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**The Thread of Juche
: Negotiating Socialism and Nationalism through Science
in North Korea**

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**The Thread of Juche
: Negotiating Socialism and Nationalism through Science
in North Korea**

by

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Thesis

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Abstract

The Thread of Juche: Negotiating Socialism and Nationalism through Science in North Korea

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This thesis focuses on the historical process of combining socialism and nationalism through scientific discourses in North Korea, in relation to the task of establishing an independent modern nation-state. A striking example framing this process is vinalon, which is a synthetic fiber developed by North Korea. The success story of vinalon's industrial production, propagated by Kim Il Sung's political allies, led socialism and nationalism to be fused into nationalist socialism, known as *Juche* (self-reliance) Socialism. In this thesis, I examine the historical background of the so-called *Juche* fiber vinalon in terms of North Korea's desire to establish itself as an independent polity distinct from the socialist bloc, domestic political struggles for power, as well as the affinity seen by the progressive doctrine and the commitment to science in socialism and nationalism. In so doing, I attempt to interpret the product, a figuration between science and society, as an "attractive thread," played a pivotal role in weaving the socialization of the *Juche* discourse into North Korean society.

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Introduction

Vinalon as a Figuration between Science and Society

In February 2010, North Korea celebrated the reactivation of the “February 8 Vinalon Complex,”¹ a factory installation producing synthetic fiber. North Korean media glorified this reactivation of the factory which stopped running in 1994 due to the economic hardship, giving it a special meaning that North Korea has now passed through a crisis. Contrary to the North Korean dramatic response, outside observers were not impressed about the event. Such a view stems from the perception of North Korea as a backward country that prioritizes the political over the economic. If considering the current economic value of vinalon, in fact, the reactivation of the vinalon factory did not have very much to do with the revitalization of the North Korean economy. Yet, when the predecessor of this Complex was first completed, the response from outside was very different from the present reaction.

In May 1961, the initial “February 8 Vinalon Factory,” the largest polyvinyl alcohol fiber factory in the world at the time, was built in North Korea. Vinalon is a synthetic fiber, produced from polyvinyl alcohol (hereafter PVA). This fiber is similar to US-developed nylon. Seeing North Korea succeeds in the industrial production of vinalon, international society, divided into the communist bloc and the capitalist camp at

¹ The February 8 Vinalon Complex (2.8 vinalon *ryŏnhapkiŏpso*) is a representative chemical plant in North Korea.

the time, was surprised by North Korea's rapid industrialization. This was not only because vinalon itself was developed by a Korean scientist, but also because the design and construction of the factory were done almost entirely under North Korea's own power. Vinalon, unlike nylon that uses oil as the main raw material, uses anthracite and limestone which are abundant in North Korea as the main raw materials. In terms of this, Kim Il Sung said "Now our industry is not dependent on foreign raw materials but primarily on our own natural wealth and raw material sources. This proves the fact that our industry is put on a solid independent footing."² Also, as vinalon's texture is similar to cotton's, the most popular fabric in Korea traditionally, the North Korean government expected that vinalon could be an alternative solution for people's clothing. Historically, the North suffered from the lack of cotton production due to the cold climate. Thus, for North Korea, it was important to have a synthetic fiber that could reduce the consumption of cotton by replacing cotton or by mixing with cotton.³

Afterward, vinalon was given the title "Juche fiber" and is significantly mentioned in the history of North Korean nation-building. Juche means self-reliance in Korean. In particular, North Korea explains vinalon as an achievement produced by the Juche idea, the official ideology of North Korea.⁴ The Juche idea appeared, however, some years

² Kim Il Sung, "Report of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea to the Fourth Congress," *Documents of the Fourth Congress of the Workers' Party of Korea* (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961), 23-24.

³ Kim Il Sung, "The significance of synthetic fiber production," *Kim Il Sung Works* 12 (1958.1 - 1958.12) (Pyongyang: Chosŏn Rodongdang Ch'ulp'ansa, 1981), 112-113.

⁴ "All scientific accomplishments during the last several years derived mainly from the struggle to establish Juche. The outcome of study of vinalon represents this." Kim, "The establishment of Juche in the field of scientific education," *Kim Il Sung Works* 17 (1963.1 - 1963.12) (Pyongyang: Chosŏn Rodongdang Ch'ulp'ansa, 1982), 551; "The vinalon industry is the shining fruition that the Juche idea of our Party was

after the success of vinalon's industrial production. Rather, the formulation of the Juche idea as the combination of socialism and nationalism is much *indebted to* the successful industrialization of vinalon. That is, thanks to vinalon, North Korea gained fresh momentum in its construction of national identity, Juche socialism.

In this paper, my question is, how did North Korea combine socialism and nationalism? I argue that it was scientific development discourses that mediated these two ideologies in the process of building a postcolonial nation-state. In general, industrialization is considered a key element in modernity. According to Giddens, "modernity can be understood as roughly equivalent to 'the industrialized world,' so long as it be recognized that industrialism to refer to the social relations implied in the widespread use of material power and machinery in production processes."⁵ Hence, it has been a general pattern for a new independent state to strive for industrialization in order to get recognition as a member of existing modern international system. Needless to say, industrial production is based on the development of science and technology. Herein, what is important is that science and technology play a major role of legitimization in contemporary society. In this respect, Habermas paid attention to scientific and technological progress as "ideology."⁶

Going back to the North Korean story, vinalon was a visible accomplishment made by the interaction between science and society, and later served as a materialized symbol

reflected in the field of chemical industry." Kim, "The importance of vinalon industry," *Kim Il Sung Works* 21 (1967.1 - 1967.12) (Pyongyang: Chosŏn Rodongdang Ch'ulp'ansa, 1983), 334.

⁵ Giddens, *Modernity and Self-identity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 15.

⁶ Refer to Habermas, *Science and Technology as Ideology*, and Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of the Enlightenment*.

of Juche.⁷ Through vinalon, North Korea could achieve multiple goals: for example, it could appear like a developed postcolonial modern state, could gain the possibility of independence from the existing division of labor among the socialist bloc focused on the Soviet Union, could demonstrate its superiority over South Korea whose industrial base was weak, etc. In addition, the North Korean people were proud of their country's industrialization, which led to enthusiasm for their country's development.

Focusing on vinalon, this thesis will look at what allowed industrialization to succeed and how the expansion of Juche discourses based on vinalon contributed to the development of the Juche idea. Next, I will examine the structural conditions that drove the cross-linkage between vinalon and Juche, and discuss the theoretical affinity between socialism and nationalism, the double-axis of the Juche idea. In doing so, we would reach the reason why the symbolic meaning of vinalon has remained strong in North Korea.

⁷ Kim Geun Bae, "Li Seung Ki's Science and North Korean Society," *The Korean Journal for the History of Science* (1998): 5, 21.



Figure 1: Working people celebrating the completion of the then February 8 Vinalon Factory. Source: *Chosŏn* (April 2011) © Chosŏnhwabosa.

Chapter 1: Vinalon and North Korean Society's Construction

THE POSTCOLONIAL NATION-STATE PROJECT

The following chapters provide a history of vinalon's industrial production. To look at this in relation to the postcolonial state's project of modernity, the first chapter treats how a scientist succeeded in developing vinalon in the social context of the 1950s. Then next chapter articulates North Korea's scientific technology policy as an important catalyst for success. Scientific technology is closely associated with politics and society. It is also an economically and socio-culturally value-oriented behavior. North Korea invested enormous material and symbolic resources into the study of vinalon because it could demonstrate their scientific achievement as a modern nation-state. This is the common characteristic that postcolonial independent states show.

Li Seung Ki's Research on Vinalon

Li Seung Ki was a chemical engineer who was called the most brilliant Korean man during the Japanese colonial era. Despite the fact that he was Korean, a second-class citizen, Li was the first Korean to earn his doctorate in Japan and was appointed a Professor at Kyoto Imperial University, which gave him a Ph.D. His success was thanks

to the “Synthetic Fiber No.1: the matrix of vinalon” (*hapsǒngsǒmyoo ilho*) that he developed. In those days, as Japan’s main export industries, silk and cotton fabrics, suffered from recession, the necessity to develop toward synthetic fibers was increasing. Also, after the American company DuPont developed nylon, the first synthetic fiber, in the late 1930s, the development of synthetic fibers was active all over the world. The research team of Kyoto Imperial University to which Li belonged, announced the development of a new synthetic fiber under the name “Synthetic Fiber No. 1” in 1939. It was the second synthetic fiber in the world, and it was developed only two years after nylon was introduced. Most important papers about “Synthetic Fiber No. 1” were released in Li’s name exclusively, meaning that he played a vital role in the process of its development. Li Seung Ki gained a doctorate in engineering with the study of PVA fiber and obtained eight patents regarding its manufacturing process.⁸ Then he published a paper that argued that practical fibers could be made from vinalon in 1942.

Due to the war, however, the industrialization of vinalon did not happen until 1945. Although the industrialization of synthetic fibers had high potential, it would be difficult to invest enough resources into the development of synthetic fiber, as its success was uncertain and even the resource supply into the existing fiber industries was not operated properly.

After liberation, Li Seung Ki came back to Korea and took office as the Dean of the College of Engineering at Seoul National University in the South where his home

⁸ Kim Tae Ho, “Li Seung Ki’s Research and Industrialization of Vinalon in North Korea,” *The Korean Journal for the History of Science* 23 (2001): 115.

Damyang was located. However, South Korea was in a state of severe social disruption, and science was neglected. The “*Kukdaean* (National Seoul University Building Proposal, *kuklip Seouldaehakkyo söllip’an*) crisis”⁹ in particular caused a split and antagonism within the university, frustrating many scholars including Li Seung Ki. Under the fierce dispute, Li left Seoul to retire to the countryside, his hometown.¹⁰ From the middle of 1946, Li received suggestions to defect to the North, but he rejected them several times. There can be various reasons; basically, it is not easy decision for an individual to leave the place where he or she has lived. Moreover, the North and South were pouring out raw criticism with each other at the time, as well as Li Seung Ki did not have a preference for a certain political system.¹¹

When the Korean War broke out in 1950, however, he defected to North Korea with his colleagues and followers. North Korea’s promise to fully support his research was hard to refuse for Li Seung Ki because he wanted to succeed in the industrial production of vinalon. As he mentioned in his autobiography, it seems to be obvious that his passion for the study on vinalon’s industrial production was the biggest motive in his defection to North Korea. It is interesting that North Korea also explained that what attracted Li Seung Ki to the North was the support of scientific and technological study,

⁹ The U.S. military government announced the establishment plan of National Seoul University in 1946, despite the Korean government not having been yet established. There were many controversial issues, such as the forced merger and abolition process on colleges, the appointment of an American naval officer as the first President at NSU, the board of directors chosen by the government, the inclusion of pro-Japanese professors, etc. Many students boycotted classes and many Korean professors joined the movement against *Kukdaean* (National Seoul University Building Proposal) by 1948. This is called *Kukdaean* crisis, which had multilayered structures. Refer to Choi Hyae Weol, “*Kukdaean P’adong*,” *Nonchaeng’ulo ilnün hankuksa* (Seoul: Yöksabip’yöng, 2009).

¹⁰ Li Seung Ki, *A Scientist’s Memoirs* (Pyongyang: Kuknip Ch’ulp’ansa, 1962), 38-39.

