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Cover calligraphy  Yan Zhenqing 颜真卿, Tang calligrapher and statesman

Purges are an integral part of the Soviet system. They never stop completely, either among scholars or among members of any other sector of the population.¹

The internecine conflict which took place on the Korean peninsula between 1950 and 1953 had a strong impact on the evolution of the historical profession in the northern half of the divided country. By the 1950s, educated in the best Orwellian traditions of Stalinist theory and practice, the North Korean communist leaders had realised that whoever controls the past controls the future, and whoever controls the present controls the past. In other words, national history, if properly manipulated, might serve as a pretext for campaigns against political enemies, both domestically and on the international stage.

The post-war reconstruction of the country was marked by severe factional struggles within the ruling Korean Workers’ Party (KWP). Disagreement on economic development strategies within the Party leadership triggered a round of political purges. The KWP leader, Kim Il-sŏng 金日成, supported by a group of former anti-Japanese partisans, started eliminating his political rivals within the Party by accusing them of ambiguous but fatal sins. Following the pattern of the 1936–38 reprisals in the USSR, when under the pretext of struggle against ideological and military subversion the “old guard” in the Bolshevik Party was decimated by Stalin, these purges in North Korea were also aimed at the “old intellectuals”.² Many prominent political figures of the time (those who received education in imperial Japan, republican China or revolutionary Russia) were accused of “dogmatism” and “formalism” in their treatment of Korean history. They

² In parallel with the Party purges, efforts were made to rewrite history in Soviet textbooks and other propaganda materials. Prominent figures executed by the NKVD were removed from texts and photographs as if they never existed. Gradually, the history of revolution was transformed to a story about just two key characters: Lenin and Stalin.

For this purpose, a large corpus of published works in Korean, Russian, Chinese and Japanese has been examined during several years of research in Australia and field trips to North and South Korea, China and Japan. Generous support from The Australian National University and the Korea Foundation brought this research to fruition. The author is greatly indebted to the staff of the Division of Pacific and Asian History, RSPAS, ANU, and particularly to his supervisory panel members (Professor Kenneth Wells, Professor Gavan McCormack, and Dr Andrei Lankov) for the advice and encouragement that made the process of work on this difficult topic both motivating and pleasurable.

were publicly harassed, humiliated, and labelled “old”, a euphemism for outmoded, incorrect, and superseded views on nationalism and patriotism. This “old intelligentsia” was invariably associated with the groups and factions that were rivals to Kim Il-sŏng and his “guerrilla faction”. Their works were destroyed or proscribed.

In its turn, Kim’s “guerrilla faction” that included a few members of the intelligentsia, who were so valuable in political battles for power, rushed to recruit a loyal army of “new intelligentsia”. Their task was to buttress the Party and to justify every decision of the leader, Kim Il-sŏng. This new generation of North Korean scholars was encouraged to stress patriotism and nationalism in national history—something that clearly conflicted with the traditional internationalist Marxist dictum that “the workers have no fatherland”. In other words, the successive political purges separated the era of Marxism-Leninism from the time when Juch’ŏn, or the nationalist ideology of “self-reliance”, took over historical scholarship in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK).

Why did this happen, and how? What were the consequences of these purges for history education in the DPRK from that time onward? These are the primary questions posed in this article, which analyses the change in North Korean historical scholarship that coincided with the purges in the KWP from 1955–58. By examining political and historiographical debates of the time, I endeavour to unveil the major reasons for, and contributing factors to, the fall of the Marxist-Leninist tradition of national history research in Kimilsŏngist Korea. This article is thus an attempt to investigate how Kim Il-sŏng managed to tame and, subsequently, destroy this Soviet-supported academic trend in a country always believed to be a Soviet client state.

In order to reconstruct the circumstances which impel intellectuals to resist or succumb to the power of a despotic regime, I also compare the fates of Korean historians with what was happening to their Soviet and Chinese counterparts. The misfortunes that beset historians in all these countries may exemplify the manipulation of intellectuals in a totalitarian state and provide an answer to the question as to why revolutionaries, if they survive the revolution, always turn into bureaucrats.

“Old” and “New” Historians

The relationship between “old” and “new” intellectuals in communist countries has never been trouble-free. Revolutions have always tended to polarise intellectuals in different camps; and this polarisation would ultimately lead to a major conflict, sparked by the ruling régime (deliberately
or otherwise). In the USSR of the 1920s and 1930s, for instance, the “old” Marxist scholars of history, who had been trained under the Tsarist regime, and the “new” ones, educated after the 1917 Revolution, constituted two different wings of the Soviet historical front.5

While the “old” historians had successfully entrenched themselves in various Soviet commissariats and institutions, the “new” generation of Party historians conscientiously challenged their comfortable existence at the top of the Soviet political hierarchy. As a result, the “old” historians treated the “new” with ill-concealed contempt and hostility, while the “new” looked upon the “old” with mistrust and suspicion.6 Both groups professed Marxist historical materialism and had an equally subservient attitude towards Party policy.

The striking difference between the “old” and “new” historians usually lay in their attitudes towards the concepts of “nationalism” and “patriotism”. It was Marx’s controversial claim that “die Arbeiter haben kein Vaterland” (the workers have no country) that brought much confusion to the circles of leftist intellectuals worldwide.7 Where the followers of orthodox Marxism-Leninism argued for the international nature of class struggle, the new generation of Soviet scholars found it wise to support Stalin’s jingoistic policies. Their previous political affiliations and personal links with Party leaders also varied considerably.

For example, Russia’s leading Marxist historian, Mikhail Pokrovskii, joined the Bolsheviks as early as 1905 and was known to be one of Lenin’s close associates.8 Although these merits served him for many years as an amulet against the sporadic sorts of his opponents, Pokrovskii’s school of Marxist historiography was finally demolished in an attack initiated by Stalin and Molotov in May 1934. His views and methodology were denounced as “fallacious” and “dogmatic” by historians who considered themselves as a “new” and qualitatively different force in the Soviet academic world.9 Nonetheless, in 1937–38, most of them would suffer arrest and execution on similarly preposterous charges.

Likewise, when the communist leadership in China began strengthening its grip on academia on 29 September 1951, the Premier of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) Zhou Enlai 周恩来 officially launched the so-called Campaign for the Ideological Reform of Intellectuals.10 Peking 北京, Qinghua 清华, Yanjing 燕京, Furen 輔仁 and other famed universities were used as a testing ground for the techniques that were later widely employed across the nation in the form of ideological remoulding programs in education.11 Some two years later, an observer published his impressions of this campaign, calling it “one of the most spectacular events in human history”:

6 Ibid., p.24.
Tens of thousands of intellectuals, indeed the most educated group of a nation with a population of 470 million, have been brought to their knees, accusing themselves relentlessly at tens of thousands of meetings and in tens of millions of written words.\textsuperscript{12}

Unsurprisingly, after the mid-1950s, the great majority of China’s “old” cultural giants had their creativity curtailed. Those who could not leave the mainland soon tended to become cautious and subservient. Debased and humiliated, some of them joined the forces of the “new”, allowing their pre-1949 reputations to be wasted for the sake of Party policies.

