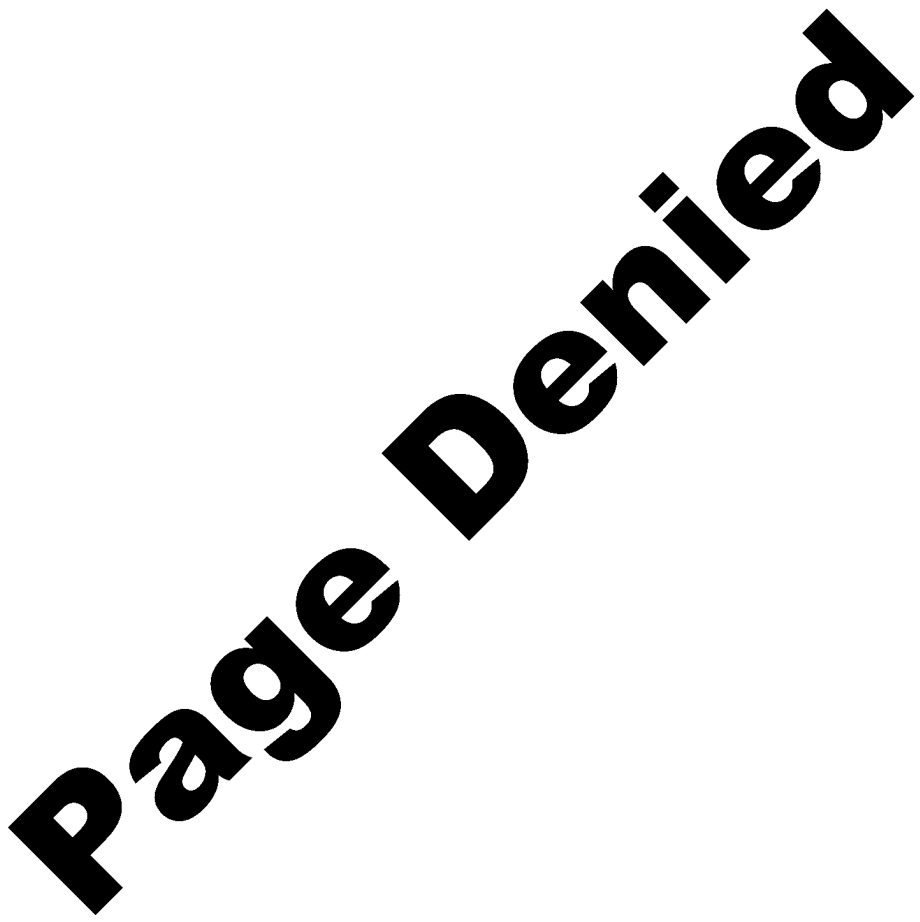
STAT
Approved For Release 2007/12/06 : CIA-RDP84S00553R000100010001-7



Approved For Release 2007/12/06 : CIA-RDP84S00553R000100010001-7

Approved For Release 2007/12/06 : CIA-RDP84S00553R000100010001-7

Directorate of
Intelligence

Secret

25X1

MASTER FILE COPY
DO NOT DESTROY
OR REMOVE

North Korea:
A Sociological Perspective

25X1

A Research Paper

Secret

EA 83-10002
January 1983

Copy 291

Approved For Release 2007/12/06 : CIA-RDP84S00553R000100010001-7

25X1

Approved For Release 2007/12/06 : CIA-RDP84S00553R000100010001-7

Page Denied

Approved For Release 2007/12/06 : CIA-RDP84S00553R000100010001-7

Approved For Release 2007/12/06 : CIA-RDP84S00553R000100010001-7

Directorate of
Intelligence

Secret

25X1

North Korea:
A Sociological Perspective

25X1

A Research Paper

This paper was prepared by
Korea Branch, Northeast Asia Division, Office of East Asian Analysis. Comments and queries are welcome and may be addressed to the Chief, Northeast Asia Division, OEA,

25X1

25X1

This paper was coordinated with the National Intelligence Council.

25X1

Secret
EA 83-10002
January 1983

Approved For Release 2007/12/06 : CIA-RDP84S00553R000100010001-7

Approved For Release 2007/12/06 : CIA-RDP84S00553R000100010001-7

25X1

North Korea: A Sociological Perspective

25X1

Introduction

Information available as of 24 September 1982 was used in this report.

For over three decades the United States has maintained forces on the Korean peninsula to defend the Republic of Korea against military aggression from the regime in the North.

25X1

25X1

we have pieced together a picture of North Korean society that provides some insight into the regime's ability to sustain the discipline necessary for this nation of 20 million people to support the sixth-largest army in the world.

25X1

What emerges is a depressing picture of a highly regimented, colorless society revolving around the central figure of Kim Il-song. In over 35 years at the top, he has removed any potential threats to his dominance and reordered society more thoroughly than any of his Communist counterparts in Europe and Asia. Adapting Korea's rigid class structure and long tradition of authoritarian rule, Kim has created a society where political loyalty to the "Great Leader" is the sole criteria for advancement.

The mechanisms for maintaining control have been effective. Frustration and dissatisfaction exist, to be sure, but we have been able to turn up only the most limited evidence of overt displays of dissidence. Kim's carefully laid plans to turn power over to his son, however, are testimony to his worry that his legacy and place in history will eventually suffer a fate similar to Mao's or Stalin's.

25X1

Approved For Release 2007/12/06 : CIA-RDP84S00553R000100010001-7

Approved For Release 2007/12/06 : CIA-RDP84S00553R000100010001-7

25X1

North Korea: A Sociological Perspective

25X1

Tradition Versus Reform—The New Social Order

Capitalizing on the traditional stratification of society, the North Korean Communists have aggressively reclassified a whole society according to their own criteria. Just as traditional Korean society was broken into four main classes (nobility, privileged, peasantry, and slave or outcast), contemporary Communist society has developed along similar lines. The difference is that Kim stood the traditional order on its head.

Songbun

Two criteria determine status in North Korean society: *songbun* or class background and, within the *songbun* category, loyalty to the cult of Kim Il-song. An individual's *songbun* is either good or bad, with various gradations within the two.

In the Communist view the only "good" people in Korea in 1945 were factory workers, laborers, poor farmers, and those engaged in revolutionary struggle against the Japanese: these people and their descendants are the privileged class of today. Highest distinction goes to the anti-Japanese guerrillas who fought with Kim Il-song. Next are the veterans of the Korean war and finally the descendants of the pre-revolutionary workers and the poor small farmers. Together, these favored groups constitute some 30 percent of the population; the uppermost level, the ruling elite, is no more than 1 percent of the population. Ranked below them in descending order—in what must be the most class-differentiated society in the world today—are some 47 distinct groups generally divided into those with acceptable *songbun* and those without.[1]

[1] Perhaps the only touch of humor in this otherwise deadly business of ranking people according to *songbun* is the party's terminology for the chosen versus the unchosen—the "tomatoes" versus the "grapes." "Tomatoes," which are completely red to the core, are considered worthy Communists; "apples," which are red only on the surface, are considered to need ideological improvement; and the "grapes" are considered hopeless.

Generally, North Korea's population can be broken down into three main groups. The preferred class (elite and privileged) is given every advantage, and with hard work its members can rise to the top. The middle 40 percent of the population—the ordinary people—hope for a lucky break, such as a good assignment in the military, that will bring them to the attention of party cadre and get them a better job; they have no hope of a college education or a professional career, although membership in the party is still possible. The bottom 30 percent of the population—the "undesirables"—are treated like pariahs; all doors to advancement—the Army and higher education—are closed to them. They can expect little except assignment to a collective farm, a factory, a mine, or doing menial labor in a city other than P'yongyang.

Party cadre and security officials keep detailed records on everyone, documenting the degree of goodness and badness. in the late 1940s and during the period immediately after the Korean war *songbun* records were rather spotty and people were able to conceal the fact that their father or uncle or grandfather had been a landowner, doctor, Christian minister, merchant, or lawyer. In the late 1960s, however, the regime began a series of exhaustive secret investigations. Since then the public security apparatus has periodically conducted additional investigations to the point where everyone now has been repeatedly checked. 25X1

25X1

25X1

records today are extremely accurate and complete.