¹¹ Li, *ibid.*, 51.

not from the ideological interpretation. In terms of South Korea's attitude toward Li at the time, Kim Il Sung reminisced in the seventh plenary meeting of the sixth Party Central Committee as follows:

After liberation, Li Seung Ki comrade returned to South Korea from Japan, but Rhee Syngman ruling circles did not welcome him at that time. Because they did not try to construct an independent industry by developing their own scientific technology but tried to build a subordinated industry by drawing on American technology and capital, Rhee ruling circles did not support Li Seung Ki's research. ... Thus we took Li home and supported his research, providing him with a laboratory despite being in the middle of a war.¹²

The North Korean government fully supported Li's research as promised.¹³ Kim Il Sung put a priority on clothing among the problems of food, clothing, and housing in 1958. At that time, he worried that North Korea was weaving cloth with imported cotton, saying that it is very unsafe.¹⁴ As a result, the preparation for vinalon industrial production reached near-completion before 1960.¹⁵ The completion of the February 8

¹² Kim Il Sung, "The development of vinalon industry," *Kim Il Sung Works* 38 (1983.6 - 1984. 12) (Pyongyang: Chosŏn Rodongdang Ch'ulp'ansa, 1992), 27.

¹³ Li Seung Ki, "Vinalone kitdŭn yiyaki," *Inmindŭl sogesŏ* 1 (Pyongyang: Chosŏn Rodongdang Ch'ulp'ansa, 1962): 216-239.

¹⁴ Kim Il Sung, "The problem of solving raw materials for fiber," *Kim Il Sung Works* 12 (1958.1 - 1958. 12) (Pyongyang: Chosŏn Rodongdang Ch'ulp'ansa, 1981), 27-28.

¹⁵ Li Seung Ki, "Vinalon sŏmyuŭi yŏnguwa kŭŭi kongŏphwa," *Chosŏn gwahakwon tongbo* (1959. 5-6): 20-27.

Vinalon Factory¹⁶ in 1961 was its fruition. In the same year, Li Seung Ki was awarded the Lenin Prize, the socialist equivalent of the Nobel Prize, for his research.



Figure 2: Scientists discussing the scientific and technological problems arising in vinalon production. The sitting person is Li Seung Ki. Source: *Chosŏn* (April 2011) © Chosŏnhwabosa.

¹⁶ 2.8 commemorates the date that ‘the Chŏngsan-ri method’ was invented. The Chŏngsan-ri method is bureaucratic process in North Korean socialism in which managerial officers have to solve problems, not by sending down directions, but by offering solutions on the spot. North Korean official history explains that Kim Il Sung created this method of guidance in the Chŏngsan-ri cooperative farm on February 8th, 1960. Afterward, this method was applied to industry as well as agriculture. Meanwhile, 2.8 is the date that The Korean People’s Revolutionary Army was founded in 1946, at the same time, that The North Korean Temporary People’s Committee was launched in 1948.

North Korea's Science and Technology Policy

North Korea adopted a policy that emphasized science and technology since the North Korean Temporary People's Committee was established in February 1946. In general, most scientists were educated in Japanese higher education and worked in relevant institutes. North Korea carried out an intensive purge of pro-Japanese Koreans amongst landlords, officers, etc.; however, they took an exceptionally tolerant attitude towards scientists. This was not only because North Korea seriously lacked scientific and technical personnel at the time, but also because the North's ruling clique was well aware of the necessity to develop science and technology for their new state's economic development. Hence, from the beginning of its national founding, North Korea implemented the active policy of inducing South Korean scientists to defect to North Korea. The reason was that most scientific technicians were in South Korea those days. Right after liberation, there were almost four hundreds of Korean scientists and technicians who graduated from university; the majority of them were in the South, while about ten people were in the North.¹⁷

In particular, the North created an environment in which scientists could concentrate on their research without the psychological burden they endured collaborating with Japanese colonialism, declaring that "the intellectuals in colony have

¹⁷ Kang Ho Je, *History of Science and Technology in North Korea 1* (Seoul: Sunin, 2007), 48; Kim Geun Bae, *Hankuk kundae gwahakgisul inryōkūi ch'ulhyōn* (Seoul: Munhakgwajisungsa, 2005), 510.

essentially a revolutionary character against imperialism.”¹⁸ Such a policy, which is called “*oraen interi chǒngch’aek*” (old intellectual policy), is a very different approach from the Soviet Union’s. Distrusting the intelligentsia, the Soviet Union executed a sweeping purge of intellectuals. North Korea, on the other hand, even adopted a written decision on securing scientific technicians on August, 1946. This decision specified that so long as the individual had scientific and technical talent, his or her collaboration with the colonial regime is not problematic.¹⁹

Even Japanese citizens were acceptable. In the case of the factory in Hŭngnam, Japanese technicians handed down the techniques of factory operation for a year after liberation. Because they did not know when they would be able to return to Japan, Japanese technicians were also willing to work at the factory for their survival. Moreover, on May 1st and August 15th 1946, five Japanese people were granted the title of “labor hero (*roryŏk yǒng’ung*)” by the North Korean government.²⁰ However, such a story is not mentioned in North Korean history thereafter. According to North Korean Provisional People’s Committee documentation, about five hundred Japanese technicians remained in the North in 1946, and North Korea presumed that about three hundred and fifty people

¹⁸ Kim Tae Ho, *ibid.*, 123. In the case of Li Seung Ki, the fact that he was imprisoned for his noncooperation to Japan during the Second World War was magnified as a justification for his collaboration.

¹⁹ “Kisuljahwakbo e gwanhan kyŏlchǒngsŏ” (August 17, 1946. The North Korean Provisional People’s Committee Decision No. 62), “Kisuljahwakbo e gwanhan kyŏlchǒngsŏ sihaeng e gwanhan gŏn” (August 17, 1946. The North Korean Provisional People’s Committee, The Office Industry’s instruction); Chung Kyong Mo, Choi Dal Gon ed., *Pukhanbŏp’ryŏngjip* 4 (Seoul: Jaedanbŏp’in daeryuk yŏnguso, 1990), 232-233.

²⁰ Kim Tae Ho, *ibid.*, 128-129.

would remain.²¹ In this manner, North Korea's affirmative action towards scientists and its support of research resulted in a considerable number of scientists defecting from South to North Korea.

These defections to the North were largely concentrated in the following three periods: 1946, 1950, and 1952. Let me explain the social context of those days. First of all, Kim Il Sung University²² was established in 1946. The university is an institution to produce high-quality human resources to perform roles all over society, as well as a base that existing scholars, including scientists, get a job and can do their research. It is a reasonable conjecture that under the crisis of National Seoul University of the South, the new university's construction in the North was seen for many scientists who were in South Korea as an attractive opportunity in terms of their research and living. In this vein, North Korea hastily established Hŭngnam University of Technology in 1947, which was the first engineering college in either the North or South. Consequently, in the case of Hŭngnam University of Technology, the proportion of South Korean professors who defected to the North was 66.7 percent among the professors of natural science or engineering, while in the case of Pyongyang University of Technology, those professors were about 20 percent.²³

²¹ The North Korean Provisional People's Committee Planning Board, "Pukchosŏn inminkyŏngjeŭi baljŏne daehan yejŏngsujja," *Pukhankyŏngje t'onggyecharyojip: 1946-1948* (Chuncheon: Hallymdae Asiamunhwa yŏnguso, 1994), 150-151. Yet, those who remained were almost returned to Japan in 1947, except for very few Japanese who settled down in North Korea.

²² The purpose of establishing Kim Il Sung University was the "cultivation of native cadres who master Kim's revolutionary idea and modern science theory." However, whether this purpose was actually articulated at the time of its founding is uncertain.

²³ Kim Geun Bae, "Wŏlbuk gwahakkisulchawa Hŭngnam kongŏpdaehakŭi sŏllip," *Asea yŏngu* 98 (1997): 95-130.

Contrary to North Korea, interestingly, South Korea implemented a policy of restoring the school system, focusing on humanities rather than scientific technology. Since the then scientific technology-centric school system was built at the end of Japanese colonial period, South Korea regarded this as the remnants of Japanese colonialism and intended to restore the original system, which was centered on humanities.²⁴ In this manner, the combination of “South Korean repulsive force” and “North Korean attractive force”²⁵ led many scientists in the South to cross over to the North. It is also appropriate to interpret the rush to come north over the border at that time with the concept of “regional movement.” This is because people did not think that the division on the Korean peninsula would last for long, and thus expected that the North and South would become one again. On this point, Kang Ho Je argues that defection to the North at this time can be said to be not so much the movement between states as the movement between regions.²⁶ In other words, this “regional” view contributed to creating the conditions for mass defections among the scientific community in the South to some degree.

Secondly, when the North occupied Seoul during the Korean War, high-ranking North Korean officials could personally persuade the famous South Korean scientists in Seoul. For example, Li Jong’ok²⁷ was instrumental in Li Seung Ki’s defection to North

²⁴ Kim Geun Bae, *Hankuk gūndae gwahakkisul inryōk’ūi chulhyun*, 201.

²⁵ Kim Geun Bae, “Wōlbuk gwahakkisulchawa Hūngnam kongōpdaehakūi sōllip,” 10.

²⁶ Kang Ho Je, *ibid.*, 74.

²⁷ Li Jong’ok (1916-1999) is a key figure in North Korean politico-economic history. He held a series of government posts - Light Industry Minister (1951), Chief in the National Committee on Planning (1956), Member of the Party Central Committee (1957), Vice Premier in Cabinet (1960), Metal Chemical Industry Minister (1962), Chief of the Academy of Science (1965) - and became a Vice President in 1984.

Korea. Li Jong'ok was in charge of North Korean Association of Industrial Technology at the time. Holding a commission from the then Prime Minister Kim Il Sung, he was sent to the South for the purpose of persuading major scientists in the South to defect to the North. It was at the end of July in 1950 that Li Jong'ok met Li Seung Ki in Seoul; as a result, he succeeded to bring Li Seung Ki along with many other scientists to the North. It is natural that the effect of persuasion gets bigger when someone who is in a position of responsibility persuades somebody earnestly. Also, it could have been a positive factor that Li Jong'ok himself majored in chemical engineering in Harbin Institute of Technology and worked as manager at Chŏngjin Spinning Mill (the present Chŏngjin Chemical Fiber Factory), which is located in North Hamkyŏng province.

Thirdly, through the founding of The Academy of Science in 1952 during the War,²⁸ North Korea tried to invite scientific experts from the South to become researchers in this new academic institute. The Academy of Sciences of Democratic People's Republic of Korea was established on December, 1952 in Pyongsung, near Pyongyang, and became the core of North Korean scientific and technical studies.²⁹ The organization of the Academy of Science was comprised of the academician, academician candidate, head secretary, etc.; 80 percent of the 10 academicians and 60 percent of the 15 academician candidates were scientists who defected from the South. In the field of

²⁸ On April 27th 1952, despite the war, the national scientist mass meeting was held in Pyongyang. In this meeting, the North Korean leadership obtained scientists' consensus on building the Academy of Science.