The same vicious cycle of purges among “old” and “new” intellectuals was repeated in North Korea at the dawn of the \\textit{juche} era. Before 1950, while Pyongyang was diligently copying the Soviet academic experience, the “old” scholars—leftist historians and economists with profound pre-1945 academic records and long-standing experience of cooperation with the Comintern—occupied senior positions in the quickly developing DPRK academic structures. Their younger colleagues, who had graduated from Korean or Japanese universities shortly before the collapse of the Japanese colonial regime in 1945 and had come to prominence on the wave of Korean nationalism, could fairly be called the “new” intellectuals. Characteristically, from the very first steps of their academic lives in post-1945 Korea, these young historians relentlessly contradicted most of the opinions of their elder comrades, the renowned historians of the Marxist Socio-economic school, Paek Nam-un 白南雲 and Yi Ch’ong-wŏn 李清源.

The Korean War raised the new nationalistic trend in North Korean historiography to a much stronger position than before. As a result, the Marxist concept of proletarian internationalism and the class-centred approach in research, which were borrowed from Soviet historiography, appeared to be in growing conflict with the new vogue for Korean national heroism and unique cultural traditions. Thus the equilibrium between the “old” and “new” historians (the respective agents of the class-centred and nation-centred approaches) was too volatile to last for long.

Triggered by aggravated intra-Party strife, the attack against “dogmatism”, “formalism”, “cosmopolitanism” and other ambiguous but deadly sins began even before the Armistice Agreement was signed in July 1953. Soon it acquired the form of a crusade against the “old” scholars. In a speech delivered by Kim Il-sŏng before the Congress of Scientists in April 1952, the “new” intelligentsia was clearly distinguished from the “old” for the first time since the establishment of the DPRK in 1948. At that time, Kim was still vacillating between two conflicting plans: either to emulate the Chinese experience of the ideological re-education of intellectuals (that is Zhou Enlai’s Ideological Reform Campaign) and consolidate his personal grip on the Party ideological machine, or to remedy the chronic shortage

\textsuperscript{12} Chung Shih, “Higher Education in Communist China”, \textit{Communist China Problem Research Series} (Hong Kong: The Union Research Institute, December 1953), p.36.
of qualified scholars and scientists vital for the post-war reconstruction of the economy by upgrading the social status of the “old” intelligentsia. A hybrid of these two options was finally created.

Peaceful co-existence between the “old” and “new” intellectuals was to be accompanied by a certain “re-education” process, where the “new” would edify the “old”.

... [The] maturing of new intellectuals does not mean that we take little account of the old-time intellectuals who are already with us. Today, when we have a serious shortage of specialists, mutual assistance among the old and new intellectuals is of special importance. ... We have to respect these intellectuals, render help in their re-education, and enhance their ideological consciousness through persevering political education.\(^\text{13}\)

In other words, as the situation did not permit the immediate replacement of the “old-time intellectuals”, it had to be ensured that they would become an obedient tool in the hands of the Party. The “new” intelligentsia, in the meantime, was encouraged to lead their re-education. However, the feasibility of such a plan was doubtful because among the intellectuals considered “old” there were many prominent political figures. Behind some “old” scholars from the South stood leading Party intellectuals who had been at the helm of political power in North Korea since August 1945. Among them were such political heavyweights such as Pak Hŏn-yŏng 朴憲永 (founder of the Korean Communist Party), Ch’oe Ch’ang-ik 崔昌益 (Deputy Prime-Minister) and Kim Tu-bong 金斗奉 (Party Chairman). Thus, Kim Il-sŏng’s plan to subdue and re-educate the “old intelligentsia” could succeed only if combined with political purges of the “old guard” in the Party.

**Fighting “Dogmatism” and “Formalism” in Historiography**

As soon as the first group of potential rivals to Kim Il-sŏng’s personal rule in the DPRK (the so-called “Pak Hŏn-yŏng—Yi Sŏng-yŏp 李承燁 Group”) had been stamped out in 1953, a true picture of the disastrous impact of the Korean War and the scale of the post-war reconstruction task was revealed to the public. In the area of culture and education, the institutes of higher learning and specialised schools were to be reinstated and their teaching level improved. Kim Il-sŏng encouraged his eponymous university and other higher education institutions to send more students to the USSR, and suggested that new education institutions be founded where workers in state management could be trained.\(^\text{14}\)

A resolution by the National Conference of Teachers in July 1955 called for the total elimination of all “old-fashioned methods”, including the


\(^{14}\) Ibid., p.459.
memorisation of historical facts and dates. Instead, as the instructions of the Fifth Plenum of the Central Committee of the KWP required, “scientific” elements and political content were to prevail in secondary education. But all these arrangements were a mere prelude to the greater reform.

The future of the North Korean historical profession, at least in the form in which it had existed since 1945, was put at stake when Kim II-sŏng attempted to strengthen his control over ideology and propaganda in the Party. The new policy was first articulated at the April 1955 Plenary Meeting of the Central Committee of the KWP, where great concern was aroused among the participants by Kim’s assertion that “some reactionary anti-Party elements”, akin to the “unmasked” Pak Hŏn-yŏng and Yi Sung-yŏp, might in their subversive activities take advantage of “some backward elements in the Party ranks”.

While delivering his report On Intensifying Class Education for Party Members to the Plenum, Kim II-sŏng especially mentioned and vigorously criticised the so-called “formalist methods” in political and historical education. Indoctrination work in the Party, claimed Kim angrily, had been conducted without taking into account the level of general knowledge or theoretical education of individual Party members:

In Party study, emphasis has been laid on memorisation or citing unnecessary dates, phrases and theses, while making little effort to grasp essential ideas and political content. As a result, Party study has failed to provide living knowledge which can be of help in actual life, nor has it been helpful in raising the members’ class consciousness.

Furthermore, some propaganda workers in charge of Party education do not explain things in plain and simple language understandable to the masses, but reel off difficult terms and theses which they themselves do not fully understand.

Interestingly, Kim’s report had much in common with the “Decree of the Council of People’s Commissars and the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks)” that had been signed by Stalin and Molotov on 16 May 1934. Focused on the inadequacies of history education in Soviet schools, this Decree played a crucial role in demolishing the class-centred and internationalist version of national historiography which had been propagated by Mikhail Pokrovskii and other Russian Marxist historians of the older generation. After finding Pokrovskii guilty of advocating a “subjective” conception of Marxism, the Party held him responsible for, as Nikolai Bukharin articulated it, “forcing the course of history into the Procrustean bed of materialism”.

