

Mother, Warrior, and Prophet: The Myth of Kim Jong Suk in DPRK Cinema¹

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Abstract

In the late 1970s, North Korean propaganda began to increasingly idolize various members of the Kim Il Sung family. Among the hagiographies of the so-called lineage of Mt. Paektu is that of Kim Jong Suk (1917–1949), the first wife of Kim Il Sung and the mother of Kim Jong Il. Although her cult has attracted the attention of many scholars, this is the first study on the representation of Kim Jong Suk on the screen. The article provides an analysis of five movies dedicated to her, created between 1979 and 1985. All were written by Paek In-jun, the most important screenwriter in Kim Jong Il's film production unit.

The image of Kim Jong Suk in cinema is highly idealized and she is ascribed attributes that exceed typical human capacities; however, cinematic representations of her are careful not to suggest any that might be interpreted as supernatural. Kim Jong Suk is a master in both the male and female spheres. She is a compassionate mother, healer, and nurturer, and at other times a ruthless, merciless warrior. The Mother-Warrior figure she represents refers to paradigms popular in the Communist sphere, and Kim Jong Suk's selflessness is characteristic of the so-called hidden heroes of North Korean cinema. The uniqueness of Kim Jong Suk lies in her close relation with Kim Il Sung, not as a wife but as his most faithful follower. It makes her a convincing messenger of his messianic role.

Keywords: North Korean cinema, Kim Il Sung's cult of personality, North Korean ideology, Kim Jong Suk, Paek In-jun

Introduction

“We commemorate the immortal achievements and holy revolutionary life of the anti-Japanese female hero, comrade Kim Jong Suk,” announced the speaker on North Korean state Korean Central Television during the one-hundred-year anniversary of the birth of Kim Jong Suk (Kim Chǒng-suk, 1917–1949), celebrated on 24 December 2017. The program showed a group of soldiers who had made a pilgrimage to Hoeryǒng, her birthplace, and people across the DPRK (Democratic People’s Republic of Korea) laying flowers in front of statues of her.³ The December edition of *Chosǒn yǒsǒng* (Korean woman), the only North Korean monthly periodical dedicated to women, included eight articles in her honor.⁴ There are many titles used to glorify her, among the most common of which are “Female General of Mt. Paektu” (*paektusan nyǒjanggun* 백두산녀장군), “Faithful Soldier” (*ch’ungjikhān chǒnsa* 충직한 전사), and “Mother of Revolution” (*hyǒngmyǒng ūi ōmōni* 혁명의 어머니).⁵ Kim Jong Suk, the first wife of Kim Il Sung (Kim Il-sǒng) and the mother of Kim Jong Il (Kim Chǒng-il), is the most venerated woman in North Korea today. Although her cult has received some scholarly attention, the representation of Kim Jong Suk in cinema is still unexplored territory.

This study compares five movies released between 1979 and 1985, in the period of the dynamic development of DPRK cinematography, sometimes called the Golden Age of North Korean Cinema.⁶ The movies discussed are *Far Away from the Headquarters*, *Love that Blossomed the Future*, *A Royal Bodyguard*, *Crossing the Yalu River*, and *Sunshine* (see Figure 1 for more details). This author is not aware of any representation of Kim Jong Suk in motion pictures before 1979. In fact, her cult is relatively new and was institutionalized only in the late 1970s. I argue that the main reason for this was the emergence of Kim Jong Il as the decision-making, dominant person in the art sphere of the DPRK. In February 1967, Kim Jong Il established the Paektusan Production Unit (*Paektusan ch’an-gjaktan* 백두산창작단, henceforth PPU). At the time, there were ten other film units in the DPRK, but the PPU aimed to produce ideologically correct movies, as defined by the Great Leader’s son. As a result, a whole new genre of so-called movies dedicated to the leader (*suryǒng hyǒngsang yǒnghwa* 수령형상영화) was created.⁷ The PPU gained the dominant position in the industry after the success of *The Flower Girl* (*Kkotp’a nūn ch’ōnyō* 꽃파는처녀, 1972, Pak Hak, Ch’oe Ik-kyu), which won a special prize at the 18th Karlovy Vary International Film Festival. It was the second time a North Korean movie had received a prestigious international award. Previously, *Boy Partisan* (*Sonyǒn ppalch’isan* 소년 빨치산, 195, Yun Yong-gyu) received special awards in Karlovy Vary and Beijing, however, the jury’s decisions must be understood in the context of the communist world’s

support for the North Korean cause in the Korean War. In the 1980s, under Kim Jong Il's guidance, the unit produced dozens of movies that mythologized Kim Il Sung and members of his family, including Kim Hyōng-gwōn (Kim Il Sung's uncle), Kim Hyōng-jik (Kim Il Sung's father), Kang Pan-sōk (Kim Il Sung's mother), and Kim Ch'ol-ju (Kim Il Sung's brother). Among the family members, it was Kim Jong Suk who appeared in the greatest number of films.⁸

Although the cult of Kim Jong Suk has been developing since the 1970s, researchers paid little attention to it at the beginning. *Communism in Korea*, a magnum opus by Robert Scalapino and Lee Chong-Sik in two volumes, does not mention her even once.⁹ The rise of studies dedicated to the “Female General of Mt. Paektu” are correlated with the so-called Sunshine Policy (*haetpyōt chōngch'aek* 햇볕정책). Initiated by South Korean president Kim Dae-jung (Kim Tae-jung) in 1998, this policy aimed at warming relations between the North and South, which created demand to increase the mutual understanding between the neighboring countries' cultures. Various academic papers in Korean on Kim Jong Suk appeared in the 2000s, including a study on the figure of Kim Jong Suk in school textbooks;¹⁰ a study on gender equality narrations in *Chosōn yōsōng*, in which Kim Jong Suk played a pivotal role;¹¹ and Chōng T'ae-ūn's research on the changing image of Kim Jong Suk in *Chosōn yōsōng* between the years 1963 and 2007, one of the largest studies to date on the process of mythologization of Kim Il Sung's wife.¹² Recently, South Korean academia has experienced a revival of interest in Kim Jong Suk, which might be an effect of the brief intensification of bilateral relations in 2018 and the rise of pro-unification discourse during the Moon Jae-in (Mun Chae-in) presidency (2017–2022).¹³

In English literature, the appearance of Kim Jong Suk's cult was described briefly by historian Suh Dae-Sook in 1988.¹⁴ The broader biography and an explanation of the political ascension of Kim Jong Suk is presented in *Kim Jong Il's Leadership of North Korea*, published in 2008 by Lim Jae-cheon. Lim argues for the centrality of personality politics in North Korea and describes the rise of the idealization of Kim Jong Suk as the result of a political clash between members of Kim Il Sung's family, which was won by Kim Jong Il.¹⁵ The elevation of Kim Jong Suk symbolism in relation to Kim Jong Il's establishment of political power was also noticed by Heonik Kwon and Byung-ho Chung.¹⁶ Their book *North Korea: Beyond Charismatic Politics* describes the symbolic place of Kim Jong Suk in the “theatre state” of North Korea and compares the semantics of Kim Jong Suk as “Mother of Korea” (*Chosōn ūi ōmōni* 조선의 어머니) and other maternal icons in communist countries—Mother of Vietnam (*Ba Me Vietnam Bà mẹ Việt Nam*) and Mother Heroine (*Mat'-geroinya Mat'-geroinya*) of the Soviet Union.¹⁷ The last choice is confusing, as Kwon and Chung explore only one honorary title, without realizing that there were many more adequate symbolic figures in Soviet

propaganda, such as the archetype of the Motherland (*Rossii-matushka Россия-матушка*) and Mother Russia (*Rodina-mat' Родина-мать*).¹⁸ Surprisingly, the other influential paper on female revolutionary heroes, written by Suzy Kim, takes Kim Jong Suk as an example while ignoring Soviet influences altogether.¹⁹