²⁹ Pyongsung currently belongs to the City of Pyongyang according to the reorganization of administrative districts in 1995. The Academy of Science is still the highest North Korean research institute and administrative organization in the field of science and technology now.

natural science and technology all academicians were from the South.³⁰ This shows not only that the scientists who defected from the South played a vital role in establishing and operating the Academy of Science, but also that North Korea did not place ideology ahead of science and technology. As a result, the number of high-quality scientific technicians who defected to North Korea reached 111 persons.³¹

Another policy of North Korea to secure human resources was to actively send students to study abroad. Under the support of the Soviet Union, North Korea began the project of studying abroad from 1946. Students studying abroad at the time had a tendency of avoiding scientific technology studies; North Korean leadership strongly encouraged them to major in science and technology. Even Kim Il Sung encouraged students studying abroad as follows:

I heard that you comrades want to enter Social Science Departments to study politics only because you are not well aware of Natural Science such as Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, etc; but that is the wrong thought. ... Comrades should learn scientific technology. That is to learn real politics. Communists knowing scientific technology can do better in politics.³²

³⁰ Li Seung Ki (Chemistry), Do Sang-rok (Physics), Ch'oe Sam-yeol (Chemistry), and Kim Ji-jung (Mathematics). In the field of social science, three of the entire four academicians were those who defected from the South: Hong Myong-hŭi (Literature), Paek Nam-un (Economics), and Park Si-hyong (History).

³¹ Kang Ho Je, *ibid.*, 76.

³² Kang Ho Je, *ibid.*, 94; Do Sang-rok. "Mullihakŭn jung'yohan kichogwahak'ypnida," *Widaehan sarang'ŭi pumsogesŏ 2* (Pyongyang: Gwahakbaekgwasajŏn ch'ulp'ansa, 1980), 155-156; Li Sang-sŏl, "Minjok ganburo tŭntŭnhyi kioosiryŏgo," *Suryŏngnimgwa juchegwahak 40nyŏn* (Pyongyang: Sahoegwahak ch'ulp'ansa, 1988), 19-29; Cha Yong-hyun and Sa Gwang-ung, *Chosŏn Rodongdang Interi chŏngchaekŭi bitnanŭn yŏksa* (Pyongyang: Sahoegwahak ch'ulp'ansa, 2005), 125-131.

Most students who were urged to study science and technology from Kim Il Sung changed their majors to departments related to scientific technology.³³ Many of them returned to North Korea as scientific experts in the late 1950s, which helped to resolve the lack of manpower in the field of science and technology. For example, about 900 students studying abroad returned from the other socialist countries in 1958.³⁴

Discursive Transformation

Moreover, North Korea made a great effort to appropriate its Japanese colonial heritage. For instance, the dominant discourse of the intellectuals trained during the colonial era was based on the need for such highly-skilled human resources. With reference to the reactivation of factories built during the colonial rule, a new identity as the new nation's physical assets was given to the factories through the discursive reconstruction. The typical pattern of appropriation in the discourse was created, based on the two facts that Japan destroyed considerable plant assets right after the 1945 defeat, and that most factories in the North were destroyed by U.S. air strikes during the Korean War. The first fact made it possible for North Korea to illustrate Japanese not as "the past factory owner" but as "the factory destroyer."³⁵ Also, though U.S. air raids inflicted

³³ Ibid., 94.

³⁴ Kang Ho Je, *ibid.*, 95; Ch'oe Sam-yeal, "Konghwakuk changgŏn yihu sipnyŏnkanŭi urinara gwahak mit kisul baljŏn," *Gwahakwon tongbo* (1958. 4), 16-28.

³⁵ Kim Tae Ho, *ibid.*, 129.

enormous economic losses on North Korea, they simultaneously offered an opportunity to assign a new meaning to the factories. As destroyed factories were rebuilt by North Korean efforts and help from socialist allied nations, they were reborn as North Korean assets, “defending against American imperialism,” and were no longer symbols of Japanese exploitation.³⁶

The construction of the February 8 Vinalon Factory is a striking example. The Vinalon Factory utilized the remnants of Bon-gung Chemical Factory which was built in the Japanese colonial period. It is interesting to see the origin of the name “Bon-gung,” which means the “main palace.” The area that the Factory was constructed on was called Bon-gung after Yi Sǒng-gye built a palace with a shrine for his ancestors in this area and stayed there for quite some time.³⁷ The Bon-gung area is located in the middle of Hamhŭng and Hŭngnam. These two areas were developed as modern industrial cities during the colonial period. The railway that connected Hamhŭng with Sohŏjin Bay (Hŭngnam) was completed in 1922, and international commerce became active in the area. The Sohŏjin Bay served as a hub linking Japan, the southern part of Korea, and Russia’s Vladivostok.³⁸

³⁶ Kim Tae Ho, *ibid.*, 130.

³⁷ For more information, refer to Kim Cheehyung, “The Furnace is Breathing: Work and the Everyday Life in North Korea, 1953-1961” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2010), 274.

³⁸ Kim Cheehyung, *ibid.*, 275; Yi Kye-hyŏng, “Ch’onggubaekisipnyŏndae Hamhŭngjiyŏk haksangundongŭi chŏnggaewa sŏngkyŏk,” *Hanguk kŭndaesa yŏngu*, no. 20 (2002): 238.

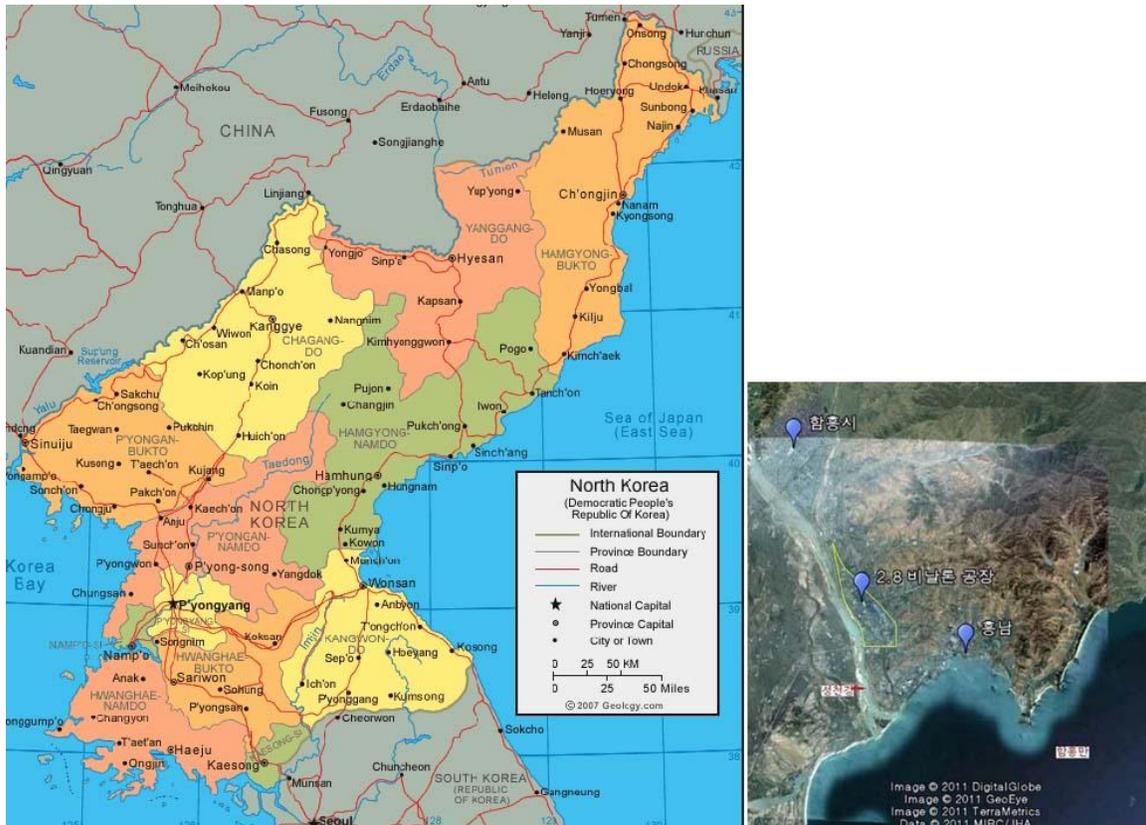


Figure 3: <The left > Map of North Korea. © 2007 Geology.com
 <The right> The February 8 Vinalon Factory (2.8 비날론 공장) is located in the middle of Hamhŭng (함흥) and Hŭngnam. (흥남) © Google.

Nihon Chisso (日窒), a Japanese company, built the first factory at Hŭngnam in 1927, and later on operated a dozen factories, including the Hŭngnam Fertilizer Factory which was the largest fertilizer factory in Asia, in Hŭngnam and Bon-gung.³⁹ Among the factories, one of the five big factories in Hŭngnam area was the Bon-gung Chemical

³⁹ For this reason, Hŭngnam was the city which had the third highest number of Japanese on the Korean peninsula on August 1945.

Factory. Through the postwar reconstruction,⁴⁰ as I discussed above, North Korea re-appropriated the Bon-gung Factory's identity. In sum, this area's image was transformed from the palace of the Chosŏn Dynasty's founder to the symbol of Japanese colonialism exploitation, and into socialist industrial city.

As with the Vinalon Factory, the Hwanghae Steel Factory was glorified and symbolized in North Korea. The Hwanghae Steel Factory was formerly the Gyeomipo Steel Factory built by Mitsubishi in 1914. This Steel Factory was heavily damaged due to the War, and it was restored on May 1958.⁴¹ North Korea promoted the Hwanghae Steel Factory was rebuilt with North Korea's own resources, while other factories at the time received foreign assistance in the form of materials, equipment, technology, skilled manpower, etc. Mentioning in particular the cases of innovation in technique that workers and technicians of the Hwanghae Steel Factory accomplished, Kim Il Sung claimed this as evidence proving the legitimacy of the economic development line that his group put forward. Kim's group supported a heavy industry first policy, as opposed to the pro-Chinese and pro-Soviet Union groups who prioritized light industry development. The Hwanghae Steel Factory eventually became emblematic.⁴²

⁴⁰ There was East Germany's assistance in the reconstruction of Hamhŭng and its surrounding areas.

⁴¹ In 1958, 'the first furnace and coke furnace' was restored and the reconstruction of the Hwanghae Steel Factory continued until 1961.

⁴² Based on the accomplishment of the Hwanghae Steel Factory and the Vinalon Factory, etc., Kim Il Sung addressed in a victorious voice in the fourth congress of the Workers' Party of Korea in 1961. "Heavy industry is the basis for the development of the whole national economy. Without building up a powerful heavy industry, there can be no technical reconstruction of the national economy nor can there be any consolidation of the foundation of an independent economy of the country." Kim Il Sung, "Report of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea to the Fourth Congress," *Documents of the Fourth Congress of the Workers' Party of Korea*, 19.

However, it is disputable that the restoration of the Hwanghae Steel Factory was achieved with North Korea's own power. According to *Chosŏn Central Yearbook 1956* and "The aid budget and detailed statement of the socialist countries in the postwar reconstruction" in *the Development of People Economy after Liberation in the DPRK* which was published in 1960, East Germany supported the reconstruction of the Hwanghae Steel Factory.⁴³ With respect to this, Kang Ho Je assumes that since North Korea stated its political will to proceed with the reconstruction of "the first furnace and coke furnace" independently from the beginning, help and support from outside in direct form would have never happened. That is, he deduces that North Korea would at the very least not have received foreign equipment directly. In the case of necessary techniques, North Korean on-the-spot technicians were likely to secure these indirectly by going to East Germany to seek advice, rather than having East German technicians come to teach them. Regardless of this controversy, what matters is that the discursive frame surrounding the reconstruction of the Hwanghae Steel Factory at the time empowered Kim's group and allowed them to push ahead vinalon's industrial production, getting through the objections of those pushed for the industrial production of nylon or acryl first.⁴⁴

To conclude, the support from the North Korean society and state contributed to the success of vinalon production, and vice versa. In other words, vinalon as a visible

⁴³ Kang Ho Je, "Jacheŭi himuro dasi ilŭkin Hwanghae jechŏlso, hyunjangnodongjadŭlŭi nunbusin sŏnggwa," *Minjok 21* (2011. 7), 59.

