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Categorizing People in the New States: A Comparative Study of Communist China and North Korea

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Abstract

What motivates states' choice of social classification? Existing explanations highlight scientific beliefs of modern states or social engineering by ideological regimes. Focusing on the initial state-building period of two Communist regimes, China and North Korea, this article complements the existing literature and suggests that social classification reflects three missions of political leaders: regime distinction, governance, and power consolidation. Population categories are created to distinguish the new government from the old, to selectively provide welfare, and to attack political opponents. The varying weight of the missions and their manifestation in social classification depend on new ruling elites' cohesion and past experiences. This comparative historical analysis sheds light on the rise of political chaos in China and the personalistic dictatorship in North Korea in the 1970s.

In *Seeing Like a State*, James Scott addresses an essential issue of state building, which is how a state imposes schematic systems to gain a clear sense of its population. However, which schemes to adopt is a choice. Like the landscape architect who has an enormous discretion and imposes "his own principles of order, utility, and beauty" on the overall arrangement and on the training and weeding out selected plants (Scott 1998, 92), the state's ruling elites make grouping choices to manage and transform the population. What motivates such choices?

Answers to this question have been approached from two different analytical perspectives. The first stresses the influence of (or the beliefs in) science that devalues and banishes politics. Scott's own seminal work suggests that modern states seek statistical knowledge about the population—its age profiles, occupations, fertility, literacy, and property ownership—to improve human conditions. Revolutionary and colonial authoritarian states are especially hospitable to the extreme beliefs in prescribing

scientific and technical solutions to human progress (Scott 1998, chap. 3). Along similar lines, some studies show the influence of epistemological development in racial categorizations. For example, race was put on the national census in postcolonial Latin America as a signal of modernity (Loveman 2014) and as a human identity in the United States in 1790 and then an instrument for scientific explanations in 1840 (Nobles 2000, chap. 2).

The second approach to understanding population grouping does the opposite, namely highlighting the politics of population grouping, which is especially common in revolutionary and colonial authoritarian regimes. For example, comparing Stalinist schema of identification and the Nazi Volksgemeinschaft, Browning and Siegelbaum illustrate how the massive social engineering in the USSR under Stalin and in Nazi Germany were to include, exclude, and marginalize certain groups (Browning and Siegelbaum 2009). Studies of colonialism also suggest that population categorization manifests how colonial powers see their subjects through a racial lens in the case of British roles in Malaysia and Singapore (Goh 2008) or natives or settlers in South Africa (Mamdani 2001).

While the extant literature helps explain states' population categorization choices, they view the state as a coherent body *a priori* that aims at making the population its subjects. However, "the state" is not an *ex ante* entity with wisdom about knowledge accumulation or bureaucratic matters (Mitchell 1991). The deconstruction of the state is especially pertinent to new states as political elites navigate the process that demarcates society from the state and the internal cohesion among political elites has yet to be ensured.

Focusing on the initial state building period of two Communist regimes, China and North Korea, this article suggests that social classification reflects three missions of new political leaders: regime distinction, governance, and power consolidation.[1] In other words, population categories are created to distinguish the new government from the old, to selectively provide welfare, and to attack political opponents. The varying weight of the missions and their manifestation in social classification depends on ruling elites' cohesion and their past experiences. This article illustrates this argument by comparing the population categorization practices in the early years of two Communist regimes in the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK or North Korea).

In the following sections, we first elaborate on our theory of population categorization. In the subsequent sections, we follow the chronological order to trace the process of population making in the two regimes. In the last section, we discuss our findings.

The theory and sources

All states want to know their population. In addition to scientific principles of data gathering and ideological criteria, we show in this article that for new revolutionary regimes, social classifications reflect three missions of political leaders: regime distinction, governance, and power consolidation. Different historical past and levels of elite cohesion affect the varying weight of the three missions and their manifestation in social classification.

We compare the social classification systems in the PRC and the DPRK in their early years of regime formation. They were both established in the 1940s, under

the ideological guidance and empirical model of the Soviet Union. The social classifications in Communist China and Communist North Korea also shared similarities, such as categories based on class background, war history, gender, and ethnicity.[2]

Despite the similarities, however, the two communist regimes differed in important ways, which we contend contributed to significant differences in the rationales behind population categorization and strategies of carrying out social classification. First, the two regimes emerged from different historical pasts. Communist China was established after a Communist revolution and civil war, whereas Communist North Korea came into being as a transition from Japanese colonial rule to Soviet control. Therefore, mandates from the two regimes to distinguish themselves from the previous ones were different, which rendered different categories in the projects of population legibility. In China, self-identified ethnicity was collected by the new government to showcase an ethnonational state the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was building which was different from the Nationalist Party, its rival. In North Korea, the identity of the "head of household" was abolished to contrast the *new* regime from the old feudal system under Japanese colonial rule.

Second, the two regimes began with drastically contrasting levels of elite cohesion that guided the attention of political leaders towards elite struggle differently. The CCP was an experienced revolutionary political party that had a consolidated leader. The CCP had its indigenous revolutionary experience,[3] and when the CCP claimed victory over the civil war in October 1949, it was already 28 years old. Its leader, Mao Zedong, had consolidated his power among elites in the late 1930s and early 1940s, as evidenced by his ideology written into the Party Charter in 1945 (Li 2005). In contrast to the CCP, the ruling Korean Workers' Party (KWP) was established in 1949, only *after* the formation of the DPRK in 1948 and as a compromise among multiple political parties.[4] In addition, unlike Mao Zedong in China, Kim Il Sung was installed as leader by the Soviet Union,[5] and he suffered from frequent opposition from other elites in the first two decades of his rule. This difference led to contrasting focuses in the two new governments. The CCP in China was able to quickly transition to the role of a government and categorize its population for the needs of economic development, whereas Kim Il Sung's policy agenda continued to meet with resistance until the late 1960s, and social classification was instrumentalized for power consolidation.

