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Military-First Politics (*Songun*): Understanding Kim Jong-il's North Korea

by Han S. Park

Introduction

As one might say that, without a proper understanding of *juche*, Kim Il-sung's North Korea cannot be comprehended, one might also say that a proper understanding of Kim Jong-il's North Korea is impossible without a proper comprehension of *songun*. *Juche* and *songun* are inseparable in that *songun* is predicated on the principles of *juche*. The *songun* theoreticians claim that *songun* has advanced *juche* to a higher plane by providing it with a realistic perspective on the history and politics of the world. Just as in the case of *juche*, *songun* is said to be in a constant process of evolving toward its perfection. At present, there are limited written sources available in any language for a researcher to discern its definitive picture. Yet, by consulting available publications from North Korea and conducting a series of personal interviews with scholars who are the leading advocates and theoreticians of this system of ideas, one might be able to portray the essence of its philosophical and theoretical attributes. It is hoped that the following pages may be of some help to observers of North Korea in explaining the system characteristics and policy behaviors of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) under Kim Jong-il.

Characteristics of *Songun*: What Is Military-First Politics?

Military the Center of the Political System

Since the death of Kim Il-sung in 1994, the concept of the center—*dang jungang*—of the Korean Workers' Party has been used in North Korea to refer specifically to Kim Jong-il. The center in this context means more than the locus of power. It means the central nervous system (as of the body). The military is the guardian for the body, which must be protected and never allowed to be vulnerable. When the military is theorized to be the center, it carries the same connotation. In this sense, the military is not just an institution designed to perform the function of defending the country from external hostility. Instead, it provides all of the other institutions of the government with legitimacy. All policy goals are articulated by the military and then disseminated to other organizations with specific strategic and tactical recommendations for implementation. After policies are implemented, their effectiveness will be evaluated by the military. In this way, the military serves as the brain in the nervous system of the body politic.

Dr. Han Park's paper is the eighth in KEI's *Academic Paper Series*, which began in December 2006. KEI intends to commission 9 to 10 papers per year on subjects of current interest to Korea watchers on a wide variety of topics. KEI will edit and distribute each paper as a *KEI Academic Paper* to over 2,000 government officials, think tank experts, and scholars around the United States and the world. Distribution of each paper is normally followed by a public discussion with the author at KEI; however, this paper was revised following discussion on May 23. The annual collection of *KEI Academic Papers* will be collated and published in a single volume by KEI. The next *KEI Academic Paper* will be published in late September 2007. Authored by Dr. Alexandre Mansourov of the Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, it will address **Disaster Management and Institutional Change in the DPRK: Trends in the Songun Era**. Dr. Mansourov will present the paper at a special closed session of KEI's Advisory Council in Los Angeles at the end of September.

When the new (current) constitution was adopted in 1998, Korean observers around the world became puzzled by the fact that Kim Jong-il assumed only the chairmanship of the Military Commission, while he permitted the office of head of state to be assumed by the chairperson of the Standing Committee of the Supreme People's Assembly (the current occupant is Kim Yong-nam). This rather unconventional arrangement would not have been regarded as puzzling if viewed through the lens of *songun* doctrine, however, because the constitution itself specifies that the military and civilian sectors are one and indivisible (Article 61) and that the Military Commission makes decisions and issues directives and orders (Article 104).

Military the Deliverer and Provider

To North Koreans, the military is not an abstract authority but a practical performer. It responds directly and effectively to people's needs and wants. It delivers in a way that no others can: it delivers services and goods to the people and provides security. When I asked a farmer about his understanding of the *songun* doctrine, he offered that "it is the military that makes farming possible as the soldiers come into the village to perform the complete range of farming tasks from toiling the soil to seeding, irrigating, and harvesting." He continued, "The military not only protects the people's lives from foreign hostility, but it also delivers food and services." It is common to notice in the streets of North Korea that soldiers carry bags of grain to civilian homes.

The concern commonly expressed by the foreign providers of food aid that the military may snatch the food away from the civilians is in fact rather speculative. The reality is that the military has food and other necessities in relatively ample supply because of its independent accounting system whereby the military retains the revenues it generates from exporting military equipment—including both missiles and conventional weapons. In this way, the military is in a position to share its resources with the public. This also allows the military to perform the service of delivering foreign aid food to the civilians in even the most remote villages. In fact, the delivery and provision functions of the military are not limited to services and food; they include virtually all commodity goods.

