

LANGUAGE and TRUTH in NORTH KOREA



SONIA RYANG

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Sonia Ryang



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Acknowledgments

Writing books is a privilege, one that I often wonder whether I truly deserve, even after having written and published multiple volumes. Although writing itself can be a burden, the opportunity that it provides me, as an author, to express myself—and not simply my mental contemplations, but the material part of me as well—is a privilege that is, in my view, unsurpassed by anything else, save for motherhood. For this book, I am once again haunted by the familiar question of whether or not I have put all of my soul into its creation.

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During the period when I was writing this book, I lost my mother, who lived to the age of eighty-five and passed away, strange as it may sound, happily and calmly, in February 2019. She was my primordial role model, having provided our family not only with maternal love, but also material security,

working long hours in an environment in which not only ethnic but also gender discrimination prevented Korean women in Japan from achieving their full potential. My mother worked to provide for our family so that her three daughters would not have to engage in manual labor, as she had done. She was the embodiment of the immigrant resilience, a remarkable and graceful woman who never forgot joy and fun, even in the most difficult of times. My mother supported my work in more ways than one, steadfastly believing in me throughout her life. None of my achievements would have been possible without her lifelong support for my endeavors. I dedicate this book to her.

Needless to say, I take responsibility for any errors that may exist in this book.

**LANGUAGE AND TRUTH
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INTRODUCTION

Truth

Overture

Following the intervention by Michel Foucault that began in the mid-twentieth century, one no longer looks innocently at that which presents itself as truth. Far from being natural or objective, we now know that truth requires the regime that projects and supports it. The process involved in the emergence of truth—one that is ongoing and often quiet and imperceptible—may take many decades, or even centuries. All the while, the regime, engaged in the task of building the parameters of its own claims, works on its language. For language plays a key role in creating and sustaining a certain understanding of events or reasoning as true and given. In order to understand the mechanism involved in such claims and their acceptance by society, one needs to peel off, one by one, the layers—layers that are sometimes thick and often fused together—built on or around the dominant discourse that sustains this mechanism. This process, which might be described as an exfoliation of the regime of truth, is demonstrated in Foucault's opus on the emergence of madness and the penal system (Foucault 1965; Foucault 1995).

Such an exfoliation, as it were, cannot be performed by simply identifying what kind of laws were proclaimed, as detailed guidelines, instructions, and recommendations often accompany such proclamations, together working to generate a complex system in which truth becomes authoritative knowledge and dominant practice, particularly linguistic practice. This can be seen, for example, in the dominance of psychiatric or psychological discourse in our everyday lives today. It can also be found in our complicit reliance on the methods used by the state to police and count its population, methods which exert a significant influence on judgments related to life or death, in turn indissolubly connecting biological life with political decisions, as in biopolitics

(Foucault 2006; Foucault 2008). We may question psychiatry or state surveillance, yet the legitimacy and legality of these institutions render it quite easy for us to carry on our lives as usual, visiting psychiatrists or psychologists, even though we may question isolated diagnoses from experts, while accepting that CCTV cameras are everywhere, even though we know that what is supposed to secure our safety can at any time be turned against us, invading our private lives. Furthermore, when conversing with our psychologist, we start sounding like the psychologist herself, repeating drug names and descriptions of symptoms—as if to confirm the successful penetration of this regime of truth in our lives by echoing its language, that is to say, turning this language into the language of truth. And, while being bothered by an airport security check, we are made to feel thankful when a potential terrorist threat has been curtailed in advance thanks precisely to such security measures. The fact that we may be critical or aware of the shortcomings and potential harms of these institutions, yet we accept them as necessary and even helpful, reminds us of the enormous power these (and other state-created and state-sanctioned) institutions have upon us in forming our understanding of the truth around us.

Following Foucault, we may assume that the regime of truth stands on power, power that is not simply oppressive or violent, but highly productive and innovative, power that creates new humans and new forms of life, and power that turns the proclamation of a law or even its enactment into a social norm that soaks into the threads of the fabric of everyday life in such a way that people make clothing out of it and wear it without always thinking about the origins of such threads. It would be safe to say that in modern history, the ultimate unit of such power has come to coincide with the nation-state that encases national sovereignty. And if so, the national language and the way the world comes to be understood in such a language become our utmost concern when thinking about sovereign power and the truth it projects. It is on the basis of these grounds that I embark upon an exploration of truth in North Korea.

In thinking about truth in North Korea—in the sense of that which is seen as and sustained to be as such—we are given a set of very obvious points from which to start. The current Supreme Leader, Kim Jong Un, is held in the utmost reverence, credited not only with the nation's success and prosperity, but also with the happiness and well-being of the North Korean people, and, more recently, with the state's increasingly visible international standing, as was seen in the series of contacts between North Korea and the US as well as between North Korea and South Korea in 2018. A quick glance at any

recent edition of *Rodongsinmun*, the official news organ of the ruling Workers' Party of Korea, would provide us with sufficient evidence. Now in its third consecutive generation, the news articles would tell you that the nation's leadership lineage is as comprehensively and metaphorically enshrined as Mount Baekdu itself, the sacred mountain associated with the origins of the greatness displayed by these three generations of leaders. Kim Jong Il, Kim Jong Un's father, is said to have been born deep inside the mountain, despite the existence of empirical evidence showing that he was born in the Soviet Union in 1942. Before that, Kim Il Sung, the originator of this lineage, is said to have waged anti-Japanese guerrilla resistance on this mountain, although it is known that the activities of his armed band were centered on the region to the northeast of the mountain, in eastern Manchuria. The North Korean almanac has been altered so that 1912, the year of Kim Il Sung's birth, is counted as Year One of the era known as *Juche*, the term used to refer to the idea that embodies the philosophical and ideological core of the North Korean revolution created by Kim Il Sung. This unprecedented continuity of tri-generational rule in a socialist nation has intrigued observers, not least due to the sheer longevity of the dynasty (e.g., Kwon and Chung 2012; see section 4 of this introduction below).

The sustainability of truth in North Korea is most clearly witnessed in the use of language. The ubiquitous phrase "thanks to the Great Leader," used when referring to any positive aspect of life, from flowers blossoming in the spring to the beauty of white snow in the winter, from abundant sunshine in the summer to the changing colors of leaves in the autumn, corresponds to a recitation which praises the Great Leader and expresses gratitude to him for his endless love for the people. It is thanks to the Great Leader that North Koreans live happily, and it would be under his guidance that North Korea defeats American imperialism and ultimately achieves victory—as repeated references in the national discourse would have it. The consistency and regularity with which praise is shown and pledges of loyalty made toward the Great Leader in North Korea can be widely recognized in the fine and performing arts, in textbooks, on billboard slogans, in policies, in the media and mass communication in general, and also on the chests of all citizens in the form of pin-size portraits of the Great Leader. The outpouring of emotion displayed by the masses upon the deaths of Kim Il Sung (in 1994) and Kim Jong Il (in 2011) left a lasting impression on those who viewed the images carried by media outlets around the world. Meanwhile, the "million-people-moving-as-one" mass-game performances, as well as the military parades featuring

slogans such as *gyeolsaongwi* (“defense through martyrdom”)—carrying the message that North Koreans are willing to risk their own lives to protect their Leader—attest to the extent of the linguistic embodiment of loyalty and devotion—or such is the case, according to this regime of truth (e.g., Kim 2010). In this picture, what we see is an infinite proximity between representation, the core of which is performed by the national language, and what we may call national truth. This book is an attempt to unpack the mechanism that sustains the national truth of North Korea.

Dominant Discourse in North Korea

In approaching North Korean truth and its language, rather than framing such truth as the product of indoctrination, and therefore, oppression, and instead of denouncing it as a policy to deceive and brainwash the nation’s citizens, I would like to follow what Foucault does in *Psychiatric Power* (2006) and *On the Government of the Living* (2014). In these works, Foucault resists applying the term *ideology* and the theory that pertains to it *a priori*, instead examining the micro-techniques that are used as tools to consolidate knowledge in the form of truth. To do so is also to attend to power. He asks:

How is it that, in our type of society, power cannot be exercised without truth having to manifest itself, and manifest itself in the form of subjectivity [. . . that goes] beyond the realm of knowledge, effects that belong to the realm of the salvation and deliverance of each and all? (2014: 75)

Let us read the above passage alongside a further statement by Foucault referring to truth generated in the psychiatric asylum:

. . . we should talk of an asylum tautology, in the sense that, through the asylum apparatus itself, the doctor is given a number of instruments whose basic function is to impose reality, to intensify it, and add to it the supplement of power that will enable the doctor to get a grip on madness and reduce it, and therefore, to direct and govern it. (2006: 165)

Here, truth is not simply evidence or scientific knowledge. It is inseparable from power and, as such, it links the subject to it, not as an objective student of it, but as an emotional and sometimes visceral responder to it, or even as a participant in its materialization. Such a relationship between power and subjects in turn (and not necessarily in terms of causality, but more in terms

of a correlation) necessitates the governing mechanism of truth, for this is an inseparable partner to power—power is most effective when it is accompanied by efficacious truth, and vice versa. Truth about the Great Leader and truth offered by the Great Leader work to incorporate citizens into socio-cultural and historical conditions whereby statements are uttered as truth and citizens become subjects bearing this truth, subjecting themselves to the power of this truth. And such practices need to be governed; that is to say, there has to be a mechanism and institutions that generate and maintain an art of governing.

I stress that I am not delving into the realm of ideology right away. Rather, my strategy is to take a detour, capturing this relationship between subject and truth more in the sense of a form of life than as an effect of the dominant ideology—the latter would entail the channeling of our focus toward the state apparatus and other forms of top-down structure, which I am deliberately leaving out for now (e.g., Althusser 1971). Instead, my focus remains with the tools and the mechanisms, the processes and the series of phenomena that have been created and manifested in generating this regime of truth. This does not mean that, as an antidote, we can simply ask North Koreans whether they believe all that the state says since such an approach would constitute an uncritical aggregation of selective data and present it as something that people really believe. As such, this approach also relies on the categorical existence of dominant ideology and its effect without further ado. Rather than asking whether North Koreans believe a certain version of truth or not, I ask how and according to what mechanisms and tools North Koreans participate in sustaining this truth, thereby submitting to this truth regime. Many such tools do come from the governmental sources, the close examination of which, as shown in this volume, would reveal inconsistencies and internal contradictions—far from being a seamless dominant ideology of the state.

As in any other society, including our own, truth is multiple in North Korea, and I wish to be very clear about this. For, more often than not, when scholars, as well as journalists and politicians, talk about North Korea, we tend to adopt a monolithic perspective, presuming the existence of “the truth” in that society—that is to say, truth that is created by the Great Leader as well as the entire apparatus that sustains such truth. Even when dismissing North Korean propaganda, authors end up recycling the notion of the monolithic state, thereby ultimately reinforcing its existence (see Schmid 2018: 16–17). Alternatively, when defector recollections are assessed, we are more often than not given the polar opposite of this version: that people are aware of how deceptive the state is, that they want to leave, and that they resist the regime

through the use of double-talk, in the sense that they say one thing but what they really mean is another (e.g., Fahy 2015). It is perhaps the case that people live one truth in the workplace, at school, and at self-criticism sessions, or during mass rallies or periods of heightened public indignation toward the imperialist American “wolves,” for example. But it will serve us well to remember that people live different kinds of truths: even in North Korea, empirical science exists, sexual knowledge exists, and proverbial and habitual knowledge of life exists. In this book, however, my concern is to look at the regime of dominant truth in North Korea. I am not, moreover, attempting to reveal or expose what is hidden behind this truth. Instead, I shall complicate the notion of truth as it is sustained currently in North Korea by peeling off some of the layers that cover the logic behind it and trying to demonstrate that what is often labeled as propaganda in North Korea is truth—a certain kind of truth, more precisely speaking—and that this version of truth is, in fact, complex, inconsistent, and multi-dimensional, yet still capable of being very efficacious.

I say this without insinuating any conflicting relationship between these multiple regimes of truth. That is to say that North Koreans, in common with people everywhere, are comfortable with, skilled at, or perhaps unconsciously willing (contradiction intended) to submit to lives that straddle more than one set of truths. Thus, in North Korea, mathematics and experimental science exist alongside fallacious praise of the Leader without this resulting in chaos. While the nation has succeeded in developing advanced nuclear weapons technology, official publications refer with the utmost deference to magical miracles performed by its Leaders, such as the famous claim that Kim Jong Il scored five holes-in-one the very first time that he played golf. Meanwhile, in the United States, we have the world’s most advanced scientific apparatus, credible research institutions, competent researchers, and students of theoretical physics—a field that harbors no doubt whatsoever concerning the material origins of the universe. Yet, in this very same society, we also have a cohort of individuals that unreservedly rejects this type of thesis, insisting that the universe was created in a day by one deity. Our society includes both natural and social scientists who can attest to the fact that race is, in no sense, a marker of superiority or inferiority. At the same time, however, we have sections of people who adamantly reject such an argument, insisting on the superiority of one race over another. One can argue that the perspective of one group is grounded in fact, while that of the other is derived from ideology. Such an argument, however, falls apart when one is presented with the subject of a certain regime of truth. For, within that regime, truth is truth is truth . . .

If we remind ourselves of what Emile Durkheim proposes in his opus on religion, the act of speaking the language of truth in North Korea becomes more understandable. Durkheim recognizes that religion is necessarily a collective phenomenon, and that the study of it is built upon the radical duality between the sacred and the profane (Durkheim 1915: 38–39). It is in rituals and ceremonial occasions that this separation becomes most pronounced (Durkheim 1915: 306). This resonates with what William Robertson Smith presupposes in relation to the connection between ritual and belief: that the primary issue regarding religion is not so much whether people believe in it, but the notion that they should not neglect the ritual actions that their religion prescribes (Robertson Smith 2002). In terms of day-to-day living, the knowledge of how to perform proper ritual actions takes precedence over what to believe. In North Korea, the use of proper language on the appropriate occasion bears a strong semblance to ritual. The knowledge behind the ritual-like use of formulaic language and the performance of this knowledge, together, work to strengthen the regime of truth.

The ritualistic knowledge of formulaic language necessarily stands hand in hand with power. I will elaborate further using an example. At home in North Korea, children may fight over the amount of candy each of them has received, and their parents may scold them. On public transportation, female middle school students may begin picking on an obese man, laughing at his appearance, displeasing some of the other adult passengers. The Great Leader's truth may not interfere in such instances, but nor is it canceled out either. The parents may or may not scold their children, holding up the Great Leader's childhood as a model to aspire to. Similarly, the adult passengers on the bus may or may not admonish the girls, calling on them to behave in accordance with the Great Leader's expectations of students. If further pressed, these parents and adults would readily state, using the language of the Great Leader's truth, that the children were being selfish, that they lacked appreciation of what a wonderful society they lived in thanks to the Great Leader, and that the students were being discourteous by paying attention to attributes that had nothing to do with the revolutionary goals of the nation. There is no way of telling how likely it might be in a given situation for North Koreans to refer to the Great Leader and with what degree of reverence. What one can be reasonably certain about, however, is that North Koreans are aware that the correct use of the correct language (with references to "proper" objects, such as the Great Leader) would locate their statements within the territory of truth and that they are equipped with such linguistic tools. And, by activating this

knowledge, that is to say, by reproducing the North Korean dominant discourse, their discursive actions would conform to the truth projected and produced by power. Thus, the speaking subject submits to power by upholding the truth that it projects—and this happens through language. It is this connection between language and truth in North Korea that this book tries to address.

Anthropology as Method

In this book, the method that I adopt when approaching North Korea is one that is grounded in anthropology and, perhaps more importantly, its critical use. The reader might ask: how could one carry out an anthropological study of North Korea if one were not able to conduct long-term or even short-term ethnographic fieldwork on site? I have addressed similar issues in my previous publication on North Korea, *Reading North Korea: An Ethnological Inquiry* (Ryang 2012), which was my first major attempt to produce an ethnological reading of North Korea through an exploration of novels published in the 1970s and 1980s. In that work, I asserted, it should be possible to achieve an ethnological (*not* ethnographic) interpretation of a society using literature as ethnological data. Needless to say, my own training as a social anthropologist has a lot to do with the direction that I have taken. In this book, I shall further develop my use of such an approach.

When thinking about this issue, shifting our timeframe back about seventy years may offer us an interesting point of reference, one which I also briefly touch upon in my 2012 book. Facing the need to research the culture of Japan during World War II, when access to Japan as an ethnographic field site was not available, Columbia University anthropologist Ruth Benedict adopted an approach predominantly based on an examination of secondary literature, notably history books and autobiographical works. She interviewed Japanese individuals as well as US citizens of Japanese heritage who were interned in camps during World War II, but this represented only a minuscule part of her research. The assignment that had been given to her by the Office of War Information was to produce research that would enable Americans to understand the fundamental cultural logic of Japan, their wartime enemy. This research culminated in Benedict's *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (Benedict 1946).

Her work was heavily immersed in the method used by the Culture and Personality School, which was led by the founding father of Columbia

University's anthropology program, Franz Boas, and whose famous students included Benedict's long-term colleague, Margaret Mead. The fundamental premise of this school was that each culture contained its own representative logic, set of practices, and cosmology that formed the core of that given culture and produced discernible patterns, patterns which would then produce a personality type unique to that culture. Knowledge of the personality type, according to this reasoning, would permit one to understand how a mind created by that culture would work. According to this method, therefore, a typical personality associated with a discrete culture could ultimately be defined.

The unthinkable *kamikaze* attacks on Pearl Harbor led to heated debate involving scholars of diverse disciplinary backgrounds as US authorities struggled to grasp the logic behind the Japanese behavior, something never before witnessed: suicide pilots flying in decrepit airplanes with only enough fuel for one-way journeys. Understandably, debate concerning the extreme behavior of Japanese soldiers had taken on a strongly speculative nature of a psycho-pathological inclination, including the theory that the severe toilet training that the Japanese soldiers had been subjected to during their infancy had produced such behavior (Gorer 1942). As research by John Dower and others has shown, it is also true that the Japanese were understood by the wartime US government and military as the racial Other (Dower 1987).

Rather than being swayed by the racially biased undercurrent, Benedict stood on her own conviction, drawing a conclusion that was somewhat removed from racist and simplistic assumptions. It was, according to her, perfectly understandable that the Japanese were behaving in such a manner when one looked at the relationship between Japanese individuals and the Japanese emperor. The way in which the emperor was worshiped as a sacred deity created a belief system that accorded pride to individuals through their willingness to risk their lives for his glory. Thus, according to Benedict's reasoning, an emperor-centered culture created the possibility that dying for the emperor on a wartime mission was not only a necessity, but also the utmost honor—such was, according to the principles of the Culture and Personality School, a typical personality trait of the Japanese. Seen in this way, what had looked like insane acts began to look logical. During the Cold War, the approach taken by the Culture and Personality School, by that period referred to as the Culture at a Distance approach, was deemed relevant, and it was avidly deployed in the study of culture behind the Iron Curtain (Mead and Métraux 2000).

I am not suggesting that we recycle and revive the Culture and Personality School. Its approach to other cultures was replete with assumptions based on a rather unmediated equation of individual proclivities and collective norms. Further, its interpretive method was largely based on a Western- or US-centered approach, basically reinforcing what were often negative stereotypes of other cultures. In addition, it was circular in its methodology, firstly assuming that each culture was unique and already equipped with its own unique personality, and then going on to present exotic findings that were then used to support the original assumption. Nevertheless, in the context of an anthropological study of North Korea, Benedict's contribution offers a useful point of departure—not so much because of what she did as because of what kind of after-effect her book created. The book's timely publication enabled it to become a manual for personnel involved in the administration of Japan during the US and Allied occupation, offering an alternative understanding of Japan whereby the Japanese were rendered human, or at least considerably more so than they had been during the war (Ryang 2004: chap. 1). Yet, what Benedict did was not so much about revealing a secret that had been intentionally hidden by the Japanese. Rather, the Japanese were proud to serve their emperor and such was their national truth. It was the Americans that had a hard time understanding it.

Just like Japan during World War II, North Korea has been framed and depicted as the enemy, as simply evil, and, at times, as the racial Other. Just like Japan during World War II, North Korea has been taken as incomprehensible and beyond the limits of Western reason. Just like Japan during World War II, North Korea has been seen as primitive and bizarre. Just as they did during World War II in relation to Japan, Americans today have difficulty understanding North Korea beyond portrayals that involve caricature and exaggeration, simply replicating negative stereotypes. An anthropological study of North Korea is thus doubly burdened, firstly by the unprecedented nature of the task involved, and secondly by the context in which it is being conducted, in which the nation being examined has preemptively been labeled as evil, bizarre, or both in Western public discourse.

Then there is the question of how such a book can be considered an anthropological study of North Korea without the author having conducted ethnographic fieldwork there, given the typical understanding that ethnographic evidence based on the anthropologist's having "been there" functions as a testimonial to truth. Here, I would like us to remind ourselves that the

technical aspect of fieldwork, in and of itself, does not constitute the entirety of anthropology. As Talal Asad writes:

In my view anthropology is more than a method, and it should not be equated—as it has popularly become—with the direction given to inquiry by the pseudoscientific notion of “fieldwork.” [. . .] What is distinctive about modern anthropology is the comparison of embedded concepts (representations) between societies differently located in time or space. The important thing in this comparative analysis is not their origin (Western or non-Western), but the forms of life that articulate them, the powers they release or disable. (Asad 2003: 17)

Asad cautions us not to equate anthropology with ethnographic fieldwork *per se*. According to this understanding, North Korea offers a field for “an inquiry into cultural concepts.” Thus, an anthropology of North Korea would start with “a curiosity about the doctrine and practice” that (are said to) constitute North Korea (by North Korea’s own public discourse) (Asad 2003: 17). As in any anthropological inquiry, mine takes place within the context of its raw material, *i.e.*, its language, even though the language being referred to here is published language, and, following Asad, my curiosity about it. While this was the method utilized by the Culture at a Distance scholars during the Cold War, my purpose in using published texts as ethnographic raw material differs from what they had in their minds—that is to say, understanding the enemy’s mindset. My purpose is not to summarize the psyche of North Koreans, nor do I intend to generalize North Korean culture as a finite set of patterns. Moreover, I do not propose to regard North Korea as enemy or non-enemy. For, if one were to regard a certain entity as the enemy—that is to say, as an object that needed to be ultimately eliminated—one would have to recuse oneself from the realm of academic research. This course is one that I shall clearly steer myself away from.

Following Asad, in this book, I look into the power that is generated by the link between language and truth and into the way this power enables something to emerge and remain as truth. To do this, I do not regard the identification of the original (by way of accusing North Korea as a copy) as imperative. Many have already pointed out the similarities between North Korean statecraft and cultural institutions and the Soviet models (*e.g.*, Lankov 2005; Gabroussenko 2010). Rather, I am concerned with the power that constitutes

the North Korean regime of truth, as well as that which is generated by it. Thus, just as anthropologists gather their data from the bottom up, grounded in the everyday lives of individuals in a given community, I read North Korean publications with the eye of an ethnographer, attending to the effects and senses that are contained if not necessarily always expressed, and following the two-way movement between the contours and core of the language through the behavior of the printed language itself.

Another way in which anthropological sensitivity helps advance my exploration of North Korea stems from its ethnological tradition of cultural comparison. In one of my previous publications, I rely on Marcel Mauss's scholarship concerning the dual morphology of the Inuit. Based on an analysis of seasonal variation of Inuit social life, Mauss synthesizes its duality, starkly divided as it was between summer (productive and work-intensive) and winter (festive and ritual-intensive) periods; hence, "dual morphology." In the publication referred to above, I argue that the winter morphology of the Inuit shares similarities with North Korea during the ritual celebrations of the eternal life of the Great Leader Kim Il Sung following his death in 1994 (Mauss 2013; Ryang 2012).

What is perhaps Mauss's most famous work, *The Gift*, provides us with a further comparative example. In this essay, Mauss compares cultural forms of exchange in what he calls archaic societies, representatives of which include Pacific North America (the potlatch) and Melanesia (*kula*). He posits that economic exchange in these societies is not primarily concerned with the accumulation of wealth, but rather with the confirmation of honor and the conferral of prestige on participants, which is in turn returned to the gift-giver as honor multiplied. From this understanding, Mauss synthesizes a logic of reciprocity based on the total benefit of generalized exchange ("*des prestations totales*") that underscores economic exchange in human societies, whether they be commodity economies or gift economies (Mauss 1925). Here, abstraction takes us not so much toward empirical origins of universal human behavior that cut across diverse cultures, but to an indication of a logical core that sustains similar institutions, since, just as in the case of Wittgensteinian family resemblance, each institution may not completely overlap in purpose, significance, image, and function (Wittgenstein 1953). Nevertheless, the institutions of gift-giving and reciprocity are identifiable and recognizable in many different cultures, periods, and practices, from Japan to Melanesia, from pre-modern to modern eras, and in examples ranging from Christmas presents

to matrimonial gifts, even though the actors may not mean or do completely identical things.

Putting this into the North Korean context—while concentrating our gaze internally and placing the diverse, state-sanctioned linguistic opus alongside for comparison—we will see interesting points of overlap and disconnect emerge, showing the complexity of the linguistic institutions that, while different from each other, overlap to support the regime of truth in North Korea, a concept that is further developed in subsequent chapters of this book.

The anthropologist is often equally suspicious of the native culture and his or her own intellectual capacity, and is keenly aware that the categories that anthropology uses are often not objective or perfect ones, the world not being as clearly defined as one would wish it to be. For example, Lucy Mair, referring to the difficulty of clearly defining categories, wrote in 1965: “[The] Queen’s coronation would be called a ritual, but her opening of parliament (although prayers are said) would be regarded as ceremonial” (Mair 1965: 225–226). Reading these words, we can already anticipate dissenting voices among anthropologists who might argue that these examples can be considered neither ritual nor ceremonial, but as ideological reflections of feudal-monarchical remnants, for example, leaving Mair’s concession meaningless. But, dismissing what the queen does as an ideological institution helps little in enriching our understanding of what the monarchy means in today’s Britain, how it functioned in the past, and what this institution may morph into in the future, affecting the everyday lives of British people. For the subjectivities surrounding this institution are far too complex for it to be simply pigeonholed as ideology without further ado. Similarly, as E. E. Evans-Pritchard notes in his study of Azande witchcraft, while the Azande may have looked upon individual witch doctors with greater or lesser amounts of skepticism, there was no skepticism about witch-doctoring itself as an institution among the Azande (Evans-Pritchard 1968). Based on this, Jack Goody stresses “the difference between specific and general skepticism” that can coexist in many societies (1978: 69). Many societies, including advanced industrialized ones such as our own, contain within them enduring elements—beliefs, values, practices, and laws—that are seemingly incompatible or sometimes outright contradictory, and that include competing elements within themselves. Countless examples of such complexity can be found—not only in the anthropological literature, but also in the world out there around us. Our knowledge of North Korea will benefit from efforts that are geared

toward complexity or from the desire to complicate our own understanding of this nation.

Still, as charitable as anthropology has been to native idiosyncrasies, this process has not been without its political failures, involving complicity with the colonial and imperialist ambitions of the West with respect to the rest of the world (Asad 1973). Indeed, Benedict's *Chrysanthemum and the Sword* itself can be seen as part of such involvement in postwar American military imperialism and the Cold War geopolitical strategy in East Asia. It is well-known that the Western anthropological establishment had to go through a revision of its scholarly stance during the 1980s amidst the postmodern turn of critical self-reflection, seriously questioning its own position of power vis-à-vis field sites, cultures and peoples, and, more importantly, the information or data that anthropologists themselves laid claim to (e.g., Clifford and Marcus 1986). Along with such reflexivity, the late twentieth century saw critical concern being raised in relation to the primordial stance of anthropology, which assumed, as a condition of its epistemology, an encounter between unknowns or an encounter between a powerful unknown and a powerless unknown—or more precisely, an encounter between a Western anthropologist and a non-Western native culture (e.g., Narayan 1993). Indeed, some of the most influential anthropological works of the late twentieth century were written by anthropologists who, while originating from and having been trained in the West, had native-cultural heritages and connections within the fields in which they conducted their ethnographic fieldwork (e.g., Abu-Lughod 1986; Kondo 1990). More recently, in the current age of intense globalization, the possibility of native anthropology itself has begun to be questioned, leading to a recognition of the importance of ethnographic sensitivity by researchers, regardless of whether or not the researcher is native to the culture he or she studies (e.g., Tsuda 2015).

The historical trajectory of this self-critical path that the discipline of anthropology has taken, although far from perfect, informs the approach and the strategy that I have adopted throughout this book. And, even though many of the materials that I will be dealing with in this book do come from historical and published texts, rather than from contemporary ethnographic data, I shall approach such texts in a similar way to that which one adopts when conducting ethnographic fieldwork: by immersing oneself in the data and comprehensively digesting it before emerging from it to engage in critical reflection. In reading North Korea's publications and in approaching its language, I deploy a sensitivity acquired through being both an anthropologist

and a native reader, having been brought up in the North Korean community in Japan (Ryang 1997; Ryang 2008). I am not saying this because Korean is my native language, but instead because of my firsthand familiarity with North Korean publications, proficient knowledge of which I was made to acquire throughout my formative years in Japan (see chapter 4 of this volume).

Language as Formula

Before leading the reader through a chapter-by-chapter plan of this book, I would like to briefly touch upon what kind of language practice we are dealing with when we discuss the linguistic institutions of North Korea and the relationship between language and truth in North Korea. When the language is as formulaic as that used in North Korea's official discourse, it hides many things in broad daylight, making it difficult to see how it works. Let us take a look at the following example, a short article published by the news organ of the Workers' Party of Korea, *Rodongsinmun*, on June 22, 2018, under the title "Youth and Students Vow to Be Loyal to Kim Jong Un":

A national meeting of youth and students was held on the top of Mt. Paektu [Baekdu] on Wednesday to vow to steadily carry on the march started on Mt. Paektu [Baekdu] under the guidance of the respected Supreme Leader Kim Jong Un.

Led by Pak Chol Min, first secretary of the Central Committee of the Kimilsungist-Kimjongist Youth League, the participants expressed their resolve to more firmly prepare themselves to be persons strong in idea and faith armed with the revolutionary spirit of Paektu [Baekdu], the spirit of the blizzards of Paektu [Baekdu], and the principle of giving priority to self-development [. . .] for accomplishing the revolutionary cause of Juche.

They stressed the need to hold President Kim Il Sung and leader Kim Jong Il in high esteem as the eternal sun of Juche for all ages and resolutely defend and forever glorify the revolutionary idea and leadership exploits of the peerlessly great men.

They also vowed to absolutely believe in and follow Supreme Leader Kim Jong Un and become manifold fortresses and shields devotedly defending the Workers' Party of Korea Central Committee.

The above quotation captures the way North Korea's official discourse works as part of the structure that sustains its regime of truth. The phrases, including "idea and faith armed with the revolutionary spirit of Paektu [Baekdu]"

and “the spirit of the blizzards of Paektu [Baekdu]” are part of the set of fixed epithets used when describing the revolutionary tradition on which North Korea stands today. As stated earlier in this introduction, Mount Baekdu is associated with the Kim family, providing the location for its sacred origins. The types of phrases quoted above do not remain permanently unchanged, but undergo historic shifts and occasional adjustments of varying degrees, some of which involve an outright abolition or purge. Nevertheless, by and large, the core message flowing through North Korea’s official discourse is at once preserved and enhanced by each incarnation. The fact that Kim Jong Il was born in the Soviet Union, in the guerrilla camps of eastern Siberia, a well-known fact, is not necessarily hidden from the North Korean public. In Kim Il Sung’s revolutionary history, which was part of the grammar school curriculum in North Korea until at least the 1970s, it is clearly stated that he and his armed band moved to the Soviet Far East in 1941, remaining outside Korea until 1945. Normally, this period of Kim Il Sung’s life history is obscured except in references to a strategic move in the face of newly emerged conditions or, according to the North Korean template, *saero joseongdoen jeongsee daecheobayeo* (“in order to cope with newly formed conditions”). The new conditions that arose at this time included the USSR-Japan neutrality pact of 1941, after which Kim Il Sung and his group relocated to Siberia, where Kim Jong Il was born. North Korean publications utilize the term *sobudae gidongjakjeon*, or small mobile unit operations, in their references to the sporadic small-scale armed activities across the Korean border and back that were allegedly waged by Kim Il Sung’s guerrilla unit during this period. Kim Il Sung returned to Korea in September 1945. This is public knowledge, and anyone who has studied Kim Il Sung’s revolutionary history at school during the 1960s and 1970s (which would include all North Koreans educated during these decades) would remember this. It would take a leap of faith to swallow the story of Kim Jong Il having been born on Mount Baekdu, some 570 miles distant from Khabarovsk, that is included in Kim’s official biography (*Kim Jong Il Brief History* 1998: 1). Yet, this account has been accepted, at least, as part of the national truth—as I shall further detail in chapter 4 of this volume. The regime that sustains this truth is neither horribly coercive nor completely calculating, and many contingencies and inconsistencies are involved, as shall be shown in this book.

In the above quotation, the following pair of sentences shows a rule-like sequence of references to each Great Leader:

They stressed the need to hold President Kim Il Sung and leader Kim Jong Il in high esteem as the eternal sun of Juche for all ages and resolutely defend and forever glorify the revolutionary idea and leadership exploits of the peerlessly great men.

They also vowed to absolutely believe in and follow Supreme Leader Kim Jong Un and become manifold fortresses and shields devotedly defending the Workers' Party of Korea Central Committee.

The method of clustering Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il together as “the peerlessly great men,” or, in Korean, *jeolse wiin*, was introduced after Kim Jong Un became Supreme Leader in 2011. Kim Jong Un is now assigned a separate sentence to denote his current leadership status, often accompanied by a reference to his leadership of the Workers' Party of Korea. Each Kim has his own epithet: Kim Il Sung is the Eternal President and *suryeong* (the leader or chief), Kim Jong Il *jangggun* (the general) and *jidoja* (the leader), and Kim Jong Un *choegoryeongdoja* (the supreme leader). These titles are not to be mixed. Furthermore, when verbs such as “to defend,” “to glorify” and “to believe” are used in reference to the Kim leadership, they need to be always accompanied with adverbs, respectively, “resolutely,” “forever,” and “absolutely,” as shown above. It is in this practice of referring to the leaders in a formulaic manner according to a predetermined order and within a prearranged set and sequence of sentences, using vocabulary that is tightly coupled with the objects or concepts that it denotes, that statements of truth are made in North Korea. This is what I call the language of truth.

But isn't it actually non-truth that I am talking about here? For, in North Korea, truth is something that individuals almost appear forced to speak. Are they really expressing something that they are witnessing, one wonders? Are they expressing something that they believe in, or that they are made to believe in? Better still, are they expressing something that they have been made to believe that they believe in?

Let us think closely about what we might most readily recognize as truth. Contemplative truth, whereby the subject discovers truth that is intricately connected with his or her own inner truth or through a direct encounter with that inner truth, would be one such example. According to John Peters, such truth comes as an inward conviction which, as in the case of evangelizing, in turn invokes a witnessing—a witnessing of one's own inner truth (Peters 2005: 250). However, historically speaking, witnessing has notoriously been haunted

by realizations of the fragility and unreliability of the witnesses themselves. The need has consequently arisen to invent measures to ensure reliability, such as torture. According to Peters: “[Among the] historic solutions to the unreliability of witnesses, torture is one of the most persistent, from the ancient Greeks to modern intelligence gathering” (Peters 2005: 253). Bodily infliction, taken to the extreme, would mean death, and it is precisely here—upon death—that the eternity of truth is often achieved, as in the case of martyrdom. For, the dead bear ultimate truth—this becomes obvious in the words of survivors of extreme situations of affliction such as concentration camps. According to Giorgio Agamben:

The witness usually testifies in the name of justice and truth and as such his or her speech draws consistency and fullness. Yet here [in the case of Auschwitz] the value of testimony lies essentially in what it lacks; at its center it contains something that cannot be borne witness to and that discharges the survivors of authority. The “true” witnesses, the “complete witnesses,” are those who did not bear witness and could not bear witness. They are those who “touched bottom”: the Muslims, the drowned. The survivors speak in their stead, as proxy, as pseudo-witnesses; they bear witness to a missing testimony. (Agamben 1999: 34)

And, according to Primo Levi, the Auschwitz survivor:

I must repeat: we, the survivors, are not the true witnesses. This is an uncomfortable notion of which I have become conscious little by little, reading the memoirs of others and reading mine at a distance of years. We survivors are not only an exiguous but also an anomalous minority: we are those who by their prevarications or abilities or good luck did not touch bottom. Those who did so, those who saw the Gorgon, have not returned to tell about it or have returned mute, but they are the “Muslims,” the submerged, the complete witnesses, the ones whose deposition would have a general significance. They are the rule, we are the exception. (Levi 1989: 83–84)

There is an uncanny, almost eerie resonance between the incompleteness of the living witnesses (survivors) on the one hand and the completeness of the dead witnesses on the other. Such a juxtaposition clearly emerges when we look at what happened in the Khmer Rouge prison S-21 in the years between 1975

and 1979. In S-21, thousands of prisoners were chained, starved, and humiliated, but above all, severely and regularly tortured, and ultimately executed. Between torture and execution, there was confession—supposedly written, corroborated, or approved by the prisoner as truth. Torture functioned—just as in ancient Greece or during CIA waterboarding—as a mechanism for extracting truth. Needless to say, the truthfulness of forced confessions is dubious when seen from an outsider’s perspective. But objective (so to speak) factuality was, as it were, not the interest or concern of torturers such as Kaing Guek Eav, a.k.a. Comrade Duch, who oversaw the entire S-21 prison operation. The confession—the written document itself—functioned as truth, which was preordained and formulaic as a fruit of torture, the assumption being that so long as one were tortured, one would produce truth. Unlike the dead, even though Comrade Duch produced detailed accounts of what had happened inside S-21 during the trial by the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia for the crimes of the Khmer Rouge regime in 2012, Comrade Duch can only be incomplete as a witness (Cruvellier 2014).

Comrade Duch’s torture (and murder) victims were subjected, in totality, to the power of the Khmer Rouge, which defined itself as the sole bearer of truth. Truth in North Korea, as far as it is produced in narratives, both by the state and by individuals, presupposes this subjection—subjection to power, be it that of the torturer or that of sovereignty, which includes “the power to take life,” and is now accelerated by the power of biopolitical regulation, that which allows men and women to live and die (Foucault 2003: 247). Truth in North Korea can ultimately be understood in this sense as truth produced and reproduced under duress, under subpoena, under the ultimate threat of the kind of punishment that one can imagine taking place in North Korea. At the same time, there is a vast array of different discursive practices which, again through their partial overlapping, work to produce the targeted effect, yet, precisely because they are only partially overlapping, behave in disparate ways, moving in different, sometimes opposite, directions from each other. The same applies to the concept of belief when thinking about North Korea. North Koreans are made (forced) to believe what they believe, so our imagination goes. It is true that one believes what one sees, yet if one sees through a set of lenses that come with a particular set of vocabulary, one’s beliefs are formulated exclusively within the framework of this vocabulary. Truth, in this case, can only be talked about using the words that are available within this vocabulary. Yet, such sets of vocabulary neither remain unchanged, nor always neatly serve state-projected objectives—even in North Korea. As this

book will demonstrate, different discursive and linguistic institutions, practices, and texts create different effects, and the field from which truth is produced in North Korea is a diverse one, to say the least. One might even claim that in North Korea there exists a multitude of different discursive practices that work to sustain that nation's version of truth.

In order to proceed with care—that is to say, in order not to be bound by preimposed political conclusions, which are always construed via facile routes without reflection—I would like to move one step away from ideology, indoctrination, or, more directly, censorship and control in my discussion. Certainly, by now, it has become the practice in North Korea to follow the nomenclature created by the top authorities, as citizens are aware that this would be the right (and safe) thing to do. But, simply labeling this as censorship or brainwashing seems to miss the point, abbreviating or even occluding productive aspects of such a practice. For new names for leaders, new slogans, and new phrases do not simply suppress, but also create new forms of life. Today, in North Korea (even in North Korea, that is to say) the internet (which is only available domestically) and huge television screens mounted on podiums erected in main squares play a role in the creation of new forms of life and the dissemination of information. Via such media, new names and phrases quickly penetrate people's lives—and in not such different ways from other societies, for that matter. Prior to this technology being deployed, however, the nation had a history of well-organized publications producing discrete sets of discourses. What did these discourses make or do, and what do they continue to make and do? Such is my question.

Based on the above, in this book, I look at the productive aspect of North Korea's language and linguistic practice that allows a North Korean to become skilled at absorbing the new names of the leaders and able to reproduce them—thereby, as it were, contributing to the reinforcement of the regime of truth. In order for such a process of linguistic production (and reproduction) to happen, tools need to have been available. For this purpose, I believe that it is important to carefully look into linguistic policies and linguistic reform, but without an agenda aimed at exposing a state conspiracy. Rather, it is the accompanying technology operating at the micro level, as well as its side effects, the accumulation and effects of which deliver the productive process of the emergence of truth, that I would like to consider. I follow the stance of Foucault when he states: “We do not try to trace their origins [i.e., those of the relations of domination] back to that which gives them their basic legitimacy. We have to try, on the contrary, to identify the technical instruments that guarantee that they

function” (Foucault 2003: 46). Such instruments are necessary because, again in Foucault’s words, “every regime of truth, whether scientific or not, entails specific, more or less constraining ways of linking the manifestation of truth and the subject who carries it out” (Foucault 2014: 100). The tools that are required here to link the manifestation of truth and the subject are provided by language, among other things.

Following this, I would not ask whether or not North Korea’s abolition of the use of Chinese characters was successful or viable, but instead investigate how it was rationalized—and perhaps examine how the old practice ended up mingling with the new, in turn creating something messy and entirely unexpected. Similarly, I am not so concerned with the motives of the North Korean regime and the ideological basis of its insistence on being the sole source of pure Korean (language), or with the propaganda that it deploys in order to legitimize itself vis-à-vis South Korea (e.g., King 2007; Kumatani 1990; Kim 1978). Rather, my concern relates to the way in which certain words and expressions are innocuously incorporated and tacitly rationalized in the formation of language that embodies the national truth of North Korea. Most importantly, while I look at the language, I am not concerned with language per se, as in the case of linguistic or grammatical analysis. Rather, I follow the contours of the process whereby language and truth have become enmeshed with each other in North Korea to constitute as well as reflect the power that sustains this truth.

While it is true that in North Korea, Kim Jong Il and Kim Jong Un are as sacred and revered as Kim Il Sung, in this book I shall focus solely on the emergence of truth under Kim Il Sung’s leadership, with my focus being the period from the end of the Korean War (1950–1953) until his death in 1994. Frequently in this book, I call this period the Kim Il Sung era. This is because it was during these four decades that the way in which language is related to truth as we know it in North Korea was intensively consolidated and because, as such, focusing on these decades will give us a clearer framework within which to conduct our exploration. These were the decades during which North Korea’s main linguistic outlet took the form of printed material, and, to state a well-known fact again, all printed matter in North Korea remains state-issued and state-controlled to this day. As the reader will see, during the decades of the Kim Il Sung era that I deal with, the effects of linguistic projects that the government implemented were manifested in an inconsistent manner, to say the least, yet such inconsistent policies nevertheless created an unmistakable linguistic intimacy between the people and the Great Leader.

Outline of Chapters

In what is to follow, I look at four processes in North Korea that involve language use and linguistic institutionalization. These are arranged in a roughly chronological manner: early literary criticism and purges from the mid-1950s through the mid-1960s; vocabulary standardization projects during the 1960s through the 1980s; essays that make up a people's chronicle of the Great Leader, published from 1962 through to the present day and spanning 107 volumes as of 2018; and the Great Leader's seven-volume memoirs, published in the years 1992 to 1996, 1994 being the year of Kim Il Sung's death. At the same time, the chronological arrangement of these chapters is not clear-cut. Many parts overlap, due to the synchronic occurrence of certain events, yet each accentuates different aspects of national life. Furthermore, these aspects are not clearly marked historical events, but resemble discrete processes by which, for example, an old practice is discarded, an old practice is replaced by a new one, or a new practice is enforced through specific instructions and guidelines, all the while in an environment in which a certain amount of messy coexistence of old and new are allowed. As such, this book is not, as it were, a history book. It does not, for instance, necessarily trace what happened and when according to chronological order, let alone insinuate a causality. Rather, what this book traces is logic or, more precisely, the emergence of a certain logic in the formation of truth concerning the North Korean state, or that which came to carry the value of truth in North Korea during the Kim Il Sung era. Each of the different processes that is dealt with in this book is built around a body of texts which are mutually heterogeneous in terms of authorship, style, purpose of publication, genre, and so on. Yet, all have contributed to consolidating this regime of truth, making things that did not exist exist and creating a set of assumptions and shared understandings that are taken to be true.

Chapter 1, "Purge," takes the reader to the now-forgotten world of North Korean public discourse via a selective focus on literary criticism. Forgotten, because this field no longer exists in North Korea. This was a field filled with references to foreign literary sources on the one hand and naked emotions, including petty jealousy, outright hatred, fawning among writers, and, ultimately, the political will to purge and execute those deemed to be enemies of the state on the other. Forgotten also because texts from this period (from 1953 to 1964 or thereabouts) are paved with many words and expressions that were later to be erased from North Korea's public vocabulary and therefore reveal what existed before. In addition, the referencing style utilized by

these literary critics is far removed from that found during the later period—the period when the Great Leader’s truth comes to dominate—in that Kim Il Sung’s words appear as one of many sources of authority (and not as the sole source of authority, as in the later period), at times even a source of lesser authority than Marx, Lenin, or Stalin, for example.

It is well known that following the end of the Korean War (1950–1953), North Korea conducted a large-scale and drastic purge of Kim Il Sung’s adversaries and rivals, a process which consolidated Kim Il Sung’s unchallenged leadership. This process, which lasted for approximately ten years, led to fierce debate within the literary establishment. For many, political (and physical) survival was at stake. The purpose of this chapter is not so much to interpret what really happened and who was destroyed by whom, and so on. Rather, my interest lies in the language that was deployed in the course of literary criticism, as the critics’ language got funneled to a certain direction, which ultimately conformed to state-projected truth. Interestingly, the language of those who purged was not so far removed from that of those who were purged, and in the end, literary criticism as a whole as it had been practiced from the mid-1950s through the mid-1960s was itself, also, let us say, purged. By concentrating on specific examples of how certain keywords are used, I attempt to capture the shift or series of minor shifts that constituted the core of this purge during a period in which the national language was beginning to be consolidated.

Chapter 2, “Words,” addresses the standardization of vocabulary, closely examining authoritative publications issued during the years 1963 through 1986. Together, as detailed manuals on how to speak using what kind of tone and posture on what type of occasion and so on, they illustrate the direction taken by the North Korean linguistic authorities in correcting, unifying, and enforcing the Party-guided lexicon. These texts point to ongoing state efforts to standardize and unify the language and turn each North Korean into a properly speaking subject fitting the mold projected by the state. A close examination of the texts will reveal interesting contradictions, showing both the meticulous and detailed nature of instructions related to prescribed forms of emotional expression for each speech act, particularly those referring to the Great Leader, as well as the challenges involved in upholding the law-like consistency of this project (as these volumes intended). Together, paradoxically, they created the unexpected effect of removing emotion from language revering the Great Leader, turning the set of vocabulary items used in reference to the Great Leader into a performative tool of linguistic correctness. But

such a process was not straightforward; it started off with an attempt at creating a new nation with new speaking subjects, which, then, was repurposed to become a nation that was built around absolute reverence of the leader.

This chapter is followed by chapter 3, “The Chronicle,” which deals with the essays written by individuals—some famous, many unknown—who had firsthand encounters with the Great Leader. These essays come from a collection of dozens of volumes known as *Inmindeul sogeseo* or *Among the People*, the first of which was published in 1962. New volumes are still being published to this day, the collection now numbering more than one hundred volumes. Examining the language used in these essays will give us access to firsthand examples of native North Korean linguistic constructs and expressions that are used when depicting the Great Leader. We will recognize that, interestingly, state linguistic policies that are used when defining the terms of reference for Kim Il Sung fade into the background, so to speak, when it comes to the affective connection between the Great Leader and the people, which is first and foremost an emotional and personal one and only secondarily an ideological or political one. It is for this reason that the affect between the Great Leader and the people is relevant in the formation of the truth, authenticity, and self in North Korea. In chapter 3, we shall see the emotional language that is used in the context of the relationship between the people and the Great Leader, language that is unexpectedly (or, perhaps, wholly expectedly in retrospect) mundane, simple, and apolitical, yet intensely intimate, with words and expressions drawn from outside the vocabulary set that the state had clearly intended to be reserved for the purpose of revering the Great Leader (discussed in chapter 2). Building on this understanding, we will interrogate what I call the concept of native truth that provides the backdrop to the affective connection between the Great Leader and the people.

The final chapter in the main body of the book, chapter 4, “The Memoirs,” introduces the reader to the language of the Great Leader himself. Published from 1992 and completed posthumously in 1996, these eight volumes of memoirs encompass Kim Il Sung’s formative years up until the end of his armed resistance during the Japanese colonial period. Interestingly, Kim’s language is nothing like North Korea’s formulaic language of truth. It transgresses almost all of the norms stipulated in the linguistic reforms discussed in chapter 2 while also being far removed from the everyday language of the people captured in the essays discussed in chapter 3. Heavily mixing in examples of classical idioms of Chinese origin which, paradoxically, Kim had ordered the nation to abolish decades before, his passages defy

the linguistic unification and standardization which the North Korean state has long intended to achieve. At the same time, Kim's raw emotion and the authenticity of his accounts of his own vulnerability and hesitation, agony and sorrow, open up an entirely unprecedented field of discourse, one unlike any part of Kim Il Sung's revolutionary history that the North Korean population learned by heart during the 1970s, in which Kim Il Sung is depicted as always victorious and right. Thinking about the Leader's language in comparison with the national language of truth will help us to understand the power behind the North Korean regime of truth, in which the Leader occupies a position of total exception. At the same time, thinking about this particular language and its coexistence with other forms of North Korean language explored in earlier chapters enables us to see the multitude of discursive practices in North Korea, from which the strands of truth that branch out are then braided into the authentic existence of North Koreans.

Based on the foregoing, the final, brief segment of the book, "Self," addresses the location of power and its connection to the subject by interrogating the formation of self in North Korea as an embodiment of the national language of truth. I posit the notion of the subject in North Korea as being just as complex as the notion of truth in that nation. My discussion of this part will function both as a summary of the book and as a prelude to future explorations of the culture and forms of life in North Korea.

