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Author(s): Korhonen, Pekka; Cathcart, Adam

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This is the authors' final version, and slightly different from the final published one. This one uses McCune–Reischauer romanization, which in the final one was edited to the Gugeoui romaja pyogibeop. There are also other small differences in the notation system and elsewhere.

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Tradition and Legitimation in North Korea: The Role of the Moranbong Band

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Authors:
Pekka Korhonen works as Professor of World Politics at the University of Jyväskylä in Finland. He specializes in the conceptual history of Asia, Asia Pacific politics of cooperation and conflict, and North Korean politics of music. Corresponding author for this manuscript.
Department of SoPhi
FI-40014 University of Jyväskylä
FINLAND
pekka.a.korhonen@jyu.fi

Adam Cathcart works as Lecturer in Chinese History at the University of Leeds in England. He specializes in contemporary East Asian history, including the history of the Sino-Korean border region, ethnic Koreans in China, and the Cultural Cold War.
a.cathcart@leeds.ac.uk

Abstract: Since its debut in 2012, the Moranbong Band has served as a key symbol for the Kim Jong-un-era ruling style, limited cosmopolitanism, and ultimately political conservatism. This article analyses the legitimacy strategies of North Korean official culture in the light of perceived internal needs for change, even as the foundations of the traditional personality cult remain intact and strengthened by the Band's performances. Analysis of musical performances online and relevant comparative literature on North Korean music form the core of the article. Finally, the article shows the arc from the Band as an innovative symbol of possible liberalization into a far more conservative implement as time has gone on. Because North Korea remains staunchly fixed as both the target and agent of a classical war propaganda campaign, the country is far more renowned for missile tests, purges and labor camps than for its music; this paper argues that culture is also a relevant aspect of North Korean life, and a significant carrier of political legitimacy.

Keywords: Moranbong Band, North Korea, music and politics, Kim Jong-un

Introduction

North Korea continues to maintain its position in the global media spotlight, having attained an almost magnetic status more central than the size and wealth of the state would ostensibly warrant. Much of this has to do with the fact that it is both an agent and the target of continuous propaganda war, the Korean peninsula being one of the main theatres where the increasing military tension in East Asia is played out. Rounds of tightening multilateral and unilateral sanctions by the United Nations and individual states create continuous speculation of a possible collapse of the North Korean regime, but its staying power has been surprising over the decades. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) was officially founded in 1948, making it now 69 years old. There must be reasons why it does not easily collapse, and the usual propagandistic explanations of repression, surveillance, information control, and harsh punishments are not satisfactory as the sole reasons (Eberstadt 2013). Significant changes are taking place in the society. This is what observers of North Korean economy have been arguing already for years (Smith 2015, 260-293; Lankov and Kim 2008; Lankov 2015), but changes are occurring also in the cultural sphere. North Korea as a distinct society already has traditions spanning over three generations, and with them the state has a proven order and a certain legitimacy, which helps in understanding its resilience even against the collective will of the rest of the world. Our approach in this study is to look at North Korea as an ordinary modern state, whose functioning follows ordinary state logic, and which can be understood with normal social theoretical concepts. Our specific purpose is to analyze the role of music in the construction of the North Korean order of legitimacy.

Our primary research material is music videos published on the internet. The exploitation of the online video medium by North Korea has been brought into full-fledged being in the Kim Jong-un era. Nowadays one can watch Pyongyang news in real time, and North Korean documentaries, concerts, and songs are published almost daily in YouTube and corresponding sites in China and Russia (Zhang 2017). The government in Pyongyang's desire to keep its own population guarded from the presumptively contaminating effect of internet connectivity is well known, but it has few compulsions about using the internet to disseminate its own message. This offers a more-or-less real time view into the secluded country. This material has been underutilized in studies in English. However, several South Korean researchers have been actively following the scene, recognizing its importance. An excellent study on North Korean musical politics (음악정치 *umak jönchi*) was published by Cheon Hyeon-sik (Cheon 2015), building on the work of his colleagues, such as Bae Ihn-gyo (Bae 2013), and Kim Soo-Min & Han Seung-Ho (Kim and Han 2013). Keith Howard has written extensively on North Korean music and even explored the sphere of popular music in the country (Howard 2006), but has not turned his analytical

gaze to works produced under the auspices of Kim Jong-un. We attempt to rectify the situation somewhat in the English language sphere in this article.