Recently, the myth of Kim Jong Suk and narratives related to her figure were explored in depth by Robert Winstanley-Chesters and Victoria Ten, first in a 2016 study that takes a structuralist approach to analyzing the ancient, spiritual Korean mountain traditions of worship in juxtaposition with the modern Kim Jong Suk myth and its relation to Mt. Paektu.²⁰ After publication of the joint paper, the authors explored the subject further, which resulted in the publication of two books (one published jointly, and one as the solo project of Winstanley-Chesters) largely devoted to the semantics and cultural determinants of Kim Jong Suk's myth.²¹ My analysis of the films confirms the authors' numerous discoveries based on literary sources, mostly the official biographies of Kim Jong Suk. North Korean art, especially as it relates to the Kim family mythology, is highly dogmatic, didactic, and interdiscursive. In the scenes discussed, North Korean audiences encounter situations already recognized from literature, songs they had already heard, and cinematic depictions of scenes they had seen in popular paintings. Nevertheless, there are some significant differences. The movies do not stress the transformation of the hero or the role of Mt. Paektu in the hero's development.

Although the cult of Kim Jong Suk has received much attention, I am not aware of any other research on the cinematic representations of Kim Jong Suk. I found only one brief description of the motion pictures in Yi Hyo-in's doctoral thesis on the idealization of Kim Il Sung in films.²² This is troubling, as cinema is a powerful medium. The growing literature on the cognitive science of film shows that visual art has much stronger possibilities of influencing the viewer than any form of text.²³ The importance of film was known to the Soviets, who promoted cinema and trained Korean filmmakers during the occupation of the northern part of the peninsula (1945–1948).²⁴ The new government was faced with the challenge of turning a society that had only a faint idea of communism before 1945 into full-fledged Korean communists.²⁵ Cinema played a key role in the project of creating the New Korean. To use a classic Benedict Anderson concept, it helped to imagine and, with ideological changes, re-imagine what it meant to be Korean in Kim Il Sung's country.²⁶ Motion pictures have been used as a crucial part of sociocultural training in the DPRK and have been watched, among others, in workplaces, schools, local community halls, and public open spaces.²⁷ In other words, cinema might be considered a North Korean *Biblia pauperum*, a tool for delivering the political message irrespective of age, education, and literacy.

I present a typology of Kim Jong Suk as Mother, Warrior, and Prophet. In the films discussed, Kim is a highly idealized, benevolent, and protective mythological figure. She possesses incredible character traits and almost impossible skills. As we will see, her perfection is used in the stories to point to someone even greater. The motion pictures analyzed in this study are not the only North Korean movies that feature Kim Jong Suk. The hero appears as a supportive character in other movies dedicated to the leader, for example in *Sun of a Nation* (*Minjok ūi t'aeyang* 민족의 태양, 1987–1990, Ōm Kil-sŏn, in five episodes). I am also aware of two more movies about Kim Jong Suk: *Blood-soaked Freedom* (*P'iŏrin chayu* 피어린 자유, 1998, Paek Hyŏn-gu, Chŏn Paeg-yŏn, in two parts) and *Shore of Tumen River* (*Tuman'gang kisŭk esŏ* 두만강 기슭에서, 2003, Paek Hyŏn-gu, Pak Chu-guk). However, this paper scrutinizes the formative years of the myth of Kim Jong Suk in North Korean cinema, the 1980s, as built by Paek In-jun, the most important writer to Kim Jong Il (more on that subject further on). *Blood-soaked Freedom* and *Shore of Tumen River* were released after Kim Il Sung's death in 1994, when the myth of Kim Jong Suk was well established, and Paek In-jun was no longer involved. Furthermore, the analyzed movies are easily accessible at the Information Center on North Korea (*Pukhan charyo sent'ŏ* 북한자료센터) in Seoul and, outside of South Korea, through the DPRK state-controlled website *uriminzokkiri*.²⁸

From articles to screens: Birth of the myth

As religious scholar Jonathan Z. Smith has pointed out, “myth has its authority not by proving itself but by presenting itself.”²⁹ Today, Kim Jong Suk stands out as the most venerated female in North Korean society, with statues, mosaics, books,

Date	English Title	Korean Title	Romanization	Director	Screenplay
1979	<i>Far Away from the Headquarters</i>	사령부를 멀리 떠나서	Saryŏngbu rŭl mŏlli ttŏnasŏ	Not credited	Paek In-jun
1982	<i>Love that Blossomed the Future</i>	미래를 꽃피운 사랑	Mirae rŭl kkot p'iuŋ sarang	Pak Hak	Paek In-jun
1982	<i>A Royal Bodyguard</i>	친위전사	Ch'inwi chŏnsa	Kim Tŏk-kyu, Chŏng Un-mo	Paek In-jun
1982	<i>Crossing the Yalu River</i>	압록강을 넘나들며	Amnokkang ūl nŏmnadŭlmyŏ	Kim Tŏk-ku, Chŏng Un-mo	Paek In-jun
1985	<i>Sunshine</i>	해발	Haebal	Chŏng Un-mo	Paek In-jun, Song Sang-wŏn

Figure 1 List of movies featuring or focusing on Kim Jong Suk³⁰

and a museum in Hoeryŏng dedicated to her figure. There is a separate subject in primary and secondary school on her revolutionary activities.³¹ There is even Kim Jong Suk County, a whole region renamed from Sinp'a County in her honor in 1981.³² Popular songs and novels have been written about her.³³ The widespread nature of symbolic representations related to Kim Jong Suk makes it easy to fall for the illusion of her crucial importance during the liberation struggle and the fight against the Japanese colonizers.

The reconstruction of Kim Jong Suk's biography is a difficult task due to the lack of sources and the intense process of mythologization in North Korea, which has erased inconvenient historical traces and sanctioned the official version of her hagiography. The existing materials, however, paint a radically different picture. In reality, during her lifetime, Kim Jong Suk was unknown to the broader public. There are no materials to support the idea that she was an important figure in the communist movement, or that she organized the women partisans' units. Just like Kim Il Sung, during the period of partisan activity, which she joined as a young girl, she was a member of the Communist Party of China. After the lost fight against the Japanese in Manchuria, with other Korean partisans, she found refuge in the Soviet Union, where she moved in late 1940. As she adopted a Russian name (Hana), it is likely that, just like Kim Il Sung, she did not believe she would return to Korea.³⁴ The Soviet General N. G. Lebedev remembered her as an uneducated but lively woman. She was probably Kim Il Sung's second wife.³⁵ However, there is no information about the marriage ceremony or when it took place (if at all). During her time in Vyatskoye (Вятское, Khabarovsk Krai), she gave birth to two sons, Yuri (Kim Jong Il) and Shura (Kim Man Il). After Korean liberation, in 1946, she also delivered a daughter, Kim Kyŏng-hŭi. Kim Jong Suk was first mentioned in *Rodong Sinmun*, the Party newspaper, only on 22 September 1949, with the announcement of her death. The text mentioned an unspecified disease. Interestingly, Kim Il Sung was not a member of the Funeral Committee. Unofficially, her death was the result of an unsuccessful childbirth.³⁶