... The teaching of history in the schools of the USSR is not administered satisfactorily. Textbooks and even the teaching are of an abstract, schematic nature. Instead of teaching civic history in a lively manner, narrating in their chronological sequence the most important events and
facts accompanied by characterisations of historical figures, the students are given abstract definitions of socio-economic structures, thus substituting obscure schemes for the coherent narration of civic history.\(^\text{19}\)

That verdict pronounced the Kremlin's disapproval of all "abstract and formal" history textbooks and teaching methods. An essential requirement for the thorough mastery of history was supposed to be the observance of a chronological sequence in the presentation of historical facts, personalities and dates. Thus the "correct" analysis and synthesis of historical events was to guide the student to a "genuinely" Marxist understanding of history. Because of this campaign, nationalism began to increase its influence in Soviet historiography and, starting from the early 1930s, the concepts of "patriotism" and "the fatherland" returned to daily life and the media.\(^\text{20}\)

In the North Korean case, Kim Il-sŏng simply tried to blame the growing popular disgruntlement about post-war living conditions on the leaders of the supposed factions within the KWP: the so-called "Yan'an faction" and "Soviet faction". The former was represented by the Korean communists who had spent the years of Japanese colonial occupation in China together with Mao Zedong 毛澤東 and his Revolutionary Army, while the latter group was made up of Soviet Koreans dispatched to Pyongyang by Stalin after the end of World War II. Given that members of both "factions" had traditionally controlled the business of Party education and propaganda, the accusations of "bureaucratism" and "factionalism" were very easy to apply.\(^\text{21}\)

In December 1955, at the Enlarged Plenum of the Central Committee of the KWP, Kim addressed propaganda and agitation workers with a vitriolic speech entitled *On Eliminating Dogmatism and Formalism and Establishing Juch'ë in Ideological Work*. The term "juch'ë" (subject) in the context of intra-Party life and ideological education was not in use before 1955, and this speech is therefore usually regarded as the first milestone in the creation of the juch'ë ideology of national self-reliance. Nevertheless, Kim continued to be cautious in his search for independence from the large neighbouring communist nations until 1958.\(^\text{22}\) The text of the speech was classified as "confidential" and it was distributed among KWP members for "closed discussions" only.

Although it was not until some ten years later that juch'ë as an ideology of self-reliance came to dominate every aspect of life in the DPRK, some historians believe that with the appearance of juch'ë in 1955, historical scholarship in North Korea was placed under the total control of the KWP and of Kim Il-sŏng personally.\(^\text{23}\) This process emphasised the establishment of the "tradition of the Korean revolution" built around Kim, and was closely related to changes in the political relationship between North Korea and the Soviet Union, and between North Korea and China.\(^\text{24}\)

What was the core of Kim's main argument for this? While emulating

\(^\text{19}\) Mazour, *Modern Russian Historiography*, p.197.

\(^\text{20}\) Ibid., pp.200–1.

\(^\text{21}\) These "factions" were informal groups in the KWP that united people coming from a particular country where their members had been during the colonial occupation of Korea. See Andrei Lankov, *From Stalin to Kim II Song: The Formation of North Korea, 1945–1960* (London: C. Hurst, 2001); Andrei Lankov, *Crisis in North Korea: The Failure of De-Stalinization, 1956* (Center for Korean Studies: University of Hawai’i Press, 2005).


\(^\text{24}\) Ibid., pp.63, 64.
the Chinese “rectification campaign” (zhengfeng yundong 整風運動), in which the Chinese Communist Party endeavoured to set its ideology and organisation straight under Mao Zedong, Kim Il-sŏng proposed to establish juch’ë in the Party’s ideological work and placed special emphasis on the importance of domestic issues and interests:

We are not engaged in any other country’s revolution, but solely in the Korean revolution. This, the Korean revolution, determines the essence of juch’ë 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 revolution.25

In this connection, Kim criticised his audience for not publishing more books about “precious cultural heritage” and the history of the national liberation struggle. Moreover, he pointed out that many historians, apparently plagued by “formalism” and “dogmatism”, had closed their eyes to the revolutionary tradition and the national liberation struggle. According to Kim, the 1919 March First Movement for Independence, the 1926 June Tenth Independence Demonstration, the anti-Japanese Student Incident of 1929 in Kwangju and other important events remained underestimated.

In schools, too, there is a tendency to neglect courses of Korean history. During the war, the curriculum of the Central Party School allotted 160 hours a year to the study of world history, but very few hours to Korean history. This is how things were done in the Party school, and so it is quite natural that our functionaries are ignorant of their own country’s history.26

Under the pretext of “inculcating the national spirit”, in this 1955 speech Kim allowed himself for the first time to be critical of Soviet influences over academic research and education in the DPRK. Portraits of Pushkin and other Russian poets, a landscape of Siberia, and other Soviet symbols displayed in public places and schools of North Korea aroused Kim’s indignation.27 He also lamented that Korean historians, when compiling schoolbooks, indiscriminately took material from Soviet publications and even placed the table of contents at the back of a book, as the Russians usually do.

As a result, North Korean intellectuals of foreign origin began to be placed under government scrutiny. To start with, three prominent Soviet Koreans working in the DPRK, Pak Ch’ang-ok 朴昌玉, Pak Yong-bin 朴永賓, and Pak Ui-wan 朴의완, were accused of negating Korean literary history and producing propaganda of a reconciliatory mood towards
America, the sworn enemy. Pak Ch'ang-ok—a leading theoretician of the Soviet faction and the Chief of the KWP Central Committee's Propaganda and Agitation Department—often contributed articles and essays on theoretical issues of Marxism-Leninism to historical journals and central newspapers. In January 1956, Pak was removed from his post in the Economic Planning Commission for proposing a post-war reconstruction plan with the emphasis on improving living standards and agriculture which contradicted Kim Il-sŏng's vision of economic reconstruction; Kim, who followed Stalin's model of country development, insisted on the predominance of heavy industry.

At the Conference of Activists in Literature, Art and Press Propaganda (held on 23–24 January 1956 in Pyongyang), the novelist Han Sŏl-ya 韩雪野—an old enemy of the Soviet "faction"—openly linked Pak Ch'ang-ok with "Pak Hŏn-yŏng's entourage". This attack echoed Kim Il-sŏng's own earlier charges against the members of Soviet and Yan'an "factions" in the KWP for their "ideological mistakes" that had prompted some scientists to employ "old-fashioned methodologies" and some writers and artists to become bogged down in "bourgeois liberalism".

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.

In fact, the way in which Korean history, particularly the history of the ancient period, was taught in DPRK schools and universities was criticised even by Pyongyang's most committed allies. A report signed on 28 June 1955 by Pal Szarvas, the Hungarian Ambassador, was focused on the North Korean education system and particularly the teaching of history. Although he had his own assessment of the style which dominated history teaching in the DPRK, Szarvas emphasised that the plan of communist indoctrination by way of history had been a failure. He also noted that the main problem lay in the shortage of adequate teaching materials:

Teachers do their best to teach Korean history in the materialist spirit and this indeed works in the case of medieval and modern history. But they still teach the history of ancient times, the establishment of the Three Kingdoms and the Empire [sic] in a rather romantic way. According to the pedagogues' opinion, it will take many years to prepare adequate textbooks.

While suggesting concrete ways of improving historical education in North Korea, Kim Il-sŏng decided to pay special attention to the question of the "correct" (orŏn 오른) periodisation of history and to the "scientific" analysis of "inter-connections between economic forms and classes at every stage of historical development". The following year, the duties

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28 Three years after the purge of the "Pak Hŏn-yŏng—Yi Sŏng-yŏp Group" such a claim was tantamount to the beginning of the new wave of witch-hunting in the Party. Scalapino and Lee, *Communism in Korea*, vol.1, p.505.
31 HMFA (The Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs), XIX-1-k Korea Admin 1945–1964, 9th box 18/g (025/25/3-28/1955).
of DPRK historians were more clearly formulated at the Third All-Party Congress. Its resolutions unambiguously suggested that historians were to “eliminate dogmatism, regain juch’ė, study and creatively apply Marxism-Leninism; quickly, consistently and with enthusiasm produce scientific achievements and maintain a diligent attitude toward research.”