Third, the two regimes had different levels of governance experiences to inform their preparation for government roles. The CCP had experimented with governance, albeit briefly. During the anti-Japanese war of the 1930s and the subsequent civil war (1945–1949),[6] the communists experienced land reforms, economic cooperation, legal development, and political struggles (Gao 2018; Keating 1994; McAleavy 1962). By contrast, Communist North Korea did not have a party-led revolution and its leaders had little governance experience. As a matter of fact, the Soviets conducted quick background investigations of all prospective provisional North Korean government personnel to replace Japanese colonial administrators; these were then put through short training courses and deployed throughout the northern part of Korea (Collins 2012, 10). As a result, while both regimes classified their populations by class, the experienced CCP appeared to be more flexible and practical, whereas the KWP was more rigid.

To show how these differences informed social classifications in the early days of the two regimes, our analysis is based on both primary and secondary sources. In the case of China, we primarily rely on the secondary literature to illustrate major political changes. Primary sources are also consulted, such as the *People's Daily* or *Renmin Ribao* (RMRB, coded as RMRB-YEAR-MONTH-DATE), the mouthpiece of the communist regime in China, the publications of the national and local statistics bureaus as well as authors' personal collections of household identification materials. In the case of North Korea, the 1993 "Resident Registration Project Reference Manual" issued by North Korea's Ministry of Public Security is a meaningful primary source. We were not able to obtain the original copy, but we adopt two secondary sources that analyzed the manual in detail, one in Korean (Hyun 2008) and one in English (Collins 2012). In addition, other North Korean publications, which have been obtained during fieldwork in March 2021 at the Information Center on North Korea at the National Library of Korea in Seoul, were used as evidence for causal inference. For additional historical evidence, we refer to declassified documents on North Korea from its former communist allies from the Woodrow Wilson Center's North Korea International Documentation Project.[7]

Different pasts and distinctive new beginnings

Communist regimes aim to create the "new man" and new order. A source of newness for Communist China governed by the CCP and the DPRK governed by the KWP was conveniently provided by the Soviet Union. In terms of social classification, the Soviets provided a blueprint for how to group society in class categories, but the different historical pasts and ruling parties in the two countries conditioned their initial visions and their strategies for categorizing the population.

In terms of initial class categories, the more experienced CCP classified its population based on its governing experiences, or rather from lessons of the past and practical needs in the context of a post-civil war society. By contrast, the class categorization in the Communist regime in North Korea had imprints of its colonial history. Beyond class categories, the PRC distinguished itself from the past Republican rule through an ethnonational angle in census taking. Meanwhile, in North Korea, the inexperienced ruling party attempted to break away from the colonial and feudal systems by abolishing the household head system.

Initial class categories

The initial class categories formulated by the CCP not only reflected the lessons it learned from its past experiences of land reform but also manifested its main task as a post-civil war regime: the elimination of armed resistance and the recovery of public order. By contrast, in North Korea, class categorization lacked flexibility due to its inexperience and reflected its colonial history.

China

Confronted with a post-civil-war context and based on past lessons, the CCP followed a gradual and flexible approach in class categorization. Broadly speaking, class

categories could be divided into those that were property-based and those formed for practical reasons.

Following its land reform experiences in the 1930s and 1940s, the CCP's post-1949 policy of deciding class categories through land reforms reflected local flexibility. After all, its earlier experiences in classifying "rich peasants" in the 1930s did pay attention to local conditions and did not simply follow orders from the Communist International (Lan 2012; Lin 1994). The violent land reform in northern China between 1946 and 1948 was a lesson learned by the CCP, who had then decided to soften its approach in land reform in the South between 1949 and 1953 (Moïse 1983). Its categorization of class in 1950[8] reflected these past experiences, which determined the categorization based on the duration of one's property owner-ship with reference to local period of liberation as well as the ratio of land farmed by owners and their tenants.[9] Whereas the class categories have been criticized by schol-ars as inflexible (Man 2005), it was much more localized than its counterpart in North Korea, as we examine below.

As for class category derived from practical needs of a post-civil war society, the enlarging scope of population under the label "counterrevolutionaries" was a fitting example.[10] As a revolutionary regime that newly came into power by winning a civil war, the CCP aimed at cleaning out remaining armed groups and gangs, and reestablishing public order in the first few years of its rule. This process generated new interpretations of a class category—"counterrevolutionaries"—that the commu-nists had been using since the 1930s. Originally referring to rebel groups or bandits and their accomplices who invaded the Soviet Zones (苏维埃领土) of the CCP,[11] the composition of the category "counterrevolutionaries" began to incorporate criminal activities in 1949. In 1950, the CCP named those who robbed warehouses, damaged public properties, and killed party cadres as armed bandits (匪).[12] In 1951, the scope of "counterrevolutionaries" was further broadened to include criminals who forged public documents and certificates, fabricated and distributed rumors, engaged in attacks or escaped from prison, and used feudal sects and societies "for counterrev-olutionary purposes."[13] These changes in what constituted "counterrevolutionaries" reflected the CCP's transition from an armed force in a civil war to a ruling party in a new regime.