Kim Jong Suk was ignored by propaganda until the early 1960s. During the 1940s and 1950s, the periodical *Chosŏn yŏsŏng* (Korean woman 조선 여성) regularly presented idealized lives of the Female Partisan Generals (*ppaltchisan ŭi nyŏjanggalgun* 빨찌산의 녀장군), but Kim Jong Suk was not among them. Her partisan activities were first described in detail in 1963, in the October edition of *Chosŏn yŏsŏng*. The article, written by Kim Myŏng-hwa, presented idealized fragments of Kim Jong Suk's life from the perspective of an eyewitness of events—a form typical of communist hagiography.³⁷ According to the text, Kim Jong Suk was brought up in a poor family, and because of the harsh living conditions she lost her parents when she was a child. After a colonial punitive unit killed her younger brother,

she pledged revenge and joined the revolution as a member of the children's unit (*adongdan* 아동단). As a partisan, she was helpful to everyone and forgiving of the mistakes of younger communists. The text emphasizes her cooking skills several times. The author praised the *choegittök* (쨌기떡), special rice cakes Kim Jong Suk made with flour and pine tree cambium. She worked hard to feed everybody in the unit and always remembered to secure food and kitchen equipment, while often refusing to eat herself. Her readiness to sacrifice herself is also revealed in the story of her detention in Changbaekhyön (now in the People's Republic of China), where she chose to endure the worst tortures rather than betray the revolution. The text also includes a story about her covering Kim Il Sung with her own body during an enemy ambush. Kim Myöng-hwa emphasizes her devotion to the Great Leader. According to her, Kim Jong Suk was fully committed to Kim Il Sung's political line.³⁸

Kim Myöng-hwa's reminiscence built the foundations of the cult of Kim Jong Suk's personality. However, at that time, she was not yet the "Mother of Revolution" (*hyöngmyöng üi ömöni* 혁명의 어머니), and her figure paled in comparison with the developed cults of other women such as Pak Chöng-ae (an important North Korean politician at the time).³⁹ Kim Jong Suk was one model hero among many. Even in 1964 one could encounter articles praising Lenin's mother Maria Alexandrovna as an example of an "excellent mother" (*hullyunghan ömöni*) who will live forever in the hearts of Korean women.⁴⁰ Kim Myöng-hwa published another article on Kim Jong Suk in 1967, just after a wave of political purges (Pak Chöng-ae was removed from position, among others) and the introduction of the "25 May Instructions," which centralized Kim Il Sung's political power in a totalitarian manner.⁴¹ The position of Kim Jong Suk quickly grew, and the number of titles glorifying her increased rapidly.

One of the effects of the removal of the Kapsan faction and the introduction of political changes was Kim Jong Il's assumption of a key position in the Propaganda and Agitation Department. Kim Jong Il was heavily involved in the promotion of the cult of his biological mother. This naturally secured his own political position. As he lost his mother when he was eight, the intense efforts to immortalize Kim Jong Suk were likely also fueled by trauma. Nevertheless, the push for the new line of propaganda had ramifications in the family conflict over political power. Kim Söng-ae, Kim Il Sung's second wife, tried to suppress the growing cult of Kim Jong Suk by strengthening the image of Kim Il Sung's mother Kang Pan-sök (which was already well known). Kim Söng-ae feared that Kim Jong Il's strong position would block the possible succession of her own son, Kim P'yöng-il—and, as it turned out, these concerns were justified. However, Kim Söng-ae lost the struggle, to which she publicly admitted on International

Women's Day in 1975.⁴² In the following years, the cult of Kim Jong Suk far surpassed the cult of Kang Pan-sök.

During the Sixth Party Congress held in October 1980, Kim Jong Il was revealed to the public as the Great Leader's successor. The previous year, Kim Il Sung had taken numerous steps to strengthen his son's position.⁴³ It was during this period that Kim Jong Suk gained the status of the undisputed mother of the nation. The spread of her cult can be seen in the statistics on the *Chosön yösöng* periodical. While by 1980 the magazine had published six articles with Kim Jong Il's mother's name in the title, there were seventeen such articles between 1981 and 1985. During the late Kim Jong Il regime, this number increased further, with a record 197 titles between 2005 and 2010.⁴⁴ From the second half of the 1990s, more fanciful titles began to appear in the press, such as the "Supreme Incarnation of the Desperate Guard of a Great Leader" (*suryöng kyölsa ongwi üi ch'oego hwasin* 수령결사옹위 최고화신), the "Model of a Nobel Revolutionary" (*kogyörhan hyöng-myöngga üi kwigam* 고결한 혁명가의 귀감), and the "Phoenix" (*pulssajo* 불사조).⁴⁵

The task of immortalization of Kim Jong Suk on the screen was undertaken by the PPU. Paek In-jun (1920–1999), the first chairman of the unit, wrote the scripts for the initial five movies dedicated to Kim Jong Suk. In North Korea, from the late 1950s, it was the screenwriter rather than the director who was perceived as a film's author.⁴⁶ In all the movies discussed in this paper, Paek In-jun's name appears first on the closing credits. Paek In-jun rose to the position of top writer and producer of Kim Jong Il's cinema after the success of the movie *The Family of Ch'oe Hak-sin* (*Ch'oe Hak-sin üi ilga* 최학신의 일가, 1967, O Pyöng-ch'o, in two parts), an adaptation of Paek's theatrical play. Before Kim Jong Il took an interest in it, Paek In-jun was a discredited "reactionary writer" (*pandong chakka* 반동작가). As a chairman of the PPU, Paek was involved in the development of movies dedicated to the leader (*suryöng hyöngsang yönghwa* 수령형상영화). He is known as the author of twenty-one movie scripts, including *Fire Burning All Over the World* (*Nuri e punnün pul* 누리에 붙는 불, 1977, Pak Hak, Öm Kil-sön), which, except for the banned *I See Mt. Paektu* (*Paektu-san i poinda* 백두산이 보인다, 1957, Chöng Kyu-wan), was the first movie in which Kim Il Sung was played by a real actor. He also wrote a screenplay of a famous revolutionary opera, *Flower Girl*. He was granted the unique title of Great Literature Writer (*taemunho* 대문호) for his achievements.⁴⁷

Paek In-jun's *The Family of Ch'oe Hak-sin* presented much more nuanced heroes and problems than was typical for North Korean cinema at the time, which was dominated by binary dichotomies. In the movie, Ch'oe Hak-sin is a Christian pastor, but that alone does not make him an evil man. Instead, he is presented as someone deluded by false promises. When it becomes clear that his faith was used by the American imperialists to control Korea, his ideological

consciousness grows, and he rejects Christianity altogether. Similarly, the Kim Jong Suk saga written by Paek In-jun uses the theme of the external enemy to focus on internal threats and patterns of behavior. Kim Jong Suk faces not only the Japanese occupiers, but also careerists in her own movement, communists who do not belong to Kim Il Sung's faction, and *minsangdan*, the secret pro-Japanese spies who try to break down the communist movement in Manchuria.⁴⁸ In every situation, Kim Jong Suk comes out victorious, proving the exclusivity of Kim Il Sung's political line.