Living With *Songbun*

Everyone in North Korea seems to have a fairly good idea of what their *songbun* is, although official notice is never given. At every important juncture in life its effects are obvious: admission or nonadmission to high school or college, entry or nonentry into the Army,

Approved For Release 2007/12/06 : CIA-RDP84S00553R000100010001-7

Approved For Release 2007/12/06 : CIA-RDP84S00553R000100010001-7

admission or nonadmission to the party, approval or nonapproval for marriage, assignment to a job, or transfer into or out of the city or a collective farm. Just how good or how bad a person is viewed becomes clearer over time, with the more subtle changes in a career.

who had lived privleged lives in P'yongyang had been disturbed by the system's injustices. They resented those with better *songbun* being excused from volunteer labor on collective farms while they had to work 18-hour days, seven days a week, for three or four weeks during the rice transplanting season; they resented others being able to vacation at government rest homes while they had not had a vacation in years; they resented those with superior *songbun* being given the honor of graduating first in their class, although others might have had better grades; and they resented those with good *songbun* being given choice assignments over better qualified candidates.

Besides fostering resentments of this type, the *songbun* system has crippled incentive, ambition, and hard work. The privileged have a feeling of guaranteed success in life, whether they work hard or not; the nonprivileged have a sense of futility that eventually kills any incentive to work hard and do well.

If the *songbun* system is as important to upward mobility as current information suggests, it will be a major impediment to economic progress. The government seems to have begun to recognize this problem in recent years, particularly in trying to motivate that middle 40 percent of the population from which the regime draws most of the working force and the majority of the armed forces. While offering no hope for change in social status, it has begun to offer some monetary and other material incentives to increase productivity and to sustain a higher level of worker commitment and output.

The regime has done little, if anything, to motivate the bottom third of the population. Lacking any hope of significant advancement, people with bad *songbun* tend to act the way the party describes them—lazy, mistrustful, and sometimes obstructionist—in a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy; many have been relocated to remote areas.

In denying social advancement to such a large segment of the population, the regime has created a situation in which people have good reason to be dissatisfied with their lot in life. They can hope for nothing more for their children than what they have received; and, although there is some chance for improving their material standard of living, there is no way for them or their children to move up the social ladder, to obtain a higher education, to choose their own job or place of residence, or even to marry outside their class. 25X1

The potential for opposition from those so openly discriminated against is difficult to assess, but it clearly has been one of the reasons for the regime's preoccupation with "antirevolutionary sentiments." Propaganda constantly decries elements hostile to the regime's programs and projects a level of security consciousness excessive even in such a controlled environment. Reports of antiregime activity that occasionally reach the outside world suggest the regime's concern is warranted.

The Kim Cult

recounted myriad stories illustrating the importance of being a "Kim Il-song man"—loyal to Kim's thinking and teaching. They do not, however, always recognize the interplay between *songbun* and political loyalty—and the two are inseparable. Political loyalty is the key to career advancement; however, it operates only within the constraints already dictated by *songbun*. 25X1

Dedication to Kim Il-song cannot erase bad *songbun*, but it can improve a person's lot in life—within the limits established for his class. The son of a former landowner will not get into college or the Army, but proven dedication to Kim is likely to get him a low-ranking job in a factory rather than on a cooperative farm. Dedication to Kim's teachings might give someone in the middle social bracket a chance to live and work in the city as a lower level bureaucrat rather than as a factory worker. And among the privileged class it determines who rises to the top in government, education, management, and medicine.

Approved For Release 2007/12/06 : CIA-RDP84S00553R000100010001-7

Approved For Release 2007/12/06 : CIA-RDP84S00553R000100010001-7

Less-than-zealous devotion to Kim is grounds for demotion, but again within established limits. People with good *songbun* are not likely to be sent to a collective farm or a coal mine except for the most serious offense, such as the defection of a close family member or some other treasonable act. Normally, they will be dropped several notches within the range of occupations reserved for their social class; for example, a top party official might be demoted to some lower level party position on a collective farm, a high-level factory manager reassigned to office work, or a middle school teacher demoted to a factory worker.

Ambitious people in North Korea are forever trying to outdo one another in their show of loyalty to Kim. [redacted] once observed a North Korean diplomat who, upon arriving at P'yongyang Airport from an assignment overseas, immediately began to bow ostentatiously to a photograph of Kim he had pulled from his wallet. [redacted] thought the diplomat was acting for the benefit of the foreigners present, but, [redacted] he would have done it if no foreigners had been there. His extravagant show of fealty is likely to have won him more status than a job well done.

No one — except Kim and his immediate family — is immune from such political displays of loyalty. For all their special privileges, the elite are just as obligated as any other North Korean in this regard. Indeed, as a person rises through the ranks to the top, more is expected in terms of political loyalty. Thus, the most exaggerated worship of the cult occurs at the upper levels of government. From all reports, in an embassy the ambassador is invariably the most fanatical. He got where he is that way; it may not be a measure of his true feelings, but it is the price of success, if not political survival.

The adulation of Kim and the central role he is given in almost every aspect of daily life in North Korea exceeds that of any other modern personality cult. In part, this is possible because of North Korea's relatively small size and its homogenous population. Kim is also a man of considerable charisma; he has taken special pains to cultivate a close relationship with the people. His unusually long tenure and penchant for making on-the-spot inspections have allowed him to become personally familiar with virtually every town, village, factory, and farm in North Korea. Most North Koreans have seen him at close hand on one or another of his routine visits to their province. Thinking of North Korea as about the size of Pennsylvania, it is easy to imagine the relationship that a charismatic governor of such a state might develop with his people over a period of 40 years, if he spent 150 to 200 days on the road each year, as Kim Il-song has.

Figure 1. The "Great Leader" giving on-the-spot guidance. [redacted] Korea Today

25X1
25X1
25X1
25X1
25X1

The meticulous study of Kim's writings at every level of society, excessive displays of loyalty to him (particularly on special occasions such as his birthday), and the mass mobilization to construct national development projects or monuments for his personal glorification reinforce the mystique of his leadership.

The higher a person's education, the more hours spent studying the life and thought of Kim. University students in the social sciences spend no less than 40 percent of their time studying Kim. Students in the science departments are reported to devote about 20 percent of their time to political study.

Approved For Release 2007/12/06 : CIA-RDP84S00553R000100010001-7

Approved For Release 2007/12/06 : CIA-RDP84S00553R000100010001-7

Seeing Kim Through the Cult

While the cult to a degree reflects genuine popular support for Kim, it has become exaggerated to the point that it is also a major irritant. Many Koreans have long since passed the tolerance point for learning more minutiae about Kim's life—when he visited a certain factory, exactly what he said, or what the weather was like that day. This does not diminish their affection for him, and they consider him worthy of respect, but it does make them critical of party officials who carry the national religion to absurd proportions.

From all reports, the cult's most onerous aspect is the forced display of emotion. It is not uncommon for North Koreans to cry when speaking to foreigners about the "Great Leader's unbounded goodness." Visitors to North Korea have so many encounters of this kind they are convinced these "spontaneous" expressions are carefully rehearsed.

[redacted] confirms this beyond any doubt. On the occasion of Kim's 65th birthday in April 1977, all diplomatic personnel abroad received watches as a special commemorative gift, presented at formal ceremonies in the embassies. The diplomats were instructed to "show their love and gratitude to Kim with tears of joy." Movies recorded the event for later showing in the Foreign Ministry. [redacted]

With support for Kim so broadly based, the regime must calculate that it can afford this kind of nonthreatening dissatisfaction. It may also be unable to stop the momentum it put in motion when it organized society on the basis of political loyalty to Kim. Other Communist societies, never as thoroughly politicized as North Korea, have not faced the problems that result from making loyalty to a particular leader, rather than the system, the sole basis for advancement in society.