North Korea

In contrast to the CCP, which had past experiences of localized land reforms and which reinterpreted class categories to maintain public order in a post-civil war con-text, the practices of class categorization in North Korea reflected the inexperience of its new government as well as its colonial past.

To begin with, the North Korean government largely followed their Soviet advisers to have a uniformed national standard for property-based class categories (Lankov 2002). Shortly after liberation in August 1945, the North Korean Provisional People's Committee (NKPCC), chaired by Kim Il Sung, was formed in February 1946. A month later, the Soviet advisors assisted the Agriculture and Forestry Department to launch the land reform (Scalapino and Lee 1972, 1013n2). According to the Land Reform Act of March 5, class enemies were defined based on the standardized land size (five *chongbo*), function of land (tenancy only without

self-farming) as well as the landowners' participation in war (traitors), and large land-holding (five *chongbo*) religious organizations.[14] Soon after, in August 1946, the NKPCC announced a decree to nationalize industries, transportation, posts, and banks. Those "capitalists" became categorized as class enemies, whose assets were confiscated without compensation (Scalapino and Lee 1972, 1016).[15]

Other than the property-based class categories, labels that linked to its colonial past, such as "pro-Japanese and reactionary," also emerged as class categories. Those being classified as such were forced to resettle in isolated mountain areas in northern part of North Korea (Collins 2012, 10; Scalapino and Lee 1972, 1022–1023).

New government

Beyond class categories, other new classifications in the early years demonstrated the two regimes' different historical pasts and their efforts in distinguishing themselves from the previous regimes. Unlike its predecessors, the CCP introduced ethnicity in its first national census to showcase its commitment to an ethnically representative government. Meanwhile, North Korea dropped the category of "head of household" in its citizens' identification card as a breakaway from its feudal past.

China

The first national census in Communist China was taken in 1953. Urged by Stalin to have a legitimate legislature-passed Constitution,[16] Chinese leaders began campaigns of national census and voter registration in 1953 and 1954 to prepare for the upcoming legislative election.[17] The first elected National People's Congress, held in September 1954, passed the Constitution.

Items listed on the first national census showed how the CCP materialized its difference from the past rulers with population categorization. A national census that recorded individuals' name, gender, and age were also collected during the Republican era under the role of the Nationalist Party in 1946 and 1948 (Mi and Jiang 1996). However, unlike its predecessor, the CCP collected information about ethnicity (Sun 1981), and the Ethnicity Classification Project, which grouped over 400 self-identified ethnicities into 56, finalized who would be represented in the national legislature (Mullaney 2011). This item choice on the national census reflected the CCP's vision of a new China that was distinctive from the past. Whereas the imperial Qing viewed the people in frontiers as "barbarians," the Nationalist Party regime dictated that the country was home to Five Races (Han, Manchu, Mongol, Hui, and Tibetan) and that ethnic diversity was secondary to the one people, "the Chinese people" (中华民族) (Leibold 2004, 182). The Communists were against the mono-national idea held by the Nationalists or the discriminative discourse of imperial past, and they envisioned a country with politically and economically equal ethnonational constituencies (Mullaney 2011, Introduction).

North Korea

While Communist China attempted to differentiate itself from the imperial past and the Republican government's agenda, North Korean government appeared to be breaking away from its feudal and colonial past as evidenced by the abolition of

Hojeok (household head), namely the father or the eldest son as the head of the family, which used to be on the identity card.

The origin of the *Hojeok* system can be traced back to the Korean Empire (1897–1910). When the "*Minjeokbeop*" (Census Registration Law), the first type of "Hojeok" system in Korea was promulgated in 1909, the government administration was already under Japanese rule. Thus, the Minjeokbeop was technically enforced by the Japanese Resident-General. In 1922, under Japanese colonial rule (1910–1945), the Minjeokbeop was abolished and replaced by the "*Joseon Hojeokryeong*" (Joseon Family Registration Ordinance) by the Governor-General of Joseon (Japanese colonial government), which was mostly adopted from the Japanese system (Lee 2017a, 3).

While the *Hojeok* system was somewhat consistent with the indigenous Korean practices of excluding women and disadvantaging younger sons (Kim 2007), its imposition by the Japanese colonial government rendered it a target for revolution. The Law on Gender Equality was passed on July 30, 1946. A month later, with the resolutions on the individual identification cards enacted, the NKPCC began replacing old identity cards with new ones. The new identification cards were issued to all adults, men and women, without indicating household heads.[18] In the next two years, the Communist regime began the "Total Mobilization Campaign of Thought for the State Building," to break away from the former colonial and feudal systems and reform people's thoughts and everyday lifestyle (Jeong 2015, 432).

It is important to note that reforming the family was also attempted by the Soviets and China. The Soviet Union tried to reform gender roles (Glass and Stolee 1987) and China passed its Marriage Law in 1950, the first legislation of the new regime. However, the CCP did not reform its household head system. By contrast, the Communist regime in North Korea presented itself as a force of anti-colonial past, and it campaigned to remove the colonial household head system and to promote gender equality.

