

The Colored ‘Suryŏng’ Statues of the Kim Jong Un Regime*

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Abstract

Kim Jong Un has commissioned new colored statues of Kim Il Sung featuring a smiling face. The new sculptures take two forms. While both statues feature Kim Il Sung, they each represent Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Un. Kim Jong Un does not project himself as an authoritative leader but rather a ‘popular fantasy’ figure. He is thereby instilling a romantic fantasy in the people that it will be possible to build a ‘highly civilized and prosperous socialist state’ when they follow him. Rather than merely displaying an authoritarian leader who retains power by suppressing people’s desires, the statues convey that loyalty to the leader leads to the fulfillment of individual desires. I find that North Korea uses the image of Kim Il Sung in colored statues to this end. The North thereby uses the statues as propaganda to instigate the idea that a highly civilized socialist state exists within the people, not outside. Through this analysis of imagery, one can discern an elaborate strategy working within Kim Jong Un’s politics and operating through the North’s cultural policy.

김정은은 웃는 모습을 한 색조각상으로 김일성 동상을 새로 만들고 있다. 이 새로운 김일성 조각상들은 2종류로 제작되고 있다. 이는 2종류의 김일성동상임과 동시에, 각 조각은 김일성과 김정은을 표상하고 있다. 김정은은 권위적인 이미지가 아닌 통속적 환상성을 드러내는 이미지로 자신을 이미지화하고 있다. 따라서 이 지도자를 따르면, 사회주의 문명대국의 건설이 가능할 것이라는 낭만적 환상을 인민들에게 불어넣고 있다. 욕망의 제거로 유지되는 권위적인 리더의 모습이 아니라, 지도자에게 충성을 다하면 개인의 욕망도 구현된다는 메시지를 만들어 내고 있다. 이를 위해서 김일성 색조각상의 이미지를 만들어 활용하고 있다고 판단된다. 이를 통해 사회주의 문명국은 외부에 있는 것이 아니라 우리 내부에 있다는 것을 인민들에게 선전 선동화 해내려고 하고 있는 것이다. 이러한 이미지 분석을 통해, 김정은식 정치가 치밀한 전략을 통해 문화정책으로 동작되고 있음을 확인할 수 있었다.

Key words

Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Un, North Korea, Colored Sculpture, *Suryŏng* (Leader)

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Introduction

For North Korea, Pyongyang in 2013 was a space in time when Kim Jong Un actively utilized architecture and other material constructions to showcase his proposal to the people. He wanted to display his ability to build a ‘highly civilized and prosperous socialist state’ through artifacts with impressive physical properties. On April 6th, 2012, Kim Jong Un gave a talk to leading officials of the Central Committee of the Workers’ Party of Korea (WPK). Through a speech titled “Let Us Hold Great Comrade Kim Jong Il in High Esteem as General Secretary of Our Party Forever and Successfully Accomplish the Revolutionary Cause of Juche,” Kim unveiled his plan for building a highly civilized socialist state. By 2013, North Korea further elevated constructing a highly civilized socialist state as the ‘task and ideas of the Marshal Comrade.’ On July 14th, 2013, the *Rodong Sinmun* defined a highly civilized socialist state as “a country where the socialist culture is fully-blossomed and developed, and where the people possessing high creativity and culture create and enjoy the best civilization at the highest level.” Moreover, it declared the task to build a highly civilized socialist state as “the most important task that comes to the fore as presented by the Marshal Comrade in his historical New Year Speech,” and “an idea that reflects the realistic needs of the rapidly developing century.” Kim Jong Un, being the young leader that emerged to lead North Korea in the new century upon the passing of Kim Jong Il, responded to the people’s needs by presenting a highly civilized socialist state as a concrete development and management objective.¹

North Korea is going beyond constructing residential spaces, such as Mirae Scientists Street (Figure 1), to create recreational areas, such as water parks. North Korea is deploying a strategy to manifest the goal of a highly civilized socialist state, that it is not just a slogan, but something already materialized in the Kim Jong Un era. North Korea has continued to update and expand cultural facilities after Kim Jong Un assumed leadership. To this extent, North Korean propaganda mentions that the Kim Jong Un regime has begun with the renovation of amusement parks. Newly built leisure facilities for the public include Kaeson Youth Park,



Figure 1. Mirae Scientists Street, Pyongyang. Development began in 2010, and the opening was on November 3rd, 2015.

Ryugyongwon People's Theatre, Rungna Dolphinarium, Rungna People's Pleasure Ground, Masikryong Ski Resort, Munsu Water Park, Mirim Riding Club, Sohung Children's Park, People's Outdoor Ice Skating Rink, Changgwangwon Health Complex, Tongil Street Fitness Center, and Pyongyang Folk Park. I find that the construction of leisure facilities for the people has yielded two results. First, the construction period was relatively short, but the people immediately felt the impact. Second, the facilities immediately attracted people's attention and directed the people toward a new direction, different from the past slogan, which called for the people to engage in sincere and faithful labor for the state and the leader. These buildings and facilities are packaged with the term a 'highly civilized socialist state' and were promoted as 'practice for educating and cultivating emotions of the people.' The North has clarified the character of the young leader Kim Jong Un to be different from the previous leader by emphasizing 'leisure life' rather than 'labor' as the most important policy goal. The reason is that Kim Jong Un is in a different position from his predecessor, who was mired in food shortages and had to address this as a top priority. Thus, the North suggests an optimistic future of not starving anymore. Moreover, North Korea now presents an ideal-type societal image at a new level, where people can lead a humane life, enjoying various cultural activities and education. Pyongyang has projected such an image onto visible structures, such as water parks and leisure facilities, before the eyes of its people. A way to explain this direction of strategic focus for North Korea is the regime's hope to win support by bringing direct experiences to the people.