In our view, the regime has let things get out of control. Dissatisfaction with the cult's excesses among the regime's supporters is likely to be a more serious threat to "Kim Il-songism" over the long run than any problem posed by the politically disenchanted, particularly because the cult seems to offend the educated and privileged more than it does the ordinary North Korean. The less privileged do not seem as deeply affected by the cult's excesses because they have other sources of dissatisfaction—the denial of a higher education or a better job with a higher income. The better educated, however, who are more easily bored with the emotionalism and trivia of the cult, must suffer greater exposure to it. Just as Deng Xiaoping and other Chinese leaders now admit they were repulsed by the excesses of the Mao cult (though they gave no indication of it at the time), some of North Korea's leaders must be similarly repelled by many aspects of the Kim cult.

25X1

The Social Setting

The life of an average North Korean family is still spartan, although there has been some gradual improvement. The average working-class family (all but the most privileged and the elite) still needs two wage earners to meet basic needs. Even with two salaries, the average family income of 120 to 180 won per month barely covers the costs of food and clothing. Most people cannot afford to have more than two children, even though the government—in an effort to ease the labor shortage—offers limited incentives to families to have more children.

25X1
25X1

Most women—whether married or single—must work out of economic necessity. They make up just over half of the work force, dominating such areas as teaching, medicine, and textile manufacturing. Women are predominant in the party and government at the middle level and below, but there is only token representation at the higher levels in both organizations. Women are also well represented in higher education but are generally restricted to those professions they dominate.

Approved For Release 2007/12/06 : CIA-RDP84S00553R000100010001-7

Approved For Release 2007/12/06 : CIA-RDP84S00553R000100010001-7

The basic social grouping is the work unit. Every North Korean belongs to one. A unit can be a school, factory, collective farm, government office, or military unit. It is the vehicle for political development, observation, and social control. The unit provides housing as well as employment. It gives permission to marry and distributes rations of clothing and shoes. It authorizes travel, out-of-town accommodations, and even a dinner at a public restaurant. It approves vacation time and arranges for a stay at a government rest home. A person must have the unit's permission to see a doctor, have an operation, or buy a watch or a bicycle. Finally, it is with members of the unit that North Koreans attend all party meetings, militia training, self-criticism sessions, morning and evening study sessions, and cultural or social events.

Because of military service, marriage is forbidden until a man is 30; a woman is discouraged by the state from marrying before age 24. Divorce is difficult to obtain and harmful politically. Children are quickly introduced to state-sponsored group activity. Most of the family's limited leisure time will be spent with the work unit rather than together. All children join the Young Pioneers at age 9 or 10 and the Socialist Working League between 14 and 16. The latter introduces the child to basic political indoctrinations, self-criticism sessions, and volunteer labor. Student schedules for vacations, political study, and volunteer labor will differ from those of their parents. Still, family ties appear to remain strong and stable.

State-directed activities consume a major part of an individual's daily existence. Political study may take up as much as three hours a day during the six-day workweek. Add to this several hours of weekly self-criticism sessions and volunteer labor after work, on weekends, and during "free time" and some North Koreans will have spent the equivalent of 145 work days each year on these activities.

This leaves little time for recreation in any form. What evidence there is suggests that leisure time is concentrated on Sundays and limited vacation periods. It usually means going to a park, sporting event, or simply relaxing at home. The media—radio, television, and the press—offer only limited recreational opportunities. All printed material is designed to glorify the regime and stress its political message. The same is basically true for radio and television, although they carry some sporting events and local news.

The high moral standard the regime claims for its people stems in part from the fact that most people have little time or energy for getting into trouble. Reports of juvenile delinquency almost always involve the children of the elite or privileged.

Elitism and Equalitarianism

In keeping with the regime's priorities, the system has produced an elite group—perhaps 1 percent of the population—that meets the twin criteria of excellent *songbun* and proven loyalty to Kim. As in other Communist countries, members of this group enjoy privileges, tangible and intangible, that make their lives vastly different from those of ordinary North Koreans. The price, however, is high: close and constant monitoring of all but the most senior party and government officials.

At the same time, the system has produced a basic egalitarianism in the lifestyles of most other North Koreans—more noticeably so than in other Communist countries. In addition the regime's emphasis on political loyalty and constant observation prevents even those with privilege from flaunting their status.

The regime's claims that there is no great income gap in North Korea are not true, just misleading. Excluding Kim Il-song, the highest paid government officials earn only about three or four times the wage of the average North Korean worker. In a system, however, that makes only the most limited use of the open market to distribute goods and services, wages are irrelevant. They are little more than an allowance given to a child in the West for expenditures above and beyond the housing, food, clothing, education, and medical care provided by parents. In North Korea, as in the USSR, privilege operates outside the system of wages, rations, and the normal distribution of goods and savings.

Most consumer goods are not purchased, but distributed through individual work units. The food rationing system allocates foodgrains and other staples on

Approved For Release 2007/12/06 : CIA-RDP84S00553R000100010001-7

Approved For Release 2007/12/06 : CIA-RDP84S00553R000100010001-7

the basis of the physical energy required on the job. Thus, higher level officials get smaller rations than fishermen, coal miners, and workers in heavy industry. And prized woolen clothing goes only to the military, coal miners, fishermen, and others exposed to harsh working conditions.

Moreover, except for the very top leaders who live in exclusive executive apartments, housing for the privileged is much the same as for the lower classes. Most people live in a housing unit comprising a living-dining room, one bedroom, a kitchen, and a bathroom that is usually shared by several families. The elite may have private baths and sometimes two bedrooms instead of one. Education and medical care are free to all, suggesting equality in the area of so-called social consumption as well as personal consumption.

With the state providing most basic commodities, including housing, wages go for extra food and clothing, cigarettes, entertainment, and sundries. A high wage can mean a more varied diet, one or two extra suits or dresses, occasional movies or dinners at a restaurant, travel to visit relatives, or the purchase of a major item such as a wristwatch or bicycle.

Food

P'yongyang uses an extensive, complex, and rigorous rationing system, ostensibly to ensure equitable distribution. Its novel features seem in many respects to favor the less privileged over the more privileged, but in actuality it reinforces the inequities in the system. To a North Korean the amount of rice in the grain ration is as important as the total grain allotment. Preferring rice to any other foodgrain, North Koreans would choose a smaller grain allotment composed exclusively of rice over a larger grain ration with a mixture of less rice and other grains. Only the elite, laborers with very hazardous jobs, some military officers on special assignment, and seriously ill patients in hospitals receive their full grain ration in rice.

Over the years the share of rice in ordinary grain rations has been cut from 70 percent in the late 1960s to 50 percent in 1970 to 30 percent in 1973.[2] This forced decline in rice consumption was the result of the need to expand exports to repay overdue international debts. [redacted] the substitution of other foodgrains has been very unpopular and is a source of growing dissatisfaction. Nonetheless, the people have no choice but to accept the regime's explanation that it is stockpiling rice to "feed the starving South Korean masses on the happy day of reunification."

25X1

The elite, however, have countinued to enjoy their full grain allotments in polished rice, a form of rice unavailable to most North Koreans for years. Thus, a cabinet minister receiving 700 grams of polished rice a day is being treated much better than a blast furnace operator receiving 900 grams of grain per day, 30 percent in unpolished rice, 50 percent in corn, and 20 percent in wheat flour. The equality of giving larger rations to those who do heavy work and need more food is counterbalanced by the elitism of saving the finest for the privileged.

The average basic diet is not a healthy, balanced one. It is heavy on carbohydrates and low in fats, proteins, vitamins, and minerals. Whether living in the city or a rural area, the average Korean eats almost no meat, limited amounts of fish or poultry, and very little fruit. There has been less improvement in food than in any other consumer area.

Clothes and Consumer Goods

No formal rationing system exists for clothing as it does for food. However, since clothes are distributed through schools, factories, offices, or cooperative farms, the regime has almost total control over the process. Everyone is issued two winter outfits and one summer outfit, but the higher quality designs and fabrics go to those in the privileged occupations and schools. The nominal cost of state-supplied clothes has no relation to the price of clothes in the stores. The latter are for sale to those who can afford extra clothing not deemed essential by the state.