Heonik Kwon and Byung-Ho Chung in their *North Korea: Beyond Charismatic Politics* (2012) base their analysis of the North Korean construction of a legitimate social order on the concepts of Max Weber (Weber 1922). During the Kim Jong-un era, North Korea has successfully continued to traditionalize the extraordinary amount of charismatic politics characterizing its political system. Even during the Cold War North Korea was exceptional among the Socialist countries in carrying on with a strongly personalized cult of leadership, because all the others were gradually inching towards a mundane and bureaucratic form of rule (Kwon and Chung 2012, loc. 158-179). The system originated as Kim Il-sung's (1912-1994) personal charismatic authority, which was based on his futile but undeniably heroic fight against the Japanese colonizers, and on the socialist transformation of North Korean society. Kim Jong-il (1941-2011) succeeded in perpetuating the system into a hereditary form, even against the odds of the economic collapse during the famine years, largely by increasing the theatrical and propagandistic elements of his claim for legitimacy. The Arirang Mass Games during 2002-2013, with a smaller spectacle in 2015, were the epitome of this style. The second hereditary succession to Kim Jong-un (1983-) has further shifted the legitimacy basis towards a traditional system, where legitimacy lies in belief in the holiness of the tradition, rather than the personal characteristics of the leader. We call this trinity of successive Kims and the ideology of leadership with which their image has been indelibly mingled over the decades as "Kimist". There is a strong emphasis on tradition in North Korean cultural production, but also innovative elements have to be added, because new generations of citizens have to be coopted into the order – and because of a growing awareness of external trends (Zeglen 2017). North Korea is quick to employ new technology in the sectors seen as vital to national survival. This includes culture and music. The Arirang Mass Games have wound down, but the importance of musical performances aided by large video screens displaying scenes of the leader and related activities has greatly increased during the Kim Jong-un era. It fits better the dissemination of the message via TV and video, including via internet to international audiences. The state needs to be not simply coercive, but to adjust the social compact with various groups, including elites and youth (Cathcart, Green and Denney 2014). The creation of political art is thus a delicate balancing act, where old and new elements have to be mixed cautiously.

The Moranbong Band

The Moranbong Band (모란봉악단 Moranbong Aktan), established in 2012, fit perfectly this situation. It emerged out of the need to update the official culture without disturbing its foundations. Considering the situation from the point of view of North Korean youth, the musical legacies left behind by Kim Jong-il were already rather dated in 2012. He had established two ensembles specializing in popular music in the middle of the 1980s, namely the Wangjaesan Light Music Band and the Pochonbo Electronic Ensemble (Howard 2006). As Lee Chor-u shows, their original purpose was to entertain diplomats and other foreign visitors to Pyongyang in a relaxed atmosphere, and thus these ensembles were fluent with a large body of contemporary hits from different countries. However, their task was soon widened to creating songs with heavy political content and attractive modern melodies for legitimizing Kim Jong-il's reign (Lee Chor-u 2013, 6-8). They had created popular music for the previous generation of North Koreans, but were no more innovative nor even markedly active by 2012. New songs were created mainly for military orchestras, but they could not fulfill all the artistic needs of the society. The scene clearly needed something that would visibly symbolize the beginning of the third leadership cycle by bringing in new faces on stage. At the same time, there was also a need for new songs on whose tunes the young people could sing, feel generational affinity, and normalize a limited prosperity in Pyongyang. Simultaneously they should be socialized securely within the bounds of tradition, and enter the society as faithful carriers of the traditional legitimacy of Kimist religious authority. Within these parameters, the Moranbong Band was an ideal tactical innovation.

The history of the Band is described by North Korean art critic Cho Un-chol, who describes how the Band was established personally by Kim Jong-un in March 2012 to "make art a powerful means for the creation of a new pattern of life" (Cho 2014). This of course has to be understood in the sense of socialist realism, where - in opposition to classical Marxism - the superstructure is supposed to have a decisive influence on the base. Kim Jong-il's art theory follows exactly this line (Kim 1989). Cho also tells that Kim Jong-un considered the Moranbong Band to be so important that in spite of his other demanding duties, he participated tens of times in the rehearsals and concerts of the Band. Kim Jong-un has also personally guided a multitude of practical issues related with the Band, such as its basic principles, the themes of its concerts, and the way the Band expresses itself on stage. This is a rather typical North Korean way of articulating the deeds of their supreme leader (Howard 2005), but if even half of this is true, we can infer that there is a strong personal relationship between Kim Jong-un and the Band, and that at least in its original shape the Band reflected rather directly Kim Jong-un's mind.

The name of the Band is symbolic. *Moranbong* refers to Peony Hill, which is a large park in central Pyongyang, where Kim Il-sung gave his first address in 1945 after returning from exile. The park contains various revolutionary relics and monuments related to him. The naming of the Band was thus consistent with the names of former North Korean musical ensembles. The Pochonbo Electronic Ensemble and

Wangjaesan Light Music Band were both named after places where Kim Il-sung attacked Japanese forces during the 1930s. On the other hand, today the Moran Hill is most of all a recreational area, where Pyonyangites go to have picnics, sing karaoke, and dance. Its current image is not revolutionary, but festive, in a settled, civilian and even rather bourgeois sense. It is perhaps the only place in North Korea where local ladies can grab the hand of a passing foreign male and demand that he dances with her. Perhaps this combination of images explains some of the naming of the Band; it combines neatly the militaristic Kimist tradition with images of modern peacetime relaxation in the capital of a stable society.