⁴⁴ Li Seung Ki, *A Scientist's Memoirs*, 125.

accomplishment made it possible for North Korea to show off its legitimacy as a postcolonial state at home and abroad.

THE ONSET OF THE ‘AGE OF JUCHE’

North Korea has employed ‘Juche’ as era name since 1997, which was the third anniversary of the death of Kim Il Sung. This is to commemorate Kim who has been praised as the creator of the Juche idea in NK, by making the year of Kim’s birth, 1912, year one of the Juche calendar. Therefore, the year 2011 was the year Juche 100. Nowadays North Korea’s concept of Juche is regarded only as a power-oriented ideology of the supreme leaders, Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong-Il. Before the Kim-centered system, known as the *suryong* system, was established in 1967, however, there were dynamic phases in the formative process of Juche. With respect to this, succeeding chapters describe the role of the scientific domain in the formation of the Juche era and how vinalon affected the construction of North Korean national identity.

From Science to Society: Expansion of the Juche Discourse

It is common for socialist countries to require their scientists to become “red experts” who have both an ideological quality and a specialty. North Korea was no exception. In this sense, some people might think that science in the North was

unilaterally penetrated by Juche as a political ideology for North Korean society only in one direction. However, the Juche idea initially developed on the basis of the country's scientific realm.

The term Juche first appears in Kim Il Sung's speech "On eliminating dogmatism and formalism in ideology and standing Juche"⁴⁵ in December 1955. Kim thought that pro-Chinese (*yŏn'anpa*) and pro-Soviet (*soryŏnpa*) factions in North Korea tended to follow the model of the dominant socialist powers, rather than think practically based on the North Korean reality.⁴⁶ For example, Kim criticized that "the cadres in the Party's publicity department intend to imitate the Soviet Union's model mechanically in all business areas," and emphasized that "we are doing Chosŏn's revolution, not any other countries' revolution."⁴⁷

At this time, however, Kim's statement of Juche did not hold the meaning of the "creative application of Marx-Leninism" that it later did. For socialist intellectuals and state-makers, the authority of Marx-Leninism was tremendous; thus, they were reluctant to stray from the formal framework of Marx-Leninism for fear of being criticized as revisionist. Therefore, they did not actively employ the term Juche, even after the completion of Vinalon Factory in 1961.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Kim Il Sung, "On eliminating dogmatism and formalism and establishing Juche in ideological work," *Kim Il Sung Works* 9 (1954.7-1955.12), 255-269.

⁴⁶ These groups were also in conflict over economic policy; for example, light industry first vs. light-heavy industry together. For more information, see p. 40-43.

⁴⁷ Kim Il Sung, *ibid.*, 467, 475.

⁴⁸ Kim Geun Bae, *ibid.*, 21.

In fact, **it was in the world of science where the considerable flow of the Juche discourse was formed and expanded.**⁴⁹ Particularly, the Juche discourse received strong support from engineers in the field.⁵⁰ This is because these people had practical-oriented characteristics, rather than theoretically. Thus their concern was to develop science and technology fitting to North Korea's reality. Also scientists often mentioned the term Juche along with science and technology in public discussion. Sometimes, they even used Juche in discussing ideas or politics. For instance, Kim Chang-Man⁵¹ who had a great deal of enthusiasm for scientific development, advocated that the establishment of Juche was to put Marx-Leninism into practical use as it was best suited North Korean society, which was deemed "scientific" in the 4th North Korean Workers' Party Congress in 1962.⁵² In this manner, figures in the scientific world took the lead in the social expansion of Juche, using the term actively.

⁴⁹ Kim Geun Bae, "Li Seung Ki's Science and North Korean Society," 20-22. Kim Geun Bae has argued that the emerging process of Juche idea was greatly influenced by vinalon's successful industrial production.

⁵⁰ With respect to the opinions of domestic engineers in the field, refer to "Dang'ui gwahakjǒngchaek e ömmilhi yipgakhayö chǒngubaekosippalnyöndo gwahak'yöngusaöpül sönggwajökuro bojanghaki üihayö," *Kisulgwahak* (1958. 3).

⁵¹ Kim Ch'angman was an independence activist that belonged to the pro-Chinese group at first. Despite the purge of pro-Chinese elements in 1956, he undertook one of five vice-chairmen positions in the Party Central Committee as the only non-anti-Japanese partisan member in the same year. This was because he took the lead in purging the pro-Chinese group with Kim-centered partisans. Before he was purged in 1966, he tried to suggest the theoretical foundation in accommodating a transformation of the Chinese mass mobilization doctrine.

⁵² Kim Geun Bae, *ibid.*, 22; *Chosǒn Rodongdang chesacha toronjip* (Pyongyang: Chosǒn Rodongdang Ch'ulp'ansa, 1962); Kim Ch'angman, "Chollima sidaega yoguhanün injaega düiki üihayö," *Günroja* (1959. 9).

Juche Fiber's Contribution to National Identity

If this is the case, what was the reason that the scientific world became such an active proponent of the Juche discourse? In search for a reason, Kim Geun Bae argues that for scientists, Juche was considered something proven through the success of scientific study; thus they probably thought that it would be fine to apply Juche widely across society. Indeed, after vinalon's industrial production, advances were achieved in making anthracite into fuel, refining methods of reducing pellet, semiconductor studies, breeding silkworms, meridian system studies, and so forth, all of which impacted North Korean society.⁵³ To be specific, another striking case is the development of a self-reliant method in iron production. In order to produce iron, North Korea had to purchase coke from other countries because there is no coke in the DPRK. However, North Korean scientists succeeded in developing a new iron producing technology that utilizes hard coal, which is abundant in the North. This also contributed to strengthening the atmosphere for developing an independent economic base in North Korea.⁵⁴

The scientific studies which had the Juche character succeeded beyond expectation, which led to the recognition among scientists that Juche's scientific accuracy was legitimated. Over time, the Juche discourse which was prevalent in the scientific world spread to society through interaction with the politico-social structure. This means that

⁵³ "Kisulgwahak bunya esöüi uri dang gwahak jöngchaeküi kuhyun," *Kisulgwahak* (1962. 5), 1-7; Do Sang-rok, "Urinaräü sahoejuüi könsölgwa kicho gwahaküi baljön," *Günroja* (1964. 9), 23-31.

⁵⁴ Kim Il Sung, "The establishment of Juche and efforts for self-dependence are the motive power of economic development," *Kim Il Sung Works* 24 (1969.6 - 1969. 12) (Pyongyang: Chosön Rodongdang Ch'ulp'ansa, 1983), 97-98.

political powers optimized the Juche discourse by extracting some successful cases in the scientific world.⁵⁵ Vinalon's industrialization was an important watershed in this process. The Juche fiber vinalon gave North Korea confidence that it was possible to be independent to some degree from the socialist powers of the Soviet Union and China. This confidence expanded across the ideological arena, which led to the creative application of Marx-Leninism, and the Juche idea as an independent idea. Metaphorically speaking, vinalon as an attractive thread played a pivotal role in weaving the socialization of the Juche discourse into North Korean society.

⁵⁵ When it comes to this process, it is worthy of note that the *Chollima* Movement was changed into a technical innovation movement. For a primary source to show the emphasis on the development of production power based on modern technology rather than socialistic production power, refer to Kim Il, “*Inminkyŏngje modŭn bumunaesŏ kisulhyŏksin undong ’ul jŏnmyunjŏkuro jŏn ’gaehalde daehayŏ*” (Pyongyang: Chosŏn Rodongdang Ch’ulp’ansa, 1960).



Figure 4: <The left> Kim Il Sung seeing vinalon cotton. June 1967. Source: *Chosŏn* (April 2011) © Chosŏnhwabosa. <The right> The Tower of Juche Idea in Pyongyang. The height of this Juche tower is 170m, which is the highest stone pagoda in the world. Hammer, sickle, and brush representing workers, peasants, and intellectuals are the symbols in the flag of the Workers' Party of Korea. © Author

Chapter 2: Fetish toward Juche Science

STRUCTURAL CONDITIONS

When it comes to analyzing a social phenomenon, it is crucial to understand the social context that made it take place. There are entangled relations of related social groups from which a scientific technology is chosen and used in a certain time and space. As far as the circumstances from which North Korea could carry forward Juche science is concerned, internal and external situations acted as significant structural factors. I describe these factors as “fetish.” The fetish means the social conditioning to create attraction towards a person, place, or an object. The reason I utilize the notion of the fetish is that I want to articulate the process of how the fetishized power that an object embodies was formed, based on North Korea’s desire for a modern nation-state. The fetishism of the image of the Juche fiber vinalon generated the soil for the Juche idea to grow. Simply speaking, my argument is that vinalon is the thread by which the Juche idea was constituted and expanded. Thus, I employ the notion of the fetish in this paper.

In North Korean history, the 1950s is very important because the current socialist framework was mostly completed in this period, although a variety of possibilities for system development were open to North Korea. First of all, the power structure was reorganized with the Kim Il Sung group as the center. In the socio-economic aspect, a socialist economic system was formed throughout the society on the axes of

industrialization and agricultural collectivization. Lastly, the base of self-reliant diplomatic policy was established during this period.⁵⁶ In the following section, I will describe the social context regarding Juche science by considering both the international and domestic conditions.

International Circumstances

After the death of Stalin in 1953, the power struggle in the Soviet Union caused the decline in its strength within the international communist bloc. Khrushchev was elected First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party after Stalin's death, and he came into conflict with Malenkov who was Premier concerning the economic development policy. Khrushchev was also in conflict with Molotov's group, which advocated Stalin's line, and this prompted him to publicly criticize Stalin in the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union on October 1956. Apart from his attempt to break with Stalin's cult of personality, Khrushchev had another motive in raising this issue; it was a means of eliminating his political enemies. As such, deep divisions in the Communist Party of the USSR undermined its power. In addition,

⁵⁶ Baek Jun Ki argues that the socio-economic aspect was the basic factor that caused the changes of the political structure and diplomacy. Baek Jun Ki, "Chŏnkubaekosipnyŏndae pukhanüi gwŏnryŏkgaldüngüi baekyŏngkwa soryŏn," *Chŏnkubaekosipnyŏndae nampukhanüi sŏnteakgwa kuljöl* (Seoul: Yŏksabip'yŏngsa, 1998), 438-439.

the increased influence of the Chinese Communist Party stirred up the crustal movements in the topography of the socialist camp.⁵⁷

In the late 1950s, consequently, the Soviet Union and China were in conflict over the hegemony of the communist bloc. The Chinese Communist Party raised its voice in criticism of Khrushchev's peaceful coexistence policy with the West and of his denunciation of Stalin, defining the Communist Party of the Soviet Union as "revisionism." The Soviet Union responded to this by stating China as "dogmatism." Under the conflict between the Soviet Union and China, North Korea was in a dilemma that cannot support one side because the support of both countries was important for them to develop further their scientific, military, and industrial potentials.⁵⁸ Thus, North Korea

⁵⁷ As for the cleavage in the socialist camp, another point I need to mention is the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. On July, 1956, the Hungarian people protested against the then socialist regime centered on Rakosi, who was called the "little Stalin." As the demonstrations developed, the Soviet Union dismissed Rakosi from First Secretary and placed Gere in his seat. The Hungarian demonstrators then demanded an independent policy free from the USSR's influence, but based on socialism. Thus they were against the Hungarian government and its Soviet-imposed policies and a mass uprising occurred on October 23rd, 1956. To mollify armed protesters, the Soviet Union sent Mikoyan, a member of the Standing Committee of the Party Central Committee, to Hungary the next day to display a conciliatory attitude, by accepting Nagy who was supported by the demonstrators as the Prime Minister, instead of Gere. Nagy took actions for changes, such as adoption of multiparty system, and even pushed ahead with the withdrawal from the Warsaw Treaty Organization and the neutralization of Hungary, promising the withdrawal of Soviet troops out of Hungary. These actions enraged the Kremlin and Khrushchev commanded the repression of the Hungary Revolution by force of arms. On November 4th, 1956, Soviet Forces with tanks invaded Hungary. Nagy was arrested (later he was executed and many Hungarians died in the bloody suppression of the uprising. Under the support of the Soviet Union, Kadar was appointed as the next Prime Minister because he visited Moscow before the Soviet armed intervention and promised to remain in the Warsaw Treaty Organization. As such, there were many instances where the Soviet Union intervened in cases where an allied socialist nation attempted to deviate from the USSR's frame. North Korea was no exception. I will explain this in the next section, "Domestic Condition."