Military the Problem Solver

Not only is the military regarded as the embodiment of legitimate power and authority, it is also considered the most able problem solver in practically all spheres of people's lives. Each unit of dwellers (called a *ban*) is assigned to a military post that is responsible for looking after all the occupants' needs, ranging from repairing house-

hold electrical appliances to fixing faucets and sewage systems. Under *songun* society, the people are supposed to trust that the military is equipped with the resources, knowledge, and skills necessary to solve such problems encountered in people's daily lives. In this way, the doctrine calls for the complete dependence of the people on the military. The popular belief being promoted under the banner of *songun* is that "no problem is too big or too small for the military to solve." In this way, the idea is promoted that, without the military, people cannot sustain their existence.

Military the Engine for Social Engineering

The military is also the prime opinion leader. People trust that soldiers are the best educated in ideological preparedness. In fact, military education always places ideology and politics at the top. The soldiers are the ones who teach the common villagers. When soldiers are on leave from their military barracks, they are in essence assigned to their hometowns to teach the villagers in such a way that the commoners will be prepared to carry on the "revolution" just as effectively as the soldiers themselves. In my numerous trips to North Korea, I have consistently been amazed by the ability of soldiers to spell out in most specific terms their mission as soldiers and, hence, as leaders of the so-called revolutionary struggle. It might be appropriate to characterize the mission of the military in North Korea today as that of social engineering.

The concept of social engineering is one of future orientation. Social engineering requires designing society for the future and, thereby, directing the course of social change toward desired goals. People are expected to look up to the military for its visionary leadership; they supposedly need only follow its guidance. The norms and values desirable for the society will be created by the military, which is also designated to disseminate them to the people. In this sense, the military is society's greatest educator.

At the heart of military education is the Military University. This institution is central to developing the ideology of *songun*, training military officers, and disseminating the *songun* philosophy throughout the other educational institutions in the country.

Military the Creator and Advancer of New Culture

Cultural change occurs in every society, and North Korea is no exception. The fact that there seems to be no appreciable cultural generation gap in the country defies the common expectation that, as society becomes modernized, the youthful population should become disillusioned with the establishment and attracted to a consumerist lifestyle. There also seems to be little difference between the rural and

urban areas in this regard. The country has maintained a remarkable degree of uniformity in the cultural orientation of its populace. This uniformity has been created and maintained largely through the institution of the military.

With a 10-year compulsory military service and a large portion of the population (in excess of one million) serving at any given time, virtually every family has at least one soldier in military service. In fact, there is hardly any separation at all between the military and civilian sectors. The military performs an extensive role in the civilian villages, and the military's role is further heightened by the fact that practically all physically functioning people in the country are mobilized in the People's Militia. It is no surprise that the military's culture is the North Korean culture. Thus, the country's cultural traits include uniformity, obedience to authority, a clear definition of a common enemy, and resolve and determination as the highest virtues.

The *songun* doctrine has created a belief system in which the public must follow the military because the military is always right. It is no longer the Korean Workers' Party that leads the way, neither is it the government that assumes the role of leadership.

One intriguing feature of the North Korean culture is the pervasive sense of equality. The participation of average citizens in decision-making processes provides a significant sense of self-worth and a morale boost to the population. Except for the office of the Supreme Leader, everyone is supposed to be equal in the sense that all are involved in making decisions that affect everyone. Life in North Korea, therefore, is one of successive meetings and deliberations at all levels of society, including the military itself. Typical meetings begin with self-criticisms (confessions) by every participant and conclude with remedial recommendations for any wrongdoing committed by any member, regardless of that person's standing in the social and political strata.

The principle of "one for all, and all for one" is not just a slogan anymore. It works and is felt in the country. This doctrine epitomizes the "military way." Thus, the same practice is emulated in civilian life. Every administrative unit, the *ban*, convenes a regular weekly meeting for the purpose of information dissemination from the center (the Supreme Leadership) and to stage the process of self-criticism.

Military the Synthesizer of Body-Mind-Spirit

Unlike *juche*, which primarily emphasizes self-defense, *songun* is a much more comprehensive doctrine; its con-

cern is not limited to the physical and material aspects of existence but rather extends just as importantly to the psychological and spiritual domains. In this way, *songun* has become the contemporary fountainhead of political and social philosophy, just as *juche* was during the Kim Il-sung era. One should remember that the doctrine of *juche* reached its height as it advanced the philosophical concept of the "political-social body" (PSB) in the late 1980s. With the PSB, *juche* attempted to articulate a theory of human development (maturation) by providing a progressive theory of personal development: one is said to become a social body as one undergoes the process of transformation from a biological being to a social being. The biological being is one full of instinctive desires for physical comfort. The social being, however, is charged with social and political consciousness (*eusiksong*). Hence, the concept of human development became an important feature of the *juche* philosophy.