Governance and population making

In the following years of the two young communist regimes, their trajectories continued to diverge. The CCP began a more assertive role of "government" during its first five-year plan (1953–1957) to redistribute welfare through population regrouping. In North Korea, economic development was interrupted by the Korean War and resistance within the KWP against Kim Il Sung's economic development policy. As a result, Kim Il Sung's efforts in building his authority dominated the process of economic development and population making.

China: Residential categories and population mobility

The first five-year plan by the CCP from 1953 to 1957 signaled its formal role of government. During this time, the necessity of economic growth and industrialization was accompanied by social classifications based on rural versus urban status, so as to limit population mobility from rural to urban areas. This was not the first time that the CCP linked residential categorization to population mobility. In the first couple of years of its rule, the CCP relied on household registration booklet to track

population movement in its fight against remaining bandits and Nationalist spies. On the household registration booklets that were issued in 1951 and 1952, there were not only personal information,[19] but also pages of travel records by family members or guests received by the household. In other words, in addition to class categories, the tracking of population movement on the household booklet propagated the CCP's mission at that time, as stated on the back cover of the booklet: "reporting on those cheated on the household registration is for your own safety," and "household management is the best way to thoroughly eliminate bandits and spies."[20]

The household registration system, which had been practiced in urban areas since 1951, was formalized in 1955 when the State Council circulated a Notice Regarding the Establishment of Permanent Household Registration System (国务院关于建立经常户口等级制度的指示). An important update in this system was that each person was classified as having an agricultural (rural) or non-agricultural (urban) status. In the rural areas, peasants were tied to their lands and received food rations for their households while adults participated in agricultural production. In the urban areas, most urban residents were organized into workplace units (*danwei*) from where they received social services.

As the speed of industrialization escalated, restrictions on population mobility were also tightened. In 1957, the State Council explicitly stated restrictions on population mobility[21] and the procedural approval was put in place for rural-to-urban migration in 1958.[22] By August 1964, when the country was slowly recovering from the Great Famine of 1959–1961, the Ministry of Public Security established the Draft Policy[23] of "two tough constraints" (两个"严加限制") on the movement from the countryside to cities and from small towns to cities. These restrictions were closely related to giving priority to industry development at that time (Zhang 2003), as well as to the state's limited capacity of covering the social welfare of the urban population (Cheng and Selden 1994).

Such strict control over population mobility went beyond Soviet models. The Soviets also introduced an urban passport system during the famine in 1932 to "clean" unwanted elements from cities (Kessler 2001). However, peasants were allowed to move later and they were included in more welfare programs in the 1960s and 1970s (Kingston-Mann 2006). By contrast, the household registration system in China continued to control migration from rural to urban areas for the next half a century (Chan and Zhang 1999).

North Korea: Interrupted planning and new class enemies

Unlike in its counterpart, economic planning in North Korea was interrupted by the Korean War (1950–1953) and political purges of the 1950s. As Kim Il Sung fought the war as well as his political opponents and pushed through his governing plans, these events also generated newly categorized class enemies.

Kim Il Sung's leadership position was hardly consolidated in the late 1940s. Before the DPRK was established in 1948, he was elected the chair of the North Korean People's Committee in 1947. He was then appointed chairman of the KWP in 1949. However, the KWP was a compromise of multiple political parties and factions. In addition to Kim Il Sung's comrades who spent time in Manchuria and the war

years in the Soviet Union (the Guerrilla faction), there were largely three other factions at the time.[24] Some were ethnic Koreans from the USSR who were brought to North Korea by Moscow following the liberation to work in party and government institutions (the Soviet faction). Others came from China, where a large number of ethnic Koreans were in close connection with the CCP since the 1920s (the Yan'an faction). A third group consisted of former underground communists who fled the US-controlled South to join their Northern comrades (the Domestic faction).

The economic planning at the time was interrupted by the Korean War, but the defeat of the North provided momentum for Kim Il Sung to attack his political opponents (Lankov 1999, 45). Kim was able to eliminate the Domestic faction by arguing that the battle situation had worsened because there were no mass movements in the southern part to support the North, as the Domestic faction had predicted would happen (Suh 2001, 23). He condemned the Domestic faction for false intel and denounced its leaders as "US spies."[25] Members of this faction were executed or at the very least removed from the party.

The Korean War and purges of the early 1950s saw North Korea's social classification system evolving into the next stage as war orientations became standards for class categorization. When the authorities launched a national investigation in December 1958, those who "sacrificed for the fatherland" during the Korean War were classified into "core" class, whereas those South sympathizers were classified into "hostile" class (Collins 2012, 12–13; Lee 2006, 60–61). Furthermore, those who had associations with the Domestic faction were labeled as class enemies.

Radicalization: Elite conflict and social classification

Destalinization in the Soviet Union and the Hungarian crisis in 1956 were major events that affected both the CCP and the KWP. In China, the CCP began soliciting societal opinions to improve party governance, but it soon turned into radicalization in both economic planning and class categories along policy lines. In North Korea, reactions to de-Stalinization were accompanied by Kim Il Sung's ideological reckoning for indigenization of Marxism-Leninism and more sweeping purges after he was openly challenged in 1956. The subsequent process of reclassifying party members and society served to clean the party and the state of impure elements (those who sided with the South and opposed Kim's leadership). By now, the categories of "class" enemies expanded their scope to include party and state actors both in China and North Korea. However, while the new class category was framed along policy lines in China (i.e. the "Rightists"), categorization in North Korea was explicitly about the trustworthiness of the population to the regime and the leader.

