

Evaluation of

The Evolution of the Myth of Kim Il Sung as Reflected in North Korean Film 1949-1994 By Roman Husarski for Jagiellonian University

I have read the dissertation by Roman Husarski and learned a lot from it.

I was impressed, first of all, by the number of DPRK films Husarski was able to watch and analyze for this dissertation. It is not easy to gain access to DPRK films, especially older ones. Husarko was able to watch earlier versions of movies which were later modified to accord with changes in the political climate. Everyone who studies the DPRK will benefit from Husarko's detective work in tracking down those old films and noting the changes in those films over time.

I was also impressed with Husarski's skillful analysis of those films to trace changes in how Kim Il Sung has been portrayed. That analysis is clearly the result of very careful observation of those films themselves combined with sophisticated knowledge of the ideological currents which have flowed through the DPRK since 1948.

In dealing with ideological currents, I would have preferred to have seen Husarski pay more attention to the possible role *chuch'e* may have played in the ideological orientation of those films, but I can understand why that was not done. After all, *chuch'e* is a rather empty philosophy, one that does not have much concrete content which could have been identified in those films. Nevertheless, I would have like to have learned something about the "ornamental function (p. 9) *chuch'e* played in those films and why, if *chuch'e* preaches the need for everyone to unite single-minded around a leader (which it does), Husarski doesn't think *chuch'e* has much to do with the way Kim Il Sung has been portrayed in DPRK films.

Speaking of *chuch'e*, I am curious why the author consistently spells it as *chuch'e* rather than using the DPRK preferred spelling of *Juche*. *Chuch'e* is the correct romanization according to the McCune-Reischauer system which the author wisely uses, but, since that term refers to a North Korean ideology, it is usually spelled *Juche* in English-language material on North Korea.

In chapter one, Husarski discusses religion and myth but doesn't really tell us which definition of religion applies in discussing the DPRK. Husarski notes that "Researchers who argue for presenting North Korea as a religion seem to

fail to notice that the ritualization, myth, sacredness, or glorification of historical figures do not have to take place within the category of religion only but are extremely common.” (p. 26) I would argue that depends on how you define religion. If you use a broad definition of religion, as many scholars of religion do, those features give an air of religiosity to what otherwise might be considered secular philosophies or ideologies. I am not asking that Husarski use a broader definition of religion, however. I am simply stating that the argument made here would be more clear if Husarki provided a clear statement of the concept of religion applied in this dissertation. The same goes for the discussion of myths. I would have liked to have seen a clear definition of myths, particularly of the difference between secular and religious myths. And I would have liked to have seen a better discussion of the relationship between religion and myths. That would help readers understand why Husarksi says chuch’e is not a religion but devotes a lot of attention to DPRK myths, nonetheless. If DRPK make Kim Il Sung a sacred being, how is that not religious? Husarski is not clear enough on that point.

Also, chapter one shifts rather suddenly from religion and myth to socialist realism. It would make it easier for the reader if the socialist realism section is made a separate chapter, since it does not fit well with the discussion on myth and religion.

Chapter 2 tries to distinguish Japanese colonial influence from Soviet influence. That is a good approach, and Husarski presents a persuasive argument that Japanese influence has not been given the credit it should be given. However, the argument of this chapter would be easier for a reader to follow if this chapter had a **short conclusion summing up instances of Soviet**

influence on early DPRK filmmaking together with examples of the DPRK not following Soviet examples.

Chapter 3 is an important chapter, since this is where Husarski focuses on Kim Jong Il and how he “sacralized” the image of Kim Il Sung. However, I would like to have seen more on how the Ten Principles are reflected in films made under Kim Jong Il’s guidance, or, if they are not important in film, why not. Moreover, we get a brief mention of Kim Jong Il’s seed theory of art but are told “there is no real difference in the way cinema operated before and after “seed theory.” The difference is in the *content* of art, which during Kim Jong Il’s control in PAD made the leader a central idea.” (p. 108) Maybe it is the difference in content which reflects the influence of the seed theory. That is hard for a reader to determine, since we are not given many specific elements of that seed theory. Like Chuch’e philosophy, seed theory may be vacuous but that doesn’t mean people in the DPRK don’t feel compelled to take it into account in producing works of art.