Compared with other items sold on the open market, clothing is reasonably priced, except for quality woolen and leather goods. This reflects a price structure in

[2] Some reporting suggests it was increased to 50 percent in 1978.

Approved For Release 2007/12/06 : CIA-RDP84S00553R000100010001-7

Approved For Release 2007/12/06 : CIA-RDP84S00553R000100010001-7

which goods that the regime deems essential (unrationed foods, simple clothing, cosmetics) are subsidized while nonessential items (above-average clothing, electric appliances) are sold at inflated prices. The profit the state makes on the latter compensates for the losses on the former.

An ordinary North Korean could never save enough money to buy a refrigerator or a black and white television. Imported color televisions and Swiss and Japanese wristwatches cost more than an average worker earns in an entire year. Consumption is controlled by price alone, without resorting to rationing. Such items do become available to members of the middle class and the privileged on special occasions, such as Kim's birthday. They are distributed as "personal gifts" from Kim.

Relative to wages, all prices are high—reflecting the limited role of money in the economy and the minor role of the open market in the distribution of goods and services. A nylon sweater and two pairs of nylon socks cost the ordinary worker a month's wages. The average daily wage of 2.5 won can buy either 1 meter of cotton cloth (not nylon, silk, or wool), a toothbrush and toothpaste, one private bath in a bathhouse and a cake of soap, or a set of ping-pong paddles and a ball.

[redacted] in addition to the direct distribution of goods through work units, there is a network of "special stores" that most North Koreans never hear about. Some are open only to foreigners and charge exorbitant prices to earn much-needed foreign exchange. Others, modeled after those in the Soviet Union and operating independently of the open market, are available only to privileged North Koreans and sell prestige items at discount prices. Not only are prices lower than in regular government-operated stores, but goods (mostly imported) not otherwise available are for sale: leather shoes, wool suits, beef, pork, fresh fish, caviar, wine, liquor, and high-quality cigarettes. Except for some shoes imported from Japan, no foreign-made clothing is available to ordinary North Koreans. Beef and pork are almost never available, and wine and liquor only on national holidays and special occasions such as weddings.

The elite, however, have ready access to these goods, at discount prices, all year. [redacted] 25X1 25X1

Housing

Housing is another area in which elitism flourishes alongside a basic egalitarianism. Of all consumer areas, housing has consistently received top priority, second only to investment in heavy industry and surpassing transportation, agriculture, and light industry. Although the share of state capital allocated to housing has gradually declined in recent years, the absolute amount has grown steadily. Since the Korean war, the regime has constructed new housing for more than three-fourths of its population, urban and rural.

Visitors to North Korea are inevitably impressed with the modern high rise apartments (many of them 12 to 20 stories high) in P'yongyang and other cities and the cement-tiled cottages of rural North Korea. Both bespeak a higher standard of living than in neighboring China. North Koreans take pride in the significant improvement in housing since the war and the basic equality of the system. 25X1

Even though the people are more impressed with the improvements in housing than in any other area, [redacted] complained of cramped housing more than the shortage of meat and the lack of variety in the diet, the cost of warm clothes, the poor quality of other clothes, the scarcity of medicines, or the limited opportunities for higher education. Although city dwellers believe their one-bedroom apartment is an improvement over the past, they look forward to the regime's promise of a two-bedroom apartment for every family of five or more. 25X1

Housing construction, whatever its record, simply has not kept pace with demand. Families are assigned housing associated with the factory, cooperative farm,

Approved For Release 2007/12/06 : CIA-RDP84S00553R000100010001-7

Approved For Release 2007/12/06 : CIA-RDP84S00553R000100010001-7

or government ministry where the father works. Even if they had the money, people could not choose to spend more on better housing or housing in a different location at the sacrifice of other consumer wants.

No other consumer area seems to have presented the same challenge to the regime. Rural housing still consists primarily of single-story dwellings with two basic rooms plus a kitchen shared with another family. All homes have electricity but few have inside plumbing.

Despite significant improvements in the quality of construction, it would be wrong to leave the impression that North Korean apartments—even the newer ones—are of superior construction. [redacted] observed: "None of the walls are free from cracks. Most electric switches and outlets are defective. The wooden floors are not properly laid. Rain soaks through many of the roofs, the doors are narrow, and there are no screens on the windows."

Housing for the Elite. People do not cite discrimination in housing as a major complaint, largely because of the regime's success in concealing the special housing available to the elite. The inequalities, however, are every bit as striking as in other consumer areas. In urban areas at least, the level of privilege is also disguised by placing special housing units in sections of the city where ordinary citizens have no reason to visit. Thus, the single-unit homes of the most privileged or the three- and four-bedroom executive apartments are visible only to those who live there.

Basic furnishings—a dining room table, one or two wooden wardrobe chests, a wooden desk, and pantry cabinet for kitchenware—come with every apartment. Furnishings for higher class apartments—sewing machines, fans, televisions, and small refrigerators—represent a substantially higher standard of living and are beyond the hope of most North Koreans. Most would have access to a black and white television and sewing machine only through their apartment buildings or collective farms, much as US students have access to a television and laundry facilities in their dormitories. Thus, when the regime boasts that all North Koreans have television, it means that all citizens have access to television. Small villages typically have one to three televisions that villagers can gather around to watch sporting events, the evening news, or movies.

While ordinary North Koreans typically share communal bathrooms with other families on the same corridor of their apartment building or in their complex of rural homes, residents of the elite apartments have private bathrooms—some with running water and flush toilets. The apartments of the privileged usually have other conveniences, such as elevators, central heating, and sometimes air conditioning and private telephones. [redacted] have spoken of the disadvantages of living on the upper floors of a high rise apartment building with no elevator or running water. [redacted] North Koreans much prefer individual housing units in rural areas to apartment living in the cities because "they so dislike carrying trash, water, coal, and groceries up and down so many flights of stairs." One of the luxuries of the executive apartments is that they are only two or three stories high.

25X1
25X1
25X1
25X1

The North Koreans have devised a novel system for ensuring that the privileged always enjoy the latest in modern housing. As new apartment buildings with the most up-to-date conveniences are constructed, privileged families are moved out of their old apartments into these new ones. The people who rank just below them move into the old apartments, and on down the line. People are constantly moving in and out of apartments, in a slow but steady improvement in their standard of living. The family of a senior military officer is known to have moved nine times in 16 years, all within the P'yongyang vicinity. Since apartment buildings are occupied by people working in the same government ministry or factory, the residents are moved as a group, with no disruption of their social ties.

In addition to their own special housing, the elite have access to luxurious vacation homes along the beach on the east coast, in mountain areas near P'yongyang, and as far away as the northwestern border with China. The North Koreans have created artificial