The name with its flower element symbolizes also femininity. Excepting its concert of December 28, 2016, the Moranbong Band has been an all-female ensemble, consisting of ten to eleven instrumentalists and six to eight singers. Already the Mansudae Art Troupe, a large opera and classical music ensemble consisting of more than 500 artists, established by Kim Jong-il in the late 1960s, had contained an all-female section of musicians and singers, and performed in Dandong, China, in October 2012 (Lee Chor-u 2013, 5). Likewise, the Wangjaesan Light Music Band had an all-female section, and there also existed an all-female group of singers called Moranbong during 2008-2011. Kim Jong-un's wife, Ri Sol-ju, was one of the members of the latter ensemble during her brief stage career (Minjog21 2012). Although the personnel in this chorus and the Moranbong Band was different, apparently the name was inherited. Because of its gendered composition, the Moranbong Band is sometimes considered as an equivalent to the numerous girl groups in the South Korean music business, but the concept is very different, as Cheon also comments (2015, 520). The musicians have an important function as performers, and their role is that of skilled professionals rather than beauties (Lee Jun-woo 2009). This is important in terms of gender roles, as emphasis on education and the attainment of competitively high technical skills also for women are central elements in the image of the Band. "NK-pop" in the form of the Moranbong Band displays foreign influences, but they come from Western pop music rather than K-pop, even though dance choreography during concerts in 2016 and 2017 appears to be K-pop inspired. More work is needed in order to document mutual musical influences between the two Koreas, although recent scholarship shows a path forward (Kim Suk-young 2014; Koo Sunhee 2016; Bell 2013). However, to describe the origins of the Moranbong Band purely as some urgent and direct answer to South Korea's pop colossus would be inaccurate.

Because the Band is an unstable balancing act between different cultural elements, we have seen thus far two different concepts of the Band. The first concept was highly innovative, seen during 2012-2014. It meant placing a classically educated string quartet in front of a Western style pop band, supplemented by a group of singers. A characteristic of the instruments is that they are foreign, with famous Japanese brand names like "Roland" and "Korg" proudly displayed in videos, thus distancing the Band from the old trend of developing and using indigenous North Korean musical instruments (Howard 2011). This

kind of combination allowed for a large variety of experimentation in the musical style, and the repertoire included lots of skilled instrumental music, sweet popular songs, foreign music from Chinese revolutionary ballets to European popular classics and American film music, and of course North Korean party, military and Kim dynasty songs. Within this concept the Band's performances displayed continuous innovation, and its image clearly was also directed abroad as a verification that North Korean music culture was at a high international level. Cheon comments that the Band has acted as a role model for achievement, enterprising spirit, and innovation (2015, 512), where we can add also individuality, as it was partly through skilled individual stage comportment and even limited improvisation that this message was conveyed. During 2014-2017 we have seen a shift to a much more traditional concept, where the strings have been amalgamated with the pop band, and the singers have been elevated to the central role. The Band nowadays seldom performs by itself; it is usually combined with the State Merited Chorus, a large military ensemble. This was accompanied by a change in the repertoire, which nowadays centers on songs legitimizing Kim Jong-un's rule. The Band is thus oriented more towards the domestic audience. Individuality has been suppressed; the Band pointedly acts as a disciplined collectivity, but it nevertheless continues to represent the psychology of technological innovation and mandated optimism, now only at the group, rather than personal level.

The Moranbong Band has since its inception given more than forty announced concerts, 32 of which have been published in YouTube, at least partly. The statistics below refer to them. It is also possible that the Band gives private concerts to the leadership and its guests, and does factory visits, but there is no public information about this. Most of the published concerts have taken place in Pyongyang, but occasionally the Band travels also to regional cities and military bases. By and large, all songs the Band ever performed can be seen and heard all over the globe within reach of the internet. The Band has performed by summer 2017 over 600 published songs (Korhonen 2017). Some songs are performed repeatedly, such as the national anthem, as well as party classics and traditional Kimist songs, namely songs written for eulogizing the rule of each or all the three Kims. These songs have to be seen as a category of their own. The repertoire has included about 230 different North Korean and 61 foreign songs, the latter mostly European popular classics, as well as some Chinese and Soviet revolutionary songs. Altogether they have performed over 300 different songs, which means that an individual song is performed usually only twice, often only once. The breadth of the repertoire has left considerable leeway for experimentations in style. Studio recordings are relatively few, although they exist; most recordings are taken from live performances. The producing cycle of new concerts was roughly every two to four months during the first period, but after the concept of the Band changed in 2014 this interval was lengthened to every five to eight months. It is probably the composition of totally new songs that takes time; for this reason the pace of the concerts of the Moranbong Band is a flawed metric for questions of regime stability and political purges (Evans 2015). Concerts are perfectly rehearsed, with absolutely exact

timing by all production team members; no mistaken notes are ever heard. Simple practicing apparently takes up much of the time when the Band is off-stage and not resting.