⁵⁸ Chung Chin O, *P'yongyang between Peking and Moscow: North Korea's Involvement in the Sino-Soviet Dispute, 1958-1975* (Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1978), 26.

claimed to be neutral and took a position that North Korea supports the socialist camp led by the Soviet Union and China.⁵⁹

As the Sino-Soviet conflict grew more serious, assistance from these countries rapidly diminished and almost cut off in the end. There was almost no foreign aid except from the Soviet Union right after liberation. However, socialist allied nations such as the Soviet Union, China, and East Germany played a significant role in the restoration of all sorts of facilities during the postwar reconstruction period.⁶⁰ North Korea stated that its postwar reconstruction period was from 1954 to 1956,⁶¹ and the proportion that overseas aid occupied in total amount of North Korea's budget during this period was 34% (1954), 21.7% (1955), and 16.5% (1956) respectively.⁶² Yet, as the First Five-Year Economic Plan (1957-1961) began in 1957, the ratio fell to 12.2% in 1957, 4.2% in 1958, and 2.7%

⁵⁹ After the early 1960s, North Korea was inwardly inclined to support China, and indirectly criticized Khrushchev's Soviet Union as revisionism. Kim Il Sung strongly criticized the "contemporary revisionism," associating the critique of the USSR as follows: "Some people aggress upon *charyōkgaengsaeng* (working out by one's own efforts) as nationalism, but why is this nationalism? ... Why is it bad that one has a revolution on one's own and constructs socialism for oneself? ... We welcome our brother nations' assistances. However, what would we do in the situation that they do not give these assistances? Although there is no assistance from others, we must have a revolution and construct socialism. ... How can we understand those who aggress upon our self-dependence as nationalism, not providing us with assistances?" Suh Dong Man, *Pukchosŏn sahoejuūi chejesŏnglipsa 1945-1961* (Seoul: Sunin, 2005), 843-844.

⁶⁰ Other socialist nations that supported North Korea were Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Rumania, Bulgaria, Albania, and so forth. With regard to the size and detail of the socialist countries' aid during the postwar reconstruction, see Kang Ho Je, *ibid.*, 64-65.

⁶¹ In the sixth plenary meeting of the Party Central Committee which held on August 5th, 1953, North Korea decided to make the period until 1956 the time for the postwar reconstruction, and will carry out the First Five-Year Plan from the year of 1957. Jeon Suk-dam, "Chosŏn Rodongdangūi ryongdo ha'e jŏnhu sahoejuūi gŏnsŏlesŏ chosŏninmini dalsŏngha sŏnggwawa kŭ ūūi," *Gwahakwon yŏksayŏnguso gŭnsesa mit ch'oegŭnsesa yŏngusil, Yŏksanonmunjip 4: sahoejuūi gŏnsŏl pyŏn* (Pyongyang: Gwahakwon ch'ulp'ansa, 1960), 12-18.

⁶² Gwahakwon kyŏngjebŏphakyŏnguso, *Haebanghu urinaraūi inmin kyŏngje baljŏn*, 123.

in 1959.⁶³ In this way, it can be said that the decrease in aid from the socialist countries was a structural factor that drove North Korea to conceive of a plan for creating the foundation of economic independence.

The Sino-Soviet conflict was a power game that focused on their own interests, not on the advancement of the socialist world. Thus, some nations in the Third World began to vocalize criticism that the colonialist aspects of the past were reproduced even within the socialist bloc. Such a representative example was the Bandung Conference to be held in Bandung, Indonesia, on April 18th, 1955. Delegates from 29 countries of Asia and Africa attended this international conference. Participating nations declared their nations' neutrality in the Cold War and urged for the end of colonialism. The significance of Bandung Conference was to declare the emergence of the new forces of "the Third World" in the international political stage, which was being divided between the capitalistic states and the socialistic states. North Korea was very active in this 1960s non-alliance movement of the Third World. Its huge support to African countries was a case in point.

In Africa, Ghana and Guinea became independent in 1957 and 1958, and 17 new nations were born in 1960. North Korea set up diplomatic relations with Algeria and Guinea, neutral nations in Africa, in 1958. Kim Il Sung emphasized that the North should make developing friendly relationships with Afro-Asian-Latin American independent nation-states an important North Korean project during the Fourth Party Congress held in

⁶³ Ibid., 123; Li Ju-yŏn, "Chokukŭi pyŏnghwajŏk t'ong'iltoknipgwa sahoejuŭi gŏnsŏldosang esŏŭi chŏnkubaekosippalnyŏn kukga'yesan," *Kyŏngjegŏnsŏl* (March 1958), 24.

September 1961. North Korea held the “Asian Economic Conference” in Pyongyang in June 1964, which was the first international conference led by North Korea. 34 countries, including 16 states in Africa, attended this Conference and discussed the issue of new nations’ independent economy. Reinforcing these efforts to establish diplomatic relations with the Third World, North Korea declared an “autonomy line” (*chaju nosŏn*) through the Rodong Sinmun in August 1966.

The mutual relationship among Communist Parties and Workers’ Parties is based on the principle of a complete equality, autonomy, mutual respect, non-intervention, comradeship, etc. There cannot be any privileged Party between Communist Parties and Workers’ Parties. There can be big Party and small Party, however, there cannot be higher Party and lower Party, and leading Party and guided Party.⁶⁴

Since 1966, North Korea began providing Third World countries with huge economic aid. Herein, there was an aspect of competition with South Korea over legitimacy. In December 1962, 15 countries diplomatically approved North Korea, whereas 53 countries approved South Korea. However, the North established diplomatic relations with 26 nations in Africa in the first half of the 1970s, while the South set up 4 African nations. North Korea became a member country of the Non-Aligned Movement Summit in 1975, and reached an almost even number of diplomatic ties (90 states)

⁶⁴ The Rodong Sinmun, on August 12, 1966.

compared with the South (95 states) in 1976.⁶⁵ As such, the Sino-Soviet dispute during the 1960s provided a space that each country's Communist Party could seek for its own path.

Also, Kim Il Sung attended the 10th anniversary of the Bandung Conference in April 1965, and declared the four principles of the Juche idea in the conference: Juche in ideology, autonomy (*chaju*) in politics, independence (*charip*) in economy, and self-defense (*cha'ui*) in national defense. These principles of Juche were organized over a long period of time. To be specific, Juche in idea was mentioned in 1955 for the first time, although the degree of the meaning was qualitatively different. In the case of economic independence, in 1956; self-defense, in 1962; and autonomy in political affairs including diplomacy was mentioned in 1966 for the first time. In 1967, North Korea announced that Juche would be the guiding idea in policy; and in 1970, through the 5th Workers' Party Congress, DPRK adopted the Juche idea and Marx-Leninism as the Parties' official ideology. In 1980, finally, the Juche idea was defined as the only official ideology in North Korea.

Domestic Condition

In the middle of 1950s, the political groups of North Korea largely divided into the pro-USSR faction, the pro-China faction, and the anti-Japanese partisans. These factions

⁶⁵ Ko Byung Chul and Park Jae Kyu ed., *Pukhan oekyoron* (Seoul: Kyungnam Univ. Institute for Far Eastern Studies, 1977), 161.

were intensely competitive over policy initiatives. Kim Il Sung, the prime minister, was the leader of the anti-Japanese partisan group. In fact, the struggle over power in politics is natural; herein the important thing is on the matter of what is the power struggle is for. Some researchers explain that power struggles are only based on each group's desire for supremacy. In this case, however, this explanation becomes scanty because all leaders with power have the desire for power.⁶⁶ Of course there was this aspect in North Korea's political struggle. If considering the nexus of power and policy, however, it is possible to see this as the struggle over what the DPRK's socialist system will become. The "August Plenum Affair"⁶⁷ of 1956 is called as the biggest power struggle of the North. In the context this Affair took place in, we can see not only each political group's drive for power, but also policy conflicts among these groups respecting socialist reconstruction. To understand this intertwined conflict, let us examine the historical background before the Affair occurred hereafter.

Though Kim Il Sung secured the country's top political post right from liberation, this is not to say that his anti-Japanese partisan group always occupied the dominant place in the North Korean political topography. The North Korean leadership was formed by a coalition, which was comprised of the anti-Japanese partisans, the domestic communist group, the pro-Chinese, the pro-Soviet, etc. in the early years. During the

⁶⁶ Eunsung Cho, "Malsseum (Instruction) of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il and Social Integration: 1990-2000" (Thesis, University of North Korean Studies, 2008), 23.

⁶⁷ This is usually called "the August Faction Affair." Instead of this, Baek Jun Ki uses the term "the August Plenum Affair" in that the faction incident itself has a political estimation which was defined later by the winner of power struggle. As a neutral term, I follow his term choice in this thesis. Baek Jun Ki, *ibid.*, 439-440.

Korean War, the domestic communist group, such as Pak Hŏnyŏng,⁶⁸ was considerably purged. After the War, the remaining three groups competed and shared the political topography in the North. Although Kim was a chairperson continuously, the pro-Chinese/USSR groups were as influential as the Sino-Soviet power was strong. It was from 1955 that the factional conflict became serious. This was caused by mistakes generated in carrying out the economic reconstruction plan; for example, the waste of resources coming from ineffectual cadres and their inexperience. Furthermore, unrealistic plans and their excessive implementation brought about peasants and workers' dissatisfaction and socio-economic instability.⁶⁹ The USSR unofficially invited the North Korean leadership to Moscow on April 1955, and strongly recommended the fundamental revision of the First Five-Year Plan that North Korea brought; for instance, canceling the plan to construct factories with little productive potential, and increasing the investment to agriculture by redirecting these resources. On the evidence of the document of foreign policy of the Russian Federation Ministry of Foreign Affairs (ABПРФ), Baek Jun Ki introduces an anecdote to describe the North Korean situation in 1955.

