

**“ON ELIMINATING DOGMATISM AND FORMALISM AND ESTABLISHING  
JUCHE [CHUCH’E] IN IDEOLOGICAL WORK” (SPEECH, 1955)**

By Kim Ilŏng

**Introduction**

After the end of colonial rule in 1945, political divisions within Korea interacted with the escalating Cold War tension between the United States and USSR, each of which had occupied and fostered a government in one half of the peninsula, to create the conditions that led to the Korean War (1950-53). In the aftermath of that war, with its non-decisive result, the separation of North and South Korean states (officially the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea, respectively) has been maintained to this day, continually reproduced until fairly recently by an atmosphere of mutual hostility.

The Kim Ilŏng (1912-1994) government of the North considered itself the heir of the Communist anti-imperialist struggle against Japanese forces in Manchuria. As time passed, other ideological foci came to supplement or even supplant Marxism-Leninism as the central official state ideology. In this 1955 speech, entitled “On Eliminating Dogmatism and Formalism and Establishing *Juche* in Ideological Work,” Kim explained what he meant by *juche* (“subjectivity” in literal translation) and why it was important for North Korea.

**Document Excerpts with Questions** (Longer selection follows this section)

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It is important in our work to grasp revolutionary truth, Marxist-Leninist truth, and apply it correctly to our actual conditions. There should be no set rule that we must follow the Soviet pattern. Some advocate the Soviet way and others the Chinese, but is it not high time to work out our own? ...

**Question:**

1. According to Kim, should Korea simply follow the example of the Soviet or Chinese Communist systems? Why or why not? What distinctions does he make?

**Primary Source Document with Questions (DBQs) on**

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Today I want to address a few remarks to you on the shortcomings in our Party’s ideological work and on how to eliminate them in the future. As you learned at yesterday’s session, there have been serious ideological errors on the literary front. It is obvious, then, that our propaganda work also cannot have been faultless. It is to be regretted that it suffers in many respects from dogmatism and formalism.

The principal shortcomings in ideological work are the failure to delve deeply into all matters and the lack of *Juche*. It may not be correct to say *Juche* is lacking, but, in fact, it has not yet been firmly established. This is a serious matter. We must thoroughly rectify this shortcoming. Unless this problem is solved, we cannot hope for good results in ideological work.

Why does our ideological work suffer from dogmatism and formalism? Why do our propaganda and agitation workers only embellish the facade and fail to go deeply into matters, and why do they merely copy and memorize things foreign, instead of working creatively? This offers us food for serious reflection.

What is *Juche* in our Party’s ideological work? What are we doing? We are not engaged in any other country’s revolution, but solely in the Korean revolution. This, the Korean revolution, determines the essence of *Juche* in the ideological work of our Party. Therefore, all ideological work must be subordinated to the interests of the Korean revolution. When we study the history of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the history of the Chinese revolution, or the universal truth of Marxism-Leninism, it is entirely for the purpose of correctly carrying out our own revolution.

By saying that the ideological work of our Party is lacking in *Juche*, I do not mean, of course, that we have not made the revolution and that our revolutionary work was undertaken by outsiders. Nonetheless, *Juche* has not been firmly established in ideological work, and this leads to dogmatic and formalistic errors and does much harm to our revolutionary cause.

To make revolution in Korea we must know Korean history and geography as well as the customs of the Korean people. Only then is it possible to educate our people in a way that suits them and to inspire in them an ardent love for their native place and their motherland.

It is of paramount importance to study and widely publicize among the working people the history of our country and of our people’s struggle. ... Only when we educate our people in the history of their own struggle and its traditions can we stimulate their national pride and rouse the broad masses to revolutionary struggle. Yet, many of our functionaries are ignorant of our country’s history and so do not strive to discover, inherit and carry forward our fine traditions. Unless this is corrected, it will lead, in the long run, to the negation of Korean history.

...

Once I visited a People’s Army rest home, where there was a picture of the Siberian steppe on the wall. Russians probably like that landscape. But we Korean people like the beautiful scenery of our own country. There are beautiful mountains such as Kungang and Myohyang in our country. There are clear streams, the blue sea with its rolling waves, and fields with their ripening crops. If we are to inspire in our People’s Army men a love for their native place and their country, we must display more pictures of our own landscapes. ... I noticed in a primary school that all the portraits on the walls were of foreigners, such as Mayakovsky and Pushkin, but there were none of Koreans. If children are educated in this way, how can they be expected to have national pride? ...

We should study our own things in earnest and get to know them well. ...

...

It is important in our work to grasp revolutionary truth, Marxist-Leninist truth, and apply it correctly to our actual conditions. There should be no set rule that we must follow the Soviet pattern. Some advocate the Soviet way and others the Chinese, but is it not high time to work out our own? The point is that we should not mechanically copy the forms and methods of the Soviet Union, but should learn from its experience in struggle and from the truth of Marxism-Leninism. So, while learning from the experience of the Soviet Union, we must put stress not on the form but on the essence of its experience. ...

Merely copying the forms used by others instead of learning the truth of Marxism-Leninism does us no good, only harm. In both revolutionary struggle and construction, we should firmly adhere to Marxist-Leninist principles, applying them in a creative way to suit the specific conditions and national characteristics of our country. If we mechanically apply foreign experience, disregarding the history of our country and the traditions of our people and without taking account of our own realities and our people’s political level, we will commit dogmatic errors and do much harm to the revolutionary cause. This is not fidelity to Marxism-Leninism nor to internationalism. It runs counter to them. ...

[From *Kim Il Sung’s Works* 9:395-408]

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**Questions:**

1. According to Kim, should Korea simply follow the example of the Soviet or Chinese Communist systems? Why or why not? What distinctions does he make?
2. What sort of knowledge does Kim emphasize as necessary for Koreans?
3. Does Kim put greater emphasis on the international or national dimensions of the Korean revolution and the society he hopes to build? How does this balance of emphasis compare with other Communist documents, such as the 1921 manifesto of the Korean Communists in Shanghai (see above)?
4. After reading this, how would you explain *juche*?