CHAPTER 1

Purge

Historical Background

Many scholars have already shown that North Korea consciously fashioned itself after the Soviet Union, then led by Joseph Stalin, following the 1945 partition of the Korean peninsula into the Soviet-occupied north and the American-occupied south (Cumings 1981; Armstrong 2003). Many scholars have also shown that North Korea attempted to seek relative independence from both of its powerful neighbors, China and the USSR, on all fronts of statecraft, including politics, economy, diplomacy, and culture, after the Korean War (1950–1953), and in particular after the death of Stalin in 1953 (Armstrong 2013). Some, however, including literary scholar Tatiana Gabroussenko, have argued that these efforts were not entirely successful, given that North Korea still had to follow the Stalinist path (Gabroussenko 2010). Reviewing Gabroussenko's book, *Soldiers on the Cultural Front: Developments in the Early History of North Korean Literature and Literary Policy*, Heonik Kwon perfectly sums up the situation as follows:

The conclusion that follows [Gabroussenko's] informative description is an important one: North Korea's effort to free its politics and art from Soviet models was far from an effort to part with Stalin's legacy. [Gabroussenko] contends that its postwar de-Sovietization drive was an effort to nationalize Stalin's political legacy: that is, to keep this legacy and re-make it as a North Korean legacy at the same time that it was being debunked in its powerful neighbor. Thus, the de-Sovietization of North Korean politics and art developed in parallel with a further Stalinization of these domains. (Kwon 2011: 855)

It is not my intention here to evaluate the extent of success or failure of the de-Sovietization of North Korea, as this task has already been undertaken by many others. Suffice it to say that a form of nationalization—even if not necessarily the nationalization of “Stalin’s political legacy” (Kwon 2011: 855)—did occur across a broad swath of cultural fields, including language and literature. For, the emergence of a new national language was itself part of the process of thinking about what this new nation must look like, away from the Soviets, away from the Chinese, yet close enough to both, while creating a national identity with ideological integrity in the context of the Cold War in East Asia. That is to say that nationalization in this case neither amounted to the mere imposition of a Koreanized version of a model created by someone else (such as Stalin), nor to the Stalinization of Korea, whatever that may mean. It was the process of creating and inventing the language of a newly victorious nation, a nation that had defeated the United States in a three-year-long war—such was the North Korean understanding, with the armistice resulting in preventing the unification of the peninsula under US/South Korea dominance seen as a victory. Technically, though, the war was not over, as it was only suspended by the cease-fire agreed in July 1953. Domestically, too, the war was far from over, as North Korea entered a process of state consolidation under the newly formed condition of ongoing war. This process started with elimination or, indeed, a purge. In this chapter, I shall discuss one of the most conspicuous purges in North Korea’s history—the one that took place in the domain of literature. My purpose here is to identify the process used in the clearing of the linguistic field, so to speak, in order to prepare for the implantation of a new national language, a clearing that was carried out in a rather thorough and public fashion.

Anyone reading examples of North Korean literary criticism published up until the mid-1960s would be surprised by the vibrant, if somewhat crude, free-spirited nature of its prose, as such qualities would more or less completely disappear by the end of the 1960s. Thanks to the aforementioned study of postwar North Korean literary criticism by Tatiana Gabroussenko, which is excellent on many levels, we are already in possession of valuable knowledge pertaining to this area. In her close examination of early North Korean writers, Gabroussenko reveals the complexity of power relations in North Korea, enlaced as they were with rivalries and political power struggles that resulted in numerous casualties, and in which foreign influences and elements of all kinds—whether from South Korea or the Soviet Union—were systematically

eliminated. Thanks are also due to Brian Myers, whose work focuses on the North Korean writer Han Seorya, a colonial novelist of mediocre standard (according to Myers) who was able to rise to the top of the political apparatus of the North Korean literary establishment by writing effusively about Kim Il Sung's life. Through Myers's research, we have access to the political structure of the North Korean literary establishment at the time, which was filled with petty jealousies, personal animosity, and political traps (Myers 2010).

In this chapter, therefore, rather than replicating what others have already done, taking the literary circle itself as the object of direct inquiry, I would like to shift the angle somewhat, reading the purges and demises of some of the authors during the decade following the Korean War as an allegory of what happened to the language itself. Which words were allowed to live, which words were killed off, and what kind of language emerged as a result? As we shall see, this story is not a unidirectional one. And, rather than looking at the rise and demise of individual authors, as Gabroussenko and Myers have done, I would like to follow the social life of key words and expressions. This will lead us along a strange and winding path as a new national language began to emerge.

It is well known that a considerable purge of southern (i.e., originating from south of the 38th parallel that partitioned the peninsula in 1945) and foreign (read Soviet) elements from the ranks of the North Korean ruling party was carried out during the 1950s, starting toward the very end of the Korean War and continuing during the years immediately following the armistice in 1953 (Lankov 2005). The man whose fate best illustrates the nature of the post-Korean War purge is Pak Heonyeong (his name sometimes spelled Pak Hon-yong). The number two man in the North Korean Communist Party next to Kim Il Sung, Pak was the subject of a mock trial and sentenced to death in 1955 as a US spy. It is assumed that Pak was subsequently executed thereafter, although, according to Andrei Lankov, by far the best-informed researcher on this matter, Soviet documents show that Pak was still alive in 1956 (Lankov 2012). Born in 1900 to an upper-class man and his concubine, Pak was a so-called homegrown Communist of colonial Korea, when most Korean Communists were in exile because of Japanese colonial rule. Pak, too, joined the Communist movement first in exile, as a member of the Communist Party of Korea's Shanghai-based Irkutsk group in 1921. After his participation in the Comintern's Far Eastern People's Representative Council in Moscow in 1922, he returned to Korea, where he was arrested and imprisoned by the Japanese authorities. In 1924, following his release from prison,

Pak became a staff writer for Korean newspapers. In 1925, he and others participated in the underground establishment of the Communist Party of Korea in Korea proper (Lankov 2012). The party was faced with multiple challenges—close surveillance by the Japanese colonial authorities, distrust by the Comintern leaders, and also ongoing factional strife among members of its rank and file—and ended up being forced to disband only three years after its foundation. By the 1930s, as Chong-sik Lee surmises, Korean leaders such as Pak had been largely discredited in the eyes of the Comintern (Lee 1967: 378). Even though Pak Heonyeong later traveled to the Soviet Union and received an ideological education, and despite the fact that he was generally regarded as the leader of the Communist movement inside Korea after Liberation, he was not well known to those Soviets who occupied post-1945 northern Korea. This was in contrast to Kim Il Sung, who returned to Korea in 1945 from the Soviet Far East, having participated in anti-Japanese guerrilla warfare in Manchuria in the 1930s as a member of the Chinese Communist Party.

In 1948, Pak and others, including Kim Ku (his name sometimes spelled Kim Gu or Kim Koo) and Kim Kyusik, prominent nationalist leaders, traveled to the North for a summit. Whereas the non-Communist nationalist leaders Kim Ku and Kim Kyusik returned to the South, Pak remained in Pyongyang, married a new wife (having left his former wife and children in the Soviet Union), and became the North Korean Foreign Minister (Lankov 2012). In 1953, as the Korean War drew to a close, Pak was arrested while serving as vice chairman of the Politburo. As mentioned above, he was later executed around 1955 as an American spy (Lankov 2015: 15). Lankov details that while Pak was officially declared guilty of having been an American spy, Kim Il Sung himself only made a few references to this effect, even then merely in passing, preferring to blame Pak for factionalism. Lankov asserts that this was due to Kim exercising caution, given that his audience included many who knew Pak firsthand and knew him to be a genuine Communist (Lankov 2005: 62). Another member of the Politburo, Ri Seongyeop, also perished following a mock trial, and yet another member, Heo Gai, a Soviet Korean, allegedly committed suicide in 1953, his close ties to the Soviet Union out of step with the newly adopted policy of independence from that country (Lankov 2015: 15). Needless to say, all of these developments steadily paved the way for the establishment of Kim Il Sung as the one and only Great Leader of North Korea.

Still, the elevation of Kim to a position of absolute authority did not happen overnight. Faced with the utter devastation of the Korean War—US bombing destroyed eighty percent of Hamheung, the largest industrial city in

North Korea, and seventy-five percent of Pyongyang, the capital (Crane 2000: 168)—but also taking advantage of the thorough destruction that it had suffered at the hands of the Americans, North Korea began rapidly socializing its industrial and agricultural production during the 1950s and 1960s, strengthening the state’s central planning system and nationalizing most of the sectors of production. While farmers were (and still are) allowed to cultivate their small plots of private land and harvest and sell their produce at public markets as long as they paid tax in kind, most agricultural areas became co-operatized, subdivided into state-owned farms and collective-owned farms. While key industries were already nationalized during the years immediately following the partition of Korea in 1945, the wartime devastation accelerated state initiatives to nationalize and collectivize the entire range of heavy and light industries. This process was accompanied by state mobilization of the production and construction industries during the latter half of the 1950s, culminating in the Chollima Movement, a movement named after the legendary horse that was said to have run a distance of one thousand *ri* (a Korean unit of measurement equivalent to a distance of approximately four thousand kilometers) per day.

Kim Il Sung’s style of on-the-spot-guidance, which included visits to factories and construction sites, was first seen during this period. As is clear to anyone who has had the opportunity to view documentary film footage of Kim Il Sung visiting construction sites in the aftermath of the Korean War, there was genuine enthusiasm in the faces of the workers welcoming Kim. This does not mean, however, that Kim was almighty. Neither does it mean that Kim’s words functioned exactly as non-negotiable orders. For example, as Andre Schmid shows in his outstanding work, even though North Koreans were prohibited by law from freely relocating to other parts of the country, at least thirty percent of them did so during the 1950s and 1960s (Schmid 2018). Also, despite the devastation of the Korean War, North Korea received heavy subsidies and assistance from the Soviet Union and China, enabling its economy to grow faster than that of South Korea until around 1965. It was against such a backdrop that the purge of southerners and foreign elements in the literary field occurred, a cleaning of the slate, as it were, for the making of the post-Korean War nation.

Language of the Purge

Firstly, there were the literary “southerners,” those writers and intellectuals who had crossed to the North after the partition of 1945 between it and the

US military-occupied South. Then there were the Soviet Koreans (such as Heo Gai), who were either born in the Soviet Far East or had migrated there during the Japanese colonial period before returning to North Korea along with the Soviet military occupation after World War II. To state the outcome up front, both groups were more or less entirely purged during the years immediately following the Korean War ceasefire in 1953.

One of the most prominent casualties in this context was Li Taejun (his name also spelled Yi T'ae-jun). An acclaimed writer during the colonial period, Li crossed to the North in 1946. His beautiful short stories led him to be enthusiastically welcomed as "Korea's Guy de Maupassant" by Soviet Koreans. Li, a southerner, quickly became close to the Soviet Korean faction in the North's literary establishment. According to Gabroussenko, Li seems to have been genuinely impressed by Communism, especially after his two-month-long visit to the Soviet Union between August and October 1946 following an invitation by Soviet authorities (Gabroussenko 2010: chap. 4).

His short stories, written prior to Korea's liberation, depict the simple lives of Koreans under colonial rule with a distinctly modernist sensitivity. During the period between Li's crossing to the North in 1946 and 1953, his work, including the pre-liberation short stories, was rarely the subject of criticism in North Korea, where he continued to write, now drawing motifs from everyday life in newly liberated Korea. In 1948, he was decorated by the North Korean Supreme People's Committee, becoming vice chairman of the Korean Literary and Arts Federation. He served in key offices in the cultural world, later working as the Korean People's Army war reporter during the Korean War, accompanying its forces following the breakout of hostilities in June 1950, crossing the 38th parallel to the south, and continuing all the way to the Nakdong River area where UN forces were cornered within the Pusan perimeter in September 1950. We can therefore be certain that he withdrew along with Korean People's Army forces after the amphibious Incheon landing by UN forces during the same month, unequivocally linking his fate with that of the North. We can also appreciate from his embedding with the North Korean military that Li enjoyed the lofty trust of the North Korean authorities.

After the Korean War, Li, along with poet Rim Hwa and writer Kim Namcheon, two other prominent literary southerners that had crossed to the North after 1945, was accused of being (and having always been) a US spy. As such, his opus was now deemed reactionary and criticized as having been built on bourgeois naturalist foundations. Even the stories that he had written

during the colonial period became fair game, considered to be ideologically backward and tainted with pre-revolutionary values that were harmful to the North Korean people's sensitivities, damaging them through their unproductive eroticism, their lethargy, and their art for art's sake. Following the purge Li was demoted to the position of galley proofreader for a local worker's newspaper in the northeastern industrial city of Hamheung, later working at a brick factory collecting scrap metal. In 1964, he was briefly reinstated as a staff writer in the party's Department of Culture, but was eventually relocated to the mining district of Jangdong in Gangwon Province. It is generally accepted that he lived until at least 1969 (see Kim 2009a; Kim 2009b; O 2012).

In 1953, having now being definitively labeled as a US spy and part of a bourgeois reactionary element that had sneaked into the northern half of the peninsula with the intention of destroying its society from within, Li found "himself subjected to increasingly severe critical campaigns conducted by the very same people who had consistently praised him just a few years earlier" (Gabroussenko 2010: 123). While a number of critics wrote about Li, most of them repeated what others had already written. Their critical points were, for want of a better word, childish. Needless to say, the outpouring of criticism had nothing to do with Li's literary style or the quality of his literature. Vehement criticisms of Li and other southerners, including Rim Hwa and Kim Namcheon, appeared in page after page of *Joseon munhak* (Korean Literature), the journal of the North Korean Writers' Association. Selected examples of criticism were collated and republished in 1956 as the two-volume collection, *Munyejeonseone isseoseoui bandongjeok bureujoasasangeul bandae-hayeo*, or *In Opposition to the Reactionary Bourgeois Ideology Revealed on the Frontlines of the Literary and Art Scenes*.

My intention here is not to engage in literary criticism; excellent scholars such as Janet Poole and Christopher Hanscom having already critically evaluated Li's work (Poole 2014; Hanscom 2013; see Yi and Poole 2009, 2018). Rather, I would like to highlight the way in which certain key words were favored by his critics—only to be eliminated from the North Korean lexicon later. Thus, I focus at the micro level on some of the language used by Li's critics, examining what kind of shift or erasure took place in the usage, meaning, and availability of certain words. Let us look at examples of words used by critics in relation to Li's first novella, *Omongnyeo*, published in 1925, in the aforementioned 1956 volume, *In Opposition to the Reactionary Bourgeois Ideology Revealed on the Frontlines of the Literary and Art Scenes*. Janet Poole's

superb translation of *Omongnyeo* will help us to navigate this story (Yi and Poole 2018).

Its title, *Omongnyeo*, refers to its central character, the name spelled using the Chinese characters *o* (five), *mong* (dream), and *nyeo* (woman), and it is the story of a girl purchased as a slave maid at the age of nine by a blind fortune-teller who runs a small inn. When the story begins, she is about eighteen or nineteen, and is living with the blind fortune-teller, their living arrangement similar in manner to that of husband and wife. Smart and cunning, subtle yet coquettish, she stands out in this small, impoverished, coastal village at the northeastern tip of the Korean peninsula near the border with Russia. *Omongnyeo* deceives her blind husband, and when a rare food item becomes available, she eats all of it herself. This type of behavior is presented not simply as a demonstration of her greed, but also, through the subtlety of Li's depiction, as something we might call passive resistance to her sad, subjugated fate. Even though she takes care of her husband in relation to all of his needs, from the kitchen to the bedroom, the villagers, and especially a handful of the most powerful among them, are well aware of the attraction of this young woman, who is now coming of age. *Omongnyeo* herself is also aware of her value, so to speak, once or twice using it to secure favors from police officers. A newly installed police officer in the village cannot resist her and plots to possess her as his concubine. Once, he sneaks up for a brief rendezvous in the back room, taking advantage of the fact that the blind fortune-teller is dealing with guests. But the fortune-teller comes into the back room unexpectedly. Even though the officer remains silent, the blind man picks up the officer's shoe from the floor, feels the laces, smells the scent of old leather, touches the mud stuck to the sole, and knows that there is only one person in the whole village whom this shoe could belong to. The officer now has to do something to prevent the rumor from reaching his superior, and begins plotting to murder *Omongnyeo's* husband. In the meantime, right after her rendezvous with the officer, *Omongnyeo* leaves the village on a small fishing boat owned by a young fisherman whom she has been seeing and with whom she has been developing intimate relations. Upon her return to the village, she discovers that her husband has been murdered and that the evil police officer has forged a property deed and become the owner of the inn. *Omongnyeo* then begins to plot. She seduces the officer into thinking that she will now be his concubine. The officer lavishes her with a silk quilt and other luxury goods. Once the officer leaves for work, *Omongnyeo* collects all of the treasures, including the quilt, her

favorite, and runs off with the fisherman in his small boat to Vladivostok. It would be too naïve to imagine that this story is about female agency, let alone feminism. At the same time, a positive reading of this story is possible, given that it describes a young woman who takes her fate in her own hands. Rather than becoming a concubine of the corrupt police officer (an embodiment of colonial authority), she escapes with a man of her choice to an unknown foreign destination which is, of all places, part of the Soviet Union.

The North Korean critics' attack is not actually based on the storyline of *Omongnyeo* per se. It revolves around one point—the sexual liaison between the blind fortune-teller and his child slave, who became his de facto wife. The critics, interestingly, unanimously consider *Omongnyeo* to be the fortune-teller's child, rather than his wife, viewing the relationship between them as being incestuous, illicit, immoral, and un-Korean. The type of language used by the North Korean critics is nearly unanimous in nature. (All of the examples quoted below are taken from the 1956 collection mentioned above.)

Kim Myeongsu: [Li has committed] a shameless act of misrepresentation of the Korean nation as immoral and ugly human scum by writing a story in which an old man has sex with his own daughter [*han neulgeuniga jag-itareul gantonghaneun iyagi*] (1956: 53; author's translation).

Li Hyoun: [Li's first novel] depicts an old, blind fortune-teller having sex with his daughter like an animal [*han neulgeuniga jagiui ttareul ganeumhaneun geot*] (1956: 77; author's translation).

Yun Sepyeong: [This] is an immoral story about an old, blind fortune-teller who has sex with his adopted daughter, and then this woman carries on her debaucherous life [*neulgeuniga geuui suyang ttareul ganeumhayeo geu nyeojaga . . . ryullagui haengjeongeul geotge doeneun aju paedeokjeogin jakpum*] (1956: 86–87; author's translation).

Eom Hoseok: [This is a story] of an old man who is blind and [lives as] a fortune-teller having sex with his adopted daughter [*eotteon roini jagi yangnyeoreul ganeumhaneun chuakhan iyagi*]. Through this ugly story, [Li Taejun] depicts Korea as a nation of immoral and inferior people (1956a: 118; author's translation).

According to North Korea's first, as well as its most comprehensive and authoritative Korean dictionary, *Joseonmal sajeon* (Dictionary of Korean),

which was published in 1962, the term *ganeumbhada* refers to “an act of entering into immoral sexual relations by a man and a woman who are not married to each other” (Gwahagwon coneo munhak yeonguso sajeon yeongusil 1962: 83). Nowhere in the original story, by the way, is Omongnyeo said to have been adopted—she is bought at the age of nine for thirty-five *won* by the blind fortune-teller. And, this purchase is not made with the intention of making her into his child. Rather, she is bought at a young age in order to be raised and trained as a domestic servant who is the personal property of the old man. Thus, he is able to use her as a slave for whatever purpose he sees fit. The twist of the story, as presented, is that the slave is just as clever a manipulator as the slave-owner, if not more so. Interestingly, critics chose not to think about anything other than sex, placing their attention strictly on what they deemed as the illicit sexual relations between the two protagonists. No one was bothered to criticize Li by taking what might be described as an orthodox line of proletarian literary criticism by questioning, for example, why Omongnyeo did not grow up into a revolutionary or an anti-Japanese subject. All critics wanted to focus on were the pseudo-parental incestuous sexual relations between the old fortune-teller and Omongnyeo.

At the time of the purge, a literary focus on sexual acts itself appears to have constituted a crime in North Korean art, critics weaponizing the very mention of sexuality or sexualized content when attacking their political opponents. Rather simplistic, yet relentlessly clear denunciations of Li Taejun and others categorized as enemies of the people, as well as condemnations of the reactionary nature of contemporary South Korean literature, revolved around what critics took to be the sexualization of the subjects of such literature or their references to sexual acts, as the following excerpts show:

Kim Myeongsu: [Today’s South Korean literature] shows the world of sexual desire of human scum [*ingansseuregideurui saekjeong segye*] (1956: 62; author’s translation).

Eom Hoseok: Li Taejun allocates a large part of his work to the theme of sex [*saekjeong*] . . . These long novels [of Li’s] depict the secret inner lives of evil and ugly sex-crazed protagonists who hover at the bottom of the world of immoral sexuality [*eumranhan saekjeong segye*] . . . These sex-crazed [*saekkwang*] [protagonists], who are only interested in fornication and who regard [frivolous] love as the supreme purpose of life, populate Li’s novels. They are rooted within the narrow framework of the

supra-social world of animalistic instinct and the private life and, by so doing, are not totally unrelated with politics. These protagonists “attract” many young readers and eat these readers’ healthy spirits like tuberculosis bacteria . . . (1956b: 101, 103–104; author’s translation).

The 1962 *Joseonmal sajeon* defines *saekjeong* as *saegyogui gamjeong* or “feelings of sexual desire,” following with this example: “Bourgeois reactionary writers were trapped in a world of corruption and sexual desire [*saekjeong*], while flattering Japanese imperialism and justifying Japan’s colonial rule” (Gwahagwon eoneo munhak yeonguso sajeon yongusil 1962: 2520; author’s translation).

It is interesting to note that the word *ganeum* (illicit sex) is altogether omitted from the updated *Hyeondae joseonmal sajeon* (Dictionary of Modern Korean) which was published in 1968. The fact that this dictionary is much shorter than its predecessor can be deemed as a critical revision of the earlier volume, which was viewed as carrying too many words of Chinese origin (see chapter 2 of this volume for further discussion). As for *saekjeong*, the 1968 dictionary lists only as *saekjeongjuui* or sexualism (so to speak), with the predicate “*nalgeun sahoeseo*” or “in the old society” presumably referring to pre-socialist societies. The 1968 dictionary explains it as: “a corrupt and reactionary *literary trend* that allocates a pathological degree of interest to sexual relations between men and women and prioritizes such relations” (emphasis mine; Sahoegwahagwon eoneohak yonguso 1968: 713). It is interesting to see that sexual desire is now confined to a reactionary literary trend in the past, that is to say, the idea or trend depicted in the text, and not the embodied reality.

Needless to say, sex—whether marital or extramarital—has always existed, and continues to exist in North Korea today. In North Korean literature, too, sexuality and sexual relations have existed and continue to exist, if not in very obvious ways, and typically in a more encoded form of prose requiring sophisticated analysis, as Immanuel Kim has shown in his seminal book, *Rewriting Revolution: Women, Sexuality, and Memory in North Korean Fiction* (Kim 2018: chap. 2). Nevertheless, it is unquestionable that in the 1950s and 1960s, through a process of denouncing and discrediting politically shunned writers, sex, sexual intercourse, and sexualized images were used as effective weapons to demolish them. With the elimination of those deemed to be enemies of the people, such as the authors mentioned above, through the 1950s–1960s purge into the 1970s, sexual intercourse between unmarried men and women disappeared from the North Korean lexicon. Thus, according to this regime of truth, sex outside marriage no longer existed in North

Korea as indicated in the 1968 dictionary. North Korea is, perhaps, not alone among what we would call totalitarian societies in dramatically erasing a concept that is deemed undesirable in an efficient manner. The irony is that, by 1968, along with Li's opus and those of other reactionary writers, the language of criticism that Li's critics themselves used came to be purged too, as can be seen in the attrition of the word *ganeum*, illicit sexual intercourse, from the 1968 dictionary.

Peers and Reviewers

The period that witnessed the demise of Li Taejun, from the end of the Korean War through to the middle of the 1960s, was characterized by the almost confusing coexistence in the field of literary criticism of foreign, colonial, postcolonial, capitalist, socialist, modern, and premodern elements, to list but a few. It was in this atmosphere that North Korea engaged in serious literary criticism. During the 1950s and 1960s, critics had relative freedom in terms of linguistic practice, as the party was still in the process of formulating its approach to this area. Furthermore, critics continued to openly critique each other, exposing to the public their mutual disagreements, animosity, and sometimes even contempt. Although some writers and authors, or *jakka*, participated in criticism, it was mainly professional critics or *pyeongronga* that engaged in this activity. Critics would cite multiple sources of authority in their critical pieces and use them as points of comparison, including a wide range of foreign (mostly, but not always, Soviet) authors and literary works, often shunning Korean writers compared against the superiority of foreign ones—a practice unthinkable today. Not only were the words of Kim Il Sung invoked, but also those of Lenin, Stalin, Marx, Engels, and a large number of Soviet as well as some European authors, including pre-Soviet Russian authors. Classical and premodern Korean authors were also referred to as exemplary figures as part of the authentic national tradition. In other words, Kim Il Sung was not the only source of authority or legitimacy—yet.

It was also during this period that North Korean publishing houses began publishing foreign literary works and Korean classical works for public consumption. Contrary to the common and mistaken assumption that North Korea completely rejects foreign literature, it has always published foreign stories in Korean, albeit according to a rigorous selection process and with the addition of prefaces and annotations. Examples include an entire series of classical children's literature consisting of more than twenty-five volumes, including works by Leo Tolstoy and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (Tolstoy and

Yun 1991; Goethe and Yun 1991). Moreover, it is remarkable that the afterword to Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, published in 1957, during the same period that the purge of so-called reactionary writers was taking place, refers to Maxim Gorky and Daniel Defoe using the adjective *widaehan* or "great," a term now solely reserved for the nation's Great Leader today (Swift and Li 1957: 332). Similarly, a direct translation of the 1954 People's Republic of China version of the *Selected Novels of Lu Xun* was translated and published in Korean in 1956 (Lu 1956). Other works that were published during this period include Korean classics such as *Rangrangbeorui Sanyang* (Hunting in Rangrang Field) (Hong 1964). These were compiled by the revered classical scholar Hong Gimun, son of Hong Myeonghui, a prominent anti-Japanese novelist during the colonial period who, just like Li Taejun, crossed over to the North after 1945 and served in the North Korean government. Further examples include poetry by Pak Illo (1561–1642) related to the sixteenth-century Japanese invasion of Korea and Korea's resistance; an extensive and annotated collection of patriotic writings by Sin Chaeho (1880–1936), who died in prison after his arrest by Japanese police; *Hanjungrok* or *Records Written in Silence*, by Lady Hyegyong (1735–1815), a royal consort to the crown prince Sado, who was ordered by his father, the king, to enter a large rice chest and remain there until his death; *Yenmal*, a collection of medieval tales; a short book introducing notable women in Korean history, including Hwang Jini and Heo Ransolheon; and a collection of essays on Yeonam Pak Jiwon (1737–1805), a Korean medieval philosopher and writer, produced in commemoration of the 220th anniversary of his birth in 1957 and including contributions by contemporary writers such as Han Seorya (Han et al. 1957; Lu 1956; Pak 1961; Sin 1966; Joseon nyeoseongsa 1964; Joseon munhak yesul chongdongmaeng 1965a; Joseon munhak yesul chongdongmaeng 1965b). *The Crab Cannery Ship* by renowned Japanese socialist writer Kobayashi Takiji was translated into Korean, the translator including a biography praising Kobayashi's life and lamenting his death by torture at the hands of Imperial Japan's special police (Kim Y. 1960: 149–155; Kobayashi 1960). A twenty-volume opus known as *Hangil ppaljjisan chamgajadeurui hoesanggi*, which included recollections and memoirs of participants in the anti-Japanese guerrilla struggle, also began to be rolled out in 1959, the twentieth and final volume being published in the 1970s, along with a dozen monographs written by former guerrilla members (e.g., Pak Y. 1962). However, the period from the late 1950s through the early 1960s was one in which North Korean public discourse still retained a broad range of genres, repertoires, lexical sources, and spontaneous forms of

expression, and was not yet unified around the singular objective of absolutizing the legacy of Kim Il Sung. It is against such a background that we examine the *pyeongron* or literary criticism of the day in this section.

Regularly published in the monthly organ of the North Korean Writers' Association, *Joseon munhak* (Korean Literature), and sometimes also published in collections of critical essays, literary criticism was not free to deviate from the accepted party line. Critics would often cite the writings of leaders of the Federation, such as Han Seorya, Li Giyeong, and Jo Gicheon, as exemplary models. (Jo, a Soviet Korean, perished in the bombing of Pyongyang during the Korean War, a fate which perhaps saved him from being purged later.) It is also obvious, however, that the critics were not simple mouthpieces of the party and did enjoy a certain level of literary autonomy. Their opinions were offered as peer reviews, rather than as mere relaying of the party message. Considering that the practice of publicized peer reviews no longer exists in North Korea today, it deserves our attention as a site for excavation of what may be described as "pre-Great Leader" language of North Korea.

One example of such a peer review is Eom Hoseok's criticism of Li Bungmyeong. Eom (1912–1975) was North Korea's most prominent *pyeongron* or critic. Born to a poor family in northeastern Hamgyeong Province in 1912, the year of Kim Il Sung's birth, he had to give up his studies when he was expelled from high school in 1929 for having played a leadership role in an anti-Japanese student boycott in solidarity with the Gwangju Student Incident, when hundreds of students in Gwangju in southwestern Korea organized protests and street demonstrations in the wake of public harassment of female Korean students by male Japanese students. After giving up further study, Eom worked as a fisherman while participating in the leftist working class movement in his hometown of Hongwon, South Hamgyeong Province. In 1932, while working toward organizing a cell within the Hongwon Red Farmers' Union, he was arrested by Japanese police and sentenced to three years' imprisonment in 1933. Afterwards, he taught himself literary criticism in Seoul. In 1946, having returned to the North after Korea's liberation, he became editor-in-chief of the Korean Literary and Arts Federation organ, *Yesul* (Art), eventually becoming head of the Federation's Department of Criticism (Choi 2001). He was a prolific writer and a tough critic, writing many positive as well as bitterly negative appraisals of others' work, as seen in his critique of Li Taejun discussed above (e.g., Eom 1960; Eom 1962). Indeed, Gabroussenko calls Eom and other critics at the time North Korea's political executioners (Gabroussenko 2010: chap. 5).

The author Li Bungmyeong, one of Eom's regular targets, was frequently subjected to severe public criticism for "the poor artistic quality and psychological shallowness of his novels," even though, in Gabroussenko's words, "the equally inferior works of his boss [Han Seorya] were invariably praised" (Gabroussenko 2010: 138). Unlike Li Taejun, however, Li Bungmyeong's frequent subjection to criticism did not result in his political demise, and he went on writing novels until his death in 1975. Born in Hamheung, North Korea, in 1908, Li Bungmyeong had a deep fondness for literature and was influenced by socialist writers. After graduating from high school, he worked as a laborer at the Heungnam fertilizer factory (now Hungnam Fertilizer Complex in North Korea), which was then operating under Japanese management and ownership. Possessing the determination to write about the daily reality of the working class, Li taught himself to write novels. With national liberation, Li was able to achieve his dream of becoming a professional writer, defining his mission as writing *gongjangsoseol* or factory novels. Building on his early representative work, *Jilso biryo gongjang* (A Fertilizer Factory, published in 1930), Li avidly continued to produce short to medium-length stories that had industrial labor as their main motif. During the 1950s through the 1960s, Li was known by the name *rodongja jakka*, worker author (Kang 1960a).

Eom's criticism of Li Bungmyeong differs fundamentally from his attack on Li Taejun, in that Li Bungmyeong was never regarded as an enemy of the state; that is to say, Li Bungmyeong, unlike Li Taejun, did not have to be eliminated altogether. At the same time, he does not spare Li Bungmyeong from unforgiving and hyperbolic criticism, combing through Li's words and lines, turning over every stone, so to speak, and pointing out every inconsistency and shortcoming. It is undeniable that Eom's writing displays passion and tenacity, but also quite a bit of originality. Eom invents on the go, in a somewhat nonchalant manner, new Korean words and expressions, and also tweaks old ones, a practice that disappears altogether after 1970. Eom disliked writers in the *saengsanmunje* or production theme genre (including Li Bungmyeong), claiming that they had a tendency to produce work that was beneath the aesthetic standards of North Korean readers, stating that "readers frequently tell us that our current literary products are too boring and unreadable (*ilkkie siljjeungi namyeo ttabunhayeo ilkhbyeojiji anneunda*)" (Eom 1954: 5). Eom's favorite criticisms of novels in this genre—even when novels may not have contained *jeongchijeok gwao* or political errors—were that they were boring and unreadable. Less frequently, he would dismiss novels as being depressing (*chimchimhada*). His main complaint with respect to writers in this genre was that they

devoted too much attention to ideological forms (*ideollogijeok hyeongtae*), to the details of the production process and other technical matters, rather than the literary depiction of personalities and the relationships between specific characters, and that they consequently depicted workers as if they had no personal sentiments and were merely extensions of machines (Eom 1954: 11).

As he prepares to launch an all-out critique of Li's opus, he lambasts the boredom that he argues is created by the novel's excessive attention to the vocations of its characters—that Li's stories sacrifice personalities and human relations and excessively highlight production, industry, and even machinery. Referring to Li's story *Jeonsa* (The Fighter), the backdrop of which is a battle on the production line to shorten the time it takes to repair a compressor, Eom evaluates Li's depiction as "dark and sad [*ulchimhagodo eulsseunyanghamyeo*], because all of the protagonists devote themselves completely to the machine and its repair, and because there is no progressive character development" (Eom 1954: 19). In Li's story, Eom continues, personalities are simple appendages to industrial problems and production challenges. When human relations are included, Eom's argument goes, they are inserted along with the cheap and insincere motive (*seongsilbaji mothan donggi*) of merely courting the reader's attention. In *Jeonsa*, there is a scene in which the protagonist Sin Hogeuk, a discharged soldier, declares his love for Ju Hyesil, a nurse, but this love "is simply declared and there is no exploration of the complexity of love relations" (Eom 1954: 19). For Eom, this is a pathetic trick that results in a one-dimensional characterization of the North Korean workers, as if to say they are unable to fall in love.

Eom then goes further by denouncing Li for having perpetrated a deformation (*gihyeonghwa*—a derogatory term often used with reference to disability) of North Korea's working class in his stories (Eom 1954: 26). In contrast with the white-collar protagonists, Eom asserts, the worker-protagonists in *Jeonsa* and other stories speak in an uneducated tongue, Li's practice impoverishing and debasing the character of members of the North Korean working class, vulgarizing them, and depicting them as if they are slow-witted and unintelligent. In Li's stories, even the workers' appearance is intolerably shabby, their lifestyle unsanitary, their nicknames cartoonish, and their demeanor uncivilized. Eom uses terms such as *jungsangjeok* (slanderous) and *bibangjeok* (defamatory) to describe this practice, warning Li that his stories give readers the impression that the North Korean working class is idiotic (*umaehago*), uncivilized (*munmyeongchi mothamyeo*), and that it possesses base and vulgar emotions (*jeoryeolhan gamjeongui soyuja*) (Eom 1954: 27). Indeed,

according to Eom, Li's depiction of workers is not about depicting their honesty or unpretentiousness, but instead creates the impression that they are more like imbeciles (*jeoneung*) (Eom 1954: 29).

It is not my intention here to evaluate the literary value of Li's novels. Suffice it to state that four years later, a lesser-known critic, Kang Neungsu praises "Li Bungmyeong literature" (*Li Bungmyeong munhak*) for its deep love for the working class and its faithfulness with respect to the spirit of the age (*sidae jeongsine daehan chungsilseong*) (Kang 1960a: 402). Li Bungmyeong went on to write more industrial novels, including the well-known *Dangui adeul* or *A Son of the Party*, which is about a young worker who suffers an extensive burn injury at a production site, and the sacrifices that are made by fellow workers and medical personnel to ensure his recovery. Li wrote this novel in order to demonstrate that, under socialism, factory workers in North Korea are no longer the disposable slaves that they formerly were under Japanese colonial rule (Li 1961: 5–7).

What is notable here in the example of Eom Hoseok's criticism of Li Bungmyeong is the way in which he is not bound by rules to the same extent as North Korean public discourse would come to be a decade later. In his forty-six-page essay berating Li's work, Eom does not even once mention Kim Il Sung, instead quoting from political authorities such as Marx (pp. 7, 26), Engels (p. 8), and Stalin (p. 8), and literary sources such as Balzac (p. 8) and *The Arabian Nights* (p. 30) (all from Eom 1954). He mixes words from European languages into his sentences, including *ppapposeu* (purpose: pp. 11, 14, 39), *ditaecil* (detail: p. 12), *syujeteu* (*sujet*: p. 26), *peurosissenteu* (percent: p. 37), *seuttamppeu* (stamp: p. 38), *ideollogi* (*ideologie*: p. 11), and *episodeu* (episode: p. 42) (all from Eom 1954). The adjectives he uses, such as *ttabunhada* (boring, dull), *chimchimhada* (depressing), *ulchimhada* (dark), and *eulsseunyanghada* (sad), are, as stated earlier, either no longer used in North Korea's printed materials or used extremely sparingly. As can be seen in the previous paragraph, while criticizing Li's literature as boring and pathetic, Eom's own writing contains a slew of vulgar and derogatory expressions. Even more striking is the fact that, in the decade from the mid-1950s through the mid-1960s, it was still possible in North Korea to have publications that engaged with individual authors to this degree, giving writers ample time and space for criticism laden with demonstrations of personal dislike and the personal selection of somewhat creative language. Furthermore, a state of affairs was still possible in which a particular author was subjected to both scathing criticism and warm support, as in the responses to the work of Li Bungmyeong by

critics Eom and Kang respectively. It is certain that such a scenario would be unthinkable in today's North Korea.

The Demise of Diversity

As can be seen in Eom's critique above, literary criticism during the decade from the mid-1950s through the mid-1960s was characterized not only by the deployment of a diverse and colorful range of descriptive words, but also by a plurality of authoritative sources, by demonstrations of disagreement among critics, and, to put it simply, by the application of critical vigor and force to enemy (e.g., Li Taejun) and non-enemy (e.g., Li Bungmyeong) alike. Critics routinely referenced foreign sources. For example, in his call for the promotion of depictions of protagonists bearing the characteristics of the party, *dangjeok ingan*, literary critic Li Hyoun extensively refers to Alexander Fadeyev's 1946 novel *The Young Guard*, which depicts resistance to the Nazi occupation by the underground Communist youth group in the city of Krasnodon in eastern Ukraine, as a superior example compared to the contemporary North Korean counterparts. Ideological criticism of this work by the Soviet Communist Party, published in *Pravda*, led to the revised version of this novel so that it depicted the party leadership as playing a more prominent role (Li 1954: 50–52). In the process of emphasizing the importance of the role played by the party in the novels, Li does quote Kim Il Sung's words, but relies equally on Engels. He laments depictions of *dangjeok ingan* in North Korean literature, stating: "In our literature, we still do not find characters such as Davidov in Sholokhov's *Virgin Soil Uplifted* or Batmanov in Azhayev's *Far from Moscow* [representing], a party member and protagonist with strong party characteristics [*dangjeok ingan*]" (Li 1954: 81). The term *dangseong* or party characteristics exists in North Korea today, but to use it in connection with Soviet or other foreign characters would be unthinkable. For, today, *dangseong* in North Korea solely means the characteristics of the Workers' Party of Korea, and nothing else.

Another fundamental difference in practices between then and now relates to modes of reference to Kim Il Sung. Kim Il Sung is usually referred to as a comrade, rather than the absolute leader. Thus, each of the Korean sentence endings denoting his actions may or may not contain the honorific component *si*, as in *basida* (the honorific form of the verb to do), as opposed to *hada* (the non-honorific form of the verb to do). For example, the collection of nine essays in *Urinaraseoui markseu-reninjuui munyerironui changjojeok baljeon* or *The Creative Development of Marxist-Leninist Literary and Artistic*

Theory in Our Country, published in 1962 by the Department of Literature of the North Korean Academy's Language and Literature Research Unit or Gwahagwon eoneo munhak yeonguso munhak yeongusil, makes only sparse and uneven mention of Kim Il Sung (Yeon 1962; Kim H. 1962; An 1962; Pak J. 1962; Li 1962; Yun 1962; Han J. 1962; Han R. 1962; Eom 1962). When Kim is mentioned, he is referred to using the term *wonsu* or Marshal, not *wonsunim* (Marshal with an honorific added), as would become the practice in the post-1970s era, or *daewonsunim* (Great Marshal with an honorific added), following his death (Kang 1960b; Gwahagwon eoneo munhak yeonguso eoneo munhwa yeongusil 1961). Many examples of literary criticism produced in the 1960s omit the honorific particle *kkeseo* or the honorific signifier *si* in their references to Kim. Indeed, overall, the use of honorific forms in reference to Kim Il Sung is inconsistent (e.g., Kim H. 1960; Kang 1960b). At the same time, the honorific *si* is sometimes used in statements referring to Lenin, Marx, Stalin, and Engels; that is to say, by those deemed to be the leaders of Communism. In other words, Kim Il Sung did not necessarily stand above his international Communist leader peers. Also, in 1950s literary criticism, not all pieces necessarily include quotations of Kim Il Sung's words and when included, his words are not quoted as an absolute measuring standard, as they are so deemed today, while his words stand as an equal alongside other sources of authority (unlike the later practice of bold-facing Kim's words; see chapter 2 of this volume). Besides, various sources are used, including Soviet writers such as those mentioned above and also classical European and American writers, such as Honoré de Balzac, O. Henry, William James, or John Dewey. As will be shown in the next chapter, Kim's position became drastically elevated during the 1970s. Elsewhere, I have argued that it was during the 1970s and 1980s that Kim Il Sung came to assume attributes and positionality that exceeded a mere mortal in North Korean public discourse: Kim went through a metamorphosis from a man, or even a great man, to something that was sacred (Ryang 2012). But, in the 1950s, he did not yet enjoy exclusive and absolute authority—either in literature or beyond—and he was as real and secular as other reference sources.

Interestingly, some of the charges that were laid against writers included the use of terms that are today reserved for North Korea's enemies. Eom's accusations that Li Bungmyeong was *jungsangjeok* (slandering) and *bibangjeok* (defamatory) toward the North Korean working class fall into this category. In more recent decades, these terms have come to denote the sinister activities

waged by such hostile forces as the South Korean military dictatorship or the US and its allies. The fact that one critic deploys these terms in an attack on a writer not classified as an enemy of the state shows that during the late 1950s and early 1960s, the nation's central linguistic policy had yet to achieve firm control of the process by which word usage came to be paired with discrete purposes, as would later become the case. Additionally, Eom's characterization of Li Bungmyeong's literature as dark, depressing, and lethargic would strike today's readers of North Korean publications as odd or out of place, since these characteristics would belong to the extra-societal realm, i.e., the realm outside North Korea.

In the 1950s, these negative characterizations were at critics' disposal, just as words such as *ganeum* or illicit sexual liaison still had public currency and appeared in publications, avidly weaponized in the attack against the internal enemy. But, as can be seen in the above-mentioned difference between the two state-sanctioned dictionaries of Korean, published respectively in 1962 and 1968, the overall direction in which the Korean language in North Korea was moving was toward the elimination of negativity and the banishing of what is seen as evil from North Korea. Thus, by the mid- to late-1960s, critics were no longer deploying harsh or accusatory language in their criticism, except in references to enemies of the state and more typically, in references to the enemies outside of North Korea, such as US imperialism and the South Korean government.

In 1962, Han Seorya, then chairman of the Korean Literary and Arts Federation, was himself purged (Myers 1994: chap. 5). With Han's fall, critics had to make adjustments. But, more importantly, the rise of a more centralized ideological command system under Kim Il Sung meant that no one, not even critics, was entitled to publicly present his or her own views, using words of their own choosing, even when attacking anti-revolutionary elements. Thus, after the 1960s, "all the conflicts in the North Korean literary world, if there were any, were henceforth to be hidden from public view" (Gabroussenko 2010: 165). As vocabulary became compartmentalized and usage standardized, the kind of literary criticism practiced in the 1950s, a war of words waged in front of the eyes of North Korean ordinary readers, was no longer published. The 1970s began with the establishment of a centralized literary production apparatus, the April 15 Literary Production Unit (*4.15 Munhak changjakdan*), the sole mission of which consists of the production of the series known as *The Immortal History* (*Bulmyeorui ryeoksa*), an exemplary epic-historical literature

that focuses on Kim Il Sung which is taken to be eminently authoritative and which continues to be published to this day, its thirty-eighth volume having been published in 2014 (see Kim 2016).

After the mid-1960s, the previously obligatory practice of mentioning Korea's liberation by "the great Soviet Army" in 1945 also ceased. Frequent references to Maxim Gorky, Leo Tolstoy, Alexander Fadeyev, Nikolay Ostrovski, Nikolay Chernichevsky, and many other Russian and Soviet authors, as well as some European and American authors and their works, as sources of authority more or less completely disappeared by the early 1970s. At the same time, for the most part, North Korean literary criticism ceased mentioning specific literary works by South Korean authors: earlier, South Korean literature was severely yet avidly criticized and depicted as negative force often referencing individual writers; in the 1970s on, it no longer received such generous treatment. Altogether, these developments constituted a process by which a certain truth was arising, eliminating others—evil, inferior, South Korean, or otherwise—from the time and space that North Korea was to occupy.

By the end of the 1970s, *pyeongron* or literary criticism in North Korea meant something entirely different. Criticism of individual authors and their work came to be replaced by critical consideration of such issues as theme selection, character development, the degree of alignment with revolutionary objectives, and, perhaps most importantly in the context of the North Korean literature, depictions of the Great Leader (e.g., Jang 1990; Kang 1990; Li 1990; Jang 1989; Hwang 1993; Kim 1991; Ryeom 1988; Yun 1991). In genres spanning children's literature, classical novels, poetry, plays, science fiction, and the like, literary production came to be devoted to depictions of North Korea as a successful socialist society, illustrations of revolutionary camaraderie among North Korean people, and, above all, demonstrations of the greatness of the Great Leader's literary theory (Gwahak baekkwasa jeon chulpansa 1979; Kim 1985: 88). By the 1980s, critics would analyze *suryeongnimseon*, directly translatable as the Leader line, a storyline involving human relations built around the Great Leader's virtue and written in reverence of the Great Leader (Eom 1988).

I would like to resist the temptation to simply call this focus on the Great Leader censorship or oppression, since doing so would be attributing absolute power and effectiveness to one action taken by a legal and political authority, which is not the case in North Korea or elsewhere. For a truth regime to function, it requires a form of universal understanding that is shared by all,

albeit with the limitation that this sharing is manifested in an uneven fashion. Censorship or oppression alone does not produce truth. Or we should perhaps say that power does not just suppress; it produces effects and results, shaping a new, productive social order. And for this to happen, a set of tools needs to be provided. Besides, North Korea has published, and continues to publish, examples of classical Korean literature, folklore, literature from the period of Japanese colonial rule, proletarian heritage literature, Korean translations of selected foreign works, works of science fiction, and so on. In other words, the landscape of contemporary literary publication in North Korea is a complex one.

Nevertheless, it is undeniable that during a decade immediately following the end of the Korean War, something like a clearing of the field took place in terms of how the language was used in the public domain. Given that all publications and media productions in North Korea are sanctioned by the state, the purging of freewheeling vocabulary of the kind seen in Eom's critical pieces attests to a grave shift. The demise of alternative political platforms and diverse literary opinions, among others, in a society where almost every aspect and element of social, political, and economic life has come to be funneled toward party centralization, as well as a focus on the Leader, reflected post-Korean War political conditions that greatly facilitated dominance by the ruling party (Lankov 2001).

While the above shift was taking place, some other notable changes were also happening in terms of book printing and presentation. Text inside books published during the 1950s and the very early 1960s was printed from right to left, with Korean text typeset vertically and sometimes interspersed with Chinese characters or *hanja*, while the books themselves were bound on the right-hand side in traditional East Asian style. The use of Chinese characters had disappeared altogether by the 1960s (see chapter 2 of this volume). From around 1964 to 1965, books started to be bound on the left side of the pages, with the typeset unified in horizontal format. By the late 1960s/early 1970s, almost everything, including language and literature, had come to trace its intellectual and spiritual origins to the anti-Japanese guerrilla struggle of the 1930s led by Kim Il Sung, for North Korean society was supposed to be built on this revolutionary tradition or *hyeongmyeong jeontong* (e.g., Sahoegwahagwon 1971). Indeed, by the beginning of the 1970s, North Koreans were supposedly speaking a new language, one that had been cultivated in the field that the purge of the 1950s had cleared. In the following

chapter, we will examine which tools were utilized in the creation of this new language in North Korea. We will see that state linguistic institutions were not completely consistent in their implementation of this reform. We will also see that, despite such inconsistencies, the new language of North Korea has been surprisingly effective in forging a new nation inside the mold that it offered.

CHAPTER 2

Words

Linguistic Reforms

While literary circles were experiencing a bloodcurdling purge, the Korean language in North Korea was going through a series of changes. The disappearance by the early 1970s of some of the colorful language that critics had used from the 1950s through the early 1960s in attacking their peers as well as their enemies was part of this larger process. In order to place this situation in historical context, it will be useful here to briefly look at what happened to the Korean language in North Korea following Korea's partition in 1945. When Korea became independent of Japanese colonial rule in 1945, a substantial portion of the population was illiterate. Although Korean as a language did have a standardized format that was promoted by native linguists during the colonial era (1910–1945) despite horrendous persecution by the Japanese authorities, linguistic practices across the peninsula were not unified, reflecting the classical and precolonial practice of linguistic division in Korea between the Chinese classics that were used for royal chronicles, court-related business, and the education of the gentlemen-literati on the one hand, and the vernacular form of Korean used for and by commoners and women. It was further complicated by the existence of extremely diverse local and regional dialects. Combined with the effects of the imposition of Japanese language use during the colonial period on what was already a diversified linguistic field, the linguistic environment in Korea in the immediate postwar era was one that was both complex and decentralized.

Multiple sets of practices existed in both the spoken and written languages. It was common to mix Chinese characters with Korean ones, for example, by using Chinese characters for particular words in order to avoid ambiguity with respect to their meanings, and then completing sentences by

writing particles and sentence endings using the native Korean *hangul* alphabet. This practice was particularly helpful in the case of homonyms, the various meanings of which could be deduced by the context in which they were found or by the Chinese characters used to write each of them. Most Korean words double as Chinese characters—that is to say, they can be transliterated into Chinese characters—and newspapers and other publicly circulated printed matter often featured Korean writing mixed with Chinese ideographs. For private purposes, literate Koreans would use *eonmun* or vernacular text, but the use of Chinese characters was deemed as a sign that the writer had received some formal education. By the time Japanese colonial rule ended, the use of Chinese characters mixed with letters from the Korean alphabet was further complicated by the influence of the Japanese language, which also utilizes Chinese characters, side by side with the influence of the classical Chinese that had dominated the high culture of premodern Korea.