Approved For Release 2007/12/06 : CIA-RDP84S00553R000100010001-7

Approved For Release 2007/12/06 : CIA-RDP84S00553R000100010001-7

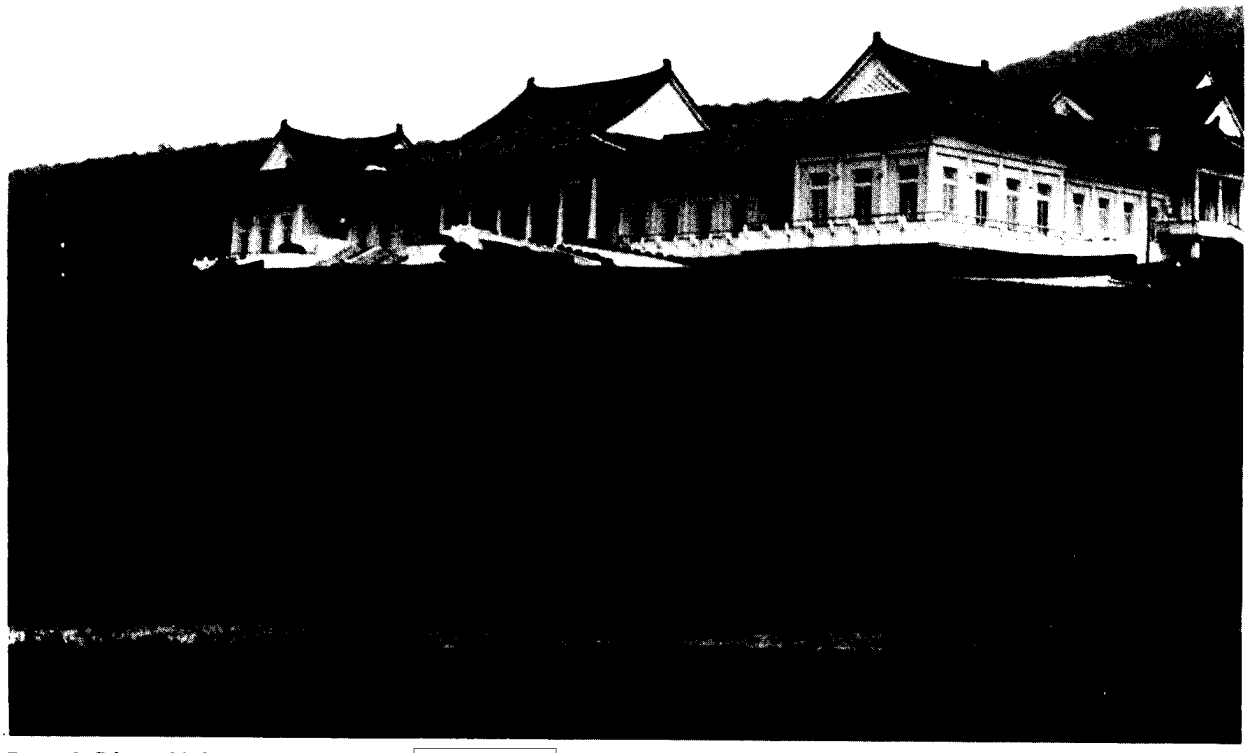


Figure 2. Sihanouk's home near P'yongyang.

25X1

lakes in these remote mountainous areas. The palatial home built for exiled Kampuchean leader Sihanouk on a secluded hillside about 15 minutes from downtown P'yongyang is located near such a manmade lake and has a private boat dock. On the other side of the lake are equally impressive and equally isolated villas, also with private boat docks.

Similar villas on the edge of manmade lakes in the remote mountain areas of northwest North Korea have even more elaborate, covered boat docks;

Kim Il-song is reported to have a palatial home outside P'yongyang, near Sihanouk's home. John Wallach of the Hearst papers interviewed Kim in one such villa in May 1979. Wallach described it as "enormous, by far the most lavish villa I have ever seen in the Communist world." It was surrounded by acres of terraced planting, a swimming pool, and tennis courts.

25X1

25X1

25X1

Medical Care

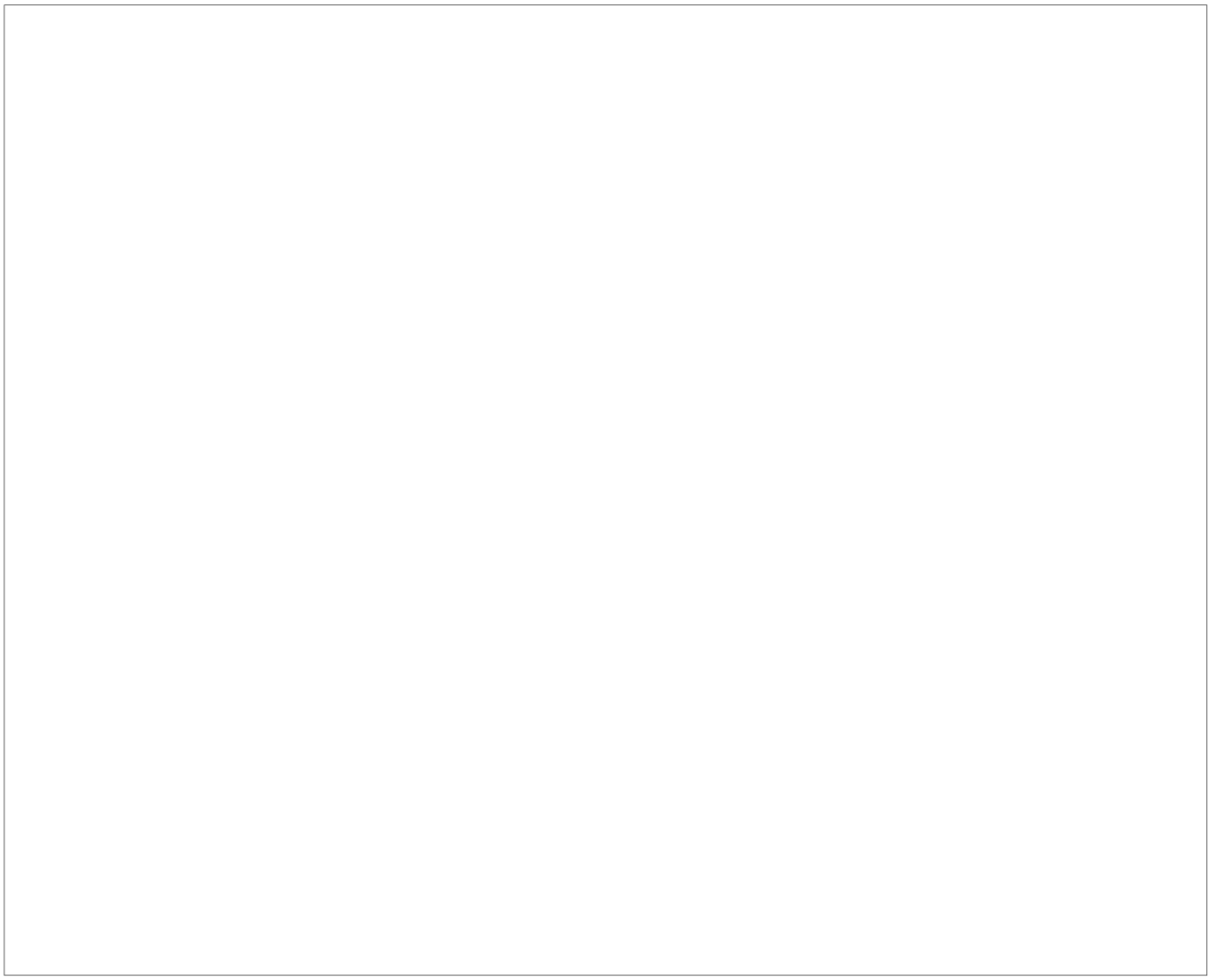
Although free medical care for all North Koreans implies a system of basic equality, there is a large gap between medical services for the elite and that available to most North Koreans. Visitors to P'yongyang are routinely taken to the showcase facilities: the Red Cross Hospital, the P'yongyang Medical College Hospital, and the new Maternity Hospital. These, however, are the only modern hospitals in North Korea.

25X1
25X1

In addition, there is a clinic located in the Ponghwa section of P'yongyang for high-ranking party and government officials only. Most North Koreans do not even know of the existence of the Ponghwa Clinic, just

Approved For Release 2007/12/06 : CIA-RDP84S00553R000100010001-7

Approved For Release 2007/12/06 : CIA-RDP84S00553R000100010001-7



25X1

as most Soviet citizens apparently do not know of the Kremlin Clinic in Moscow. Both leaderships make every effort to keep such prestige facilities secret.

Despite North Korea's almost irrepressible desire to show off its prestige facilities, including its premier medical facilities, we know of no foreign visitor who has ever been taken to the Ponghwa Clinic.

Although the three central hospitals in P'yongyang are reasonably good by world standards, they are not typical of the 6,700 hospitals, clinics, and rural health centers outside the capital. These three are the only ones in the country with central heating, air conditioning, private rooms, and comfortable beds with mattresses. most hospitals are poorly equipped, overcrowded, badly heated, and notorious for their poor food, uncomfortable wooden beds, and inadquate supplies of medicines.