Now the philosophy of *songun* is attempting to integrate the three components of human existence, the body-mind-spirit. Here, as before, the notion of an ideal personhood is being created, but this time with three elements: one becomes ideally developed through the attainment of martial art (body), education and training in the arts and sciences (mind), and devotion to a sense of mission for life (spirit). The curriculum for education, in both the military and civilian sectors, is designed to promote all three.

Military the Exemplar

During my frequent travels in North Korea, my favorite question to pose to a single woman or girl is to ask what kind of man she would wish to marry. Of late, I have noticed that the most common answer is "a soldier." One has to appreciate this in the context of *songun*, for the military institution houses the best manifestations of all three components (body-mind-spirit) of human existence. For instance, military artists are revered, as their ranks include most of the accomplished artists in the country; the military houses the best scientists, as demonstrated by the advancement of nuclear physics and the engineering of the bomb; and, of course, the military shows resolve and unwavering loyalty to the cause of fighting the "most powerful enemy" in the world, the United States.

Even this cursory review of *songun* clearly suggests that it is a peculiar system of ideas that are not commonly found in world politics. If it is so unique, how has the pattern of thought culminating in this doctrine come about? What conditions or causes may have been responsible for the birth and development of such an ideology?

Origins and Causes of *Songun*

Remote Origins

Kim Il-sung as guerrilla fighter. Militarism in North Korea cannot be properly comprehended without an appreciation of the formation of Kim Il-sung's charisma as a young guerrilla fighter in Manchuria. When he returned home after the Japanese surrender, he was heralded as a military general although he never attained that rank. The most popular song about him, in fact, was promoted at the very time of his homecoming and has since become deeply entrenched in the North Korean soul: its title is "General Kim Il-sung." This set the stage very early for a militarism whose development remains unimpeded even today.

Hiroshima-Nagasaki shock. When Kim Il-sung was active as a guerrilla fighter, he lamented the fact that he and his comrades did not have enough guns and grenades, and he was awed by the military might of the imperial army of Japan. He thought that the Japanese military, which was able to attack the United States at Pearl Harbor, was indeed invincible. But such a military power had to surrender almost instantly to the nuclear bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. Judging by Kim Il-sung's remarks in his writings, he must have been shocked by the force of the bombs. It is not far-fetched to infer from this that the North Korean nuclear program may have started as early as in the late 1950s, when Kim solidified his leadership, and that the program has been nurtured ever since. In fact, during the 1950s and 1970s, Pyongyang sent scores of scientists to Moscow for long periods of study and established Soviet scientists in residence in North Korea in order to contribute to the development of North Korea's indigenous nuclear science and technology.

Juche's self-defense. The ideology of *juche* was initially prompted by the passionate desire on the part of Kim Il-sung for keeping the country from repeating its experience under Japanese colonialism. When the Japanese colonial power was removed, it did not take much time for the Korean War (which began in 1950) to introduce yet another "imperialistic" power that occupied the southern half of the nation and posed a constant threat to the peninsula's security.

Juche was Kim Il-sung's response to this string of foreign ambitions and dominations. It was natural that *juche* started out as a doctrine of antiforeignism and self-defense. For self-defense, the ideological preparedness was not enough; as Kim Il-sung used to say, "a soldier without a gun is a straw man [puppet]." When he criticized South Korea, he always aimed his condemnation at Seoul's dependence on the U.S. security umbrella. Although *juche* developed a di-

verse set of ideological properties over time, the backbone of its philosophical premises has always been military self-defense: "You must have a nation before working on its prosperity." The much-used notion of a revolutionary struggle must also be seen in the ideological light of protecting the nation from imperial forces and achieving national unification as a sovereign and integrated nation-state rather than in terms of the realization of a Marxist proletarian classless society.