35 Ibid., p.249.

**Historians as “Scholar-Bureaucrats”**

The Third Congress of the KWP, in April 1956, was convened just two months after Khruschev’s sensational speech, “On the Personality Cult and its Consequences”, was delivered at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, in which Stalin’s crimes, his extreme concentration of power, and the means of its execution were denounced. In the North Korean case, it was not the Party’s top leadership but the Party Education and Propaganda Department that was placed under intensive fire. The main grievances were against the alleged “rampant dogmatism”, “lack of juch’ė”, and “inadequate creativity in the application of Marxism-Leninism”.

In his report before the Congress, Kim Il-song complained that the state of affairs in agitation and propaganda had been far from satisfactory. The criticism of certain “untrustworthy” elements within the Department occupied a central place in the Congress’s agenda.

These elements failed to conduct educational work to equip Party members with revolutionary ideas and prohibited propaganda among people of the south about the achievements of the democratic reforms in the northern half. As a result, the ideological level of the Party members was very low, and many of them finally ended up by joining the “Guidance League” conspired [sic] by the enemy to destroy our Party.

Kim Il-song attacked the members of Soviet and Yan’an “factions” who had been in control of agitation, propaganda and ideological work in the Party since 1945. He complained that while occupying key posts in the Party these individuals tended to be better acquainted with the revolutionary histories of Russia and China than with that of Korea.

One serious manifestation of dogmatism in Party ideological work is that we neglect to study and publicize Korean problems, particularly the history of our country. Many functionaries and Party members know the revolutionary histories of other countries, but are ignorant of their own. So accustomed to this are they that some functionaries do not see it as a shortcoming and are not ashamed. They take it as a matter of course and do not even recognize the need to learn about things Korean.

In this regard, Kim placed special emphasis on the importance of “new
social science” and outlined the task standing before the “old intellectuals” to whom the task of laying its future foundations was assigned:

We should not cling to what is old. Our job is to study systematically the achievements of new, advanced science, and then take concrete steps to introduce them into production. Our major task confronting the old intellectuals, particularly workers in the social sciences, is to lay the foundations for the sound, magnificent development of science and culture in the future. To do so they must carry over the excellent heritages [sic] of our country’s science and culture while studying modern science they must also collect and compile all data for scientific research. Scientists are not yet fully aware of how important this task is.36

The response from the DPRK Academy of Sciences (DPRKAS) Institute of History Research (IHR) to Kim’s report was immediate and explicit. The July 1956 editorial of the journal Historical Science (Ryōksa Kwahak 历史科学) supported Kim’s criticism that since the establishment of the DPRK its “academic culture” (kwabak munbwa 科学文化) had not been developing satisfactorily.37 Despite the great support of the Party, claimed the anonymous author, the professional level of historical scholarship in the North had not yet reached an advanced level, and many historians were still failing to link their research interests with the requirements of Party policy.

A certain part of our academic circles is still reluctant to jettison its old professional practices and remains stuck to old-fashioned topics. Therefore, all their efforts to react immediately to the extremes of the present-day situation and to set the appropriate research topics are still inadequate. Moreover, a certain number of questions related to national history remain full of serious gaps and flaws.38

Who were these mysterious wrongdoers inside academia that formed a major impediment to the healthy forces in DPRK historiography? In July 1956, no specific names were mentioned, but one could easily guess that only “old” intellectuals were reluctant to change their “old professional practices” and remained attached to their “old-fashioned topics”. Those castigated were the historians who concentrated only on ancient and medieval history: “they were averse to examining any other patriotic figures of the past”.39 The editorial lamented the fact that their research was limited to the circle of national heroes such as Admiral Yi Sun-sin 李舜臣 (1545–98) of the Imjin Wars, Koryo’s General Kang Kam-ch’an 姜邯贊 (948–1031), and thinkers Pak Chi-wŏn 朴趾源 (1737–1805) and Tashan Chŏng Yag-yong 茶山丁若镛 (1762–1836).

When talking about the foreign influence on Korea’s history, the same editorial denounced “some historians” for attempting to overrate its impact; this was “belittling the Juch’ê factor in history”. Even the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, albeit acknowledged as the main catalyst of world revolutionary
movements, was now evaluated simply as “an auxiliary factor assisting the inexorable progression of national history.” This new interpretation clearly indicated the beginning of a tremendous transformation in North Korean historiography. As a result of this change, the rock-solid foundation of the Soviet-centred vision of Korean history that had dominated DPRK historiography since August 1945 now began fracturing under the pressure of new nationalistic policies.

Among the topics recommended for urgent re-examination, the Ryoko Kwabak editorial listed the Sirhak Movement for Practical Learning (Sirhak Undong 實學運動) of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Kaehwa Patriotic Enlightenment Movement (Kaehwa Undong 開化思想愛國啓蒙運動) of the nineteenth to early twentieth centuries, the 1884 Reforms of Kim Ok-kyun 金玉均 (1851–94), the 1919 March First Movement for Independence (Samil Undong 3.1 三一運動), and some other subjects which, despite their outstanding patriotic nature, had been long ignored by “dogmatists” in historical scholarship. As examples of the progressive approach, three separate articles penned by “new” historians Kim Sak-hyang 金錫亨, Hwang Chang-yop 黃長燁 and Han Yang-hae 韓陽海 were presented. Remarkably, in the ten years after 1956, two of these three scholars reached the highest level of prominence in North Korean academia. Kim Sŏk-hyoŏng 金錫亨 was put in charge of history writing in the DPRK, while Hwang Chang-yŏp 黃長燁 guided philosophical studies and eventually formulated the new official ideology of Juch’e.

Pak Si-hyoŏng 朴時亨, another leader of the “new” historians, brought forward a number of theoretical problems that came to preoccupy North Korean historical scholarship. The November 1956 issue of Ryoko Kwabak carried Pak’s views as formulated in the article On Various Issues in the Korean Historical Profession. Referring to materials from the Third All-Party Congress, Pak hurried to support Kim Il-sŏng’s allegations concerning the poor performance of the historical profession in the DPRK, putting all responsibility for this onto the “old” scholars:

Comrade Kim Il-sŏng has harshly criticised some scholars who are still relying on the old methodology for their professional irresponsibility and inability to comprehend their noble mission to serve the proletariat and the working masses. The [grim] ramification of this negative tendency is obvious.

Carefully couched in Marxist-Leninist phraseology and replete with formal bows to Moscow, Pak’s article nevertheless expressed serious qualms regarding the suitability of the Soviet historiographical experience for research on Korean national history. First, Pak questioned the reason why Korean historians were to copy the USSR tradition and limit their research to the region lying within the contemporary borders of the DPRK.
“Will it become a violation of proletarian internationalism or a manifestation of nationalism if we start examining the history of Parhae as part of Korean history?” inquired Pak, referring to the ancient state of Bohai which between the seventh and tenth centuries occupied the territories of northeastern China and the Russian Far East. 

Second, Pak clearly refused to regard the conventional Marxist-Leninist classics as the only source of answers to the questions of national history. By way of example, he claimed that dogmatists in North Korean academia would invariably offer one hackneyed answer if asked the question, “Why did all popular movements during the Unified Silla 統一新羅 [668–935], Koryŏ 高麗 [918–1392], and Yi Chosŏn 李朝鮮 [1392–1910] dynasties fail to achieve their original goals?” Their infallible reply would be that in medieval Korea, in accordance with Engels’ Peasant War in Germany, (Der deutsche Bauernkrieg, 1851) there was no such class as the proletariat which could have led the peasantry, and therefore the isolated peasants’ struggle was doomed to failure. This mechanistic approach of Marxism, argued Pak Si-hyŏng, could bring nothing but harm to Korean historical scholarship.