The Early Artistic Style of the Moranbong Band

The first concert of the Moranbong Band in June 6, 2012 was surprising in the North Korean context. Given the relatively recent ascent of Kim Jong-un to power, the appearance of a new popular music band in itself would have been a news item, but of course the presentational emphasis on the feminine beauty of the artists, and the high level of their artistic skill added to the news value. The simultaneous world debut at the concert was made by Ri Sol-ju, who sitting next to Kim Jong-un at the concert was identified for the first time as his spouse (Draudt 2016). Among North Korea commentators one specific item of great attention was that the Band performed a number of songs related with the United States, namely a medley of Walt Disney movie tunes with Disney characters like Mickey and Minnie Mouse shown on the stage, as well as Bill Conti's "Gonna Fly Now," which had been the theme song for the film *Rocky*. The Band performed also "Comme d'habitude" by the French composer Claude François, but its title was given in Korean as *Naye kil* (My Way), implying a reference to Frank Sinatra. (Lee Jimin 2013) The Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) announced that the concert was an example of Kim Jong-un's "grandiose plan to bring about a dramatic turn in the field of literature and arts" (KCNA 2012), implying that a large innovation indeed was being observed in the concert. An innovation there indeed was, but it is doubtful that the audience in Pyongyang saw it as some form of cultural diplomacy towards the United States, or still less saw the concert through the prism of copyright (Tomoff 2011). The whole repertoire of the debut concert was rather diverse. The Band played foreign songs, but most of them were European popular classics. If we follow the logic that a diplomatic move was meant by the repertoire choices, it was rather towards the European Union. However, we are inclined to follow Cheon's interpretation (2015, 539), and regard the phenomenon as a general proclamation that the quality of North Korean music was at a high international level, but even here the main target was the domestic audience.

Placing foreign music on the repertoire in-between North Korean songs is actually a rather traditional way of introducing new orchestras. When Unhasu Orchestra debuted in September 8, 2009, "The Phantom of the Opera" by the British composer Andrew Lloyd Webber was performed in English in front of the orchestra's creator Kim Jong-il, but the repertoire included also European popular classics and songs from the Soviet Union. When Kim Jong-un's newest creation, the Chongbong Band, debuted in October 11, 2015, it performed the Canadian folk song "Red River Valley" and three songs by the American nineteenth century composer Stephen Foster, including "Oh Susanna," but also several Soviet

songs. Portraying the new ensembles as constituted of high international level artists may be a basic element here, combined with the optimistic psychology accompanying this kind of new undertaking. New ensembles as such imply a spirit of experimentation and innovation. Moreover, foreign songs are an ephemeral phenomenon, disappearing soon after the debuts. Usually the ensembles perform only North Korean songs.

What have the Band's repertoire choices meant for the consolidation of authority in the country? North Korea has to be classified in many senses as a repressive totalitarian society (Yang 2013), but the age of revolution is clearly past. North Koreans nowadays are presided over by a traditional, rather than personally charismatic authority, and this requires changing the political time frame of the society from future utopian goals to displaying what is good at the present. The Moranbong Band epitomized this. The beauty of its members, their fashion-creating hair styles and make-up, and the jewelry worn with all kinds of outfits symbolized that life could be good in present North Korea, especially among its middle and higher urban classes enjoying the benefits of the new economy (Koo Jun-hoe 2014; Tudor and Pearson 2015).

With skillfully performed melodies arranged in a catchy and quasi-Western pop music style, including laser light shows, the Band demonstrated its ability to add something new and interesting to old songs. Because the issue was also transition of power to a new generation, the repertoire needed to transfer the existing legitimacy of the grandfather and father to the son. This was the main idea in the early concerts. When one looks at the age of compositions, one notices that almost all of the songs performed dated from the Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il periods, eulogizing the greatness of these two forefathers, as well as the party, state and military created by them. A concert used to contain only one or two new songs specifically created for Kim Jong-un. This resulted in a strange combination of songs performed in an enthralling pop music style, but often retaining the old political lyrics. In order to display the individual virtues of the musicians, there were also lots of instrumental pieces. The stage behavior of the Band members was relatively free, indicating that the traditional art administration had not caught a firm hold of the situation. The state had not experienced exactly this kind of power transition before. Kim Jong-il spent three decades for rising slowly from the shadow of his father, but Kim Jong-un's turn to reign came abruptly a decade or two before it was expected (Frank 2012).