Intermediate Origins

Demise of the Communist bloc as a support system. Until the early 1970s, North Korea maintained a level of economic development that was superior to that of South Korea. This was possible in part because of economic, technological, and military assistance from the Soviet Union, China, and, to a lesser degree, the Eastern European countries with which Pyongyang had maintained trade and diplomatic relations. The 1970s, though, marked the onset of a series of alarming changes for North Korea, beginning with the deepening rift between the two superpowers of China and the Soviet Union and the ensuing demise of the socialist countries in Europe. Eventually the fall of East Germany as it was absorbed into the West caused extreme alarm among the North Korean leadership. Kim Il-sung attributed this massive change in the world political landscape to the lack of solidarity and ideological cohesiveness on the part of the socialists, and he began to tighten up political education and accelerate his military buildup.

Encirclement by enemies. While North Korea was losing its international support system, South Korea was allied with the United States and Japan. By the end of 1980s, South Korea had become a formidable economic power in the region and the world and had staged a hugely successful Summer Olympic Games in 1988. Furthermore, the U.S.-South Korea joint military exercise (Team Spirit) that took place annually in South Korea was regarded by the North Korean leadership as a warning that the country could be attacked at any time. Reminding themselves of the devastation of the Korean War in which the U.S. air assault virtually flattened Pyongyang and other major cities, they began creating bomb shelters. The subway system in Pyongyang, which extends some 34 kilometers and is 100 meters in depth on average, was designed as a massive bomb shelter for the two million residents of that city. In addition, it is believed that virtually every town is equipped with similarly secure shelters. This sense of fear of the threat of a U.S.-backed South Korea accelerated the development of the nuclear weapons program.

Legitimacy war with the South. Since the inception of the political system in 1948 and especially since the Ko-

rean War (1950–53), the divided Koreas have constantly engaged in a competition over legitimacy for ruling the entire peninsula. An unmistakable reminder of this competition is the fact that each of the Koreas officially (constitutionally, in fact) claims to be the sole legitimate regime. As it became evident that the North could no longer compete with the South on economic terms, the North began to see a clear advantage in its ideas of national sovereignty and self-defense. In advocating nationalism vis-à-vis the South, nothing proved handier than the North's *juche* and its doctrine of military self-preparedness.

Immediate Origins

Death of Kim Il-sung and consolidation of military.

The abrupt death of Kim Il-sung in July 1994 meant a profound turning point for North Korea in many ways, none more important than Kim Jong-il's succession to power. When the senior Kim held control, the young Kim was primarily responsible for the ideology and propaganda functions of the Korean Workers' Party. The military at that time was still in the hands of members of the "old guard," such as Marshall O Jin-u; but Marshall O died in February 1995, one year after Kim Il-sung.

The young Kim was left with the huge task of consolidating the military under his control. Upon assuming leadership, he never neglected to pay attention to the army, as his almost exclusive visits ("on-the-spot guidance") to the military barracks attest. At the same time, he worked on replacing the old guard with young soldiers loyal to him. In this process of leadership consolidation, Kim Jong-il devised a strategy, and that strategy came in the form of *songun*. This new doctrine gave him a new version of legitimacy and the rationale required for restructuring the military elite. Kim Jong-il's strategic move was also necessitated by his need to prevent the possibility of a military coup d'état.

Need for solidification of political power. Once the military was consolidated under his leadership, Kim Jong-il never overlooked the importance of solidifying political power. This prompted the promulgation of a new constitution in 1998, which was designed to accomplish two separate but related objectives. The first was the creation of Kim Jong-il's own basis of power legitimacy, not by denouncing his father but by deifying him as an eternal, soulful leader of the nation. In the real and unforgiving world of power politics, Kim Jong-il needed his own basis of legitimacy, and he found one in the doctrine of *songun*. This doctrine was embedded in the constitution, as well, because the chair of the Military Commission is elevated to the top of the authority structure. It was envisaged then (just as it is now) that *songun* was and would continue to

be Kim Jong-il's legacy. One might note that the testing of the Taepo-dong 2, a multistage long-range missile, was conducted in the same year to tangibly demonstrate this development.

The Bush administration. The election of George W. Bush as president of the United States and his administration's hostile policy toward North Korea became the immediate stimulus that was exploited by Kim Jong-il to provide the rationale for further advancing *songun* politics. Following his inauguration in January 2001, President Bush announced no policy toward the North at all until after the events of 11 September 2001 (nearly eight full months after his inauguration). His administration then promptly dropped all policies that were premised on direct negotiation with North Korea. The Bush administration pronounced its principle of no negotiation with countries that are considered "evil," and Kim Jong-il's North Korea was included in the "axis of evil" along with Iraq and Iran.

