

# NORTH KOREA PURSUING THE HERMIT TRADITION

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*Abstract:*

## **Origins and development of North Korean characteristics**

Already during the early days of the epoch of the Cold War, North Korea acquired a reputation for being 'different', a view also held by other states in the Socialist Block. After the implosion of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of the Comecon, the Warsaw Pact and other manifestations of Communist world politics, North Korea has, virtually only accompanied by Cuba, continued to follow state socialist principles in both economics and administration of society. This policy has had disastrous consequences such as economic collapse and famine but the regime nevertheless sees no reason for a reappraisal. In making an attempt at explaining the reasons for the emergence and development of this unique state and society the attention shall be drawn to its three dominating characteristics, namely *the old and unbroken isolation, the East Asian cultural tradition and Marxism-Leninism*.

The experience of *isolation* significant for the history of Korea, and which continued in the North after 1945, explains the absence of knowledge of the outside world and other civilizations as well as of world politics in general; the *East Asian tradition* means that North Korea has remained a *Confucian* museum, taking this philosophy for granted to a degree that the North Koreans believe it to be common for mankind and reassuring them of being the sole carriers of superior inherited morals; while *Marxism-Leninism* provides them with the keys for conquering the future. The combination of these convictions makes them impregnable to any point of view deviating from theirs. To negotiate with North Koreans does not imply discussions in order to arrive at an understanding, only to listen to preaching generously offered in order to assist others in sharing their insight and thus being transformed into supporters.

## **North Korea facing a world of changing rules of the game**

During the Cold War, world politics were severely frozen according to the dualistic principle *you are my friend or foe*, distrusting neutrality and non-alignment. Germany and Korea were the victims of this principle to the extent of being divided. Accordingly politics were in many aspects reduced to petrified power politics of the old-fashioned form of *control of territory*. Nevertheless the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century shows a distinct *change of parameters* towards replacing it with *control of economy*. By way of illustration one should compare the effects of the Marshal Plan with the consequences of the Soviet exploitation of Eastern Europe. Furthermore the totalitarian way of controlling territory implied political oppression by violent means while control of economy might be disagreeable and degrading but using more subtle ways for the realization of its goals. The totalitarian methods are less efficient both on the international and the national scale as demonstrated by the achievements of Comecon countries and North Korea, compared to OECD countries and South Korea respectively. North Korea, however, faces insurmountable problems in accepting reappraisals in any field.

China is the key factor in all East Asian matters. Its policies are guided by the inspiration of historical experience. But the pragmatic Chinese have begun adapting to changing parameters by adjusting their economic policies better to serve their goals. Their analysis of the North Korean factor has to be carefully interpreted in order to facilitate arriving at a lasting solution.

### **The Present Negotiations**

The present negotiations are more or less totally devoted to nuclear issues, which suits Pyongyang perfectly. It makes them important in world politics, a position becoming to a nation being led by outstanding personalities, capable of creating the invincible Juche idea. As a consequence, negotiating with them remains fruitless. Their aim is continuing negotiations *ad infinitum* in order to save the survival of their state. Their counterparts must learn to master the art of filling these endless negotiations with contents and to direct them skillfully in order to preserve peace and promote change. In the Far East black and white are not opposites – they complement each other.