It must be noted, though, that many comments expressed in Pak’s article were apposite and even proved prophetic. For example, when criticising local “dogmatists” for their fear of authority and constant search for the Party’s approval, Pak aptly noted that in such circumstances scholarship would soon become more akin to theology. In Pak Si-hyŏng’s view dogmatism was so acute in North Korean historical scholarship simply because of the small number of people involved. For instance, if one scholar wrote something on a particular subject, it would immediately make him the utmost authority in that field. Likewise, noted Pak, if anyone else dared to contradict the findings of the first scholar, he would promptly be recognised as the spokesperson for a new “official” line.

The escalating tension in the KWP, where besides the “Soviet” and “Yan’an factions” there also were Korean communists who had stayed in the country throughout the years of Japanese colonial occupation (the so-called “domestic faction”), was bound to culminate in a massive clash of interests and identities. Once this had begun, a rising fear of possible reprisals began to permeate the DPRK historical profession. Trying to protect themselves from accusation and violent attacks by critics, the “old scholars” tried even harder to demonstrate their acquiescence to the Party line and its leadership. In an atmosphere of escalating terror, historians tended to be conservative in choosing topics for research and drawing conclusions. This tended to make them look like inveterate dogmatists and allowed them to fall easy prey to a régime that was always hungry for purges.
It does not seem as though Pak Si-hyong was personally keen on the idea of destroying the “old” historians. Rather, his proposal was oriented towards the hasty preparation of the “new” academic cadres. Describing the methods and goals of this professional training for academics, Pak used the term “scientific-cadre” (kwabak kanbu 科學幹部), which appositely portrayed the place and role of an intellectual in the totalitarian society.

As the task of achieving the most advanced academic level in the world has been set up before our scholarship, we must be ready to produce numerous scholar-bureaucrats who will be able to meet this grandiose challenge.45

The term kwabak kanbu may also be translated as “scholar bureaucrat”. However, the duties which this new generation of scholars were supposed to fulfil would significantly restrict their academic freedom and overtax their personal responsibility for possible “mistakes” in their research. For this reason the comparison with a bureaucrat—devoted but faceless—seems to be more appropriate. In the context of communist politics, moreover, the term “scholar-bureaucrat” was not a new phenomenon. Social experiments in the Soviet Union and China had already created the prototype of the Party hack whose duties were a mere realisation of the Politburo’s latest decisions.46 An ideal scholar, like a loyal soldier, was expected to serve the Party and the people through fulfilling his daily duties, dictated primarily by political rather than purely scholarly needs.

Responding to the Congress’s resolutions, the Institute of History Research avidly commenced the required work aimed at the improvement of history research and education, and produced a document entitled A Ten-year Plan for Scientific Development (1957–1966). Such issues as the essence of feudalism, the genesis of capitalism, the formation of a bourgeois nation, and the proletarian struggle for hegemony in Korea awaited urgent resolution. Historians were also to focus on the study of socialist revolution, fatherland unification, revolutionary traditions, patriotism and Korean cultural heritage.

The “creative” (ch’angjojok 創造的) application of the Marxist concept of the “inexorable law of objective development” (happōpech’iksŏng 合法則性) in the writing of history was also stressed. As the pending tasks of socialist construction and national unification demanded constant boosts of nationalism, it became imperative to overcome the traditional Marxist views on Korea’s early history. In this light, the legacy of the “old” socio-economic school of historiography, developed in the 1930s by Paek Nam-un and Yi Ch’ŏng-wŏn, began to be regarded as “dogmatic”, “formalistic” and, therefore, harmful.

Against a background of ongoing political purges and ideological campaigns, this search for historical truth soon transgressed the frames of


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a purely academic discourse and acquired features of an ideological witch-hunt. Inspired by the Party-approved vogue for ideological self-reliance, the “new” historiography in North Korea poised itself to launch the last, resolute attack against the “old” school.

The Resolute Attack

In August 1956, a serious crisis befell KWP headquarters. At the Plenary Meeting, a group of Central Committee members (led by Pak Ch’ang-ok and Ch’oe Ch’ang-ik, the unofficial leaders of the “Soviet” and “Yan’an factions” respectively) launched an open attack on Kim Il-sông. Their criticism once again raised the question of economic reconstruction policy and dealt with general issues of the transition to socialism. Also among the topics of discussion were the “dictatorship of the proletariat”, the relationship between the Party and the people, and democracy in the Party. Attempting to take advantage of the unfolding de-Stalinisation campaign in the Soviet Union, both Pak and Ch’oe used all available channels to attack the cult of personality and give strong support to the so-called “Leninist norms of collective leadership” in the KWP.

Their move was unsuccessful, however, and the coup abortive. The Plenum denounced all anti-Kim forces as “anti-Party elements”. Pak Ch’ang-ok and Ch’oe Ch’ang-ik were purged from the KWP’s Presidium and the Central Committee and relieved of their state posts. After the swift intervention of a joint Soviet-Chinese delegation headed by A. Mikoyan and Peng Dehuai 彭德懷, many of those who had been purged were pardoned and even temporarily resumed their positions. Nevertheless, this incident triggered a new campaign for “anti-sectarian struggle” and “concentrated guidance” in the DPRK.

This campaign reached its culminating point in March 1958, when the First Conference of KWP Representatives was convened in order to uncover numerous “subversive actions” in the area of culture and education. This time, Soviet Koreans (such as Pak Ui-wan and O Ki-sŏp 吳琪燮) and even the formal head of state, Kim Tu-bong, were found guilty of factionalism and plotting against the Party. Although none of them was formally charged with a real felony (such as “counter-revolutionary conspiracy”), Kim Il-sông hurried to endorse the final offensive against the leaders of the “Soviet” and “Yan’an” factions. In the concluding speech delivered before the Conference, Kim denounced his former comrade Kim Tu-bong, saying that his crime was “really serious” as he had allegedly “spoiled many young people”. Among the disclosed “crimes” there were many fabricated simply to smear Kim’s potential opponents. For example, an investigation held in

the DPRK National Library discovered that books there were positioned in such as way that Marxist-Leninist treatises were less prominently displayed than other literature, while books about Kim II-sŏng were gathering dust on a back shelf. The Director of the National Library, Han Pin 韓斌, was found responsible for this misdemeanour. Despite his Soviet Korean origin, Han was also a prominent activist of the “Yan’an faction”, for which he had been purged from the Central Committee of the KWP in early 1950.\(^{49}\) The same fate awaited “old” scholar-politicians Kim Ch’ŏng-do 김 정도 and Hŏ Kap 혜갑. For those who were born in the USSR or China, deportation to their country of origin became normal practice. As for the rest of Kim II-sŏng’s real and potential opponents, they all met their death in labour camps after their departure from the political scene.