This all made the music of the Band fresh and rousing. Indeed, it was arguably the most successful international public relations activity ever undertaken by the North Korean state since 1953, an assertion which can be measured by the number of visitors in YouTube and Youku sites. The fame of the Moranbong Band abroad is based on the fact that most of its foreign fans do not understand the lyrics,

but they enjoy the music. The Band has drawn in interested people who otherwise do not in any sense appreciate the North Korean political system. Total numbers are difficult to determine because uploads are often deleted after a time, but some concerts have stayed in YouTube longer, and have attracted over 200 000 visits, some even 600 000. This is of course far less than popular K-pop videos draw, but surprising high numbers for North Korean art. Domestically, defining the "popular" aspect of "popular music" in North Korea is as problematic as the definition of, say, popular culture in the Soviet Union, when the leadership had a fuller monopoly on cultural production and consumption (Robin 1990). Yet it clear that the Band has contributed to the early depiction of Kim Jong-un as a visionary leader willing to move toward a limited cultural liberalization, as the group was so closely associated with him personally. Much of the behavior of the spectators in concert videos towards the Band and Kim Jong-un appears genuine. The Band's visit to a military base in April 11, 2013, in the midst of a major security crisis on the peninsula, was a case in point: In the small concert hall there was no space for high Pyongyang brass, so that Moranbong Band played only for the young conscripts, whose faces amply demonstrated their admiration towards the Band. The ensemble did perfectly well what it was supposed to do.

The Song "Tansume"

To the extent that the Moranbong Band has signature songs, "Without a Break" (단숨에 Tansume) is surely the most important one. Like much of the Moranbong Band's early repertoire, the song was not newly composed for the Band, but was instead a military song created in 2003. The song's composer, Hwang Jin-yŏng (황진영), is one of the most celebrated composers of light music and military marches in North Korea. Having been born in 1959, his professional career spans the age of all three ruling Kims. He studied at the Pyongyang University of Music and Dance, with composition as his major, and worked after graduation as a musician in the National Symphony Orchestra. Hwang started his composing career in 1985, and has a long list of successful songs. He also wrote many songs in popular style for the Pochonbo Electronic Ensemble as a designated People's Artist. In spring 2012, Hwang's ascent through the musical world of Pyongyang proceeded further when he joined the Moranbong Band, becoming its vice director and chief composer. In April 2014 he was awarded the title of Labor Hero, not least because of the success of "Without a Break". (Rodong Sinmun 2014) The song represents not only the Moranbong Band, but symbolizes also the national self-confidence of the early Kim Jong-un era.

The original singer of the song was Hyŏn Song-wŏl (현송월), born in 1972. Hyŏn is likewise a graduate of the Pyongyang University of Music and Dance. That university is called nowadays the Kim Won Gyun Pyongyang University of Music, and it is the alma mater of most of North Korean musical elite,

irrespective of specialization in classical or popular brands of music. Hyŏn appears fluent in both, becoming one of the most well-known popular singers of North Korea. She worked as a vocalist for both the Wangjaesan Light Music Orchestra and the Pochonbo Electronic Ensemble, ending her active recording career in the middle of the last decade. The last time she has been seen singing on stage was with the Unhasu Orchestra in March 8, 2012, when she was visibly pregnant, and acted in the role of a former hit singer. Around the same time in spring 2012 she was nominated the administrative director of the Moranbong Band. Obviously she was not able to take a long maternity leave, because the Moranbong Band made its debut in July 6, and the administrative director would have been needed for the preparations.

The lyricist for "Without a Break" was Yun Du-gŭn (윤두근). Born in Soviet-occupied Korea in 1947, Yun joined the Army and started to write song lyrics in 1968, winning prizes for his revolutionary poems; in 1971 he began to work as a lyrics writer in the Music Ensemble of the People's Army. He has written lyrics to over 200 military songs, many of them well known hits. Yun received the Kim Il-sung prize for his work in 2001, which merited his mention in even South Korean media. (Tongil News 2001) While North Korean paintings and monuments often do not list the creator's name, song publications in the DPRK invariably list both the composer and the lyricist specifically. Actually, the lyricist is considered more important than the composer, because of the importance placed on the political message.

On December 12, 2012, North Korea successfully launched the Unha-3 carrier rocket, which took the Kwangmyŏngsŏng 3-2 satellite to orbit the earth. This was a project started by Kim Jong-il, advanced through several years of hardships and setbacks, including unsuccessful launches. Now the project was finally carried through. As Dafna Zur shows, space travel had exerted tremendous influence on North Korean imagination from the 1950s onwards, because a successful space program, even more than a nuclear weapon, was the ultimate symbol of a technologically advanced state (Zur 2014). In the 1950s and 1960s the honor of the most advanced country had been willingly yielded to the Soviet Union, but now the Juche state had carried out the feat by itself. Outside North Korea, the launch was responded to with a great deal of anger and frustration directed at the DPRK. Inside North Korea the mood was totally opposite, jubilant and festive. The scientists and technicians related with the project were transported to Pyongyang, where they were congratulated by the top leadership, toured around the city, encouraged to dance with factory workers, and to try their skills at skating on a new and modern ice rink. On December 21, the festivities peaked when the scientists were wined and dined at the Mokran House, a banquet hall in central Pyongyang built for the use of the Korean Workers' Party Central Committee. Kim Jong-un welcomed them to the event, saying: "Scientists and technicians […] powerfully demonstrated our space science and technology at the ultra modern level before the whole world". The

whole event was crowned by the Moranbong Band giving a special congratulatory performance. (KCNA 2012)