Figure 2. *Standing Statue of Kim Il Sung in Natural Color*. July 2013. The Main Hall of the Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Museum



(Left) Figure 3. *Standing Statue of Kim Il Sung in Natural Color*. July 2013. The Main Hall of the Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Museum

(Right) Figure 4. *Standing Plaster Statue of Kim Jong Il in Natural Color*. October 2014. The Central Square of the Munsu Water Park

In response, the Kim Jong Un regime argues that such a policy direction embodies the politics of ‘prioritizing the people,’ ‘respecting the people,’ and ‘loving the people’ in its publications.² At the same time, I note the cases of colored statues of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il installed in these public spaces.

Among them, the most prominent is the statue of Kim Il Sung erected at the Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Museum (Figure 2). North Korea refers to it as a ‘colored statue’ of the leader.³ The memorial is located along the Potong River in Pyongyang, and it reopened for public view in July 2013. The museum is a three-story building with a basement and a Gross Floor Area (GFA) of 51,000m², sitting on 9,300m² of land. According to its explanation,

North Korea built the museum to arouse anti-American sentiment and educate the people on the Korean War victory.⁴ At the grand central hall of the museum stands a statue of Kim Il Sung in natural color, smiling brightly in response to the enthusiastic cheers of the army and the people at Jongsung Square in July 1953 (Figure 3). The image of the young Kim Il Sung appears to be more youthful than when he was photographed on August 19th, 1953.

Colored statue production has continued in the Kim Jong Un era. When it comes to the color sculptures of Kim Jong Il, North Korea unveiled the most well known statue at the opening of the Munsu Water Park in October 2014 (Figure 4). The in-color plaster sculpture stands facing the frontal view of the central square. Built on the banks of the Taedong River, the Munsu Water Park features indoor and outdoor water play areas, steam baths, treatment steam rooms, gymnasiums, beauty salons, massages rooms, and restaurants. North Korea has refigured a proclamation of a highly civilized and prosperous socialist state into a visualized space through the Munsu Water Park.⁵

One can find differences in the monumental statues that Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il made in the Kim Jong Un era when compared against those of the previous periods. The most notable features are the use of color in the three-dimensional sculpture, the smiling face, and the more youthful representation in the case of Kim Il Sung. This paper will interpret the implications of introducing colored statues of the leader into North Korean society.⁶

The Solemnness⁷ of the Sculpture for Representation of the Leader

In North Korea, the leader's view, which forms the basis for the socio-political organism theory, is at the core of North Korea's socio-political structure. According to the theory, there are two types of human life: one refers to biological life, which one receives from birth parents, and the other is socio-political life, which a person receives from the leader. Such is the basic theory that supports the socio-political system of North Korea.⁸

The leader's view forms the basis for the operation of North Korean society, and the critical task of propaganda work in the North is how to represent the leader. In North Korea, the representation of the leader is defined as "representing the glorious history of revolutionary activity and the noble communist trait of the great leader of the labor class in the socialist and communist literary art."⁹ Accordingly, the North Korean artists are pursuing 'representation of the leader' in sculpture and other genres such as literature, music, and cinema. However, not everyone is permitted to participate. Only the 'number one artists,' recognized as the cream of the crop, are given the honor to represent the leader.

The North Korean art circles describe the 'sculpture for representation of the leader' within the concept of monumental art. Monumental art is a visual artwork created in the desire to keep people from forgetting a particular object. In essence, it refers to the works of art produced in North Korea to glorify the life story and achievements of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il.¹⁰

In the previous era, the North Korean artists did not create colored statues of the leaders Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il. It was an unfamiliar practice in North Korean art circles. Before the Kim Jong Un era, artists created solemn representations of the leader, mainly with mediums such as bronze, gilt bronze, and marble.¹¹ They featured the leader without using color and also without depicting a smile on his face. They created such solemn and sublime statues of Kim Il Sung because Kim Jong Il stipulated their form and content within his theory on creating a representation of the leader.¹² The artists used this framework to create artworks that embody the revolutionary history and the communist trait of the leader.¹³ The communist trait is closely asso-

ciated with the basic quality of communists who view 'loyalty to the leader as the primary life.'¹⁴ North Korean society demands that individuals make efforts to become a Juche-type person based on the Juche ideology, which is linked to the basic quality requirement for the individual and the leader's view. Accordingly, the artists have to represent the leader in the appearance of a high, noble, and inviolably solemn moral character. Subsequently, the people come to commemorate this image of the leader as their father who gave them a socio-political life.¹⁵

The theory also describes the essential characteristics distinguishing the leader from other revolutionaries or heroes represented in artwork. In sum, it is the leader's trait.¹⁶ Here the leader is defined as a great leader and an outstanding individual who has both a political leader's trait and a human trait. However, there was much emphasis during this period on the leader's trait as someone who leads, meaning a political leader. The artists must show the leader's traits to reveal his absolute status and decisive role within North Korean society. The artist may have represented the leader's physical appearance well in his drawings but failed to fulfill the basic requirements for representing the leader. Therefore, when turning the human characteristics of the leader into an artwork for representation of the leader, the artist must thoroughly portray the leader as a great being, not as a secular person. Accordingly, the most critical term concerning the representation of the leader around this time was 'solemnness.' To be solemn means that a person is high, noble, and so sublime that no one dares to subvert his status. In other words, artists depicted solemn facial expressions to reveal the leader's solemn character.¹⁷ Sculptors emphasize 'solemnness' in the colored statues of the Kim Jong Un era much less than they did during the Kim Jong Il era. In contrast, they highlight the leader's 'liveliness,' as North Koreans put it.

The Sculpture for Representation of the Leader and the 'Smiling Face'

Originally, the North had used the image of President Kim Il Sung at the age of 58 for the official portrait. When he passed away in 1994, North Korea used his picture at the age of 73 (taken in 1985) as an official photo at the funeral. It was named the image of the sun. Kim Il Sung is seen smiling in it. The sun is rotating in the sky, not rooted on earth. In other words, by naming the picture of Kim Il Sung as the image of the sun, I assume that North Korea deployed a strategy of elevating the presence of the deceased, and at the same time, bestowed the real-world position of supreme leader on earth to Kim Jong Il. However, the North seemingly took more time before it used



(Left) Figure 5. Portraits of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il, 1982.