China: New class categories as elite struggle and policy differences

Following destalinization in the Soviet Union and the Hungarian crisis in 1956, how to reform the state and the CCP was put on the agenda. Popular participation in criticizing the government and the CCP went beyond the imagination of the CCP, which led to a dramatic left turn of radical industrialization and repressive political struggles against newly classified enemies, as a result of elite struggle and policy differences

(Zhu 2012). Consequently, the scope of class enemies was expanded to include political elites but framed along policy differences.

After soliciting external criticism of the government, also known as the rectification movement in May 1957, Mao Zedong became weary of those who doubted the CCP leadership and resorted to anti-rightist campaign in June 1957 (Shen 2013). "Rightists" as a new class label then emerged. According to the "Criteria for Classifying Rightist Elements" (划分右派分子的标准) issued by the CCP Central Committee in October 1957, those who were against Socialist system, proletarian dictatorship and democratic centralism, and the leadership role of the CCP in government affairs were to be labeled as "Rightists." These criteria lacked operationalizable instructions and, as a result, local standards were applied to many state officials who criticized agricultural collectivization, previous political campaigns, and the operation of their work units (Cao and Li 2010; Cao 2015).

As the left turn continued into rapid industrialization of the Great Leap Forward (1958–1962), Mao began to interpret policy debates as elite struggle against his authority (Li 1989), and policy failure as an outcome of sabotage by class enemies who hijacked the government administrations. As a result, waves of political campaigns began, including the three-anti (anti-corruption, anti-waste, and anti-Bureaucratism) and rectification movement (整风整社) in 1960, and the violent Socialist Education Movements that began in rural areas in 1963 then moved to the cities in 1965 (Baum and Teiwes 1968; Lin 2005).[26] Class struggles became further radicalized during the Cultural Revolution period (1966–1976).

During this period, class categories can be broadly grouped into three types, the "red," the "ordinary," and the "black" (Walder 2015, 113). The "black" category included capitalists, landlords, rich peasants, Nationalist Party members, "counterrevolutionaries," "bad elements,"[27] and "Rightists." State officials who supported different policies and political elites who opposed Mao Zedong were placed into the category of class enemies and labeled as "Rightists." Policy and political cleavages among elites were translated into population classifications.

North Korea: Class categories as loyalty checks

De-Stalinization in the Soviet Union was accompanied by two movements in North Korea, one ideological and another one political. These movements led to solidifying Kim Il Sung's leadership and, along the process, a recategorization of the population was carried out based on their "trustworthiness" to the regime and the leader.

When Khrushchev's de-Stalinization movement began to manifest among Soviet Koreans in 1955 (Lankov 1999, 45–49), Kim Il Sung initiated indigenization of Marxist ideology and nationalism to counter the influence from the Soviet Union and China. Kim argued the importance of adapting the ideology to better accommodate North Korea's reality rather than inheriting Marxism-Leninism in principle. This led to a debate between dogmatism and formalism versus establishing *Juche* (which roughly translates to "self-reliance") in ideological work within the party. Criticizing his opponents, Kim told Party Propaganda and Agitation Workers in December 1955 that "many comrades swallow Marxism-Leninism raw, without digesting and assimilating it" and they had "no intention of studying our realities

… Some advocate the Soviet way and others the Chinese, but is it not high time to work out our own?" (Kim Il Sung 1955).

Another movement was political. When Khrushchev delivered a speech on February 25, 1956, to criticize Stalin for his abuse of power, Kim Il Sung was also openly challenged at the August Plenum of the KWP Central Committee in 1956 as an outcome of policy disagreements, ideological debates, and power struggle (Paik 2010, pt. 3; Person 2008; Yoo 2017). This did not come entirely as a surprise for Kim Il Sung. Following the famine of 1954–1955, the Soviets had made their position clear by advising Kim Il Sung to abandon his personality cult and pay attention to the collective leadership principle (Lankov 2020, 22). By the end of the August Plenum, Kim successfully controlled the situation and launched an "anti-factional struggle" campaign.[28] Four of the opposition members sought refuge in China on the very day of the plenum for fear of their personal safety (Paik 2010, 388). While the subsequent interference from the USSR and China forced Kim Il Sung to soften his political rhetoric, party cadres who had connections with the opposition leaders were eventually purged.[29] Ultimately, 3,912 members were expelled from the KWP (Lankov 2005, 153).

These purges were through processes of identifying those who were disloyal to the regime and Kim Il Sung. As the first five-year plan (1957–1961) began, Kim Il Sung launched a five-month campaign to exchange party identification cards in December 1956. With the rapid increase of the KWP members between 1951 and 1956, it may seem reasonable to issue new cards and replace damaged cards.[30] However, the timing of this policy points to its political motivation of rooting out disloyal members from the party. The KWP Central Committee formed an organization dedicated to this task and interviewed every member of the party to check their ideological and political stance (Suh 2005, 569–70). The party card exchange measure proved to be of great assistance in checking the reliability of all party members and thoroughly inspecting for any anti-Kim Il Sung elements (Lankov 2005, 145–46; Suh 1988, 152).

After removing additional opponents through the second legislative election in August 1957[31] and during the first national conference of the KWP in March 1958,[32] Kim Il Sung was able to push through his *Chollima* (flying horse)[33] campaign in 1958. It was also during this period that a nationwide population investigation was launched to determine people's origins, background, and ideological inclination. The KWP issued the "May 30th Resolution" of "On Transforming the Struggle against Counterrevolutionary Elements into an All-Party, All-People's Movement" in 1957, which laid the foundations for the classification of the entire North Korean population (Collins 2012, 14; Hyun 2008, 13–14). This move may not have been a result of the August incident alone, rather, uprisings from the population during the Korean War (Szalontai 2020, 18) and some remaining non-KWP members siding with the South (Lankov 2001, 116) had also seeded suspicion and paranoia in the KWP.