Refusing to talk directly with Pyongyang, President Bush opted to pursue a multilateral framework, allowing China to take the leadership role in organizing and hosting the six-party talks to be convened in Beijing for disarming North Korea. Amid all this, the Kim Jong-il government went ahead with missile tests in July 2006 and ultimately the underground nuclear test in October of the same year. Despite the Bush administration's success in moving the UN Security Council to adopt additional economic sanctions, Pyongyang has not shown any wavering with regard to its nuclear program. This incredible degree of persistence on the part of Pyongyang would not be possible without the pervasive authority and unquestionable legitimacy given the regime by its adoption and advancement of the *songun* doctrine.

Afghanistan and Iraq. When one asks any North Korean about the reason for the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, one will get one answer only: Those countries were invaded because they did not have the military capability to defend themselves. Every North Korean is also likely to offer the view that the United States would not have attempted either invasion if the target country had had nuclear weapons. Setting aside the issue of the credibility of such an answer, it is quite evident that North Koreans believe that it is only the nuclear and military capability of their country that prevents a U.S. invasion. When Bush declared three countries as the axis of evil in 2002 and invaded Iraq in 2003, North Korea did not yet have a nuclear bomb—but it was certainly pressured by the unfolding events to become a legitimate nuclear state at all costs in order to avoid the same fate as Afghanistan and Iraq. In the minds of the public in North Korea, the bomb itself is a product of *songun*, and *songun* will continue to deter U.S. aggres-

sion. North Koreans are thoroughly “realist” in that they believe that “the flesh of the weak is eaten by the strong” (*yakyuk kangsik*).

Implications and Ramifications of *Songun*

The above discussion ascertained the nature and characteristic features (properties) of *songun*. It also specified the historical and political context in which *songun* has been articulated and promoted. Now I would like to explore how *songun* has been practiced in political behavior and social life.

3-3-4 Principles

Professor K. P. Chon, one of the leading architects of *songun* in North Korea, spelled out clearly the common principles on which *songun* is based:¹

Three functions of the military. First and foremost, the military must “live and die with *Soryong* to the end.”² This implies that every soldier’s commitment and devotion to the leader is absolute and unconditional. Second, the military will achieve its assigned goals at all costs. Third, the most admirable quality of a soldier lies in the spirit of sacrifice for the greater good, and nothing is greater than being with the leader to defend the nation.

Three objectives for education and training. First, the objective of organization must be followed; that is, individuals are meaningless and considered dead when they are not organized. In a collective system of the North Korean breed, individuals exist only for the group (although similarly, the group exists solely for its members). Second, in the core of behaviors and actions, discipline must find its place. In education and training, the virtue and practice of discipline occupies the center. It is only through this discipline that the “arduous marches” can be won. Third, once again it is unity and solidarity that should never be compromised.

Four virtues of the People’s Army. Although this was discussed earlier in this paper, it is important to introduce the slogan of the “four virtues of the People’s Army.” The first is patriotism to the country; second, love of the nation; third, care for the people; and fourth, devotion to *Soryong*.

Songun in Operation

New authority structure. As alluded to earlier, the 1998 constitution itself reflects this *songun* doctrine unambiguously: It places the National Defense Commission firmly at the very center of the government as the repository of all political authority and power. Kim Jong-il was advanced to

its chairmanship under Kim Il-sung’s leadership on 9 April 1993, some 15 months before the elder Kim’s death. This suggests that the senior Kim was paving the way for the junior to have a firm grip on the military during his reign. Yet, the specific ideology of *songun* did not emerge until after the promulgation of the new constitution in 1998.

Economy. *Songun* makes the defense industry the core of the economic structure. In fact, the heavy-industry sector is regarded as the most essential and central to the national economy, followed by light industry and agriculture, which are considered coequally secondary. As a result, the military industry is the only one that brings in foreign revenue. This, Pyongyang’s own policy choice, coupled with international economic sanctions and the North’s inaccessibility to external investors render the economy in a state of chronic poverty. In this sense, *songun* may have been necessitated by a number of national imperatives, but it has not served the economy of the nation well.

Education. At all levels of education, military training is the backbone of the curriculum. Military education begins with *songun*, which is a required subject for all students. One of the peculiar features in education in the country is the fact that the military itself is referred to as a form of “university.” This suggests that people learn in the military just as well as they do at institutions of higher education. This parallels the practice of the “factory-college,” whereby workers attain college-level education. These extraordinary “universities” and “colleges” are staffed with commuting professors and experts from the ordinary institutions throughout the country.