(Right) Figure 6. Portraits of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il, 2001.

the image as a portrait of Kim Il Sung to be hung in the everyday spaces of the people. At its core was a discourse about interpreting a ‘smile’ within the representation of ‘solemnness.’ The reason for this is that in 2001, which was after Kim Il Sung passed away, North Korea replaced the portrait of Kim Il Sung in the Mao suit with those of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il in military uniforms (Figures 5 and 6).¹⁸ Amid an urgent political situation of the military-first era, where guns stood at the forefront, the leader had to urge the people to “defend him at the cost of their lives.” Therefore, North Korea would have decided that having the leader wear a look of resolve, as opposed to a smile, was more suitable for propaganda work.

Looking at the process of making the statue of the leader for the Kumsusan Memorial Palace, one can note the differences between the Kim Jong Il and Kim Jong Un periods. In 2006, a renowned sculptor was preparing a marble statue of Kim Il Sung for the Kumsusan Memorial Palace. Kim Jong Il reportedly showed up at the art studio and criticized him for depicting a smiling face.¹⁹ The sculptor, whose name is Ro Ik Hwa, wrote about his confused emotional state at this time. He was only carving a smiling face to follow suit with the image of the sun, which was the official photo used at the funeral. Kim Jong Il commented that visitors enter the Kumsusan Memorial Palace filled with a sublime emotion and struck with reverence. Thus, Kim concluded that the image of a smiling face was inappropriate and instructed the sculptor to redo the work and depict a sublime visage and a solemn face.²⁰



Figure 7. *Statue of Kim Il Sung*, 2006, Marble, Kumsusan Palace of the Sun

Accordingly, the artist followed the instruction of Kim Jong Il to make the leader’s statue at the Kumsusan Memorial Palace wear a solemn facial expression in a sublime style (Figure 7). There was also a debate about lighting placement, which needed to propel the sublimity of the statue to the

extreme. The statue needed lighting positioning that revealed the courteous gesture and prevented shadowing upon the curvature of the lower body. At the end of a lengthy discussion, the museum chose a method of powerful lighting at the front. The lighting position helped create a courteous, solemn, glorious, and grave image for the artwork for representation of the leader. This approach is in line with the previous bronze and marble sculptures that emphasized solemnness in creating a representation of the leader.

In the past, the formality required that the background of the marble statue be treated with Mosaic murals, pictures, or off-white color painting. This time, however, it is noteworthy that the museum used color lighting on the background. It is because color lighting creates a background for the afterglow to spread from the bottom of the screen, just like a sunrise in the morning. The

Kim Il Sung statue symbolizes the sun. So by setting such a background to the image of the sun, North Korea is creating an image of not a setting but a rising sun. It can be said that the North intended that the museum not be a place to mourn the dead but a space of romance and hope for the new day, to indicate that the leader is living an eternal life.

These solemn marble statues undergo further change during the Kim Jong Un era. They have become colored statues with a smiling face. Therefore, it can be said that the aesthetic taste of these colored statues is representative of the Kim Jong Un era (Figure 8).



Figure 8. *Standing Colored Statues of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il*, 2015, Kumsusan Palace of the Sun.

Erection of the Younger-aged Statue of Kim Il Sung

The replacement of the Kim Il Sung statue with a younger version has already appeared at the Monument to the Victorious Battle of the Musan Area, renovated in 2002. The Battle of the Musan Area is Kim Il Sung's alleged battle against the Japanese Army in Musan County, North Hamgyong Province (present-day Daehongdan County, Yanggang Province) from May 22nd to 23rd, 1939. In May 1971, North Korea constructed a monument that includes a 35-meter-tall tower and a relief engraved with a picture of Kim Il Sung to commemorate the battle (Figure 9). In 2000, however, Kim Jong Il made field guidance and instructed his workers to rebuild this monument in line with the spirit of the military-first era. The monumental art was subsequently re-

constructed and opened at the anniversary of the Victorious Battle of the Musan Area on May 23rd, 2002 (Figure 10). The young Kim Il Sung first appeared through this event. The Monument to the Victorious Battle of the Musan Area covers a total area of 11,000m². It consists of a statue of Kim Il Sung at the front, a rifle obelisk, the groups of subsidiary theme sculptures of 35m in length and 4.1m in height, and the revolutionary relics of 12m in length and 4m in height behind it.

Undoubtedly, as it became the monumental art of the military-first era, the sculpture that received the highest attention was the rifle obelisk. As evidenced by the give-importance-to-bayonet ideology that North Korea currently refers to as the basis for building a strong and prosperous nation, the center icon representing the military-first politics is the 'rifle.'²¹ What is noteworthy in extending this monumental art of 1971 is that it was enlarged to represent the revolutionary achievements of the commanders of Mt. Paektu, on top of the revolutionary achievements of Kim Il Sung. The three commanders of Mt. Paektu refer to Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Il, and Kim Jong Suk. On the front of the newly produced subsidiary theme sculptures, the sculptors carved reliefs embodying the political activities of Kim Jong Suk, who is said to have worked together under her husband Kim Il Sung's unit, along with the battle scenes. Moreover, the back of the subsidiary theme sculptures records Kim Jong Il's achievements by depicting Kim Jong Il's handwritten letter, the situation in which the Battle of Musan took place, and the past and present of the Musan area. The North Korean art circles appraise the artwork highly for revealing the history of the give-importance-to-bayonet ideology and military-first ideology from the anti-Japanese movement period to the present. It is thus described as a monument representing the military-first era, thereby opening a new chapter in the revolutionary memorial sculpture.²²



(Left) Figure 9. Monument to the Victorious Battle of the Musan Area, May 23, 1971.

(Right) Figure 10. Monument to the Victorious Battle of the Musan Area, May 23, 2002.