⁶⁸ Pak Hŏnyŏng was a famous communist leader in the South. As the U.S. military government in Korea placed him on the wanted list, he escaped to the North in 1946 and became Vice Premier of the DPRK as the representative of the South Chosŏn Workers Party group in 1948. After the War, he was purged for the failure of "the Fatherland Liberation War" and espionage. With respect to Pak's purge, it is worth noting Suh Dong Man's analysis. China and the Soviet Union were involved in the Korean War from its programming phase. Before the War, the North Korean leadership negotiated with Stalin and Mao Zedong to gain the support for the War; it was Kim Il Sung and Pak Hŏnyŏng to lead this negotiation. The failure of the War required someone who assumes the responsibility. However, Kim was very closely connected with Stalin and Mao throughout the preparation of war. Hence Suh Dong Man explains that it was wide ranging in the case that Kim Il Sung takes responsibility for that, as a result, the South Workers Party group including Pak became a scapegoat because it was easy to deal with the matter of war responsibility in the form of separating the Soviet Union and China from the responsibility. Suh Dong Man, *ibid.*, 438.

⁶⁹ Baek Jun Ki, *ibid.*, 456.

The North Korean leadership did not invite any country except the USSR and China to its National Liberation Day Celebrations, despite the fact that the year of 1955 marked the 10th anniversary of the National Liberation. In spite of the USSR's recommendation, North Korea did not invite even the East-European countries that provided assistances to the North, in its own judgment that 'we have nothing to show' for economic accomplishment.⁷⁰

Kim Il sung began to criticize the pro-Soviet Union faction which was in control of agitprop since 1948, emphasizing ideological self-reliance on December 1955. He directly attacked Pak Ch'ang'ok , the former head of the Agitprop Department, and Pak Yŏngbin, the present head of it. To be specific, Kim pointed out that the Central Party School teaches little Korean history, that foreign literatures are much more than Korea's ones in the textbook, that the Party does not promote the history of its formation despite the fact that it has been ten years since the Party was founded, the Agitprop Department does not undertake systematic research on the Korean history and national culture, and so on.⁷¹ Also the two Paks were criticized for their mistakes in their literature work, in the Party Standing Committee on January 1956. Consequently, they were dismissed from their posts in the Party Political Committee.⁷² Since Pak Ch'ang'ok was relieved of his post as the chairperson of the National Planning Committee, he remained as Vice Premier

⁷⁰ Baek Jun Ki, *ibid.*, 459.

⁷¹ Suh Dong Man, *ibid.*, 525.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 526.

without assignment.⁷³ Pak Yǒngbin had already been dismissed as head of the Party Agitprop Department. Meanwhile, as the replacement of Pak Ch'ang'ok , Li Jong'ok, a heavy industry-firster, was appointed.

As stated above, from December 1955 to January 1956, the Kim group's power increased and thus the pro-USSR group was excluded from major posts during this period, while reaching a compromise with the pro-Chinese group. Such changes in the power relations within the Party were reflected by the list of the Party Central Committee members and candidate members, who were newly elected during the Third Party Congress held on April 23rd 1956.⁷⁴ In this Party Congress, Brezhnev who was the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union attended. He plainly demanded the modification of the DPRK's First Five-Year Plan, which also indicated the Soviet Union's dissatisfaction that the plan was made without Pak Ch'an'ok .⁷⁵ After the Congress, North Korea carried out a partial cabinet reshuffle, and Pak Ch'ang'ok was appointed the Minister of the Machine Industry, which is a core of the heavy industry-first policy.⁷⁶ Then to ask for assistance for the First Five-Year Plan, Kim Il Sung went on a long journey to visit nine nations – the USSR, East Germany, Rumania, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Albania, Poland, and Mongolia – on June 1st 1956.

⁷³ Because Pak Ch'ang'ok was a representative of the pro-USSR faction, nonetheless, he maintained his post of Vice Premier.

⁷⁴ The list of the Party Central Committee members and candidate members was published in the Rodong Sinmun on April 30th 1956. As for the number and specific list according to each political group, see *ibid.*, 550.

⁷⁵ Suh Dong Man, *ibid.*, 541.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 554.

The “August Plenum Affair” was drawn-up during Kim’s official trip abroad. As the secret report in which Khrushchev criticized Stalin’s cult-of-personality in the Party Congress on June 4th 1956 was released by the U.S. State Department,⁷⁷ the pro-Chinese/USSR faction drew strength for their justification to curb Kim Il Sung. While Kim was visiting abroad, the pro-China and pro-USSR factions had secret meetings and united under the common aim to oust Kim. According to Lee Jong Seok, Ivanov, the then-USSR Ambassador to the North, was involved in this anti-Kim association.⁷⁸ There are testimonies that the anti-Kim, pro-Chinese group planned to make Kim only serve as Premier under the collective leadership, and to have Ch’oe Ch’ang’ik as the head of the Party.⁷⁹ Kim Il Sung who was abroad as part of a delegation of the DPRK government at the time noticed this serious move and returned to the North in a hurry. How could such a secret fly overseas? Suh Dong Man suggests that the anti-Kim coalition’s plan was reported to the USSR through its Embassy allowing Kim to find out abroad.⁸⁰ According to Lankov, from late July, Ch’oe Ch’ang’ik, Yoon Gonghŭm, Pak Ch’ang’ok, Kim Seunghwa, Li Pilkyu, and so on had talked with the USSR Embassy and spoke of their plan to criticize Kim’s personality cult.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Ibid., 535.

⁷⁸ Lee Jong Seok, *Chosŏnrodongdang yŏngu* (Seoul: Yŏksabip’yŏngsa, 1995), 276. North Korea also describes that the Soviet Union incited “the factional elements” and tried to subvert the Party leadership. Sahoegwahak ch’ulp’ansa, *Chŏsonrodongdangŭi bansujŏngjuŭi toujaeng kyonghŏm*, 91-95.

⁷⁹ Ahn Sung Kyu, “Chungkuk e mangmyŏnghan yŏnahn’pa gŏmuldŭlŭi wŏnhangwa chunggyŏk jŭng’ŏn,” *The Monthly JoongAng* (May 1994), 564. These testimonies mainly include Suh Hui, Yoon Gonghŭm, Li Sangjo, and Li Pilkyu who fled to China.

⁸⁰ Suh Dong Man, *ibid.*, 557.

⁸¹ Andrei Lankov, *Soryunŭi charyolo bon pukhanhyundaechŏngchisa* (Seoul: Oreum, 1995), 208-213.

Kim Il Sung unaccountably postponed the plenum which was going to be held on August 2nd, and tried to gain hold of the situation. The plenum of the Party Central Committee was convened on August 30th. First, Kim Il Sung reported on the results of the government delegation's visit to the USSR and Eastern Europe, and then Pak Gümchöl who belonged to the Kim group made a report on the improvement of public health services, as previously planned. Afterwards, Yoon Gonghŭm, the pro-Chinese Party Central Committee member, requested an unscheduled right to speak. He criticized Kim's faults related to his personality cult. Furthermore, he charged that the building fund placed too much emphasis on heavy industry, and that Ch'oe Yonggŏn, belonging to the anti-Japanese partisan group became Vice-Chairman of the Party, among other things. The mainstream of the Party, including Ch'oe Yonggŏn, reacted strongly against it, claiming that collective leadership had always been practiced in the DPRK. Other anti-Kim members such as Ch'oe Ch'ang'ik and Suh Hui tried to continue the criticism of Kim, however, most members of the Central Committee supported Kim and criticized his opponents. As the situation flowed contrary to expectation, four people of the opposite party, such as Yoon Gonghŭm, Suh Hui, Li Pilkyu, and etc., slipped out of the room during the meeting, and fled to China on that day. The plenum continued until August 31st and adopted a decision that included the depriving Ch'oe Ch'ang'ik and Pak Ch'ang'ok their posts in the Party Central Committee and canceled the Party membership for Yoon Gonghŭm, Suh Hui, and Li Pilkyu. Ch'oe, Pak, and Yoon were also dismissed from the Cabinet.⁸² The decision recorded the contents denouncing them.

⁸² The Rodong Sinmun, September 5, 1956.

To attack the Party Central Committee unexpectedly, they brought out the anti-party discussion that they secretly completed in advance in the August Plenum of the Party Central Committee. In the case of succeeding in creating confusion and division in the Party Central Committee, they planned the conspiracy that their followers call the Party enthusiast meeting in Pyongyang, and that other followers in southern Hwanghae Province uphold that and then they all together attack the Party and Government. The basic purpose of such an anti-party conspiracy was to gain the 'hegemony' in the Party that they have always wanted.⁸³

As the pro-Chinese/USSR group's challenge to Kim failed and they were dismissed from the important posts in the Party, the Soviet Union and China sent out Mikoyan, Vice-Premier of the USSR, and Peng Dehuai, Defense Minister of China, to North Korea in September 1956. This Sino-Soviet delegation demanded the cancellation of the August Plenum decision.⁸⁴ After all, the Plenum of the Party Central Committee was held on September 23rd. Ch'oe Ch'ang'ik and Pak Ch'ang'ok, representatives of the pro-Chinese/USSR, returned to their place in the Party Central Committee; Yoon

⁸³ Suh Dong Man, *ibid.*, 562; "On the factional conspiracy of Ch'oe Ch'ang'ik, Yoon Gonghüm, Suh Hui, Li Pilkyu, Pak Ch'ang'ok, etc." -Plenum decision 1956. 8.30-31, the 1956 Plenum decision documents, Standing-Political-Organizing Committee, 12-13.

⁸⁴ According to Suh Dong Man, Mikoyan and Peng Dehuai initially thought of a plan to change Kim Il Sung to other person, just like the Soviet Union reorganized the power structure in Eastern Europe. However, after realizing that Kim's political base is stronger than they expected during their visit, they lowered their demand level. The aide-memoire of Ivanov, the Soviet Union Ambassador, shows that China also agreed with expelling Kim Il Sung from the Party. Chung Chang Hyun and Chung Tae Su, "Pyongyangjuae soryöndaesa Ivanov bimanglok yi jöghanün palwöl jongpasagönnü jönmö," *Win* (June 1997), 94-101.

Gonghŭm, Suh Hui, and Li Pilkyu regained their party membership.⁸⁵ As such, Kim Il Sung could not help but succumb to the Sino-Soviet's pressure for the time being. Yet, some anti-Kim persons' exile and the Sino-Soviet intervention weakened the domestic justification for critiques of Kim's personality cult.⁸⁶ Besides, as the Hungarian Uprising took place in October and the Sino-Soviet's concern turned that way, the support for the anti-Kim group from these two powers decreased.

Kim Il Sung started to attack the opposite party including Ch'oe Ch'ang'ik from the middle of November as "anti-party factional elements." In December, the Kim leadership also revised the First Five-Year Plan that reflected the Sino-Soviet's pressure to some extent. After 1957, the Kim leadership began a large-scale "anti-factionalist struggle," consequently, a considerable number of the pro-Chinese/USSR group were purged. In the end, the challenge of pro-Chinese and pro-Soviet group paradoxically led the anti-Japanese partisan group to occupy the core positions of power.

In other areas outside of politics, however, the conflicts between these groups continued. A good example was the conflict between scientists who had studied in the Soviet Union and those who had been trained domestically. In terms of vinalon's industrialization, there were also considerable disagreements because some people insisted on constructing nylon or acrylic factories first.⁸⁷ However, Kim Il Sung's groups supported a vinalon-first approach to achieve several political purposes. Consequently,

⁸⁵ The Rodong Sinmun, September 29, 1956.

⁸⁶ Suh Dong Man, *ibid.*, 567-568.