The family. The tie between the family and the military is intimate. A family contributing to the military in an extraordinary way is praised by the public and rewarded by the government. When there is more than one member on active duty, the family is rewarded in a variety of tangible ways, such as a larger food ration and additional perquisites regarding other daily necessities. When all children are in the army, the government sends workers to the parents to help them with household chores. If daughters are in the military, the government sends female helpers to the parents. In this way, the family can relate to the military naturally and appreciatively. This is an important way for the government to mobilize grassroots support.

The arts. It is said in North Korea that any form of art lacking an ideological message is useless. The ideological message today is *songun*. New musical creations, including popular songs that herald the military and the *songun* philosophy, have been pouring out in recent years. The People’s Army itself created its own musical group called

the “*Songun* Chorus”; it is regarded as the very best in the country. The chorus performs regularly for radio and television broadcasts. In this way, even the tone of North Korean music has shifted to one of militarism and revolutionary consciousness, and not necessarily with artistic charm.

Culture. As pointed out earlier in this paper, *songun* is changing the popular culture in North Korea by promoting a set of specific values and norms. These include reverence for the military, military culture, and individual soldiers. Also included in these norms is the notion that it is noble to find pride and self-esteem despite economic hardships; the “arduous march” of life is precious; life in the midst of gunfire is the noblest; and we are living for tomorrow, not for today. In this cultural atmosphere, the leadership contends that there is no room for foreign “decadent” cultural values to slip into the society. During one recent visit to Pyongyang, I came across an anecdote involving a wounded and handicapped soldier who was seeking marriage. Upon learning of this story, hundreds of girls expressed their desire to become this soldier’s bride. One can find this attitude only in *songun* North Korea!

Foreign policy. *Songun* politics advances a series of mythical or ideological doctrines. Whether these notions carry any objective credence is irrelevant because both the military leadership and the *songun* theoreticians appear to have great faith in them:

- Foreign policy works when it is accompanied by the barrel of gun. This notion is strikingly and intriguingly similar to the premise upon which current U.S. foreign policy is built.
- North Korea’s defiance of U.S. force will popularize “progressive” ideologies and deepen the bonds of friendship among all the “progressive” peoples of the world.
- All those against U.S. “imperialism” must and will unite, and the days of imperialist hegemony are numbered.

Reunification of Korea. The common belief among *songun* followers is that national reunification will be brought about by the force of nationalism, and it is the North that will prevail over the South because its political system is one of nationalism. North Koreans see the South as richer, but not as a legitimate system. They believe that the past two administrations in the South (the administrations of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun) have tilted toward nationalism and, hence, toward the North Korean ideology.

Concluding Words

This survey of North Korea’s military-first politics suggests that *songun* is much more than a political slogan, and it is more than the simple practice that the military holds all the power and the civilian sector is thus undermined and neglected. It is, in a single phrase, a pervasive philosophical ideology that undergirds the very structure and function of North Korean society. Understanding that fact renders the society intelligible. It is a misconception, for example, that the leadership pushes for weapons programs despite people’s dissatisfaction and discontent. It is equally mistaken to conclude that the regime persists only because of its oppressive and brutal military leadership that cracks down to silence any voices of dissent. On the contrary, *songun* is the product of historical and political circumstances unique to North Korea. To the extent that *songun* is pervasive throughout the population and deeply integrated into the mass belief system and the lives of the masses, it is highly improbable that the regime will collapse as a result of internal rebellion.

The analysis offered in this paper is largely based on personal, firsthand observations, and interviews and conversations with North Koreans during my own numerous and frequent trips to North Korea. Although limited references have been consulted, all are from North Korea. Much remains to be done to further document the arguments made herein. The doctrine of *songun* is still being formed, and it is therefore elusive.

Han S. Park is University Professor of Political Science, School of Public and International Affairs, and Director of the Center for the Study of Global Issues (GLOBIS), at the University of Georgia, in Athens, Georgia. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Korea Economic Institute, Washington, D.C., on 23 May 2007.

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References used for this paper are numerous; most important among these are a number of firsthand interviews and conversations carried out in North Korea, particularly since 1998 when the current constitution was promulgated. The following books have also been consulted:

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Endnotes

1. K. P. Chon, interview with author, Pyongyang, 23 March 2007.
2. *Soryong* means “supreme commander,” and this title is reserved for Kim Il-sung.



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