The young Kim Il Sung appeared during this process. Kim Jong Il ordered the reconstruction of the monument art in 2000. It is possible that Kim Jong Il was already deploying a cultural policy mindful of succession by a young leader upon his death at that time. As evidence of such an argument, in an article from 2007, it is interesting to note that the North Korean art circles highly appraise the portrayal of the Kim Il Sung statue as a young general in his twenties in this piece of monumental artwork.²³ North Korea is trying to prove that there is no contradiction in the age of the young leader and the image of a leader of the military-first era with an emphasis on the young Kim Il Sung. He was actually in his 20's when he achieved the brilliant exploits of defeating the Japanese army. However, the young Kim Il Sung statue created in the Kim Jong Il era does not express a smiling face. Although the statue looks younger, it still belongs to the Kim Jong Il era in that Kim Il Sung's image as a solemn and majestic leader continues.

Changes in the Representation of the Leader and the Colored Statues

Currently, North Korea claims that Kim Jong Un made the official photo used at the Kim Jong Il's funeral, the image of the sun with a bright smile in 2012.²⁴ During a February 2011 guidance, Kim Jong Un said, "Our people remember Kim Jong Il as a sun-like figure with a bright smile." He further added that the artists should "move away from the conventional notion of representing a solemn face, towards creating an accurate image of the sun to accurately represent the leader's high character, great spirit, and great man's trait."²⁵

Later in 2013, a smiling colored statue of the younger Kim Il Sung was erected at the Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Museum (Figure 2). North Korean artists made colored sculptures in the Kim Jong Un era by painting oil or acrylic pigments on gypsum or duranium. Accordingly, North Korea installed colored standing statues of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il in smiling faces at the Kumsusan Palace of the Sun, where Kim Jong Il once said the smiling face was inappropriate for statues.²⁶ Looking back into the history of Western art, the use of color was also taboo in making sculptures for academic and public art purposes after the Enlightenment. In other words, viewers found the smooth surface of the neat and translucent marble to be elegant, simple, and pure. At the same time, they perceived polychrome color schemes as inferior due to its stimulation of the five senses of humans. Colors were perceived as inferior to shapes that reflect mathematical elegance in the ratios of points, lines, and planes.²⁷

In his book *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, Krauss states that “the use of color (···) converts structural elements into the flat profiles.” David Smith has argued that one should only apply monotonous color to sculpture. Calen A. Johnseon identified color to be associated with base sensuality. As such, color was often perceived in the history of Western art as an unsuitable element in sculpture production. As mentioned in Jeong Yeon-shim’s research, the view that sculpture and color should be fully separated became more accepted, especially in the 18th century. Accordingly, color became the yardstick that separated Europe’s fine art sculpture from barbarian art. Therefore, colored sculpture was recognized to be suitable for primitive art and folk art craft.

It seems extraordinary that a state commissions a colored commemorative statue of a figure who held absolute power, as Kim Il Sung did, whose title surpassed leadership and reaches toward the sun. It seems unusual even from the perspective of Western art history.

North Korea emphasizes authenticity, intimacy, and liveliness as the main characteristics of these sculptures. In this regard, I am reminded of the hyperrealism sculpture of Ron Mueck. The colored statue of Kim Il Sung that stands in the grand central hall of the Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Museum is not as hyper-realistic as Ron Mueck’s sculptures. North Korea emphasizes this sculpture’s liveliness and natural intimacy but still differs from Ron Mueck’s artwork. Sculptors in North Korea, of course, have the skills to create hyper-realistic sculptures like Ron Mueck’s work. *Wu Chi Son* (Figure 11) was created to commemorate the passing of Wu Chi Son, a highly recognized ceramic artist who embodied the tradition of the Goryeo Dynasty celadon in North Korea. As such, from time to time, North Korean artists create hyper-realistic sculptures to commemorate fallen heroes. The Kim Il Sung statue in the Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Museum does not adopt such a style. However, the museum’s example shows North Korean artists paying homage to the subject by making such hyper-realistic artworks.

There is still an acceptance within the North Korean art circles that the solemnness of the leader has to permeate in these sculptures and that they show a high level of authenticity and liveliness.²⁸ However, one should reconsider the characteristics of colored statues. They are different from hyper-realistic sculptures, and the authority of traditional and solemn sculptures is disappearing. The fireworks appearing in the background of the colored statue provide another revealing detail (Figure 3). They look like a miniature of Disneyland. It is because Kim Il Sung’s colored statue operates on the aesthetics of ‘popularity.’ The qualities of intimacy and liveliness, portrayed through ‘popularity’ and combined with ‘fantasy’ elements of the likes of Disneyland, aim to imbue a romantic fantasy of being welcomed to the



Figure 11-1. *Wu Chi Son*, circa 2007, resin, Mansudae Art Studio.

Figure 11-2. A Partial View of the Figure.

‘highly civilized and prosperous socialist state’ that has already arrived. My interpretation is that the target that Kim Jong Un sought to communicate through colored statues was the ‘people.’ Therefore, he chose to actively apply the aesthetics of ‘popularity’ for this purpose.

Erection of Two Types of Kim Il Sung Statues

Currently, North Korea is making two types of Kim Il Sung statues at the same time. When representing a leader bestowed with strong power and authority, the universal principle applied is not to change his image frequently. The reason for this is that frequent changes of such an image can signal a power change to the people. In North Korea, the images of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il have also valued consistency. However, in the current Kim Jong Un era, the North produces Kim Il Sung images in two types. The image of the sun, an older image, is applied to the statue of Kim Il Sung that appears together with that of Kim Jong Il (Figure 8). On the contrary, the younger image is used for the statue of Kim Il Sung alone, as in the case of the statue at the Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Museum (Figure 2). My attention is drawn to the fact that two types of powerful leader images were distributed at the same time. However, these statues can be regarded as two types of Kim Il Sung statues, and at

the same time, as two different statues, considering that the young Kim Il Sung featured in the sculpture is at the current age of Kim Jong Un. The older statue represents Kim Il Sung, and the more youthful statue represents Kim Jong Un, respectively.