25X1
25X1
25X1
25X1

Education

The North Korean leadership has long touted its free educational system. Having lost most of its intellectuals and skilled technicians in the mass exodus to the

Approved For Release 2007/12/06 : CIA-RDP84S00553R000100010001-7

Approved For Release 2007/12/06 : CIA-RDP84S00553R000100010001-7

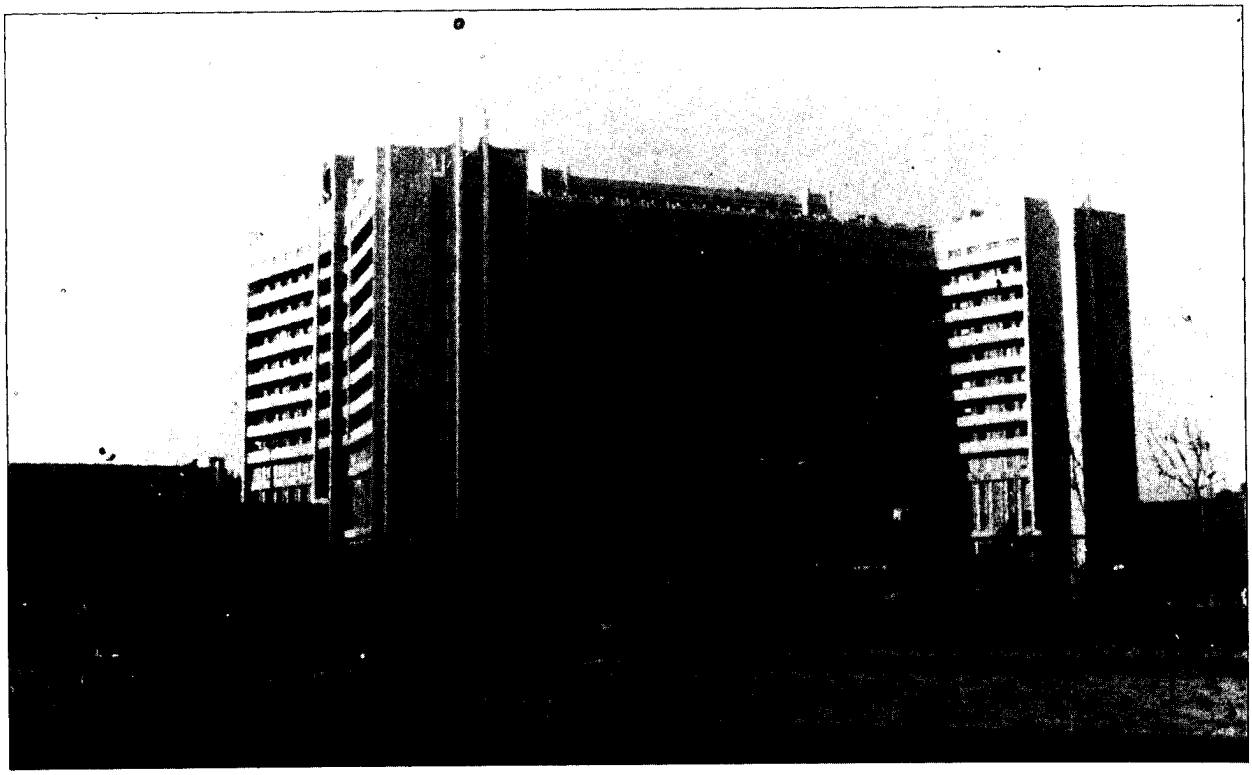


Figure 4. The P'yongyang Maternity Hospital, a showcase facility not typical of most hospitals in North Korea. [redacted] 25X1

South after the war, the regime was faced with the immediate need to develop a new class of skilled technicians "to accelerate the revolution and promote national construction." P'yongyang claims that the educational system has produced an unprecedented number of "new intellectuals." In the Communist sense of the word, "intellectual" is often interchanged with "technician." The North's basic concept of education is to link study with work, a kind of on-the-job training through life.

Political indoctrination is the other key ingredient of the North's approach to education. From nursery school on, students are taught the national ideology as part of every subject. Young children become used to thanking Kim Il-song for every meal, their school supplies, their teachers, and the schools themselves. In reading, students learn about Kim's guerrilla exploits; in math, they learn by counting the number of American soldiers killed or tanks destroyed during the Korean war; in history, they study the Communist revolution in Korea; in music, they sing Kim's marching songs; and in drama, they reenact his life story.

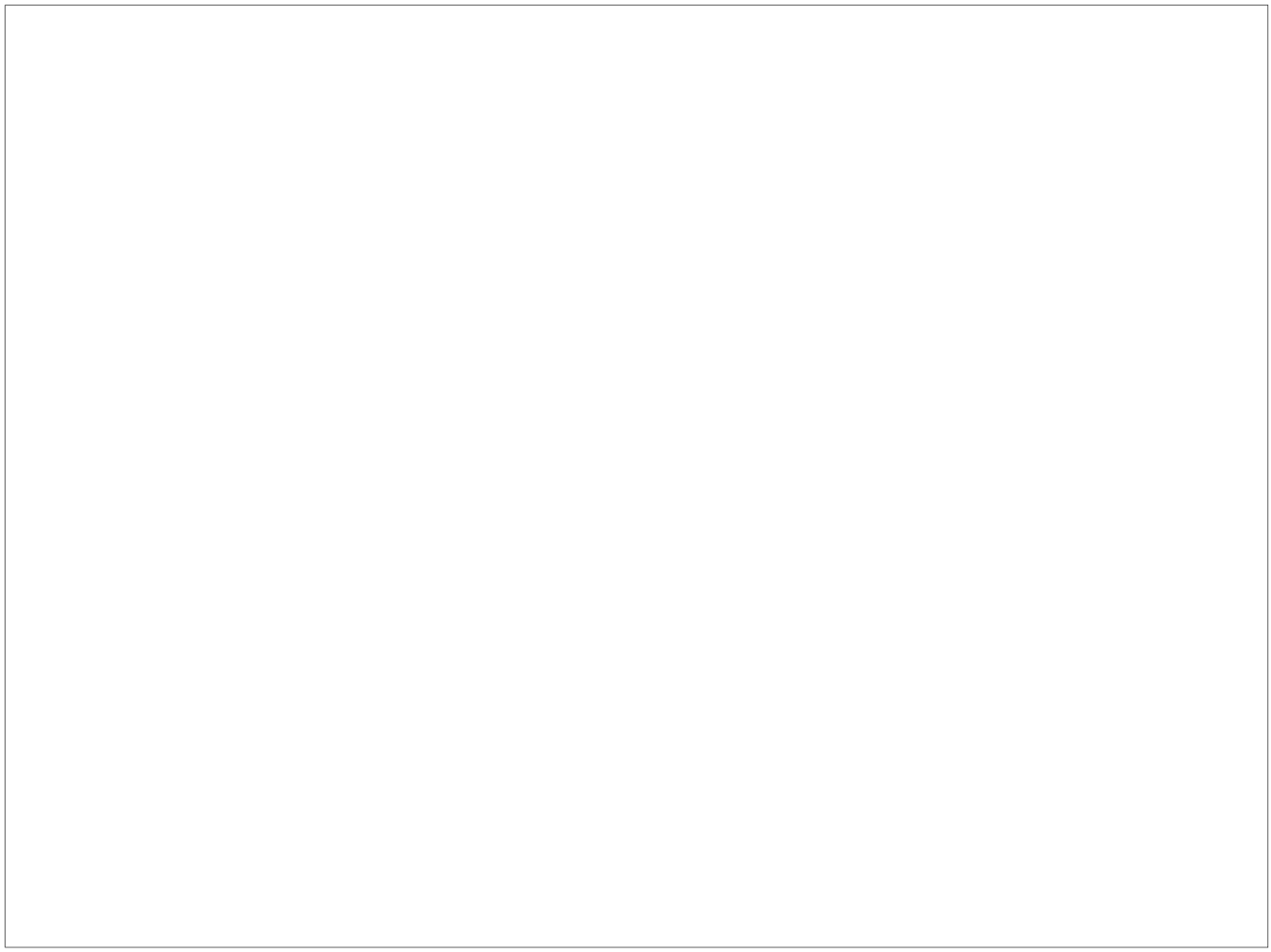
[redacted] 25X1

[redacted] estimated that "about 80 percent of the contents of schoolbooks in some way concerned the idolization of Kim." 25X1