Shortly after its foundation in 1948, North Korea began practicing a Korean-only policy, which prescribed the exclusive use of the Korean alphabet in all public and printed texts and the elimination of Chinese characters. The abolition of Chinese character use in publications was an unequivocal effort to decolonize and indigenize the form of Korean that was used in North Korea. Along with the introduction of compulsory elementary-level education, the policy abolishing the use of Chinese characters was officially adopted in September 1949 (Kumatani 1990: 93).

This reform went hand-in-hand with a movement to eliminate illiteracy, *munmaeng toechi undong*, as the Korean vernacular-only policy proved to be highly effective in quickly teaching the masses to read and write. Unlike the Chinese writing system, which includes thousands of characters, the Korean one is much simpler to learn. Invented in the fifteenth century, it was developed as a utilitarian measure to allow lower-class men and women, who had traditionally been excluded from educational opportunities, to achieve literacy without having to learn the massive and complicated set of Chinese characters (see below).

One of the consequences of the abolition of Chinese character use was to make the Korean language more dependent on the sounds of words rather than on the ideographs used to write them. In the classical Chinese ideographic system, knowing the meaning of each ideograph was of imperative importance. Since time immemorial, Chinese characters were used by Korea and other small states that surrounded China. In Korea, as stated above, the royal court utilized Chinese classical writing in all aspects of formal

documentation. From around the first century BC onwards, Chinese characters were used to express the Korean phonology, that is to say, Chinese classical syntax was disregarded and characters were used purely to copy sounds, as Korean syntax does not resemble its Chinese counterpart. In the fifteenth century, a revolutionary alphabet, *hunminjeongeum*, was invented so as to be able to denote Korean sounds. Literally meaning “the correct sounds to be taught to the people (commoners),” *hunminjeongeum* was meant to copy the sounds of Korean that were spoken by all and sundry, basically having little connection with the Chinese ideographic system. The system consists of parts that are assembled to form syllables. According to linguist Noma Hideki, “[in premodern Korea] all *écriture* was Chinese characters and Chinese sentences. That was all of it. Yet, in the world of Chinese characters and Chinese sentences, the hitherto-unknown *jeongeum* [literally, “proper sound” or “correct sound”] system was established. This is the point of departure for the structure that brought about fifteenth-century Korea’s *jeongeum écriture* revolution” (Noma 2010: 184; author’s translation).

Its modern form having evolved from the original *jeongeum*, the Korean *hangul* alphabet consists of twenty-one vowels and nineteen consonants, which are combined into syllables according to their sounds. As such, the task of learning this alphabet is an incomparably simpler one for first-time learners than that involved in memorizing thousands of Chinese characters, each of which carries a different meaning. Each element of a Korean character denotes a sound and not a meaning, with meaning conveyed only after the parts have been combined to form a word. With *munmaeng toechi undong* (a movement to eliminate illiteracy), more than eight thousand adult night schools had been built in North Korea by the end of 1945; by 1947, a total of forty thousand such schools were operating (Kumatani 1990: 91; Sahoegwahak chulpansa 1973: 102). Sahoegwahagwon eoneohak yeonguso or the Department of Linguistics of the North Korean Academy of Social Sciences claims that by the end of 1949, two million people had learned to read and write (Sahoegwahagwon eoneohak yeonguso 1962: 136–137). Putting aside whether or not this figure is correct, it is nevertheless completely believable that the adoption of a Korean-only writing system enabled the North Korean state to educate men and women, the old and the young, at a remarkably fast speed, achieving national literacy in an efficient manner.

This new practice was profoundly meaningful for nation-building. During the centuries prior to Japanese colonial rule, no commoner had been able to understand the king’s language in either its spoken or written forms.

During the colonial period, the language of the Japanese Government-General was that of a foreign nation. In North Korea, for the first time in the history of the Korean peninsula, the population came to share the same language as the nation's governing body. Kim Il Sung's works, as well as government documents, were published in Korean and Korean only, therefore giving the masses direct access to the words of their leader.

Kim Il Sung himself paid a great deal of attention to the role of language in nation-building. Scholars of the language in North Korea place importance on two conversations that Kim Il Sung had with linguists, in 1964 and 1966 respectively (Kim 1982a; Kim 1982b). In these rather short conversations, Kim stresses the need to rid Korean of cumbersome words of Chinese origin; that is to say, not the Chinese characters per se, but the words that can be transliterated into Chinese, *hanjamal* or *hanjaeo*, both terms literally meaning Chinese-character-words, to which I shall refer as Chinese-originated words. In the Korean lexicon, the number of such words exceeds the number of words that have no Chinese-character equivalents (e.g., King 2007: 211–213). Aside from these two occasions, Kim is also documented as having been a keen interventionist with respect to the Korean language. Already in February 1948, a visit by Kim to a newspaper office set the scene for the subsequent abolition of Chinese characters from printed matter (Sahoegwahak chulpansa 1973: 125). It has also been said that his (unpublished) teachings, delivered on May 3, 1962, resulted in improving the linguistic cultural standards of the North Korean working class (Gwahagwon eoneo munhak yeonguso eoneo munhwa yeongsil 1963a: 5–6), while Kim's teaching on December 30, 1962, regarding the role of social sciences is said to have referred to the importance of centrally controlling the vocabulary of the Korean language (Pak, Li, and Go 1986: 30).

As Kumatani Akiyasu succinctly states, language reform in North Korea was carried out in an unequivocally top-down manner in accordance with the teachings of Kim Il Sung, although, it is true, most language standardization by newly independent nations are usually carried out top-down (Kumatani: 1990: 97). The National Language Assessment Committee or *Gugeo sajeong wiwonhoe* was established in 1964. Attached to and also reporting to the cabinet, it was responsible for overseeing linguistic reform. In accordance with the Workers' Party of Korea's mass participation policy, pace Kumatani's comment above, newspapers actively engaged in seeking opinions and feedback from the public (Pak, Li, and Go 1986: 33; King 2007: 211; Kumatani 1990: 97). In 1966, the Committee published the *Joseonmal gyubeom* or *The Rules*

of Korean. This comprehensive yet concise booklet, which was broadly circulated nationally, included authoritative clarifications with respect to grammar (referred to using the vernacular-oriented term *matchumbeop*, rather than the more Chinese-oriented term *munbeop*), spelling, and punctuation (Gugeo sajeong wiwonhoe 1966). In its preamble, the committee stresses the importance of “raising the cultural standards of our linguistic life” (Gugeo sajeong wiwonhoe 1966: 1). During the 1960s, other books published in relation to linguistics and language were generated by government-run offices and national higher education institutions rather than by individual researchers or authors (e.g., Gwahagwon eoneo munhak yeonguso eoneo munhwa yeongusil 1960; Gwahagwon eoneo munhak yeonguso eoneo munhwa yeongusil 1963b; Kim Il Sung jonghapdaehak eomunhak yeonguso 1964).

As stated in the previous chapter, 1968 saw the publication of *Hyeondae joseonmal sajeon* or *Dictionary of Modern Korean*, a new dictionary reflecting linguistic reforms following Kim Il Sung’s 1964 and 1966 teachings, based on the revision of the earlier *Joseonmal sajeon* (published in 1962), which Kim Il Sung had criticized for carrying too many Chinese-originated words (“Hyeondae joseonmal sajeoni nawatta” 1968; Sahoegwahagwon eoneohak yeonguso 1968; see also chapter 1 above). Whereas the 1962 dictionary had a total of 187,137 entries over 5,054 pages, the 1968 dictionary was a dramatically leaner volume containing a mere 1,350 pages. While the majority of the entries in the 1962 dictionary have Chinese characters attached for disambiguation, nowhere in the 1968 dictionary does one see Chinese characters.

What I’d like to do in this chapter is not to repeat what we already know—that the North Korean state centralized its hold on the national language and administered state-initiated reforms based on Kim Il Sung’s ideas. In fact, centralized language standardization is nothing new when it comes to the histories of nation-building worldwide, from ancient to modern times. When Japan established itself as a modern nation under the restored Meiji emperor in 1868, the language standardization policy which ensued—involving the unification of the writing system, the imposition of a standard language, and the suppression of dialects—arrived hand-in-hand with the introduction of compulsory public education. Upon annexing Okinawa in 1879, Japanese authorities prohibited the use of the Okinawan dialect. Schoolchildren were required to report on each other whenever a transgression was made, with anyone found guilty made to carry around a piece of wood broadcasting their “offense” of having spoken in their native tongue (Tanaka 1981). Japan annexed Korea in

1910, from the 1930s dictating that school instruction be conducted exclusively in Japanese. Throughout history, language—both as a means of communication and as a part of the symbolic identity of a community—has always played a central role in the establishment of cultural dominance by a central power, whether it be the state, colonial authorities, or even resistance groups working toward national liberation (Anderson 1983).

Linguists have also written about North Korea's language policy by measuring how far it has distanced itself from the language used in South Korea or by examining the extent of divergence between the forms used in North Korea and South Korea respectively (Kumatani 1990; King 2007). Yet, on this point, too, it can be argued that this development, in and of itself, is one that may have been expected. Just as Spanish is used more frequently in the US today than was the case some decades ago, shifts in language use reflect political, economic, and demographic changes. Suffice it to say that there is no reason to assume that the South Korean language should be used as the basis for measuring the North Korean language's degree of "deviation."

What is not so well known is the *how* of the central reforms, which is what ultimately delivered the Great Leader's truth that prevails in North Korea today. Scholars have emphasized that these reforms ultimately succeeded in making the form of the Korean language used in North Korea unique and establishing Kim Il Sung as the leader of all aspects of national linguistic life (e.g., Kumatani 1990: 96–107). This is no doubt true. For example, the North Korean linguistic authority goes so far as to claim Kim as the creator of rather common words, such as the word for "party cell" and the words that make up national slogans, such as "Chollima Speed" (Eoneohak yeonguso 1976: 55, 69). But, overly focusing on such practices—as outlandish and unthinkable as this may be—inevitably diverts attention from the actual process by which the Korean language was transformed, in and of itself an undertaking that involved large-scale and multi-faceted reforms and practices. This is not to suggest that the ideological effects of North Korea's linguistic reforms were not significant—they were. But at the same time, it is also necessary to examine the techniques deployed at the micro level in this process so as to reach a fuller understanding of just how the process of creating the North Korean national language of truth inched along, turning each and every speaker of this language into a national subject of North Korea. As will be shown in the rest of this chapter, this process was neither a clear-cut nor a smooth one, involving willful omissions, stretched justifications, and unexpected revelations.

The Guidebook

In 1963, the Department of Linguistic Culture Research (Eoneo munhwa yeongusil) of the North Korean Academy's Language and Literature Research Unit (Gwahagwon eoneo munhak yeonguso) published a comprehensive guidebook entitled *Uri saenghwalgwa eoneo* or *Our Life and Language* (Gwahagwon eoneo munhak yeonguso eoneo munhwa yeongusil 1963a). While this book also includes recommendations with respect to good writing practice, its primary focus is *mal* (words) or *immal* (spoken words), rather than *geul* (writing) or *geulmal* (written words). The guidebook starts with the archetypal presentation of the thesis that North Korea's linguistic tradition began during the anti-Japanese guerrilla fight waged by Kim Il Sung (Gwahagwon eoneo munhak yeonguso eoneo munhwa yeongusil 1963a: chap.1). Once it leaves the altar of this ritualistic preamble, the book goes into a surprising degree of detail in stipulating the *bon usage* of Korean, explaining not only how to speak it, but also what to say, when to say it, with whom, in what tone of voice, at what kind of pace, using what kinds of mannerisms, and adopting what kind of body posture, for example.

The most notable undercurrent sustaining the book is the need to speak politely and respectfully when addressing one's fellow citizens. Throughout the guidebook, the preservation of civility when speaking is of the utmost concern. This need, as it were, does not stem from a hierarchy based on social status, but from an urge to create a new and egalitarian socialist culture in which people must not degrade themselves by failing to respect others. Secondly, it is emphasized throughout the book that the practice of speaking *pyojuneo* or standardized language is an inevitable, law-like historical outcome of socialism, unlike in pre-socialist society, where class stratification and differentiations in status prevented people from speaking the same language, creating a divide between cities and the countryside on the one hand and the exploitative and exploited classes on the other. The book asserts that the new socialism of North Korea demands that the language be standardized, with the use of regional dialects minimized and with their replacement by a unified national language. These two points—civility and standardization—are pursued equally in the book, as it proceeds to comment on diverse forms of speech and appropriate language to be used in various social contexts. It provides detailed direction with respect to the writing of letters, telegrams, propaganda posters, journals, advertisements, and announcements, as well as in relation to public speaking, telephone

conversations, discussions, and debates. It offers guidance on how to speak to, with, and in front of children, also providing advice on speech etiquette, the correct use of particular adages and idioms in conversation, recommendations relating to pronunciation, punctuation, greetings, and the proper kinship terms to be used when addressing and referring to others.

When emphasizing the need to be polite and respectful in a face-to-face situation, the guidebook adopts a painstakingly detailed approach. For example, according to the section on *daehwa* (conversation) and *jwadam* (dialogue or, more precisely, sit-down-talk), it states:

When speaking to the elderly and older persons, one must not say: “*Abai, nai myeotsariyo?* [How old are you, Mister?].” Clearly one should use *jongyeongeo* [honorific language] and say: “*Harabeohim, nyeonse (chunchu) ga eotteokke doesimnikka?* [Sir, how old might your age be?].” Also, around the elderly, one must be careful not to act too busy and be too talkative (*dasahageona sudaseureopke malhajiantorok*). (Gwahagwon eoneo munhak yeonguso eoneo munhwa yeongusil 1963a: 69; author’s translation)

The guidebook goes on to stress that when taking public transportation, it would be rude (*sillye*) and mannerless (*myrye*) to other passengers to discuss a specialized topic or work-related matter with one’s companions or talk loudly about one’s private matters or family-related issues (Gwahagwon eoneo munhak yeonguso eoneo munhwa yeongusil 1963a: 69). When on the train, the guidebook details, it would be highly appropriate and advisable to talk about the locale that the train is passing through—the region’s local specialties, its legends and folklore, its geographic conditions, and so on (Gwahagwon eoneo munhak yeonguso eoneo munhwa yeongusil 1963a: 70). Interestingly, many words the guidebook uses—*dasahada* (busy) and *sudaseureopda* (talkative), for example, in the quotation above—are examples of Chinese-originated words, which would disappear in the post-1970s reform.

In other public settings, such as at a theater or cinema, the book warns, it would cause a disturbance (*banghae*) to other customers if one were to talk among one’s friends about the play or the film that is being presented on stage, presenting one’s own opinions about it. When walking, at intersections, the book advises, people must not talk loudly to each other or laugh out loud, as this would make other pedestrians feel uncomfortable. The book then states that “[these kinds of behaviors] would lower one’s own dignity and

grace [*pumwireul natchuda*]” (Gwahagwon eoneo munhak yeonguso eoneo munhwa yeongusil 1963a: 70). In public, even close friends should not use colloquialisms when talking to one another, such as completing sentences with *ya* or *ja* (i.e., informal, friendly forms as opposed to the formal forms *eoyo/seumnida* or *sida*), the guidebook warns, because even though one may be talking with one’s friend, other people would be listening too and one needed to be considerate toward other citizens. In sum, the guidebook places particular importance on *insaseong* or proper mannerisms while having conversations in public, on taking a modest stance and respecting one’s counterpart, on carefully choosing cultivated and polite words, tone, volume, and on appropriate overall behavior when talking (Gwahagwon eoneo munhak yeonguso eoneo munhwa yeongusil 1963a: 72).

In providing guidance related to manners in public speech, public discussions, debates, and lectures, the book devotes enormous attention to the need for politeness, civility, and modesty. While stressing that words used in public presentations need to be clear and simple, the book still warns about the danger of violating the boundaries of civility and humility, stating: “The audience will place better trust in sincere, simple, and modest words” (Gwahagwon eoneo munhak yeonguso eoneo munhwa yeongusil 1963a: 74). The use of pretentious and overly intellectual expressions is criticized, not only because it would render the presentation inaccessible to the audience, but also because it would be rude to the audience. Each word needs to be enunciated clearly, the guidebook continues, and the speaker or lecturer must respect the audience and not use careless expressions, such as “*igeot bosio*” or “Look here!” (Gwahagwon eoneo munhak yeonguso eoneo munhwa yeongusil 1963a: 78). It is repeatedly stated that one needs to *ryejeoreul jikida* or observe the proper etiquette, as doing so would elevate the *munhwaseong* or level of cultivation of both speaker and audience. The book sternly discourages any use of *banmal*, the form of Korean used when addressing younger or lower-ranked persons, in public speech, strongly recommending that readers address audiences using the terms *yeoreobun* (everybody—polite form) or *dongji* (comrades), for example, and refer to themselves using the term *je* or *jeo*, a humble form of I, as opposed to *nae* or *na*, a neutral or peer-to-peer form of I (Gwahagwon eoneo munhak yeonguso eoneo munhwa yeongusil 1963a: 75).

The guidebook does not neglect the insertion of ideological content, and this can be best seen in examples of rhetorical questions. In the sentence “Is there any way to think that American wretches [*migungnom*] have a conscience?” the rhetorical question is asked to emphasize the inverse of what

is being asked, i.e., that Americans have no conscience (Gwahagwon eoneo munhak yeonguso eoneo munhwa yeongusil 1963a: 81). But such examples are far fewer in number than those that simply demonstrate how the new Korean language should be used in daily life in workplaces and in public spaces: with civility, politeness, respect, and humility. And nowhere in the book is there any mention of special ways to express respect for Kim Il Sung.

In relation to telephone usage, too, the guidebook is unequivocal in its intention to promote politeness and civility. It details the correct manner of speaking on the phone, starting with the need to properly introduce oneself to the listener and speak *chinjeolhago budeureopge* or kindly and softly (gently) when requesting to speak with a third party. Clearly, this section assumes that telephones are in use primarily in workplaces or in other public settings rather than in private homes, thus also including the assumption that business-related matters would be the main reason for making a call. It directs the reader to use phrases such as “*bappeusinde mianhamnidadaman*” or “I’m so sorry to bother you when you are busy” when asking for someone in the workplace (Gwahagwon eoneo munhak yeonguso eoneo munhwa yeongusil 1963a: 85). The guidebook strongly recommends that proper manners also require that the recipient of a call firstly notify the caller of his or her intentions before attempting to transfer the call to his or her colleague in order to keep the caller informed. Similarly, the book prohibits the reader from speaking to a third person while on a phone call with someone else. It also recommends that he or she adopt correct posture and self-presentation, even though his or her counterpart would not be able to see him or her, this being an example of *oreun ryejeol* or proper etiquette. In another example of *ryejeol* (politeness) related to phone use, the book recommends that one should wait for the other person to hang up first when speaking with a senior or older person (Gwahagwon eoneo munhak yeonguso eoneo munhwa yeongusil 1963a: 86).

It is interesting to see that the guidebook clearly directs the reader to utilize *jondae* or the highest honorific form of Korean when addressing comrades, “regardless of rank or position,” because such is the beautiful virtue of Communists (Gwahagwon eoneo munhak yeonguso eoneo munhwa yeongusil 1963a: 228). In other words, rather than adopting more egalitarian or less cumbersome forms, such as *hao* or *hage*, the forms immediately below the *jondae* level in the hierarchy of Korean honorific levels, North Korean linguistic authorities are opting to promote the politest forms of address as part of the new socialist speech practice to be used among peers, even though,

traditionally speaking, the proper way to address the younger individual would be to use *banmal*, or form of address that is specifically reserved for speaking down, according to the Korean convention.

It is also interesting to see that, while placing an emphasis on the avoidance of using Chinese-originated words (*hanjamal*), the guidebook concedes that using honorific would entail mixing more words with Chinese origins, including *tansaeng* (birth), *seogeo* (death), *chunchu* or *nyeonse* (age), *daek* (house), and *samonim* (wife), into daily conversation. It also details the use of the honorific particle *si*, which gets inserted or is added when referring respectfully to a person's actions or state, as in *hasida* (to do) as opposed to *hada*. A similar example is the use of the honorific *kkeseo* instead of the non-honorific *ga*, both nominative particles that denote an aspect of the subject (explained in detail in Gwahagwon eoneo munhak yeonguso eoneo munhwa yeongusil 1963a: 227–228). What draws our attention is that at no point the guidebook reserves the use of special honorific terms for Kim Il Sung or any members of his family. Rather, politeness is demanded as a basic virtue to be shared among North Korean citizens and comrades in general, and not set aside, only and exclusively, for the Great Leader.

A similar, if not even deeper, degree of concern over politeness prevails when the discussion shifts to the subject of how to talk to children, with children, and in front of children. The guidebook is particularly intent on emphasizing that language habits have their roots early in life. It admonishes parents who mimic baby talk back to their babies, claiming that such a practice delays these babies' development. When a child begins kindergarten, the book continues, its parents must pay special attention to the child's linguistic behavior regarding honorific usage. For example, children must not refer to adults eating using the expression *babeul meongneunda* (to have a meal—plain form), but should instead use the term *jinji deusinda* (to have a meal—honorific form). According to the guidebook, such polite linguistic practice among children can only be achieved when adults demonstrate exemplary manners at all times (Gwahagwon eoneo munhak yeonguso eoneo munhwa yeongusil 1963a: 269). Likewise, the book recommends teaching kindergarteners how to greet others properly using entire polite sentences, such as in "*Inminngundae ajeossi, annyeong hasimnikka*" ("Dear Korean People's Army soldier, good morning"), rather than via simple greetings, such as "*Annyeong!*" ("Hello!") (Gwahagwon eoneo munhak yeonguso eoneo munhwa yeongusil 1963a: 269). When a child reaches elementary school, the book suggests, adults should pay

attention to how they speak in front of the child and his or her peers, since children learn by taking adult behavior as a model. The book prohibits adults from calling children using vulgar terms such as *saekkiya* (kid—vulgar), further recommending that they talk to other adult interlocutors politely in front of children. Adults must also, according to the book, teach children that the latter should never resort to name-calling or the use of vulgar, derogatory, or risqué words as well as other “*beoreut eomneun mal*” or coarse and unpolished words, since such behavior would run counter to the ideals of the Korean Young Pioneers. Indeed, the book claims, teaching others how to be polite is an important element in the cultivation of Communist virtue (*gongsanjuuijeok dodeok gyoyang*) (Gwahagwon eoneo munhak yeonguso eoneo munhwa yeongusil 1963a: 271–272).

As has been seen briefly above, the guidebook goes into considerable detail when summarizing etiquette concerned with private conversation conducted in public, providing guidelines with respect to attitude, vocalization, volume, tone, posture, and pace. The book strictly warns against yelling or shouting in quiet places, such as libraries, even if it is between close friends. There is no need to raise one’s voice when criticizing or blaming another person in public, it argues, as this would be rude to any third party that happened to be in earshot. One must neither speak too quickly nor too slowly, as either would be unkind and awkward for the listener. One also needs to observe proper posture and body stance when speaking, and one must not “lean against a wall or sit back in a chair,” when engaging in conversation in public, even with people familiar to one. When answering someone who is speaking to you from a standing position, you should also stand—such is the proper attitude (*oreun taedo*). It is also important to maintain a bright countenance and a kind expression when speaking with others. Further, it would be rude to convey your naked emotion when talking to a third party about a past event, as such an attitude would lack *gongsanjuuijeok suyang* or Communistic discipline. When in public, one must refrain from whispering to one’s friends, as this would cause misunderstanding and be awkward for the people nearby. Even when one is talking to one’s own wife or children, if there is a third party or guest present, one should always talk to them politely or *jeomjanke*, as such is the *ryejeol* or the proper mannerism. One must not monopolize a conversation, as this would be impolite. When asked a question by someone, regardless of the questioner’s age, one must respond sincerely and clearly, in order to maintain *ryejeol* or politeness (Gwahagwon eoneo munhak yeonguso eoneo munhwa yeongusil 1963a: 263–265).

Commentary on local and regional dialects in the guidebook includes a similar degree of detail to that which we have seen so far in relation to polite mannerisms in speech. However, it is interesting to see that it considers that the standardized North Korean language should not only be free from local and regional dialects, but also be equipped with politeness and civility, thereby making standardization not simply an effort to unify the language's vocabulary and expressions but, more importantly, an effort to unify language practice, mainly in the area of spoken language, through the use of polite forms of address and speech mannerisms. Thus, the guidebook is intent on asserting that being polite is to be the standard of the new socialist lifestyle in North Korea regardless of localities and regions. Needless to say, an added layer exists in the assumption that the standardized language is polite, while regional dialects are impolite. This does not mean that the book shuns the diverse dialects that are found in Korea. On the contrary, it praises the Korean dialects as being equipped with the capacity to express the delicate emotions of local people as well as the unique geo-cultural settings of each locality. The reason why North Koreans must overcome local dialects and uphold the standardized language as their daily tongue, the book stresses, is because the latter incorporates the strengths of each of the various dialects found throughout Korea, while emerging as the most sophisticated, comprehensive and appropriate language for the new socialist reality and a "powerful tool to construct socialist culture" (Gwahagwon eoneo munhak yeonguso eoneo munhwa yeongusil 1963a: 60).

In reasoning as such, the guidebook stresses the inconvenience suffered by non-speakers when communicating with speakers of particular dialects, an inconvenience which would hinder socialist nation-building. By way of contrast, citizens' active use of the standardized language would enhance sophisticated and effective communication, and elevate the general education level. The only place where the dialects should legitimately be used, according to the book, would be in literary works (Gwahagwon eoneo munhak yeonguso eoneo munhwa yeongusil 1963a: 63). At this point, nowhere in the North Korean linguistic policy a special emphasis is placed on the language spoken in Pyongyang as the standard Korean, which would become the case later on (see below).

Citing the need to notice and correct others' use of dialect forms, and with the intention of assisting citizens in carrying out such tasks, the book provides examples of dialect forms from Hamgyeong Province in the northeast and Pyeongan Province in the northwest, as seen in the tables below.

Table 1. Hamgyeong dialect

<i>English</i>	<i>Hamgyeong dialect</i>	<i>Standardized Korean</i>
lie (as in untruth)	<i>dosap</i>	<i>geojinmal</i>
grandmother	<i>amae</i> or <i>amai</i>	<i>halmeoni</i>
mother	<i>jema</i> or <i>imi</i>	<i>eomeoni</i>
side dishes	<i>haem</i> or <i>haemse</i>	<i>banchan</i>
squash	<i>dongae</i>	<i>hobak</i>
swiftly	<i>eolssin</i>	<i>colleun</i>
chimney	<i>gusae</i>	<i>gulttuk</i>
kimchi	<i>jimchi</i>	<i>gimchi</i>
radish	<i>mukka</i>	<i>muu</i>
autumn	<i>gaseul</i>	<i>gacul</i>
scissors	<i>gasae</i>	<i>gawi</i>
soil	<i>halgi</i>	<i>heuk</i>
oil	<i>jireum</i>	<i>gireum</i>
soup	<i>gwigi</i>	<i>guk</i>
Let's work.	<i>ireu hapjibi</i>	<i>ireul hapsida</i>

Compiled from Gwahagwon eoneo munhak yeonguso eoneo munhwa yeongusil 1963a: 64–65.

Table 2. Pyeongan dialect

<i>English</i>	<i>Pyeongan dialect</i>	<i>Standardized Korean</i>
station	<i>deonggeodang</i>	<i>jeonggeojang</i>
school	<i>hakko</i>	<i>hakkyo</i>
June	<i>nuwol</i>	<i>yuwol</i>
side dishes	<i>chilge</i>	<i>banchan</i>
shy	<i>ssuakseureopta</i>	<i>bukkeureopta</i>
purse, wallet	<i>jibak</i>	<i>dongabang</i>
chili peppers	<i>daenggaeji</i> or <i>dangchu</i>	<i>gochu</i>
chives	<i>gochu</i>	<i>huchu</i>
will go	<i>gagassuda</i>	<i>gagesseumnida</i>
inexpensive	<i>nukda</i>	<i>ssada</i>
expensive	<i>ssada</i>	<i>bissada</i>
Because you came.	<i>nirae onikki</i>	<i>nega onikka</i>
I	<i>naerae</i>	<i>naega</i>
to be	<i>issoda</i>	<i>isseumnida</i>
Will (you) go?	<i>gagan?</i>	<i>gagenni?</i>

Compiled from Gwahagwon eoneo munhak yeonguso eoneo munhwa yeongusil 1963a: 65–66).

As can be seen from the tables, some dialects show regular patterns in their replacement of unique consonant sounds, as in *j* becoming *d* or *y* becoming *n*, while there are also cases of whole words being replaced by other words. By providing a comprehensive list of patterns and practices involving the use of dialects, the book encourages readers to both self-censor their utterances and police others' use of language.

The guidebook then encourages *modeun geulloja* or all working people (i.e., North Korean citizens) to read as much as they can, so as to overcome their local dialects and be immersed in the standardized language, such as that found in publications of the Workers' Party of Korea (Gwahagwon eoneo munhak yeonguso eoneo munhwa yeongusil 1963a: 67). Aside from the preamble and chapter 1, where Kim Il Sung is mentioned in passing, the part on dialect use is the only place in three hundred or so pages of the book where one finds references made to Kim Il Sung's teachings, as in: "Our Respected Leader Comrade Kim Il Sung taught us in his teaching on May 3, 1962, to strengthen and improve publication work and youth education" (Gwahagwon eoneo munhak yeonguso eoneo munhwa yeongusil 1963a: 67). No further details are given with regard to Kim's teachings. In fact, the major theme of the guidebook—to speak politely to each other—entirely stems from the need to construct a new socialist nation, and not from the need to safeguard the Great Leader's teachings. This is a notable difference from the practice that would begin in the 1970s, as we shall see in the remainder of this chapter.

Juche and the Red Book

The content of the above guidebook, *Uri saenghwalgwa eoneo* (Our Life and Language), gives us a curious window into North Korea's nation-building on the cultural front, in that the book shows us a work that is genuinely in progress—not completed and still searching for direction. And unlike North Korea we know today, the book projects the image of the new nation to be civil and polite, rather than, say, revolutionary and thunderous. The guidebook insists that citizens talk gently to each other, respect not only one's conversation partner but also passers-by around them, and amply err on the side of the honorific, as we have seen (Gwahagwon eoneo munhak yeonguso eoneo munhwa yeongusil 1963a). As the book's publication in 1963 predates Kim Il Sung's famed conversations with linguists in 1964 and 1966, the two events widely seen as the most important interventions by Kim Il Sung in North Korean linguistic policy (see above), it is not heavily politicized in terms of projecting the nation's linguistic behavior. Rather, the book provides guidance to

readers on how to be good socialist citizens of North Korea—nothing more, nothing less.

The quality required of being a good socialist citizen of North Korea, however, would change dramatically in the space of only a few years. At the 1967 Plenary Session of the Workers' Party of Korea, the rival faction that had existed was eliminated, and Kim Il Sung and his closest associates took firm control of the party and the state (Person 2013). By the end of the 1960s, North Korea had seen a thorough makeover of its ideological orientation, with the clear identification of Kim's concept of Juche as its guiding principle. Many studies have already commented extensively on Juche—a term composed of two characters, *ju* meaning masterhood and *che* meaning body—mostly on the basis of negative assessments with respect to its origin, logical consistency or lack thereof, or ineffectiveness as a propaganda tool (e.g., Suh 2014; Myers 2015). Thus, rather than repeating what this idea is about or not about or discussing how effective or not effective it is, I shall focus on what is relevant to my discussion here.

One of the earliest public references to Juche by Kim Il Sung comes in a speech given to Workers' Party of Korea propaganda workers entitled "On Eliminating Dogmatism and Formalism and Establishing Juche in Ideological Work" (Kim 1955a, 1955b), and it appears to bear interesting relevance to the overall direction that North Korean linguistic practice would take during the 1960s and 1970s. I ask the reader to recall what went on in the literary field during the latter half of the 1950s—a purge of southerners and Soviet Koreans as US spies or counter-revolutionary elements. After the suicide of Heo Gai, a Soviet Korean, in 1953, and the elimination of Pak Heonyeong and others who had occupied high-ranking positions in the party and the government, a great purge ensued, targeting literary figures such as Li Taejun (see chapter 1 of this volume above). The content of Kim Il Sung's 1955 talk resonates perfectly with these developments, with Kim referring to Li Taejun as a "reactionary bourgeois writer," for example (Kim 1955b). As shown earlier, the purge continued well into the mid-1960s, as a few Soviet Koreans still remained in office. One of these was Pak Changok (his name sometimes spelled Pak Chang Ok). After he became vice premier in 1954, his conflict with Kim Il Sung led to him being expelled in 1956, and he died in 1960 (Armstrong 2013: 62, 130). I introduce Pak Changok here because Kim Il Sung refers to him and his practice in a critical manner in his 1955 speech. Another individual that Kim refers to is Pak Yeongbin (his name sometimes spelled Pak Yong Bin), a Soviet

Korean who was sent to North Korea by the Soviet authorities during the Red Army occupation that followed the end of Japanese colonial rule in 1945. He was purged in 1957 and returned to the Soviet Union in 1961.

In the 1955 talk, Kim Il Sung bitterly and repeatedly complains about a state of affairs in which things Korean are shunned and things foreign—Soviet and, to a lesser extent, Chinese—are given priority in the fields of literature, education, journalism, as well as in party publications. Kim says: “I noticed in a primary school that all the portraits on the walls were of foreigners such as Mayakovsky, Pushkin, etc., and there were none of Koreans. If children are educated in this way, how can they be expected to have national pride?” (Kim 1955b). And he laments: “The lack of Juche in propaganda work has done much harm to party work” (Kim 1955b). What Kim means by Juche is basically Korea’s own cultural and historical heritage. Time and again, he berates positions taken by officials who revere the Soviet Union, even though North Korea was the recipient of substantial economic assistance from the Soviet Union at that very time, and for several decades thereafter—or, perhaps, it was precisely because of this fact that the acute need to move away from the Soviets and go alone the Korean way emerged. For example:

Comrade Pak Yong Bin, on returning from the Soviet Union, said that since the Soviet Union was following the line of easing international tension, we should also drop our slogans against US imperialism. Such an assumption has nothing to do with revolutionary vigilance. The US imperialists scorched our land, slaughtered our innocent people en masse, and are still occupying the southern half of our country. They are our sworn enemy, aren’t they? (Kim 1955b; original translation)

His frustration about party officials being ignorant about things Korean is vividly captured in the following criticism of Pak Changok. It is interesting to see that Kim’s criticism here specifically relates to language use:

The formalism of our propaganda workers also finds expression in exaggerating things in propaganda work. For example, such bombastic expressions as “all have risen,” “all have been mobilized,” etc., have long been in fashion in speeches and articles. We advised Pak Chang Ok more than once against it. Pak Chang Ok made mistakes because he could not break away from the “all” type of bombast he had created. Later, he took a fancy

to the superlative of the Chinese ideograph “great.” I do not know whether this practice was due to his ignorance of Chinese ideographs or to his erroneous ideological viewpoints. When propaganda work is continued with such exaggeration without any substance to it, it will lead people to be carried away by victory and become easygoing. This bad practice is also responsible for the false reports handed in by junior officials. The use of an adjective may seem a simple matter, but when wrongly used it may cause our work to fail. In future, such a practice should be discounted thoroughly. (Kim 1955b; original translation)

In the above, Kim appears to assert that the correct way to write and speak is indissolubly connected to the correct ideology. One recalls that in earlier publications, as shown in chapter 1, Jonathan Swift, an unequivocally foreign author to Koreans, is referred to as the “great” Jonathan Swift (see chapter 1 above). The mere use of an adjective, according to Kim, can have grave connotations. In this light, it is interesting to see Kim Il Sung, when referring to the negative tendency of prioritizing foreign things, does not fail to mention the proper way to treat seniors, as if emphasizing that respect for seniors were an essential trait of Korean Communism: “Today our functionaries have become so insolent that they show no respect for their seniors. They have been allowed to fall into such a habit, whereas Communists naturally have a higher moral sense than any other people, and hold their revolutionary seniors in high esteem” (Kim 1955b; original translation). Kim himself was only forty-three years of age at the time of this speech, that is to say, he was not particularly old himself. This passage, perhaps, resonates with the focus placed on politeness toward the elderly and seniors in the 1963 guidebook introduced in the previous section, where, as has been shown above, it is stressed that being respectful is part of the Communist attitude, but as we also noted, such a focus was not introduced because Kim Il Sung said so.

One other point concerning the 1963 guidebook’s emphasis on politeness that we noted above is its claim that one would degrade oneself should one use impolite language when talking to others, including members of the class that is regarded to be less progressive (i.e., peasants vis-à-vis workers)—and it is this point that seems to bear some relevance to Kim Il Sung’s concept of *Juche*, as expressed in his 1955 speech. According to Kim Il Sung, *Juche* means to know and become the master of power, firstly to conquer one’s own weaknesses, and then to conquer the surrounding world, thus making oneself proud of who one is:

Everyone will show enthusiasm when he realizes that he is a master [. . .]
 The workers will [. . .] throw all their energy and zeal into their work when
 they become clearly aware that their labor is for their own happiness and
 for the prosperity of society. . . .

The same is true of peasants. If they realize that the working class
 are not only their allies but also their leaders, and that they too are mas-
 ters of power, the peasants will work their land well, take good care of
 their implements and willingly pay their taxes in kind. (Kim 1955b; origi-
 nal translation)

Kim repeatedly states that when people understand that they are the masters
 of their own land, factory, fate, and nation, they will do everything accord-
 ingly as masters, taking a positive, active, and optimistic approach to construc-
 tion and production, being willing to learn more in order to improve their
 skill set and productive output, maintaining a disciplined attitude, and fight-
 ing against counter-revolutionary elements (Kim 1955b). This, according to
 Kim, is *Juche*.

It is evident that Kim Il Sung's *Juche* concerns sovereign rights and a
 sovereign attitude to life. As a sovereign, one identifies oneself as the master
 of one's own destiny. As a sovereign, one governs oneself, recognizing both
 one's entitlements as well as one's responsibilities. For a sovereign, a subject is
 an object, for sovereignty as an individual means self-ownership and the free-
 dom to engage in creation, modification, and production of and for one's own
 desire. This stance was to be invoked time and again from the 1970s onwards,
 and it had a deep bearing on the formation of self in North Korea. Let us
 remind ourselves of the 1963 guidebook's repeated emphasis on the neces-
 sity of respecting other citizens and the elderly just as one would respect one-
 self, and its claim that not doing so would constitute degrading and hurting
 one's own dignity; such a logic stems from *Juche*—that North Korean citizens
 must take ownership of their language, their lives, their environment, their
 places of work, their state, their government, and their hope for the future.
 In order to achieve these goals, the creation of a new citizenry first and fore-
 most involves turning citizens into self-respecting subjects. Only when one
 respects oneself as a human is one able to respect others—such is the reason-
 ing of *Juche*. But it is still important to note that as of the time of the 1963
 guidebook's publication, the ethos of nation-building and the nation's linguis-
 tic practice were not directly connected to Kim Il Sung's words or the
 concept of *Juche*.

In the 1970s, about fifteen to twenty years after Kim's speech and the great purge of southern literary figures and Soviet Koreans as shown in the previous chapter, one begins to see a more systematic incorporation of Juche and related concepts in North Korea's publications, including linguistic manuals. One such example is the 1975 publication *Joseonmal hwasul* or *The Speech Art of Korean* (Li 1975). Before we look closely at this manual in the following section of this chapter, comparing it with the 1963 guidebook discussed above, let us note one more text that defines Kim Il Sung's ideas on language, which are said to have been created during the anti-Japanese guerrilla struggle.

Published in 1970, this work is entitled *Hangilmujangtujaengsigi Kim Il Sung dongjiui eoneosasangwa geu binnaneun guhyeon* or *Comrade Kim Il Sung's Ideas on Language [Created] during the Anti-Japanese Armed Struggle and Their Brilliant Realization* (Sahoegwahagwon eoneohak yeonguso 1970a). Consisting of five essays published by the Department of Linguistics (Eoneohak yeonguso) of the North Korean Academy of Social Sciences (Sahoegwahagwon), the book unapologetically begins and ends with references to the application of Kim Il Sung's Juche—both the concept itself, as well as its essence, *jucheseong*—to linguistic practice. In this book, unlike the 1963 guidebook, we begin to see a practice in which Kim Il Sung's words are framed in independent paragraphs, not embedded within other ones, and printed in boldface font—a practice that we are familiar with in North Korean publications today. This practice is not only adopted with respect to his actual words, which appear in double quotation marks, but also to the gist of his spoken words, which is encased in dots. In this latter practice, Kim Il Sung's words are typically depicted as words spoken in the past where the circumstances would not allow his words to be precisely documented; for example, the words he uttered during the anti-Japanese guerrilla struggle are often reproduced in this way, based on the recollection of the individuals who had participated with Kim in the guerrilla struggle. Even when these spoken words or *malssseum* appear as a recollection by another person, Kim's words are printed in boldface font and occupy independent paragraphs.

This new practice was of significance for a number of reasons. Firstly, the words here were not simply quoted words, but the basis of rules and laws. As such, they were to be memorized and reproduced in one's own self-criticism sessions or quoted in one's essays and other writings—verbatim and with absolutely no errors. For, these words bore different symbolic meaning and political function, as they functioned as the test of one's loyalty—if one's loyalty is sincere, one would be able to treat Kim's words with utmost respect, the most

evident expression of which would be the ability to be able to cite Kim's words by heart, without making any errors. The symbolic as well as political meaning of these words was unsurpassed and thus, they entered into readers' minds as bearers of authority. Even though the words themselves might be referring to completely innocuous matters, such as in recommendations that "one must read more" or "one has to eat healthy," they were no longer simple indicators of content. These utterances by Kim were now immortalized—untouchable, unchangeable, and not to be tampered with. In short, they were now sacred.

What did this new practice do to North Korea's linguistic life? Most importantly in the context of the current study, it had a profound effect on the formation of the self, as the self now received directives from these bold-face words, acting as bearers of a voice from above. I shall return to this point, along with the issue of sovereignty, at the end of this book. For now, let us see how the Juche discourse started to change the overall approach to language in North Korea.

The 1970 book on Kim Il Sung's linguistic ideas or *eoneosasang* is a red clothbound, hardcover volume. Let us therefore refer to this book as "the red book." In its first chapter, the red book traces the origins of the Juche language policy to the period from the 1920s through the 1930s, when Kim Il Sung was involved in the anti-Japanese student movement and later the armed guerrilla struggle in Manchuria. The red book effusively extols the sagacity and correctness of Kim Il Sung's views on the role of language in the proletarian revolution. According to the book, Kim already clarified during the anti-Japanese guerrilla struggle of the 1930s that the use of foreign words should be minimized, as this would create a negative effect on Korea's unique language. Kim also emphasized that revolutionaries must speak in simple, easy-to-understand language in order to work with the masses. The red book defines the study of the Korean language carried out by the anti-Japanese guerrilla fighters as an exemplary case of patriotic language education and cultivation of national self-reliance which enabled the Korean people to preserve their own language in the face of the brutal language extermination policy systematized by the Japanese colonial authorities (Sahoegwahagwon eoneohak yeonguso 1970a: chap.1).

Chapter 2 of the red book further expands on the content of the previous chapter, using concrete illustrations. These include the Children's Corps schools in the guerrilla bases in Manchuria, where all instruction and school-related activities were said to be carried out in Korean, and where love for Korea's own national heritage was cultivated. At these schools, not only formal

classes, but also extracurricular activities were designed to enhance Korean language education. Through *iyagimoim* or storytelling gathering as well as *hyeongmyeonggayo bogeup* or disseminations of revolutionary songs, children at the base schools learned to love their own Korean language and become able to effectively contribute to the revolutionary cause led by Kim Il Sung. Another important initiative illustrated in this chapter is *munmaeng toechi undong* or the movement to eliminate illiteracy, which can be compared with North Korea's drive to improve literacy in the late 1940s through the abolition of the use of Chinese characters (see above). This movement is said to have encouraged adult members in the guerrilla bases, who had never had the opportunity to learn how to read and write in Korean, to attend night schools and adult schools. The movement was especially effective in overcoming a lack of literacy among women and the elderly in the bases during the 1930s. After 1940, the chapter continues, having correctly assessed the new conditions, Kim Il Sung made a strategic shift from armed guerrilla warfare to *gidongjeogin sobudaehwaldong* or resistance activities using small mobile units (This is a euphemism for Kim's relocation to Siberia following the USSR-Japan neutrality pact of 1941—see the Introduction to this volume). The success of such units under Kim's leadership in their engagements with the Japanese forces greatly boosted their sense of national pride, and helped to consolidate their love for the Korean language (Sahoegwahagwon eoneohak yeonguso 1970a: chap. 2).

The next three chapters (chapters 3, 4, and 5) of the red book are of particular interest to us, since they go into actual word-making and usage. Chapter 3 introduces an entirely new concept—that for Korean Communists, to speak truthfully is to speak Korean in a manner reflecting the concept of *Juche*. This principle was established during the anti-Japanese guerrilla struggle, according to the book, as Kim Il Sung was directly involved in creating and performing artistic presentations at guerrilla bases which truly gripped the hearts of audiences (even though, as has been stated, Kim Il Sung first used the term *Juche* much later, in 1955). This was, the book claims, due to the fact that they were thoroughly based on his revolutionary ideas, which found their perfect expression in the authentic Korean language (Sahoegwahagwon eoneohak yeonguso 1970a: 95). Here, we register one of the earliest linkings of the Korean language of North Korea with the national truth.

Chapters 4 and 5 of the red book list examples of the creation of new vocabulary and new, revolutionized applications of old words as well as other detailed practical examples drawn from the anti-Japanese guerrilla struggle.

For example, one of the *byeongmyeonggayo* or revolutionary songs that the guerrillas enjoyed singing goes:

With fists striking iron
 Let us smash the capitalist's system of exploitation
 [*Jabongau chakchwijedo ttaeryeobusija*]
 (Sahoegwahagwon eoneohak yeonguso 1970a: 121; author's translation)

The term *ttaeryeobusija* (let us smash) is one that is used by the masses in their everyday lives, but by metaphorically applying this term to the act of bringing down capitalist society and its unjustifiable exploitation of workers, the red book asserts, this usage successfully converts an innocuous term that already existed in Korean into a revolutionary term that encourages the masses to participate in the anti-Japanese struggle. The book concludes that such practices define the Juche-like and revolutionary nature of the Korean language (Sahoegwahagwon eoneohak yeonguso 1970a: 121). Here, the assertion is that the Korean language has always been a Juche-type language, the embodiment of the Juche idea, and it is this language that speaks the truth of the nation.

The book also discusses a similar case involving the term *tujaeng* or battle. According to the red book, the way in which the anti-Japanese guerrillas used this term transformed its meaning—from acts of confrontation to revolutionary activities conforming with the historical law according to which class struggle leads to fundamental transformation in a social system (Sahoegwahagwon eoneohak yeonguso 1970a: 144). Such transformation occurred in the realm of metaphoric and metonymic expressions, with the red book citing the example of *bul* or fire, quoting from one of the revolutionary songs:

Let us burn the old society with the fire that flames in our heart
 [*Uri gaseum bunneun bullo nalgeun sahoe taego . . .*]
 (Sahoegwahagwon eoneohak yeonguso 1970a: 151; author's translation)

The book explains that the use of fire in the above context adds an important revolutionary property to the term *fire*, which would ordinarily simply refer to burning, thereby rendering it more profound and sophisticated (Sahoegwahagwon eoneohak yeonguso 1970a: 151). The same logic applies to rhetorical questions, metonymic expressions, refrains, rhythms and rhyming,

and other techniques used in poetry, songwriting, public speeches, and so on. According to the red book, under Kim Il Sung's leadership, the anti-Japanese guerrillas were able to successfully advance and refine their existing techniques and vocabulary so as to capture and convey revolutionary meanings in alignment with the concept of Juche, which emphasized Korea's own beauty and strength (Sahoegwahagwon eoneohak yeonguso 1970a: chap. 5).

In the span of a mere seven years, between the publication of the guidebook, *Uri saenghwalgwa eoneo* (Our Life and Language), in 1963 and that of the red book in 1970, there was a notable shift in North Korea's approach to the Korean language. In the guidebook, as shown above, importance is placed on civility and proper etiquette as a way of ensuring one's own grace as well as a means of enhancing social cohesion and order. The subtext of the guidebook is that, as newly independent national citizens of North Korea, individuals must elevate their dignity when speaking as the first step in developing civil relations between comrades. While the use of standardized language was promoted, the guidebook never placed the origin of the socialist language of truth in North Korea in the anti-Japanese guerrilla struggles waged by Kim Il Sung. Far from it: the guidebook is oblivious to such references, as it pours its effort in creating a new linguistic life for North Koreans. In the red book, by way of contrast, language is no longer a means of enhancing politeness and civil interactions among North Korea's citizens, or simply dignifying oneself and others. Rather, it is simultaneously a tool to represent the truth of Juche, the revolutionary spirit of the Korean Communists led by Kim Il Sung, as well as the very substance of this truth. The red book was published as part of an ongoing "red book" series connecting Kim Il Sung's Juche with the language of North Korea that was published by the Department of Linguistics of the North Korean Academy of Social Sciences (Sahoegwahagwon eoneohak yeonguso 1970b; Sahoegwahagwon eoneohak yeonguso 1971). Together, the series rewrote the origin of the North Korean language and retrospectively identified it amidst the anti-Japanese guerrilla struggles of Kim Il Sung and his comrades. The origin of Juche, according to this endeavor, goes all the way back to the 1930s, and the Juche idea was from the outset the undercurrent of the truthful North Korean language.

The red book series set the standard that would be followed by later publications that were concerned with language. Guidebooks and manuals published thereafter began setting aside a section showing how to properly refer to Kim Il Sung with loyalty and reverence, and began defining North Korean

linguistics as Juche linguistics that reflected Kim Il Sung's linguistic theory and knowledge. For example, North Korea's textbook for students of general linguistics at teacher's colleges states: "[Existing] Marxist-Leninist linguistics has been [. . .] systematized for the first time in history from the standpoint of Juche by Marshal Kim Il Sung, who is the respected and beloved leader of forty million Korean people" (Gyoyukdoseo 1970: 3). In the following section, let us see this development more closely.