Kim Jong Un has set out a highly civilized socialist state as a specific development and operation goal, and at the same time defines it as the dying instruction of his predecessors, not as his idea. The reason for this is that Kim Jong Un is a successor in the lineage of three generations. Thus, the task of building legitimacy, which he inherited from his predecessor, is also critical. I find that Kim Jong Un is trying to solve this problem by using an image borrowed from Kim Il Sung as the image for himself. Kim Jong Un is not merely borrowing the image of Kim Il Sung for this purpose. Rather, I note that Kim Jong Un is moving toward creating a new Kim Il Sung image of his choosing and combining his image with it. An example would be the image of the smiling young Kim I Sung, which was newly created in color sculptures. Furthermore, Kim Jong Un has declared that he will have the statues replaced across the country. It symbolizes the beginning of politics in Kim Jong Un's style, differentiated from his predecessors.

The image of Kim Jong Un, combined with the popularized image of Kim Il Sung, which can be described as being intimate and lively, was later linked to Kim Jong Un's full bowing to the elderly soldiers at the 2017 National Conference for War Veterans. North Korea held a national conference of the Party's basic level propaganda workers on March 2nd, 2019.

On that day, Chairman Kim Jong Un sent a letter to participants at the conference. In sum, it said that the workers should not mystify the revolutionary activities and appearances of the leader to highlight the greatness of the leader. Kim warned that such an attempt would hide the truth.

An absolute loyalty comes from being fascinated by the leader as a human and a comrade.²⁹

This sentence best summarizes the essence of Chairman Kim Jong Un's message on that day. It is to this end that Kim chose to use a popular image. "Popularity" has long been a vital aesthetic element in North Korea. However, I draw attention to it because it was Kim Jong Un who combined the aesthetics of "popularity" with the image of the god-like leader.

On October 10th, 2020, Chairman Kim Jong Un was seen sobbing in tears during a speech at the military parade celebrating the 75th anniversary of the founding of the Workers' Party of Korea, which was held against the backdrop of the COVID-19 situation. It is hard to imagine a leader crying out in tears in front of the people during the Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il periods, as a leader was assumed to be

and should be error-free. However, as Kim Jong Un continued to express gratitude to and comfort the people in a public speech, he shed tears, saying, “My efforts and sincerity have not been sufficient enough to rid our people of the difficulties in their life.”

People, elites, and military soldiers gathered in the square attentively watched tears falling from Kim Jong Un’s crying eyes and heard his voice cracked with tears. Kim Jong Un was displaying a candid appearance at an unprecedented level. What would have gone through the people’s minds as they watched the supreme leader admitting “errors” and a “lack of ability”? Such an image strategy did not appear suddenly because of the COVID-19 outbreak. Rather, it was consistently pursued from the beginning in the Kim Jong Un era, as discussed in this paper.

The portrait of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il in military uniform pushed the desperateness of the crisis in the military-first era to an extreme. Thus produced was an image of fear, in which the people should risk their lives in defense of the leader. Kim Jong Un, however, is believed to instill a romantic fantasy in the people that if the people follow this leader under the popular fantasies that activate ‘intimacy’ rather than ‘authority,’ they would be able to build a highly civilized and prosperous socialist state, the likeness of which resembles Disneyland. The target audience that Kim Jong Un seeks to communicate with through this colored statue is his ‘people.’ It can be said that the colored statues of the leader have significant implications in that they show how he uses a policy of image to convey the People First-ism, affirming that he advocates for the people above all else. The emphasis is on People First-ism, the main keyword in the grand succession from Kim Il Sung, to Kim Jong Il, and ultimately to Kim Jong Un. However, North Korea uses a Kim Jong Un-style image of the leader to reach out to the people by creating an intimate and popular image, lacking traditional solemnity.

It will also work to stir people’s desires effectively. This is because Kim Jong Un’s slogan to build a water park, an amusement park, and a ski resort to cultivate a civilized and educated life is different from the slogan of the previous authoritarian leaders who controlled the society by suppressing people’s desires. Therefore, I find that the image of Kim Il Sung in colored statues effectively represents the image of realizing a highly civilized and prosperous socialist state in which an individual’s desires are fulfilled through loyalty to the leader. As such, the North is a highly civilized socialist state that is selling into the people’s minds the fantasy that the civilized socialist state is being realized within itself.

Conclusion

In the Kim Jong Un era, Kim Jong Un ordered the creation of colored statues of Kim Il Sung that depict a youthful appearance and smiling face to replace the previous figures with authoritative appearances. Kim Jong Un further declared to have these statues replaced across the country, which shows that Kim Jong Un is projecting an image of himself by installing new statues of Kim Il Sung as a young leader. The North is expected to take a starkly different direction from the days of crisis in the Kim Jong Il era, when portraits of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il were changed from wearing Mao suits to military uniforms. Therefore, I find that this image is adequate evidence that Kim Jong Un is conveying to his people that a new era has begun.

Since 2012, Kim Jong Un has significantly increased the construction of cultural facilities, thereby promoting a change in his leadership style with material manifestations to the people. The construction of the amusement park, which started in Pyongyang, is spreading nationwide. Kim Jong Un is now making it clear that the critical agenda of his time is People First-ism and that it will replace the military-first politics of Kim Jong Il. Kim Jong Un is pursuing a policy of proposing to the people a romantic fantasy that building a highly civilized and prosperous socialist state like Disneyland will be possible by promoting popular fantasy rather than 'authority.' North Korea is further strengthening the fantasy by bringing public spaces such as the water parks, Ryomyong Street, and Future Scientist Street, accessible to the people as popular fantasy spaces like Disneyland. Such confidence was further consolidated in the Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Museum, a venue for war victory education.