The May 30th Resolution was put in action in December 1958 through a large-scale campaign to sort out those who were deemed politically unreliable. The "Korean Workers' Party Intensive Guidance Project" (hereinafter the Guidance Project), which lasted for two years until December 1960, was led by Kim Young Ju, Kim Il Sung's younger brother and head of the Organization and Guidance Department; approximately 7,000 personnel were involved (Suh 1996, 72–73).

From Pyongyang to rural areas, these personnel traveled to investigate people using various tactics, such as interviewing, holding trials in courts, and making people confess and self-criticize (Hyun 2008, 13). Eventually, the Guidance Project found one third of all North Koreans to be "hostile class," namely those disloyal to the socialist revolution, the party, and its leadership (Collins 2012, 22). In sum, 6,000 of these individuals were given prison sentences and 70,000, including their family members, were forcefully relocated to isolated inhospitable areas in northern North Korea.[34]

As North Korea moved on to the seven-year plan (1961–1970), in February 1964, the official re-categorization measure of all North Korean people was approved at the Eighth Session of the Fourth Party Congress. This reclassification based on a criterion of trustworthiness was so unique to North Korea, in comparison to other Communist states and the Soviet Union, that the Hungarian ambassador at the time described his "amazement," which was shared by the Soviets (WWC June 1, 1964).

Thereafter, the Resident Registration Project (hereinafter the RRP) began in April 1966 and finished in March 1967. Kim Il Sung argued that due to Japanese colonial rule, the partition of the country, and the war, the "social and political composition of the population of our country has become very complex" (Kim Il Sung 1966, 369–370), thereby justifying the investigation into the population's background. Based on the RRP, the North Korean regime classified its people into three classes (the core class, wavering class, and hostile class) and 51 subcategories based on property-ownership and individuals' loyalty during the Japanese occupation, the Korean War, and toward Kim Il Sung during the waves of purges of the 1950s. In the end, this came to be known as the *songbun* system.

Conclusion

Broadly speaking, there were three classes in the North Korean *songbun* system in the 1960s, namely the hostile class, the wavering class, and the core class. There were also three classes in China's *jieji* (class) categories in the 1960s, namely the "black," the "ordinary," and the "red." However, a close examination shows that the hostile class in North Korea differed from the "black" class in China in that the former was strictly ideological and political by focusing on citizens' loyalty towards the regime and its leader, while the latter was political but also practical. The hostile class in North Korea included direct descendants of landowners, rich farmers, and vassals, Japanese collaborators, members of the *Chiandae* (low-level militia that sided with the Americans and South Koreans during the civil war), members of religious denominations, draft dodgers, and political criminals who lost battles against Kim Il Sung. By contrast, the "black" class in China included ideological enemies, political elites, petty criminals such as in the name of "counterrevolutionaries," and "Rightists." In other words, social classification in China appeared to be more practical and less uniform. Why? We argue that these differences manifested how China differed from North Korea at the incipient stage of regime formation in terms of history, elite cohesion, and governance experiences.

Overall, this article suggests that social classification reflects three missions of political leaders: regime distinction, governance, and power consolidation. The varying weight of the missions and their manifestation in social classification depend on new

ruling elites' cohesion and past experiences. The CCP established the PRC after winning a civil war. To distinguish itself from its predecessor and rival, the Nationalist Party, it included ethnicity in its first national census to build an ethnically representative republic. The CCP had a more coherent elite group so it could devote more attention to governance and introduced strict residential categories to selectively provide social welfare. Learning from their prior experiences in governance, the CCP pursued more flexible and practical class classifications. Political opponents of Mao Zedong were only included in class categories when the elite group split in the mid-1960s. By contrast, North Korea was established after ending the colonial occupation by Japan. To set itself apart from the colonial past, the new regime abolished patriarchal identifications. Without any prior experience of governance, the new regime followed the Soviet advice more rigidly in class categorization. The KWP was an outcome of compromise among multiple left parties and its leader, Kim Il Sung, was constantly confronted with resistance against him and began utilizing social classification to handle political opponents early on.

By the late 1960s and early 1970s when the mission of regime distinction faded, the North Korean population was identified based on how loyal they were to the regime and to the leader and the regime quickly descended into a personalistic dictatorship. In China, not only ideological enemies of the Communist regime, but policy deviants and petty criminals were categorized as class enemies. The Cultural Revolution became an opportunity for some types of class enemies to change their status by attacking other class enemies and claiming loyalty to Mao Zedong.