As for the “new” academics, the ongoing purges opened new opportunities for them. In July 1957, while criticising the slow pace of development in DPRK academic circles, the historian Kim Sŏk-hyŏng actively supported and augmented Pak Si-hyŏng’s earlier idea about turning historians into Party “scientific-cadre” or kwabak kanbu. In his article “Creating a basis for Korean history research”, Kim affirmed that owing to the residue of “old ideology” amongst some North Korean intellectuals, dogmatism and formalism had become widespread within DPRK scholarship.\(^{50}\) Along with re-education of the “old” academics, Kim prescribed the mass training of “new scholar-bureaucrats”. In this process, the establishment of juche and the suppression of “formalism” and “dogmatism” were named as major priorities, and as such occupied central place in Kim’s article.\(^{51}\)

Kim Sŏk-hyŏng also argued that the work of constructing a solid basis for Korean history research could not be considered successful unless the “old” methodology was fully exterminated, the mass education of scholar-bureaucrats was well organised, and all historians faithfully followed the victorious Party line.

Our historians can and must achieve the goals proposed by the Third All-Party Congress and the December 1956 Plenum. [...] It is a matter of fact that the political line of our Party is always correct. Therefore, if we move forward in the direction suggested by the Party, we shall overcome every impediment that may appear on our way.\(^{52}\)

An expression of Kim Sŏk-hyŏng’s—“The creation of scholarly culture is unimaginable without the establishment of juche”—would be the motto of the North Korean historical profession for many years to come. Kim also exhorted his colleagues to continue learning from the advanced experience of the Soviet Union, China and “progressive foreign countries” and to base their research firmly on the “scientific” theory of Marxism-Leninism. However, he alerted them also to the necessity of implementing this foreign philosophy with great caution and careful consideration of local circumstances.
Two months later, in September 1957, another North Korean academic, Ha Ang-ch’ón 河仰天, praised the KWP’s policy towards the intelligentsia but admitted that many “unhealthy elements” remained in academia. He claimed that even among the lecturers at Kim Il-sŏng University there were certain people who had criticised the Party line in the classroom. Some scholars, continued Ha Ang-ch’ón, imitated foreign models mechanistically, without any sense of independence. To remedy this problem, he proposed that the “new” intellectual class from among the workers be nurtured and united around KWP organisations and Party cadres. This was just at the time when a new round of purges against the “old” intellectuals in the DPRK began.

Ch’oe Ch’ang-ik, in association with other prominent intellectuals of the “Yan’an faction” in the KWP (such as the aforementioned Kim Tu-bong and Han Pin), had been supervising DPRK historical scholarship for more than a decade. It is hardly surprising that his name would become the epitome of “old” scholarship in the country. By leading the abortive 1956 August Plenum coup outlined above, Ch’oe had thwarted the traditional domination of the “old” intellectuals. Swift intervention on the part of the Soviet and Chinese governments saved them from reprisals for another year and a half. However, the December 1957 Plenum of the Central Committee of the KWP delivered the final blow to the ranks of “old” historians, effectively removing them from the central research and education bodies. The draconian measures taken against the main figures of the August coup included putting them on trial for “factionalism” and “revisionism”.

By late 1957, the resolutions of the August 1956 Plenum were reconfirmed as correct, and the instigators of the coup (Ch’oe Ch’ang-ik, Pak Ch’ang-ok, and Kim Sŭng-hwa 金承化) were publicly labelled “traitors of the revolution and extremely corrupt elements”. In March 1958, at the First Conference of KWP Representatives, Pak Kŭm-ch’ŏl 朴金喆—then Vice-Chairman of the Central Committee of the KWP—launched the final assault against the “Cho’e Ch’ang-ik/Pak Ch’ang-ok group” by claiming that they had perpetrated “anti-revolutionary activity which they had been plotting for a long time”. For this, Pak Kŭm-ch’ŏl appealed to the Party to continue severely punishing and re-indoctrinating them.

As we can see, the abortive coup of August 1956 was followed by harsh reprisals against the “old intellectuals” affiliated with the “Yan’an faction”. As soon as the strategic heights of historiography changed hands and came under the control of the forces of the “new” scholars, “old” scholarship was to be effectively erased from academia along with its former supervisors, Ch’oe Ch’ang-ik, Kim Tu-bong and other prominent scholar-politicians. This was done by means of historiographical debates that unfolded in the second half of the 1950s.
Historiographical Debates as Political Trials

Enthused by their easy victory in August 1956, the “new” scholars began a broad campaign against the pre-war views of the “old” socio-economic school. Its protagonists, Minister of Culture Paek Nam-un and the Head of the History Compilation Committee Yi Ch’ong-wön, were suddenly confronted in a series of open academic discussions.

In October 1956, a debate on slave-owning in ancient and medieval Korea created the perfect setting for an attack on the “old” historians. In self-defence, Yi Ch’ong-wön tried to divert the course of the discussion by encouraging his fellow scholars to scrutinise the “backward” characteristics of the ruling class in the Three Kingdoms and to focus their research on the nature of the lingering remnants of the primitive communal system. Since the mid-1930s, Yi Ch’ang-won had been advocating the idea that during the transition from primitive communism to slave-ownership, the earlier modes of production did not immediately and completely disappear but continued to linger for a considerable period of time. Yi thus concluded that such archaic remnants were impairing the whole development of Korean society. However, by that time any reference to “stagnation” and “backwardness” in national history had become extremely unpopular, and were considered unpatriotic and destructive. Such reckless comments made in 1956 would therefore ensure an early sunset on Yi Ch’ong-wön’s academic career.

In addition, negative comments were made publicly on Yi Ch’ong-wön’s latest book, The Struggle of the Proletariat for Hegemony in Korea (Chos’un-issosõ Püoreiat’iHegemoni-rül whan T’ujaeng 朝鮮에 있어서 프로레타리아트의 해게모니를 위한 闖爭, 1955) in a special panel discussion convened at the Institute of History Research on 30 October 1956. The outcome of the panel’s debate had already been determined by Yi’s affiliation with Ch’oe Ch’ang-ik and other leaders of the “Yan’an faction”. But in order to disguise this bloodletting behind the shield of “free discussion”, representatives from every academic institution in Pyongyang were invited. In the course of the discussion, serious shortcomings were “discovered” in Yi’s work. Among the gravest mentioned were “the mistreatment of historical sources”, “the dispersion of the research subject” and “the weakness of theoretical analysis that made the book incomprehensible”.

Yi Ch’ong-wön refused to acknowledge his errors, and there was open disagreement between him and other participants in the discussion. First, there was a dispute over the date of the ultimate establishment of “proletarian hegemony” in Korea. While Yi argued that the struggle for hegemony was accomplished well before August 1945, his opponents insisted that this had happened only on 9 September 1948 with the
proclamation of the DPRK. Second, Yi Ch'ông-wôn's identification of Sin'ganhoe 新幹會 (1927–31), as the first united front organisation in Korea which brought together nationalist Left and Right was also questioned by many discussants. Yi's critics were keen to credit Kim Il-sŏng's Association for Fatherland Restoration (Choguk Kwanghokhoe 祖國光復會) as the first national united front, and they therefore dismissed the Sin'ganhoe as simply an anti-Japanese club. 59

There was, in addition, a complex debate over the "correct" attitude towards the national bourgeoisie. Following the classical revolutionary theory of Lenin, Yi Ch'ông-wôn had asserted in his book that the Korean proletariat, while searching for a coalition with the peasantry, were able to achieve this strategic alliance only through "total isolation of the national bourgeoisie from the masses". 60 This hypothesis sparked another debate in early 1957, which was closely watched by the Ryōksa Kwabak journal. 61 The historian Kim Sang-ryong 김상용 criticised Yi for his "mechanistic" application of foreign strategies formulated by Lenin, Stalin and Mao; colonial Korea in the 1920s and 1930s had differed significantly from Tsarist Russia or semi-colonial China. "When we discuss the Korean proletariat's struggle for hegemony, why should we copy the policy of isolation of the bourgeoisie adopted by the bourgeois-democratic revolution in Russia?" questioned Kim resentfully. 62