Linguistic Manual

How does Juche linguistic practice differ from pre-Juche practice? Published in 1975, *Joseonmal hwasul* (The Speech Art of Korean) offers an interesting contrast and comparison with the 1963 guidebook, in which we recognized that politeness and civility among citizens of the new socialist society stood out as the prominent concern. The 1975 book defines itself as "a manual intended to assist [readers] by showing [them] the rules of speech and the knowledge to achieve the ideologico-artistic standard when [verbally] expressing [their] ideology and emotion [*sasanggamjeong*]" (Li 1975: 5). For this reason, let us refer to this book as "the manual." In a notable departure from the stance taken in the 1963 guidebook, which defined the language as a tool for mutually respectful communication, the manual identifies language as an expression of one's ideology and emotion, or more precisely, ideology-emotion, *sasanggamjeong* with *sasang* (ideology) and *gamjeong* (emotion) put together, implying that they are not separate from each other. This does not mean that the 1975 manual omits references to politeness. By way of contrast to the 1963 guidebook, however, the manual does not include ubiquitous references to politeness among citizens throughout its pages. More pages and more illustrations are devoted to the issue of how to express ideology and emotion in the correct manner, both in terms of vocabulary and delivery (tone, pitch, pace, and speed).

For example, when discussing how to convey diverse feelings using the flow of a sentence, the 1975 manual lists the following examples, advocating that extra emotional emphasis is to be placed on the underscored parts (Li 1975: 115; author's translation):

1. With a sense of honor:

To live and fight as the Great Leader's soldiers is our greatest honor.

[*Widaeban suryeongnimui jeonsaro salmyeo ssauneungeoseul gajang keun yeonggwangeuro ganjikhada.*]

2. With a sense of happiness:

How wonderful our socialist system is!

[*Urinara sahoejuuijedoneun eolmana joeunga!*]

3. With indignation and determination:

As long as our sworn enemy, US imperialism, remains, the peaceful unification of our fatherland will not be possible.

[*Mijewonssudeuri namainneunhan jogugeun pyeonghwajeogeuro tongildoelsu eopda.*]

In the above examples, certain emotions and certain sentences are paired: honor and respect go with the Great Leader; happiness and bright emotion are paired with North Korean society; darkness and hatred go with the enemy. A similar pairing happens with respect to the speed of speech in the following examples (Li 1975: 136; author's translation):

1. At a moderate pace and with gravity, when referring to the Great Leader:

The respected and beloved leader Comrade Kim Il Sung is the sage of the revolution and an outstanding leader who always leads the Korean revolution along the singular road to victory and correctly shows us the future of the international Communist movement and the labor movement.

2. When showing agitation, slightly faster:

If we let US imperialism remain on South Korean soil, we will not be able to live, even for one moment. We must drive out those wretches and, with our own hands, achieve our nation's reunification.

In particular, when showing indignation toward the enemy, the manual recommends that the reader adopt a bright yet determined voice, strongly enunciating each word in a sentence. It also advises that "when expressing hatred, i.e., [a sentiment] stronger than indignation, one has to pronounce [one's] words with one's mouth only slightly open and, as if grinding one's teeth, one has to squeeze the words out" (Li 1975: 165; author's translation). The manual gives examples of sentences used to show hatred toward the enemy, with readers advised to tense their mouths and throats when reading the underscored words in order to amplify the hatred (Li 1975: 165; author's translation):

1. US imperialism is the most brutal and shameless aggressor and thief of our time, the main source of invasion and war, the origin of the world's reactionary forces, the den of modern colonialism, the murderer of national liberation and independence, and the evil disruptor of peace.
2. Landlords and capitalists are in the same hole.

Additionally, the manual gives advice on how to express disdain toward immoral and ugly phenomena using the example of Myeongdong in downtown Seoul (Note: This example depicts Myeongdong as if it were a red-light district, but during the 1970s, Myeongdong was the main area where anti-government protest demonstrations erupted in opposition to the South Korean military dictatorship then in power) (Li 1975: 167; author's translation):

The masters of Myeongdong's streets appear to be staying up all night tonight too. Red, blue, and, in fact, other unknowable colors of neon lights blink intermittently, blinding the eyes. Sounds—impossible to determine whether they are human voices or animal sounds—seep out from under [the neon lights].

The manual stresses that when faced with situations such as the one portrayed above, one should thrust one's jaw forward while speaking in order to accentuate one's feelings of sarcasm and disdain. It is also important, according to the manual, to use a somewhat mocking voice in order to express one's disgust (Li 1975: 167).

Unlike the 1963 guidebook, in which the main emphasis is on politeness and civility, the 1975 manual limits its discussion of politeness to the following three domains: *gaebyeoldambwa*, which would be translated into “a separate conversation with an individual,” denoting one-on-one conversation for the purpose of ideological education or individual criticism (as opposed to public criticism); telephone conversations, references to which, by and large, replicate content from the 1963 guidebook—and thus I shall omit detailed discussion here (see above); and references to or quoting from the Great Leader (Li 1975: 274–283, 284–293, 355ff.). The one-on-one conversation or *gaebyeoldambwa* is an interesting strategy that has been consistently deemed important throughout North Korea's political history. All party cadres, government officials, workplace managers, teachers, and other personnel that occupy supervisory positions are supposed to carry out such talks with their equals, but also,

more importantly, with their subordinates. For example, teachers are expected not simply to teach, but also to ideologically educate their students and cultivate their political values. For this purpose, the one-on-one talk, when used in addition to the classroom instruction, is said to be the most effective tool. It basically permits those lagging behind in the revolutionary march forward to be identified and pulled aside in order to be given constructive criticism, rather than being given a public dressing-down. The manual directs *dambhwaja* or those initiating such talks (normally, higher-ranked individuals) to present themselves as helpers, rather than superiors. Even though the object of each *dambhwa* or talk would be one who is ranked lower than the *dambhwaja* or talker, the latter is required to use a gentle voice and show humility, modesty, and care. Most importantly, *dambhwaja* must adhere to conventions related to politeness, using honorific forms as well as proper terms and sentences. Especially given that, according to the manual, those on the receiving end, as it were, of *dambhwa* would usually come to their appointments in an anxious state, anticipating trouble, it is extremely important that *dambhwaja* display a benevolent yet easy-going, serious but respectful attitude (Li 1975: 283).

The *dambhwa* is also dealt with in the 1963 guidebook, but not as an activity undertaken on a personal level by political superiors and workplace managers. Instead, referred to as *haeseoldambhwa* or an explanatory talk, it is assumed to be a speech format used in public performance to educate the masses. The 1963 guidebook also deals with spontaneous and/or planned conversations between people under the terms *hwadam* (sit-down talk) and *daebwa* (face-to-face chat), but neither is presented as an occasion for political education or ideological criticism (Gwahagwon eoneo munhak yeonguso eoneo munhwa yeongusil 1963a: 68–76). Thus, attention to politeness in conversation in the 1975 manual has shifted from the egalitarian politeness and civility among equal citizens advocated by the 1963 guidebook into part of a positive strategy whereby higher-ranked individuals politically educate lower-ranked ones. Undoubtedly, the ideological mission of everyday language has become more prominent in the 1975 manual.

By far the most important emphasis on politeness is found in the section involving the Great Leader. Throughout the book, the emotions of loyalty, reverence, respect, and honor are associated with the Great Leader. Concern with how *heummo* or reverence toward him should be expressed appears frequently in the manual. When expressing ideology and emotion, the manual stresses that “[t]he endless reverence that our people possess toward our respected and beloved leader Comrade Kim Il Sung occupies the place of utmost importance

among all of the emotions capturing political ideology (*jeongchijeok sasang-gamjeong*)” (Li 1975: 144; author’s translation). What is interesting about the 1975 manual is that the book oscillates between outright propaganda proclaiming the Great Leader’s greatness and technical advice related to anatomy, breathing techniques, and voice training, for example. Like the 1963 guidebook, the manual covers a wide range of contexts, including public speaking, lectures, voice acting, and so on. What is new is that one third of the manual is set aside for broadcasters—providing guidance with respect to how to present a given manuscript. It is here that the most explicit explanations of how to refer to and quote from the Great Leader are given. Indirectly, this is a sign that, by 1975, most North Korean households would have owned a radio that exclusively broadcast state-run programs.

Entitled “Vocabulary Expressing Respect and Reverence toward the Great Leader Comrade Kim Il Sung and Speech Conveying the Teachings and Works of the Great Leader” and addressed to broadcasters or *bangsongwon*, this part of the 1975 manual echoes the aforementioned red book in treating Kim Il Sung as the source of all revolutionary success (Sahoegwahagwon coneohak yeonguso 1970a). What is distinct here when compared to the red book is that the manual, first and foremost, stresses what the people owe to the Great Leader. According to the manual:

In order to build a paradise on earth and give great happiness to the people, as we have today, the Great Leader devoted his entire spiritual energy, care, and passion. With the heart of true kin, he is taking care of us so that we can live a rich and civilized life in the most superior socialist system with nothing to envy in the world.

Our Great Leader is the greatest leader of the working class, who has embodied unsurpassed and unprecedented sagacity and leadership and the loftiest Communist virtue, and has developed, with profound revolutionary theory and practice, an entirely new history of our time. He is our benevolent parent who has paved the entire long road to revolutionary victory with dedication toward the revolutionary cause and warm love toward the people.

[. . .]

Without the Great Leader, we cannot at all think about our honor, happiness, pride, and dignity. It is only because the Great Leader is here with us that the glorious past and present of our party and people exist. Likewise, only when we follow the road that is shown by the Great Leader

will we achieve a brilliant future and the final victory of the Korean revolution. (Li 1975: 355; author's translation)

In the above passage, the author strictly follows the use of *si* and *kkeseo*, the honorific particles that are used to denote action and the nominative case respectively. As we have seen, the 1963 guidebook, too, includes an extensive discussion of the use of honorifics, but this discussion is not reserved for Kim Il Sung. In the 1975 manual, Kim Il Sung is the sole object of honorific use. As we have also seen, the 1963 guidebook is intent on detailing the correct use of the honorific particle *si*, which gets inserted or added when respectfully referring to a person's action or state, as in the example of *hasida* (to do; honorific) as opposed to *hada* (to do; non-honorific). A detailed explanation is also included relating to the honorific and non-honorific nominative particles *kkeseo* and *ga*, which are used to denote the aspect of the subject in a sentence. But these are not presented in the 1963 guidebook with exclusive reference to Kim Il Sung (Gwahagwon coneo munhak yeonguso coneo munhwa yeongusil 1963a: 227–228). The 1975 manual makes a notable departure, explicitly reserving the use of the honorific particles *si*, *kkeseo*, and *kke* (an objective or dative particle) for Kim Il Sung (Li 1975: 357). Indeed, this elevated use of honorifics toward Kim Il Sung represents an entirely new regime of speech in North Korea. As we saw in chapter 1, just a decade before this time, Kim Il Sung was simply referred to as *wonsu* or Marshal, denoting his military rank, but by the mid-1970s, he was universally referred to as *wonsunim*; with the honorific *nim* attached to the military rank of Marshal. No longer was this term neutral: the addition of *nim* denoted reverence and pledge of loyalty, and this change in linguistic usage came to bear political significance.

According to the manual, Kim Il Sung's name or *jonham* (using the honorific term, Chinese in origin, rather than *ireum*, the native Korean equivalent), as well as his teachings, whether quoted in verbatim or conveyed in gist, need to be uttered "precisely and slowly with a reverent heart (*gyeonggeonhan maeum*)" (Li 1975: 358). Before and after his name, the manual advises, one has to include a slight pause in order to accentuate one's respect for *geui*, an honorific term meaning "that person" (Li 1975: 358). The term *gyeonggeon* or reverence carries a religious or sacred connotation. It is applied to an object that inspires awe—in a state of utmost respect and reverence, one is almost frightened, and it is this kind of ethos that this regime of speech is stipulating. Importantly, before and after quoting or paraphrasing (i.e., reading an example of official paraphrasing—no personal improvisation is allowed when

paraphrasing Kim Il Sung's words), one needs to count two to three beats (*bakja*), as in music, in order to distinguish his words from the sentences that precede and follow them (Li 1975: 359). It is also important to select an appropriate *soribitgal* (literally, "color of voice"). Depending on the content of Kim Il Sung's quoted words, one needs to use a "low but bright" voice, a "thick voice," or a "deep voice" (Li 1975: 362–364). When quoting his words, one needs to make a distinction, depending on whether the quoted words were spoken or written by Kim, between the *immaltu* or speaking form and the *ikkitu* or reading form (Li 1975: 360–362). Thus, the 1975 manual codifies the voice, vocal tones, forms (honorific use as well as vocabulary), as well as breaths and pauses that are to be used when referring to Kim Il Sung, the Great Leader. And these are all supposed to be associated with deep and genuine emotion of reverence for the Great Leader. In other words, the manual is requiring that the speaker or reader of the sentences referring to and quoting from Kim Il Sung try to connect emotion and words together as much as one can, minimizing the mediatedness of speech or language as representation of emotion.

After the publication of the 1975 manual, North Korean vocabulary books begin carrying separate sections including expressions of reverence and respect toward the Great Leader. For example, the practical vocabulary aid book called *Urimal eohwi mit pyohyeon* or *Vocabulary and Expressions of Our Language*, published in 1977, opens with two sections on Kim Il Sung, one with example sentences illustrating the correct use of honorific particles and expressions of reverence toward Kim, and another including expressions of loyalty toward him. These rather redundant sections are populated with codified expressions and phrases that users can safely utilize whenever necessary (Gonggeop chulpansa 1979: 9–24). After these sections, the book moves on to cover a diverse range of topics, including vocabulary items and expressions related to socialist economic construction; human nature and appearance; kinship; spoken and written language; living, housing, and food; home life; nature; physical education and public culture, and so on (Gonggeop chulpansa 1979). Similarly, a dictionary of scientific English, *Gwahagyeongeongeo yongbeop-sajeon*, published in 1977, includes quotations by Kim Il Sung wherever possible (Jang 1977). For example, when referring to the term "resource," the dictionary cites the following example that uses this word: "Juche must be established in science and technology, too, so that we can start using home resources effectively" (Jang 1977: 251–252). A 1983 publication on Korean linguistic mannerisms, *Joseonmal ryejeolbeop* (*Korean Language Etiquette*), builds on the shift of focus from politeness as civility among equal citizens

(as in the 1963 guidebook) to politeness dedicated toward the Great Leader (as in the 1975 manual), stating that “[linguistic politeness toward the Great Leader] is our *hyeongmyeongjeok uiri* [revolutionary obligation] and *bonbun* [proper and natural expectation], because the Great Leader gave us political life and happiness and fulfillment of life as revolutionaries” (Kim 1983: 111–112; author’s translation).

One of the significant features of the 1975 manual is its declaration that North Korean Korean is Pyongyang *munhwaeo* or the cultured tongue of Pyongyang. According to the manual’s reasoning, “The reason why the cultured Korean tongue came to be established with the language of our revolutionary capital [Pyongyang] as its standard is because the Pyongyang tongue is the only language that thoroughly embodies the Juche linguistic idea and the revolutionary literary style of the Great Leader” (Li 1975: 8; author’s translation). We have seen earlier that there is a distinct dialect in Pyeongan Province where Pyongyang is located and it is highly unlikely that the language spoken in Pyongyang in 1975 was more standard than the rest of the Pyeongan provincial language. The deliberate elevation of the Pyongyang language, the language spoken in the capital, is reflective of a fundamental repurposing of the national language. Technical aspects aside, after the North Korean language had undergone nativization and purification via the purging of Chinese ideographs, bourgeois writers, and foreign elements, the rise of the Juche-oriented singular command system under Kim Il Sung saw language become something beyond and other than simply a means of communication. By the 1970s, the Korean language in North Korea, especially when used with reference to Kim Il Sung, was functioning as a performance code, rendering most utterances—and all utterances connected to the Great Leader—performative; ritual statements formed and reproduced within a given framework of rules and stipulations that were occasionally updated via party publications. No longer was it conceivable to cite Kim Il Sung alongside Karl Marx, for example, as the Great Leader had come to occupy an entirely different space within referential practice in North Korea.

One area of the linguistic reforms of North Korea that has attracted much scholarly attention was the nativization of Chinese-originated Korean words. As will be shown in the following section, Kim Il Sung’s two conversations with linguists, in 1964 and 1966, would lead to the conscious elimination of Korean words of Chinese origin. Yet today in twenty-first-century Korea under the rule of Kim Il Sung’s grandson, Kim Jong Un, North Korean publications are filled with words of Chinese origin, including words that

appeared in more recent years such as *gyeolsaongwi*—a favored slogan meaning “defense [of the Great Leader] through martyrdom”—perhaps an even more classical Chinese-originated expression than those found in the slogans created in the 1960s. What are we supposed to make of this? We shall see that there would be an interesting course correction—by the Great Leader himself in the 1990s (see chapter 4 of this volume below). Here, in the following section on the vocabulary management, let us see just how much nativization of the Korean language was technologically possible.

Vocabulary Management

Linguist Ross King, a prominent scholar of the language of North Korea, notes:

[The] replacement of undesirable Sino-Korean and other non-indigenous lexical material with neologisms composed wholly or at least in part of ‘pure’ Korean word-formation elements [. . .] has been a dominant component of North Korean language planning ever since the 1960s. With the considerable nativization of the North Korean lexicon achieved during the 1960s-1980s, there currently appears to be less of an ongoing drive to emphasize further lexical purification. (King 2007: 226–227)

As King points out, following Kim Il Sung’s conversations with linguists that took place in the mid-1960s (mentioned earlier in this chapter), centralized efforts were made to nativize (i.e., Koreanize) the vocabulary of Chinese origin. The Korean nativization effort was referred to either as *maldadeumgi* or *ehwijeongri*, the former a Korean term and the latter, ironically, a term of Chinese origin or what King would call “Sino-Korean.” The verb *dadeumda* that is used in the former term roughly translates as “to straighten,” while *mal* means language or words, thus *maldadeumgi* meaning the correcting or straightening of words. As for the latter, *ehwui* means vocabulary, and *jeongri* means to put in order or to manage. These slight differences in nuances notwithstanding, both terms denote the nativization of Korean words, i.e., replacing Chinese-originated words with uniquely Korean words. The former was used during the 1970s, while the latter was more commonly used in the 1980s. There is a subtle yet interesting difference in approach between the decade of the 1970s and that of the 1980s, as will be shown in this section.

In 1974, commemorating the tenth anniversary of Kim Il Sung’s 1964 teaching, “Some Questions Regarding the Development of the Korean

Language,” the Department of Vocabulary Research (Eohwi yeonguso) of the North Korean Academy of Social Sciences (Sahoegwahagwon) published a comprehensive text, *Daneomandeulgi yeongu* or *A Study of Word Making*, demonstrating the achievements that had been made in the area of vocabulary management (i.e., Korean nativization) by upholding the principles contained in the Great Leader’s 1964 teachings, which consisted of the need to nativize or Koreanize words of Chinese origin (Sahoegwahagwon eohwi yeonguso 1974). Following this, in 1980, what I would regard as a formative report in the area of studies concerning the nativization of Korean vocabulary was published under the title *Joseoneo eohwiron yeongu* or *A Study of Korean Vocabulary*, which was followed by a summative text, *Urinaraeseoui eohwiyeongri* or *Vocabulary Management in Our Country*, in 1986 (Choe and Mun 1980; Pak, Li, and Go 1986). In this section of the chapter, let us take a comparative look at these three consecutive texts that concern vocabulary management and consider what kind of outcome the project to nativize Korean vocabulary yielded. For convenience, I will refer to these three texts as the “word-making book” (1974), the “vocabulary study book” (1980), and the “vocabulary management book” (1986), respectively.

All three texts include not only an emphasis on the urgency as well as the correctness of converting words of Chinese or foreign origin, especially those words that are remnants of Japanese colonial rule, into indigenous words, but also, interestingly, a recognition of how challenging such an endeavor would be, given the huge number of words of Chinese origin already deeply embedded in the Korean language; in fact, such words, known as *hanjamal* (and occasionally, *hanjaeo*), make up the dominant part of the Korean vocabulary. It should be borne in mind that, therefore, from the outset, North Korea’s linguistic authorities never insisted on the total elimination of all words of Chinese origin. Kim Il Sung himself, in his conversations with linguists in 1964 and 1966, respectively, did not insist on an all-out elimination of words of Chinese origin; rather, he suggested that the linguists come up with ways of reducing the usage of words of Chinese origin from standard Korean. To state the conclusion up front, therefore, the vocabulary management (nativization) project was conceived to be partial, inconsistent, yet flexible as far as its treatment of words of Chinese origin was concerned. In this sense, nativization of Korean would mean, at best, the partial Koreanization of words of Chinese (and foreign) origin. In fact, as will be shown, complete Koreanization never took place with respect to the language used to express reverence for the Great Leader.

The above three books differ in terms of the degree of detail that they include, but all generally follow the same line of discussion and include quite incredible details (in particular the 1974 word-making book and the 1986 vocabulary management book). In the main, the three books overlap heavily in terms of content, such as in the particular examples they cite or in their presentation styles. Both the 1974 word-making book and the 1986 vocabulary management book refer to merbromin liquid or Mercurochrome as *ppalgan yak* (red medicine), for example. Both texts explain or justify the adoption of this appellation as the “straightened” or reformed term (*dadeumeojin mal*) for Mercurochrome, claiming that it is the *color* of the medicine which bears the most relevance to the populace and that, therefore, this is a superior example of a native word (in this case, the word for “red”) replacing a cumbersome foreign name for a substance (Sahoegwahagwon eohwi yeonguso 1974: 57–58; Pak, Li, and Go 1986: 83). What is interesting is that North Korean linguists were (possibly willfully) unaware of the fact that the Japanese called merbromin *akachin* (*aka* being “red” in Japanese and *chin* being an onomatopoeic expression of unknown origin, probably denoting the act of applying a tad of liquid on a spot) well into the 1970s, and that the term *ppakgan yak* is most likely a holdover from the colonial period, the product of simply translating the Japanese *akachin* into the Korean *ppalgan yak*. Neither the 1974 book nor the 1986 book mentions anything about the Japanese and colonial influence on this word and instead, both books praise the creativity of North Korean linguists.

All of the three vocabulary books reveal inconsistencies and arbitrariness in their conversion of words of Chinese origin into Korean ones. For example, the 1974 word-making book states that the “pure” Korean equivalent of the term *mang* (meaning net or network, and originating from a Chinese ideograph) in the expression *gyoyungmang* (education network) would be *geumul*. However, calling it *gyoyuk geumul* instead of *gyoyungmang* would not only be unintuitive, but also cause confusion and delay in the conveyance of meaning. Thus, the authorities opted to preserve *mang* as it is used in *gyoyungmang* (Sahoegwahagwon eohwi yeonguso 1974: 67). Similarly, terms of Chinese origin such as *buyuhada* (to be rich and abundant) and *gwallihada* (to administer or manage) have pre-existing, indigenous Korean equivalents in the terms *gayeolda* and *gaambhada* respectively. But, the 1974 word-making book states that these two *goyueo* or pure Korean words are no longer used in any aspect of linguistic life by North Korean people today and therefore do not need to be adopted (Sahoegwahagwon eohwi yeonguso 1974: 73). Another interesting

example involves words used for lunch box. In reforming the term *benttobap* (which combines the Japanese term for a boxed lunch, *bentō*, and the Korean term for a meal, *bap*), simply using the old, pure Korean term *dosirak* would be “*neomudo nalgatta*” or “just too old-fashioned,” according to the authors, and so linguists settled on the practice of using the term *gwakbap* or boxed meal and the term *jeomsimbap* when referring to lunch, abandoning the idea of reintroducing the original Korean term (the latter term, *jeomsim*, sharing characters with the Chinese word, *dianxin*, meaning dessert, pastry, or light refreshments, commonly known today in the English-speaking world as *dimsum*) (Sahoegwahagwon eohwi yeonguso 1974: 73–74).

Even in the case of *dadeumeojin mal* or “straightened (reformed or man-aged) words,” many words of Chinese origin remain. For example, the newly created word *saekgareugi* (distinguishing, classifying, or separating colors), when compared with the word of Chinese origin *bunsaek* (color distinction or color classification), still contains the element *saek* or color, which is of Chinese origin taking a Chinese ideograph. But there is no pure Korean equivalent for the term color or *saek*, and the 1974 word-making book asserts that it has become, in this sense, itself Korean (Sahoegwahagwon eohwi yeonguso 1974: 215). Similarly, the term *seon* or line, also of Chinese origin, was reformed and replaced with *jul* (line in pure Korean), but not in all words involving this term. Thus, *hoengseon* (horizontal line), a word of Chinese origin, was replaced with the Korean word *garojul*, while *deunggoseon* (a line of equal height) was replaced with *gateun nopi seon*, i.e., preserving the term *seon* in the latter (Sahoegwahagwon eohwi yeonguso 1974: 225). One other example of such compromise comes from the conversion of *je* into *yak*, both terms denoting medicine and each having an equivalent Chinese character: the Chinese terms *jeongje* and *hwanje*, meaning pill, have been replaced with *aryak*, but *yak* is a term of Chinese origin with an ideograph, and so, in this sense, replacing *je* with *yak* does not nativize this term at all. The same point also goes to the example of *ppalgan yak*, red medicine, above. Even the term *daneoman-deulgi* or word-making, itself, includes *daneo*, a term of Chinese origin meaning words. These examples show that there is not really much room for further Korean nativization, due to the predominant presence of words of Chinese origin, each carrying its own ideographs, in the Korean language.

On the other hand, one can see that nativization has had the effect of reducing the vocabulary. As can be seen in the above example of medicine (*yak* and *je*), rather than keeping two words of Chinese origin alive, the state linguistic authority kept one alive and let the other die, so to speak, weeding out

what the state saw as duplicate. Similar developments happened with respect to many other words and expressions of Chinese origin, thereby consequently reducing the vocabulary—I call it lean or skinny vocabulary. And when, on some rare occasions, authorities had to deal with questions regarding the reasoning behind keeping one term of Chinese origin alive while eliminating another, the only answer they gave was that the former had become part of *uri mal* or our language, despite the fact that selections tended to be based more on arbitrary choice than on established custom in each case—although it is true, as will be shown below, that the choices were not totally one-sidedly made by the authorities, and concerned North Korean citizens participated in the nativization project through letters to the editor or Q&A sections of a journal (Gugeo sajeong jidocheo 1968: 37; see below).

The lack of clear logic with respect to which words of Chinese origin end up *wanjeonhi urimalhwa doeyeotta* or “completely Koreanized” vexes the vocabulary management project throughout. Choe Wanho and Mun Yeongho, the authors of the 1980 vocabulary study book, refer to these challenges and the dilemmas stemming from this. Both of them linguists, they declare with some resignation that “those [foreign] terms that have become completely Koreanized must not be subjected to *jeongri* [management, meaning reform or in this case, nativization]” (Choe and Mun 1980: 58). They list examples, including the case of the word *jeonguk*, meaning the entire country. The pure Korean equivalent for *jeonguk* is *on nara*. In the case of the following sentence, conversion would be possible: *Jeongugi bugeulbugeul kkeulleunda* (“The entire nation is boiling”—an expression of excitement or heightened emotion, presumably referring to revolutionary spirit) can be restated as *On naraga bugeulbugeul kkeulleunda* without altering the meaning. However, in the case of a set three-part expression such as *jeondang jeonguk jeonmin*, meaning the entire party, the entire nation, and the entire people, one cannot replace *jeonguk* in the middle with *on nara* (Choe and Mun 1980: 65). Choe and Mun list terms of Chinese origin such as *hakkyo* or school as *urimallo gudeojeotta* or having become fixed as pure Korean, yet they cite similar terms such as *yeongu* (research) and *ryejeol* (politeness) as not having been Koreanized, nevertheless claiming that “we must preserve them in the Korean vocabulary system” and offering readers no further explanation or justification (Choe and Mun 1980: 20–21). Just how it is that the term *hakkyo* is more Koreanized than the term *yeongu* is not stated—except for the fact that while Kim Il Sung mentioned *hakkyo* as one of the words of Chinese origin that had become indigenized, he did not do so in the case of *yeongu* (Kim 1982a: 29).

A similar inconsistency is obvious in the 1986 vocabulary management book. The book cites the following as the objects of vocabulary management and, as such, as elements to be eliminated: foreign words having identical meanings to existing pure Korean words, words of Chinese origin that are difficult to use and not like Korean words, and words that exert a negative influence on the consciousness and ideological life of the people. This final category is further subdivided into words that weaken national pride, and words that are *sok-doego bimunhwajeok* or vulgar and uncultured (Pak, Li, and Go 1986: 50–63). However, words such as *dang* (party), *gyeongje* (economy), and *gisul* (technology), as well as other words of Chinese origin already used in North Korean publications, are said to be *urimaldapda* or Korean-like words, while others are not, yet nowhere in the book is an explanation given as to the basis used when and how making such judgments. The same goes for non-Chinese foreign words. The authors preserve words such as “pianissimo,” “television,” “program,” and “rocket” on the basis that such terms are *segye gongtongjeok* or universally common, but eliminate others, presumably because they are not. Again, just how this distinction is made is not explained (Pak, Li, and Go 1986: 63–71).

One additional point about linguistic reform in relation to nativization is its insistence that such reform be carried out taking the form of Korean spoken in Pyongyang as its point of reference (as shown above in relation to the 1975 manual). This does not mean that dialects are completely discarded and, indeed, some dialectical forms are incorporated into *dadeumeojin mal* or the reformed vocabulary: for example, the Hamgyeong dialect refers to scissors as *gasae* (listed in Table 1), rather than the standard Korean *gawi*, and this dialectical form is preserved in the term *gasaepyo*, which refers to the cross sign denoting the negative (Sahoegwahagwon eohwi yeonguso 1974: 79). We have already seen that from the earlier 1963 guidebook (see above), North Korean linguistic authorities paid substantial attention to *bangeon* or dialects, and this continued though to the 1980s, for example publishing *Bangeon sajeon* or *Dictionary of Dialects*, which included not only the northern dialects, but also the southern ones such as the dialect of Jeju Island (Kim 1980). The author of this dictionary, Kim Byeongje, also developed the academic discipline of *bangeonhak* or dialect studies (Kim 1975). Dialects and localized linguistic divergence exist in the language of Pyongyang as well, but, as we saw earlier, the revolutionary capital Pyongyang has come to be identified as the geo-political center of the new cultured Korean language of North Korea, its completion emphasized (albeit in a rather circulatory fashion) in the summative report of the 1986 vocabulary book:

The language of Pyongyang, which has been developed [on the basis of the language used in] the place of origin of our revolution and the capital of our Juche fatherland, is the most superior form of our cultured language, which has been enriched and enhanced by [incorporating] excellent linguistic elements of the language used by our people of all strata and all regions. It is perfectly just and correct that we develop our language based on the Pyongyang language. (Pak, Li, and Go 1986: 45; author's translation)

But, just to what degree the “reformed” Korean language is Pyongyang-esque is not clarified in any of the books dealt with here. For example, how much more native or revolutionary the Pyongyang language is when compared to versions of Korean spoken in other parts of North Korea is far from evident. Besides, the 1963 guidebook above registered a rich variety of dialects that are available in Pyeongan Province where Pyongyang is located (see the second section of this chapter above). Just how Pyongyang language stands out from the rest of the Pyeongan provincial tongue, that is to say, how much Pyongyang language is more cultured than the language of the province itself, is not stated anywhere in the 1986 vocabulary management book or in the earlier 1975 manual (see above), both simply declaring that the language spoken in Pyongyang was the cultural standard-bearer of the North Korean linguistic life. Furthermore, none of the authors so far argued that Pyongyang language is freer from Korean words of Chinese origin, as compared to the rest of the North Korean language, thus not providing any ground to assume that this language represents the “most superior form of [North Korea's] cultured language” (Pak, Li, and Go 1986: 45; quoted above) measured against the top-most concern of the state linguistic reform at the time, the nativization of Korean. We can only understand this as a political decision to identify Pyongyang, the heart of North Korea, as the source not only of the language but also of revolutionary truth of North Korea.

Language's New Role

What we have seen thus far tell us that North Korean linguistic reform in the area of nativization in relation to words of Chinese and foreign origin was carried out inconsistently at best, with its own linguists more than once admitting the impossibility of undertaking a total overhaul of foreign words and often resorting to the vague assertion that certain words had already become Koreanized or nativized, while not providing the reason as to why certain other words remained foreign. Rather than replacing the Chinese-originated

words with pure or native Korean words, the nativization project ended up making the North Korean vocabulary lean or skinny. But, what *is* more significant in the context of the current study with respect to the language of North Korea and its transformation since its early days is that, while general literacy may have improved, enhancing egalitarian access to materials printed in vernacular Korean, the genre concerned with references to Kim Il Sung and his family (including his son Kim Jong Il and grandson Kim Jong Un) has been set aside as an entirely untouchable, sacred realm. This is the case for both writing and speaking. The earlier emphasis during the 1960s on civility morphed into the exclusive use of super-honorific forms with respect to Kim Il Sung and his family. In other words, even though for the first time in history, ordinary Koreans became able to read the government's proclamations and the words of the state leaders, the referential rules to the Great Leader were now created, thereby generating a new kind of linguistic hierarchy. This hierarchy was not a matter of rank or genre in the linguistic realm; rather, it was a matter of ideology in the political realm, and as such, the rules became an awe-inspiring law, the transgression from which would entail blame beyond simply being seen as a bad speaker or writer.

Furthermore, these honorifics and coded epithets applied to Kim's family members are predominantly made up of words of Chinese origin—and have nothing to do with the language spoken in Pyongyang or nativization of the rest of the North Korean language. Kim Il Sung's father, Kim Hyung Jik, is referred to as *buryobulgurui hyeongmyeongtusa* or the revolutionary fighter of unbreakable will; Kim Jong Il as *gyeongaehaneun janggunnim* or the respected and beloved General; and Kim Jong Un as *hyeonmyeongghan choegoryeongdoja* or the wise Supreme Leader. One can transliterate all of these epithets into Chinese ideographs. More recently, the neologism *Baekdu wiin* or the great men of Mount Baekdu has come into use to collectively refer to Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Il, and Kim Jong Un. *Wiin* is a rather old-fashioned term of Chinese origin. The terms that are used to refer to the Great Leader and his lineage, in other words, are far from nativized.

How did North Korean citizens respond to the nativization project? A look at *Munhwaeo hakseup* or *The Study of the Cultured Tongue*, the quarterly language study journal issued from the late 1960s through the mid-1980s, may provide us with some insights. Its Q&A section, while small in size, includes published questions from readers, while its *jisangtoron* or open discussion section carries suggestions and opinions from readers regarding how best to nativize words of Chinese origin. A survey of these sections shows that the

citizens of North Korea were keenly interested in state linguistic reform and quite actively participated in discussion. Li Junhui (female) of Pyeongcheon District, Pyongyang City, for example, responds to the editorial call for suggestions to “straighten” the word for “ice cream” (at that time referred to as *aiseu-keurim*, in transliteration of the original English word), suggesting that it be called *eoreum kkul*, *eoreum* meaning ice and *kkul* meaning honey, both being native Korean without corresponding Chinese ideographs (Li 1974: 45). Pak Gyeongcheol (male) of Songpyeon District, Cheongjin City, joins in a previous discussion about nativizing the term for “curtain” where some readers had suggested the term *changmunbo*, *changmun* meaning window and *bo* deriving from *bojagi* or wrapping cloth, suggesting that, instead, it be called *changmunjang*, *jang* meaning spread cloth and taking a corresponding Chinese character; in fact, the term *changmun*, window, is a Sino-Korean word, doubling into two Chinese ideographs (Pak 1974: 45).

A close reading of the journal reveals that the nativization project was filled with tension or outright contradiction. For example, in a column entitled “Widaehan suryeongnimkkeseo momso dadeumeojusin mal” or Words That the Great Leader Directly and Kindly Straightened for Us, the journal lists the example of Kim Il Sung revising the word *deoksu*, denoting beneficial (spring) water, with the term *raengcheon*, meaning cold spring water—neither *deoksu* nor *raengcheon* being indigenous Korean and both of them squarely doubling into Chinese ideographs. In other words, there is no clear reason why *raengcheon* is superior to *deoksu*, yet the journal insists that Kim Il Sung engaged in an exemplary and virtuous act by correcting an old and erroneous term, replacing it with a superior one (“Widaehan suryeongnimkkeseo momso dadeumeojusin mal” 1975: 15). Indeed, by the early 1980s, readers seem to be asking for the meaning of Chinese-originated words and expressions via the journal’s Q&A section, since even though the state linguists worked hard to nativize Korean, an overwhelming number of words and expressions of Chinese origin continued to linger and ordinary citizens kept encountering these words, many of which no longer appeared in Korean language dictionaries at their disposal. For example, in the number 4 edition of the journal for 1981, Kim Cheolho of Unggi County, North Hamgyeong Province, asks the meaning of a classical expression of Chinese origin, *cheonhaji daebon*, and the editorial rather meticulously answers that this expression means the fundamentally important core of all things under the sky, illustrating its usage through the example of the expression *nongsaneun cheonhaji daebon*, meaning that farming is the core of all things under the sky (Kim 1981: 62). The

term *cheonhaji daebon* is a fixed expression written with five Chinese ideographs and when put in Chinese characters, the term can be completely and correctly understood by Chinese speakers/readers. However, putting it all in vernacular Korean, denoting only the sounds of this term, loses the reader in terms of what exactly it is referring to. Furthermore, as is evident from the exchange above, this is a classical expression that had disappeared from North Korea long before the early 1980s. An exchange such as this one reflects the fact that even after older classical expressions had disappeared from official publications, they somehow remained in the everyday lives of North Korean citizens. Indeed, the same year, 1981, saw the publication of the second edition of *Hyeondae joseonmal sajeon* (Dictionary of Modern Korean). Updating the first edition of 1968, the new volume dwarfs its predecessor, containing 2,960 pages as opposed to the first edition's 1,350, while it is still made up of fewer entries (about 130,000 entries) compared to the 1962 *Joseonmal sajeon* or *Dictionary of Korean*, which houses a total of 187,137 (Jeong et al. 1981). Ironically, the second edition revives many terms of Chinese origin that appear in the 1962 *Joseonmal sajeon* (Dictionary of Korean), yet are purged later in the first (1968) edition of *Hyeondae joseonmal sajeon* (Dictionary of Modern Korean). In the 1981 (second) edition, for example, we see the term *ganeum*, meaning illicit sexual intercourse, the term that was weaponized by Li Taejun's critics during the literary purge of the 1950s, which was carried in the 1962 *Joseonmal sajeon* or *Dictionary of Korean*, yet was eliminated in the 1968 *Hyeondae joseonmal sajeon* or *Dictionary of Modern Korean*, first edition, find its way back in the North Korean lexicon by appearing in the 1981 *Hyeondae joseonmal sajeon* or *Dictionary of Modern Korean*, second edition (see chapter 1 of this volume).

The only reason that one would call some words Koreanized and others foreign would simply be because certain terms are rolled out, codified, and imposed on the population as part of a sanctioned and authorized vocabulary by the party and the government. Indeed, in all of the three texts that we dealt with in the previous section—the 1974 word-making book, the 1980 vocabulary study book, and the 1986 vocabulary management book—one finds a clear emphasis on *tongje* or control: by the party; by government linguistic authorities, such as *Gugeo sajeong wiwonhoe* or the National Language Assessment Committee; and by designated units inside national academies, such as the linguistics research unit at Gwahagwon or the Academy of Science (later to branch out as Sahoegwahagwon or the Academy of Social Sciences). The spirit of *tongje* in the area of state-managed linguistic practice

runs through North Korean linguistic research publications, consisting of a good assortment of thorough and rich studies in phonetics, semantics, syntax, morphology, homonyms, antonyms, synonyms, *hangul*, historical linguistics, classics, sociolinguistics, and word combination, for example, mostly written with the intention of improving the population's linguistic knowledge and language use, so to speak (e.g., Kim Il Sung *jonghapdaehak* 1976; Kim 1988; Go 1987; Baek 1992; Ryu 1992; Choe 1994; Li and Ryu 1999). I am, however, not asserting that certain words such as *je* for medicine were eliminated, while others such as *yak* for medicine were preserved, on the basis of some kind of ideological or political concern. Most likely, there was no such concern or if there was any, it would have been driven more by contingency rather than political necessity. Rather, I am merely asserting that throughout the linguistic reform process, the state's top-down control was consciously instated and it occupied a more prominent place as opposed to mass participation.

More important than the technical, academic, and popular aspects of vocabulary management was the aspect of this project that aimed to make language into a materialized reflection of the emotion or ideology that is expressed through it, that is to say, to make language and ideology overlap. Reforming and managing vocabulary, expressions, and conversational mannerisms in such a way as to classify them as either good and bad—for society, for the nation, for the revolution, for the party, etc.—yields the effect of relatively unifying linguistic practice among the North Korean people, and leading to a linguistic environment in which the number of vocabulary items is reduced, value judgments of “good” or “bad” are attached to particular words and expressions, and users are enabled to self-censor themselves in order to stay within the parameters of linguistic correctness. When the size of a vocabulary is finite, the ideas that this vocabulary expresses may also remain rather simple and clear. As a tool for governing, such a linguistic policy is highly effective. The true effect of the nativization of Korean resides here: by sorting and classifying words and expressions into “good = usable” and “bad = unusable” and by reducing the number of available words, vocabulary management, or lexical purification, has locked the Korean language in North Korea inside the boundaries of government-sanctioned vocabulary, which in turn drew the limit of how far the legitimate ideology in North Korea would stretch. In this process, issues such as which words and how many of them to nativize were not as relevant as the consideration of how best to make North Koreans into individuals that would speak (and think) in a manner appropriate to the new nation under Kim Il Sung.

We have seen above that, along with nativization, vocabulary and expressions used to refer to the Great Leader and his lineage came to be highly codified during the decades from the 1960s through the 1980s. Using such expressions outside of this specific context (for example, by calling one's teacher "respected and beloved" using the term *gyeongaehaneun*, which is reserved for references to Kim Il Sung) would be not only linguistically irregular but ideologically a transgression in North Korea. Compared to the 1963 guidebook, which emphasizes the importance of universal mutual respect and deference among the citizens of North Korea, by the end of the 1980s, linguistic practice related to respect and politeness had come to be concerned to a disproportionate degree with references to the Great Leader. One can appreciate that the instatement of such a system would increase the degree of conformity to rules, and that, accordingly, linguistic practice involving references to the Great Leader would bear increasingly mechanical and performative characteristics. In other words, insofar as performativity is concerned, one would expect references to the Great Leader to be uttered as part of ritual practice, rather than as spontaneous expressions of feelings of love or reverence. Yet, it has been clear, from the materials introduced in this chapter, the purpose of the North Korean linguistic project, turning references to the Great Leader into sacred and unchangeable set of expressions, is precisely to make the North Korean people *feel* loyalty and devotion toward their Leader when they utter the words of praise for the Leader. Hence, detailed guidance, as we saw earlier, in the color of voice, tone, and pace, when representing the Great Leader's voice or referring to his virtues (see the 1975 manual above). A discrepancy therefore exists, to say the least, between the goal of educating the citizens with ritualized, performative, and coded language, on one hand—the type of language which does not normally convey emotion and is uttered on cue rather than derived from spontaneous sentiment—and the goal behind the linguistic reform that citizens genuinely express their love, respect, and affect for the Great Leader when speaking this language, on the other.

I propose to argue that, as I shall show in the next chapter, the affect of the North Korean people toward the Great Leader stems not from the codified and super-authoritative language referring to the Great Leader, but from what I call the people's chronicle, whereby, somewhat removed from the official terms of reference to Kim Il Sung, enshrined as they are within a sacred realm, individual authors write about their firsthand encounters with Kim Il Sung using everyday expressions and simple references.

First published in 1962 and continuing to be published to this day, *Inmindeul sogeseo* or *Among the People* is a collection of more than one hundred volumes containing essays written by individuals who had firsthand encounters with Kim Il Sung. These volumes were published in parallel with the ongoing linguistic reforms that we have looked at in this chapter, yet, as we shall see, the narrative structure and storylines share very little resemblance with the codified, law-like stipulations with which references to the Great Leader have come to be defined. Furthermore, when reading the chronicle, the effects of the embedding of the Juche ideological system in North Korea's linguistic practice, as emphasized in the 1970s red book (see above), are not so clearly observable. Given the emphasis on top-down control and the extent of codification with respect to references to Kim Il Sung, this is a curious counterexample, as the essays in the chronicle express individuality as well as personal and subjective reflections using what appears to be the kind of language that each author feels at home with. It is true that we will see a considerable degree of uniformity and coordination in these essays. Yet, we shall also see that the affect of the people toward their Leader, even when it is mentioned with clear regularity, gets expressed in ways that are removed from the codified epithets, bringing the leader into the mundane (or perhaps I should call it the secular) realm. As we read excerpts from the people's chronicle in the next chapter, we shall see that the relationship between the North Korean people and the Great Leader, and the language used to describe it, is, altogether, surprisingly rational and, shall we say, genuine.

CHAPTER 3

The Chronicle

The Question of Truth

First published in 1962 and continuing to be published to this day, with the 107th volume released in 2018, *Inmindeul sogeseo* or *Among the People* is a massive collection of essays written by men and women of all generations, occupations, and regions of North Korea recollecting their direct encounters with the Great Leader. Those who have made passionate contributions to the chronicle include individuals unknown to the general public as well as well-known figures, such as the high-profile defector Hwang Jangyeop, formerly North Korea's leading ideologue, and author Cheon Seborg, who has written exemplary stories featuring the Great Leader (Hwang 1982; Cheon 2008). The number of stories that each volume contains ranges from twelve and twenty, making the total number of stories into the vicinity of 1,600 to 1,800. The majority of the authors have contributed only one story, while quite a few have returned with follow-up stories capturing their encounters with the Great Leader.

Since the essays are recollections, there is a time lag between the events recalled by each author and the date of publication. Some of the essays involve encounters that took place several decades prior to the period in which the stories were published, while others involve a time lag of a mere month or two since the author's meeting with the Great Leader. Even after the death of Kim Il Sung in 1994, the stories have continued to refer to past events that authors experienced firsthand through their encounters with Kim Il Sung, creating an illusory effect as if he were still alive, the temporality of their essays therefore not affected by Kim's actual death. At this time, the majority of the stories contained in the chronicle are about Kim Il Sung. Although there is a handful of stories recalling the authors' direct interactions with Kim Jong Il,

Kim Il Sung's son, who died in 2011, on the rare occasions that Kim Jong Il is mentioned, he is normally accompanying Kim Il Sung, thus appearing in the story in a secondary capacity. So far, there are no stories that directly and solely recount interactions with Kim Jong Un, North Korea's current leader, although his name is occasionally mentioned by the more recent writers as the successor of the revolutionary lineage.

The sheer diversity of the writers would impress any observer: an orphan, a schoolgirl, a widow, a widower, a farmer, a former Korean War prisoner of war, an athlete, a soldier, a teacher, a factory worker, managerial personnel, a storekeeper, a retiree, a war-wounded and disabled veteran, a train conductor, a medical doctor, a bus driver, a fisherman, a nurse, a technician, an architect, a secretary, an artist, an actor, a mother, a single mother, a lumberjack, a pilot, a diplomat, a wrestler, a journalist, a scientist, an apple vendor, a hotel worker, a painter, a student, a researcher, a villager, a construction worker, an office clerk, a person with an illness, a person with a disability, a person recovering in the hospital, a divorcee, a person who has been ostracized in the community, a person who suffered from mental illness, and the like. All kinds of individuals in all kinds of circumstances, as it were, encountered Kim Il Sung and wrote about their experiences. In other words, the authors are by no means all exemplary revolutionaries whose life histories would be appropriate for inclusion in a textbook. This is the reason why I am calling this corpus the people's chronicle.

In reading the chronicle, rather than simply taking such a massive publication as evidence of indoctrination, I suggest that we look at it as a testimonial to rational government over the lives of the North Korean population or, borrowing from Foucault, that we view it as a branch of the art of government, or what Foucault calls governmentality (see Foucault 2008). Insofar as governing had real effects—be it the rapid overcoming of illiteracy or the unification of the national communication network—North Korea's policies, including its linguistic policies, were no less rational than, say, the US Social Security system or the federally insured system of banking. For instance, the making of a new language was part of the fashioning of the North Korean state according to its own logic, a logic that generates and continues to assert its own truth, which is in and of itself quite rational: standardizing the new national language is something that any rational government would try to do. But there is a distinct turn or perhaps inconsistency in the case of the North Korean state, in my view, an inconsistency that is produced, as it were, unbeknownst to the state itself. We have already seen in the previous chapter that the discrepancy

was created between the state's goal of enhancing the love for the leader among the population and the actual effect of instating super-honorific formulas referencing the Great Leader; the rule-bound formula of referencing, ironically, augments the ritual-like, performative effect of the utterance, rather than working to instill spontaneous and authentic sentiments among the population. Similarly, the decades of nativization efforts of the Korean language resulted more prominently in making the vocabulary lean or skinny; while a smaller vocabulary would certainly ensure the economy of ideological messaging, the reduction of words was not necessarily the goal of the linguistic nativization. It is inconsistencies like these that I would like to explore in the lines and words of the chronicle that I present in this chapter.

If, as I stated earlier, standardizing the national language is a rational act of governing, how is this connected to the nation's truth? Every national language standardization or every language systematization, for that matter, is, in my view, ultimately related to the need to write and preserve one version of truth as opposed to the other versions. In other words, a sovereign nation would ultimately want to be the document-taker of its own past, present, and future, that is to say, truth about itself. What if a national language itself is equipped, as part of its structure, with the special references for its leader that are embedded in the language itself—just like syntactic or grammatical rules or idiomatic expressions? This is what North Korea's new language was about; the general population uses this language to live their daily lives as well as to revere and glorify the Great Leader. Still, living daily lives would require material transactions—even under socialism—and would entail private or non-/less political (so to say) matters such as grocery shopping or family dinner. How does the national language deliver the national truth while it also functions as a tool for daily communication, for example? It is with these questions in mind that I shall introduce the stories from the chronicle. Toward this end, I shall try to introduce as numerous and diverse a range of stories as a chapter of reasonable length will allow.

But first, let us explore the connection between the governing and truth on the one hand and the connection between the language and truth on the other, as these connections underline stories of the chronicle, as their authors recall the miscellany and trivia of daily scenes where, suddenly and amazingly, the Great Leader's presence gets inserted (as shall be shown below). I will do so with reference to Foucault's notion of the art of government contained in *The Birth of Biopolitics* (Foucault 2008). While not proposing in any way that what Foucault abstracts on the basis of three to four centuries of capitalist

formation in Europe empirically fits North Korea—far from it—I will use Foucault’s reasoning as a parallel guide for understanding the logic behind the North Korean state and its way of governing, which at once concerns and manifests its own truth.