The regime has made notable progress in expanding mass education at the lower levels, but it has not made commensurate efforts at the higher levels even for the privileged class. [redacted] 25X1 only about 30 to 40 percent of middle school graduates go on to high school, less than 10 percent of high school graduates go on to college or university, and only some 5 percent of military draftees return to school. Competition for admission to Kim Il-song

Approved For Release 2007/12/06 : CIA-RDP84S00553R000100010001-7

Approved For Release 2007/12/06 : CIA-RDP84S00553R000100010001-7



25X1

University is intense. As of late 1980, only one of every five or six applicants was accepted and in some departments only one of 10.

Thirty-five years after its founding, Kim Il-song University with 12,000 students is still the only four-year university in the country; 200,000 to 300,000 students attend specialized two-year colleges. Each year the regime allocates substantial resources to improve the facilities of the university—reserved for the chosen elite—but gives no consideration to establishing other four-year universities in the country.

Imbalances in the curriculum reflect the skewed nature of the educational system, which is structured to provide the necessary training for productive labor. Sciences predominate; social sciences are all but neglected, except for the study of Marxism-Leninism and the Communist Revolution in Korea

25X1

as many as eight out of every 10

25X1

classrooms at Kim Il-song University are laboratories for the study of biology, chemistry, geology, communications, and related practical subjects. The regime's defensiveness about its academic program in the social sciences is evident in its unwillingness to allow visiting social scientists to meet with their North Korean counterparts.

Most elementary schools outside P'yongyang suffer a shortage of supplies and an even more acute shortage of teachers, most of whom are undertrained and

Approved For Release 2007/12/06 : CIA-RDP84S00553R000100010001-7

Approved For Release 2007/12/06 : CIA-RDP84S00553R000100010001-7

overworked. Teachers of primary grades in rural areas are usually new graduates of middle school, barely 17 years old. Other than paper and pencils, teachers and students must make most classroom equipment—all maps, charts, pictures, chemicals, and other experimental materials.

Despite these weaknesses, the regime has succeeded in many areas. When the Communists came to power in 1946, illiteracy was widespread and less than 20 percent of all Korean youth had gone beyond elementary schooling (taught in Japanese). The Korean language was immediately introduced at all levels. From the outset, the regime put a premium on the rapid training of technically oriented personnel who could aid the one-generation industrial revolution being planned.

Since the early 1970s, the increase in school enrollments at all levels has been phenomenal. Education seems to have been one of the few areas unaffected by government cutbacks resulting from the economy's disappointing performance during the mid-1970s.

By 1980 the number of colleges had grown to 170, of which 25 were in P'yongyang. According to North Korean statistics, school enrollment jumped from 2.6 million students in 1968 to 8.6 million in 1980. Some 6 million students were reported to be in primary, middle, and high school. Enrollment in colleges had increased substantially, from a low of 200,000 in 1970 to 350,000 in 1980. Attendance at factory colleges, night schools, and correspondence courses was about 2.3 million.

The relatively high enrollment in these factory colleges suggests no less emphasis on adult education even though the government was expanding its efforts in other areas. The regime claims the number of factory colleges increased from 20 in 1960 to 85 in 1981. [redacted] some 15 percent of the country's workers and peasants had studied in adult education programs by the end of 1981.

The results of these tremendous efforts in education have been impressive in many regards. Over 600,000 technicians and specialists were reportedly trained during 1970-76, bringing the total number of trained technicians in North Korea to more than 1 million, up from 22,000 in 1953 and 497,000 in 1970. As a share of the estimated total work force, this is an increase from under 1 percent in 1953 to over 8 percent in 1970 and up to 15 percent in 1980. About 10 percent of the labor force are graduates of college and higher technical institutes, and the average worker has seven to eight years of education, compared to four to five years in the 1970s.

Education for the Privileged. Perhaps the greatest privilege of the elite is access to the finest education. Although all children go to nursery school from the age of three months, the children of the privileged attend the celebrated 18 September Nursery, a showcase school featuring a heated swimming pool, modern playgrounds, spacious classrooms, and a well-trained staff. None of the other 60,000 nursery schools or kindergartens, which accommodate some 3.5 million children up to the age of 6, have similar facilities.

Privileged children living in P'yongyang have the opportunity to pursue extracurricular activities at the plush Children's Palace, a huge complex of some 500 rooms offering courses in music, dancing, embroidery, the martial arts, science, mechanics, painting and sculpture, gymnastics, swimming, boxing, soccer, basketball, volleyball, weight lifting, and ping-pong. [redacted] 25X1
[redacted] as many as 10,000 25X1
of North Korea's most privileged children, ages 8 to 16, use the Children's Palace daily. A staff of 500 full-time teachers plus another 1,000 part-time teachers direct their activities. [redacted] 25X1
[redacted] 25X1
[redacted] Apparently, some students get to go 25X1
more often than others depending on the prestige of their schools.

[redacted] the exclusiveness of higher 25X1
education is a major source of dissatisfaction. In a system that promotes the sons and daughters of the 25X1
elite by virtue of their having the best *songbun*, the

Approved For Release 2007/12/06 : CIA-RDP84S00553R000100010001-7

Approved For Release 2007/12/06 : CIA-RDP84S00553R000100010001-7

people who get ahead by going to the best schools are those who have grown up amidst relative privilege. Members of the second-generation leadership—typified by Kim Chong-il—who have gone to North Korea's most prestigious schools, who have avoided spending eight to 10 years in the military, who have lived in comfortable homes, played tennis, driven cars, and vacationed at beach resorts while others have been doing volunteer labor on the farms are somewhat out of touch with the mass of people who lead very different lives. Certainly, they are a different breed from the first-generation leaders—self-styled guerrilla fighters with little formal education, devoted to the cause of Korean independence and reunification, and much more egalitarian in their thinking.

Second-generation leaders cannot claim to have known hard times or to have lived as the ordinary North Korean lives, as Kim Il-song can. As members of the new aristocracy, they will probably claim leadership on the basis of birth and rank. And that is precisely what we are seeing in Kim Chong-il's efforts, with his father's blessing, to establish the first "Communist monarchal succession" in history. Compared with its predecessor, this generation is likely to be much more elitist in its thinking and more concerned with preserving the system that protects its privileged position.

Educational Weaknesses. An educational system that puts a premium on political skills naturally motivates the bright and ambitious to cultivate their political rather than academic skills. Guaranteed as they are of a successful professional career in the future, privileged students at the best schools feel relatively little need to do well. Even in technical fields the regime has remained relatively unsophisticated. Political distortion is even more noticeable in the social sciences. North Koreans know nothing of US involvement in World War II or much else of world history, focusing instead on Korean history and the study of Marxism-Leninism.

The regime has begun to feel some of the inadequacies of the educational system. The lack of English linguists, in particular, has inhibited P'yongyang in advancing its diplomatic objectives. English is now compulsory in the school curriculum, and the government is sending a relatively large number of students abroad for English-language training.

In short, the educational system at any level provides little in the way of a truly intellectual experience. North Koreans are technically trained and thoroughly imbued with Kim's teachings—and not used to thinking for themselves.

Life in P'yongyang

So great is the difference between living in P'yongyang and living elsewhere in the country that some feeling for P'yongyang is necessary for an appreciation of privilege in North Korea. P'yongyang is the center of everything—the government, the arts, science, and technology.