The films were not made in accordance with the chronology of Kim Jong Suk's biography. Rather than presenting one linear story, they resemble a collection of moralizing stories related to Kim Jong Suk's greatness. The plots of the films in question are largely made up of micro-stories crowned with didactic moments that imply an appropriate behavior or indicate the uniqueness and importance of Kim Il Sung. The first movie, released in 1979, was *Far Away from the Headquarters*. As indicated in the opening credits, it was produced for Kim Jong Suk's sixty-second birthday. The action takes place at a partisan base in 1939. Kim Jong Suk tries to complete a task ordered by Kim Il Sung, to organize 600 winter uniforms (*kyöul gūnbok*) for the soldiers. She works undercover as Ok-sun in the village to gain the villagers' trust. It turns out that the biggest obstacle is not the local people but the ambitious commander of the hidden camp. Despite his attempts at sabotage and various false accusations, Kim Jong Suk emerges victorious. The film ends with the triumphant crossing of the Yalu River by the united partisans led by Kim Il Sung himself. It is 5 April 1939, the Arduous March (*konan ūi haenggun*)⁴⁹ is over, and the partisans celebrate the beauty of spring.

Love that Blossomed the Future, a present for Kim Jong Suk's sixty-fifth birthday, was directed by Pak Hak (1914–1982). Pak Hak was a veteran in the DPRK film industry, a famous actor, director of popular movies such as *The Demarcation Village* (*Pun'gyesön maül esö 분계선 마을에서*, 1961), and co-director of *Flower Girl*. His experience of working with children on movie sets is likely why he was chosen to direct *Love that Blossomed the Future*. It was his last film, and he passed away soon after its release.⁵⁰ The movie tells the story of the orphans that Kim Jong Suk took care of, and her fight to protect them, not only from the freezing cold and hunger, but also from colonial punitive forces and bad, greedy communists. The film also depicts the crucial moment in the life of Kim Jong Suk—her first meeting with Kim Il Sung, which the narrator places in March 1935.⁵¹

A Royal Bodyguard focuses on Kim Jong Suk's guerrilla activities. The film takes place during the famous partisan campaigns conducted from a secret base on Mt. Paektu in 1939. Much of the plot takes place in winter and highlights the hardships Kim Jong Suk had to overcome. Kim not only manages to secure food

but also turns out to be a brilliant commander. The movie includes an iconic scene, also immortalized by North Korean painters, of her guarding Kim Il Sung with her own body. In contrast, *Crossing the Yalu River* has a much slower pace of action. It depicts the political activity of Kim Jong Suk among the people in her hometown, Hoeryŏng, where she works undercover as Ok-sun. In the finale, Kim exposes a spy sent by the colonial government to work against the communists and convinces the local intellectuals to join the cause.

In *Sunshine*, Kim Jong Suk returns as Ok-sun to an unidentified village on the Manchurian–Korean border. She organizes secret patriotic teaching, creates a pro-Kim Il Sung Women’s Society (*punyŏhoewŏn*부녀회원), recruits new guerrillas, and establishes justice, among others by arresting the cruel landlord. She even converts a Christian deaconess to “Kimilsungism.” Although the exact date of Kim’s activity under the pseudonym is not given in the films, it can be deduced as having taken place over the course of 1937 from the scenes in which the villagers rejoice over Kim Il Sung’s victory in Pochonbo (which happened on 4 June 1937). The last film was made in the Sin Sang-ok era and features a number of technical improvements that make it more dynamic than the previous pieces. Some of the standout techniques include fast editing, cross-cutting, tracking shots, long zooms, and a shaking camera to create an effect of “sickness.” The movie was also filmed on higher-quality film reel.⁵²

All five motion pictures can be treated as part of a larger biographical series aimed at propagating the highest female ideal represented by Kim Jong Suk. The next section analyzes the characteristics of the sacred heroine.

From benevolent mother to ruthless warrior

“We have a mother, we have a father, who warmly takes care of us,” we hear in the extra-diegetic song in *Love that Blossomed the Future*. The scene depicts a group of orphans dressed in the new communist uniforms, happy to meet their savior, Kim Il Sung. Under Kim Jong Suk’s care, the children have gone through a series of hardships, but thanks to being reunited with Kim Il Sung’s unit, they are safe. At the end of the film the narrator emphasizes that thanks to Kim Jong Suk, the children will grow into true revolutionaries completely devoted to Kim Il Sung. One can read the poor orphans of *Love that Blossomed the Future* as a metaphor for the Korean nation, protected by the parenting power of Kim Jong Suk and Kim Il Sung. As noticed by B. R. Myers, the Great Leader himself was often described by reference to mother-like qualities, as one who takes care of the innocent, childlike Korean race.⁵³ In the case of the Paek In-jun movies, it is rather Kim Jong Suk who is delineated as the mother of the people. She is much closer

and more approachable than the distant, legendary Kim Il Sung, who is absent most of the time (he does not figure in the last two movies) and appears mostly to serve justice and teach (reminiscent of the behavior of a traditional patriarch).

The phrase “love of mother,” which we hear in the aforementioned song, describes Kim Jong Suk’s tendency to sacrifice her own needs for others. In *Love that Blossomed the Future* she takes care of the orphans, despite some communists considering them a problem, or even children of *minsaengdan* traitors (which we find out is a lie used to slander Kim Il Sung’s communists). In order to save them, she is forced to lead them on a difficult, frosty route through the steppes of Manchuria. During this march, she defends them from the Japanese. She cooks for them, but we do not see her eating. She tirelessly guards them as they sleep by a fire under the open sky. She treats sick children with Korean medicine obtained from a local herbalist. Not only that, but she also manages to comfort the traumatized children and give them hope. The children reciprocate with joy, call her “big sister” (*nuna*), and in numerous scenes we see them cuddling up to Kim Jong Suk.



Figure 2 Kim Jong Suk as protective mother in *Love that Blossomed the Future*

It is Kim Jong Suk's self-sacrifice and dedication that wins people over. In the partisan unit, despite the harsh winter conditions, she organizes comforting food. She commands the building of a vermicelli press from wood; she uses herbs she collects; or she cooks *sundae*, a traditional Korean dish made from intestines stuffed with blood and other ingredients, from a bear she hunted herself. In *Sunshine*, her medical knowledge saves the life of the seriously ill Yöng-sun, a maid from a landlord's house. We find a similar story in *Crossing the Yalu River*. Emphasizing Kim's knowledge of herbal medicine is not accidental, as it is considered a national treasure in the DPRK.⁵⁴ In *Far Away from the Headquarters* she wins over an elderly peasant woman by doing a lot of housework and restoring a clay kitchen. The grandmother repays her with materials for sewing winter uniforms. Thanks to this, Kim Jong Suk manages to complete the mission of sewing the 660 uniforms ahead of time. Once again, the symbolism of a mother who warms her children is touched upon.