By the art of government, Foucault does not mean the actual ways in which governments or governors govern. Rather, his focus is on “the study of the rationalization of governmental practice in the exercise of political sovereignty” (Foucault 2008: 4). In the European Middle Ages, the sovereign bore a paternal role vis-à-vis the population, the sovereign being the one that aided his subjects to gain salvation in the next world. Starting from around the sixteenth to the seventeenth century, the logic of the royal government began shifting and, by the eighteenth century, with the rise of utilitarianism and the political economy, “success or failure, rather than legitimacy or illegitimacy [became] the criteria of governmental action” (Foucault 2008: 16).

The grounds for judgment as a good or bad government were derived from the location of justice and the verification of truth—in the case of Europe, the market. The market was the location of justice because of its seemingly self-regulating capacity to generate the right or normal price for exchange—a price that people could agree to pay and be paid. In this way, the market would tell the truth in relation to governmental practice, in assessing examples of good and bad government with the judgment based on successful (or unsuccessful) market transactions (Foucault 2008: 32). Here, government needed to minimize its intervention, allowing the truth of the market to prevail, which would in turn provide the people with the means to judge the performance of the government. This was a shift from the previous period, which Foucault highlights with reference to a shift in the penal system: direct involvement by the sovereign in capital punishment and torture, still evident as late as the beginning of the eighteenth century, was replaced by milder and more measured forms of punishment from the eighteenth century on, heralding the emergence of a less interventionist form of government, or what we understand today as liberalism or the liberal art of government where capital punishment occurs rarely and if it does, it takes place away from the view of the general public (Foucault 2008: 45–46).

In this form of government, governments rely on and utilize exchange or successful transactions, as opposed to decrees or regal proclamations, as the determinant of truthful value, so to speak, as it is generated by the market. This, in turn, forges an indissoluble connection between economic growth based on the truthful value of goods and services on the one hand and

successful government on the other. Needless to say, this process involved a few more centuries of meandering via the age of mercantile capitalism, where growth was perceived as a zero-sum game—one's gain was another's loss—later moving on to the more recent centuries of competition based on freedom and, importantly, mutual enrichment under liberal governments, where everyone grows, one way or another, or so it was believed. In contrast to the medieval fear of demons and monsters, this market-based liberalism has seen the emergence of a new concept—security consciousness—concerned with dangers of a mundane, material, and everyday kind, such as ill health and property loss, necessitating state control and discipline, yet with the sole purpose of enhancing and maintaining freedom—the freedom of the market, above all (Foucault 2008: 65–70). Through it all, the logic that Western liberal states pursue is and has always been a singular one: the pursuit of growth in profit through good government (Foucault 2008: 164–165).

The reason why I do not take Foucault's analysis as an empirical basis that can be transferred to the case of North Korea should be obvious: unlike liberal, democratic Western countries, North Korea (or Korea for that matter) was born out of colonial occupation and resistance to it in the aftermath of a world war in which the victorious powers took it upon themselves to decide the fate of the weak and the defeated; with the rising Cold War in East Asia, also, North Korea, from its birth, operated in historical conditions that diverged fundamentally from the market-driven liberal democracy in the West. Nevertheless, as far as the truthfulness that is intrinsic to government (not as a set of offices and buildings, but as the art of governing) is concerned, Foucault has some important tools that we may productively use in our examination of North Korea.

Foucault does not present the process involved in the emergence of liberal democracy as part of a top-down axis in accordance with a theory of the state or by means of a presupposed macroeconomic law (Foucault 2008: 77). Rather, he tries to capture the art of government that derives from “the necessities intrinsic to the operations of government” (Foucault 2008: 19). This he calls the regime of truth—the regime of truth “as the principle of the self-limitation of government” or this particular art of governing (Foucault 2008: 19). What does he mean by this? He states:

The question here is the same as the question I addressed with regard to madness, disease, delinquency and sexuality [referring to his well-known corpus]. In all of these cases, it was not a question of showing how these

objects were for a long time hidden before finally being discovered, nor of showing how all these objects are only wicked illusions or ideological products to be dispelled in the [light] of reason finally having reached its zenith. It was a matter of showing by what conjunctions a whole set of practices—from the moment they become coordinated with a regime of truth—was able to make what does not exist (madness, disease, delinquency, sexuality, etcetera), nonetheless become something, something however that continues not to exist. (Foucault 2008: 19)

At the beginning of this book, I proposed that in North Korea, there is a particular kind of truth, the truth of the Great Leader (see the Introduction above). The Great Leader's truth is that he is the source of all good and all power; all achievements and all purposes of the North Korean nation reside in him. Here, I wish to resist the use of terms such as fetishism or misrecognition, as some otherwise excellent works on North Korea have suggested, such usage being itself ideological in that it implies the existence of "correct" recognition on the one hand and "incorrect" recognition on the other (e.g., see Kim 2014: 828–830). Rather, I am treating the Great Leader's truth as one version of truth—just like Foucault's truth of the market—that has emerged and been sustained in North Korea.

How does this truth become guaranteed, for example, as in the way the market appears to operate on the basis of truth in modern capitalism—the truth of the value of the goods being exchanged, a truth ultimately agreed upon by buyer and seller? The North Korean regime of truth does not align well with the market—it is only recently, under Kim Jong Un, that the exchange of goods between citizens has become a normal part of life. During the Kim Il Sung era (1945–1994), the state's central distribution system sourced the bulk of materials needed by the people, although the informal market (mostly barter) was fully legal and existed from very early on in North Korea (Itō 2017). In our market-dominated societies that most readers are familiar with, the masses participate in the veridiction of the truth of the state, while at the same time following the rules—rules concerning voting, the payment of taxes, economic transactions, conforming with law enforcement, and banking, for example. But such is not how people are related to the government and evaluate its art of governing in North Korea.

Whose rules and what kind of rules, then, are adhered to in North Korea in evaluating the government performance if market-driven truth is not being used as the source of measurement criteria? It is here that the Great Leader

plays a pivotal role. For, the primary questions individuals face in participating in the veridiction of the state's truth is: Who are you in relation to the Great Leader? How are you related to him? How truthful are you toward him? While these questions presuppose the absolute positioning of the Great Leader as an entity that does not change or move around, an entity that one should use in order to measure one's own position, they do not come in abstract terms. On the contrary, the conditions that enable the Great Leader's truth to be validated are material ones—not so much in the sense of capitalist economic growth or profit-making, but in the sense of improvements in quality of life—sometimes dramatic ones indeed—when compared to the colonial past, during the Korean War, or even the previous year. In fact, the main material reference in North Korea during the 1960s, when referring to its economic goal, consisted of the expression, *ibabe gogigugeul meongneunda*, meaning that the people would be able to eat white rice with meat soup; such expression was favored first because it was often used by Kim Il Sung himself, but also because it represented the overall material ambition of North Korea—starting with the goal that the people be able to eat enough good food. We shall see in this chapter that concrete material improvements are documented by the authors of the chronicle in relation to examples of what they view as good state policy—be it the provision of new housing, the allocation of more farm animals, or the Great Leader buying a new pair of shoes for a little boy whose parents don't have money, for example. Thus, tangible material improvements are part of North Korea's truth, even though these may not result from market exchange.

Unique here is that these concrete material improvements are registered on the visceral level by the authors as expressions of the love and benevolence of the Great Leader. The Great Leader's love, according to the stories in the chronicle, is extremely detail-oriented, almost to an obsessive degree—seen in the way he looks at an injured child with the eyes of a parent that is worried sick; in the way he checks and double-checks whether a family's rice chest really contains rice; in the way he pretends he needs to buy some chicken from a farmer in order to have an excuse to hand him some money; in the way he worries about a young woman not having a suitable lover, et cetera. The Great Leader's love and care, importantly, are accompanied by material benefits, such as a pair of new shoes, a new apartment, or an admission and scholarship to a college, in turn substantiating the success of the government under the Great Leader's leadership by ultimately encouraging people to voluntarily mobilize themselves. The glue, so to speak, that connects the Great Leader and the people's mobilization is, therefore, the affect.

In response to the Great Leader's love, people urge themselves to reflect on themselves, critically and constructively, by asking: How much faster can we build a factory? How many more tons of steel can we produce? How many more healthy babies can we deliver? How much stronger can we build a dam? In other words, the delivery of the Great Leader's love and care, which touch people deeply and intimately on an emotional level, takes the form of concrete interventions to improve material conditions, and is thus indissolubly connected to good government, which further reinforces the regime of truth of the North Korean state. And, all of this is done through the deployment of what I call the affective language of the chronicle. As such, the chronicle is not a hagiography of hero stories or accounts relating to a divine personality; it is, rather, an archive documenting the working of the North Korean state, or its art of government, through the eyes of the masses using the language they are comfortable with.

While the production of the chronicle needs to be seen in tandem with the guidelines and directives given with respect to linguistic practice in North Korea that we discussed in the previous chapter, it would also be important to note that the language of the chronicle, even though it is part of North Korea's national language, is not completely overlapping with state linguistic policies, as will be shown below. Rather, the language of the chronicle offers a window to look into the formation of self in close connection to the Great Leader, yet does not necessarily repeat the state-instated formulaic language of reverence: from a position of close physical proximity to the Great Leader the individual authors locate their identities and enact their selves. We will see that the pages of the chronicle are filled with exorbitant details about Kim Il Sung's eyes, hands, gait, stature, smile, and most importantly, words, as captured firsthand by each author. We will also see that the authors write with emotion, with deep affection toward the Great Leader on one hand, and with serious introspection into their own souls on the other. Such features at once render the essays in the chronicle ethnographic and authentic, at least to the extent that it is possible to discern so within the framework created by North Korea's national language.

Even though the language of the chroniclers does not exactly align with the codified embellishments that the government stipulated should be used in relation to the Great Leader during the decades from the 1960s through the 1980s, the affective documentation of the Great Leader's love and care for the people creates a different kind of stanza-like regularity. The Kim Il Sung that emerges from the pages of the chronicle is devoid of the ornate adjectives that

the state-sanctioned code established and is very close to the everyday lives of the North Korean people. While there are unmistakable patterns and regularities used when referencing Kim Il Sung, an effect the writers' voices carry rings authentic, their self-introspection conveying truthfulness, and the ethnographic details they capture rendering the stories simply more real, even though, ultimately, the state publisher copyedits each story. Such is the paradox—how can a text that is published in conformity with the state policy of advancing the Great Leader's virtues and that has been heavily edited by state officials still convey truth? What kind of truth are we to discuss here? And what kind of self is to emerge in connection with such truth? These are the questions that I will address in this chapter.

Good Government of the Details

In a Mountain Village

Kang Seonghun tells us of his encounters with Kim Il Sung through a series of on-the-spot guidance sessions or *hyeonjjido* conducted in Changseong County, North Pyeongan Province following the end of the Korean War. Kim Il Sung's first visit is in 1954, one year after the ceasefire agreement, with Kim closely inspecting Yaksu Village in Changseong County. Asked detailed questions by Kim about the market situation with respect to barley, beans, and the corn, the author, a local party worker, reports that industrial workers' living conditions have improved dramatically. Upon hearing this, Kim suggests that they visit a worker's family. Kang takes Kim to a small house nearby, where a niece of the wife is housesitting as both husband and wife are at work. Entering the house, which contains a paucity of household goods—all they have is one storage box and two sets of bedding—Kim is prompted to ask the girl: "Is this all you have in the house?" Kim goes into the kitchen, removes the lid of the rice chest and sees some white rice inside. Surprised, Kim asks the girl whether the family always has white rice to cook. The girl responds that her aunt got it specially so as to treat the niece with white rice, and that they would usually not be able to eat white rice, meaning that they would eat corn or barley. Kim appears seriously pained to hear this. That evening, Kim Il Sung visits a farmer's family. Having learned that this family, too, can only eat corn, Kim looks very concerned (Kang 1972: 34–35).

The following year, 1955, Kim Il Sung visits the county again, this time in order to look more closely into the livelihoods of the farmers. Upon meeting with the local party officials, who brief him with respect to demography,

production output, arable land surface, and the cattle farming situation, Kim Il Sung looks surprised, since one of the items that the official has reported touches upon the fact that the majority of local farmers are continuing to receive food loans from the state (which, apparently, is no longer the case in many other localities). Kim Il Sung charges the officials with the task of calculating how much tax in kind the local farmers are being asked to pay, and how much food they would have to borrow in order not to starve, so that the officials would be able to formulate a plan to improve the situation. The next day, he visits a fruit stand and, finding out that peaches and acorns are produced in abundance in the area, suggests that there should be ways to supplement nutrition using local produce.

A few days later, he visits an electrician's family and asks whether the family keeps small animals for nutrition purposes. Finding out that the family cannot afford animal feed, Kim Il Sung comes up with the idea of raising pigs in the family's small backyard, since pigs do not require much feed (Kang 1972: 38). Afterwards, Kim Il Sung goes to a hillside and collects various kinds of plants, showing the people which ones would be suitable as pig feed. He looks elated at the discovery of the plants, which are native to that locale, and which would make high-quality animal feed (Kang 1972: 39). Later, referring to this discovery, Kim Il Sung tells the residents that they have treasure in their mountains. Upon hearing the enthusiastic response of party officials, who propose redirecting their resources immediately in order to make better and more effective use of the mountains and their resources, Kim Il Sung gently admonishes them, stressing that excessively hasty planning would hurt the current economy, and arguing that the foremost and most immediate task is to improve farmers' living standards (Kang 1972: 42). The party officials are moved by Kim Il Sung's insights.

Upon visiting Yaksu Village again in 1956, Kim Il Sung is very pleased to find that each farming household now enjoys increased production output, and that each family now keeps a small number of animals as a source of nutritional supplements. "Only a few years ago, when the Great Leader Comrade Kim Il Sung first visited Yaksu Village," states Kang, "most of our farmers lived off state loans, but since his visit, basically, we have resolved the food problem [. . .] Our villagers have come to believe that as long as we followed the Great Leader's teachings, we can solve any challenges . . ." (Kang 1972: 43).

Upon his fourth visit to Yaksu Village, Changseong County in 1957, Kim Il Sung brings up the issue of how to utilize the mountain, telling villagers that

they now have good conditions after having almost completely collectivized their farmland, and arguing that it is therefore time to explore how to maximize their utilization of the mountains. He tells them that the mountains in Yaksu Village would be better suited to the raising of goats, sheep, cows, and rabbits. Especially with respect to rabbits, he tells officials: “You must raise more rabbits. Rabbits are very useful, but you comrades do not understand this very well. Rabbits are easy to raise and they reproduce every month . . .” (quoted in Kang 1972: 44). The Great Leader tells the officials that rabbits—with their fur, leather, and meat—would offer all kinds of benefits, adding that they should build cages that include shallow caves, so as to prevent the rabbits from freezing in winter. Later, the party officials come to learn that Kim Il Sung has been consulting specialists specifically with regard to the possibility of raising rabbits in Yaksu Village. Indeed, his teachings offer “an opportunity to turn around our project to make use of the mountains with maximum efficiency, because he had already scientifically analyzed the concrete situation of Yaksu Village and given us the most correct measures to follow” (Kang 1972: 47).

Kim Il Sung visits the county and Yaksu Village again in 1957 and in 1958. During his 1958 visit, Kim Il Sung gives a ride to a boy whom he had met four years earlier. Back then, his family was so poor that they could not even offer Kim Il Sung a clean seat. But now, four years after, the family has two dogs, a dozen chickens, four sheep, and tens of rabbits in their yard. Inside the home can be found numerous furniture items and appliances, including a grandfather clock and a sewing machine, and the family’s rice chest contains an abundant quantity of white rice. Not only has Kim Il Sung guided Yaksu Village, helping it to develop from a poverty-stricken mountain village into a flourishing farming community, he has also drawn upon and applied his experience in ways that other poor villages in the nation have been able to follow, allowing them to transform themselves into materially robust communities (Kang 1972: 50–51).

Building an Industrial City

Kim Taebok’s story follows the footsteps of Kim Il Sung in the industrial city of Kim Chaek from the 1960s through the late 1980s. In 1974, Kim Il Sung visits Kim Chaek City, formally Seongjin, one of the key industrial cities of North Korea located in North Hamgyeong Province, gazing in a satisfied manner at the beautiful high-rise apartment complex for workers that has been built along the Ssangpo hills. It was Kim himself who proposed, back in the

early 1960s, that an apartment complex for workers be built at this location. It is at this point that Kim Taebok's recollection begins. In the early 1960s, while visiting Kim Chaek, a city named after one of Kim Il Sung's comrades-in-arms during the guerrilla war against the Japanese in Manchuria in the 1930s and a general in the Korean People's Army who was killed during the Korean War, Kim Il Sung talks to a worker who is a veteran of the Korean War. The worker is living with his parents, his wife, and two toddlers. Kim becomes very concerned upon hearing that he and his family are living in a one-bedroom apartment. Kim further presses party officials, asking them how many of the veterans who returned home after the Korean War are living in bachelor dorms, even after marriage, due to the housing shortage. The officials tell Kim that they simply do not have a sufficient supply of housing to meet needs and that, furthermore, there are no suitable locations for the construction of workers' housing. Kim Il Sung tells the officials that there used to be a clubhouse operated by the Japanese colonial regime up in the Ssangpo hills, suggesting that this might be a good location to build a housing complex for workers. The party officials are struck by his original idea, realizing that this location would make an ideal site for a new apartment complex. It is in this way that the site for the current workers' apartment complex is chosen (Kim 1989: 33–35).

But the party officials are worried, because the construction of multiple buildings with multiple levels, each of them filled with advanced amenities and facilities, would result in them exceeding the allocated budget for housing. Kim Il Sung states: "Let us do a good job constructing workers' homes [. . .] Let us make the City of Kim Chaek into a modern cultural city for our working class" (quoted in Kim 1989: 36). Kim Il Sung continues paying attention to the occupational differences between the workers, suggesting that homes for ironworkers should be built in such a way that rooms are cooler, in order to let them have a break from their high-temperature work environments, while the homes of workers in the fishing industry should be overlooking the harbor. The party officials are utterly moved by the level of detailed care that the Great Leader displays toward each member of the working class.

In subsequent visits, Kim Il Sung worries about the source of drinking water—Comrade Kim Chaek has previously told Kim Il Sung that there is a good spring called Okcheon near his hometown, and Kim urges party officials to devise a way to bring Okcheon spring water to the housing complex. He tells the officials that this task should be prioritized, even at the cost of delaying current production (Kim 1989: 38–39). It does not end there: Kim Il Sung notices that the prevailing wind direction means that residents of the

new housing complex would be exposed to fumes from the chimneys of waste management furnaces, telling officials to destroy all eleven furnaces (Kim 1989: 40–41). Furthermore, in order to secure transportation between the housing complex and the factories, Kim Il Sung instructs party officials to build a streetcar network in the city (Kim 1989: 42–43). By his thirteenth visit to the city in 1983, the City of Kim Chaek has all of the things that Kim Il Sung had in mind: a beautiful, multi-level housing complex for workers; a health-conscious system for dealing with factory exhaust and waste; a supply of high-quality drinking water; and a streetcar service connecting homes and workplaces (Kim 1989: 43).

To the amazement of party officials, on this thirteenth visit to the city, Kim Il Sung tells them that there is one more thing that he wants for the city: a workers' amusement park. Kim Il Sung then charges party officials with the submission of a blueprint for such a park. Upon examining the plan, Kim tells them that the planned park is too small in scale. Kim Taebok recalls in his essay: “[The Great Leader] told us to dream big, just like the great working class would, and make an amusement park that offers a place of recreation for working families and a dating spot for young men and women for a romantic outing” (Kim 1989: 45). Thus, by 1989, the City of Kim Chaek comes to boast an amusement park which turns out to be three times larger in scale than the original plan, “adding one more benefit to the lives of working families, who are already so very happy” (Kim 1989: 45).



The above two stories are representative of many such stories recounting Kim Il Sung's on-the-spot, hands-on guidance. In these, one recognizes that material improvements to people's lives are directly connected to the Great Leader's in-person guidance. It is his presence that brings about material advancement, by way of better food, better water, better housing, and improved productive output. What clearer illustration could there be of good government in the hands of the Great Leader? This mechanism is not dissimilar to the way in which good government is registered in modern parliamentary democracy. Lawmakers are supposed to listen to their constituencies; they then go to the capital to propose new laws; new laws are implemented; budgets are allocated; citizens are satisfied. Throughout this process, some citizens are happier and others less so; some are willing to pay more taxes for better public services, while others would be happier with lower taxes, yet, all in all, the mechanism

has it that lawmakers (are supposed to) reflect the voices of their constituencies in their legislative actions.

In North Korea, as far as the people's chronicle tells us, a parallel loop is in place: Kim Il Sung makes an on-the-spot guidance visit to talk and listen to the people; Kim Il Sung makes a decision to carry out an action or charges officials with the implementation of new policies; people register the change as an improvement; and people thank Kim by way of endorsement of his good government, often in tears, but above all, in words. The difference, obviously, is that the work carried out by a collective body of elected legislators is undertaken by Kim Il Sung single-handedly, with all of his sagacity, insightfulness, love, and care. Still, concrete material improvements are made, thanks to his government. Stanza after stanza of this loop fills the pages of the chronicle, simultaneously reproducing and constructing the discourse of good government in North Korea.

Kim Il Sung's attention extends to broad and diverse terrains on multiple levels; Kim Il Sung pays attention to the material want of a humble worker's family on the one hand and the panoramic vision of a new industrial city equipped with modern amenities and housing complexes on the other. The details he deals with spread contiguously from micro to macro levels, touching every individual and every family along the way. The role of villain is often played by party officials who are too myopic or too timid, too unoriginal or too untrusting of the people when compared to Kim Il Sung. It is only through the guidance of Kim Il Sung, who not only emerges in diverse locations throughout North Korea over many decades, but also conducts research and amasses knowledge about nutrition, cattle farming, animal feed, water management, public health, education, public recreation, and so on, that material improvement in North Korean people's lives is achieved. In reality, moreover, considering that the Korean War destroyed most of the country's infrastructure, North Korea in the ensuing decades after the war did achieve a remarkable recovery, both economically and materially, as well as significant advancement, thanks to what Charles Armstrong calls the "fraternal socialism" that was embodied in multinational assistance from the Soviet Union, China, and other socialist nations (Armstrong 2005; see also Shen and Xia 2012).

Indeed, during a short period of about nine years between 1953 and 1962, North Korea rebuilt the bulk of its infrastructure, which had been more or less completely decimated by UN/US carpet-bombing during the Korean War. According to Armstrong: "The post-Korean War reconstruction of

North Korea was the most ambitious multilateral development project ever undertaken by the socialist countries during the Cold War” (Armstrong 2005: 161). Still, as can be seen from the chronicle, it is nevertheless the case that material improvement was registered as the product of the sagacity of Kim Il Sung’s government, rather than as the result of assistance received from other socialist countries. Some scholars would deem this as fabrication or as a falsification of history. Perhaps this is true, on one level. But the reality that is reproduced over and over again in the words of the authors in the chronicle is that the material improvements following the Korean War are to be credited to Kim Il Sung, this narrative thereby playing its own part in the creation of North Korea’s own truth.

In the stories, Kim Il Sung appears capable not only of paying attention to just about everything, but also of understanding the logic behind everything as well, from the planning stage through to delivery and operation, in a myriad of different contexts, fields, and circumstances, from a citizen’s backyard to a city’s water source, from a plan to build a streetcar network to the dating spots that young lovers fancy. The all-seeing and all-knowing Great Leader, here, presents an uncanny resemblance to modern capitalist government, which is, to make an obvious point, also all-seeing and all-knowing by means of its ubiquitous surveillance technology as well as via human policing that often involves tactics such as “stop and frisk” targeted at particular, profiled population groups, standardized education (including standardized language and standardized, mandatory tests), cultural censorship all the way down to social media, taxation that reaches out to every minuscule type of revenue that an individual might procure, and a national identification registry the efficacy of which only improves in tandem with the technology of surveillance. In the current state of global capitalism, digital technology joins in the policing of individuals all the way down to what they fancy eating for lunch, proactively advertising food items on smartphone screens, for example. In liberal democracy, while we are astounded at and often worried about this level of intrusion, we also benefit from this network of surveillance in time of crisis and danger, thereby rendering the current art of governing, all in all, effective. What is interesting in the case of North Korea as depicted in the chronicle is the manner in which the stories about Kim Il Sung, as told by ordinary authors, become a mechanism for illustrating the practice of good government in North Korea. The Great Leader knows exactly what is needed, what would help the community, the potential of the community, and the desires of the

community, and ultimately provides convenience, security, and happiness—just as good government in the age of smartphones is supposed to do in our society today. The all-seeing and all-knowing Great Leader is captured with the underscored assumption that his capacity to know all and see all is absolutely a good thing, as it ultimately leads to improvements in people's lives and thus embodies his love—or so goes the North Korean logic of governmentality.

Parenting Each and Every One

A Story of Orphans

Appearing in the very first volume of the people's chronicle, Choe Yeongok's story starts with a chance encounter with a gentleman or *ajeossi* (a generic term referring to an adult male), who happens to be an assistant to Kim Il Sung. Here and in many other stories, Kim's assistants play an important role in scouting or gathering information for Kim Il Sung. According to many stories in the chronicle, Kim's assistants roam the cities and the countryside incognito, talking to ordinary residents, children, the elderly, and so on, just like the secret royal emissaries of dynastic, premodern Korea, the *ambaengeosa*, who were sent in disguise all over the country to investigate local governments and spy on corrupt officials.

It is 1960 and the first day back at school for the new academic year. Fourteen-year-old Yeongok and two of her friends are walking along the street wearing the new school uniforms that they have received from the government when an *ajeossi* comes up and says hi. The *ajeossi*, after complimenting them on their new school uniforms, suggests that the girls get into the car with him to go someplace nice. The three girls agree and, before long, they are taken to a two-story home in Pyongyang. To their surprise, it is the residence of Kim Il Sung.

During their visit, Kim smiles and then asks them all kinds of questions: How many pairs of new shoes did the girls receive the previous year? How many pencils are they allocated each year? How many notebooks could they find in the school store? And so on. He then shifts to the topic of their parents. Yeongok, unlike her friends, has no answer, since both of her parents have passed away. Kim kindly asks her why she was orphaned. Yeongok tells him that her father was killed during the Korean War, when she was less than seven years old, and her mother, who raised four girls singlehandedly after her husband's death, died of illness at a young age in 1959. Since then, her sixteen-year-old sister has worked and taken care of two of her younger siblings—Yeongok

and one other, while the youngest has been entrusted with a co-worker of her deceased mother, as she was still only a toddler when her mother passed away. Kim Il Sung looks truly pained. That night, the *ajeossi* gives Yeongok a ride home and identifies the apartment where she and her sisters live.

Listening to Yeongok's adventure, her sisters are so envious of Yeongok, because Yeongok has met Kim Il Sung in person, a dream-like experience! Then, the following day, the *ajeossi* comes to visit the sisters and tells them that Kim Il Sung has invited all of them to his residence. The girls cannot believe it. Upon meeting the sisters, Kim arranges for all of the girls, including their youngest sister, to be sent to a *hagwon* or boarding academy where the bereaved children of revolutionaries are raised and educated. Kim tells them to come back to his residence to spend the May Day holiday together with his family. As they are leaving, the sisters receive gifts from Kim Il Sung, including stationery, apples, eggs, and clothing. Before leaving Pyongyang for the academy, the four girls stand and pay homage to their parents' grave, letting their parents know the utmost honor and happiness they have received at the kind hands of Kim Il Sung: "We looked toward Bonpyongyang [central Pyongyang where Kim's residence was located]. My sister smiled and said: 'Yeongok, Mom and Dad are very happy now, aren't they?' I, too, looked in the direction of the Marshal's residence. That day, I did not cry [even though I was remembering Mom and Dad]. We were simply happy and excited, because we were receiving such warm love and care from our Father Marshal. The next day, we left for our academy [. . .] We four sisters are not orphans. When we have our Father Marshal, how could we be orphans?" (Choe 1962: 35; author's translation).

Ten years after this essay, Choe Yeongok wrote another essay for the chronicle detailing the lives of the sisters afterwards at the academy (Choe 1972). In 1961, one year after the sisters are accepted into the academy, they have the honor of meeting Kim Il Sung again. By then, the girls are calling Kim *abeoji* (father) or *abeonim* (father, honorific). Kim Il Sung meets with the girls in 1961, 1963, 1967, and 1969—sometimes all four of them at once, sometimes one or two of them—each of the meetings documented in detail by Choe in her second essay in volume 12 of the people's chronicle. When, in 1967, Yeonghui, the youngest, visits Kim Il Sung's residence for the first time with her sisters (who previously visited the residence in 1960, as seen in Choe's earlier essay), Kim Il Sung asks her what kind of future career she dreams of. At the time still a middle school student, Yeonghui answers without hesitation: "I would do whatever *abeonim* (father) tells me to do" (Choe 1972: 165). Kim gladly chooses a career path for Yeonghui as a foreign language professional,

telling her: “When our Yeonghui becomes a foreign language professional, you will be traveling with me as my interpreter” (quoted in Choe 1972: 165). During that same meeting, Kim Il Sung pulls Yeongsuk, the oldest, aside and tells her in a low voice: “You are now twenty-three years old, right? Your sisters are still too young and so, I’m not too worried about them yet, but I am very worried about you. You are old enough and you need to be very careful. You understand what I’m talking about?” (quoted in Choe 1972: 166). Yeongsuk blushes a little and answers, “Yes.” Kim goes on: “Don’t be in a hurry and don’t take these things [i.e., romantic encounters] lightly. Don’t get married mindlessly, okay?” (quoted in Choe 1972: 166). Choe describes the scene: “My sister sat quietly with her head slightly lowered, listening to our Father Marshal. My sister looked just like a happy daughter whose father was so concerned about his daughter’s wellbeing and trying to do everything to protect her” (Choe 1972: 166). That day, the girls go back to the academy with gifts from Kim Il Sung, including a fountain pen, a headscarf, towels, and socks.

In 1969, Yeongsuk, the oldest, runs into Kim Il Sung’s motorcade in a Pyongyang street. The black cars come to a stop just after passing her as she walks along the sidewalk, and Kim Il Sung beckons to her from one of them, saying that he thought that he recognized her. Kim invites her into his car and instructs the driver to head for his residence, telling Yeongsuk that there is something he wants to talk with her about. Yeongsuk stays at Kim’s residence for dinner. During the meal, Kim Il Sung asks her whether she has someone in mind in terms of matrimony. Yeongsuk gets very shy, since, presumably, she has someone in mind, yet she tells him that she still has not met anyone. Kim smiles—apparently, he has figured it all out—and says: “My dear Yeongsuk, you need to listen to your father [i.e., Kim himself]” (quoted in Choe 1972: 170).

After Yeongok’s graduation from Kim Il Sung University in Pyongyang, and with Yeongsuk and Yeongok, the two older girls, having been made members of the Workers’ Party of Korea, the sisters are allocated a brand-new apartment in Pyongyang. The apartment has two bedrooms plus a kitchen, and the rooms have already been furnished according to Kim Il Sung’s directives. Even though they have lost their parents, they genuinely have nothing to envy in the whole wide world, thanks to Father Marshal Kim Il Sung.

Veterans’ Stories

Kim Yeongchi is a double amputee, having lost both of his arms during the Korean War. In May 1958, he is working as a shepherd at an agricultural

collective for disabled veterans in Kilju, North Hamgyeong Province, when Kim Il Sung visits the collective. Upon examining Yeongchi's prosthetics, Kim Il Sung asks a few questions, including "Are you married?" and "Did you get married before or after the injury?" He then comments: "Good, you were already married before the injury," before inquiring: "How do you take your meals?" (Kim Y. 1962: 125). Having learned that Yeongchi eats with a spoon inserted into the end of his prosthetic arm, Kim Il Sung continues: "Tough using the toilet, no?" "How would you dress yourself?" (Kim Y. 1962: 125). Finally, Kim Il Sung asks Kim Yeongchi to show him how he would write a letter using his prosthetic arm. Excited, Kim Yeongchi tries to demonstrate, but he keeps dropping the pen. Looking on with a worried expression, Kim Il Sung tells him: "It's all right. Just show me the movement you would use [with] the prosthetic." Kim Yeongchi is then so overwhelmed that he cannot stop his tears—he thinks that even his wife, who is completely devoted to his care, would not be able to be as considerate as the Great Leader (Kim Y. 1962: 125).

After this, Kim Il Sung asks all of the disabled veterans to gather together and pose for a photograph with him. He asks whether the veterans' families are there too. Upon learning that this is the case, he states: "Those comrades without arms [*sic*] must have photos with their families taken" (Kim Y. 1962: 128). Afterwards, Kim Il Sung coaxes the veterans, demanding that they tell him everything—what needs are not being met, who is not married yet, whether everyone has formal clothing, how the housing situation is, and so on (Kim Y. 1962: 128–129). Gathering courage, Kim Yeongchi says to the Great Leader: "We the disabled veterans are more suited to cultivating trees and plants, rather than herding cattle. I wonder if we could request an orchard. We don't have one here right now" (Kim Y. 1962: 129). Immediately Kim Il Sung makes this happen by reallocating what is currently a cooperative orchard to the veterans.

Another veteran also suggests that while they have sufficient gas for industrial needs, they often run out of gas for home heating. Kim Il Sung demands that this issue be addressed right away. Following this conversation, Kim Il Sung identifies a young veteran who is not married yet. He asks: "Why not? You don't have a girlfriend?" The disabled soldier answers: "No, I . . . I would rather go to school than get married. Great Leader, can someone like myself, with no arms, still go to school?" Kim Il Sung is excited to hear this, and says that he will make all of the arrangements to send him to college (Kim Y. 1962: 133). Kim Il Sung's main point of teaching that day is that the

disabled veterans must live optimistically and challenge themselves to achieve their goals.

After this visit, Kim Yeongchi has an opportunity to welcome Kim Il Sung's motorcade on the streets of Kilju. Kim Il Sung recognizes him and stops his car. He gets out of the vehicle and feels Kim Yeongchi's prosthetics, happily saying: "Good. When you dress up in suits like this, no one can tell you are crippled [*sic*]" (Kim Y. 1962: 137). Kim Yeongchi is again unable to hold back his tears, since the level of care and consideration shown to him by Kim Il Sung equals or even exceeds that which his parents would give him.

Kim Seongjin, another veteran writing for the chronicle, was severely wounded during the Korean War in a battle that took place in January 1953. He has taken eleven bullets on the left side of his chest and has fallen into a coma. Upon regaining consciousness several weeks later, he learns that the Supreme Commander (Kim Il Sung) has been worried about him. A few days later, a party official visits Kim Seongjin in the hospital, delivering a box filled with gifts from Kim Il Sung. Inside are Koryo ginseng and herbal medicines. In June of that year, Kim Seongjin has the honor of meeting Kim Il Sung. A military officer ushers him into a building, and Kim Seongjin hears Kim Il Sung's voice as he enters the room: "Is my dear Seongjin here? Very well. Thank you for coming all this way" (Kim S. 1962: 160). Kim Seongjin struggles to avoid bursting into tears and tries to report to the Supreme Commander by raising his arm in salute. Kim Il Sung gently takes Kim Seongjin's arm and hugs him, saying: "My dear Seongjin! You fought courageously. I'm so happy to meet you today" (Kim S. 1962: 161). Kim Il Sung goes on: "How is the wound? Still hurts, no? Let me touch . . . oh, still tender" (Kim S. 1962: 161). Kim Seongjin can no longer hold back his tears and sobs in Kim Il Sung's bosom. Kim Il Sung looks at the military officer who is present and says: "Why couldn't we improve Seongjin's condition much more?" (Kim S. 1962: 162). Kim Seongjin says in his heart: "Dear Supreme Commander! Please do not worry about my health. I am fine and I can go out to the front right now to fight against the enemy!" (Kim S. 1962: 162).

While Kim Seongjin is undergoing physical rehabilitation, Kim Il Sung invites him one more time. When they sit down, Kim Il Sung offers Kim Seongjin a cigarette. In awe, Kim Seongjin immediately answers that he does not smoke (reflecting the Korean custom by which rare and valuable goods—such as cigarettes and wine—are reserved for elders). Saying that he knows that soldiers love to smoke, Kim Il Sung takes a cigarette out of the box and lights

it for Kim Seongjin. Kim Il Sung continues: “No one will complain about you smoking in front of me. We are talking frankly and so we smoke together” (Kim S. 1962: 164). Kim Seongjin feels as if he were visiting his own father in his hometown (Kim S. 1962: 165). Afterwards, Kim Il Sung takes Kim Seongjin to the refectory. During their meal, Kim Il Sung affectionately tops up Kim Seongjin’s glass and puts more food on his plate. Kim Seongjin feels as grateful and as loved as he would have felt if he had come home to his parents (Kim S. 1962: 169–170). Encouraged by the fatherly love of the Supreme Commander, Kim Seongjin returns to military service as soon as he has recovered from his injury.

Stories from the Peripheries

Kim Il Sung’s detail-oriented love not only reached members of the so-called typical socialist population, such as workers, farmers, and soldiers, but also individuals and families at the peripheries of North Korean society. Here were those whose pasts were viewed as somehow tainted—for example, by having moved from southern Korea after the partition of 1945 or during the Korean War, by having been educated during the colonial period and worked in the upper echelons of society under Japanese rule, or by having a family member who crossed over to the South during the Korean War. Labeled as being of unsound origin, these families were discriminated against at workplaces and in neighborhoods. A returnee from Japan wrote an essay about his party membership, which was held up because of the extra hurdles he had to face due to his personal history of repatriation from Japan, enemy territory, after the 1959 opening of the repatriation route from Japan to North Korea (e.g., see Morris-Suzuki 2007). Becoming aware of this returnee’s situation, Kim Il Sung acted as guarantor for his party membership (Li 1977). A former businessman who amassed wealth during the colonial period (and gave it up after the establishment of North Korea) also wrote about his encounter with Kim Il Sung, who advocated for his full membership of the community, despite the animosity which the community showed with respect to his personal past (Kim G. 1962).

In a story told by Baek Hyeonseop about his father, Baek Honggwon, Kim Il Sung reaches out one of these families. While Baek senior is a so-called *singminji interi* or colonial intellectual, having graduated from a Japanese imperial university in the 1920s, Kim entrusts him with revolutionary tasks and demonstrates that the party treats such individuals just as it would other North Koreans. Originally a southerner, he taught at a high school in northern Korea, later working as a factory technician in North Pyeongan Province,

where he witnessed the end of Japanese rule. Energized by national liberation, Baek becomes the chairman of the post-liberation operation committee of the factory and devotes his energies toward the development of the newly liberated fatherland. But, according to his son's recollection:

The anti-revolutionary factionalists and impure elements that had sneaked into the party rejected and shunned my father as if he was a thorn in their side. They slandered my father simply because he originally came from the south and spread the rumor that he would sooner or later run away to the south. When there was an unfortunate accident in the factory, they blamed it on my father and had him arrested. It was at that time [1947] that Great Leader Kim Il Sung came to North Pyeongan Province to look into the situation. (Baek 1989: 325)

Kim Il Sung criticizes the handling of the Baek affair, arranges his release from prison, and exonerates him. Furthermore, Kim Il Sung invites him to Pyongyang. Upon his arrival, Kim Il Sung tells him that the party has decided to assign him a new responsibility in the government department that oversees industry and production. Baek is overwhelmed, and begins by saying: "General, how could a colonial intellectual like myself be . . ." Baek cannot conclude the sentence due to the tears streaming down his cheeks. Kim Il Sung smiles and encourages Baek, assuring him that he will be entirely capable of playing a leading role in the construction of the new nation and adding that he trusts him.

In the spring of 1953, Kim Il Sung invites Baek and other personnel in order to consult with them about the reconstruction of factories producing building material. As the Korean War armistice talks are still underway, technicians have not been able to figure how to embark on national reconstruction. With his wise words, Kim Il Sung rectifies this issue. Baek is determined to contribute as best as he can to national reconstruction. But, soon afterwards, his health deteriorates and he is hospitalized. One day, Kim Il Sung visits him in the hospital, offering him words of encouragement: "Comrade Baek, you'll be better soon, right?" Baek feels embarrassed and guilty because, as he puts it, "when everyone else is participating in the postwar reconstruction, I'm lying in a hospital bed." Kim Il Sung says: "What nonsense. Don't say such a thing. Don't worry about work. Let's make you healthy again. After that, you can work all you want" (Baek 1989: 229). After leaving the room, Kim Il Sung turns to the hospital director, telling him that Comrade Baek is someone that

he himself identified and inducted into the revolutionary ranks and insisting that the hospital restore his health at all costs. Despite such care by the Great Leader, Baek Honggwon passes away at the end of 1956 (Baek 1989: 230).

Kim Il Sung comes to the funeral. He stands in front of the coffin and says: “Comrade Baek, why? What happened? Why did you leave us so soon?” Kim Il Sung takes his handkerchief to his eyes. Hearing and seeing this, Baek’s son Hyeonseop (the author) and the rest of the family weep. Then, Kim Il Sung tells the children: “Don’t cry now. Your father has passed away, but you still have me.” Upon hearing these words, the children cry even more, but their tears are no longer tears of sorrow, but of joy, the joy of having another father, Kim Il Sung (Baek 1989: 231). Knowing that there are no extended family members or relatives in North Korea (because the family originated from the south), Kim Il Sung assigns a party official to take care of the burial and other immediate issues, including securing the family’s livelihood now that they have lost their breadwinner (Baek 1989: 234).

Five years have now passed and it is February 1961. On what would have been Baek Honggwon’s sixtieth birthday or *hwangap* (an important milestone in Korean culture), a party official visits the family and delivers goods and supplies sent by Kim Il Sung himself to help them celebrate this occasion. In the story, Baek’s son Hyeonseop recalls that in the summer of 1980, while inspecting a newly built monument in Pyongyang, Kim Il Sung reminisces over Baek Honggwon, referring to him as a great intellectual and technician who contributed enormously to the building of the nation; the party official who accompanied Kim Il Sung passes these words on to Baek Hyeonseop (Baek 1989: 238).

While those with family origins in the south and those who had been educated during the colonial period—such as Baek Honggwon—faced trouble, families whose members had moved to the south during the Korean War for one reason or another, known as *wollamja gajok* (a term translatable as “families of those [who have] crossed to the south), equally faced discrimination and at times severe sanctions from the community. Kim Bongae tells a story in which just such a disenfranchised family was accepted into the community through the direct intervention of Kim Il Sung. Kim Bongae gets married at age seventeen, but the family is so poor that she and her husband cannot afford to have a wedding ceremony until two years later. After the partition of Korea in 1945, her husband finds a job opportunity in the south and leaves Kim Bongae and the children behind. While the story is not clear about the background to her husband’s departure, Kim Bongae assures readers that she,

too, thought it was a great opportunity and encouraged her husband to leave. Due to the fact that her husband has crossed over to the south, thereby being classified as a *wollamja*, Kim Bongae is unable to participate fully in socialist community life, merely living day to day. Her children come home from school and ask her about their father: “Mom, other kids tell me that Dad went to South Korea. Is this true? You didn’t tell me that before.” Kim Bongae has no answer, and only sobs. Seeing her sad face, the children stop asking her about their father, which makes it even worse for Kim Bongae, since she knows that her children are being bullied at school (Kim B. 1962: 173–175).

In 1959, Kim Il Sung visits Kim Bongae’s neighborhood and specifically asks a party official to gather the *wollamja* families. Kim Bongae describes the meeting, at which families in a similar situation to that of Kim Bongae are present—most of them being women, since it was more typical that the men left for the south for one reason or another. Kim Il Sung asks Ms. Li about her husband’s departure. Ms. Li answers, fighting back tears: “My husband was taken to the south by the Americans during the Korean War when our village was occupied. I met my husband when I was eighteen and, right after the wedding, I studied in Kaesong. Then my husband was gone when I turned twenty. So I hardly shared any of [my] life with my husband.” Li breaks down and cries (Kim B. 1962: 170). Kim Il Sung looks very sad. He picks a white flower near a pond and gently places it on the water’s surface. Then he turns to the women and quietly tells them: “Because our fatherland is divided, families have to live in separation [. . .] But our fatherland will be reunified [. . .] and we will rid South Korea of the Americans [. . .]” (quoted in Kim B. 1962: 170–171). He goes on to say the following, specifically with respect to the *wollamja* families: “Some people went over to the south because they did not understand what a wonderful political system we have in the north [. . .] But I cannot say that [I have given you] a truly abundant livelihood yet. So, we have to work harder in order to raise our living standards [. . .] Not all *wollamja* families are [anti-revolutionary]. Our party does not think so [. . .] Some people went to the south because they had committed a crime here, but [. . .] even so, if they come back and do good work, they will be accepted again. Our party’s position is that we will forgive, accept, and march along with any individual who repents for their past mistakes and is newly determined to go forward with us [toward the Korean revolution]” (quoted in Kim B. 1962: 173; author’s translation).

After hearing Kim Il Sung’s words, all of the women break into tears, and then one woman stands up, saying: “Great Leader, your words open up a brand

new future for us. We will follow you to the end and we will devote ourselves to work and raise our children as revolutionaries” (Kim B. 1962: 177). Kim Il Sung looks very satisfied and bids farewell to the women, saying: “Everyone, please stay well and work harder” (Kim B. 1962: 178). After this meeting, Kim Bongae’s neighbors begin treating her and her children differently, because now that she has been consecrated by Kim Il Sung’s words, so to speak, her social status has changed—If Kim Il Sung himself has accepted Kim Bongae as a member of the revolutionary community, not doing the same will constitute transgression. Later, Kim Bongae becomes a member of the Workers’ Party of Korea. Her children are elated at the news, and mother and children renew their pledge to be eternally loyal to the Great Leader. Thus, even though the *wollamja* wives do not have husbands, thanks to Kim Il Sung, who has guaranteed their happiness in lieu of their husbands, they are able to fully participate in the socialist construction of North Korea.



The families and individuals in the above stories are missing a parent or a husband, and Kim Il Sung amply fills the void—this pattern recurs throughout the volumes of the chronicle. Kim is referred to as *abeoji* or father, the term not only being used as a metaphor, but also a term used to directly address him. Just like a parent, Kim attends to the needs of the people, regardless of how miscellaneous such needs might be, and his attentiveness is, just like in good parenting, age-appropriate, situation-appropriate, never overindulgent, and always nurturing. When an orphan girl reaches marriageable age, he worries about the need to find a good bridegroom. When meeting an amputee, he ponders over how the man’s disability might impact his toileting. When dining with a young soldier, he fills the soldier’s plate with servings of food. Indeed, his attention is as detailed as it is caring and affectionate, matching that of a concerned parent whose only wish is to see that the best be given to his or her child. In the case of wives left behind by their husbands who have left northern Korea for southern Korea, rather than turning a cold shoulder toward them, Kim protects them and restores their honor—just as a good patriarch would. Upon meeting Kim Il Sung, children cling to him as if they have found a long-lost father, women cry in his bosom as if they have been reunited with their long-lost husbands, and men break down in tears like little children. The relationship between Kim and the people portrayed in the chronicle is, therefore, unmistakably one of close kinship and intimacy.

In the previous section, we registered that Kim Il Sung's good government is understood as deriving from his all-seeing and all-knowing capacity. Here, his gaze is not that of the surveyor, let alone of surveillance. Rather than meticulously measuring and constraining individual rights, privacy, or freedom, the all-seeing and all-knowing quality of the Leader is, in and of itself, already taken as a reflection of his love toward the people, love that resembles that of a mindful parent who thinks about his or her child's needs ahead of time, even before anything becomes necessary. His love is, moreover, expressed quite spontaneously. Upon recognizing someone he knows on the street, he has his car turned around or stopped in order to have the chance to talk with that person—as in the cases of Choe Yeongsuk and Kim Yeongchi in the above stories. Far from being calculating, his outpouring of love knows no formality, as can be seen in the frank manner in which he offers a cigarette to a soldier, which in turn works to persuade readers of the authenticity of his love. Here, too, in parallel to what we have seen in the previous section, Kim's parental love is expressed through nimble and detailed connections that combine timeliness, generosity, and an astoundingly good memory concerning individual circumstances. Even his gifts are detailed and personal—eggs, candy, stationery, a pair of socks, and so on—nothing out of the ordinary or extravagant, yet each one cozy and loving.

Thinking about the citizen-leader relationship in society, what does this kind of parent-like love do? It eliminates myths, exaggerations, and untruths, paradoxically leading to the production of different myths and exaggerations, while a certain version of untruth becomes truth. Kim Il Sung is so special that he is not special any longer. Kim Il Sung is so extraordinary that he becomes ordinary. Kim Il Sung is everywhere, even when he is not seen. And, Kim Il Sung knows everything and loves everyone, even when no one notices it. The all-seeing and all-knowing Leader sees and knows everyone with so much love—such is the logic that sustains the essays in the chronicle. This mechanism works to create a particular individual self-identification and identification with the Leader: because the leader-seer-knower is constant in his ubiquitous presence, one is always in dialogue with him, examining and presenting oneself in direct engagement with him.

The foregoing does not mean that one is oblivious to oneself. On the contrary, one needs to locate one's own self, critically and consciously, in order to examine oneself vis-à-vis the Leader. When examining oneself, one can be assured that the Leader sees and knows all, and thus, all one needs to do is to

be completely honest with oneself. The words of the people's chroniclers suggest that introspective contemplation, as it were, is the key to understanding the formation of the self in North Korea. Furthermore, this inner dialogue borrows the kinship idiom, with the Leader, according to the chroniclers, being a more authentic father than one's own father, and a more loving husband than one's own husband. Indeed, out of the pages of the chronicle emerge the happy faces of orphans that have recovered their father, and men and women that have been reunited with a lost parent or husband. In an unexpected turn, reading the chronicle, one realizes that North Korea has rid itself of loneliness, because the people are not alone: there are always two of them—the Leader and “I.”

Kim Il Sung and Women

Giving New Names

Kim Aegi is a member of one of the first groups to enjoy the privilege of a state-funded vacation in Yangdeok in 1948. Like the other invitees, Kim Aegi works in the Jaedong mine, where men and women used to work as miners under Japanese managers. Now that Korea has become an independent nation, miners work with the pride of new citizens. It is the very first time that miners from Jaedong have vacationed, vacationing per se having been an utterly unthinkable concept during the colonial period. Kim Il Sung visits Yangdeok during their vacation there, but Kim Aegi has an eye infection and unfortunately has to stay in her room rather than meet Kim Il Sung in the hall. As Kim Aegi is feeling left-out and disappointed, Kim Il Sung comes into her room, asking after her health. Incredulous, Kim Aegi is at once grateful and embarrassed.