We thus have a situation in December 2012 when something big and extraordinary was needed from the Moranbong Band in terms of festive music. There were ten days between December 12 and 21, enough to arrange something creative, but perhaps not anything totally new. Both the director and the vice director of the Band had a common hit from a decade ago, with an uplifting rapid tempo and flowing military melody, as well as aggressive lyrics that everybody knew. It appears that they simply radically rearranged their old work to suit the kind of new style of the Moranbong Band, and the result was a completely new version. We can even call it a meta version, because it rose musically and visually to a new level, but clearly included also the old version as its reference, as people knew the lyrics that extoll soldiers to act always rapidly and successfully (Cathcart and Korhonen 2016). The whole concert was spirited. Members of the Band were visibly moved by the national success, giving their best in the performance, playing with emotion and strength, the whole Band working together gracefully. Tansume was turned into a rolling pop song with an unmistakable European disco beat, perfectly suitable for contemporary dancing that matched the state narrative of technological breakthrough worthy of global acclaim.

Another important element of the song was the video shown at the background. It displayed the preparations and successful launching of the Unha-3 carrier rocket, showing Kim Jong-un in a guiding role throughout the last stages of the long process, so that the history of the satellite project was contracted to what had taken place in 2012. The most famous detail of the video was that empirical reality was changed so that the video did not narrate the launching of an atmospheric monitoring satellite, but instead depicted the flight of a nuclear missile to the United States, ending into the whole Earth disappearing in an explosion. The launch of the rocket, and its slowly accelerating rise towards space was a Freudian visual experience, backed by the rhythmic playing by the Band. As a political statement, the song told to national and foreign audiences alike that North Korea under the new leader was a strong military power, technically far advanced.

The new meta version of the song was a masterpiece, but clearly the technicians and scientists were not the best audience for such a splendid song. They were too stiff. Besides clapping their hands, they sat still, and only a few of them allowed themselves to respond with tears in their eyes to the powerful national emotions radiating from the Band. Music is a direct channel to emotions (Peretz 2011). The audience thus did not fit the song, but the problem was corrected in the next concert. In the New Year 2013 concert the stage was reconstructed, allowing Band members to walk down to the floor to meet the

audience, while simultaneously leaving space for the audience to dance in front of the stage. Interaction between the Band and the audience was thus increased to an unusual degree in a formal DPRK concert. This was not totally unprecedented, as North Korea has a tradition of organizing mass dances. Dancing of audience members near the stage is encouraged especially on Women's Day and May Day, but they are formalized occasions of relaxation, whereas this was a formal state event, and especially New Year concerts had used to be rather solemn. An audience matching the skills of the Band was organized to sit and perform in front of the stage. The new hit "Tansume" was turned into a well-staged carnival. As the song proceeded the floor audience became step by step more agitated, until finally a number of brightly clad women burst in front of the stage to dance and shout there, followed by men. At the end the whole audience was standing, clapping their hands and shouting.

Perhaps the whole performance, including the part played by the audience, was simultaneously staged and real. Obviously it was explicitly organized, and encouraged. On the other hand, the happiness of the Band members, and that of the audience, was visible and real. The festive mood and the skill with which everything was carried through, along with limited spontaneity that would allow for the forming of emotional attachment to the state, strengthened domestic narratives of Kim Jong-un as the leader of a scientifically advanced and economically growing nation. Special events were organized in the same way in the Soviet Union (Petrone 2000). A package of technological advances, increased national power, and joyful celebration with good music cannot be anything but persuasive. There is a clear legitimacy seeking strategy in this.

On the other hand, despite its apparent persuasive strength, the "Tansume" style remained isolated. Only in its connection was systematic dancing, free shouting, profuse smiling and other similarly non-disciplined action encouraged, and only in concerts in the early half of 2013. The behavior of the audience during later concerts has been subdued. "Tansume" is regularly performed when new advances in missile technology are celebrated. When North Korea successfully launched the Kwangmyŏngsŏng-4 satellite in February 2016, "Tansume" was duly performed by the Moranbong Band in two concerts in February 15 and 18. The same happened after the two launches of the Hwasong-14 intercontinental missile in July 2017; the Moranbong Band performed to song in concerts in July 9 and 30. There were new videos, some changes in the arrangement, but otherwise no special innovation. The audience dutifully clapped to the tune, but there was no dancing and not much smiling either. Behavior remained within stiff discipline. The culture of mutual surveillance does not relent simply because a melody is playing (Lankov 2014). With hindsight, the December 2012 creation now looks like an experiment, which perhaps started as an improvisation, and which produced an innovative result, but which was very different from what the

DPRK art and propaganda bureaucracy had been accustomed to. The style was discontinued, and we have not seen anything like that since.