The heroine described in these movies is clearly inscribed in the nation-building project. Kim Jong Suk is a preserver and defender of Korean tradition. She engages in all sorts of cultural activities. In *Sunshine*, she sings *Arirang* to village women during night classes.⁵⁵ The popular folk song gained status as a national resistance song during the colonial period. Under Kim Jong Suk's guidance, students also learn *han'gül*, the Korean alphabet, a project as enlightening as it was propagandistic (she would then distribute revolutionary texts to them). In a patriotic revival, villagers organize a festival with Korean dances, Korean songs, and Korean games such as *yunnori*. This infuriates the local Japanese authorities. In *Far Away from the Headquarters*, her female squad members' spontaneous traditional dances cause a conflict between Kim Jong Suk and the arrogant camp commander, who does not consider these activities serious. As a "Mother" of the whole nation, through these various activities, Kim Jong Suk affirms and redefines the meaning of Korean-ness. For instance, the "national dance" (*minjok muyong*) performed by the villagers is a perfect example of an invented tradition, as it was designed by Ch'oe Süng-hüi during the Soviet occupation of the northern part of the peninsula in 1946 and did not exist at the time of the film's action.⁵⁶

Kim Jong Suk's character has many elements associated with the home space (tidying up, sewing, babysitting, cooking). However, those patriarchal notions of motherhood are mitigated by the warrior ethos, mostly demonstrated in *A Royal Bodyguard*. This movie focuses on Kim Jong Suk's battle skills more than others. She turns out to be a commander endowed with extraordinary speed of action and an excellent instinct to sense danger—she easily discovers and eliminates a spy sent by the Japanese. She is also an incredibly effective soldier who never misses when shooting. Moreover, Kim Jong Suk rejects the foundations

of neo-Confucian ethics, and as a model provides at least partial liberation to women. A neo-Confucian division of gender roles into men in the outside world (*woe* 외) and women in the inside world (*nae* 내) is not adhered to among the partisans.⁵⁷ Kim Jong Suk gives orders to subordinated male soldiers and is not afraid to confront factional commanders. *Far Away from the Headquarters* starts with the empowering scene of a female partisan who wins a strength competition against a male representative. The neo-Confucian rule of *samjong-ji-do* (삼종지도, three rules of obedience) is also abandoned. Kim Jong Suk teaches her fellow comrades that they must follow only General Kim Il Sung, not their fathers, husbands, or sons. “The General is someone more than a family,” she explains to her comrades in *A Royal Bodyguard*. The gender revolution manifested by Kim Jong Suk and her partisans, however, reveals the problem of a double burden. Women, who now must compete with men in new spheres (hunting and the military), are still required to fulfill their duties in the inner sphere (the kitchen and sewing).

Stalinist socialist realism had a huge impact on the aesthetics of North Korean cinema.⁵⁸ It has already been pointed out that movies such as *Zoya* (*Zoia Zoya*, 1944, Lev Arnshtam) had a significant impact on shaping the image of the female partisan in early North Korean cinema.⁵⁹ *Zoya* tells the mythical, likely fabricated story of Zoya Kosmodemiyanska (1923–1941), a young Soviet girl who joined the partisans to fight the Nazis and died heroically under torture. As Jun Jee Nee has observed, “[r]ather than presenting spectacular images of the heroine’s powers in battle, the film emphasizes her ‘girlness’ and ‘femininity’.”⁶⁰ The depiction of Kim Jong Suk in Paek In-jun’s movies shares this problem. Compared with other North Korean partisan movies of the time (e.g., *Mt. Paektu*, *Paektu-san* 백두산, 1980, Ŏm Kil-sŏn), there are few combat scenes; even *A Royal Bodyguard* includes only two. The emphasis is on Kim Jong Suk as a woman, defined in a patriarchal manner. Paek In-jun movies emphasize the “feminine” features of Kim Jong Suk, such as her etiquette during conversations with men, her cooking skills, and her connection with nature (as manifested by her knowledge of herbs and her love of picking flowers). In *Far Away from the Headquarters*, a frontal medium shot of Kim with a huge bouquet of *chindallae* (진달래, *Korean rhododendron mucronulatum* or azalea) perpetuates the North Korean image of women as the “flowers of the revolution” (*hyŏngmyŏng ũi kkot* 혁명의 꽃).⁶¹ Although *Sunshine* presents the story of Kim’s detention by the colonial authorities, the filmmakers chose not to show any scenes of torture (a motif present in her biographies), probably not wanting to violate the idealized body of the heroine. In this regard, Soviet cinema was far more brutal, not sparing its viewers from the gory details of tortured female bodies.⁶²

The Mother-Warrior archetype, as presented, refers to paradigms popular in the Communist sphere. Movies such as *She Defends the Motherland* (*Ona zashchishchaet rodinu Она защищает Родину*, 1943, Fridrikh Ermler) are a good example of stories that show women forced to enter the soldier's path by the cruelty of the enemy. The heroine of the film, Praskov'ia Luk'ianova, is characterized by motherly qualities akin to those exhibited by Kim Jong Suk as well as by a similar readiness for ultimate sacrifice. Moreover, "Mother Earth," "Mother of the Revolution," and "Mother of the State" are all symbolic figures widespread in Soviet cinema.⁶³ Like the female partisans in Soviet cinema, Kim Jong Suk also plays a mixture of traditional and revolutionary roles. Perfection in every sphere allows her to establish unquestionable authority. Step by step, Kim achieves her goals and becomes a caring teacher, bringing hope and comfort to the inhabitants of both cities (*Crossing the Yalu River*) and villages (*Sunshine*). Although the figure of the warrior mother is not unique to the Communist bloc, the figure of Kim Jong Suk is inscribed in a narrative unparalleled anywhere else, which will be discussed in the next section.

Prophesizing about Kim Il Sung

Wherever she is, whatever she is doing, Kim Jong Suk has one purpose: promoting the messianic mission of General Kim Il Sung. Therefore, I consider her role as that of a prophet. Hans Maier, taking Karl Marx as an example, described the political prophet as someone who postulates the collapse of the known world and points towards a way "not as a dreamer and visionary, but as a believing possessor of knowledge."⁶⁴ Prophetic speech is often used in the context of armed struggle for building the authority of a speaker's group and the mobilization of armed actors.⁶⁵ Kim Jong Suk's prophetic abilities are shown as a part of her partisan activities. Her prophetic speech directly challenges the oppressive colonial structures and promises a radical ontological change, a new meta-empirical (related to matters beyond the range of empirical knowledge) framework of meaning. The only condition is the acceptance of non-negotiable truths about Kim Il Sung's mission.

Kim Jong Suk appears as a prophet in each movie. In *Far Away from the Headquarters*, Kim Jong Suk not only convinces an elderly peasant to donate materials for uniforms but also turns her into a loyal follower of Kim Il Sung. In *Love that Blossomed the Future*, children are taught that the General can save them. There are many scenes where Kim Jong Suk explains the importance of Kim Il Sung to partisans. As presented in *Crossing the Yalu River*, her message reaches not only the poor, but also the Korean higher classes. Finally, in *Sunshine*, she wins over a Presbyterian missionary.