Kim Il Sung is an impeccable gentleman, praising Kim Aegi, who became a miner in order to raise her daughter after her husband became disabled while working as a miner himself. He states: “Ma’am, [it is] because you work so hard that you have been invited to vacation here” (Kim 1972: 115). Kim Il Sung then requests that Kim Aegi write her name on a sheet of paper. Kim Aegi writes: “Kim Aegi.” Seeing her name, Kim Il Sung asks: “Is this your name, ma’am?” (Kim 1972: 116). The reason that he asks is that *aegi* means “baby,” and it is extremely rare for anyone to have such a name, as Korean custom has it that children be given names with unique meanings, usually with connotations deemed as right, good, or auspicious. Kim Aegi explains to Kim Il Sung that her parents were illiterate and too poor to pay for a fortune teller or

divination professional to select a good name for her when she was born. Thus, her parents, in front of the municipal clerk, simply called their baby “baby” or *aegi*, and that was how her name came to be registered as such in the household registry.

Kim Il Sung momentarily falls into thought, telling Kim Aegi that under Japanese colonial rule, many Koreans lived that way—where they could not even give meaningful names to their children. Kim Il Sung then suggests: “Ma’am, since you came on this wonderful vacation, why don’t we make a new name for you? Let’s do that; let’s give you a new name!” (Kim 1972: 116). Then, he selects two characters, *bok* (meaning “happiness”) and *sun* (meaning “gentleness”). Kim Aegi is overwhelmed. Kim Il Sung’s kindness brings tears to her eyes, causing her infection to become even worse. “Ma’am, do you like this name?” asks Kim Il Sung (Kim 1972: 117). “There is no better name than this, since I received this name from you, General!” answers Kim Aegi. Kim Il Sung then asks Kim Aegi to write her new name. Kim Aegi is nervous, because all she can write is her old name, Kim Aegi, and she has no way of knowing how to write her new name, Boksun. Immediately understanding the situation, Kim Il Sung gently smiles, saying: “Fine, let’s write it together” (Kim 1972: 117). Kim Il Sung places his hand over Kim Aegi’s hand, holding the pen with her, and writes “Bok” and “Sun” in large letters. He then tells Kim Aegi that she needs to learn how to read and write, adding that women are no longer barred from learning in the newly liberated North Korea. Bearing this in mind, Kim Aegi, now Kim Boksun, studies hard, while continuing to work as a miner. This story becomes a family heirloom, told generation after generation (Kim 1972: 111, 118).

The chronicles include another story written by a woman about her name, a story about a series of events that take place forty-five years after Kim Aegi receives her new name. Heo Deokbok used to be called Heo Bokdeok, and the story behind the transposition of the two letters in her given name, Deok and Bok, involves Kim Il Sung. In 1993, Kim Il Sung visits Yeonbaek Collective Farm in South Hwanghae Province. Seeing Kim Il Sung in his eighties still continuing his on-the-spot guidance, Heo Deokbok is so grateful and also so proud, because that particular year, Yeonbaek has achieved a huge harvest. Heo Deokbok, along with other officials, thanks Kim Il Sung for his guidance, without which they would not have been able to achieve such an impressive crop yield. Kim Il Sung modestly states: “Farmer comrades tell me that thanks to my care, this year’s production went well, but I simply told you

to do good work [. . .] The reason why this year's production went so well is because you comrades used fertilizer very wisely, applying it according to the right timing" (quoted in Heo 1996: 79).

It is ten o'clock in the morning. Kim Il Sung's assistants are worried because he has not eaten breakfast yet. He invites officials and farmers to have breakfast with him. Over a simple meal, Kim Il Sung talks frankly with the farmers, jokingly suggesting that he will be an honorary advisor or *gomun* to the Yeonbaek Collective. Rather than being amused, Heo Deokbok cannot fight back her tears, recalling past visits by Kim Il Sung to the farm and the encouragement he gave to the farmers there. After the breakfast, he visits each and every unit of the collective farm, and it is mid-afternoon by the time that he returns to his train car. Kim Il Sung invites Heo Deokbok into his train car, where a luncheon has already been prepared on the table. Heo Deokbok is too overwhelmed by this kind gesture and can hardly eat any food. Kim Il Sung pushes a soup bowl and dishes toward Heo Deokbok and then thinks about her name, which at the time was still Bokdeok. Kim Il Sung repeats her name a few times in a lower voice before suggesting that she change it to Deokbok, transposing the two letters, saying: "when you have *deok* [virtue], you will have *bok* [happiness]" (Heo 1996: 84). Rather than assuming that one would be given the good fortune of happiness, according to the order of the letters in her original name, Bokdeok, Kim Il Sung is suggesting that she attain virtue first in order to earn happiness, as in Deokbok. This is a reference to Heo Deokbok's lifetime of hard work, which has earned her virtue and then happiness. Heo Deokbok is reborn, replacing the name on her Workers' Party of Korea membership card with her new name, the name given to her by Kim Il Sung.

Mentoring Women

Throughout the chronicle, Kim Il Sung is a parent and a spouse, displaying an extraordinarily detailed level of care and concern toward people of all ages and genders. But it is his behavior toward women throughout the chronicle that stands out in terms of its distinctly personal, slightly intrusive touch, at times mixed with discipline. Earlier, we saw an example in which Kim displayed overeager and excessively intimate concern in relation to the maturity and marriageability of an orphan girl (see above). Similar care is seen over and over again in the pages of the chronicle, involving women of diverse positions and ages. Kang Sunhui tells us one such story.

When Korea is liberated from Japanese colonial rule and the prisoners in Japanese jails released, Kang Sunhui finds out that her father has died in

Cheongjin prison in northeastern Korea. Her father participated in industrial action against the Japanese railroad company and was arrested and imprisoned. The family has not heard from him for some time, and then, news of his death reaches Kang Sunhui and her mother along with the news of Korea's independence. In light of the sacrifice her father made on the anti-colonial industrial front, the Workers' Party sends Kang Sunhui to Mangyeongdae Revolutionary Academy, the top-ranking boarding school where the bereaved children of revolutionaries are educated.

Once the Korean War breaks out in 1950, the party has Kang Sunhui and other promising girls and boys sent to China to study, both in order to avoid the effects of the war and also to learn about advanced technology abroad. In November 1953, while Kang Sunhui is studying in Beijing, Kim Il Sung visits China and meets with students from North Korea who are studying there. Kang is one of them. Taking her hand, Kim Il Sung asks: "What is your major?" He uses *neo*, a personal form of address meaning "you" that is used when speaking to younger people, typically children. In this case it conveys the closeness of the relationship of the speaker to the child, as in that between a parent and child. Kang Sunhui answers that she will be departing soon for Shanghai to study textile production. Kim Il Sung is satisfied, and praises her on having selected a very important area of study. Five years later, in 1958, Kim Il Sung visits China again, and Kang Sunhui has the honor of meeting with him again. After returning to North Korea, she works as a technician at the Pyongyang Textile Mill.

In 1968, while she is working as head of the silk production department, Kim Il Sung visits the factory and summons her and a few others who are also Mangyeongdae Revolutionary Academy alumni to meet with him. He asks each woman about her husband, children, and family life, telling them: "You must now think about working as woman leaders [. . .] Don't have any more children. If you give birth too many times, it will not be good for your health and will affect your work" (quoted in Kang 1989: 18; author's translation). During this meeting, Kim Il Sung suggests that the women accompany him on his next on-the-spot guidance tour.

As promised, Kim Il Sung invites the women from the Pyongyang Textile Mill, including Kang Sunhui, along on his next on-the-spot guidance tour to North and South Hamgyeong Provinces. During the trip, he tells the women: "You must complete the work that your fathers could not finish. Your fathers had asked me to raise you [into revolutionary leaders of North Korea]. So, that's why I built Mangyeongdae Revolutionary Academy,

and just like a mommy chicken would take along little chicks, I am taking you around so you will learn from the reality [of North Korea]" (quoted in Kang 1989: 20–21). After the entourage has returned to Pyongyang, the following day, Kim Il Sung asks Kang Sunhui to meet with him at his hotel. Alone with Kang Sunhui, Kim Il Sung presses Kang to tell him frankly about anything that she observed on the inspection tour. Kang Sunhui hesitates. Seeing this, Kim Il Sung presses her a few times, using very informal, parent-to-child language: "What? [. . .] Just say whatever you feel like saying" (quoted in Kang 1989: 22). Kang Sunhui gathers her courage, saying to the Great Leader that the factories that they toured showed wasteful resource allocation and that there was a disconnect between the technical staff and the assembly line workers. Kim Il Sung is pleased to hear this, saying *ne malri olta*, meaning "You got it right," using the possessive form of the colloquial personal form of address *ne*, meaning "your" (quoted in Kang 1989: 23). Kim Il Sung then orders that breakfast be brought in. Kang Sunhui is rather surprised at the modest offerings on the table. Perhaps noticing Kang Sunhui's reaction, Kim Il Sung tells the lady-in-waiting to bring in a few more interesting dishes if she can find them. As if simply to please Kang, fried eggs and dumpling soup follow. Kim Il Sung fills a bowl with rice himself before passing it to Kang Sunhui, who by now is mortified by the unpretentious and detailed care that the Great Leader is showing toward her.

Kim Il Sung's love for Kang Sunhui, however, is not simply aimed at cherishing and spoiling her. Sometimes, he gets frustrated, even angry, in response to her lack of leadership or originality of thought. For example, in the 1970s, Kim Il Sung publicly criticizes Kang Sunhui in front of hundreds of people during a conference for cadre working in the light industry sector, Kang recalling, "*Widaehan suryeongnimkkeseoneun nareul [. . .] doege bipanhasiyeotta*" ("The Great Leader severely criticized me") (Kang 1989: 26). This is because she has the tendency to rely on imported resources and does not channel enough passion into creatively utilizing materials that are available domestically. Kang Sunhui critically reflects upon herself, concluding that inadvertently, because of the lofty love and care of the Great Leader, she has developed a lazy attitude and the work style of a spoiled child. She feels ashamed, and carries out a thorough introspective examination of her own weaknesses (Kang 1989: 27).

In 1977, while working as a high-ranking factory technician, Kang Sunhui has a minor accident, and her face is cut. Even though the injury is not life-threatening, she is left with a permanent scar on her face. Kim Il Sung

makes many phone calls to party officials and doctors, repeatedly stressing that since a female official's face is at stake, they have to do their best to make sure Kang Sunhui's face will not end up showing a mark. In 1978, upon meeting Kang Sunhui again on one of his on-the-spot guidance tours, he is very pleased, saying to her: "Let's see, how is your face? Come closer!" (quoted in Kang 1989: 29). He looks at her face and gently touches the scar, before declaring that it is nicely concealed and that she will be able to be a bride again. Everyone in the room laughs out loud, but Kang Sunhui can only cry, because she feels such deep love.

The story of Song Geumsun, who also worked at the Pyongyang Textile Mill, shows that Kim Il Sung was not simply kind or loving toward women, but that he had expectations regarding their abilities, and when those expectations were not met, would become very critical, although in encouraging ways. Comparing the ways Song Geumsun and Kang Sunhui write about Kim Il Sung, it would appear that the former was not as personally close to Kim Il Sung as the latter. Thus, when talking to Song Geumsun, Kim Il Sung does not use personal forms of address, such as *neo* (you) or *ne* (your), and he uses polite forms for sentence endings. In January 1973, upon visiting the factory, Kim Il Sung pays very close attention to the hygiene and cleanliness of the worksite, and is not pleased with the way in which a new machine is being put together while the rest of the factory is in disarray. He suspects that the factory officials are not paying sufficient attention to the work environment, and wants to look into the production process. Song Geumsun is nervous and worried, but she ushers Kim Il Sung to the production site. Kim Il Sung looks very serious, witnessing the dustiness of the floor—cotton balls and debris are piled up here and there. Kim Il Sung says: "This factory is messy. I have said that the textile industry is like art. How can you produce artwork when your factory is in this filthy state?" (quoted in Song 1991: 85). He is also concerned about the health of factory workers. Kim Il Sung goes on to point out that the wires are hung in a disorganized manner and that the tools used for inspection are scattered on the floor. Kim Il Sung sternly reproaches Song Geumsun and the others, telling them that they are making a mess of their factory, that the factory looks unbecoming of one run by women, and that it looks more like a chicken farm than a textile mill (Song 1991: 85).

After Kim Il Sung's visit, Song Geumsun and the others renew their pledge to make improvements, and begin working hard. But, once started, they discover that the challenge is bigger than they have anticipated. Firstly, there are not enough funds, and secondly, most of the machinery is outdated.

They have no way of securing funds to upgrade the machinery, and are despondent. Then, one day in February 1973, Kim Il Sung invites Song Geumsun and some dozen women (both officials and workers) from the factory to his office. Kim Il Sung says that he wants to get a comprehensive picture of the factory by listening to both management officials and workers. Upon being asked, the factory workers answer that they have no problem working the night shift. Kim Il Sung does not accept such an answer. Prodding further, he eventually leads the female workers to reveal that since many of them have recently had babies and are nursing, they would appreciate it if the factory would provide childcare. Elated to hear this, Kim Il Sung immediately grabs a pen and begins calculating the cost of establishing childcare and a nursery attached to the factory. He also critically comments on men who look down on husbands that are kind and caring toward their wives. The meeting goes on for hours well into the evening.

After the meeting, the factory receives massive funding from the central party, in addition to new machinery and parts. Childcare and nursing facilities are built, and the female workers become able to work, nursing their babies during their breaks. In May of the same year (1973), Kim Il Sung visits the factory again and checks its cleanliness as well as its efficiency of production. He is especially pleased to find out that the factory is now equipped with a vacuum cleaning system that addresses the challenge of lint and cotton dust on the floor. Kim tells Song Geumsun: “This factory has improved enormously. If I were to grade it, I would give it nine out of ten points. How nice is it to have such a clean workplace?” (quoted in Song 1992: 91). Kim also inspects the refectory, eating lunch there. He instructs the catering staff to pay extra attention to food that is more suitable for and popular with women. He also personally selects work shoes for the factory workers that are suited to feminine tastes. Song Geumsun and the other factory officers are overwhelmed by the level of detailed and personal care that the Great Leader is showing toward the female workers.



The stories that I have introduced above bear witness to the way in which selves are engaged with the Great Leader. To make a plain point: Kim Il Sung gives women names (Kim Boksun and Heo Deokbok), giving them new identities. Then, he rather directly criticizes the shortcomings and failures of particular women. In this subsection, unlike in the previous two subsections, Kim Il Sung shows his stern side. When women do not push themselves, Kim

Il Sung is not happy, and he does not reserve his frustration. This makes Kim authentic—he is frustrated, because he trusts women to be able to lead the revolution. In response, women react sincerely, deeply reflecting on their own shortcomings and weaknesses, and eventually renewing their determination to improve themselves in order to repay the benevolence they have received from the Great Leader. They are in awe of Kim Il Sung, but not afraid of him, using him as their moral compass of sorts. At the same time, women are immersed in affect toward him. Just like any good mentor or teacher, Kim Il Sung is direct yet affectionate, concrete yet far-sighted, and, above all, always available.

When, in one of the stories, Kang Sunhui writes about being criticized by the Great Leader in public, rather than feeling like she has been unfairly singled out or publicly shamed, Kang Sunhui takes his comments as encouragement, responding by delivering positive results. Such an outcome is possible only when the recipient of criticism knows that it is derived from affection on the one hand and higher expectations on the other. It is this belief that enables the women to continue identifying themselves closely with Kim Il Sung. This mechanism is supported by the solid assumption of an affective bond between the Great Leader and the people. For, if there were doubt about this affect, the stories in this section would become terrifying—how would one survive direct criticism by the supreme being, one wonders? But the way in which Kang Sunhui and Song Geumsun respond to Kim Il Sung's criticism reflects their unquestioning trust in Kim's love toward them, which in turn ensures their affect toward him. The self in North Korea, as it were, emerges in this loop of affect between the Great Leader and the people.

As I have written elsewhere, the assumption that the self does not matter in a totalitarian society such as North Korea is based on an erroneous understanding (Ryang 2012: chap. 3). Rather, in North Korea, the self occupies a major position in social relations. Without firstly recognizing one's self, one cannot make oneself into a better being, bringing oneself closer to the Great Leader. It is important to recognize that such a connection between leader and follower in North Korea is supported not by surveillance or terror, but by love and affect: I shall return to this point in the conclusion of this book.

Native Truth

In the chronicle, no author refers to Kim Il Sung using a heavily embellished form, such as Respected and Beloved Marshal Kim Il Sung, to cite the most common epithet, the term that I defined as an example of a performative or ritual statement (see chapter 2 of this volume). Rather, in the chronicle, the

authors call him “my father, Marshal Kim Il Sung” or simply *suryeongnim*, Leader, or *susangnim*, Premier, during the period when Kim Il Sung held that office from 1948 through 1972, before he became President. The essays do follow the North Korean rule of quoting Kim Il Sung’s words in bold text, but references to him are far simpler than those codified by state linguistic authorities in the publications we looked at in chapter 2 above.

By way of contrast, more emphasis is placed on capturing each and every miscellaneous detail of Kim Il Sung’s words and actions, his hand and eye movements and his tone of voice, as he cares for the weak, the marginalized, and, above all, the ordinary and the masses, worrying about a disabled veteran’s toileting or the number of chickens a farmer’s family owns, a poor boy’s shoes or a suitor for an orphan of marriageable age, for example. These stories are told not in an extraordinary style, nor in the manner of a hero’s legend or a fairy tale. Rather, these are the stories of ordinary people’s encounters with Kim Il Sung as part of their lives, written by individuals with diverse occupations, ages, family circumstances, personal histories, education levels, regions of origin, and so on.

At the same time, there is an unmistakable consistency in the way in which the chronicle writers refer to Kim Il Sung over a period of more than half a century. Certainly, we should assume that state authorities perform copyediting, accepting that there really is no effective way of determining their degree of intervention with respect to texts written by diverse authors. But the consistency that I am referring to here is not confined to the choice of words used or grammatical preferences, for example. Rather, it is a consistency that can be recognized in the ambience surrounding Kim Il Sung and his presence, an ambience which is not created through sacred or mysterious incidents, but through the mundane, ordinary, hands-on, yet permanent presence of Kim Il Sung himself. For example, one of the most frequently mentioned references to Kim’s movements in the essays concern cases of *deungeul sseureojisida* or lightly patting (someone’s) back. Further, his voice is almost always portrayed as being warm and deep, or *ureongureonghasida*, his smile almost always portrayed as a *balgeun useum* or bright smile. These are native words, rather than words of Chinese origin, and it is these words that define Kim Il Sung, and not the epithets and titles of Chinese origin that the state authorities mandated to accompany the reference to Kim Il Sung. Many authors depict Kim Il Sung’s physical proximity and touch in an almost identical manner—unpretentious, friendly, and warm. In the essays, Kim is physically close to the people, standing right next to them, holding their hands, and embracing them. The authors

respond sympathetically and sensitively to Kim Il Sung's pain or his joy, but these responses are not shown to be automatic or fawning; the author's authentic feelings are captured in a straightforward manner. What this does is convey the affect of the ordinary people toward Kim Il Sung that stems from the direct and close connection the chroniclers are confident that they have with the Great Leader.

This consistency of affect is in part sustained by the use of time or tense. Since all of the essays are written as recollections, right from the inception of the chronicles in 1962, irrespective of whether Kim is alive or dead at the time of writing, the format of the chronicle can arguably continue *ad infinitum*. In fact, it is striking to see that even after Kim Il Sung's death in 1994, the chronicle essays have continued to be written in an identical manner to that used in the years when he was alive, thereby rendering the entire body of stories timeless. Indeed, one does not really detect that he is dead, as each essay is written as if recalling a person who is still alive. The effect of this is obvious: it makes Kim Il Sung's presence eternal.

Affect and a sense of eternity are embedded in the exorbitant level of detail that chroniclers include when documenting their interactions with Kim Il Sung, rendering Kim into an all-knowing, all-seeing, and all-caring Leader. It is extremely unlikely that the Great Leader possessed specialized knowledge in the vast array of areas referred to in the essays—from cattle herding and animal feed production to the performance of gymnastics, from the correct handling of advanced weapons to the construction of electric locomotives, from the design of a popular ladies' hat to Western as well as Soviet economic theory, from welding technology and construction work routines to telecommunications and electrical engineering, from herbal and Western medicine to child psychology. But he has it all and does it all—or so it is represented by the chroniclers. Yet again, this understanding is not presented as other-worldly, nor is it presented in an exaggerated manner, for Kim Il Sung in the chronicles is, first and foremost, a living being that is extraordinarily detailed in his care and deeply loving in his words.

It is interesting to note that, even at the height of Juche ideological fervor and the singular ideological system or *yuil sasang chegye*, the chroniclers hardly make reference to these political phrases and key words. This is an important point, given that many stories were published at a time when North Korea was beginning to fundamentally rearrange and reconfigure its ideological system under the Juche ideology. Starting from the early 1970s, this process saw almost everything in North Korea's public discourse coming to be

conditioned and defined under Juche—as in, for example, Juche-type blood or *juchehyeongui pi* and the Juche world outlook or *juchejeok segyegwan*. In chapter 2 above, we saw that Juche was introduced by Kim Il Sung during the 1950s as North Korea’s own revolutionary style, of especially importance in the area of linguistic reform. By the beginning of the 1970s, this keyword had become the household name for many things, as summed up by Armstrong: “[. . . F]rom the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s, North Korea worked assiduously to present *Juche* as a model—of politics, economic development, and foreign relations” (Armstrong 2009: 3). Even today, the official North Korean website refers to the “principles of Juche” and the “socialist cause of Juche.” But, in his 1972 recollection that we examined above, author Kang Seonghun does not even once mention Juche. The volume containing Kang’s story was re-issued three more times, its most recent publication being in 2006. Yet, no attempt to “rectify” the error of not mentioning Juche was made by the state copyeditors with respect to the reprint. Kim Taebok’s 1989 recollection, too, completely avoids any mention of Juche. In fact, the stories in the chronicle are conspicuously silent on Juche. The volumes that were published after 1998 refer to all calendar years according to the Juche system, North Korea having adopted the Juche calendar in 1997, with Kim Il Sung’s birth year of 1912 as Juche Year 1. But aside from references to the Juche calendar in the body texts, which are sparse, Juche is not to be found.

What can be derived from this absence of references to Juche in the people’s chronicle, a term which served indisputably as the most important linguistic reference to North Korea’s national ideology during the decades of Kim Il Sung’s leadership? Even literary creations during the 1970s and 1980s refer extensively to Juche, weaving creative stories around this theme, this ethos, and, indeed, this form of life that the North Korean state typecast as North Korea’s own (see Ryang 2012). But, this is not the case for the people’s chronicle—why? In my view, this suggests that the chronicle is produced as a body of text that offers a function different from that of literature, political commentary, newspapers, and the rest of state-sanctioned publications. The place occupied by the stories in the chronicle in the production of North Korea’s national truth is as a site for the presentation of testimonials to the good government that was practiced on the basis of and rendered efficacious primarily due to the Great Leader’s love—love that is capable of looking into all sorts of miscellanies and details, the mundane and the everyday, love that delivers real progress and improvements to people’s lives, and love that reaches out to and provides firsthand motivation to people with respect to the national cause

of construction and revolution. At the same time, the people reciprocate this love, with the chronicle attesting to this. Hence, the need to capture each and every minuscule detail using the plainest of language and devoid of political jargon, even state-sanctioned slogans and keywords. On this visceral level, love or affect supersedes Juche or rather, they exist in the realm separate from Juche. And this is why the style of the essays by the chroniclers do not change much from 1962 to the current volume, even though, as we have seen in chapter 2, the North Korean linguistic practices have gone through a few changes.

The paradox is that while the frequent invocation of Juche and the set of epithets deferentially embellishing Kim Il Sung's name clearly occupy important positions in state linguistic policies of North Korea, everyday truth about the Great Leader is created and sustained on a different level in a different manner using a different discourse. The mundane, ordinary, and hands-on presence of Kim Il Sung, supported by the excess of details and specifications concerning his on-the-spot guidance and his interactions with people, is captured in the equally mundane and ordinary language of the authors. The affect that is captured in the chronicle, consistently and longitudinally, forms an entirely different area of discourse.

So, what are the effects of such a discourse, one that inscribes the constant and consistent presence of Kim Il Sung onto people's lives over many decades, as shown in the chronicle? I propose that we recognize the emergence of something that I would call the native truth of North Korea from within this body of discourse. The looping stanza, according to which references are made to Kim Il Sung in the chronicle in a repetitious, recurring, and regular manner, renders truth about the Great Leader as tangible and long-lasting. This type of truth, native truth, is not unique to North Korea. Readers are asked to recall the example of Japan's popular discourse identifying the nation as racially homogeneous and culturally unique. Starting in the late 1960s and continuing through the 1980s, reflecting Japan's remarkable economic achievements and a state of affairs in which it threatened to usurp the US's number one ranking on economic indicators, popular and academic discussion of Japan's cultural uniqueness captivated the West as well as Japan. In Japan, books such as *Tateshakaino ningenkankei* or *Human Relations in a Vertical Society* by cultural anthropologist Chie Nakane and *Amaeno kōzō* or *The Structure of Dependency* by psychologist Takeo Doi were published and quickly translated into English and other languages (see Nakane 1970; Doi 1971). The body of literature inquiring into Japanese cultural uniqueness as the reason for Japan's economic success soon came to be referred to as *nihonjinron* or the theory of

the Japanese, more commonly translated as the theory of Japanese cultural uniqueness. Taking assumed racial and ethnic homogeneity as the bedrock of the theory, the *nihonjinron* writers basically posited the superiority of the Japanese and of Japanese culture. Many sought an explanation of the origins of Japan's postwar cultural identity in Ruth Benedict's *Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (Benedict 1946; see also Lummis 2007; Ryang 2004 chap. 2; Aoki 1990; see also the introduction of this volume). The belief that the Japanese are unique (and superior) people, and that this is due to their supposed racial homogeneity, was (and, to a large extent, continues to be) disseminated in a broad range of media, from academic research papers to daily newspapers and children's manga.

The question of Japan's unique cultural identity not only surviving the modernization of its economy, but also thriving and even being credited for its economic miracle, became one of the top enigmas for some American social scientists to inquire into (e.g., Vogel 1979). Through this process, the myth of Japan's racial homogeneity became very close to truth in the minds of Japanese readers, culminating in the emergence of native truth. Speaking in 1986, the then Japanese prime minister Nakasone Yasuhiro compared the US workforce unfavorably with that of Japan. Disregarding Japan's own multiethnic past, whereby Ainu and Okinawan peoples had been forcibly assimilated, and erasing the nation's colonial past and the continuing postcolonial presence of Koreans and Chinese on postwar Japan's soil, he attributed Japan's economic advancement to its racially homogeneous workforce, with its higher intellectual ability and superior work skills. Nakasone stated: "The level of Japanese society far surpasses that of the United States. There are many blacks, Puerto Ricans and Mexicans in the United States whose average level is extremely low" (quoted in Landler and Horvat 1986). Against the backdrop of angry reaction from the US Congress, John Burgess, writing to the *Washington Post*, captured the reaction in Japan as follows: "In the view of many Japanese, Nakasone was simply talking common sense, saying that ethnic diversity creates confusion and discord and that societies function best when people look, think and act alike, as they do in Japan" (Burgess 1986).

In the face of discursive dominance of Japanese cultural uniqueness, in both Western and Japanese academe, researchers embarked upon a critique of *nihonjinron*. For example, it is partly in response to the thesis of Japan's racial homogeneity that Anglophone research on Japan's ethnic minorities has witnessed vigorous growth since the 1990s, effectively refuting the racial homogeneity thesis (e.g., Ryang 1997; Suzuki and Oiwa 1997; Lie 2001; Tsuda 2003;

Siddle 2014). Influential studies critically reflecting on *nihonjinron* as an ideological construct have been published in both English and Japanese (e.g., Sugimoto and Mouer 1989; Oguma 1995; see also Ohnuki-Tierney 1993; Hudson 1999). Yet, one continues to see abundant references to Japan's cultural uniqueness based on the assumption of racial homogeneity in a vast array of media in Japan today, and this is not simply the result of spontaneous inquiry in the academic and popular domains. For example, the Japanese Cabinet disseminates "Guidelines for Narrating Japanese Culture" and advocates what it calls a "re-editing" of Japan through a pursuit of Japan's unique origins that explores deeper layers and adopts a longer historical perspective:

First, the deep layer comprises the natural environment and origins of history. In a country beset by frequent natural disasters and limited in natural resources, the Japanese developed a sense of recycling-based values, wherein singular resources such as rice, wood, and paper were modified and re-used in a variety of different forms. The unique styles, methods, and concepts (e.g., *mochi*, *sake*, *shoji*, etc.) which emerged from this back-drop can then be regarded as Japan's middle layer and, once recognized as such, can help clarify the underlying context of a wide range of current cultural phenomena. (Editorial Engineering Laboratory 2018)

While the policy does not overtly promote Japan's racial homogeneity, the assumption of a singular, uninterrupted tradition continuing for millennia ever since its mythical origins resonates strongly with the native truth of *nihonjinron* with the uniqueness of Japan and the Japanese at its core. For instance, *mochi* or rice cake, *sake* or rice wine, or *shoji* or the rice paper door—the items that the above quotation refers to as uniquely Japanese—are shared widely, albeit with some variation, in Sino-spherical East Asia. Identifying them as uniquely Japanese styles on the government website reflects the deep-rootedness of belief in national uniqueness. Most recently, on January 13, 2020, Aso Taro, Japan's current deputy prime minister, who also served as the prime minister of Japan (2008–2009), stated: "Japan is the only country in the whole world, where the same nation has consistently maintained one language under one royal sovereign for two thousand years" (Itō 2020; author's translation). Needless to say, the belief in Japan's racial homogeneity is not the only native truth of Japan. Nevertheless, the resilience and ubiquity of this belief is unmistakable.

Seen side by side with the above, North Korea's native truth becomes less exotic. While official discourse at the government and party level incessantly

rolls out the pre-defined adjectives, epithets, titles, expressions, and phrases when referring to Kim Il Sung, the nation, the world, and life, etc., such discourse is not monolithic. As seen in this chapter, it is in the chronicle that by far the most affective discourse is created and maintained, the Great Leader coming to life in plain and ordinary language that contrasts with the more performative language of official epithets and historical referencing that the state dictates. While, of course, the language of the chronicle is part of the state discourse of North Korea, broadly speaking, the difference between this language and the state's other, more authoritative forms of discourse, such as the formulaic reference system applied to the Great Leader, is notable in that this language is unpretentious and repetitive, thereby in some ways sharpening the focus on the affect multifold compared to more ornate references to the Great Leader.

The truth that is produced by this affective language is, as it were, more powerful and less artificial, more direct and less mediated. And it is against this backdrop of national truth that the self in North Korea needs to be understood. As seen in the chronicle, the self's immersion in a recurring stanza of references to the Great Leader, who appears just about everywhere, talks with ease to everyone, knows everything, loves everyone, and makes everything better, secures a particular way for the self in North Korea to be formed and to engage with life. Here, Kim Il Sung is not simply greatness. Rather, he is a person, family, friend, and teacher who encourages people to excel at their work, who shows them abundant care and concern, and who, above all, comes to see them, meet them, and hug them.

And it is through him that North Korea's good government is delivered. Not only in terms of materiality, but also in the area of security—as a result of affect between the Great Leader and people—things are made better and better by the Great Leader. Unlike the premodern paternal state, with which Foucault contrasted market-regulated modern capitalism and the ever receding state (as we discussed at the beginning of this chapter), in North Korea, the art of government or governmentality presupposes paternalistic affect of the Great Leader which is reciprocated by introspective and deeply emotional self-reflection by individuals asking themselves how much they love him back. As such, in North Korea, selves are not managed by market logic, but generated and enacted by affect for the Great Leader—or at least this was the case during the Kim Il Sung era. It is with reference to the Great Leader that individuals evaluate the good and bad in themselves and their actions or, more precisely, their successes and failures, and it is through the mutually affective connection

between the Great Leader and the people that individuals identify themselves and their being. If modern liberal capitalism produces self-consciously market-driven participants in profit-making, North Korea's native truth produces an affective self that is in constant connection and communication with the Great Leader.

The one point where North Korean linguistic policies and the essays in the chronicle converge is in the nativization of the Korean language, or more precisely, the shift toward a lean or skinny Korean language. Since most of the essays in the chronicle capture recurring appearances of Kim Il Sung in ordinary scenes, on ordinary days, in ordinary people's lives, the effects of nativization, which I argued has led to a reduction in the number of Korean words due to a streamlining of words of Chinese origin, are powerfully demonstrated. As we saw in chapter 2, state linguistic authorities eliminated certain words of Chinese origin and retained others, resulting in a reduction in the size of the language's vocabulary. The Kim Il Sung that appears in the chronicle is captured within the parameters of this nativized (and lean) North Korean language. The effect of lean or skinny vocabulary is to ensure Kim Il Sung's presence minimally variegated, that is to say, his constant presence is guaranteed. The fact that the afore-mentioned examples of *deungeul sseureojusida* (patting the back), *ureongureonghan moksori* (deep voice), and *balgeun useum* (bright smile) recur again and again, regardless of the diverse settings in which Kim Il Sung is introduced over multiple decades, speak to the impoverished yet superbly clear nature of the North Korean vocabulary.

The affect and affection that the people express toward Kim is most truthfully captured in the nativized Korean language, rather than the pre-reform language that the purges of the 1950s deployed, which was far more diverse, passionate, enriched, and free-spirited. But this language of affect, as stated, does not overlap with the state-stipulated epithets and verbal embellishments dedicated to the Great Leader, which themselves risk becoming the performative and perfunctory statements of ritual nature, heavily relying on Chinese-originated words, with much heavier emphasis placed on format, rather than on sentiments, meaning, or something that we might call heart. No matter how hard the state may stipulate its use, the formulaic language of ritual would primarily remain the form, rather than the content, and in fact, the ritualization of utterance itself creates a distinct separation between its form and meaning. The harder and more rigid the stipulations and rules are, the greater the risk of rendering the utterance a hollow shell of saying for the sake of saying. This does not, however, mean that such the ritualistic utterance

is untruthful. Nevertheless, the language of the chronicle offers a site that approximates the utterance to the territory of authenticity precisely because of its lean and minimalist nature. It is with this language that the affect for the Great Leader has become defined. Kim Il Sung, moreover, emerges in full scale and even closer to everybody through none other than his own words during the 1990s, which have, paradoxically, no semblance to the minimalist language of the people's chronicle or to the reformed and nativized Korean language that he himself guided the creation of during the preceding decades. Let us explore this development in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

The Memoirs

Locating Authenticity

By all accounts, 1994 was a strange year for North Korea. According to a US State Department document that was declassified in 1993, the US first deployed nuclear weapons in South Korea in 1958 and continued to do so until 1991, the number of warheads peaking at 950 during the early 1960s (Lee 2009; Kristensen 2004). It is very likely that North Korea had intelligence data on this situation and sought nuclear technology from the Soviet Union and, later, China during the early 1960s. By the late 1970s, North Korea was developing its nuclear weapons program in earnest (Lee 2009). North Korea signed the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), which went into effect in 1992. In 1993, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) requested to inspect the North Korean nuclear development site, alerted by an inconsistency between the reported plutonium count and the quantity of nuclear waste (IAEA 2019). North Korea refused to allow the inspection, announcing its intention to withdraw from the NPT. Against this backdrop, North Korea and the US (then under the Clinton Administration) began negotiations to reach some kind of stabilization, leading to the historic visit to North Korea by Jimmy Carter and his meeting with Kim Il Sung on June 17, 1994, the first-ever visit to North Korea by a former US president. Carter's visit resulted in the Agreed Framework signed between the US and North Korea in October 1994, which had as its goal the freezing of North Korea's nuclear program and eventual denuclearization (IAEA 1994).

What was strange, seen against this background, was that on July 8, 1994, just a few weeks after his meeting with Jimmy Carter, Kim Il Sung died of a heart attack at the age of eighty-two. The nation went into deep mourning, the spectacle of which caused a stir among observers around the world as

people went into a public frenzy, wailing and passing out in sorrow. The oft-asked question was whether the North Koreans had been coerced into acting despondent upon Kim's death, threatened with punishment if they failed to do so. I am hoping that by now the reader will at least be inclined to think that given the affective connection between the Great Leader and the people, as shown in the previous chapter, there is room to allow for the consideration that this might have been a spontaneous development, even though it was on a national scale. A more appropriate question would have been: what does this tell us about the native truth of North Korea, where people are intimately connected to the Great Leader?

Indeed, men and women, young and old, wailed for days and weeks, some hysterically, many drowned in tears. The avalanche of mourners wrapped, layers deep, along the route of Kim's cortege. Kim's embalmed body was to be enshrined at the Geumsusan Palace of the Sun—later to be joined by that of his son, Kim Jong Il, in 2011. In 1998, the North Korean constitution exclusively allocated the title of Eternal President to Kim Il Sung, thereby preventing his son, Kim Jong Il, or his grandson, Kim Jong Un, from ever being appointed as president. As I stated earlier in the book with reference to Mauss's work, after the initial mourning, North Korea began celebrating the eternal life of Kim Il Sung (see the introduction of this volume above).

By the time of his death in 1994, Kim Il Sung was many things in North Korea's linguistic and visual understanding. He was a father to orphans, a husband to widows, and, above all, the beloved Great Leader to all. While, as we saw in chapter 2 above, the official state linguistic guidelines detailed the coded norms to be used when referring to him—be it as the wisest leader of the revolution or the legendary revolutionary of all times—the effect of his everyday presence, reinforced through the essays written for the people's chronicle discussed in chapter 3, made him into a ubiquitous yet regular, noble yet affectionate figure standing right next to everyone. Parallel to these developments, as I have argued elsewhere, literary representations of Kim Il Sung witnessed a shift during the 1970s and 1980s: whereas in earlier North Korean literature, Kim Il Sung is a man, by the late 1980s, he has shape-shifted into a sacred being, immortal and otherworldly (see Ryang 2012). Put together, by the early 1990s, Kim Il Sung had become a revolutionary genius, a loving leader, and a sacred being, loved by the people and revered as the source of North Korea's strength, success, and, most importantly, truth. By then, there also existed more than one linguistic and rhetorical repertoire used to enact and sustain the people's relationship to Kim: the performative, ritual set of codified

epithets and decorative titles which, albeit mechanically, cultivated referencing norms involving the Great Leader on the one hand, and the intimate, affective, detail-oriented, and simple language that was used when representing Kim in the people's chronicle, *Among the People*, on the other. Together, these worked to render Kim Il Sung as something that North Koreans were able to claim as solely and uniquely theirs.

In 1994, Kim Il Sung added another function to himself—that of the memoirist. Between 1992 and 1996, Kim published *Hoegorok: Segiwa deobureo* (With the Century: The Memoirs), an eight-volume set of memoirs. Given that Kim died in July 1994 upon completion of Volume 6, Volumes 7 and 8 were published posthumously, and were written by the state-appointed publishing committee on the basis of drafts and notes that Kim had left. The names of the committee members who completed Kim's memoirs are not publicized. The memoirs capture the period from Kim's childhood in Mangyeongdae, near Pyongyang, to 1945, the end of Japanese colonial rule in Korea, although details are sketchy for the period after 1941, due in part to Kim's death before the completion of this part, and also in part to the fact that Kim spent those years prior to the 1945 liberation of Korea by the Soviet Army in retreat in the Soviet Union. Following their publication, the memoirs became one of the most popular works of literature in North Korea. An English translation of the complete set is available in PDF format on North Korea's official state website (<http://www.korea-dpr.info/lib/202.pdf>).

The close correspondence between the timing of Kim's death and the publication of his memoirs is another strange feature of 1994, as if Kim had anticipated his death and begun writing them a few years prior to his passing. But, the strangest of these features is the fact that, right before his death, Kim Il Sung had virtually rewritten his own history—in terms of content, but also, more importantly in some ways, in terms of style. For, the language Kim Il Sung uses in his memoirs is nothing like that of North Korea's official linguistic norms. Defying the policy that he himself had rolled out from the 1960s onwards, discussed in chapter 2 above, a policy that sought to establish the concept of Juche in the Korean language and excise vocabulary items of Chinese origin, replacing them with original Korean words but mostly making the available Korean vocabulary lean or skinny, the memoirs are written in a heavily classical and old-fashioned manner, reintroducing words and expressions of Chinese origin that had been long since eliminated from the North Korean version of standard Korean. In fact, Kim Il Sung's memoirs are so full of expressions and classical textual verbiage of Chinese origin that

contemporary North Koreans would either have never heard of them or have a hard time understanding them, necessitating the issuing of a reading guide to assist the reader, as we shall see below.

In something of a prosaic yet substantial counterbalance to the image of a sacred being, the memoirs speak to Kim's humanness—he depicts himself as a man, nothing more and nothing less. This human Kim Il Sung is closer to the Kim that emerges from within the chronicle, *Inmindeul sogeseo* or *Among the People*. As we saw in the previous chapter, in the chronicle, Kim Il Sung is a detail-oriented, warm-hearted, and affectionate leader, as opposed to the sacred being depicted in the state-produced literature (Ryang 2012). But in his memoirs, this Kim Il Sung goes further and deeper into his own introspection, fragility, passion, sentiments, grief, happiness, and even fear, all of this done by and through his own words. It is this point that reading Kim's memoirs effectively makes one realize that Kim Il Sung has re-written his own history, as details—little emotional wrinkles, delicate and tender feelings, and above all, uncertainty and self-doubt—that are told in the memoirs challenge the official version of the Great Leader's history. So, who *was* Kim Il Sung? Let us try to locate Kim Il Sung's own authenticity.

Kim Il Sung's epic memoirs are remarkable in many ways, encompassing many possible layers of inquiry. Needless to say, there is more than one way to read them. Some outlets point to the factual discrepancies contained within them, including, for example, the omission of any mention of the Soviet generals who were instrumental in the installation of Kim in the leadership position following Korea's liberation (e.g., DailyNK 2014). My interest does not lie in factual verification of the text. Rather, I am interested in its authenticity, which, to me, is similar to but not identical with factual verification.

It has been said many times over that the authenticity of an autobiography, a memoir, or even a testimonial cannot simply be taken as given. Indeed, many autobiographies are tested, contested, scrutinized, and disputed. We see a well-known example in the controversy surrounding Rigoberta Menchú's autobiographic life history. Published in 1982, on the basis of tape recordings made by Elisabeth Burgos-Debray while Menchú was in exile in Paris, *I, Rigoberta Menchú, an Indian Woman in Guatemala* immediately gripped the world's conscience through its first-person narratives revealing the extreme violence and hardship endured by the Guatemalan people, and especially its native population, under the military government that was then in power in that country (Menchú and Burgos-Debray 1982). Rigoberta Menchú claimed that hers was the story of all of the poor Indians of Guatemala. Her story

played a decisive and pivotal role in disseminating knowledge concerning the plight of the Guatemalan peasants, eventually earning her the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992.

Some years later, a dissenting voice refuting Menchú's account arose from a rather unexpected quarter—not from the Guatemalan military, nor from the forces associated with it, but from an American anthropologist. Dissecting and refuting many of the details that Menchú had presented as factual events, some of which she claimed to have witnessed personally, David Stoll, an anthropology professor, argued that Menchú's stories were simply not true. For example, contrary to Menchú's recollection of her own brother and others having been tortured and burnt to death in her hometown's main square, Stoll drew upon firsthand interviews with townspeople, who told him that no one had actually been burnt alive in the town square (Stoll 1999: chap. 1). Stoll went on to assert that the situation in Guatemala, in particular the oppression by the military, was not as clear-cut as it had been presented by Menchú—as a sharp, dichotomous, and violent conflict between government army and guerrilla forces—but, instead, a more complex scenario in which peasants were caught in the middle, suffering at the hands of both the army and the guerrillas (Stoll 1999).

Does this make Rigoberta Menchú's memoir false? Perhaps it does on one level, in the sense that some factual details do not match up exactly with a different version. Or, there may be multiple versions of facts, depending on who remembers them and how, and based on their convictions and recollections of their own experiences. Autobiographic writings are haunted by a dilemma: while a subject may assert his or her own version of past events, others may recall these events in different and sometimes fundamentally contradictory ways. Stoll's work has been heavily criticized, mostly on political grounds, inducing his response that the “wish to create quasi-religious cults around” Menchú's *testimonio* should be unmasked (e.g., Pratt 2001; Warren 2001; Stoll 2001: 120). Here, Stoll is correct in touching upon the ideological aspects of autobiographic language, be it testimony or memoir. For, the writing of self is necessarily subjective, but it would also be fair to say that social scientific writing, such as ethnography or anthropological studies (including Stoll's own), is not objective either. Besides, in so far as Menchú's words are subjected to verification, similar scrutiny should be applied to Stoll's sources. So, what happens when the memoirist is also, simultaneously, the embodiment of the nation's truth, as in the case of Kim Il Sung?

In thinking about this question, rather than deeming Kim Il Sung's memoir as a factually based document to be judged true or false, I would like

to approach it as a text that *does* something—as in J. L. Austin’s notion of the performative statement (Austin 1962). In ritual, for example, many illocutionary statements are uttered, and the purpose in doing so is not to say or convey something, but to do something, that is to say, the act of saying X does Y, as in the case of “I do” in a marriage ritual. Everyone present knows the answer, but the answer is still uttered in order to make it official; such utterance does something in addition to or aside from being an act of saying. As such, just as Menchú’s *testimonio* had a mission, I would like to discern what the mission of Kim Il Sung’s memoirs could have been, not so much in immediate reference to state policy-making, but in the more mediated sense of truth-making in North Korea. This would mean a detour when thinking about the authenticity of this text, but the authenticity of Kim’s memoirs may lie not in their factual correctness or exactness, but in the truth effect or efficacy of truth that the text creates through the revelation of the self, as I shall argue in this chapter.

The Native Reader

Background

In thinking about Kim’s memoirs in close relation to the question of truth, I situate myself as a “native reader,” not because Korean is my first language, but, as I stated briefly in the introduction, because my formative years were spent in an environment where children were taught to revere Kim Il Sung as their respected and beloved leader and to accept that North Korea was their fatherland, a nation to which they would eventually “return.” This environment was in Japan, at Korean schools run by an organization known as Chongryun, its full English name being the General Association of Korean Residents in Japan. I received the first sixteen years of my education, from elementary school to college, at Chongryun schools, where the curriculum followed Chongryun’s ideological stance of defining itself as an overseas organization representing North Korea (Ryang 1997; Ryang 2016).

The historical background to the emergence of Chongryun is complicated, yet wholly understandable in hindsight considering the Cold War tensions in East Asia following the end of World War II and the partition of Korea into American and Soviet zones. In August 1945, there were about two million Koreans living in Japan. Many had come to Japan seeking better livelihoods, and many had been brought over to Japan, at times coercively, to work on the construction of military facilities and the production of ammunition.

With the end of the Japanese Empire, more than two-thirds of the Koreans in Japan returned to Korea, leaving around 600,000, the majority of whom originated from the southern provinces of the Korean peninsula, which were placed under the administration of the American military government after 1945. For these “southerners” in Japan, northern Korea under the Soviets appeared far more attractive, as they identified themselves as newly liberated people, and enthusiastically sympathized with the Japanese leftist forces that were inspired by the simultaneous East Asian socialist revolutions, a trend of thought that was popular at that time, and opposed the US occupation of Japan as well as that of southern Korea. In southern Korea, for example, the American military government relied on the remnants of the Japanese colonial establishment, allowing a state of general discontent to prevail that was often punctuated by eruptions of brutality and violence (Cumings 1981). The leading Korean organization in Japan, the League of Koreans, founded in October 1945, started as part of a broad international coalition of the leftist forces in Japan, closely working with the Japanese Communist Party. However, reflecting the worsening conflict between the northern and southern halves of the Korean peninsula, the organization rapidly began moves to express its support for North Korea. It is important to be reminded that the Koreans in Japan—and many others around the world at the time—regarded the partition of Korea to be only a temporary phenomenon, and Koreans in Japan, the predominant majority of whom came from the southern provinces of the peninsula, reasoned that the support for northern Korea would lead to the dissemination of the Soviet-style reforms in northern Korea to southern Korea, which would result in the reunification of Korea and the genuine independence of the Korean nation (Ryang 1997: Ch.2).

The alignment of the Korean left in Japan with North Korea was not welcomed by the Allied occupation and the Japanese government. The authorities dealt a decisive blow to the League of Koreans in 1949 by forcefully closing its buildings, seizing its holdings, and issuing arrest warrants for its leaders, who had to go into hiding underground, while rank-and-file Korean activists joined the Japanese Communist Party (O 2009). Amidst the armistice talk on the peninsula during the Korean War (1950–1953), the North Korean Foreign Ministry alluded more than once to the possibility of entering into diplomatic relations with Japan. Reflecting this, Korean members left the Japanese Communist Party en masse and formed their own organization, Chongryun, in 1955. By then, the international leftist movement in East Asia was moving

toward coexistence with the ideologically opposed camp: no one was talking about the simultaneous East Asian revolutions, and in Japan, the system to allow adherents to opposing ideological positions to form a *détente* based on an understanding that they would coexist and not try to undermine each other through overtly violent measures, began to be consolidated—this is referred to as the 1955 system (Park 2012: chap. 2).

In order not to suffer the devastating fate of the League of Koreans in 1949, in 1955, Korean leaders in Japan performed a strategic turnaround. Chongryun was founded with a declaration that it was an overseas organization of North Korea, and as a foreign organization, it explicitly vowed that it would not interfere in domestic Japanese politics. But given that Japan never recognized North Korea as a legitimate nation, Chongryun's semi-legitimacy stood on a peculiar and precarious footing. Koreans in Japan at the time had no civil rights in Japan. Their residential status was based on a temporary post-war arrangement and they had no state-issued identification; that is to say, none of them possessed citizenship or a passport, of Japan or Korea, the only record they had being the yearly renewable alien registration, instated after 1952 upon the signing of the San Francisco Treaty between Japan and the US (involving neither North Korea nor South Korea). Their living situation was in disarray, with the majority hovering at or below the poverty level. Meanwhile, they were the target of open and day-to-day discrimination and disenfranchisement in Japan, Japanese society regarding them as an inferior and morally degraded people and a burden on society. Korean veterans of the Pacific War received no veterans' benefits, and Korean atomic bomb victims were excluded from state medical care, on the basis of their nationality, that is to say, that they were no longer Japanese nationals. This historical condition makes it less difficult to understand that organizing themselves around Chongryun and looking up to North Korea as their genuine motherland, to which they would eventually return, gave Koreans in Japan a ray of hope (Ryang 2016).

