90% in 2015 and imports by 26%. The total deficit account was over \$2 billion which was double the 2004-15's annual average deficit ( Kim Byung Yeon,2017).Sanctions have also affected the sectoral structure of the country.

There is no want to secure inputs for the manufacturing market. Domestic production has no investments available like, for example, the shutting down of the country's largest fertilizer plant- Hungnam Fertilizer Complex suffered from the ban of oil imports.

However, it is difficult to analyze whether the country actually acted upon the sanctions or not. In reality the North Korean exports are diverted with "made in China" labeling or even via Russian route. In 2018, it was observed that North Korea amidst the sanctions received 263 deliveries of oil via water route which likely helped the gasoline prices become stable (Bondaz, 2019). Only the wealthier class in North Korea has access to the luxury goods from China, which was then stopped in 2017. North Korea has been operating from China under the United Nations news. High imports of cigarettes to goods to nuclear supply, China is a full fledged partner of the violation. All the commercial industrial equipment sold to China by Europe are dispatched by Chinese traders to North Korea from the roads that are highly congested and subject to very few inspections. In 2020 during the Covid era, dependence on a single partner did cause a toll on North Korea by 30%. It led to the decrease in the foreign trade, purchase of raw materials and fall in the textile industry.

While North Korea produces very little trade data, the information on bilateral trade is limited as it does not include the illegal smuggling which is supposed to be very high via the water and land routes. Therefore, actually the impact of sanctions on North Korea can only be traced from the minimal credible sources available, which is the Bank of Korea (South Korea) and probably other spying agencies.

### **3) Developmental Indexes**

#### **3.1) Gross Domestic Product**

The country experienced a lot of recessions around the 1990s against the confusion around Kim II's death, China claiming profits for its exports and disintegration of the USSR leading to the fall of the economy by 30% (IMF, 1997). However According to the Bank of Korea, North Korea recovered in 1999, when a positive turn in the GDP took place. The annual GDP growth averaged to 1.4% between 1999 to 2016. The economy grew by 4% in 2016 which is the fastest since 1999. But it shrunk down by 3.5% in 2017 and 4.1% in 2018, ranking 178th in the world. According to the trading economic global macro level, currently GDP for North Korea is expected to touch 21.24 USD billion by the end of 2023 (2023).

#### **3.2) Health**

Health in Korea is a far-found topic of concern for the North Korean government. It is only the leader whose health is the country's top most priority. Recently, science labs have been established to make the current ruler Kim Jong Un immortal. There is slight improvement in the healthcare system in North Korea. According to UNICEF (2019), the maternal mortality rate decreased to 89 per hundred thousand births in 2017 from 106 in 2010.

However, the hidden hunger, stunting and micronutrient deficiencies remain widespread in the country (Begrave, 2019). Almost 1/5 of the total population still face chronic or recurrent malnutrition, along with stunting which is still affecting 19% of the North Korean children. In the recent Coronavirus outbreak, their rudimentary health care system was a huge fail. The rank at which North Korea stands in the health index is 193/195 (GHS Index, 2021).

#### **3.3) Food supply**

Food supply is a serious issue in North Korea. From the famine 1990, the scarcity and shortage of food



storage remains a point of concern, especially for the cities other than Pyongyang. The rulers have only focused on the capital ignoring the other parts of the country. The food production in the last two decades has only increased by 15% ( Kim,2019) .

Lack of equipment, technology as simple as a tractor and most importantly arable land ; all these factors have led to low per capita food production. Fuel and electricity shortages have led to poor transportation for the processing of crops and its ventilation. There is poor irrigation and drainage system which lead to the land becoming more prone to flooding. The recurrent heat waves, droughts, plus limited supply of agricultural inputs has severely damaged the production of crops. Keeping aside the physical factors,notwithstanding the factors of liberalism and realism, working in a closed economy has adversely affected the food shortage up to 1,360,000 tonnes ( Rural Development Administration, 2018) .

Both the food consumption and quality is low in North Korea. Insufficient nutrition intake is an everyday problem in the country . According to the World Food Programme and Food Agricultural Organisation, the total grain production in November 2021 to November 2022 was down by 12% and the total population suffering from food shortage accounts for up to 40%.

The two organizations have intensified programmes like South-South initiatives where other countries in the Global South have extended help for North Korea. For example, India contributed \$1 million to the country's food supply along with which South Korea provided 50,000 tonnes of rice via WFP. Moreover, international sanctions that have been imposed do not include food. Thus North Korea imports rice from China and soybean from the US. 85% of the population is able to have three meals per day. There has been noticeable improvement by establishing farmer markets and efforts on price stability. The authorities have responded to the crisis by encouraging the farmers, traders and state controlled enterprises to produce, import food grains, and release them in the market via direct price cap.

### **Critique and Conclusion**

North Korea's dynasty rule represents a distinctive blend of political, cultural,ideological and power influence. The persistent hold of the Kim's Family upon the North Korean society and international affairs has built up a political landsca[e that blurs the lines between myth,statehood and leadership . The dynasty rule has great implications on North korea, its people and its neighbors. North Korea believes in individual existence on the planet.With a different calendar system , North Korea believes to have an ideological difference with the entire world. Though it called itself a Socialist state, when it comes to the increasing production of Nuclear weapons ,it has converted to the capitalist state. Profit making in the proliferation of nuclear weapons has become a profit making zone for North Korea.

It also called itself a communist state however equality is something that is not visible in the country. Only the people who come from economically high backgrounds are allowed to live in Pyongyang and the rest are moved to other parts. The development in other parts is almost next to zero. When it comes to power supply,the blessing of light is limited to a few. The education system is designed to glorify the Kim Dynasty. Nobody is allowed to acquire education from universities abroad. North Korean children cannot compete with other students in the world. Science is the only area of focus to become a catalyst in the development of nuclear power.

Governance has entered an individual's personal life. From as basic as a haircut to what one wears, acquiring education, movement within and outside the country is all under the surveillance of the government. The country forms a choking atmosphere for its citizens who then usually cross the border

illegally and then become North Korea's most wanted criminals.

Decentralization of power and Good Governance is an alien governing concept for the Kims . Totalitarian , authoritarian and military rule best describes North Korea. No bureaucracy has resulted in the extreme unfair and unjust policy making for the domestic running of the country. Welfarism is not a priority for North Korea and it is the largest violator of human rights.

There have been dynasties existing in the world from times immemorial but not with such extremist attitudes . We have had harsh rulers rule over the countries but their succeeding generation ahead deterred themselves from continuing that approach. It supposedly believed that the Kim Dynasty lived in great denial and delusion. With zero flexibility in their approach will surely bring a doomed end.

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