Outdated Formulae and Schematism

Reading signals of cultural retrenchment in any state ruled by a unitary party is a matter of awareness of inferences. In May 2014 in Pyongyang there was held a grand national meeting of artists, which sent out a number of signals. Kim Jong-un dispatched to the artists a specific letter, reprimanding them for being "caught in a snare of outdated formulae and schematism". Boring art and literature, he argued, was not able to arouse the masses to support his regime. The exception in the North Korean art scene was the Moranbong Band. Kim Jong-un admonished all artists in all fields to learn from the creative style of the Moranbong Band, so that they would fulfil their task to support the leadership by creating "lots of masterpieces like waterfalls!" (KCNA 2014) The Moranbong Band was thus raised at the pinnacle of the North Korean art world, and its importance for creating and maintaining the legitimacy of the Workers' Party of Korea and the Kim Jong-un regime was authoritatively endorsed. Yet this was done in a context of cultural retrenchment, and like in similar situations in the Soviet Union (Taruskin 2010), also in North Korea the operation heralded a return to more strictly disciplined traditionality. The person who read the letter aloud in the meeting was Kim Ki-nam, a party stalwart in his 80s, who had worked for decades alongside Kim Jong-il in supervising the North Korean art scene. His eminent role in the meeting signaled that he had again been placed in charge of the national art administration, including the Moranbong Band. There is no retirement age for very important people.

At this point Kim Jong-un himself appears to have concentrated on his military and economic construction projects, distancing himself from the Band. An indication of this was seen a year later in the aborted concert series in Beijing in December 12-15, 2015. In 2015, after a three-year break in international musical diplomacy in which Kim Jong-il had been active, North Korea sent first the State Merited Chorus and the newly created Chongbong Band to a tour in Russia in August and September 2015. This was to be followed by concerts in Beijing by the Moranbong Band and the State Merited Chorus. These diplomatic overtures appear to have been organized by Kim Ki-nam, who bade the groups farewell in Pyongyang station, and who had acquired lots of this kind of experience during the Kim Jong-il period. At first in Beijing everything went excellently, journalists and paparazzi surrounding the Moranbong Band where ever it moved, and smiling Band members giving short interviews to the media. Everything changed when back in Pyongyang the supreme leader suddenly announced that North Korea was ready to detonate a hydrogen bomb. This led to a diplomatic row between China and North Korea, and as a result both ensembles were recalled home, without giving a single concert (Korhonen 2015;

Cathcart 2016). This indicates that Kim Jong-un was not closely involved with the tour of the Band, and that his actions were not synchronized with the North Korean foreign diplomatic machinery.

Predictably, traditional bureaucratic management of the Moranbong Band did not mean that the music of the Band would have improved. Quite the opposite happened. The concert in September 4, 2014 was indicative of the new style. It was titled "New Music Pieces Given by Moranbong Band", the idea being that lots of new "masterpieces like waterfalls" had by then certainly been created since the national meeting in May. Nearly all songs indeed were new, but it is not easy to create masterpieces. They may come, but their quality may vary in spite of whatever central directives arrive to write a model composition. Most of the songs of that concert have not been heard again, as they belonged rather to the category of "outdated formulae and schematism." As the management of the band is a balancing act between old, new, domestic, and foreign elements, the pendulum in this concert appears to have moved rather far towards the old and domestic.

A Traditional Regime

The concert signified the conclusive commencement of the second stylistic period of the band. Compositions, though still of course important, became a secondary element, while lyrics and their vocalization by the singers assumed a central role. Slow ideological ballads, performed with amplified sentimentalism, became the most important songs. All individualistic merry-making at the stage ended, and the Band started to behave in the disciplined way of a model military. Their outlook in terms of hair style and outfit was unified. The individually most expressive musicians were moved out of the Band, being replaced by new ones, who very much look like each other, up to having the same solemn expression on their faces throughout the concerts. The Band performs now mostly with the State Merited Chorus, the orchestra and choral ensemble of the Korean People's Army. The psychological message of the Band towards the populace is collective discipline, though combined with adulation for excellent technical skills and training. All concerts are extremely well rehearsed, all movements on stage are exactly timed and synchronized, and nothing spontaneous is ever seen. As this is a balancing act, there of course is variation between the concerts, which usually involve also one or two old style instrumental numbers, as well as some songs with a rapid pop beat. Yet, everything is done with trained military discipline. The early liberal style started by Kim Jong-un himself in North Korean music in 2012 appears to be a thing of the past.