Moreover, in many ways, Chongryun's strategy of adopting a position as an overseas entity associated with North Korea, i.e., a foreign entity in Japan, was an ingenious one. For, it became evident in the eyes of the Japanese authorities that Chongryun was not about to demand residential rights or economic justice from the Japanese government so long as it was left to pursue its own patriotic agenda, which insisted that the sojourn of Koreans in Japan was only a temporary one, and that there was therefore no need for them to participate in civic activities demanding an improvement in their residential status in Japan. This measure effectively created a mutual, if only superficial and

unstable, distance between Chongryun and the Japanese authorities. One distinct effect produced by this position was the exemption of Chongryun's education system from official academic accreditation by the Japanese education authorities. Instead, all Chongryun schools were allowed to register as vocational schools. This deprived Chongryun schools of academic legitimacy and access to government funding and subsidies. Nevertheless, Chongryun was able to maintain a curriculum that was autonomous, and therefore not subject to regulation and inspection by the Japanese authorities.

Chongryun rolled out creative measures to secure its politico-ethnic network. At the height of its strength during the 1970s and 1980s, it commanded a total of over 150 elementary, middle, and high schools, in addition to four-year college and graduate programs; it operated a credit union that catered to Koreans saving money and offered housing and business loans during a period when Japanese financial institutions denied Koreans such opportunities; it operated its own publishing houses, which printed all of its school textbooks; it owned a robust media outlet, issuing a daily newspaper in Korean as well as periodicals in Korean and four other languages; it formed its own art troupes, soccer team, professional associations, and grassroots organizations; and, most importantly, its prefectural headquarters covered all of Japan, subdivided into branches and sub-branches reaching out to Koreans in diverse neighborhoods throughout the country. North Korea was on board from the beginning: it maintained its communication channel with Chongryun mainly through the Korean Central News Agency, which had a direct connection with Chongryun's own communication office, and it sent funds to Chongryun schools in the name of educational assistance, for example (Ryang 1997; Ryang 2010). According to recent media coverage, the total amount that North Korea sent to Chongryun schools between 1957 and 2019 amounted to \$452 million (Rich 2019).

In 1959, with the facilitation of the International Red Cross, the North Korean Red Cross and the Japanese Red Cross reached an agreement allowing Koreans in Japan to be repatriated to North Korea, a process which resulted in the relocation of more than 90,000 Koreans from Japan to North Korea including some 1,800 Japanese spouses (Morris-Suzuki 2007; Kikuchi 2020; Hayashi 2019). This route also functioned as a direct line between Chongryun and the North Korean agency that oversaw its intelligence operation in Japan, facilitating the intelligence gathering under the condition that there were and still are no diplomatic relations between Japan and North Korea (Han 2005). Relevant to our discussion, this route also made it possible for the North

Korean publications including school textbooks to reach Chongryun's publishing company for reproduction and distribution (see below). After Japan's ratification of the United Nations Refugee Convention in the early 1980s, Koreans in Japan were given more secure residential rights; re-entry permits to Japan were also issued, which enabled Koreans to visit repatriated family members in North Korea. Until tough sanctions were introduced in the early 2000s following the revelation of kidnappings of Japanese citizens by North Korean agents during the 1970s and 1980s, Chongryun Koreans sent remittances to repatriated family members and regularly visited North Korea, not only for family reunions, but also for professional seminars, teacher training, and school tours, as well as simply for sightseeing (Ryang 2000). In sum, Chongryun's identification as an overseas entity associated with North Korea thrived during the Kim Il Sung era.

Up until the early 1990s, the Chongryun school curriculum was modeled after that of North Korea. It included academic subjects such as the Revolutionary Activities of Marshal Kim Il Sung and the Revolutionary History of Marshal Kim Il Sung, paralleling the equivalents in North Korean grade schools. Core classes in the Korean language, Korean history, and Korean geography were offered, respectively, under the rubrics of (what would be the equivalent of) language arts, history, and geography, with the Japanese language offered as a foreign language (a required subject, not an elective), and Japanese history and geography respectively incorporated into world history and world geography. The subjects dealing with Kim Il Sung were organized around Kim's family history, briefly covering his great-grandfather, known for having fought to repel the US merchant ship General Sherman that happened to enter the Daedong River in Pyongyang in 1866, before moving on to Kim's birth in 1912, his childhood, his parents and other key family members, his formative years, his young adulthood in exile, and his anti-Japanese guerrilla warfare in Manchuria during the 1930s. Following a mysterious blank between the years 1941 and 1945, while Kim Il Sung was in the Soviet Union, Kim's revolutionary history reopened with the fanfare of national liberation in 1945, ostensibly achieved by Kim Il Sung himself, and moving on to the continuous victory of North Korean-style socialism thereafter. Such content was identical to that offered in schools in North Korea at equivalent grade levels. The language of instruction was Korean.

Outside of the school environment, the students and teachers spoke Japanese as native speakers, watching Japanese television shows and doing the kinds of things that their Japanese cohorts would do—taking private piano or

violin lessons, going to the movies, playing arcade games, etc. Still, the school environment and the subjects that students were taught made Chongryun students remarkably fluent in the North Korean version of the Korean language, albeit with heavy Japanese accents, in the use of political expressions, and, above all, in the use of proper ways to refer to Kim Il Sung and other members of his revolutionary family, exactly as students in North Korea itself were being educated in during the same period. (Today, Chongryun is an entirely different and far more insignificant entity with a very different relation with North Korea, but this is a topic for another study.)

Becoming Native

Born in 1960, I studied at Chongryun schools until 1982. I was a good student at my Chongryun grade schools, both academically and in terms of organizational activities, and was consequently given a leadership role in the Korean Young Pioneers up to middle school and in the Korean Youth League at high school. These roles required me to diligently read the collective works of Kim Il Sung, faithfully memorizing his New Year's greetings and other key "teachings," for example. One of my duties in the Young Pioneers was that of "explainer" or *haeseorwon*, which would be more appropriate to translate as "revolutionary guide"—the same term being used for today's North Korean tour guides to revolutionary sites—meaning that I was assigned to describe (following a set script) photographic panels depicting Kim Il Sung's revolutionary history, starting all the way back with his great-grandfather and the General Sherman incident, echoing the curricular content of the subjects that taught about Kim. The poster panels were replications of identical North Korean sets visually capturing moments in Kim's life, including some old photographs, but many with artistic renditions. Each panel had ten to a dozen visuals that introduced members of Kim's lineage, all of whom were legendary fighters, each a leader in his or her own right in contributing to Korea's independence movement, and each with his or her own proper set of epithets and deferential titles; Kim's childhood, which was filled with stories of filial piety, good behavior, and patriotic and revolutionary spirit; and Kim's anti-Japanese guerrilla struggles, marked by great victories, eventually enabling Korea to achieve its independence from Japanese colonial rule. A *haeseorwon* was to reproduce all of these stories at verbatim learned via rote memorization. The verbal reproduction must also be reflective of proper emotion, with highs and lows, bright or dark voice tones, and so on, which was in parallel with the voicing instruction that was practiced in North Korea as shown in chapter 2 above.

The panels were displayed on red-velvet-covered walls in a special room at the school named *Kim Il Sung wonsunim hyeongmyeong hwaldong yeongusil* or the Study Room for the Revolutionary Activities of Marshal Kim Il Sung. At the front of the room was a white alabaster bust of Kim Il Sung. Entering the room, we were to pay our respects to Kim, our right arms raised in the formal salute of the Young Pioneers. I would stand in front of the students and recite, word for word, what I had memorized, pointing to the appropriate pictures with both hands deferentially raised as I moved from one panel to the next.

This type of practice was part of North Korea's efforts during the 1970s and the early 1980s to complete the establishment of Juche's singular ideological system or *yuil sasang chegye*, noted in chapter 2 above. Demands for pure loyalty toward Kim Il Sung were stepped up, with the effects most evidently manifested in both North Korea and Chongryun within the linguistic domain, as shown in the 1970 red book introduced in chapter 2. For example, in workplaces and in party cells, North Koreans were required to faultlessly quote Kim Il Sung's words during their routine and mandatory criticism and self-criticism sessions, with any erroneous citation seen as a sign of insufficient loyalty that would result in severe criticism and sometimes even punishment. The same practice was introduced into Chongryun schools and organizations. In Young Pioneer units, children would start their daily or weekly self-reviews by quoting the words of Kim Il Sung. Any mistake would lead to drawn-out criticism by all present. Children would therefore adopt a strategy of memorizing the shortest sentence possible in order to minimize risk. In such an atmosphere, anyone who was able to quote longer passages from Kim's works without error would be seen as a student who was better prepared, more loyal, and therefore superior. In addition to the correct reproduction of Kim's words, the accurate use of epithets, adjectives, and storylines was also important, along with the appropriate insertion of highs and lows and the adoption of suitable vocalization, in conformity with state recommendations concerned with correct linguistic practice to be used when quoting Kim Il Sung's words as stated in chapter 2 above.

As Chongryun's discursive practice mimicked that which was enforced in North Korea, its discursive practice also became increasingly condensed within a lean and skinny set of vocabulary and expressions, reflecting what happened in North Korea during the 1970s and 1980s, as shown also in chapter 2 above. Accordingly, the Korean language of Chongryun Korean schools was impoverished in vocabulary variation, mixed with Japanese-influenced

pronunciation and expressions, as children spoke Japanese outside of the school. The rule had it that all students should speak Korean while at school, called *uri mal 100 peuro undong* or the movement to speak 100 percent Korean. In addition to wrongly quoting from Kim Il Sung's words, recurring offences in uttering Japanese words on the school premises would result in public criticism (Ryang 1997). By the time our high school education was over, my cohort and I were masters of fixed expressions, including *baekjeon baekseungui gangcheorui ryeongjang* ("the legendary steel-like general who fights one hundred wars and wins one hundred victories"—a reference to Kim Il Sung's military prowess), *uri inminui eobei suryeong* ("our people's leader, who is both father and mother"), and so on.

In repeatedly recited stories and examples, and through the practice of opting for the most economic way of quoting Kim Il Sung's words, linguistic practice built around Kim Il Sung's greatness became performative for Chongryun Korean speakers. At the same time, the affectionate and caring image of Kim Il Sung, the man presented in the pages of *Inmindeul sogeseo* (Among the People), the people's chronicle that we looked at in the previous chapter, went hand-in-hand with the consolidation of the terms used to venerate Kim. At Chongryun schools, too, *Inmindeul sogeseo* was required group reading material, thereby familiarizing students with the use of a plain and non-decorative language of affect to depict Kim Il Sung. Although the two domains—one involving the use of officially approved adjectives and epithets when making references to Kim Il Sung, the other involving the ongoing enterprise of bringing Kim Il Sung into the everyday lives of ordinary North Koreans via the chronicle—fulfilled different functions, both worked together to create a North Korean native truth of and about Kim Il Sung as the core of the nation, the heart of North Korea. If Kim Il Sung the great, the one that emerges from within the state-sanctioned adjectives and epithets, had moved very close to being a sacred being by the end of the 1980s, Kim Il Sung the affectionate, the one that emerges from within the pages of the people's chronicle, came ever so close to the people themselves. Neither, however, refers to Kim Il Sung's own introspection, and it is this gap that Kim Il Sung's memoirs get to fill.

For a native reader such as myself, reading Kim's memoirs was an experience that mixed the familiar with the strange. Familiar, because there were episodes and events that were precise repetitions of what would be etched into the memory of any native reader—and especially a former *haeseorwon* or

“revolutionary guide” like myself—including Kim’s recollection of visiting his father in prison as a little boy after his father’s arrest by Japanese authorities, or the story of the twelve-year-old Kim taking a solo journey home to Korea from Manchuria in order to attend the (Christian missionary) school run by his maternal grandfather. At the same time, the memoirs revealed fine details concerning Kim’s emotions and vulnerability that no novel, government publication, or publication by Kim himself (mostly official speeches and political writings) had ever conveyed, making the Kim in the memoirs a stranger to the native reader.

The image of Kim that emerges from the pages of his memoirs is one that is far from that of an abstract being or an all-capable leader—he is weak, fearful, sorrowful, and hurt; he is uncertain and hesitant; he is self-doubting and, above all, honest. In his memoirs, Kim is *not* a general who fights one hundred wars and wins one hundred times, *not* an all-knowing, all-seeing wise man, and *not* a strong and great man whose conviction never flickers. Frequently, Kim is emotional, remorseful, and guilt-ridden. He makes errors and admits to doing so, he acknowledges his own petty suspicions and wrong judgments, and he weeps, wails, cries, and loses direction—in other words, Kim Il Sung is not perfect and is very, very human, in flesh and blood. This humanness that emerges through the pages of the memoirs is visceral and raw, unlike the harmonized and balanced humanness that we recognized in the people’s chronicle in chapter 3 above. So, how are we to face Kim Il Sung here and locate this Kim Il Sung in relation to the native truth of North Korea?

If we are to accept, at a minimum, that historical texts such as memoirs that depict the lives of particular individuals do different things with respect to factual forms of documentation, whether they be retrospective attempts to reach back to the spirit of the past or introspective reconstructions of the past that reflect today’s perspective—thereby informing the reader more about the present than the past itself—then my native reading of Kim Il Sung’s memoirs is not carried out with the intention of refuting or verifying Kim’s words on a true-or-false basis. In this regard, it fundamentally differs from Stoll’s efforts in rereading Rigoberta Menchú. Rather, my strategy is to excavate humanity from within Kim’s words, words written by a man who died as a deity for North Korea and who lives on (forever) as its Eternal Great Leader, exploring what these words do with respect to the relationship between Kim Il Sung and his people and with respect to the location and locution of North Korea’s native truth.

All Too Human

Life in Exile

Kim Il Sung was born in 1912 to a Christian family in Mangyeongdae, near Pyongyang. His father was studying at an American missionary high school at the time of his birth. Kim's father was a religious man, and his favorite slogan was "Learn literature for Korea, learn science and engineering for Korea, and have faith in Heaven for the Heaven over Korea." This comes as a surprise to the native reader. Kim's father was supposed to be a patriot pioneering the anti-Japanese mass movement, and the fact that Kim's father's friendship network overlapped with the faith-based community is not mentioned in the official discourse of Kim Il Sung's revolutionary history. However, according to what Kim himself writes, it is more likely that Kim's father's Christian faith inspired him to oppose Japanese colonial rule and desire national independence for Korea (Kim 1992a: 23). Kim Il Sung is also candid about his father's admiration of Sun Yat-sen's progressive ideas and, in particular, his attraction to Sun's Three People's Principles of democracy, nationalism, and people's livelihood. The fact that Kim's father sought wisdom from foreign sources, including Christianity and Sun Yat-sen's nationalism, again, is not mentioned in North Korea's official depiction of Kim's family until the publication of Kim's memoirs (Kim 1992a: 72).

By 1916, Kim's father had dropped out of school and become a teacher at a local elementary school. In 1917, when Kim was five years old, his father was arrested by the Japanese police and charged with the crime of engaging in anti-Japanese, pro-independence activities. After serving a little over one year in prison, Kim's father decided to move the family to northeastern China in 1918 in order to fully participate in the anti-Japanese resistance movement, and Kim was to grow up in China until he reached the age of twelve, when, concerned that Kim was receiving his education in China and in Chinese, his father decided to send him back to Korea, to his maternal grandparents, who operated a local missionary school. Kim's maternal grandfather was a religious leader and educator. Kim had become fluent in Chinese, gotten used to wearing Chinese clothes, and had made many close Chinese friends. It must have been no small challenge for a twelve-year-old to return to a Korean environment that he remembered only vaguely, and to live away from his parents. But, within a year or so, Kim's father's health deteriorated, resulting in the thirteen-year-old Kim travelling back to northeastern China. Thereafter, Kim was not

to return to Korea again until 1945, having fought against the Japanese in guerrilla warfare in northeastern China until around 1941 before moving to the Soviet Union, where he stayed until Japan's surrender.

The revolutionary history of Marshal Kim Il Sung that I learned at my Chongryun school did not hide the fact that Kim Il Sung was a child of immigrants in a foreign land. At the same time, it never emphasized the fact that Kim's formative years were spent in China, speaking Chinese and being at home with Chinese culture. His best friend during his adolescence was the son of a wealthy Chinese family who helped Kim in many different ways (see below). His childhood memories of food were also those of Chinese cakes and sweets (see below). These details were omitted in my revolutionary history classes. Rather, Kim Il Sung was always authentically Korean, the embodiment of the national essence ever since his childhood, if not from his birth. Thus, his trip back to Korea at the age of twelve in order to study at a Korean school became a high point of his childhood, while the reality of his growing up in northeastern China, fully immersed in the Manchurian culture, albeit right across the border from Korea, came to recede into an obscure background.

Perhaps more significantly, according to the memoirs, Kim's family was devoutly Christian, even after they were displaced in exile to northeastern China. Not only his father, but his mother and uncle too, preached at a Korean church across the Yalu River, although it is not clear from anywhere in the memoirs whether any member of his family was ordained. Kim himself would go to the church to listen to his father's sermons. Also interesting is the issue of Kim's father's cosmopolitan inclinations. Since Kim was receiving no schooling in Korean, his father would give him classes in Korean at home. While the native reader would receive perfunctory information concerning Kim's family being a Christian family, no revolutionary history classes would teach about this level of constant and concrete involvement with the church by Kim's family. The materials used for Kim's homeschooling included writings on and by Sun Yat-sen, Lenin, and George Washington, which his father had selected to broaden Kim Il Sung's education. But Kim himself fooled around, often failing to fulfill his father's expectations. This kind of openness toward non-Korean materials in Kim Il Sung's childhood home and toward Kim's own lack of dedication as a child was never mentioned in the official North Korean writings or curriculum that the North Korean establishment provided during the 1970s and 1980s, and needless to say, references to such details would come as a surprise to the native reader.

Kim was, according to his own accounts, a bit of a bully. As a little boy, he would dare his friends to carry out some dodgy act on the frozen Yalu River during the frigid winter, making them fall in the icy water, or would take children deep into the mountains, not returning home until after dark. He did not always do well at academics, either, and for this he would be severely punished by his father, who, according to the Korean tradition of the day, would use corporal punishment. He loved his mother very dearly. Once, his mother gave him a small amount of money to buy a new pair of shoes for himself. Instead, he went out and bought a new pair of shoes for his mother. His mother was overwhelmed and, in tears, told him what made her the happiest was that he studied hard and did well at school. Whenever Kim Il Sung mentions his mother or reminisces about her in the memoir, the reader can immediately sense the warmth and affection of a son who loved his mother deeply. For, even in the midst of poverty and Japanese surveillance, his mother did her best to keep her children's spirits high. Kim writes about his father, too, with utmost respect, but such commentary veers more toward awe-inspiring respect than the kind of open affection he expresses toward his mother. Besides, Kim Il Sung was only fourteen when his father died. His mother did not live long, either, passing away seven years after her husband's death. Taken together, his loving words expressing how he misses his parents turn the image of the young Kim Il Sung into that of a tender-hearted, warm, yet vulnerable young man who lost both parents by the age of twenty-one and was placed in the position of having to take care of his two younger brothers. His despair and sorrow seep through the pages of the memoirs when he reminisces over the untimely loss of his parents, leaving readers moved, including native ones.

An Inexperienced Youth

By 1930, when he was eighteen years old, Kim Il Sung had already formed the conviction that the only way for Korea to regain its sovereignty from Japan would be through armed guerrilla struggle. Already, beginning in the early twentieth century, independence-minded Korean men and women had organized themselves into armed units in eastern Manchuria. This territory was known as Gando in Korean (Jiandao in Chinese)—a term meaning “the land in-between,” in this case, the vast expanse between China, Korea, the Soviet Union, and even including the northern islands of Japan, which the latter nation had acquired after the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905 (see Park 2005). The sporadic units of armed Korean groups were grouped together

under the collective term *dongripgun* or independence army. Some of these units were officially affiliated with the Provisional Korean Government in Exile that had been proclaimed in Shanghai following the 1919 anti-Japanese uprising on the peninsula, while others were voluntary groups of men and women committed to Korea's independence, each with greater or lesser degrees of connection with the armed anti-Japanese Chinese groups in Manchuria. By and large, they were governed by the Confucian ethos of *ui* or righteousness, since the usurpation of Korea's sovereignty by Japan was seen as a violation of the just order of the world, and righting this wrong was the mission of the armed groups. This does not mean that all of the units were dominated by typical Confucian ideas, such as age-based seniority and lineage-based unity; there were even female *uibyeong* or righteous army soldiers. The scale of national humiliation and injustice was so egregious, it may be argued, that it would have been right for anyone—man or woman, old or young—to rise up and fight against the Japanese (O 2017).

The righteous army groups were active in Manchuria, rather than in Korea proper, because the thoroughness of police surveillance on the peninsula made it impossible for such activities to be organized and sustained there. Besides, although it had steadily come to be dominated by the Japanese military, northeastern China during the early 1900s was not yet completely ruled by the Japanese—as would later be the case during the post-Manchukuo period, starting from 1932. Despite sharing a roughly common desire to defeat Japan, the armed independence-minded groups did not always enjoy a cooperative relationship with each other, sometimes engaging in serious confrontations. Still, it would be safe to say that all of them were skeptical of the new ideology, Communism.

Separate from these earlier generations of anti-Japanese fighters, Kim was seeking to build a form of armed resistance that identified itself with Communism—not an unusual endeavor for a diasporic Korean youth in Jiandao/Gando during those days. This did not mean that Kim was hostile to earlier generations of independence fighters; in fact, he was duly deferential and reconciliatory toward the older generation, consistently maintaining respect in light of the fact that many members of this generation were close allies of his deceased father. Still, he felt that the older generations were missing the mark by not embracing the new ideology, Communism, and that they were clinging on to a premodern idea concerning the national sovereign that did not align with concepts such as democratic government and equality for all.

Everything that we have covered up to this point aligns with the memories of the native reader—how the young Kim was attracted to Communism in his search for a new way to regain independence for Korea. What follows, however, is a hitherto-unnoticed point: Kim recalls how naïve and simplistic he was at the time about the political conditions and the reality of colonial rule, saying, “We had only patriotism and young blood,” and thought that if he and his group were to wage armed resistance, they would be able to defeat the Japanese Imperial Army in three to four years, an idea that he wryly qualifies by saying, “If the Japanese warlords had heard of this, they would surely have thrown their heads back and burst out laughing [*angcheon daeso*—a term with its origins in the Chinese classics]” (Kim 1992b: 44; original translation). This deviates from the official representation of Kim’s revolutionary history, which maintains that Kim’s revolutionary journey started with clear conviction from the very beginning and that it was consistently guided by scientific methodology and the correct vision, without hesitation or miscalculation. If anyone were to depict the young Kim as naïve at any of the Chongryun schools, let alone at a North Korean school, this would have incurred wrath.

Kim’s own recollections of his interactions with the older independence fighters show a man of flexibility—sometimes compromising, sometimes frustrated, but altogether not stubborn, willing to talk with others who may not have shared the same values, rather than alienate them. In the official North Korean version of Kim Il Sung’s revolutionary history, he is depicted as having lofty virtue and *poongryeok*, the ability to be inclusive and reach out to others, including elders. What is newly presented in the memoirs is *how* he does this. In contrast with the image of Kim presented in the official history, that of a sagacious young man whose overwhelming wisdom renders his age irrelevant to older and more experienced independence fighters, leading them to adopt a humble stance toward the young Kim and making him into the natural leader of all, the memoirs have Kim himself detail how he would maintain a deferential approach when addressing the elders and humbly accept the elders speaking down to him, often quite rudely, using *banmal*, the form of speech used for speaking down to those ranked lower on the social hierarchy and age; how he would present his own views to them timidly, and only when the appropriate etiquette allowed; and how he would respect their ideas and suggestions and often obey their words. Altogether, the young Kim that emerges from the memoirs is someone who is not in conflict with the Confucianist order of things, rather than a fervent Communist.

Most strikingly to the native reader, while recalling a particularly formidable challenge during the anti-Japanese guerrilla struggle, Kim Il Sung reveals his self-doubt and moments of near mental collapse. In the early days of his guerrilla struggles, Kim recalls, sickness took hold of his body and his mind wandered in and out of consciousness. In high fever and debilitating pain, he could only feel an occasional thump whenever the makeshift sleigh, on which he was being carried by his comrades, stumbled over something. In the deep, snow-covered mountains of Tianqiaoling, Manchuria, neither he nor his comrades were certain whether he would survive. For, they knew that not too far behind them, the Imperial Japanese Army was closing in on them. It was January of 1935, and Kim Il Sung was leading a small armed band of anti-Japanese guerillas when he fell seriously ill. They were trying to pass along a mountainous route in order to rejoin Zhou Baozhong's unit in Jiandao, their Chinese comrades-in-arms. When he set out on the expedition, Kim had fifty or sixty men. Now the unit was down to sixteen.

When the group stopped to catch its breath, Kim Il Sung learned that his favorite soldier, Wang Tae Hung, had been killed during the last skirmish with the Japanese. Overcome with sorrow, his sickness worsening, he wept painfully. It was then that an angry thought came to him, the thought of quizzing his comrades as to whether they had buried Wang properly—if the tundra soil had been too hard to dig, at least whether they had covered his body with snow. Immediately, however, he realized that his comrades would have taken care of the soldier's body as best as they could under the circumstances, and decided not to ask any questions: how would they have not known to do that? They, too, loved Wang. Instead, he asked his comrades whether they remembered the location at which Comrade Wang had fallen. They told him that they did, and all of the men made a resolution to return one day in order to properly rebury Wang. But, this never happened. Kim recalls: "Many other comrades-in-arms also lay unburied there at Tianqiaoling. When I recall them, I still feel my heart rending asunder. I feel I owe a debt which I can never repay. How can I express my regret?" (Kim 1992c: 415; original translation). Here, Kim Il Sung is not a legendary general who fights one hundred battles and wins one hundred times. Far from it: he feels guilty for a sacrifice that he allowed to happen, and responsible for the lost lives of his comrades—and he regrets many things that happened during the guerrilla struggles under his leadership. Such revelations come as an utter surprise to the native reader.

Sinophilia

As a youth, Kim Il Sung loved learning and was full of admiration for his teachers. While attending Jilin Yuwen Middle School in the late-1920s, he developed a particularly deep respect for Shang Yue, or Sang Wol in the Korean readings of the identical Chinese characters. A member of the Chinese Communist Party, Shang introduced Kim to the works of progressive writers such as Maxim Gorky, but also to Chinese classics, including *Dream of the Red Chamber*, while teaching at Jilin Yuwen in 1928. It was through Shang that Kim Il Sung became attracted to Communism, began reading Marx and Lenin in Chinese, and was exposed to the avant-garde European novels of the day (in Chinese translation). This is one of the many connections to China that Kim details in his memoirs, abundantly admitting how much he loved things Chinese, his Chinese peers, and his Chinese teachers, all such sentiments enmeshed with his youthful memories of Jilin Yuwen.

For the native reader, it is strange to hear Kim himself discuss these feelings. For, although the fact that Kim attended Jilin Yuwen is well-known to the native reader, how much he loved it is not part of the Kim Il Sung revolutionary history curriculum. For Kim Il Sung was always (and still is, in North Korea's official texts) supposed to be the autochthonous product of Korea, the embodiment of the essence of Korea and Korea only. Kim's life during his formative years was, in fact, firmly rooted in Manchurian soil, through his shared experiences and close collaboration with Chinese peers, friends, teachers, and then, comrades. Forever indebted to Shang, Kim welcomed Shang's two daughters to North Korea in 1989 and 1990. He concludes his chapter on Shang Yue with the statement: "He who has had a teacher to remember for his lifetime is a lucky man. In this regard, I am a lucky man. When I miss Master Sang Wol, who left an indelible mark on me during my formative years, I go back to Yungmun [Yuwen] Middle School and walk its campus in my mind. I miss Master Sang Wol very much" (Kim 1992a: 235; original translation).

One of the individuals from his youth to whom Kim devotes a large number of pages in his memoirs is Zhang Weihua, his childhood friend from Fusong, just north of the Korean border. Zhang and Kim enjoyed a special relationship that began during their childhood. This was despite the fact that Zhang came from a family of enormous wealth, while Kim was the son of impoverished immigrants. After Kim joined the guerrilla army in the early 1930s, Zhang wanted to join him, passionately begging Kim to take him

along. Kim refused out of love, as he knew that joining the guerrillas would place Zhang's life in perilous danger. Instead, Kim asked Zhang to support him from behind enemy lines (Kim 1993: 417–418).

Zhang operated a photography studio at the time, and Kim asked him to use his position of influence and network to engage in information gathering. Eventually, the Japanese authorities found out about Zhang's personal connection with Kim, arresting him for interrogation. Zhang's father managed to bail him out. Knowing that another interrogation session was imminent and worried that he might not be able to withstand the torture next time around, leading him to inadvertently reveal the whereabouts of Kim Il Sung, Zhang took his own life—in order to protect Kim.

Zhang's death tormented Kim for the rest of his life. Many decades later, he built a monument to Zhang with his own handwritten Chinese inscription and invited Zhang's children and grandchildren to Pyongyang many times, welcoming them as state guests (Kim 1993: 385ff. 419ff.). Indeed, Kim's friendship with Zhang is simply beautiful and, at times, carries a homoerotic air. Even though Zhang was married with children by the early 1930s, Zhang wanted to go with Kim to fight against the Japanese because he found separation from Kim unbearable. Kim, just like a lover trying to protect the other, asked him not to follow him and instead stay behind to support him. In the end, Zhang, out of fear of not being able to protect Kim, committed suicide. Their love was so deep that one was ready to kill himself for the other. Zhang Weihua, or Jang Ulhwa as his name is read in Korean enunciation, gets mentioned briefly in the North Korean version of Kim Il Sung's revolutionary history, but only as a strong supporter of Kim Il Sung's anti-Japanese resistance. In the memoir, Zhang is more than that. He is Kim's confidant, admirer, friend, and eternal companion.

Kim's Sinophilia is captured in many of the anecdotes presented in his memoirs, including his recollection of an incident in 1935 in the village of Emu on Lake Jingbo in today's Heilongjiang Province. In an effort to break the ice with the local Chinese residents while attempting to penetrate the village of Emu, Kim's Korean armed guerrilla group performed, in Chinese, *Su Wu Mu Yang* (*Su Wu Tends Sheep*), a song about *Su Wu* (140–60 BC), a Han dynasty diplomat who spent nineteen years in captivity in a foreign land. Despite his extended incarceration and the various hardships that he suffered while in exile, *Su Wu* never abandoned his loyalty for his homeland. Kim Il Sung was deeply moved by the song himself, recalling:

My experience at the Chinese village [of Emu] on the Lake Jingbo was so emotional that I tried in various ways after the liberation [of Korea] to find the text of the Su Wu song. It was only recently that I was able to obtain the text in Chinese [. . .] I was so pleased that I sang the song [again], forgetting that I was already in my eighties. How well could a man of eighty sing? [. . .] [T]he fresh memory of my youthful days, which had vanished far beyond the clouds, welled up in my mind, together with my deep attachment to the soil of northern Manchuria, where we had pioneered the revolution with such difficulty. Whenever I yearn for those days, I play this song on the organ. Sometimes I try to whistle it, but the sound is not as fresh as when I was in my twenties [. . .]. (Kim 1993: 189; original translation)

The fondness with which he recalls the song is unmistakable. And the reader is reminded that, of course, it would be only natural to wage various anti-Japanese activities in Chinese and not in Korean, in northeastern China. But, this is, again, a surprise for the native reader, because this natural fact is kept understated in the formal curriculum of Kim Il Sung's revolutionary history.

Aside from the Su Wu song, Lake Jingbo provides Kim with another recollection. It was on the edge of this lake that he heard the news of the death of his younger brother Chol Ju. Chol Ju was killed in an armed skirmish near Chechangzi in June 1935 when he was aged twenty. And it is because of this that Kim thinks about his younger brother whenever he sees a large river or a lake, according to his memoirs (Kim 1992b: 433). Due to Chol Ju's young age at the time of death, very little is known about him, save for the remarks in North Korea's official revolutionary history of Kim Il Sung's lineage that Kim Chol Ju was a Communist, that he fought for the Communist ideal and the independence of Korea, and that he was sacrificed at a young age. Kim Il Sung, on the other hand, mentions a rather interesting detail about Chol Ju in his memoirs. According to Kim, Chol Ju served with a "Chiang Kai Sek guerrilla unit" and was killed in action. This information is not mentioned in the Korean version of the memoirs, but only in the official English version. I have tried to identify the "Chiang Kai Sek" that is referred to here. While the spelling is similar to that of Chiang Kai-shek, it is not identical. If, however, this is indeed a reference to Chiang Kai-shek, it would cast some doubt on Chol Ju's commitment to Communism as it is depicted in the official North Korean version of Kim Il Sung's family history. Chiang strenuously refused

to collaborate with Mao until 1936, devoting more effort to defeating the Communists than the Japanese.

Despite one of Kim Il Sung's epithets being *jeolseui aegukja* (the unprecedented patriot), it is undeniable that he had a deep connection to China and a love for the people, culture, history, and language of China, or more precisely, Manchuria. There is nothing wrong with this: love of Korean culture and love of Chinese culture need not be mutually exclusive. Kim Il Sung admiring Chinese culture and appreciating its classical and contemporary literature, art, etc. would only add weight to his credentials. But, in the orthodox North Korean revolutionary history that the native reader is familiar with, his Sinophilia is suppressed. He is a wholesome Korean patriot who personifies the essence of the nation through and through. Any outside influence, let alone predilection, becomes not only irrelevant but also posits obstacles in maintaining the purity of Kim's Korean essence, which is later to be defined as *Juche*. Besides, recall the 1970 red book that I introduced in chapter 2 of this volume: this book (and many other books of North Korea) traces the origin of North Korea's pure Korean language to Kim Il Sung's anti-Japanese guerrilla struggles during the 1930s. The book goes into details of how children and adults learned Korean in the guerrilla camps and sang Korean songs (see chapter 2 above in this volume). But the memoirs show that in the 1930s, Kim was deeply immersed in the Chinese language and culture, primarily using Chinese in the guerrilla activities and propaganda outreach, as can be seen above. Nowhere in the memoir Kim mentions the origin of the North Korean language having been born in Manchuria in the 1930s. The native reader is, thus, caught by surprise when reading about Kim's affectionate recollections of Manchuria. Although the official history does not deny that Kim was a fluent speaker of Chinese, the extent to which he was versed in Chinese, identified his affect in this language, immersed himself in Chinese culture, and was emotionally linked to his Chinese friends and teachers comes as a surprise to the native reader.

Mother

Recollections by Kim about his love of and longing for his mother extend over many pages and chapters of his memoirs. They are particularly moving, as Kim Il Sung writes with emotional candor, which in turn strikes the reader as authentic. His mother, Kang Ban Sok, was born to a Christian family that enjoyed a relatively high standard of living, as well as local respect for the missionary school that it operated, Changdeok Elementary School. Kim himself

attended this school for a short while after being sent back alone to Korea at the age of twelve when his family was exiled to Manchuria (see above). He studied there under his maternal grandfather, a devout Christian minister, until he was called back to Manchuria due to his father's worsening health. His mother was a religious woman—references to her attending church services in Kim's memoirs remove any doubt about this. According to Kim Il Sung, his mother was a woman of conviction and strong will, her love deep and genuine. Whether her strong will stemmed from her religious faith is not possible to determine from the memoirs, but given that her entire upbringing was Christian and that, at the age of eighteen, she married Kim Hyung Jik (Kim Il Sung's father), who was two years her junior and a student at a missionary high school at the time of their marriage, as stated earlier, it would be safe to assume that her life was immersed in Christianity. The marriage was no doubt an arranged one, and it would seem justifiable to assume that it was arranged on the basis of shared faith and religious devotion.

It is striking, then, to see that despite having grown up in relatively fortunate economic circumstances, by which I mean that her family ran a school, her father and brothers were highly educated by the standards of the day and, so far as one can detect, she was not sent out to work as a maid or farmhand in order to earn extra income for the family, Kim's mother endured extreme poverty and hardship after her marriage. Especially after the passing of her husband in 1926, Kang lived in utter poverty, struggling to feed the children and pay the rent. This led her to suffer from chronic ill health and eventually die at the age of forty. Due to a shortage of income and having been most likely evicted a number of times, she had to move the family frequently. A photo of the lonely thatched shack in Xiaoshahe where she finally passed away illustrates the starkness of the family's everyday circumstances.

Recalling his mother in his memoirs, Kim often drifts into introspective musings concerning the challenges one faces when striving to reconcile love of family and love of nation (e.g., Kim 1992b: 207). In his recollections, whenever he is inclined to show concern about household affairs—Kim is, after all, head of the household after the passing of his father, according to Korean tradition—his mother proactively and preemptively warns him not to trouble himself with such matters. Nevertheless, Kim continues to agonize over how to strike a balance between his commitment to the guerrilla struggle and his filial piety toward his mother, especially after her illness takes a serious turn.

In 1932, soon after forming an anti-Japanese guerrilla group, Kim pays his mother a visit, traveling on foot and carrying a bushel of rice on his back

for many miles. During this visit, Kim is gripped by feelings of deep hesitation and self-doubt. He thinks about putting off the armed struggle for a while and continuing his underground activities for a few more years in order to be able to support his mother and visit her often—wouldn't this be the right thing for an eldest son to do (Kim 1992b: 381)? Reading this passage sends a mild shock through the native reader. While the official North Korean version of the nation's history presents Kim's founding of the Korean People's Revolutionary Army (guerrilla group) in April 1932 as a solid coup preceded by thorough preparations and supported by unshakable conviction and determination on the part of Kim, his memoirs offer a different story, revealing Kim to be full of hesitation even after establishing the guerrilla group, exploring the possibility of suspending the armed struggle and returning to underground activities, which would allow him more opportunities to check on his mother's well-being. Bidding his mother farewell as he leaves, he lingers in front of her house, his concern for her health momentarily preventing him from taking one more step away from her. His mother, now back inside the house, flips the door open and scolds him severely: "How can a man who has committed himself to the cause of winning his country back continue to have such a weak heart and worry about his home? [. . .] If, in the future, you were ever to come home because you were anxious and worried about your mother [. . .] I wouldn't meet that kind of son!" (Kim 1992b: 337; original translation).

In the fall of 1933, having won a few successful battles against the Japanese army units, and despite his mother's admonition a year earlier, Kim decides to pay another visit to his mother. His unit has decided to move to Wanqing, located quite a distance from Jilin, and he wants to bid his mother farewell prior to his long absence. He brings along a few packets of herbal medicine for her. Approaching the cottage, he has a strange feeling. His mother normally recognizes his footsteps and opens the door. This time, however, no one opens it. Inside, he sees that his mother's bed is gone. Soon, his two brothers come into the cottage, breaking into tears and asking him why he has come only then and not sooner; his mother has already passed away. As the three brothers weep aloud in their grief, a Korean neighbor comes in and tells Kim about his mother's final days. She took care of Kim's mother, staying with her until her final breath. Kim recalls how this woman's voice sounded like a voice from a "celestial land" (Kim 1992b: 421). The woman tells him that toward the end, in severe pain and completely incapacitated, Kim's mother asked the neighbor to cut her hair short—a highly unusual and almost unthinkable

request for a Korean woman of the time—because she had not been able to wash it for such a long time and her head was too itchy (as it was likely to have been infested with lice). As soon as Kim hears this, he regrets that the woman has told him: “It would have been better if I had not heard this story from her. I felt that my mother’s final, sad moments were tearing me apart inside” (Kim 1992b: 422; original translation). Later, paying a visit to his mother’s grave, he sees Chol Ju quietly burying the packets of medicine that Kim brought along with him—as if their mother might still be able to make use of them after her passing over to the other side. Kim completely breaks down at this sight, wailing aloud for hours and hours (Kim 1992b: 424).

In official North Korean references, Kang Ban Sok, Kim Il Sung’s mother, is the Mother of Korea—not simply the mother of her own three sons, but the person given credit, through her having given birth to and raised Kim, for the birth of an independent Korea. In Kim’s recollections, this image of Kang—as a strong-willed woman—sits alongside another, in which she shows devotion to her son’s cause. This devotion is not derived from her being a revolutionary or a Communist, but instead that of a mother helping her son to realize his dream. According to Confucian practice, Kim would have inherited the family lineage from his father as the latter’s first-born son. In this regard, his mother was doing something that all Korean mothers at the time were expected to do. But Kim also provides a clear illustration of a woman struggling to live in the face of poverty, hunger, and widowhood, several steps removed from revolutionary glory and the anti-Japanese fighting spirit. Kim’s mourning for his mother is heart-wrenching and very personal, filled with remorse and regret, at times reducing him to an emotional wreck. This is far from the image contained in official North Korean accounts, which portrays Kim smoothly and heroically sacrificing everything, including his own family, in his quest for Korea’s liberation. The raw emotion recalled by Kim in his memoirs is something new to readers, leading them to empathize with him and feel closer to him as a person, as would anyone who loves their own mother.

Faith and Beliefs

Perhaps understandably, given his Christian upbringing, Kim Il Sung had a particular interest in religion since childhood. He describes being surrounded by Christians during his childhood, effectively stating that he himself was one of them (Kim 1994: 378). He had church elders who mentored him and influenced his development. One such figure was Son Jong Doh, a widely respected

minister, and Kim was a regular member of his congregation in Jilin in the late 1920s—another fact that comes as a surprise to the native reader. Reverend Son was a prominent leader among Korean expatriates in Manchuria, and had strong connections with leaders inside Korea’s independence movement, including Ahn Chang Ho. Kim Il Sung revered him and was therefore overcome with sorrow when he heard the news of Reverend Son’s death. After being arrested by the Japanese authorities, Son became seriously ill while in their custody, dying shortly after his release (Kim 1992b: 8). Reverend Son had a special place in Kim’s heart, as he documented in detail a visit made to him in 1991 by Reverend Son’s son, Dr. Son Won Tae, from Omaha, Nebraska. On his visit in Pyongyang, Dr. Son from Nebraska asked Kim whether he would buy him *bingtanghulu*, a traditional Chinese candied fruit snack, just like in the old days in Jilin. Kim writes: “I felt my heart leap at his request, for this was a request one made only to one’s own brother” (Kim 1992b: 13).

In North Korea’s official verbiage, this kind of non-Communist connection (given that the Sons are Christians, let alone the fact that Dr. Son is a Korean American) is swept under the rug of Kim’s outstanding virtue or his unprecedented broad-mindedness; that is to say, Kim Il Sung has such a big heart that he attracts people of different religious persuasions and turns them into admirers. In Kim’s memoirs, however, his reunion with Dr. Son is simply one of old friends—or “brothers” as Kim states—who shared their childhood in exile away from their homeland. And the fact that Reverend Son, Dr. Son’s father, was a moral mentor and father figure to Kim, who had lost his own father at the young age of fourteen, played a significant role in the formation of such a bond. One cannot deny that religion played a role here too. For, if Kim Il Sung were against Christianity, he could have sought the company of leaders of other ideological inclinations, including Communism. In fact, many early Korean Communists crossed the border to the Soviet Union, joining the Communist movement on location, so to speak. Especially after the death of his father, he was, in a way, in a position to be able to leave Christianity altogether, if he had so wished. But Kim did not, remaining instead in Reverend Son’s congregation, which doubled as his surrogate family. Given that North Korea’s official version of Kim’s revolutionary history omits Kim’s religious faith, the following statement by Kim is an unexpected one for the native reader: “I see no contradiction between the Christian doctrine of ‘peace on earth and good will for all mankind’ and my ‘Juche’ doctrine of self-determination for all mankind” (Kim 1992a: 104; original translation).

Not the Best nor the Only

Surprisingly, the native reader learns in the memoirs that Kim Il Sung was not the most superior nor the most capable guerrilla commander in the anti-Japanese resistance movement in Manchuria. Indeed, Kim is frank when it comes to his relative youth and lack of experience as a guerrilla commander among many who were superior to him. Kim Il Sung candidly depicts his band as being smaller than many similar armed guerrilla units—another image that contradicts North Korea's official revolutionary history, where Kim's group is said to be the best and the largest, with hundreds following his leadership when, in reality, a maximum of some dozen men and women joined him. His memoirs make frequent references to coexisting armed groups with a diverse range of political orientations operating across the vast Manchurian wilderness—some adamantly nationalistic and anti-Communist, others directly connected with the Chinese Communist Party. Kim is also frank in admitting the relative youth of the members of his unit, which made it necessary for his group to seek collaboration with and help from other units. Set against North Korea's official revolutionary history, which positions Kim at the apex of the Korean anti-Japanese guerrilla movement, unparalleled in influence and authority, this is a notable divergence.

More surprising is Kim's candid statement regarding his membership in the Chinese Communist Party and his recounting of many of the incidents he experienced as a party member. In February of 1935, a conference was arranged in Dahuangwai to review and assess the worsening situation involving mutual Chinese and Korean suspicions caused by the clandestine activities of the pro-Japanese organization, Minsaengdan. Rumor at the time had it that over seventy percent of the Korean Communists in eastern Manchuria were secretly members of Minsaengdan and were plotting against the Chinese Communists. As a result of such suspicions, during the early 1930s, the Chinese Communist Party purged thousands of Korean Communists. By 1935, mutual suspicion had resulted in numerous brutal cases of ethnic persecution and inter-ethnic violence. In 1933, Kim Il Sung himself was arrested by the Chinese Communist Party, only to be exonerated in 1934 (Armstrong 2003: 30). Kim participated in the Dahuangwai conference in his capacity as member of the East Manchuria Special District Party Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (Kim 1993: 46). Despite the personal persecution that he had suffered at the hands of the Chinese Communist Party, he remained loyal to the party.

Korea did not have its own Communist Party. In the eyes of the Communist International, Korea's status as a Japanese colony disqualified it from having its own party, as the organization had a policy of recognizing only one party per nation. Accordingly, those who were in China (including Manchuria) joined the Chinese Communist Party, and those who were in Japan joined the Japanese Communist Party (the suppression of which was complete by the mid-1930s). It is likely that Kim joined the Communist Party of the Soviet Union later on, after 1941, when he relocated there and became a Korean guerrilla commander under the Soviet military. The official line maintained by the North Korean historiography is that Kim formed his own Korean party, but a more accurate description would be that he was an international-minded Communist with a keen desire to help Korea regain its independence who held full membership within the Chinese Communist Party. Nowhere in North Korea's official history is Kim Il Sung represented as a member of the Chinese Communist Party at any time—such would perpendicularly contradict the image of Kim as the embodiment of Korea's essence and Korea's own revolutionary leader who realized national independence through his own military strategy and political sagacity. Kim's own words provide unmistakable acknowledgement that Kim was indeed part of the larger international Communist movement.

Reviving Abolished Words

What is prominent throughout the memoirs is the ubiquitous or almost excessive use of words and expressions originating from the classical lexicon that the North Korean linguistic authorities long ago abolished in the process of nativization during the 1960s through 1980s. The irony is evident: Kim Il Sung, who wanted to establish Juche in Korea's linguistic life by replacing words of foreign, and especially Chinese, origin with original Korean words, writes about his life deploying heavily Chinese-influenced words and classical expressions that basically draw from Chinese counterparts. This is understandable, considering that he received his formative education in Chinese in northeastern China. However, given North Korea's practice of upholding Kim's words as sacred canon, if he himself grossly transgresses a state-sanctioned norm, how should the people take this? Besides, it is simply challenging for North Korean readers who were educated after the 1960s to read the memoirs. For this reason, the publishing committee provides general readers with an *Explanation of Vocabulary* (*Eohwipuri*) to accompany each volume. For example, in Volume Six of the memoirs, Kim Il Sung emphatically stresses:

“In our unit, there was no room for people who have different dreams while sleeping in one bed (*dongsang imong*) or people who express support on the surface while behind the scenes plotting to undermine (*yangbong eumwi*)” (Kim 1995: 259; author’s translation). The two expressions, *dongsang imong* and *yangbong eumwi*, are listed in the *Explanation of Vocabulary*, because no one in North Korea would know or use such expressions today. Both idioms originate from the Chinese classics and thus, without the use of the original Chinese ideographs and depending on the vernacular Korean that only represents sounds, the reader would have no way of even guessing the meaning.

Similarly, recalling an incident in which Kim and others tried hard to persuade young boys who wanted to join the anti-Japanese guerrilla unit to leave and go home for the sake of their parents, Kim uses the expression *mai dongpung*, literally meaning the eastern breeze on the ear of the horse, figuratively referring to something falling on deaf ears (Kim 1995: 252). The expression draws its meaning from the image of a horse not noticing the eastern breeze, i.e., the arrival of spring, and refers to a situation in which people refuse to listen to others’ views and advice. This expression is also included in the *Explanation of Vocabulary*, as no North Korean reader would understand this Korean expression, let alone the original Chinese characters that would be used to transliterate it.

Writing about his strategic planning for the 1937 raid on Japanese military stations in the Fusong area, Kim refers to *ijeong hwaryeong*, which is translated in the memoir as “elusive hit-and-run tactics of attacking suddenly, then disappearing into nowhere” (Kim 1993: 4; original translation). This expression (sometimes transposed as *hwajeong iryeong*) was widely used among anti-Japanese guerrilla forces, and it denotes the classical guerrilla tactic of ambushing from nowhere and disappearing without a trace. Even though North Koreans today are supposed to have a proficient knowledge of the official history of the Kim Il Sung-led guerrilla war against the Japanese, which routinely refers to this guerrilla strategy using vernacular Korean expression—*donge beonjeok seoe beonjeok*, meaning “one moment appearing in the east and the next moment in the west”—this classical expression Kim deploys, *ijeong hwaryeong*, is not found anywhere other than in Kim’s memoirs, and North Korean readers would find it utterly foreign.

Additionally, throughout the memoirs, Kim uses archaic words that were eliminated in the state linguistic reforms of the 1960s through the 1980s (see chapter 2 above). For example, Kim uses the term *gigang* (e.g., Kim 1993: 187). North Koreans today would use either *gyuryul* (rules) or *jilseo* (order).