It is important to stress that, according to Paek In-jun's vision, Kim Jong Suk does not possess any supernatural characteristics. She amazes people with her behavior and skills, and some of her performances (her endurance, or her ability to kill with one shot) can be hard to imagine, but they do not break our ontological expectations about the world (they are at least technically possible), and they are no different from those possessed by the superhumans of Stalinist cinema.⁶⁶ This contrasts with Winstanley-Chesters and Ten's analysis, which finds supernatural elements in Kim Jong Suk's written biographies.⁶⁷ At the time the movies were made, the cult of Kim Jong Suk was dynamically expanding but did not involve such radical claims. The official biographies from 2002 and 2005, on which Winstanley-Chesters and Ten base most of their analysis, appeared more than a decade after the release of Paek's movies.⁶⁸ Just like in the literature, the rise of supernatural elements in the DPRK cinema can be observed in the 2000s, during the late rule of Kim Jong Il.⁶⁹ Paek In-jun's films, filled with prophetism and mysticism around Kim Il Sung, seem to be a step toward the supernatural sphere, but they do not reach it.

The transformation on Mt. Paektu, a central theme for Kim Jong Suk's twenty-first-century biographies, according to Winstanley-Chesters and Ten, is also absent in Paek's movies. In Paek In-jun's cinematic works, the role of Mt. Paektu is marginal. While *A Royal Bodyguard* does depict the secret camp on the slopes of the volcano, the location is not discussed in any way, nor is Kim Jong Suk's unit approached differently from other locations and camps presented in other movies. Mt. Paektu is a highly important place in North Korean culture, and its symbolism of independence and spiritual guidance of Kim Il Sung was popularized by the first North Korean film, *My Home Village* (*Nae kohyang* 내 고향, 1949, Kang Hong-sik). The mountain appears in the last scenes of *Far Away from the Headquarters* and *Love that Blossomed the Future*, as a song of hope. However, this cannot be considered a novelty and is related to faith in the Korean nation rather than to character development.

While Kim Jong Suk is in no way an esoteric character, the figure of the General is built on messianic claims and surrounded by an aura of eeriness. Kim Jong Suk is convinced of his total uniqueness and his mystical capabilities as a savior. One of the most poignant scenes in *Love that Blossomed the Future* is the death of a little orphan girl, Song-i. Kim Jong Suk uses the situation to direct the children to the object of her worship. She asks the children in an agitated voice if this death would have been possible had the General been with them. They all shout a loud "no." Without Kim Il Sung, combat loses its meaning. "If we leave him, where we will go?" she asks in a dramatic voice in *A Royal Bodyguard*. The messianic role of the leader is strengthened by the *deus ex machina* function he performs

in the movies. In *Far Away from the Headquarters* and *Love that Blossomed the Future* Kim Il Sung appears only at the end of the movie. His arrival is combined with optimistic music, images of melting ice and the rising sun, symbols of hope and his leadership. All problems are solved one by one, and the movie has a happy ending. The General is much more present in *A Royal Bodyguard*. Here, too, an aura of holiness is being built around him. The partisans strive to outdo each other in applause after his speeches or cry, touched by his goodness. The highest distinction is to fall into his loving bosom. Although Kim Il Sung does not appear in person in *Crossing the Yalu River* or *Sunshine*, in the latter, a gospel-like extra-diegetic song about his greatness is juxtaposed with the blue sky. The leader is identified with what is most high.⁷⁰

The religious nature of Paek's saga is also revealed through clashes with alternative systems of meaning, which could potentially threaten the exclusivity of Kim Il Sung messianism. Paek In-jun was a writer known for his more sophisticated plots focused on the internal dangers in the world. In *Far Away from the Headquarters* the commander of a secret base at first seems willing to cooperate with Kim Jong Suk. Soon, however, he reveals his true face, that of a careerist. He tries to humiliate women with his knowledge of communist doctrine and undermines their efforts. His arrogance is juxtaposed with the purity and *sobakham* (소박함)—“benevolent naivete and spontaneity”—of Kim Jong Suk.⁷¹ Emotional engagement is much more valued than intellectual considerations, which can lead one astray. Other examples of misguided communists appear in *Love that Blossomed the Future*. Here Kim Jong Suk's nationalism clashes with the internationalism of local Party executive Pak. Pak is a cold cynic who does not believe that revolution can be won by Koreans themselves. He rules Chechangzi (a town in then Manchuria) with an iron fist. He imprisons an activist who distributed food to the poor and sentences him to death. Then he closes the local orphanage due to lack of funds. The internationalist factionists depicted in the movie do not behave differently from landlords. This is contrasted with the attitude of Kim Jong Suk and her promise of the boundless love of Kim Il Sung. In the end, all unsound communists fail badly, punished either by the General or by his people (once again, he acts as *deus ex machina*).

Depicting unsound communists within partisan units is a relatively rare theme in North Korean cinema. Even more intriguing is the encounter with Christianity in *Sunshine*. In the village, missionary work is conducted by Chŏng-guk, a Presbyterian *kwŏnsa* (권사, deaconess, a special position for respected women in Presbyterian churches).⁷² However, the woman is not exposed as an enemy of the people, or as deluded by American imperialism, as is the case in the classic anti-Christian movies *Jackals* (*Sŭngnyangi* 승냥이, 1956, Ri Sök-chin)⁷³ and

The Family of Ch'oe Hak-sin. It turns out that women have a similar passion for helping the poor and are willing to make the same sacrifices for the national cause. These comparisons in the film are not accidental. Paek In-jun drew a similar analogy between Christianity and North Korean ideology in his well-known *The Family of Ch'oe Hak-sin*. However, in the previous movie, Christianity is judged more harshly, and the pastor's conversion is more radical. In *Sunshine*, Chŏng-guk tries to convince Kim Jong Suk to become a Christian, but she is the one who is then won over to Kimilsungism. The turning point is the dialogue between the characters, which I present below.

- Kim Jong Suk: My older sister, you overcame a big challenge and gained a lot of strength, but you cannot do a great work alone. We need to set up an organization.
- Chŏng-guk *kwōnsa*: An organization?
- Kim Jong Suk: Yes, and now you need to become the sunshine that delivers the General's path of national liberation.
- Chŏng-guk *kwōnsa*: Me?
- Kim Jong Suk: Yes.
- Chŏng-guk *kwōnsa*: But I believe in Jesus ...
- Kim Jong Suk: This is not a problem. For independent Korea, everyone who loves the country should join in the General's world. Even if you believe in Jesus, believe in Korea, and believe in opposing the Japs.

The scene also reveals the true meaning of the title. If Kim Il Sung is the sun, his followers are sunshine. While Christianity is shown as a positive, nationalistic force, the film also contains criticism of it. Chŏng-guk's prayers are not effective in helping the villagers, while Kim Jong Suk's actions are. Finally, under the influence of Kim Jong Suk's friendship, Chŏng-guk undergoes a transformation into a full-fledged follower of Kim Il Sung and swears to believe in his cause. The tolerance for Christianity is therefore only apparent. Moreover, Christianity is shown as a religion of old people, and so as belonging to the past. The depiction of Buddhism is even more harsh and present only in the form of a ruined Buddhist temple the characters stop at in *Love that Blossomed the Future*.