⁸⁷ According to Kim Tae Ho, those who argue the industrialization of nylon or acryl were criticized later for reason of advocating "aristocratic fiber." This is because while vinalon was defined as an alternative to cotton, which is "popular fiber," nylon and acryl were mainly used as alternatives to silk and wool respectively at that time. Kim Tae Ho, *ibid.*, 127.

vinalon was chosen as the first object for industrialization. In particular, vinalon's industrialization was closely related to the struggle over the themes of economic policy between Kim's group and the pro-China/USSR group. While the latter group argued for the priority of light industry, Kim Il Sung maintained the importance of parallel development of light and heavy industry. In fact, this conflict was one of the important factors that caused the sectarian strife in August 1956. Kim's group needed to have something that could demonstrate their policy was the right route.

At this time, they found vinalon's industrialization as an exemplary alternative to the others' suggestions. First of all, in its political aspects, vinalon was a great model for showing visible achievement regarding North Korea's independent development both at home and abroad. Also, in its economic aspect, vinalon was expected to improve the supply of people's clothing, as well as to contribute to the overall economic development of the country. This was because the products of vinalon's complex production-process could be used as resources with which to develop other forms of chemistry.⁸⁸ Originally, the North Korean government supported Li Seung Ki's research; however, after June 1958, *top priority* was given to the industrialization of vinalon. As the slogan "let us put everything into the construction of the Vinalon Factory" shows, all resources were preferentially committed to this construction project.

Furthermore, when North Korea established the People's Awards (*inminsang*), the first prize in the field of science was awarded to Li Seung Ki. The title of "labor hero" was also granted to Li Seung Ki, which showed that not only laborers but also scientists

⁸⁸ Kim Geun Bae, *ibid.*, 14.

could become such a hero in the socialist nation. After the completion of the February 8 Vinalon Factory, North Korea made promotional brochures for vinalon in several languages and actively distributed them abroad.⁸⁹ The point was to inform the world of their development as an independent modern state. In this manner, vinalon gave them the confidence to pursue a path of self-reliance.

With respect to economic development, in fact, North Korea worked on a belief in the international division of labor and an organic correlation with the socialist nations up to the middle of the 1950s. Even though there was the change in perception toward reinforcing its economic independence after 1956, the DPRK's independent economic policy was still based on the rational use of the socialist international division of labor. However, North Korea gradually moved in the direction to exclude the socialist international division of labor in the 1960s, pursuing a self-sustaining structure. Such a change arose in the division and conflict of the international communist movement.⁹⁰ Kim Il Sung's address in the Second Party Representative Meeting in October 1966 clearly shows the then DPRK's perception: "The current circumstances arising from the complex problems within the socialist camp require us to strengthen our independent economic base much more."⁹¹

As we have seen above, both external and internal factors interacted in North Korea's ultimate adoption of the "Juche" line in its political, economic, and ideological

⁸⁹ The brochure in English is *Vinalon* (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962).

⁹⁰ Lee Tae Sup, *Kim Il Sung leadership yǒngu* (Seoul: deulnyeok, 2001), 292-294.

⁹¹ Kim Il Sung, "Hyǒn jǒngsewa uri dangŭi gwaǒp" (1966. 10. 5), *Kim Il Sung Selected Works 4* (1964.1-1967.12) (Pyongyang: Chosǒn Rodongdang Ch'ulp'ansa, 1969), 360.

structures. Science was a realm that contributed to the process as well as being influenced by it.

AFFINITY BETWEEN SOCIALISM AND NATIONALISM

Socialism and nationalism, at first glance, seem to be conflicting discourses in that they connote internationalism and making boundaries, respectively. In North Korea, however, these different discourses were fused into nationalist socialism, which took place amid the process of building the modern state in the post-colonial era. In theory, socialism and nationalism have a common ground in that both emerged based on modernity. These two isms in North Korea are core values that the North Korean political power uses to legitimize itself and wins people's support. The DPRK was well aware of the power shared by the languages of socialism and nationalism and took advantage of it by combining these two.

In the following section, I will illustrate how the theme of modernity and science was used, in relation to socialism and nationalism. Next, I will describe the common background of the times that could not but combine socialism and nationalism, and then trace the origin of nationalist socialism in North Korea historically.

Modernity and Science

What is modernity? When talking about the change to the modern times in Western history, one thing that is often mentioned is the scientific revolution in the seventeenth century. The project of modernity is backed up by a few key elements; one of them is scientific discourse as “objective science.” The development of science brought material affluence, emancipated people from simple labor, and in the philosophical context it gave people the confidence that we can reconstruct nature. Such an excessive confidence ultimately leads to the belief that humanity is able to transform itself, as constituted by society as well as nature.

Some people might consider socialism an old and even feudal social system; however, the idea of socialism stems from modern thought. Modern industrial societies can be divided into capitalist and socialist categories. In particular, socialism shows the height of belief in human reason because it assumes that human beings designed all society. That is, socialism saw that it is possible to produce human beings appropriate for the ideals of socialist society through education, etc., based upon the premise that humans are altruistic in nature. In this vein, some say socialism stemmed from a search for alternatives to overcome the ills of capitalism as “the greatest human project.”

Socialism, an invention of modernity, argues for a history based on the scientific developmental trajectory: from primitive communal society, to ancient slavery, to medieval feudalism, to modern capitalistic society, to socialist society, and finally to communist society. Therefore, socialist ideology explains that socialism is the result of historical progress. Out of this ideology as an imperative (or an oughtness), North Korea formalized their own version of “scientific socialism.” The term “scientific socialism,”

however, does not mean socialism supported by science and technology, which implies that the necessity and superiority of socialism was explained in the “scientificness.”⁹² Nonetheless, there were traditions in which actual socialist countries since Lenin put an emphasis on the development of science in order to catch up with capitalistic economies. North Korea had also vigorously pushed forward the development of science and technology since the founding of the country. In particular, as the Juche discourse spread out based on the industrial production of vinalon, North Korea transformed the interpretation of scientific socialism. That is, for North Korea, what was self-reliant became both more socialist and also more scientific.⁹³ In this vein, the Juche idea was glorified as the most scientific idea in North Korea.

Nationalism, as non-specific to North Korea, also has science as the representation of rationality at its core.⁹⁴ A key change from the medieval times to the modern times is that a God-centered society has changed into a human-centered society. This means that reason, namely rationality, has nominally become a core concept of the current modern age.⁹⁵ Also, man-made science and technology play a vital role in industrialization and

⁹² Scientific socialism is the term used by Friedrich Engels to describe the social-political-economic theory first pioneered by Karl Marx. The purported reason why this socialism is “scientific socialism” (as opposed to “utopian socialism”) is because its theories are held to an empirical standard, observations are essential to its development, and these can result in changes/falsification of elements of theory. Although Marx denounced utopian socialism, he never referred to his own ideas as “scientific socialism.” “Wikipedia,” accessed May 10, 2011, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scientific_Socialism

⁹³ Kim Geun Bae, *ibid.*, 22.

⁹⁴ It is hard for me to agree that nationalism is just the product of modernity. However, in this paper, I will limit the definition of nationalism to the western nationalism which has the “certainty” of science and reason. This is because, after experiencing the age of imperialism, conceptions based on western values began framing the current social structure on the macro-level.

⁹⁵ Of course, the reality is different. Particularly, 20th century history shows barbarism such as genocide.

capitalism. These are other constituents of modernity.⁹⁶ In this manner, socialism and nationalism have the common characteristics of a belief in and desire for progress, which committed them to the development of science.

In addition, it is noteworthy that Jeon Mi Yeong analyzed socialism and nationalism in North Korea with the concept of “credenda” and “miranda,” as defined by Charles E. Merriam. Credenda means the symbol of rationalization to appeal to human reason. Thus this is the device of logical persuasion that makes people have the belief in the power’s legitimacy and rationality. Miranda signifies the symbol of sensibility, which indicates situations in which the ruled sanctify political power and emotionally admire it. Jeon Mi Yeong explains that socialism in the North implies the trust in power, which functions as credenda, justifying North Korea’s policies and means of exercising power.⁹⁷ Also she argues that nationalism in North Korea serves as “miranda,” i.e. the glorification of power. As a result, these two dominant discourses have played a role in supporting the power of the Kim Il Sung leadership.

To conclude, socialism and nationalism in the North fulfilled the function of “what is trusted” and “what is glorified,” imbued with the nature of modernity and science.

⁹⁶ According to Giddens, modernity produces certain social forms, of which the most prominent is the nation-state. Giddens, *ibid.*, 15. Nationalism is also used as the most effective ideology in establishing a nation-state and integrating a society.

⁹⁷ Jeon Mi Yeong, “The Dominant Discourse of North Korea: Socialism and Nationalism,” *Hankukchŏngchihakhoebo*, vol. 35 no. 1, 240.

The Origin of Nationalist Socialism

The cognitive matrix combining socialism with nationalism in North Korea is based on the experience of Japanese colonialism. In general, the national liberation movement in the Third World under colonial rule had a tendency to reject capitalism by highlighting the imperialistic aspect as a central tenet of capitalism. Hence, in many cases nationalism was identified with socialism. Likewise, the mainstream of national liberation movement groups in Chosŏn, a Japanese colony, was fascinated with socialist ideas. This naturally led socialism and nationalism to be merged together under the objective for national liberation. That is, socialism and nationalism had a common background as the liberation from capital's violent overseas expansion and imperialism.

However, because Marxist theory considers socialism and nationalism to be conflicting, North Koreans also could not speak about nationalism in public. According to Marx's teleological progress in history, communism, the highest stage of the evolutionary process, dissipates all differences between classes and between nations. For Marx, because the nation is just a product of capitalism, he linked the nation's dissipation to the collapse of capitalism. This can be seen as denying the national (*minjok*) body itself, which is the base of nationalism. Thus, North Korea expressed nationalism in other words, "socialist patriotism," and justified the combination of socialism and nationalism through the concept of "national form and socialist content." This phrase was suggested by Lenin first.

In contrast with Marx and Engels, Lenin was concerned about the national question. This is because there was a realistic need to solve the theoretical conflict, especially considering Third World socialism, which was strongly associated with nationalism. With regard to national policy, Lenin thought that Marx-Leninism as “science” could combine each nation’s different national forms, although it guaranteed national cultural development.⁹⁸ The reason Lenin could suggest the dialectic relationship between nationalism and proletarian internationalism lies in the fact that he lived in an era of imperialism. Hence, he discerned that the nation is highly stable and nationalism is politically useful. During Marx’s living years, imperialism did not reveal its mode of operation. Owing to the limit of the times, Marx lacked a complete understanding of imperialism. In other words, it can be said that Lenin was the first builder that established a state based on socialism in reality, whereas Marx was a planner who provided the socialist theory.

Now let us examine the origin of nationalist socialism in the North Korean context. To understand North Korea’s nationalist socialism, we need to mention “the Minsaengdan (People’s Livelihood Corps) Incident” that the anti-Japanese guerrilla associated with Kim Il Sung experienced in Eastern Manchuria in the 1930s. In this incident, many Chosŏn communists who struggled against Japanese colonialism with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in Eastern Manchuria were massacred by the Chinese on suspicion that Chosŏn communists might be spies for Japan. Why did the CCP wildly

⁹⁸ With regard to the Soviet Union’s national policy, refer to Suh Kyu Hwan and Lee Wan Jong, “Socialism and National Question,” *Slav yŏngu*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (Institute of Russian Studies, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, 2007): 1-29.

doubt the Korean communists who were fighting together and commit this random massacre?