Notes

1. Svolik (2012) identifies two fundamental missions for authoritarian leaders: power sharing with other elites and control over society. We consider social classification a manifestation of both missions, as well as regime distinction at the initial stage of regime transition.
2. See Kraus (1981) for the detailed population classification in China and Collins (2012) for North Korea.
3. Unlike the Soviet difficulties mobilizing poor peasants, the Chinese communist revolution successfully relied on the peasants (Alavi 1965). Unlike communist mobilization in the Bolshevik revolution, the CCP relied on nationalist mobilization in the anti-Japanese and civil war (Zhou 2019). Its ideological guidance was not only that of Marxism and Leninism, but also Mao Zedong thoughts that were written into the Party Charter in 1945 (Li 2005).
4. The fragmented KWP was established in June 1949 as an ultimate compromise among multiple political parties. To begin with, the KWP was a merger between the North Korean Workers' Party and the South Korean Workers' Party. The North Korean Workers' Party, established in August 1946, was a compromise

between the North Korean Communist Party, which was originally the bureau of the Communist Party of Korea supported by the Soviet headquartered in Seoul, and the New People's Party of Korea, which was established by those who had close ties with China in February 1946. In addition, the South Korean Workers' Party was established in November 1946 as a merger of the Korean Communist Party, New People's Party of South Korea, and People's Party of Korea (Im 1999, 110–118, 213–214).

5. Kim Il Sung was one of the guerrilla fighters carrying out resistance activities in Manchuria against the Japanese colonial government. After being put on a wanted list as "the tiger" (*tora*) by the Japanese (McCormack 1993, 23), he escaped to the Soviet Union and joined the Soviet Red Army. In December 1945, the Soviets appointed Kim as the First Secretary of the North Korean branch of the Korean Communist Party. With the continuous support from the Soviet Union, Kim Il Sung became the leader of the KWP in 1949.

6. The CCP grew in a hostile environment between 1921 and 1949. In 1933, the Party membership reached 300,000 but was nearly defeated by the Nationalist Party in 1934 and its members dropped to 15,000 in 1938. The Japanese invasion in 1937 and the Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945) provided the Communists a second chance to grow and it reached 1.2 million members by the Seventh Party Congress in 1945 (Koss 2018, chap. 5).

7. Documents from the "Woodrow Wilson Center Digital Archive" appear under that name in the references and are cited as "WWC original document date" throughout this article.

8. The State Council issued the *Decisions Regarding Class Categorization in the Countryside* (关于划分农村阶级成分的决定) on August 4, 1950.

9. The State Council, *Guanyu Huafen Nongcun Jiejie Chengfen de Jueding* (Regulations Regarding Class Categorization in Rural Areas), RMRB 1950-08-21.

10. Another example is the categorization of intellectuals. The composition of "intellectuals" (*zhishi fenzi*) changed from those educated in the 1930s to counting unemployed intellectuals, schoolteachers, and even state retirees in the early 1950s (U 2007).

11. 1934 *Chinese Soviet Republic Regulations on Punishments for Counterrevolutionaries* (中华苏维埃共和国惩治反革命条例).

12. 1950, the CCP Central Committee, *Instructions Regarding Suppressing Counter-Revolutionary Activities* (中央对镇压反革命活动的指示), The Maoist Legacy, accessed March 22, 2021, www.maoistlegacy.de/db/items/show/5377.

13. The 1951 *Regulations on Punishment of Counterrevolutionaries*. The Regulations defined those crimes that "have overturning the People's democratic dictatorship or destroying the people's democratic cause as objective" as counterrevolutionary crimes (art. 2). Activities of either performing or attempting to perform were now under the category of "counterrevolutionary crimes." Both English and Chinese versions of the 1951 Regulations are available at https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/1951/02/20/regulations-on-the-punishment-of-counterrevolutionaries-of-the-peoples-republic-of-china/. Accessed March 23, 2021.

14. 1) Land owned by the Japanese government, people, or organizations. 2) Land owned by the traitors to the Korean people whose actions have been injurious to the interests of the people and the men who have played active roles in the political organs of the Japanese imperialists; or the men who fled from their homes at the time of the liberation from Japanese oppression. 3) Land owned by Korean landowners that own more than five *chongbo* of land. 4) Land owned by men who hold their land under tenant farmers without themselves cultivating the land. 5) All the land placed continually under tenancy, regardless of size. 6) Land of more than five *chongbo*, owned by churches, temples, and other religious organizations. See Lee (1963), 67 for a detailed description of categories.

15. Another confirmation comes from Collins (2012, 114). Collins' Appendix B shows the songbun category of "capitalist" and describes it as "those who lost all of their commercial assets to nationalization after 1946."

16. Stalin suggested in October 1952 that it was imperative for the new CCP regime to have a Constitution passed by a legislative body to be recognized by the international audience (Lv 2017)

17. The campaign of national census and voter registration took place simultaneously in 1953 and 1954. Historically, national census taking was associated with tax increase or drafting soldiers. To distinguish the new government from the old ones, the new regime mobilized various propaganda formats to show that the national census was not for the purpose of increasing tax, drafting soldiers, or land redistribution, but to ensure voter registration and the implementation of a planned economy. See Jin 2016.

18. It included ID number, expiration date, name, birthday, birthplace, current residence, ethnicity, and underage dependent's personal information, and on the bottom left there was a space for a photo and fingerprints (Lee 2017b, 40).

19. Such as each member's name, gender, religion, date of birth, marriage status, level of education, occupation, class status, family origin, as well as their relationships to the head of the household.

20. Physical copy of the 1951 household registration booklet, author's collection.

21. *The Instruction of Prohibiting Peasants from Blindly Flowing Out* (关于制止农民盲目外流的指示) was issued by the State Council in December 1957.

22. Article 10 of the *Regulations on the Household Registration* (中华人民共和国户口登记条例) promulgated by the National People's Congress Standing Committee on January 9, 1958 stipulated specific application and approval procedures if a rural resident wants to move to urban areas.