An equally fundamental change can be seen in the repertoire. Old songs were reduced in number, while new songs specifically created for Kim Jong-un have formed the majority, or sometimes all of the songs

performed. At the same time most older creators, even though they made songs for the young supreme leader, have been phased out during 2014-2016, being replaced by younger composers and poets. Kim Jong-il judiciously followed the customary three-year mourning period after his father died, and cautiously emphasized the blood line throughout his leadership, building his legitimacy as a leader on continuing the policies of Kim Il-sung. Kim Jong-un instead appears to be willing to distance himself in limited ways from the image of his father. As seen in the repertoire of the Moranbong Band, already after two years of his father's death he started building his own cult, and he is doing this based on his own achievements both on the military and the economic sector. The military ones have caught the world's attention much stronger than the economic ones, where changes are slower, undramatic, and difficult to quantify. Yet, the return of the theme of bountiful harvests in the Band's repertoire is an important indication of an optimistic economic outlook during Kim Jong-un's reign. As Keith Howard points out, such themes were usual until the beginning of the 1990s, but when the years of hunger set in, they disappeared as they only would have sharply indicated what a disaster Kim Jong-il's early reign was (Howard 2005). Thus, songs like "Song of High Haul in the Sea" (바다만풍가 *Pada manphunga*), first performed in March 17, 2014, depicting a large catch of fish, or "Sea of Apples at the Foot of Chol Pass" (철령아래 사과바다 *Chŏllyŏngare sakwapada*), introduced in September 4, 2014, are vital indicators of the leadership's confidence in the economy. Fertile fields and storerooms full of food, as well as busy factories and construction sites are the usual background of news clips of Kim Jong-un (Winstanley-Chesters 2015).

However, it is in the military sector where technological advances have been most dramatic. Kim Jong-un has invested heavily on nuclear and missile development, being undeniably successful there, even though the resulting international sanctions jeopardize development of the civilian economy. The Moranbong Band assists the leader also on this field. A good example is the song "Glory to Marshal Kim Jong-un" (김정은 장군께 영광을 *Kim Jong-un janggunkke yŏngwangŭl*), performed by the Band for the first time in its February 13, 2016 concert as the ending number. Its composer is Kim Kang-nam (김강남), of whom we have no information, which indicates that he is a young entrant to the production team. Its lyrics were written by Cha Yong-do (차영도), whose personal background likewise is obscure, but he is an announced staff member of the Band, and has written during 2014-2017 lyrics to more songs than any other poet, including the fish and apple songs mentioned above. The composition is nothing special, and the lyrics are the typical kitsch of this kind of religio-nationalistic songs (Sondermann 1995). Nevertheless, their legitimating message is strong, as seen in the first verse of the lyrics; translation by us:

Hailing glory
To the strong power of Mount Paektu

Who thundered to the world
To the peerless hero
At whom we look with awe.
Citizens of a Great Power
Cry out in delight with a voice
That shakes the whole Korean Peninsula
Hailing glory to our Marshal
Hailing glory to Marshal Kim Jong-un
Hailing reverently glory to him.

There is a small reference to the blood line in the beginning, as the holy Mount Paektu in the north at the Chinese border is in North Korean mythology considered to be the place where Kim Il-sung with his guerillas kept up the fight against the Japanese, and where Kim Jong-il is supposed to have been born (Smith 2015, 60). Yet, the poem soon moves to Kim Jong-un himself. His "thunder" was the detonation of the hydrogen bomb and the successful launching of the new satellite to orbit the earth. His deeds have made North Korea a great power, apparently on par with the other nuclear powers from the United States to China. These are concrete achievements, for which all North Korean citizens are intended to feel boundless national pride. All the rest of the lines simply depict a deep vertical social relationship, where Marshall Kim Jong-un towers high above the worshipping ordinary citizens.

Even though Kim Jong-un clearly is building his own personality cult in song texts and the arts, there of course is nothing revolutionary in this. Every leading Kim has had his own cult. It is a traditional element, and everything else takes place within traditional forms. The vocabulary of the song is quite similar with those written to both earlier Kims. Like in the military and economic spheres, there are innovations in the art field, exemplified by the continuing use of Western and lately also South Korean pop music style in the performances of the Band, but these innovations are only attempts to show that his leadership stays in tune with the changing times and is itself capable of navigating the revolution into the future. The legitimacy basis of the reign of Kim Jong-un lies on a continuing attempt to perpetuate hereditary charisma, which increasingly turns it towards traditional authority. It implies preserving a belief among the citizens on the holiness of the political structure as such, including the system of succession. We can notice that the state puts a lot of effort on this, and that the cultural productions are skillfully made and emotionally efficient creations. North Korea is ruled not only by repression, but also by well-done persuasion. The regime is simultaneously making small reforms on the economic sector, as well as enhancing the military outlook of the country, including nuclear weapons and recently intercontinental missiles. Despite new technologies, all this activity is entirely traditional. Continuous small changes can be expected in the North Korean system, but a traditional regime eschews drastic ones.

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