I also would like to make a minor point about chapter 3. Husarski dismisses too quickly any suggestion of Confucian influence on the DPRK. There are many signs of a Confucian legacy in the DPRK, particularly in the patriarchy, in the emphasis on loyalty to the leader of the “family” (meaning the leader of the national family), and in the insistence that morality is defined as agreement with the leader and that therefore those who disagree are immoral. It is true that we can see similar characteristics in authoritarian regimes around the world which do not have a Confucian historical background, but the way those characteristics are manifest in the DPRK show some elements of continuity with Chosŏn which should not be ignored. Moreover, the superhuman military skill attributed to Kim Il Sung remind me of the superhuman military skill attributed to Yi Sŏnggye, the

founder of Chosŏn. (See the Song of Flying Dragons for a poetic articulation of the myth of Yi Sŏnggye.)

Chapter 4 is the most puzzling for me. For example, I am puzzled by the statement on p. 141 that saying Chuch'e is the religion of North Korea is wrong, though Husarski shows that there are religious aspects to the way Kim Il Sung is portrayed, and the way he is portrayed is a core element of Chuch'e. Moreover, Husarski talks about rituals and myths in connection with the movies discussed in this dissertation. Can't those be seen as religious and as part of Chuch'e? In addition, the author says that DPRK films provide a sacred story. Is the author arguing that DPRK cinema is not influenced at all by Chuch'e? If that is an argument the author wants to make, it should be made explicit. The author also needs to make explicit why sacralization is not religious.

If I were to be in Poland to discuss this dissertation in person with Husarski, there are a few questions I would like to ask, drawing on the concerns expressed above:

How do religion and myth relate to one another? (Do all myths about more-than-human phenomena qualify as religious?)

Why does Husarski say that Chuch'e is not the state religion of the DPRK? Does the author think that the increasing sacralization of Kim Il Sung has nothing to do with Chuch'e? And what is the author's definition of religion and how does it exclude Chuch'e?

Could Husarski provide a short summary in which Japanese colonial, Soviet, and local influences on DPRK cinema are contrasted?

Could Husarski say more about how Kim Jong Il's "seed" theory, as vacuous as it may be, was applied to cinema in the DPRK?

What was impact of Shin Sang-ok on DRPK cinema? Did any of the techniques he introduced to the DPRK continue to be used after he re-defected?

Even though I mention above a few things I would like to see changed in this dissertation and a few questions I would like to have answered, those changes and answers can wait until this is revised for publication. As it stands now, it is a fine dissertation. My overall evaluation is that this dissertation makes an original

contribution to a better understanding of how the Kim family has managed to stay in power over three generations while also adding substantially to our knowledge of the film industry in the DPRK. It will be read and appreciated both by scholars of Korea and by scholars of cinema.

I find the dissertation meets the standards expected of a doctoral dissertation because it is well-documented and well-argued. Though there are a few places in which I wish the author had made the argument easier to follow, nonetheless I conclude that, once the many typing errors are cleared up, it should be accepted as easily meeting the standards required for awarding a doctoral degree. I know it would be accepted as meeting the standards required for a doctoral degree at my university.

There were, however, some typing mistakes that need to be cleared up. There were also a few factual claims that I believe should be worded a little more carefully. Here is a list of changes which should be made before this dissertation is considered finished:

p. 6 typing mistake: industry was from the **beginning** free from Soviet influences

p. 8 which **manifests** itself

p. 11 South Korean and Western **academics**

**p. 11** on an ancient Chinese belief which puts the Korean Peninsula at the center of the world —

I have looked at a pdf file of the 2nd edition of Cumings' Korea's Place in the Sun, and I see there that he claims that Koreans (not ancient Chinese) thought Korea was the centre of the world. As evidence of that, he cites a 15th century map, Kangnido. I know that map well. China is the centre. Korea is off to the side, larger than its actual relative size but in no way in the centre and still much smaller than China. So you should drop this statement.

p. 17 **misses** some important movie examples,

p. 22. The quotation from Brad Martin's book is what Martin says, but it is most likely a fabrication by Kim Il Sung, since Kim Hyōng-jik was a Christian.