Kim Il-song has built a showcase city in P'yongyang that is atypical of the rest of the country. There is great natural beauty in its parks and rivers and grandeur in its public buildings and wide, tree-lined avenues. Added to this is the city's extraordinary cleanliness, some even say sterility.

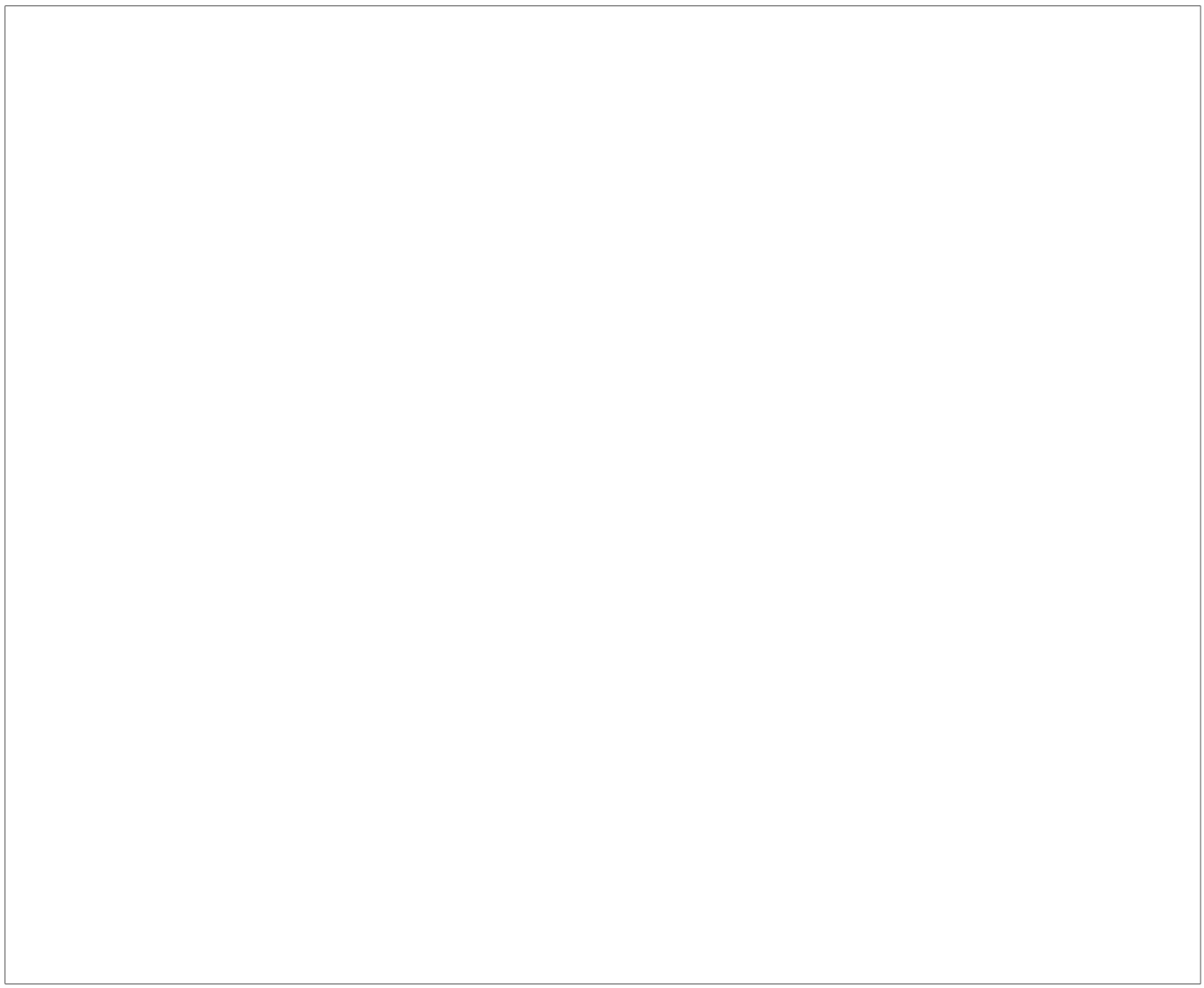
Part of Kim's design in creating his "dream city," as he calls P'yongyang, has obviously been to limit the size of the population—which now stands at about 1 million. [redacted] more North Koreans want to live in P'yongyang and many people would migrate to the city were it not for the tight controls exercised by the government. North Koreans cannot move into or out of P'yongyang without official approval. 25X1

Bicycles are forbidden in the city, and trucks are restricted to certain sections to maintain its orderly, uncluttered appearance. Since there are no privately owned automobiles, the only cars evident are those owned by the government and used to transport high-level party and government officials, university professors, and distinguished artists and athletes. Other people travel by bus, trolley, or subway. The lack of

Approved For Release 2007/12/06 : CIA-RDP84S00553R000100010001-7

Approved For Release 2007/12/06 : CIA-RDP84S00553R000100010001-7

25X1



traffic, along with the absence of industry within the city, has kept it free of air pollution, a troubling problem in most other areas of North Korea.

Unlike most cities, which grow helter-skelter, P'yongyang was carefully planned. Reduced to rubble in the Korean war, it was rebuilt on the drawing boards. The streets, laid out in a north-south, east-west grid, give it a well-ordered appearance. Its public buildings—built on a grand scale—make it a monumental city. The city's showcase quality, however, may be best illustrated by the extensive P'yongyang subway. The mere existence of a subway in P'yongyang seems unreal, given the state of transportation in the rest of the country. It is hardly typical of a country where most of the people walk to and from work and only the lucky are bused to their factories. Built deep underground to also serve as an air-raid shelter, the subway stations have marble floors and sculptured ceilings, exquisite chandelier lighting, and beautiful mosaics.

For North Koreans the rebuilding has been dramatic. The whole country takes genuine pride in the city. This pride is reflected in the question North Koreans often ask foreigners: "Do you like our city? Is it

Approved For Release 2007/12/06 : CIA-RDP84S00553R000100010001-7

Approved For Release 2007/12/06 : CIA-RDP84S00553R000100010001-7

Figure 7. Interior of the P'yongyang subway.

25X1

pleasing? Tell us how to make it even better." believe that "most people think that the improvements justify their hard work." They are particularly proud of the cleanliness of the city.

25X1
25X1

Summary

This description of life in North Korea presents to any Western observer a depressing picture of a highly regimented, disciplined, colorless, and tense society, in which life is hard, improving only at a glacial pace, and any fires of hope and ambition have been all but snuffed out. This is not necessarily the way people in North Korea see their lot, although there is ample evidence of frustration and unhappiness. The vast majority of citizens have known only authoritarian governments, first under the Japanese, briefly under Soviet occupation during 1945-48, and since then under Kim Il-song.

At a minimum, Kim has established a government free of foreign domination, one that took the lead in rebuilding the country after the war, and now provides jobs, housing, and security. Because of the isolation in which North Koreans have lived throughout this period and the constant drumbeat of propaganda that has compared their relative well-being with the "misery" of South Korea or other states, they have no basis for comparing their standard of living with that elsewhere.

Approved For Release 2007/12/06 : CIA-RDP84S00553R000100010001-7

Approved For Release 2007/12/06 : CIA-RDP84S00553R000100010001-7

A key element in sustaining the regime's control and the essential docility and cooperation of the people has been the figure and personality of Kim Il-song. The careful and deliberate manner he has taken to groom his son to succeed him and to perpetuate his type of leadership reflects the difficulties he foresees once he is no longer on the scene. Kim probably is not so much worried about a sharp growth of dissidence or a breakdown in public discipline as he is in a slower unraveling of the control mechanisms that depend, to a large extent, on his unique personality as the unrivaled leader of North Korea for over 35 years.

25X1

Approved For Release 2007/12/06 : CIA-RDP84S00553R000100010001-7

Approved For Release 2007/12/06 : CIA-RDP84S00553R000100010001-7

Approved For Release 2007/12/06 : CIA-RDP84S00553R000100010001-7