23. The *Provisional Regulations Regarding Hukou Change* (公安部关于处理户口迁移的规定, 草案) was issued by the Ministry of Public Security in 1964.

24. Boundaries of these factions were not always clean cut (Scalapino and Lee 1972, 479–480). Here our main point is the fragmentation of the Korean Workers' Party.

25. The Domestic faction was led by Pak Hon-yong, one of the founding members of the first Communist Party of Korea in 1925. Around the same time, some of the prominent members of the foreign factions were also eliminated. For example, Pak Il-u from the Yan'an faction was purged and Ho Ga-i from the Soviet faction died by suicide in 1953.

26. There is a different periodization of the Four Clean-ups Campaign. For some, it began as early as 1957 when Mao discussed the "Socialist Education Movement" in rural areas in the "Situation in the Summer 1957." Some consider 1963 as the beginning year when the Central Party Committee held Work Meeting to discuss issues related to Five-Anti in urban areas and Four Clean-ups in rural Areas. In terms of the end of the Four Clean-ups, it is often considered to be 1966, especially in terms of its temporal connection to the Cultural Revolution. For an informative review of the different periodization. See Zhan and Chen (2009).

27. "Bad elements" as an identity category originally appeared officially in 1951 to label those politically opposed to the CCP, ranging from affinity to exploitive classes and the CCP's enemies, to those who were coercive and selfish. See the Party's Decision on Developing New Members (关于发展新党员的决议) in April 1951. The category was then broadened, in 1956, to include those who lied about their political history, hooligans (流氓分子), and those with severe moral degradation (品质极端恶劣的蜕化变质的分子). See https://laogairesearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/A560428.pdf.

28. In the August Plenum 1956 resolutions, those who criticized Kim were concluded to have "wicked conspiracy" with main the purpose of winning "hegemony" in the party. These oppositions were said to have "condemned the party's policies, slandered leaders of the party and the government, and attempted to confuse public sentiment by fabricating and disseminating various rumors that discouraged our party" (Korean Workers' Party 1998, 784–785).

29. On September 3, 1956, Yi Sangjo, the DPRK's ambassador to Moscow, informed Khrushchev of the event by writing a letter, in which he asked Khrushchev to interfere in North Korea's domestic politics (WWC September 3, 1956). Finally, the Soviet-Chinese joint delegation led by Mikoyan and Peng Dehuai arrived in Pyongyang on September 19. At the meeting, Kim Il Sung admitted that the party's decision had been rushed and accepted the delegation's proposal to call a new plenum. At the September Plenum, held on September 23 with Mikoyan and Peng Dehuai as observers, Kim Il Sung "agreed to rehabilitate" those involved in the August incident and "promised not to undertake any wide-scale purges of high-level functionaries" (Lankov 2005, 142). Consequently, Choe Chang-ik and Pak Chang-ok were reinstated as members of the Central Committee, and Yun Kong-hum, So Hwi, and Yi Pilg-yu's party registration was restored. However, a few months later, Kim Il Sung revoked the decision and purged the opposition. See also how Kim Il Sung controlled the narrative of the events (WWC September 1, 1956).

30. In April 1956, the KWP had 1,154,000 members. Based on the declassified document from the WWC, the reasons behind the party cards exchange campaign explained by the North Korean officials to Samsonov, First Secretary of the Embassy of the USSR, are as follows: a) Among the existing cards there are still many old ones from before 1948. There were many cards with the old name of the party, the Korean Workers' Party of North Korea (beginning in 1948, the party's name was changed to the Korean Workers' Party of Korea). b) Paper qualities in the old cards were not good and many had been destroyed or were in poor condition. c) The exchange of cards was combined with an education campaign

for the party members. d) On the occasion of the card exchange, the rehabilitation of wrongly punished comrades is being conducted (WWC December 24, 1956).

31. On August 29, 1957, the second legislative election took place for representatives of the Second Supreme People's Assembly. Only 75 of the 572 members of the first Supreme People's Assembly were re-elected, and the remaining 140 were newly elected (Suh 1988, 153). The influence from Communists based in South Korea appeared to be dramatically reduced this time. Individuals from South Korea accounted for 16 percent of the 210 seats, which was a change from 60 percent of 600 seats in 1948 during the first legislative election (Scalapino and Lee 1972, 516). This made it possible for Kim's loyal followers from the North to be elected.

32. The KWP held its first national conference between March 3 and 6, 1958, during which over a dozen high-ranking cadres from the Party were purged. Afterwards, a Central Committee Plenum resolved to establish a special party committee to reinforce the KWP's control over the armed forces (Szalontai 2005, 120).

33. The Chollima Movement was a state-sponsored movement in North Korea to promote rapid economic development.

34. Based on Cabinet Decree No.149 at this time, those who were judged to be "impure" were forcefully removed from areas 20 km away from the seacoast and demarcation line, 50 km away from Pyongyang and Kaesung, 20 km away from other large cities, and into limited residential areas that some scholars deducted to be remote areas such as Jagangdo, Yangangdo, and Hamgyeongbukdo. Those being forcefully resettled received a special stamp on their ID card and were registered on the public security agency list for close monitoring (Suh 2005, 64–65). Overall "approximately 5,000 families were removed from Pyongyang, 600 families from Kaesong, 1,500 families from Hwanghae South Province, and 1,000 families from Kangwon Province" (Collins 2012, 22–23; Suh 1996, 74).

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