The question has its roots in the early 1930s. Japan invaded Manchuria in 1931 and established a puppet regime, Manchukuo (*manjukuk* in Korean) in 1932. Manchuria designates the northeast area of China, and north of the Tuman River has been called Kando. Kando officially belongs to China, however, more than three quarters of the entire population were Koreans. In the guerilla bases in Eastern Manchuria, the Koreans composed more than 95 percent of the population.⁹⁹ The proportion of the Korean party member in the Eastern Manchuria Special Committee (*dongmanteukŭi*), the branch of the CCP in Kando, was more than 90 percent. In the 1920s, the Chinese communists and the Korean communists in Manchuria fought against Japanese colonialism individually. After the Comintern's "December Theses" of 1928 called for the creation of one party in each country, however, the Korean communist guerilla group was organizationally absorbed into the Chinese Communist Party.¹⁰⁰ For the purposes of exterminating the anti-Japanese guerillas in Eastern Manchuria (or Eastern Kando) and of stirring up divisions in the China-Korean communist United Front, Japan established a pro-Japanese organization named the Minsaengdan, and enlisted the converted Chosŏn communists in it. Yet the organization was active just for five months and was dissolved three months after that. One of the reasons for the dissolution was that the Minsaengdan's slogan as "Koreans' self-government in Kando" provoked the strong Chinese opposition. As Han

⁹⁹ Han Hongkoo, "Wounded Nationalism: The Minsaengdan Incident and Kim Il Sung in Eastern Manchuria" (Ph.D. diss., University of Washinton, 1999), 14.

¹⁰⁰ Charles Armstrong, *The North Korean Revolution, 1945-1950* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 25.

pointed out, the Minsaengdan Incident's causes were so complicated that a single factor cannot explain its origins.¹⁰¹

However, it is quite clear that the problem began with doubts of the members of the CCP that the Korean communists were secretly connected to the Minsaengdan. According to Han Hongkoo, when the Minsaengdan suggested a slogan of the Koreans' autonomy in Kando, the Chinese communists recognized this as a crisis of division of China. This is because it was considered an attempt to separate Kando from China and to amalgamate into Chosŏn. In its geographic, economic, and cultural aspects, Kando was closer to Chosŏn than China. Kando was also historically an object of territorial dispute between China and Chosŏn. Particularly, because absolute majority of the bases for revolution in this region was the Korean, these bases were called the Korean Soviet. The CCP leadership saw this phenomenon as evidence that Koreans responded to the Minsaengdan's slogan of the autonomy in Kando.¹⁰² If we consider Japan's other aim to stir up the ethnic feuds between the Chinese and the Koreans, the organization of the Minsaengdan was successful from the Japanese point of view. Han's article contains many cases explaining how many Korean communists were victimized in the name of ridiculous suspicions; for example, in the cases of spilling some rice (wasting hard-gotten food), of sighing in front of other people (promoting anxiety about the future of revolution), and even of saying that "I miss my home" (stimulating one's nationalism and homesickness), etc., they were arrested as Minsaengdan. All those arrested on suspicion

¹⁰¹ Han Hongkoo, *ibid.*, 152.

¹⁰² Han Hongkoo, "Babŭl hŭryŏdo jugyŏtda," *Hankyoreh* 21, no. 399.

of being Minsaengdan were ethnic Koreans, and some five hundred were executed.¹⁰³ Kim Il Sung was also arrested as a Minsaengdan suspect. As some Chinese communists who were close with Kim guaranteed his innocence, however, Kim narrowly escaped death. With respect to the influence of the Minsaengdan Incident, Han Hongkoo clearly states as follows:

The Minsaengdan Incident is important in itself because it illuminates important aspects of the Korean communist movement in Manchuria, the nature of the communist purges, the collective madness admists the revolutionary process, and the conflicting relationship between communism and nationalism. However, the greatest significance in studying the MSD Incident lies in its long-lasting influence on north Korea and its "Great Leader" Kim Il Sung.¹⁰⁴

For instance, later on Kim Il Sung formulated his own version of proletarian internationalism: "Patriotism and internationalism are inseparable. He who does not love one's own country cannot be loyal to internationalism, and he who is unfaithful to internationalism cannot be faithful to his own country and people. A true patriot is precisely an internationalist and vice versa."¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Han Hongkoo, "Wounded Nationalism: The Minsaengdan Incident and Kim Il Sung in Eastern Manchuria," 347. The number of victims due to the purge of the Minsaengdan is estimated to be at least 500 people maximum 2000 people. Meanwhile, Han also describes that one of the major factors that led to the Minsaengdan Incident was the blind belief in the myth of the infallibility of the party. Ibid., 361.

¹⁰⁴ Han Hongkoo, *ibid.*, 19.

¹⁰⁵ Han Hongkoo, *ibid.*, 356-357; Kim Il Sung, "On eliminating dogmatism and formalism and establishing Juche in ideological work," *Kim Il Sung Works* 9.

The purge of the Minsaengdan which began at the end of 1932 stopped in the early 1936. Kim Il Sung reported this Incident in his memoir: “There is a report that the number of the Minsaengdan was about seven to eight in the documents of enemies. That is, the campaign for purging the Minsaengdan massacred about two thousand people in one’s side, just in order to track down seven to eight. This was a uncommon tragedy that cannot find a precedent in the history of the world communist movement.”¹⁰⁶ The documents of the then-Chinese Communist Party and Japanese colonialists admit the fact that the number of the Korean revolutionary victims due to the purge of the Minsaengdan exceeded the number of those who were victimized by the Japanese brutal punitive expedition.

This tragic incident was traumatic for Chosŏn communists in Manchuria, and became a painful collective memory as “wounded nationalism” at the bottom of their hearts. When they grasped political power in North Korea, that memory exerted a strong influence on them in shaping the topography of the DPRK. Taking all these factors into account, the experience as a colony under Japanese imperialism, the Minsaengdan Incident, and the national division into the North and South were fetishised to drive the North Korean pursuit of nationalist socialism.

¹⁰⁶ Kim Il Sung, *With the Century*, vol. 4, 10 ch’ang 2 jŏl, see Dahuangwei esŏŭi nonchaeng.

Conclusion: Desire for a Modern Nation-State

This paper examined vinalon as a figuration between science and society, especially in the aspects of the postcolonial, independent nation-state-building project, political struggles, and theoretical affinity between socialism and nationalism. Vinalon, as a concretized symbol of Juche, functioned as an important source of momentum in constructing North Korea's national identity. In other words, Juche socialism that combined socialism and nationalism was mediated through the scientific discourse which is represented by the success of vinalon. Because of vinalon's symbolic importance, North Korea became the only country in the world in which the PVA fiber constitutes the majority of synthetic fibers. This shows that North Korea, which suffers from a lack of resources and technology, entrenched itself in the increased production of vinalon, instead of the development of other synthetic fibers. At the same time, this demonstrates great pride that North Korea has in vinalon.¹⁰⁷

After the success of vinalon's industrial production, North Korea exported vinalon technology to the Soviet Union, Mongolia, etc. In the late 1980s, North Korea constructed a new Vinalon Complex which produces 100,000 tons a year. Despite high production volumes and great political importance, the economic value of vinalon remains low for two reasons. First, the production method of vinalon relies on high consumption of electric power from coal. As the center of the world chemistry industry

¹⁰⁷ Kim Tae Ho, *ibid.*, 127.

moved from Europe, which focused on coal chemistry, to America, which concentrated on petro-chemistry, vinalon's economic value was hit hard. Accordingly, vinalon lost its competitiveness relative to nylon.¹⁰⁸ That is, it was more economical to import other synthetic fiber, rather than produce vinalon. Second, North Korea suffered from a serious electric power shortage in the early 1990s; in the end, they stopped the operation of the factory in 1994 when Kim Il Sung died.

The symbolic meaning vinalon has in North Korea, however, has not subsided at all. As an example of this, from February 2010, the reactivation of the February 8 Vinalon Complex was widely reported in the North Korean press.¹⁰⁹ Kim Jong Il even attended a mass rally in Hamhŭng city to celebrate this reactivation after a 16-year hiatus. This was an unusual occurrence because it was the first time for Kim Jong Il to attend a mass meeting related to economy. North Korea has long publicized the year 2012, which is the centenary of Kim Il Sung's birth, as well as the centennial of Juche, as year North Korea will enter into "a powerful and prosperous nation" (*kangsungdaekuk*). In advance

¹⁰⁸ Nonetheless, Kim Il Sung argued that North Korea should stick to a vinalon-centered policy. "It may be cheaper and faster to produce the synthetic fiber using petro-chemistry by developing the industry of petro-chemistry. But, constructing industries dependent on other countries' raw materials is the same as having others grab you by the collar. Given the condition that our country has no raw oil, if we lean toward petro-chemistry, it can be a problem. Thus our scientific study should proceed in the direction of developing self-reliant industry." kim Il Sung, "Strengthening the development of Juche science," *Kim Il Sung Works* 27 (1972.1 - 1972. 12) (Pyongyang: Chosŏn Rodongdang Ch'ulp'ansa, 1984), 568. Originally, vinalon has the disadvantage that dyeing is not very good for it, although vinalon is light and tough. For these reasons, the PVA fiber has been mainly used for the working clothes regarding industry, rather than for the general clothes in other countries except North Korea. In the North, there are many products made from vinalon, such as blanket, scarf, etc.

¹⁰⁹ In the same context of the vinalon factory, the reactivation of the Hwanghae Steel Complex (The Hwanghae Steel Factory's future being) was widely reported through the coverage of Kim Jong Il's field guide on February 2010. As such, the fact that these two emblematic factories' reactivation took place in the same period implies that these events are situated in relation to a big picture of North Korean government.

of next year, the implication of vinalon's reproduction returns to the matter of identity.

This is because vinalon itself represents the Juche on which North Korea is based.



Figure 5: <The left> Vinalon threads and vinalon cloths. Source: *Chosŏn* (July 2011) © Chosŏnhwabosa. <The right> A variety of products made from vinalon, such as blanket (top), cloth for the suit (middle), and scarf (the bottom) are selling in the Pyongyang First department store. (January 14 2012) © The Choson Sinbo.

Meanwhile, *Kangsungdaekuk* is a North Korean political slogan that began to be used in 1998. This slogan's meaning is the construction of economy through the power of ideology and military force. On August 22, 1998, through *Rodong Sinmun* which is an organ of the Workers' Party, North Korea first presented this slogan. The discourse of *Kangsungdaekuk* is closely intertwined with the idea of *Songun* (army-first), and also the Juche idea and Songun idea have an inseparable relationship. Vinalon and nuclear

weapons are the symbols to penetrate Juche and Songun respectively. In a manner of speaking, it seems that vinalon and nuclear weapons exist in the same category.¹¹⁰ In other words, these two may be Siamese twins which were created by North Korea's desires for approval as a modern state (normal state) and towards their development.

¹¹⁰ Interestingly, Li Seung Ki was the first head of the Institute of Atomic Energy Research in Yŏngbyon, which was built in 1962. According to Abraham, after the massive destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the Second World War, "the atom was universally taken to be the primary symbol of the new era, the so-called *atomic age*." Thus "the atomic energy had a particular presence around representations of the state and nation, reflecting its origins in the modern meeting of science and war." Itty Abraham, *The Making of the Indian Atomic Bomb* (New Delhi: Orient Longman Limited, 1999), 6-7.

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