Kim Jong Suk, with her zeal to praise the leader and constant, selfless effort, resembles the other typical heroes of the Hidden Hero Campaign (*sumŭn yōngung undong* 숨은 영웅 운동), a narrative especially popular in the 1970s and 1980s.⁷⁴ A "hidden hero" is completely dedicated to working for other people and the Great Leader and does not care for recognition. However, although Kim Jong Suk shares this characteristic, she is not a "hidden hero." While there is nothing in the movies to suggest a romantic relationship between the heroes, all movies stress her special emotional relationship with the General, which resembles the relationship



Figure 3 An unexpected friendship between Kim Jong Suk and a Christian deaconess in *Sunshine*

Source: Paektusan Production Unit

between a guru and his most devoted student. Kim Jong Suk is always touched by the Great Leader's words and believes him implicitly. In *Crossing the Yalu River*, she writes him passionate letters apologizing for not being effective enough. Soviet films about female partisans emphasize the family ties of the heroines. Kim Jong Suk, an orphan, is completely devoted to the cause and Kim Il Sung. While the main heroes in *Zoya* and *She Defends the Motherland* recall the women's prewar lives, in *Love that Blossomed the Future* Kim Jong Suk's retrospections are related to her first meeting with the General.

As the narrator of *A Royal Bodyguard* emphasizes at the end of the movie, Kim is the most faithful and loyal soldier of Kim Il Sung. This makes her position higher than that of any "hidden hero," and her mission more convincing. Furthermore, the movies indirectly praise Kim Il Sung's wife, thus creating the image of a holy family (underlined by extra-diegetic songs in praise of the mother and father). Such a strong idealization of the ruler's relatives is unheard of in any other communist country. Uniquely, the leader's wife is portrayed in the motion pictures not only as a saint, but also as a special mediator between the people and the leader.

Conclusion

In Paek In-jun's cinema, Kim Jong Suk was turned into the North Korean female ideal. A persona unknown to the broader public suddenly became the most praiseworthy figure. Already in the 1980s the cult of the mythical female partisan almost completely replaced the topic of pro-women social activists, who had passionately worked for the female cause in previous decades, removing the subject from the social landscape.⁷⁵ The cinematic Kim Jong Suk is a complex figure with feminine and masculine traits, combining the qualities of a mother and a warrior. Kim Jong Suk fully succeeds in the military sphere, which was reserved only for males in pre-revolutionary Korea; however, the emancipatory discourse is weakened by assigning numerous traditional roles to the heroine, which helps to preserve the patriarchal worldview. Nevertheless, Kim Jong Suk was elevated to "Mother of Revolution," a woman of unconditional love, and an ambassador of Korean traditions and culture in the period of colonial oppression. Kim also stands out from the many "hidden heroes" of the DPRK cinema as the most devoted and loyal follower of Kim Il Sung and an implacable teacher of his vision.

Kim Jong Suk's idealization has some limits. In Paek In-jun's movies, she is not a magician, and she does not possess any supernatural abilities—an implication we find in further biographies. Her skills are outstanding and almost impossible, but they do not break the laws of physics. The connection with the holy Korean mountain, Mt. Paektu, also is not developed. Although not yet a goddess, she can be described as a saint or a prophet on a sacred mission. She prophesies about the messianic and teleological role of Kim Il Sung and turns other heroes into his followers. In *Sunshine*, even a Christian deaconess submits under the influence of her zeal. As it turns out, Christianity is only one step away from Kimilsungism. Kim Jong Suk also exposes a factionalist in a rare critique of bad partisans. As it turns out, to be a communist in North Korea means to have total faith in Kim Il Sung; this truth is more important than anything else. Once more, the myth of Kim Il Sung as the only liberator of Korea (which ignores the decisive role of the Soviet Red Army) is strengthened—the internationalists are punished. Overall, these movies contribute to the genre of *movies dedicated to the leader* as well as the further mythologization of the Great Leader and the members of his family. The sacralization is seen even in the closing credits, which never reveal the names of the actors who played Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Suk.

It should be pointed out that Paek In-jun's movies about Kim Jong Suk contributed to the development of her myth only to an extent. The discussed movies use only a short period of Kim's historiography, namely her activities

between 1935 and 1939, likely because of a broader campaign to promote Kim Il Sung's partisan activities.⁷⁶ We do not learn how Kim Jong Suk became a communist; there is no coming-of-age story or any ideological maturation. Neither do we learn what she did after the liberation of the country. It is also not clear why exactly she perceives Kim Il Sung as the only savior of Korea, and why she follows him so passionately and tries to convert everyone to his vision. Rather, we are presented with the same idealized, archetypical hero in each movie. Ironically, all the described motion pictures use her example to promote the *real* hero of the story, the messianic General Kim Il Sung. Such subjugation of the female to the male likely further disempowered women's position in DPRK society. At the same time, the myth proliferated by Paek In-jun inspired a multitude of artists and exploded into numerous representations, especially in the 2000s. Praised among the "Three Generals of Mt. Paektu" (*Paektusan 3taejanggun* 백두산 3대장군), she is the most glorified female figure in North Korea to this day.

The Kim Jong Suk saga fits in with the broader activities led by Kim Jong Il to remodel the symbolic landscape to completely subordinate it to the cult of his own family. As today the country is ruled by Kim Jong Suk's grandson, Kim Jong Un (Kim Chong-un), it is clear that the ongoing myth has its political utility in presenting the continuity of the power structure and legitimizing the social order. North Korean biographers of the ruling family never forget to underline that genius is inherited, not acquired. Even the official biography of Kim Jong Suk claims that she was born in Hoeryŏng to a poor peasant family with a great revolutionary background. Although the position of cinema has weakened under Kim Jong Un's rule, films dedicated to Kim Jong Suk are still being made, with examples as recent as the 2020 Korean Central Television screen documentary movie *The March of Mt. Paektu, Go Forever!* (*Yŏngwŏnhi karira Paektu ūi haeng-gun'gil ūl 영원히 가리라 백두의 행군길을*).⁷⁶ As long as Kim Jong Un is in power, the cult of Kim Jong Suk will continue to thrive.

Notes

1. This research has been funded by the Faculty of Philosophy budget under the Strategic Programme Excellence Initiative at the Jagiellonian University, 2022.
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33. Chŏng, "Kim Jŏng-suk," 2009, p. 39.
34. Fyodor Tertitskiy, *Kim Il-sŏng tŏn ūi Pukhan 1945 nyŏn 8 wŏl 9 il soryŏn'gun ch'amjŏn put'ŏ 10 wŏl 14 il p'yŏngyang P'yŏngyang yŏnsŏl kkaji* (Seoul: Hanŭl, 2018), p. 114.
35. Andrei Lankov, *From Stalin to Kim Il Sung: The Formation of North Korea, 1945–1960* (London: C. Hunt & Co., 2002), p. 54.
36. Fyodor Tertitskiy, "The Cult of Kim Jong Suk: The Story of a Housewife Turned Divine Figure," *NK News*, 2018. <https://www.nknews.org/2018/12/the-cult-of-kim-jong-suk-the-story-of-a-housewife-turned-divine-figure/?t=1664281395> (accessed 16 December 2022).
37. A model work of the genre was Dmitry Furmanov's *Chapaev*, the romanticized story of a real Red Army commander, published in 1923.
38. Kim Myŏng-hwa, "Kim Jŏng-suk tongji rŭl hoesang hayŏ," *Chosŏn yŏsŏng* 10 (1963).
39. Kim and Pak, "'Chosŏn nyŏsŏng' kisa," 2021, p. 153.
40. Kim Kŭm-ja, "Renin ūi ōmŏni," *Chosŏn yŏsŏng* 12 (1964).
41. Fyodor Tertitskiy, "The Ascension of the Ordinary Man: How the Personality Cult of Kim Il-Sung Was Constructed (1945–1974)," *Acta Koreana* 18.1 (2015), pp. 221–223; Tertitskiy, "The Cult," 2018.
42. Lim, *Kim Jong-Il*, 2008, p. 51.
43. Lim, *Kim Jong-Il*, 2008, p. 70.
44. Kim and Pak, "'Chosŏn nyŏsŏng' kisa," 2021, p. 138.
45. Chŏng, "Kim Jŏng-suk," 2009, p. 50.
46. Dima Mironenko, "A Jester with Chameleon Faces: Laughter and Comedy in North Korea, 1953–1969," PhD dissertation (Harvard University, 2014), pp. 131–132.
47. Chŏn Yŏng-sŏn, "Paek In-jun ūi suryŏng hyŏngsang hwa wa kyegŭpsŏng nonjaeng 'Ch'oe Hak-sin ūi ilga' rŭl chungsim ūro," *Nambuk munhwa yesul yŏn'gu* 5 (2009).
48. Although in the movies Kim Jong Suk unmasks spies without much of a problem, in reality, the actions of the Japanese greatly weakened the communist movement in Manchuria, which plunged into purges and political paranoia. For more on the Minsaengdan Incident,