Even worse was Kim Sang-ryong's suspicion that Yi Ch'ông-wôn opposed the principal document of Kim Il-sŏng's Association for Fatherland Restoration, the "Ten Point Program" (Choguk Kwanghokhoe "Siptae Kangnyŏng"조국광복회 "십대강령" 十大綱領) promulgated in 1936. Yi's decision to indiscriminately group all categories of the bourgeoisie into one enemy camp was found to be in conflict with one of the Program's clauses, namely "to outlaw every enterprise which cooperated with the Japanese, and unconditionally support every business which improved people's life". 63 Kim Sang-ryong declared that Yi's hypothesis on the bourgeoisie was "potentially harmful to the union between the proletariat and the progressive part of the bourgeoisie, while the mere isolation of the hardened pro-Japanese elements was inadequate". 64 In other words, in his article Kim reminded readers that the DPRK was a state based on the principle of "people's democracy" and not "proletarian dictatorship".

An attempt to find an acceptable solution to the problem was undertaken by a young scholar, Hwang Chang-yŏp. In a short but eloquent article, Hwang confirmed that Yi Ch'ông-wôn's book suffered from serious shortcomings. 65 He used his skills as a Moscow-trained philosopher to dialectically divide every policy into "strategic" and "tactical" on the assumption that Yi simply meant the "strategic isolation" of the comprador bourgeoisie and was therefore probably not against the "tactical union" with the national bourgeoisie. 66 This ambiguous explanation allowed the cluster of "new" historians (including Kim Sang-ryong, Yi Na-yŏng 리나영,
According to recently declassified Russian diplomatic documents, in early September 1957 Yi Ch'ong-won, along with his fellow historians, Kim Ch'ong-do and Hŏ Kap, was briefly arrested on suspicion of involvement in a conspiracy against the Party. The same year, a brand-new book titled The Communists’ Struggle for Proletarian Hegemony in the Anti-Japanese National Liberation Struggle (Panil Minjok Haebang T'ujaeng-esŏ Proletaria Hegemoni-ről wihan Kongsanjuŭija-dŭl-ŭi T'ujaeng [The Communists’ struggle for proletarian hegemony in the anti-Japanese national liberation struggle], Pyongyang: Kwahagwŏn Ch'ulp'ansa, 1957) by historian Kim Si-jung 김시종 promptly overrode Yi’s “erroneous” views on the matter. This practice of rewriting “erroneous” books on history (often using the same title) became common in DPRK historiography.

In January 1958, appealing to the readers of Ryŏksa Kwabak with the new slogan “Let us deeply study the great guiding documents!”, the historian Kim Sŏk-hyŏng once again addressed the question of loyalty to the Party among academics. This time, Kim was more outspoken and discussed ideological “crimes” in historiography by mentioning the names of his older colleagues. The edge of his criticism was aimed against the rebel group of scholar-politicians. Defending the purity of Marxism-Leninism, Kim Sŏk-hyŏng lambasted their leader, Ch’oe Ch’ang-ik, for “dogmatism” and “revisionism” together.

Ch’oe Ch’ang-ik, who was deeply haunted by the factionalist idea, deliberately disguised his true identity. After Liberation, Ch’oe used his post pretending to be a “theoretician” and “historian” and imposing his dogmatic and revisionist views upon the studies of the history of the national liberation struggle.

Everyone affiliated with Ch’oe Ch’ang-ik was denounced as an “enemy of the people” and subsequently purged from academia. Among the victims of the purges at Kim Il-sŏng University there were many scholars and teachers and some undergraduate and postgraduate students. All the former activists of the “Marxist-Leninist faction” in the old Korean Communist Party (KCP 1925–28), who until the end of 1957 had formed the core of the editing committee of Ryŏksa Kwabak, were all vilified as Ch’oe’s accomplices.

Yi Ch’ong-wŏn, Kim Ch’ong-do, Hŏ Kap, and some other “historians” and “theoreticians” followed Ch’oe Ch’ang-ik, who in 1949 published the History of the National Liberation Struggle in Korea. By upholding revisionist
and dogmatic views, in their books they propagated the so-called “pro-
factionalist idea”. After Liberation, they deliberately distorted historical
facts and misrepresented the development of the contemporary history
of our country in a light beneficial only to the M-L Faction”.72

Yi Ch’ông-wôn did not escape this fate. Kim Sŏk-hyŏng used his most
venomous vocabulary to portray Yi Ch’ông-wôn, his former colleague, as
an incorrigible dogmatist, factionalist and schemer. According to Kim, in
his Struggle of the Proletariat for Hegemony in Korea (1955), Yi Ch’ông-
wôn was “deliberately hailing various KCP factions and slandering the
role of Kim II-sŏng’s Fatherland Restoration Association in the course of
the pre-1945 national liberation struggle”.73 Kim Sŏk-hyŏng reacted par-
ticularly furiously to Yi’s statement that Kim II-sŏng and his guerrilla units
were operating in the early 1940s not in Korea but abroad.

In the past, it was the gang of Pak Hŏn-yŏng and now it is Ch’oe Ch’ang-
’ik, his henchman, Yi Ch’ông-wôn and some other “historians” and “theo-
reticians” who, with some variations, continue to ignore the historical fact
that in the 1930s Manchuria, particularly its parts near the Soviet, Chinese
and Korean borders, formed the centre of Korean national liberation and
revolutionary movements.74

Trying to rebuff this allegation that would be dangerous for the
“invincible General”, Kim Sŏk-hyŏng emphasised the large number of
ethnic Koreans residing in Northeast China, even referring to the Japanese
colonialist doctrine of “Homogeneity of Manchuria and Korea” (Sen-Man
ichiyo 鮮滿一様). Even worse, he suggested, the frequent recurrence of
Marxist-Leninist dicta in Yi Ch’ông-wôn’s books put the author under
suspicion of plagiarism. Kim Sŏk-hyŏng claimed that Yi, who had
abundantly cited Stalin and Mao, had in some cases simply replaced the
names “Soviet Union” and “China” with “Korea” and presented the new
wording as his own ideas.75 For this, Yi Ch’ông-wôn was relegated to the
role of librarian at the DRKAS, and soon completely disappeared from
view.76

In addition to Kim Sŏk-hyŏng’s disparagements, the January 1958 issue
of Ryŏksa Kwabak carried many other criticisms aimed at Yi Ch’ông-wôn,
Ch’oe Ch’ang-ik, Hŏ Kap, Kim Chŏng-do and Kim Sŏng-hwa. One writer,
Ch’oe Ung-ch’ol 최웅철, even claimed that despite their “pretentious
leaning” towards the tenets of Marxism-Leninism, the majority of “old”
scholars were “petit-bourgeois intellectuals”, and that therefore the true
nature of their actions and research had always been “anti-proletarian” and
“anti-Marxist-Leninist”.77