p. 23 he, among others, **points** out that

25 f leaders' pictures and monuments, **chuch'e** study halls, mythical

- p. 29. often described in ~~a~~ language associated with dirt. Delete a
- p. 29 **Mauss**, makes myth a powerful tool in A comma is needed after Mauss.
- p. 31 a significant amount of fear in its **inhabitants**
- p. 33. Scholars (Korea University), criticized my Need comma after Korea University)
- p. 34 **drink** perfume
- p. 34 Santa Claus **have**
- p. 35 the socialist realism method ~~of~~ governing the art Delete of.
- p. 36. Maskym Gorky is spelled Maxim Gorky on p. 37. Isn't the latter the usual spelling? His name is also spelled Maxym on p. 38.
- p. 37. ~~As~~ Zhdanov Delete As
- p. 39 place **of group** to stage tragedies should be place for groups to stage tragedies
- p. 40 emotions. **it also**
- p. 43 's most canonical literature of the 1940s, and **1850s**. Should be 1950s.
- p. 43. one of the few people in the industry who **had** engaged in real left-wing activities
- p. 44 Mōndong i ttūl ttae, 1927, 1927 appears to be a typing mistake.
- p. 47. Unimaginable things not long before, should be Thing unimaginable not long before
- p.49 **Koreans** learned to **perceive** themselves. Delete comma after learned, and drop d from perceived
- p. 51. mere tools for **achieving** Marxist objectives.
- p. 53 **film**, was executed by Need comma after film commonly **questioned** by scholars

Staline should be Stalin

p. 54 **Grate** Leader should be Great Leader

p. 55 Kim **Jong II**'s entrance to .

chapter II

p. 58 **Before**, the 1970s Delete comma before the 1970s

p. 60 “because as a Manchurian fighter, he was little known in the Korea, “

Two corrections “he was little known in Korea’ (delete the). But, more important, my understanding is that Kim Il Sung was well-known in Korea before 1945. His attack on a Japanese police station in Poch’ŏnbo made him famous on the peninsula. Koreans were surprised how young he was when he appeared in Korea in Oct. 1945, but they had known of his existence long before.

p. 62 in the viewer's **a** similar reaction Delete a before similar

p. 64 melodrama about an **for him** ex-convict delete for him

p. 65 *Mask Dance* is popularly **belief** belief should be believed

p. 66 Is it Father Bang or Father Bong? I believe it should be Bang And, if he is Protestant, it should be Rev. Bang. Fr. is reserved for Catholic and Anglican clerics.  
집없는 천사 should be romanized as Chibŏmnŭn

p. 67 is used in **the** film insert the

p. 69 Then, **among** Ch'oe Sŭng-hŭi, among should be “along with”

p. 70 **inherited** identity.

p. 71. Is it really landlords 'bandits (*chijunom*), which means the bandits of the landlords or should it be landlord-bandits?

p. 71 it is **only**, they who fight delete comma after only.

p. 72 future biographer of **the fighter** replace a with the

**Furmanov's** novel was written after **Chapayev's** death

p. 76 Kim Il Sung, a **representant** Should this be representative?

p. 77 "January 1 of the seventeenth year since Korea was first founded" That is what your source says, but that source must have a typing error. It first says Korea was founded 4240 years earlier, but then says Korea was founded 17 years earlier. That makes no sense! You should drop that sentence, replacing it with ..., unless you can find the original and correct the translation. I wonder if the original source says the tenth year since the Korean Empire was first founded? Or if it says the five thousandth year since Korea was first founded?

p. 80 **Ryong-yŏn's** illiteracy. She could not understand **Ryong-su's** letter Both Ryong-yŏn and Ryong-su need apostrophes. The same thing is true of **Kim Il Sung's** picture

p. 81 I am unfamiliar with the word mysticalization. I wonder if it should be mythicization or mythologization??

p. 83 "Some are still behind the bars in North Korea". That is an inaccurate statement. I don't believe they are "behind bars." That implies they are in prison. It would be accurate to say that Some are still held against their will in North Korea.

p. 84 caught and **tortured. As** he Should be tortured, as he chooses....

p. 94 **the Great Leader's speeches in mind**

p. 95 ( **the leader's** birthplace)

p. 96 **Kim Il Sung's clashed** should be Kim Il Sung clashed

. That would make it easier for readers to understand the author's argument.