While all three words share overlapping meanings and all can be transliterated into Chinese characters, the linguistic authorities preserved the latter two and eliminated *gigang*. Yet, Kim nonchalantly uses this word, prompting the *Explanation of Vocabulary* to provide the meaning in order to assist North Korean readers; with a slightly exaggerated interpretation, this can be seen as a defiance of the skinny vocabulary of the North Korean language, as if to suggest that the lean or skinny vocabulary currently available in North Korea is not adequately equipped to express the Great Leader's life. Words such as this one and expressions such as *dongsang imong* or *mai dongpung* need not be used when conveying meanings for which equivalents can be conveyed using Korean vernacular terms available in today's North Korea. Yet, one can assume that, for Kim Il Sung, these classical expressions, basically borrowed from Chinese, were more familiar to him, and that it was therefore more natural for him to use them as opposed to expressions from the reformed Korean language which North Korea's state authorities had painstakingly systematized under the policies guided by none other than Kim Il Sung himself. This makes the experience of reading the memoirs an unmistakably ironic one.

Rehumanizing Kim Il Sung

The information that Kim was a member of the Chinese Communist Party, as well as the information that he went to the Soviet Union around 1941–1942 along with other Sino-Korean guerrillas fighting in Jiandao, was readily accessible prior to the publication of the memoirs through sources available outside North Korea. Examples include the acclaimed study by Dae-Sook Suh, *Kim Il Sung: The North Korean Leader*, and Haruki Wada's *Kim Il Sung and Anti-Japanese War in Manchuria*, for example (Suh 1988; Wada 1992; McCormack 1993). But reading the memoirs from the perspective of a native reader, one immersed in North Korea's official rhetoric, with its rules and regularities, its set expressions and rigid storylines, which had been established through decades of linguistic reform effort by the state authorities—and I am not problematizing or inquiring into whether the native reader is a believer or not—and the conspicuous discrepancy that is brought up to the surface by none other than Kim himself is, quite simply, stunning.

Kim's words undo the work performed by North Korea's linguistic authorities and the Juche-oriented, statewide coding of public discourse since the 1960s. Paradoxically, it was through this work of encoding the Korean language to suit North Korea's policy and canonize Kim Il Sung's revolutionary history that Kim himself was elevated to a position of absolute and sacrosanct

authority. Such linguistic efforts, as seen in chapter 2 above, were accompanied by the ubiquitous appearance of gilded statues of the leader, by the practice requiring all North Korean citizens to wear Kim Il Sung portrait badges on their chests, and, above all, by the requirement for mantra-like recitation of formulaic expressions relating to Kim Il Sung, his family, and his revolutionary history. These measures created the effect of literally planting Kim within every citizen's heart, at the same time generating an ethos and lifestyle that placed Kim within the domain of untouchable sacredness. Meanwhile, as seen in chapter 3 above, specific examples illustrating Kim Il Sung's presence and his care for the people were meticulously documented in the people's chronicle, *Inmindeul sogeseo* (Among the People), rendering Kim simultaneously sacred yet concrete, awe-inspiring yet affectionate. So, what additional effect does the language used in the memoirs create with respect to the bond between the Great Leader and the people?

As has been shown, in the memoirs, we see a different Kim, a third Kim, emerging—a Kim that wails, gets hurt, hesitates, doubts himself, and at times makes mistakes and even admits it. Far from perfect, Kim is a fallible being; far from constant or stable, Kim goes through emotional ups and downs, often drowning in his own emotion; far from being a genius who enjoys unstoppable successes, Kim is burdened with self-doubt and error, admitting that his past mistakes have cost others greatly. These imperfections only make Kim Il Sung more authentic and utterly human. Indeed, it is not only him, but his entire lineage that is humanized, rendering it as an object of compassion, thereby dignifying and legitimizing it. What an incredible irony it is, then, to see the publication of such memoirs right at the time of the death of Kim Il Sung, the mortal?

Speaking from a functionalist perspective, efforts to humanize Kim Il Sung were no doubt necessary in the early 1990s, given his looming succession by his mortal son, Kim Jong Il, and later by his mortal grandson, Kim Jong Un. In passim in the memoirs, Kim Jong Il is credited as having continued, elevated, and perfected the endeavors that Kim Il Sung started in his youth. Such references are most prominent in the field of artistic creation and production. For example, the memoirs have it that Kim Il Sung himself wrote the script of a play, *Hyeolbae* (Sea of Blood, an expression of Chinese origin, written in Chinese characters) in the 1930s, which, under the leadership of Kim Jong Il, became the classic 1970s North Korean film *Pibada* (Sea of Blood, the name now expressed in native Korean words), an operatic adaptation of which was also produced (Kim 1994: 62).

Can we, then, come to an understanding that the imperfections of Kim Il Sung that are displayed in the memoirs and the ensuing legitimization of Kim's lineage and the compassion-incurring reactions from readers achieves the perfect result of legitimizing Kim Jong Il, who is, unequivocally, the flesh-and-blood offspring of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Suk, his wife, about whom Kim Il Sung writes lovingly in his memoirs (e.g., Kim 1994: 85ff.)? What better way to ensure Kim Jong Il's authority than to make the lineage itself legitimate? By connecting Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Il, and eventually Kim Jong Un, the memoirs lay out a blueprint for a revolutionary lineage, and anyone who is the offspring of this lineage can claim authenticity and authority. When I say this, I do not mean to suggest that the North Korean state intended to create such an effect. Rather, this is part of the process whereby a certain version of truth arises and persists through a regime of truth which is sustained by various mechanisms and institutions, such as North Korea's linguistic policy, the publication of the people's chronicle, and the publication of the leader's memoirs, which in turn work to strengthen the North Korean version of truth or native truth.

Upon Kim Jong Il's death in 2011, I predicted that North Korea would treat Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il differently (Ryang 2012). I was mistaken: North Korea produced gilded statues of Kim Jong Il, placing them right next to those of his father. His embalmed body is now on display in the "hall of immortality" along with that of his father at Geumsusan Palace of the Sun, a Kim family mausoleum that has become a destination for domestic and foreign visitors to Pyongyang. Every year starts with Kim Jong Un offering New Year's greetings to both "in humble reverence" ("Kim Jong Un Visits" 2016). The North Korean leadership, in other words, is not—contrary to widespread belief—based on a cult of personality, to mention an oft-abused term. If it is a cult, it should be seen as a cult of lineage, although it would not be accurate to use this term when depicting North Korea's reality, as it does not allow for the reality of native truth, the truth that in many ways sustains North Korea's social fabric and can shape-shift to fit a changing situation and a reality that is far more complex, impregnated with various contradictions, yet unified in the final analysis around the bond between Leader and people.

The notion of lineage that I deploy here is not, however, to be equated with lineage in the traditional Confucian sense. According to Confucian principles, it is the first-born male who should succeed his father, but it is Kim Jong Un, the youngest son of Kim Jong Il, who is now in power, and who, in 2017, managed to eliminate the firstborn, Kim Jong Nam, at Kuala Lumpur

airport (Paddock and Choe 2017). The concept of lineage practiced in North Korea today is an entirely new one. As seen in North Korean references to the blood of Baekdu Mountain (*Baekdusan hyeoltong*), Kim's lineage is said to have sprung from Mount Baekdu. In his memoirs, Kim Il Sung makes a point of describing his group moving its base to Mount Baekdu in the late 1930s (e.g., Kim 1994). It is hard to establish this by means of historiography: his guerrilla routes were located around Jiandao, to the northeast of Mount Baekdu, later shifting further northeast to the Khabarovsk area. Kim Jong Il was born in Khabarovsk in the Soviet Union, while Kim Il Sung received military training along with other Sino-Korean guerrillas, as recalled by Grigory Mekler, a Soviet propaganda officer, who was entrusted to identify and groom a future leader of North Korea in 1944 ("Soviets Groomed Kim Il Sung for Leadership," 2003). The official North Korean rhetoric, as is well known, has it that Kim Jong Il was born somewhere on Mount Baekdu. One side of this mountain, being part of the mountain range forming the border between China and North Korea, is territorially located in Korea, and it would have been impossible for Kim Il Sung's group to have been physically based there in the early 1940s. Ironically, this also comes as a surprise to the native reader: in the revolutionary history of Kim Il Sung that was taught at schools during the 1960s and 1970s, Kim Jong Il did not exist yet, and there was therefore no need to justify his birth as part of Kim Il Sung's legend. In North Korean and Chongryun schools, Mount Baekdu was taught as the highest mountain in Korea, symbolically representing Korea's spirit, but Kim Il Sung's anti-Japanese guerrilla struggle was not specifically located there. In fact, "Kim Il Sung janggunui norae" or "The Song of General Kim Il Sung," composed in 1947, the first official song dedicated to Kim and often sung accompanying the North Korean anthem, locates Kim Il Sung's fight in the Jangbaek mountains or the Changbai mountains in Chinese, extending from Heilongjiang, Jilin, and Liaoning Provinces in China and Ryanggang and Jagang Provinces in North Korea; Mount Baekdu exists in this range, but as the song goes, Kim Il Sung's legacy was not originally associated exclusively with Mount Baekdu—rather, it covered a broad area northeast of Mount Baekdu, i.e., Manchuria. The theory that Kim Jong Il was born on Mount Baekdu was created more recently. It remains to be seen what new myths will surround Kim Jong Un, whose mother was born and raised in Japan, who was educated abroad, and whose older sibling, the eldest son of Ko Young Hui, Kim Jong Il's third consort, continues to live abroad, frequently attending Eric Clapton concerts (Pearson 2017).

As clearly stated by Kim Il Sung himself, the Kims originated from Jeolla Province in southern Korea. The Baekdu lineage, therefore, marks the beginning of what might be called the “new Kims.” Recently, North Korea began using a new expression identifying its people as *janggunnim siksol* or the family of the General (e.g., Shim 2013: 86). General is a title shared by the two elder Kims; additionally, Kim Il Sung is the Eternal President and Kim Jong Il is the Grand Marshal, posthumously appointed titles that are, respectively, reserved exclusively for each man. We have here an intersection between a vertical relationship based on lineage and a horizontal relationship based on people/family or *siksol*, meaning that all North Koreans are brothers and sisters connected to and through the Baekdu lineage. Nothing could be stranger when viewed from the perspective of traditional Confucian kinship principles, according to which one has to remain loyal to one’s lord on the one hand and one’s ancestors on the other, since these two lines do not meet (the only exception being the king’s lineage), an innate tension therefore being created between loyalty to one’s lord and devotion to one’s ancestors. The idea that all people in the nation may share a fictive blood relationship is a violation of the Korean taboo concerning incest, also stipulated by Confucianism; after marriage, a woman does not change her last name, in order to prove her exogamous origin, and if a man and a woman come from the same lineage, no matter how many generations apart, matrimony between them is not allowed. As can be seen in the term *siksol*, the term that takes Chinese ideographs, the neologism is not nativized. In fact, as stated in the introduction of this volume, recent North Korean official terms are becoming more classical, drawing from Chinese-originated vocabulary such as *gyeolsaongwi*, denoting that the people are prepared to safeguard the leadership even at the cost of their own lives (see the introduction of this volume). Such expressions had disappeared from the skinny vocabulary of the post-nativized North Korean language.

In the very beginning of this chapter I proposed that I would read Kim Il Sung’s memoirs to think about what these texts *do*, rather than *say*. Based on the above, it may be safe to state that Kim Il Sung’s memoirs perform, as it were, a kind of magic in turning the Kims from southern Korea into the Kims of Baekdu Mountain, taking along all North Koreans as extended kin; his memoirs also debunk the decade-long nativization project and demonstrate that the leader’s life could not be captured by the skinny vocabulary of North Korea; and, based on the above, his memoirs are the manifestation of Kim Il Sung the sovereign, to whom the exception is applied, including the use of language that the party and the state had long since abolished and rewriting his

own revolutionary history into a different narrative that is not familiar with the native North Korean reader. The intimacy produced by the first-person narrative of the memoirs executes this magic brilliantly, Kim speaking to readers individually and personally, bringing each of them closer to him and arousing warm feelings of fondness and affection for him—similar to the people's chronicle seen in chapter 3 above, but a million times more effective because it is Kim Il Sung himself that is speaking. The memoirs create the unmistakable effect of making something emerge as truth on one level, regardless of how clearly such truth does not exist on another.

CONCLUSION

Self

New Nation, New Truth

If that which presents itself as truth presupposes a regime of normalization, involving tools and devices, innovations and discipline, and institutions and implementations, in order that something that is not true or does not exist be made to appear as true or exist, then the case of North Korea is a relatively straightforward one. First, this case does not involve a period of many centuries, as is the case for many of the religious doctrines that we have in the world today, or is also the case for the global market economy, which dominates most aspects of our modern lives. Secondly, its extent, effect, and efficaciousness are limited to a small population living in a territory which occupies a minuscule proportion of the globe's surface area.

Seen from the outside world, occasions where the regime of truth that sustains this nation are manifested have been limited to spectacular events, such as when ordinary citizens, young and old, came out onto the streets and public squares to display their deep sorrow and distress following the passing of Great Leaders Kim Il Sung in 1994 and Kim Jong Il in 2011, or each time the nation launches projectiles in order to remind the world of its existence, incurring the immediate wrath of Japan in particular, which lies well within their target range, and eliciting cautious alarm in the US, now that it is clear that North Korea does, indeed, possess nuclear attack capability. These are the times when scholars and journalists, including those who do not ordinarily specialize in the study of North Korea, write about this nation as a novelty of some sort (see, e.g., Mazzarella 2015). Otherwise, by and large, the world either ignores or ridicules it, treating it as some kind of Oriental black box—save for the year 2018 which was an exception due to the unusual and surprising meetings between the then US president Donald Trump and North

Korea's Supreme Leader Kim Jong Un on the one hand, and unprecedented level of rapprochement between North Korea and South Korea (see Lee and Ryang 2019).

Still, there seems to be an unstoppable stream of Anglophone publications on North Korea aimed at public consumption, which can broadly be categorized into the following types: the defector genre, for which the supply appears to wax and wane, depending on the availability of Western sponsors and collaborating journalists, as well as the vagaries of the readership market; memoirs written by former foreign residents of North Korea who lived there in various capacities, whether as gourmet chef, foreign correspondent, or diplomat; the denunciation genre, which includes a variety of semi-expert authors working toward a negative portrayal of North Korea; and the academic genre, spanning diverse disciplinary orientations and fields, which has shown much improvement recently, though accounting for a fraction of the print market on North Korea (e.g., Fujimoto 2003; Kang and Cha 2003; Hassig and Oh 2009; Demick 2010; Park and Vollers 2016; Lee and John 2016; Tudor 2018; Tudor and Pearson 2015; Jeppesen 2018; Kim 2013; Kim 2015; Park and Snyder 2013; Fifield 2019). While the 2018 rapprochement between North Korea and the US, as well as the seemingly rapid changes in North-South relations on the Korean peninsula, have piqued the attention of scholars and journalists, it would be safe to say that there remains an insurmountable divide between our understanding of North Korea and its reality. Moreover, mainstream world media—and consciousness, for that matter—has very little interest in, or patience for, thinking about the need to understand North Korea in a serious manner. Truth in North Korea, this book's theme, indeed, is not a subject readily found in the production of Western knowledge on North Korea, be it journalistic or academic, as there seems to prevail contempt or resignation dismissing that something like truth does not, cannot, exist there.

In trying to address the issue of truth in North Korea, the foregoing pages elected to shed light on several discrete yet mutually connected domains of discourse. In so doing, my strategy was not based primarily on tracing when the government adopted particular policies, whether it achieved its goals, and by what percentage. Instead, I took the route of going into the institutional mechanism of the linguistic technologies that were required to tell the national truth in North Korea. I began, in chapter 1, with the 1950s literary purge, whereby certain words were singled out by critics—as in *ganeum* or illicit sexual liaison in the case of Li Taejun's work—and weaponized to attack the work of so-called reactionary writers, moving on to examine how, by the

time the purge was over and a new ideological regime had begun to take shape in the 1960s, the dominant linguistic tools, including those which had been deployed by critics in their attacks on reactionary writers, were replaced by a state-sanctioned lexicon.

Once the state had located its population or *inmin* as a “new element” within the collective, new technology came to be deployed, and one of the key technological tools used by the state in its project of nativization and standardization was the new Korean language of North Korea (see Foucault 2014: 245). The state linguistic project, however, was not a simple or smooth one, either. As shown in chapter 2, in pre-Juche linguistic reform, most of the attention was placed on the promotion of civility and politeness among the citizens of North Korea on the basis that mutually respectful linguistic behavior would elevate everyone’s dignity. This mutual respect among citizens was, starting in the 1970s, turned into exclusive glorification of the Great Leader, reflecting the establishment of Juche’s singular ideological system, with its demand that citizens familiarize themselves with the codified epithets and pre-coordinated expressions to be used in reference to the Great Leader on the one hand and an all-out vocabulary management project to eliminate and replace words of Chinese or foreign origin on the other. In the case of the latter initiative, however, as seen in chapter 2, the lack of a clear internal logic for preserving certain words of Chinese origin and eliminating others simply resulted in a rearrangement of the Korean vocabulary that is allowed to be used in North Korea and the retention of many words that can be transliterated into Chinese. Accompanied by the total abolition of the use of Chinese ideographs in all publications in North Korea, this policy inevitably resulted in a reduction in the volume of vocabulary items that were available in North Korea and the creation of what I called a skinny or lean vocabulary. This reform may have been effective in rendering communication efficient, but, in and of itself, there is no reason to think that this reform enhanced the loyalty of ordinary North Korean citizens toward the Great Leader, since the codified epithets and expressions, predominantly consisting of words of Chinese origin, had a high risk of becoming performative language perfunctorily uttered in a ritualistic manner. At the same time, however, this does not mean that the ritual language is, say, fake in terms of conveying one’s belief; indeed, as many classical scholars of religion have shown, participating in ritual itself functions as believing in the doctrine (Durkheim 1915; Robertson Smith 2002). The reality is somewhere in between, rested on a more nuanced point.

On the other hand, citizens possessed a body of user-friendly discourse that recanted the virtues and wisdom of the Great Leader. As shown in chapter 3, in the epic chronicle *Inmindeul sogeseo* or *Among the People*, published continuously since 1962 and now beyond its 107th volume, one can see an abundance of detailed examples documenting the Great Leader's love, miscellaneous records of concrete things the Great Leader did for the people and with the people, and stanza after stanza recalling occasions where the Great Leader reached out, virtuously and affectionately, to ordinary citizens in general and to the less fortunate in particular, in accounts written by authors who had experienced direct interaction with the Great Leader himself. The range of writers is extremely broad, extending from high-ranking government officials to orphan sisters, from highly educated scientists and researchers to ordinary farmers and workers, from a septuagenarian to a teenager, and from individuals of revolutionary pedigree to individuals with "questionable" past histories, such as people who had relocated from South Korea and/or had family members who escaped to South Korea, as shown in chapter 3 above.

What runs through the diverse stories in the chronicle, all written in simple and straightforward way using North Korea's skinny vocabulary, is the undercurrent of Kim Il Sung as a man possessing great attention to detail and a parent-like concern for all, a man who worries about the minor ailments and inconveniences suffered by ordinary men, women, and children, a man who would remember an orphan's birthday and come to the funeral of a citizen, a man who would give new names to the unfortunate, a man who would positively mentor citizens, especially women, helping to raise them into capable leaders, and so on. The affect expressed by the Great Leader, and all the details of this affect narrated by the writers in their accounts, together capture the special relationship between the Leader and his people. The chroniclers use simple, accessible, and minimalist language that is removed from the superfluous and ornamental state-sanctioned epithets reserved for Kim Il Sung on the one hand and removed from Juche and the ideological discourse of dogma and doctrine on the other. It is through this language—the language of the people's chronicle—that the ordinary North Korean sees Kim Il Sung as a truthful figure, a real man, as opposed to (or perhaps along with) a legendary military strategist or the undisputed leader of a world revolution—as the state-sanctioned image of Kim would dictate.

In the early 1990s, as the Kim Il Sung era approached its end, North Korean readers were introduced to yet another corpus of language, this time

deployed by Kim Il Sung himself. In his multi-volume memoirs, *Hoegorok: Segiwa deobureo* or *With the Century: The Memoirs*, published in the years 1992 through 1996 and including posthumous publications following his death in 1994, Kim Il Sung revealed to the North Korean people hitherto unknown dimensions and depths of himself. Autobiographically tracing his life, from childhood and youth to adulthood, Kim Il Sung writes about his vulnerability, emotions, lack of confidence, self-doubt, imperfection, and weaknesses, making little effort to hide them. As shown in chapter 4, his writing strikes the reader as honest, making him instantaneously authentic and, in turn, making the reader feel personally close to him. Among North Koreans, who would have thought that their legendary iron general, who fought one hundred battles and achieved one hundred victories (*baekjeon baekseungui gangcheorui ryeongjang*), would shed tears of sorrow and wail like a child when his mother died? And who would have thought that we would hear from Kim Il Sung himself about how much his family was immersed in the Christian faith? Until the publication of Kim's memoirs, North Korean readers had not possessed the linguistic tools to refer to his moments of defeat during the revolution or his direct membership of the Chinese Communist Party, for example. But, and in some ways more importantly, his memoirs posed a serious challenge to the norms created by the state linguistic authorities—norms created under the direction of none other than Kim Il Sung himself—their copious use of words and expressions derived from the Chinese classics necessitating the issuing of an accompanying vocabulary explanation booklet to assist North Korean readers when reading the memoirs.

By examining interconnected yet discrete textual and linguistic practices, this book has shown that North Korean users of the North Korean language during the Kim Il Sung era inhabited multiple, coexisting domains, each possessing its own set of patterns and conventional practices. This multiplicity of linguistic practices lets us imagine a plurality of values and dimensions of life, according to which not everything is monolithically funneled into glorification of the Great Leader within the rubrics of state-sanctioned linguistic references, while, at the same time, the citizen-reader's relationship with the Great Leader is filled with affect in the more tangible, mundane area of textual practice with a lean or skinny vocabulary, yet with authenticity of emotion as well as ethnographic details as has been seen in the language of the people's chronicle. Such plurality has been augmented by Kim Il Sung's own textual practice, in which he makes abundant use of expressions of classical Chinese

origin on the one hand and presents hitherto unknown stories about himself to the public on the other.

The theme that is common to all of the contexts as well as texts that we have examined in this book—the literary purge of the 1950s, the linguistic reform and vocabulary management of the period from the 1960s through the 1980s, the stories contained in the people’s chronicle, and the Great Leader’s memoirs—is a grand project: the making of a new nation with a new identity and a new language to tell the truth of this nation. The new nation’s identity was formed on the basis of a new language, one that was altogether lean in terms of its content, devoid of Chinese ideographs, simple in terms of its forms of expression, and repetitive in terms of the stanzas its speakers chanted and its writers inscribed, when expressing the indissoluble connection between the people and the Great Leader; one that was, despite the banner of eliminating Chinese-originated words, filled with examples of these, the only difference being that those words that were kept were sanctioned by the state and were fewer than before; one that, moreover, allowed itself ample flexibility in terms of change, including the introduction of new expressions, the reintroduction of old classical idioms, or the absorption of foreign terms, starting with none other than the words written by Kim Il Sung himself.

From within the regime of this new national linguistic practice, a new national truth emerged, whereby North Korea’s material reality is interconnected, in every detail and miscellany, with the presence of the Great Leader. Through Kim Il Sung’s affective gaze, his hand movements, the tilting of his head, his leaning over, his handshakes, his loving voice, and his warm embrace, captured over and over again in the people’s chronicle, everything in North Korea has come to bear his touch, his breath, and his presence. Yet, when Kim Il Sung died, half a century after the establishment of North Korea, he not only left its people with an unexpected body of texts that exposed his human weaknesses and vulnerability, but did so using language that relied heavily on classical, pre-reform Korean words and expressions. The Kim Il Sung that emerged from the pages of the memoirs, a man who breaks down in sorrow, hesitates to make a revolutionary determination, and doubts his own conviction, opened up a new avenue to be authentic and truthful; does it show the possibility for truth to be told in another way in North Korea, one wonders?

As has been mentioned earlier in this book, today’s official North Korean verbiage contains words and expressions that have been added during the last decade or so, including *janggunnim siksol* or the family of the General (see

chapter 4) and *Baekdu wiin* or the great men of Mount Baekdu (see chapter 2). Terms such as *siksol* (family) or *wiin* (great person) are classical words, the existence of which predates the post-1960s reform and was eliminated during the nativization project of the 1960s through 1980s. The reintroduction of these terms as state-sanctioned words is not unrelated to the inconsistency of North Korea's linguistic reform, whereby core vocabulary items of Chinese origin in Korean were preserved intact, and is also due to the fact that the Great Leader himself used pre-reform language as the language that most authentically captured his own inner self. Against such a backdrop, then, how are we to grasp the formation of self in North Korea, the self that not only speaks of the truth of this nation, but also lives it every day?

Self

I hope that it has become clear to the reader that this book has not been an inquiry into the universality of self beyond culture, history, or ideology. For the language that one uses to communicate with others and contemplate one's inner thoughts is clearly connected to the formation of one's self, itself, in turn, firmly grounded in one's cultural and ideological environment under specific historical conditions. Given that language does not function universally across all cultures, the formation of self, too, is shaped by specific historical, cultural, and material conditions. Still, some scholars of the self have aspired to do the opposite, i.e., to seek a universal self. In their endeavor to compare the Japanese self and the Western self, with the Japanese self as interdependent self and the Western self as independent self, social psychologists Hazel Markus and Shinobu Kitayama ask: "[H]ow deep or pervasive [. . .] [are] cultural differences?" (Markus and Kitayama 1991: 247). The authors continue:

A failure to replicate certain findings in different cultural contexts should not lead to immediate despair over the lack of generality of various psychological principles or to the conclusion of some anthropologists that culturally divergent individuals inhabit incomparably different worlds. (Markus and Kitayama 1991: 248)

My study of truth in North Korea has done exactly what Markus and Kitayama compared to "despair"—culturally divergent people inhabit a different world, a world called North Korea, the existence of which is based on its difference from the rest of the world, and thus, these culturally divergent people come to form different selves. This, in and of itself, is nothing to despair about.

Ultimately, the desire to universalize understanding of the self of the kind displayed by Markus and Kitayama may itself be a phenomenon or tendency particular and specific to the discipline of psychology as it is practiced in the Western academe, a culturally specific institution.

Rather than trying to find universal elements of humanity, this book has attempted to look at the core of a culturally and politico-ideologically specific regime of linguistic practice—a project anthropologists are familiar with. Within the foundational rationale of such a regime lies an aspiration to shape the truthful understanding of the world and the self in North Korea as a new nation, this understanding then feeding North Korea's system of social reproduction, generating and regenerating functional unity within the nation's core culture. As such, what is considered as truth is the product of this new regimentation, imposed via the state linguistic reforms that we have seen in this book, whereby that which did not exist ultimately came to exist as part of North Korea's own truth, its native truth. If, as Wittgenstein surmised, the limit of one's language is the limit of one's world, the truth contained in the new language of North Korea constitutes the whole world of its users (Wittgenstein 1988). Sociohistorically speaking, this was particularly the case during the Kim Il Sung era (1945–1994), where communication and propaganda were predominantly dependent on sound and written text, rather than on mixed formats containing visual elements or digital material as we witness today in the age of the Internet and the World Wide Web. All aspects of North Korean linguistic regimentation—the purge of the 1950s, the emphasis on citizens' mutual politeness, the introduction of codified epithets for Kim Il Sung and his family, nativization and a skinny vocabulary, and the first-person narrative of affect for and of the Great Leader—provided the North Korean state with the technical instruments to ensure the continued functioning and validation of its truth. In this process, as a subject, one is manufactured to be equipped with all of the instruments necessary to live appropriately, understanding and expressing one's world and oneself (see Foucault 2003: 46).

Subjecthood featured prominently in the linguistic standardization that was carried out throughout the Kim Il Sung era. First, the literary purge of the 1950s focused on the presentation of the new socialist subject. As can be seen in Eom Hoseok's critique of Li Bungmyeong's literature, discussed in chapter 1, when the new working-class subject was presented as shabby, ill-educated, and unbecoming, this incurred the wrath of critics, subjecting the author to harsh denunciation using words and expressions that later came to be reserved for enemies of the nation, such as the US. When the singular

ideological system known as Juche was established, and all language used in reference to Kim Il Sung and his family came to be codified and reserved for ritual chanting and performative locution, the rationale was, paradoxically, that each being the master of North Korean society, citizens should be able to speak properly about the Leader and his lineage. A similar logic applied to the emphasis on the mutually respectful language that the new citizens were supposed to use in order to preserve their dignity as subjects (and not objects) of the new national government. Even though the actual linguistic reforms may have been inconsistent, ultimately, the new, reformed, and reduced (in terms of vocabulary, i.e., skinny vocabulary) Korean language that was sanctioned by the North Korean state provided the people with efficient and effective tool to talk about themselves and, especially, themselves in connection to the Great Leader. But perhaps a more basic summary is that during the Kim Il Sung era, North Korean citizens became new speaking/writing subjects, overcoming their colonial and pre-socialist past, where they were not only vastly illiterate but also not in the same linguistic realm with their sovereign king (whose proclamations only came in classical Chinese) or the colonial ruler (whose orders came in Japanese).

The voice of this new speaking subject was captured in plain, simple, and minimalistic expressions, surrounding an all-seeing, detail-oriented, and endlessly affectionate Great Leader, as can be seen in the people's chronicle, discussed in chapter 3. The skinny vocabulary of post-nativization North Korean language offered an economy of text, with the recurrence of identical expressions that were nativized and did not presuppose Chinese ideographs—the most prominent example being *deungeul sseureojisida*, denoting Kim Il Sung repeatedly rubbing or patting someone's back, in this case, mostly the author's back, as a gesture of Kim's affection, as shown in chapter 3 above. The plain style of writing by the authors of the chronicle was an effective embodiment of exemplary language with which the North Korean selfhood is formed in a very close proximity to the Great Leader, who would appear on your doorstep, come to your father's funeral, and send you home with socks and eggs after sharing a simple meal with you. In particular, the first-person narrative provided by the stories in the people's chronicle occupies a significant place in terms of instrumentality of self formation. If, as Jack Goody states, "[t]he mode of acquiring knowledge affects the nature of that knowledge and the way in which knowledge is organized," then, the first-person narrative used in the people's chronicle stories offers a medium which enables readers to form themselves into subjects that are directly connected to Kim Il Sung through

their identification with the “I” of each of the authors (Goody 1978: 159). While this mechanism has been in use for a remarkably long period of time—ever since 1962, the year of the publication of volume 1, and continuing to this day, the narrative has been consistent and constant, without much deviation, as the language with which stories are written—a skinny vocabulary of North Korean language—is limited in number of words, has remained largely unchanged since the publication of the first volume of *Inmindeul sogeseo*, and is shared by a diverse range of authors regardless of the age, gender, and educational background.

Then came the Great Leader’s own stories of himself, discussed in chapter 4, written by himself and speaking personally to each and every reader using authentic and honest language, which, ironically, is full of words and expressions drawing from the Chinese classics, words and expressions that had been long ago purged during the earlier linguistic reform. Still, when reading the Great Leader’s memoirs, readers are being talked to by the leader, called by him into subjecthood as the masters of North Korean society, with the self being ushered into the realm of consciousness of where it stands vis-à-vis the nation, the world, the leader, and above all, truth—or more precisely, North Korea’s native truth. The self that emerges here is one that is directly connected to the Great Leader and conscious of its place in society, critically aware of the reality it faces, and equipped with language that can speak the truth of this society and of itself.

According to Juche, the idea which is supposed to be the foundation of North Korean society, the people of North Korea are the masters of society, their world governed by *inminjugwon* or the people’s sovereignty, meaning that the power of the nation resides in the people. What we have seen in our examination of North Korea’s linguistic policies and standardization and heterogeneous texts each filling the discrete yet mutually connected domains of life attests to the effect that the linguistic subject of North Korea emerged as a constituent part of the sovereign power of the Great Leader. In other words, the sovereign subjects of North Korea emerge by way of being connected to the Great Leader. It is not a coincidence that the North Korean constitution was defined as the Kim Il Sung constitution, and then, after Kim Jong Il’s death in 2011, as the Kim Il Sung Kim Jong Il constitution. So, who, exactly, is the sovereign self in North Korea—the people or the Great Leader? Or is such a distinction useful at all?

According to Foucault, truth is culturally and historically generated, and there is no inherent reason why a subject must submit to the truth, whether

or not this takes place being dependent on the effectiveness of the tools used by a given regime of truth to link the manifestation of truth with the subject who internalizes and practices this truth (Foucault 2014: 100). It is, in the final analysis, because of the threat of death or, by the same token but on the other side, the guarantee of life that the subject submits to the truth. The relationship between the Great Leader and the people, however, is not one of straightforward subjugation of the people to the leader, or of the deception of the people as part of the dictatorial leader's grand scheme. It is true that, given that sovereign power ultimately assumes violence, that is to say, that it has the final say over one's life or death, insofar as one is subjected to that power, one also remains the object of control and regulation. Nevertheless, as can be seen in the longitudinal institution of the people's chronicle, which documents firsthand encounters with a warm and caring leader, while at the same time teaching, by showing each reader how to be the "I" in these stories, the reader-subject of the chronicle becomes part of the story, acquiring the important role of contributing to the validation of the truth that the story contains. The acquisition of such a role by the subject, and, by extension, his or her participation in the making of this story into truth, modifies the subject's position into that of an object, while rendering its subjection to sovereign power, say, pleasant, natural, and seemingly voluntary—as can be seen in page after page of the people's chronicle. The Kim Il Sung era thus culminated in an ingenuous mechanism whereby the regime of truth enabled individuals in North Korea to be simultaneously the subjects of society as well as the objects of sovereign power of the Great Leader. A helpful analogy may be our attitude toward the American dream: we Americans hope to think us to be part of the American dream, in that most Americans want to believe that, with hard work and some good luck, one day we may be able to achieve it, thereby reinforcing the truth of this dream. At the same time, we become the object of this ideal regardless of whether it truly exists or not—all it takes is that we believe it as truth. Furthermore, it *is* true that we occasionally do see some lucky person, having come from no wealthy background, becoming extremely rich, reinforcing the truth-value of this dream even though we may not be the actual achiever of it, hoping that the next time may be our turn. The same goes to North Korea: the readers of the chronicle are supposed to believe (and hope) that with a bit of luck and hard work, they, too, would have the fortune of meeting Kim Il Sung in person one day, thereby enjoying honor and joy, which, in turn, encouraging people to continue participating in the reinforcement of the Great Leader's truth.

The self that emerges from within this regime of truth carries a distinct identity as truth-teller or truth-bearer. This self is aware that it is part of the larger truth of North Korea, and is constantly in dialogue with the Great Leader through the affective language of miscellanea with the command of North Korea's skinny vocabulary. This self is both capable of and willing to examine and measure itself against the Great Leader's love and sagacity, his care and detailed concern. Such self-reflexive introspection accentuates the existence of the individual in North Korea—not in the sense of Western liberal individualism, for example, that presupposes the existence of clearly-drawn boundaries within which one functions through self-sufficiency and self-validation, but in the sense of one that aspires to move endlessly closer to the Great Leader in a journey to become one with Him out of self-awareness of his or her role in not only understanding, but also making, North Korea's truth.

A doctrine that reminds us of this mechanism of self in North Korea is Neoplatonism. Broadly referring to the strand of thought explored and discussed by scholars such as Plotinus (AD 204/5–270), Porphyry (AD 233–309), and Iamblichus (AD 245–325), and roughly continuing through the sixth century AD, Neoplatonism refers to a set of ideas, rather than an established central doctrine. It exerted an influence on many later bodies of thought and beliefs, including early Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. It will not be necessary in the context of this study to include a discussion of Neoplatonism *per se*, while it will be helpful to mention certain concepts associated with this school of thought, since this will further illuminate our discussion here. One such concept that is relevant to our exploration of the self in North Korea involves a form of monism, whereby it was believed that the world, and all the reality thereof, was derived from a single principle, the One. Taken by Plotinus as the first principle of all reality, the One, consisting of an unknowable, yet simple substance, and taking the form of unsurpassed beauty, is at once the source and the end, the origin and the purpose, the cause and the effect, of all existence, since it is designated to fill the “role of the ultimate cause and explanation of everything else” and “cannot itself have an external cause” as it is a cause for itself, “in Latin, *causa sui*” (Remes 2008: 49). Neoplatonists believed that the attainment of human happiness and perfection was possible in this world through the exercise of introspective contemplation, which would enable the intellect, the soul, and other lesser beings that had emanated from the One to return to the One from which they had originated. As far as this logic goes, one can recognize the topological resemblance in the placement

of the self (the intellect, the soul and other lesser beings) and the Great Leader (the One).

The purpose of human life in North Korea also resembles that of Neoplatonism: according to Neoplatonic teleology, the purpose of life is “to become like god” (Remes 2008: 180), hence, its emphasis on spiritual development and self-realization through contemplation and introspection, and its exploration of ways to salvage and elevate the lower hypostases that emanated from the One (Wallis 1972: 47–61). Such a purpose is echoed in North Korea’s linguistic-ideological practice of eliminating unwanted words, instating state-sanctioned vocabulary and usage, and reproducing them through stories of “I” and the Great Leader: all of these are part of making the population like the Great Leader, endlessly approximating the former to the latter and propelling the former to bring itself higher and closer to the latter. As such, truth does not exist on its own or, say, objectively in North Korea: rather, as in the case of the doctrine of Neoplatonism, it exists in, of, and toward the One, which is the Great Leader Himself in the case of North Korea. And the road to that truth is based on contemplative cultivation of the “I” or, more precisely, the relationship between the “I” and the One, the Great Leader.

This leads us to closely compare North Korean subjecthood with individualism in the early Christian ascetic movement that Foucault discusses. Individualism here is not so much about thinking about the self as an indivisible and singular being, uninterrupted by external elements and connections. Rather, this individualism consists of an ethos of thinking about oneself in relation to *one’s own self*. According to Foucault:

[T]here are societies or groups in which the relation to self is intensified and developed without this resulting, as if by necessity, in a strengthening of the values of individualism or of private life. The Christian ascetic movement of the first centuries presented itself as an extremely strong accentuation of the relations of oneself to oneself, but in the form of a disqualification of the values of private life; and when it took the form of cenobitism, it manifested an explicit rejection of any individualism that might be inherent in the practice of reclusion.

[. . .] I am referring to the development of what might be called a ‘cultivation of the self,’ wherein relations of oneself to oneself were intensified and valorized. (Foucault 1986: 43)

In North Korea, too, intensified relations of oneself to oneself render it an imperative to be able to evaluate oneself (in the eyes of one's own self) *in terms of* how one is related to the Great Leader. For one is the ultimate judge of oneself with regard to one's faith in the Great Leader. Here, the intensification of the subject posits the subject as its own object of examination, thereby eroding the subject-object distinction. One requires a language to conduct such a practice and the language of North Korea, the language that tells of its native truth, is well equipped to do this by simultaneously positioning the people as the master of society while being a constitutive part of the Great Leader's sovereignty, ultimately subjected to Kim Il Sung, the sovereign.

Thus, one may determine that the self in North Korea is formed in close connection to and in an ongoing dialogue with truth, the truth of the Great Leader. The self here is not a dupe or a passive element in society: it needs to be able to participate in the making of North Korea's truth, as well as validate this truth itself. The role of the self in North Korean society as an active agent of verification or, indeed, veridiction of North Korea's truth is imperative for this society's sociopolitical and economic self-reproduction, thereby allowing the society to continue to exist. This is a very different relationship between population and truth from that seen in the former socialist states, for instance. According to Slavoj Žižek:

[In the former Yugoslavia] the official media deplored people's indifference, escape into privacy, and so on—however, it was precisely such an event, a truly self-managed articulation and organization of people's interests, which the regime feared most [. . . A] cynical attitude toward the official ideology was what the regime wanted—the greatest catastrophe for the regime would have been for its own ideology to be taken seriously, and realized by its subjects. (Žižek 2011: 91–92)

The passage above points to the situation far removed from the North Korean approach to its official ideology. There is something very sincere about the North Korean regime's efforts at linguistic standardization, not simply in the sense that it routinely sought feedback from the masses in the form of reader's letters to journal editors, as seen in chapter 2 above, but, more prominently, because there is a fundamental acknowledgement in the language of the authorities that it is these very masses who are the producers of North Korea's truth. Such an acknowledgement lies behind the publication of guidelines

concerning correct linguistic usage, as well as the continued rolling-out of stories written by the masses recounting their direct meetings with the Great Leader, as seen in chapter 3. One can only read such actions as evidence that the state has a serious stake in converting the North Korean population into true believers, so to speak. As such, North Korean society under Kim Il Sung more closely resembles the Azande society studied by Evans-Pritchard than the Yugoslavia depicted by Žižek, in that Zande could be skeptical about particular practitioners, but on the whole believed in the institution of witchcraft (Evans-Pritchard 1968; Žižek 2011; see also Mair 1965: 245ff.).

The reading-speaking subject in North Korea, following the above, is therefore none other than the product of state power—as seen in Foucault’s notion of power, which is not simply oppressive, but, more importantly, productive. The North Korean self—insofar as we may regard the Japanese self or the Western self as objects for analysis—is as much a product of the state ideological apparatuses as an active responder and contributor to regimentation, thereby participating, quite substantially, in the making of truth—the regime of truth—itsself (e.g., Foucault 1995). By learning to speak and write the Korean language of the North Korean state, by reading the people’s chronicle and learning how to depict, understand, and reproduce the Great Leader’s detailed affect, and by reading Kim Il Sung’s words as those of authenticity, the self in North Korea operates as part of North Korea’s truth, thus becoming an important part of North Korean state apparatuses and state power.

At the same time, considering that the self in North Korea is the location of the narrating, speaking, and writing subject, a subject that possesses mastery of North Korea’s state discourse, another possibility emerges. According to Foucault:

Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it . . . We must make allowances for the complex and unstable process whereby a discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart. (Foucault 1998: 100–101)

As stated, this book has dealt with the Kim Il Sung era in North Korea. Today, a quarter of a century since the death of Kim Il Sung, we may be witnessing the emergence of a different kind of linguistic field. More precisely, it

may not be impossible to imagine that North Korea, as is the case for any other society or community, has diverse linguistic practices, a kind of heteroglossia, where there may exist not only state-sanctioned linguistic norms requiring perfect mastery, including the ability to skillfully reproduce perfunctory statements on appropriate occasions at the appropriate timing, but also more spontaneous linguistic practices that state authorities do not and are not able to account for. We have already seen this in the inability of the North Korean state to make a consistent purge of words of Chinese origin and make the Korean language purely “pure.” Seen from another angle, it is precisely such inconsistency and instability that allude to the potential of social transformation in North Korea. Given North Korea’s current exposure, albeit limited, to the Chinese market and to South Korean cultural products, it may not be hard to imagine the Korean language in North Korea becoming increasingly “foreignized,” so to speak, in the future, reversing the course of state linguistic reforms and undermining their effects from within, a process which, as we saw, was spearheaded by Kim Il Sung’s own heavy use of expressions derived from the Chinese classics in his memoirs. Given, also, North Korea’s entrepreneurial engagements with the global market, whether in the form of its Korean restaurant operations overseas, its exportation of a slave-like labor force, the transactional relations it has developed in special economic zones, or its cooperation in the arrangement of intermittent family reunions across the DMZ, it may not be that difficult at all to consider that North Korea’s exposure to the world beyond its linguistic domains has considerably widened and multiplied (e.g., Park 2015; Hastings 2016). I do not mean by this a mere infiltration of some outside words into the North Korean linguistic circulation; it is how such phenomena may affect the way truth is told in North Korea that I am curious about. Above all, the clue may reside in the North Korean language itself. A few years ago, a number of defectors confirmed to me that the ritualistic referential formula reserved for the Great Leader’s lineage is often ironically uttered as a curse on the one hand and as a joke on the other, in a private conversation. The rigidly set expressions and super-honorifics that are applied to the Great Leader are acquiring a new function that did not exist before. As such, the inversion of the meaning itself confers a new meaning to what used to be a perfunctory and performative statement, thereby potentially opening up an entirely new use of the language or the new language itself, which may well open the route to the new truth. Thus, we are faced with the task of going beyond the Kim Il Sung era inquiry into the self and truth in North Korea. At the same time, it is important to recognize that the Kim Il Sung era is a

key to future understanding, as Bruce Cumings has stated: “What is entirely predictable, in my view, is that North Koreans will welcome the only handsome face of authority that all but the most elderly Koreans have known, the founder of the country, the ‘fatherly leader,’ now reincarnated [in Kim Jong Un]” (Cumings 2013: 89). The point is not so much that Kim Jong Un appears to be making efforts to liken his looks to those of his grandfather. Rather, it is to say that if the One is the origin of all, in some ways, it does not matter which Kim occupies the position—what matters is the tools and institutions that turn each and every North Korean into a subject that contributes to the continuous making of truth, making something that did not exist exist.

Final Note: The Anthropology of North Korea

In order to locate the self in North Korea, this book has adopted a strategy that uses published texts as ethnographic data and incorporates an anthropological approach to ethnography through immersion in field data in the search for the cultural core of North Korea which enables that nation’s truth to continue to exist. Rather than looking at North Korea by relying on authoritative categories such as that of the dominant ideology or doctrinal assumptions of the existence of brainwashing, for example, I have taken a detour, presenting native data, albeit selectively, that pertains to linguistic and textual institutions and practices. Just as an ethnographer would delve into a native culture by living in the community, getting to know the people and culture, I have tried to learn the native culture of linguistic normalization that exists inside the books and archives. Just as an ethnographer would attempt to grasp the holistic understanding of cosmology of the natives, or rather than trying to document certain words uttered by the natives out of context simply because such utterances might align with the ethnographer’s own research objectives, I have tried to cast a broad net in order to consider the complexity of North Korean linguistic life. As such, just as an ethnographer would accept what the natives tell her to be the truth as truth, I have followed what the North Korean language tells us to be the truth as truth.

Moreover, as was discussed in chapter 4, my ethnographic reading of North Korean texts is that of a native anthropologist. As I have discussed elsewhere, the native anthropologist carries a specific burden of dual identification as an insider and outsider (Ryang 2000; Ryang 2005). As Mariza Peirano wrote two decades ago, even when an anthropologist works on his or her “home” culture: “[H]ome” will, as always, incorporate many meanings,

and anthropology will maintain, in its paradigmatic assumption, a sociogenetic aim toward an appreciation for, and an understanding of, difference” (Peirano 1998: 105).

In terms of ethnographic data, this volume has passed through four discrete corpuses: literature and literary criticism, linguistic guidebooks and manuals, a people’s chronicle (first person narratives by citizens), and autobiography (the first-person narrative of the Great Leader). Reading North Korean texts as a native anthropologist, I have encountered oddities that dislocated the biases and preconceptions that I had as a native—as seen in the way the native reader would experience surprise when reading Kim Il Sung’s memoirs, as noted in chapter 4. The difference the process of North Korean linguistic normalization presented was far greater and far more “exotic” than I, a cultural native, had anticipated. Its inconsistency, its imperfection, and, more acutely, its lack of thoroughness and forcefulness on the one hand, and its openness toward gathering data and feedback from the masses on the other struck me as surprising, if not exotic. At times, therefore, I found myself asking how native I really was.

As such, writing this book has doubled as a journey in which to think about my own subjecthood and self. Reading North Korean texts as a native anthropologist and writing about North Korea as an American academic researcher for Anglophone readers places me squarely in in-between territory, both as a scholar and as an informant, the borderlands of which make up a space of uncertainty that defies analytical or interpretive language. It is from within these borderlands that I have written this book, navigating the territory of inside and outside, sometimes as a researcher and sometimes as a witness, sometimes as a documenter and sometimes as a critic. Still, the challenge remains the same: that is, to attempt to capture the aspects, ethos, and mood of North Korea and its culture through language that reflects as well as constitutes its native truth.

How do we begin to understand North Korea? This has been and continues to be a challenging question for many, including Bruce Cumings, one of the most influential and admired researchers on North Korea, who once stated: “We have proved over seven decades that we do not understand North Korea, cannot predict its behavior, and cannot do anything about it—however much we would like to. We can do something about our prejudices” (Cumings 2013: 89). As Cumings’s final sentence indicates, our prejudices have hindered our understanding of North Korea perhaps far more seriously than we would

like to admit. But our prejudices hinder our understanding of other things too—whether it be an oppositional ideology or policy difference, including gun violence vs. the Second Amendment, healthcare as basic rights vs. anti-abortion activism, border control vs. immigration, criminalization of the poor and people of color vs. being tough on crime, the environmental crisis vs. corporate greed, and so on.

The frightening, yet truly basic, reality is that we, too, have prejudices, or develop them, unless we remain self-critical and self-aware. As such, engaging in critical introspection, contemplation, and self-reflection, just as the North Koreans are supposed to do when thinking about themselves in close proximity to the Great Leader, becomes as much a task for us as for everyone else, including North Koreans. One point to remember, however, is that in so doing, we rely on instruments that are at our disposal; that is to say, the language that one has acquired is the one that one will use in critically reflecting upon one's environment—just like North Korea's linguistic subject would rely on the language that is at his disposal in order to gather the understanding of the world and his own subjectivity. Furthermore, our effort to understand North Korea would first need to take place within or against its own historical and cultural context, just as we would have a better command of our own culture once we try to grasp its contextual background. In Marilyn Strathern's words:

Comparative procedure, investigating variables across societies, normally de-contextualizes local constructs in order to work with context-bound analytic ones. The study of symbolic systems presents a different problematic. If theoretical interest becomes directed to the manner in which ideas, images, and values are locally contextualized, de-contextualization will not work. Analytic generalities must be acquired by other means. The task is not to imagine one can replace exogenous concepts by indigenous counterparts; rather the task is to convey the complexity of the indigenous concepts in reference to the particular context in which they are produced. (Strathern 1990: 8)

Seen in this way, the anthropology of North Korea is as much about us as it is about North Korea. For, just as our self-analysis may be context-bound within our own culture, North Korea's cultural constructs are uniquely contextualized in their own culture. As such, simply replacing our cultural

constructs with theirs does not work. In other words, North Korea's native truth is as truthful as our own native truth in terms of possibilities as well as limitations—both help us understand our world, both empower us at times, and both help us fight injustice, albeit within the parameters of our own cultural constructs, while both distort things, both hide things, and both serve certain interests better than others, whether it be God, the wealthy, or indeed, the Great Leader.

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About the Author

Sonia Ryang is the T. T. and W. F. Chao Professor of Asian Studies in the Department of Transnational Asian Studies at Rice University. Her books include *North Koreans in Japan: Language, Ideology, and Identity* (Westview Press, 1997); *Japan and National Anthropology: A Critique* (Routledge, 2004); *Love in Modern Japan: Its Estrangement from Self, Sex, and Society* (Routledge, 2006); *Writing Selves in Diaspora* (Lexington Books, 2009); *Reading North Korea: An Ethnological Inquiry* (Harvard University Press, 2012); and *Eating Korean in America: Gastronomic Ethnography of Authenticity* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2015).