Currently, two types of Kim Il Sung statues and a statue of Kim Jong Il with a smiling face are being sculpted in North Korea. The statue of Kim Il Sung that appears with Kim Jong Il uses the image of the sun and depicts an older visage. On the other hand, the stand-alone statue of Kim Il Sung was made in the image of young Kim Il Sung, like the statue at the Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Museum. Considering that the age of the young Kim Il Sung is the same as the current age of Kim Jong Un, one can interpret that these are two types of Kim Il Sung statues, and each figure represents Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Un. Kim Jong Un set out the specific goal of being a highly civilized socialist state, and at the same time, defined this as the dying instruction of his predecessors, not his idea. The reason for this is that Kim Jong Un also placed much importance on the task of building on the legitimacy that he inherited from the previous leader. Kim Jong Un is fulfilling this task by borrowing the image of Kim Il Sung. However, I note that Kim Jong Un has borrowed an image from Kim Il Sung and created a new Kim Jong Un-style image of Kim Il Sung.

This details reveals how Kim Jong Un's politics is operating within a series of planned projects.

I find that Kim Jong Un is instilling a romantic fantasy in the people. In other words, if they follow the leader who brings out a popular fantasy that can activate 'intimacy' rather than 'authority,' it will be possible for them to build a highly civilized and prosperous socialist state like Disneyland. Emphasis on People First-ism is a core keyword in the grand succession from Kim Il Sung to Kim Jong Il and ultimately to Kim Jong Un, but the popular image of a leader close to the people is a style that belongs to Kim Jong Un. Another noteworthy change in the Kim Jong Un era is the appeal to individual desire. In the past, there was an emphasis for the people to restrain and dedicate themselves. In contrast, North Korea began promoting a society where people enjoy a socialist civilization according to their abilities. The North is creating and utilizing the image of Kim Il Sung in colored statues based on popular aesthetics. It wants to represent the realization of a highly civilized and prosperous socialist state where an individual can fulfill one's desires by being loyal to the leader, instead of an image of an authoritative leader who controls by suppressing people's desires. The North is carrying out a propaganda campaign that a highly civilized socialist state exists within and not outside the people.

The effect of this lively and intimate image is combined with the image of a powerful leader of a strong nuclear state. Through this image analysis, Kim Jong Un politics was found to be operating through a sophisticated strategy. It then raises the need to further analyze Kim Jong Un-style politics and the implementation of its cultural propaganda and agitation systems. In particular, there were difficulties in conducting full-scale statistical data analysis on the comprehensive status of commemorative public sculptures in the Kim Jong Un era, and the ratio and distribution patterns of colored sculptures in the North, given the closedness of North Korean society. Such analysis would be left as a future task to be addressed through continuous data collection.

Notes

1. “Uridangui sahoejuui munmyeongguk geonseol sasangui jeongdangseong” 우리 당의 사회주의 문명국 건설 사상의 정당성 [The Legitimacy of Our Party's Thought on Building a highly civilized socialist state], *Rodong Sinmun* (July 14, 2013), 3.

2. Kim Ryo Suk, “Uri dangui inminjungsi inminjonjung inminsarangui jeongchireul guhyeonhan myeongjakdaepungeuro Choson Rodongdang je 7 chadaehoereul binnage jangsikaja” 우리 당의 인민중시 인민존중 인민사랑의 정치를 구현한 명작대풍으로 조선로동당 제 7차대회를 빛나게 장식하자 [Let's Glorify the 7th Congress of the Workers' Party of Korea in a Brilliant Way with a Whirl wind of Master pieces That Embodies Our Party's Politics of Respecting, Honoring and Loving the People], *Korean Literature* (January 2016), 7.

3. On May 17th, 2014, *Rodong Sinmun* carried a column contributed to by Kim Song Min, who was then the vice president of the Mansudae Art Studio. Kim said that it is none other than Kim Jong Un who gave instructions in July 2014 on how to recreate the existing plaster sculpture of the leader at the museum into a ‘colored statue.’ Given the characteristics of North Korea's governing system, the fact that Kim Jong Un mentioned it himself proves that this term has gained a formal status. (Kim Song-min, “Uri dangui dokchangjeogin misulloneul changjakwaldonge guhyeonhayeo juchemisurui hwa-woneul hwaljjak kkotpiwonagetda” 우리 당의 독창적인 미술론을 창작활동에 구현하여 주체미술의 화원을 활짝 꽃피워나가겠다 [We Will Apply Our Party's Original Art Theory into Creative Activities to Make the Flower Garden of Juche Art Come To a Full Bloom], *Rodong Sinmun* (May 17, 2014), 4.) In addition, on May 1st, 2016, the Korean Central Television (KCTV) describes the new statues of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il installed in the Mansudae Assembly Hall as ‘colored sculptures.’

4. Oh Hae Yon, *Jogukaebangjeonjaengseungniginyeomgwon* 조국해방전쟁승리기념관 [The Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Museum] (Pyongyang: Foreign Literature Publishing House, 2014), 1-139.

5. Oh Hae Yon, *Munsumullorijang* 문수물놀이장 [Munsu Water Park] (Pyongyang: Korean Language Publishing House, 2014), 1-103.

6. No previous research literature exists on colored statues of the leader. In addition for research on sculptures representing the leader, as well as studies other than those from North Korean scholars, see Park Carey, “Bukanui ginyeombimisul, geu johyeongjeok teukseongeun mueosinga?” 북한의 기념비미술, 그 조형적 특성은 무엇인가? [What Are the Formative Characteristics of North Korean Monumental Art?], *Art World* (June 2004). The most representative study of North Korean scholars is authored by Oh Dae Hyong and Ha Kyong Ho, *Dangui ryeongdo mite changjak geollipdoen daeginyeombideurui sasangyesulseong* 당의 령도 밑에 창작 건립된 대기념비들의 사상예술성 [The Ideological and Artistic Quality of the Grand Monuments Created and Erected Under the Leadership of the Party] (Pyongyang: Korean Art Publishing House, 1984). However, since it was written in 1989, it has limitations in analyzing only works of the Kim Il Sung era. Since Park Carey's writings were also written in 2004, it does not target the Kim Jong Un era either. Therefore, this study would be meaningful as a starting point for the analysis of the ‘leader statues’ produced as sculpture artwork in the Kim Jong Un era.