Yi Ch’ông-wôn, in his book titled The Struggle of the Proletariat for
Hegemony in Korea insisted that the journals Sin Saengbwal and Chosŏn
Chigwang, which appeared after 1922, were Marxist-Leninist in their
essence and could guide the proletariat. In so doing, Yi Ch’ông-wôn has

73 Ibid., pp.3-4.
74 Ibid., p.4.
75 Ibid., p.6.
76 Interview with the Director, International Centre for Korean Studies,
Moscow State University, Professor Mikhail N. Pak (Seoul, 9 March 1999).
77 Ch’oe Ung-ch’ol, “1920 Nyŏndaes Chosŏn-esŏ Rodong Kyegŭp-ŭi Sangbu
Kijo Hyŏngsŏng-e Kkich’in Chongp’a Punjadŭr-ŭi Haedoksŏng-e Taehayŏ”
[Concerning the poisonous influence of nefarious sectarian elements inflicted
upon the proletariat leadership during its formation in Korea in the 1920s],
distorted historical truth by harbouring the factionalist misrepresentation of Marxism-Leninism.\textsuperscript{78}

Ch'oe Ung-ch'ol argued that \textit{The Light of Korea} (Chosŏn Chigwang 朝鮮之光), along with \textit{Ideological Movement} (Sasang Undong 思想運動), \textit{Theoretical Struggle} (Riron T'ujaeng 理論闘爭), \textit{The Masses' Newspaper} (Taejung Sinmun 大衆新聞), \textit{The Current Stage} (Hyŏn Kyedan 現階段) and other leftist periodicals, had been established either by petit-bourgeois or communist factionalists and therefore should not have been evaluated as "proletarian." Similarly disapproving was Ch'oe's appraisal of various Marxist "circles" (Rus: \textit{kruzhoks}) and factional groups such as the "Marxist-Leninist Group" (M-L'p'a 派), "Tuesday Group" (Hwayoboé 火曜會), "Seoul Group" (Sŏulp'a 서울派), "North Wind Society" (Pukp'ungboé 北風會) and "January Society" (Irwŏrhoe 一月會). The implication was that as the "old" intellectuals (such as Ch'oe Ch'ang-ik, Han Pin and Yi Ch'ŏng-wŏn) had been personally involved in the activity of those factions, they were all "factionalists". Accordingly, their attention to the issues of "proletarian hegemony" was presumed to be nothing but a quest on the part of the Marxist-Leninist group for hegemony within the Party.\textsuperscript{79} The fact that most of these "old" scholar-politicians had publicly denounced intra-Party factionalism only helped Ch'oe Ung-ch'ol to accuse them of "crafty manoeuvres in order to disguise their true identity."\textsuperscript{80}

In contrast, the founder of the "old" Socio-economic school of historiography, Paek Nam-un, was prudent enough to acknowledge defeat and to start reconsidering his views. On the final day of the "Discussion on the Socio-economic Essence of the Three Kingdoms" (which continued throughout 1956–58), Paek held the floor and announced that the existence of slave ownership in Korean history, akin to that of ancient Greece and Rome, could not be confirmed by any historical source. Supplemented by the appeal for guided assistance, this revelation became the most significant concession to political contingencies made by the former leader of the Korean Marxist historians since 1945.

I plan to scrutinise and reconsider my views expressed in the book which was written some twenty-four years ago and which sparked this discussion on the socio-economic organisation of the Three Kingdoms. I would like to appeal for assistance in this task and think that any sort of cooperation would be useful. I firmly believe that such efforts can bring some positive results to the development of our academic front, part of the larger ideological front.\textsuperscript{81}

Paek's statement marked the defeat of the socio-economic tradition of history writing in North Korea. In the face of resurging nationalism in politics and ideology, the official historiography of the DPRK was no longer permitted to look back at what had been written by the "old" scholars. From this moment onward, \textit{juch'ê} principles of self-reliance began to have
a major bearing on the work of historians. Nevertheless, it would still be a
decade before the spirit of the “old” Marxist academic tradition was com-
pletely expurgated from the North Korean version of national history.82

By late 1958, a lethal blow had been delivered to ranks of the “old”
scholar-politicians. In a matter of months, many of them were expelled
from the Party, dismissed from their positions and then publicly humili­
ated. Nevertheless, fierce reprisals continued. Scalapino and Lee estimate that
throughout 1958–59 at least 90 prominent figures were relieved of office and
purgéd from the KWP.83 Some 30 of these were individuals connected with
the defunct South Korean Workers’ Party, the old Korean Communist Party
or one of its factions. Many “old” communists, accused of factionalism or
subversive thoughts, were swiftly replaced with “new”, reliable ones. The
Korean-American historian Suh Dae-sook makes an interesting comment
in this connection, presuming that the fate of southern communists in
North Korea was reminiscent of their struggle during the Japanese colonial
occupation, with perhaps one difference: the North Korean leadership was
less hesitant in eliminating its opponents.84

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Systematic purges of intellectuals affiliated with various “factions” in
the KWP changed the course of development of DPRK historiography in
1955–58. Once the so-called Domestic, Yan’an and Soviet “factions” had lost
their last chance to dethrone Kim Il-sŏng as Party leader, many scholars of
history came under attack. Kim personally directed the assault against the
“old” scholarship that was carried out by the younger generation of North
Korean historians against their former teachers and colleagues. Those
historians whose guilt was established by association with the culprits of
the abortive August 1956 coup were purged from the Party. Accused of
“dogmatism”, “factionalism” and “revisionism”, most “old” scholar-
politicians lost their leading positions in academia and some forfeited
their lives. Their writings, which advocated the traditional internationalist
approach of Marxism-Leninism to history, were banned as anti-Party and
anti-revolutionary.

Simultaneously, historical circles in the DPRK saw the rise of a “new”
scholarship. Despite its claim to “creative” application of Marxism-Leninism,
national history research in North Korea became even more formal and
dogmatic than before. It lost the remaining features of disciplined academic
inquiry and became a mere tool of official propaganda. When the official
line demanded that these “new” intellectuals place stronger emphasis
upon some specific themes (such as nationalism, self-reliance, Kim Il-
sŏng’s revolutionary activity and the like) they had little choice.

The status and social role of a history-writing scholar-politician in North
Korea was reduced to that of an obedient “scholar-bureaucrat”. Once

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82 At the close of the 1958 Discussion on the “Socio-economic Essence of
the Three Kingdoms” it was officially stated that the problem of slave
ownership in ancient Korea had not yet been resolved and further debates
were to follow.
83 Scalapino and Lee, Communism in
Korea, vol.1, p.524.
84 Suh Dae-sook, Kim Il Sung, the North
Korean Leader (New York: Columbia
again, as had already occurred during the colonial period, scholars of history in Korea found themselves under severe ideological pressure and surveillance by political police. Those “old” intellectuals who survived the purges found it prudent to repudiate their previous internationalist views and conclusions concerning the place of Korea in the world historical process. They also resorted to untiring acclamation of Kim Il-sŏng and his family members. History research in the DPRK began to be guided by the “new” ultra-nationalistic Juch’ŏ ideology of Kimilsŏngism.

**Figure 1**

*The Great Leader, Comrade Kim Il-sŏng conducts a meeting of North Korean historians (19 October 1978).* Photo from Widaehan Sarangsŭi P’umsogesŏ 2 *In the bosom of great love* (Pyongyang: Kuhabak Paekkwa Sajón Ch’ulp’ansa, 1980).

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