- see Han Hongkoo, *Wounded Nationalism: The Minsaengdan Incident and Kim Il Sung in Eastern Manchuria*. PhD Dissertation (University of Washington, 1999).
49. In DPRK historiography, Arduous March relates to the mythical one hundred days of travel by Kim Il Sung and his partisans in extreme winter conditions from Manchuria to the Yalu River between December 1938 to March 1939. The name of the event was also used by authorities to describe the North Korean famine in the 1990s.
 50. Han Sang-ŏn, "Pak Hak ūi sam kwa yŏnghwa hwaldong yŏn'gu," *Yŏnghwa yŏn'gu* 69 (2016).
 51. The date has been set back from the Kim Myŏng-hwa article, which stated that the first meeting took place in the spring of 1936. Kim, "Kim Jŏng-suk," 1963, p. 15.
 52. For more on Sin Sang-ok's innovations for DPRK cinema see Sebo, "A Study," 2018, pp. 125–147.
 53. Brian R. Myers, *The Cleanest Race: How North Koreans See Themselves—And Why It Matters* (New York, NY: Melville House, 2010), pp. 73–95.
 54. Initially, the DPRK authorities attempted to fight with oriental medicine, but the North Korean Ministry of Health legalized all traditional healing practices in 1956. Balazs Szalontai, *Kim Il Sung in the Khrushchev Era. Soviet–DPRK Relations and the Roots of North Korean Despotism, 1953–1964* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 90.
 55. Similarly, North Korean artists gave Korean folk tales a revolutionary meaning; see for example Gabor Sebo, "Different Cinematic Interpretations of Ch'unhyangjŏn: The Same Korean Identity," *European Journal of Korean Studies* 21.1 (2021).
 56. Keith Howard, "Dance and Ideology in North Korea: Ch'oe Sŭnghŭi and Her Response to Criticism," *European Journal of Korean Studies* 21.2 (2022), p. 2.
 57. For more on the gender views in neo-Confucianism see Jisoo M. Kim, "Neo-Confucianism, Women, and the Law in Chosŏn Korea," in *Dao Companion to Korean Confucian Philosophy*, ed. Ro Young-chan (Dordrecht: Springer, 2019); Han Hee-sook, "Women's Life During the Chosŏn Dynasty," *International Journal of Korean History* 6 (2004).
 58. The cinema that came during the Khrushchev thaw rejected a number of previous narratives and had a limited impact on North Korean film production. For example, the Oscar-nominated movie *The Dawns Here Are Quiet* (*A zori zdes' tikhie*, 1972, Stanislav Rostotsky), about young female soldiers, contains threads such as nudity, the heroine's affair with a married man, bullying, emotional breakdown, and sexual temptation, which were absent from the idealized North Korean partisan cinema.
 59. Jee Nee Jun, "Female Warrior Imagery in the North Korean Film *A Partisan Maiden* (1954) and the Soviet Film *Zoya* (1944)," *Journal of Japanese and Korean Cinema* 13.2 (2021).
 60. Jun, "Female," 2021, p. 178.
 61. Pak Yŏng-cha, "Sŏn'gun sidae Pukhan yŏsŏng ūi saeksyuŏllŏt'i (sexuality) yŏn'gu (1995–2006): Kunsu chjuŭi kukka kwŏllyŏk ūi sŏng (性) chŏngch'esŏng kusŏng ūl chungsim ūro," *Tongil chŏngch'aek yŏn'gu* 15.2 (2006).
 62. Jun, "Female," 2021, pp. 181–182.
 63. Małgorzata Flig, *Mitotwórcza Funkcja Kina i Literatury w Kulturze Stalinowskiej Lat 30. XX Wieku* (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2014), pp. 145–158.
 64. Hans Maier, *Totalitarianism and Political Religions: Concepts for the Comparison of Dictatorships* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 1996), p. 321.
 65. Naomi R. Pendle, "Politics, Prophets and Armed Mobilizations: Competition and Continuity over Registers of Authority in South Sudan's Conflicts," *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 14.1 (2020).
 66. See the versions of positive heroes in John Haynes, *New Soviet Man: Gender and Masculinity in Stalinist Soviet Cinema* (Manchester and New York, NY: Manchester University Press, 2003).
 67. Ten and Winstanley-Chesters, *New Goddesses*, 2020, pp. 103–138.

68. The first Kim Jong-suk biography was published in 1991; the novels, however, were published in the 1980s. Winstanley-Chesters, *New Goddesses*, 2020, Kindle edition: 1515–2794; Chông, “Kim Jông-suk,” 2009, p. 33.
69. Roman Husarski, “Towards a Supernatural Propaganda: The DPRK Myth in the Movie *The Big-Game Hunter*,” *Studia Religiológica* 53.2 (2020).
70. A similar role of authority from above has the acousmatic voice found in many North Korean movies see Andrew D. Jackson, “DPRK film, Order No. 27 and the acousmatic voice,” in Balmain Colette, *Korean Screen Cultures: Interrogating Cinema, TV, Music and Online games* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2016), pp. 191–211.
71. Brian R. Myers, *Han Sorya and North Korean Literature: The Failure of Socialist Realism in the DPRK* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 18.
72. For more on the position of *kwonsa* in Presbyterian churches see Lee Jung-sook, “How Collegial Can They Be? Church Offices in the Korean Presbyterian Churches,” *Theology Today* 66 (2009), p. 178.
73. The movie was based on an influential 1951 short novel by Han Sorya about murderous American missionaries. However, because its creators were purged, the movie did not survive to this day. Han Sang-ôn, “‘Paektusan i poinda’ wa hangil mujang t’ujaeng yônghwa,” *Kubo hakpo* 27 (2021), p. 208.
74. Immanuel Kim, *Laughing North Koreans: The Culture of Comedy Films* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2020), p. 118.
75. Chông, “Kim Jông-suk,” 2009, p. 38.
76. Lim, *Kim Jong-Il*, 2008, p. 44.
77. Pak Su-yun, “Puk, Kim Chông-ün Chomo Kim Chông-suk 73 chugi e ‘Paektu hyôlt’ong’ ttüugi,” *Yonhap News*, 2022. <https://www.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20220922048500504> (accessed 16 December 2022).

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