7. The term ‘sculpture for representation of the leader’ may be perceived as un-

necessary duplication due to the overlap in the meaning of ‘representation’ and ‘sculpture.’ Still, it is an official term used in the North Korean art world community and will therefore be used as it is in this paper. In addition to ‘sculpture for representation of the leader,’ North Korea also uses terms such as ‘literature for representation of the leader.’

8. “Comrade Kim Il Sung revealed for the first time in history that there is a socio-political life distinct from physical life. The eternal socio-political life cannot exist without the socio-political group, which is constituted of the unity of the leader, the party, and the masses. Individuals can lead an eternal socio-political life only as the member of this socio-political group. (···) Just as the brain is at the core of an individual, the leader, the supreme brain of this group, is at the core of socio-political life. The leader is called the supreme brain of a socio-political group because the leader is the center of a unified experience of life activities.” Kim Jong Il, “Juchejeok gyoyangeseo jegidoe-neun myeotgaji munje” 주체적 교양에서 제기되는 몇 가지 문제 [On Some Problems of Education in the Juche Idea]; “Juchesasang yeongu; ‘Juchesasang’ ui ‘gimilseongjuui’ hwaie gwanhan yeongu juchesasange daehan Kim Jong Il ui nonmun.” In Taebaek (ed), 주체사상 연구; ‘주체사상’의 ‘김일성주의’화에 관한 연구 주체사상에 대한 김정일의 논문 [A Study on Juche Thought; A Study on the Transformation of ‘Juche Idea’ into ‘Kimilsungism,’ Kim Jong Il’s Paper on the Juche Idea] (Seoul: Taebaek, 1989), 264.

9. Yoon Ki Dok, “Uri dange uihan suryeonghyeongsangchangjomunjeui binnaneun haegyeol” 우리 당에 의한 수령형상창조문제의 빛나는 해결 [Our Party’s Brilliant Solution to the Problem of Creating Representation of the Leader], *Gulloja* 532 (August 1986), 58-62.

10. Regarding the artistic characteristics of North Korean monumental art, see Park Carey, “Bukanui ginyeombimisul, geu johyeongjeok teukseongeun mueosinga?” 북한 의 기념비미술, 그 조형적 특성은 무엇인가? [What Are the Formative Characteristics of North Korean Monumental Art?], *Art World* (June 2004), 79-82.

11. For the sculpture for representation of the leader before the Kim Jong Un era, see Park Carey, *Ibid.*

12. Kim Jong Il, *Widaehan suryeongnimui yeongsanghyeongsanggwa misuljakpum changjageseo naseoneun myeotgaji munjee daehaye: mansudaechangjaksareul dorabomyeonseo ilgundeulgwa han damhwa (1978nyeon 6wol 5il. 10il)* 위대한 수령님의 영상형상과 미술작품 창작에서 나서는 몇가지 문제에 대하여 : 만수대창작사를 돌아보면서 일군들과 한 담화(1978년 6월 5일. 10일) [Regarding Some Problems on Video for Representation of the Great Leader and Creation of Artwork: A Conversation with the Workers at a Visit to the Mansudae Art Studio (June 5 and 10, 1978)] (Pyongyang: Workers' Party of Korea Publishing House, 2015), 1-39.

13. Representation of the leader is defined as “representing the glorious history of revolutionary activity and the noble communist trait of the great leader of the labor class in the socialist and communist literary art.” (Yoon, “Our Party’s Brilliant Solution,” 58-62).

14. “Since the leader, the party, and the masses are a socio-political life that are united in one life and share a common destiny, they develop a relationship of revolutionary loyalty and comradeship to help and love each other. (···) The leader is at the center of socio-political life, and therefore revolutionary loyalty and comradeship should be centered on the leader. (···) Since the leader represents the life of the group as the

supreme leader of socio-political life, loyalty and comradeship to the leader become absolute and unconditional. (...) As much as the leader is the center of the revolution of the Party and the masses, it is said that loyalty to the Party and the people is the supreme manifestation of the Party character, working class character, and people's character. This is why we say that firmly establishing the revolutionary leader's view and regarding loyalty to the leader as the primary life form the basic character of Juche-type communist revolutionaries.” (Kim Jong Il, “Juchejeok gyoyangeseo jegidoeneun myeotgaji munje” 주체적 교양에서 제기되는 몇가지 문제 [On Some Problems of Education in the Juche Idea]; “Juchesasang yeongu; ‘Juchesasang’ ui ‘gimilseongjuui’ hwaegwanhan yeongu juchesasange daehan Kim Jong Il ui nonmun.” In Taebaek (ed), 주체사상 연구; ‘주체사상’의 ‘김일성주의’화에 관한 연구 주체사상에 대한 김정일의 논문 [A Study on Juche Thought; A Study on the Transformation of ‘Juche Idea’ into ‘Kimilsungism,’ Kim Jong Il’s Paper on the Juche Idea] (Seoul: Taebaek, 1989), 265.)

15. For further discussion on ‘communist trait,’ see Chon Yong Suk and Choe Sung Sup, *Suryeongui gongsanjuuijeok deokseong* 수령의 공산주의적 덕성 [The Communist Virtue of the Suryŏng] (Pyongyang: Workers' Party of Korea Publishing House, 1991).

16. Yoon, “Our Party’s Brilliant Solution,” 58-62.

17. Baek In Jun, “Cheot suryeonghyeongsang jakpumi changjodoegikkaji” 첫 수령상 작품이 창조되기까지 [Until the First Artwork on Representation of the Leader was Created], *Choson Yesul* 500 (August 1998), 17.