### Chapter 3

p.. 101 Without uncle should be "without his uncle around"

he was **demoted** to deputy chair. demoted instead of denounced

Kim Jong Il took **his** position in PAD add his



p. 102. which made them longer ~~lengthened them~~

p. 105 What is the Tenth Muse? I don't understand this reference

p. 106. and **was** the author of a memoir. Add was

p. 107 director is not **mentioned**

p. 108. film **treatise**. not film treaty.

p. 110. **He was** not proposing any film method.

ordering the **kidnapping**

Chapter 4

p. 114 Han **Söl-ya's** rehabilitation add an apostrophe after Söl-ya

p. 117 **Kim's** majesty add an apostrophe after Kim

p. 118 Sök-ch'un's gun add an apostrophe after Sök-ch'un

p. 120. Shouldn't "mountain speech" be "mountain speaking"?

p. 121 Two comments; Mt. Paektu came to be revered in late Chosŏn as the font of the animating ki which flowed from Mt. Paetku down into the peninsula. That is clear in Chosŏn maps. It became a place for spiritual perfection because it was the best place to benefit from ki.

As for San-sin, there are many san-sin, one for every mountain. There is a Mt. Paektu san-shin, of course, but there are many more san-shin on other mountains. I disagree with Grayson that there is one San-sin (I notice he provides no textual evidence for his claim of san-sin monotheism!) but I agree with him that there are many female mountain gods. I disagree with Grayson on San-sin because I have never heard anyone in Korea equate their local mountain god, who resides in a shrine behind a local Buddhist temple, with the san-sin of Mt. Paektu.

Also, I'm not sure what "to the stem" means..

p. 126 of a **Great** Leader

*Love that Blossomed the Future* Italicize

Pak Hak's last film. (add an apostrophe after Hak)

130 relationship to the Great Leader **is** based on a sacred love for the ideal

134. of the narrative: a cult use a semi-colon instead of a period.

135 descriptions of **reactions**

137 place of **descendant**. replace descendant with "the descent"

~~so~~ Kim Il Sung and Kim delete so

p. 139 missed that **movies** like

from the ~~beginning~~ from the beginning

early DPRK ~~mention~~ pictures, early DPRK motion pictures

p. 140 a **Great** Leader, not Grate Leader, .

p 143. he will fall **into** a category of a fictional one

Great Leader's ch'ukchiböp need an apostrophe after Great Leader

it is hard to imagine a widespread doubt **of** it of instead of in

p. 149 Duncan, J. (1998). The Korean Adoption of Neo-Confucianism. Confucianism and the Family: ~~A Study of Indo-Tibetan Scholasticism~~, 75. This chapter is in a book which has nothing to do with Indo-Tibetan Scholasticism. Delete that reference. This citation should say State University of New York Press. And Duncan's chapter is 75-90.

p. 150 Eungjun Min, Jinsook Joo, & Han Kwak. (2003). . Praeger is the publisher.

Gabroussenko, T. (2010). *Soldiers on the Cultural Front: Developments in the Early History of North Korean Literature and Literary Policy* is from University of Hawai'i Press.

p. 153 Kim, C. B. (2006). *Preaching the Apocalypse in Colonial Korea The Protestant Millennialism of Kil Sŏn-ju. Christianity in Korea*, This was published by the University of Hawai'i Press.

- p. 154 Kim, J. (1992). On Juche Literature. Where did this appear?
- p. 154 Urban Social Work (Not Social Work)
- p. 157 Lim, J. (2012). North Korea's Hereditary Succession: Comparing Two Key Transitions in the DPRK. 52(3), 550–570. In *Asian Survey*
- Logie, A. (2015). *The Coalescence of Dangun: towards a reappraisal of Korean mythography*. 1–10. Where did this appear?
- p. 158 Muhi, B. G. (2018). *N. K. A. P. R. S. S. (2018). North Korean Art: Paradoxical Realism*. published by Seoul Selection.
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- Myers, B. R. (2010). *The Cleanest Race. How North Koreans See Themselves - And Why It Matters*. Published by Melville House
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- p. 159 Petrov, L. (2015). *Filmmaking on the Edge: Shin Sang-Ok and Choi Eun-Hee in North Korea (1978–1986)*. In *Stars in World Cinema Film Icons and Star Systems across Cultures* Published by I.B. Tauris
- Pudovkin, V. (2006). The Film Script (The Theory of the Script). In *Selected essays* (pp. 32–64). Where was this published?
- p. 160 Savada, A. (1993). North Korea: A Country Study. List as published by US Library of Congress
- p. 161 Ch'unhyangjŏn: Should be Ch'unhyangjŏn

Don Baker. University of British Columbia January 8, 2023