18. Kim Yong Jin, “Suryeonghyeongsangmisulchangjoui siwoneul yeoreo jusiyeo” 수령형상미술창조의 시원을 열어 주시여 [Opening the Beginning of the Art Creation on Representation of the Leader], *Korean Art* 540 (December 2001), 35.

19. Ro Ik Hwa, “(Sugi) Suryongnimui daeriseoksangeul aju jal hyeongsanghayeotdasimyeo“ (수기) 수령님의 대리석상을 아주 잘 형상하였다시며 (Essay: Upon Hearing That My Marble Statue Was Well-Created), *Choson Yesul* 595, (July 2006), 6.

20. Ro, “Opening the Beginning of the Art Creation,” 7.

21. Ri Mun Yong, “(Seongunsasanghaeseol) Chongdaecheolhagiran mueosinga” (선군사상해설) 총대철학이란 무엇인가 [Explanation of the Military First Thought: What is the Rifle-First Philosophy], *Chollima* 703 (December 2017), 30; Lim Hui Song, “Seongunjeongchineun widaehan suryeongnimui chongdaejungsisasangeul byeonhwadoen jeongseui yogue matge simhwabaljeonsikin uri sidaeui wiryeokan jeongchibangsik” 선군정치는 위대한 수령님의 총대중시사상을 변화된 정세의 요구에 맞게 심화발전시킨 우리 시대의 위력한 정치방식 [Songun Politics Is a Powerful Political Method of Our Time Further Developed from the Great Leader’s Idea of Placing Importance on the Rifle to Meet the Needs of the Changing Situation], *Gulloja* 735 (July 2003), 20-22; and Park Carey, “Bukanui misuljeongchaekbyeonhwaeg ttareun misuljakpumui dosanggwa hyeongsigui byeonhwa yeongu 북한의 미술정책변화에 따른 미술작품의 도상과 형식의 변화 연구 [A Study on the Changes in North Korea's Iconology and Form of Artworks According to the Changes in Art Policy]. In the Research Division of Artistic Heritage (ed). *Bukhan misurui eojeowa oneul* 북한 미술의 어제와 오늘 [Art in North Korea: It’s Past and Present] (Seoul: National Institute of Cultural Heritage, 2016), 110-114.

22. Military-first politics is a method of ruling in North Korea that puts military above all else, chosen to overcome the economic difficulties against the backdrop of

the collapse of the socialist states in the aftermath of the death of Kim Il Sung. After Kim Jong Il made an official appearance as the Chairman of the National Defense Commission in 1998, military-first politics was established as a key method of ruling in the North. For a detailed discussion on this, see Huh Ui Myong and Kang Chol Nam, *Seongunhyeongmyeongsasangwa rironui jeongnipchegeyehwawa simhwabaljeon* 선군혁명사상과 이론의 정립체계화와 심화발전 [Formation, Systematization and Further Development of Songun Revolutionary Idea and Theory] (Pyongyang: Science Encyclopedia Publishing House, 2018); Kim Gun Suk, *Widaehan ryeongdoja Kim Jong Il dongjikkeseo balkisin seongunjeongchiui jeonmyeonjeokwangnibe gwanhan jucheui riron* 위대한 령도자 김정일동지께서 밝히신 선군정치의 전면적확립에 관한 주체의 이론 [The Theory of Juche on the Comprehensive Establishment of Military-First Politics as Revealed by the Great Leader Comrade Kim Jong Il] (Pyongyang: Social Science Publishing House, 2014).

23. “Urisigui chongdaetabeuro“ 우리식의 총대탑으로 [In Our Style of Rifle Obelisk], *Choson Yesul* 604 (April 2007), 62-63.

24. The artists are said to make the sun statues with a smiling face, following the instructions of Kim Jong Un "on representing the General in the sun statues," according to the North Korean publications such as “Suryeong hyeongsangmisuljakpumchang-age gitdeun bulmyeorui ryeongdo” 수령형상미술작품창작에 깃든 불멸의 령도 [The Immortal Leadership Embedded in Creation of Artwork that Represent the Leader] (*Choson Nyosong* [Korean Women] (October 2013), 12-13) and Hong Seong Il, “Seongunsidaewa deobureo binnaneun urisik saekjogak” 선군시대와 더불어 빛나는 우리식 색조각 [Korean-Style Colored Statue That Shines along with the Songun Era] (*Chollima* 663 (August 2014), 74),

25. Hong Seong Il, “Seongunsidaewa deobureo binnaneun urisik saekjogak” 선군시대와 더불어 빛나는 우리식 색조각 [Korean-Style Colored Statue That Shines along with the Songun Era], *Chollima* 663 (August 2014), 74.

26. *Kumsusantaeyanggunjeon* 금수산태양궁전 [Kumsusan Palace of the Sun] (Pyongyang: Foreign Literature Publishing House, 2016).

27. Jeong Yeon-shim, “Polychrome jogagui nonjaengeul tonghae salpyeobon Paul Gauguin ui doja mit mokjo jogak” 폴리크롬 조각의 논쟁을 통해 살펴본 폴 고갱의 도자 및 목조 조각 [Paul Gauguin’s Ceramics and Wooden Sculptures Seen through the Controversy of Polychrome Sculpture], *Korean Bulletin of Art History* 30 (2008), 261-289.

28. Hong Seong Il, “Seongunsidaewa deobureo binnaneun urisik saekjogak” 선군시대와 더불어 빛나는 우리식 색조각 [Korean-Style Colored Statue that Shines along with the Songun Era], *Chollima* 663 (August 2014), 74.

29. “Chamsinhan Seonjeonseondongeu-ro Hyeongmyeongui Jeonjin Dongnyeog eul Baegahae Nagaja” 참신한 선전선동으로 혁명의 전진 동력을 배가해 나가자 [Let’s double up the driving force of the revolution with a fresh approach in propaganda], *Korea Central News Agency*, March 9, 2019.

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