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No Motherland Without You: The Feminine Pastoral in North Korean Food and Agricultural Propaganda

abstract | *The North Korean ruling regime has historically taken an official stance on women's equality that falls in line with socialist progressivism while also incorporating more conservative elements from Confucian thought and the Kims' own brand of 'juche' nationalism. This essay looks at examples of food and agriculture related propaganda issued by the North Korean government within the context of its statements on gender and the circumstances arising from the food shortages of the past two decades. I argue that the regime's manipulation of signs reveals deeply patriarchal attitudes that have legitimized the domination of women and land in addition to facilitating a denial of internal conflict and disorder.*

As a subject of documentary and journalistic coverage, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) is often portrayed as a country beyond rationalization, of energies squandered on spectacle while the majority of its citizens lead lives of hidden hardship.¹ Images disseminated by the North Korean regime of Pyongyang's towering monuments or highly choreographed mass games are interpreted in the West with the implicit understanding that they are merely a cover for the consequences that decades of reckless totalitarian governance and extreme cultural, political, and economic isolation have wrought on the country. As amusing as these representations may seem to us for their inability to comprehend their own irony, it is also necessary to remember that propaganda is not merely a defense mechanism or a means of deflecting scrutiny. It also gives legible form to abstract political ideology and sets utopian imperatives for a targeted citizenry. Propaganda in the DPRK may not reflect the living conditions of most North Koreans, but it does create a space in which to conceive of the nation beyond the actualities of everyday life, giving ideological justification to unacknowledged problems such as hunger and impoverishment.

It has been argued that the North Korean regime, founded by Kim Il-sung and continued by his

hereditary successors Kim Jong-il and Kim Jong-un, has managed to hold on to its leadership precisely because of its success in implementing mechanisms of control over both its own citizens and in the nation's representation abroad: "restrictive social policies; manipulation of ideas and information; use of force; co-optation; manipulation of foreign governments; and institutional coup-proofing" (Byman and Lind 45). These strategies have helped to sustain the Kims' continued rule despite the humanitarian crises that have afflicted the nation and raised the threat of collapse or revolt. The DPRK's ongoing food shortages and problems of chronic malnutrition have presented an internal challenge to national security, with the devastating famine of the mid-1990s representing the apex of this turmoil. The North Korean government has generally responded to and discussed the food problem by downplaying its severity through euphemism, referring to the famine as *konan-ui haenggun* ("arduous march").² Rather than addressing the situation directly, it has focused instead on official campaigns promoting productivity and self-sufficiency. The regime has displaced any possible unrest by insisting on the attainability of affluence through hard work, holding up the ideals of national pride, self-reliance, and self-determination encompassed by *juche*, Kim Il-sung's foundational thesis on the



figure 1

central role of individual responsibility in promoting of Korean interests.³

Without explicitly addressing the depth and extent of shortages, food and agriculture related media in the DPRK displaces issues of food insecurity by superimposing an alternate reality in which being fed is not necessarily a right, but a moral privilege. North Korean propaganda images rely on a system of representation that not only shows how things could be, but also how things are for those who have faithfully obeyed the *juche* tenets. In a sense, these images are a realization of Hannah Arendt's dictum that "In the eyes of the masses, [the official authorities] acquire the reputation of superior 'realism' because they touch upon real conditions whose existence is being hidden" (318). State television and newspapers frequently relay images of government officials and elite Pyongyang residents touring well-stocked supermarkets, broadcasting the good life as it supposedly exists in North Korea. Aired on state television or printed in the *Rodong Sinmun*, the official newspaper of the Workers' Party of Korea, these displays form a part of the visual culture in the DPRK which, alongside posters, films, and other media, give narrative enactment to facets of state ideology. What is remarkable about the food related propaganda is the completeness with which it exemplifies the modes of repression described by Byman and Lind, constructing models not only in regards to labor and production, but also for the very essence of citizenship itself.

Of particular note within the scope of food propaganda is the frequency with which anonymous female figures appear, connecting the practices of food production and consumption with women's gender expectations. Women rarely appear in propaganda depicting industry, the military, or other more masculinized themes and are relegated to tropes enforcing their status as nurturers and carers. In some posters, the female figure seemingly serves as a Demeter-like embodiment of agriculture itself, bearing a sheaf of wheat or other symbol of the harvest.

The symbolic connections between women and food in these images suggest North Korean mod-

els of femininity that are circumscribed by limited possibilities for women's labor and revolutionary involvement. In theory, *juche* practice adheres to Marxist-Leninist values regarding female emancipation, which oppose the exclusion of women from public life and seek to grant them equal social and political rights.⁴ But the associations made within state propaganda imply a feminizing of land, labor, and bodies, pitting the female as a malleable and yielding medium onto which ideological thinking can be inscribed. The North Korean socialist woman is depicted as someone who has been liberated from the patriarchal family structures of neo-Confucianism. Within these representations, however, the dominant power formerly granted to her male relations has been symbolically appropriated by the state. Matriarchal subservience is deployed as a means of enforcing a paternalistic relationship between the regime and the masses, allowing the authority of the "fatherly leader" Kim Il-sung and his successors to go unquestioned and unchecked.

To explore the relationship between food, gender roles, and ideology in North Korean propaganda, I have examined examples of poster art reproduced in the *Rodong Sinmun* and in the online publications of the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), as well as a handful of examples collected by foreign visitors to the country. The scarcity of reliable information and representative artifacts coming directly from the DPRK, not to mention the difficulties of viewing the relevant media in its intended context, has thus far prevented me from carrying out extensive first hand analysis of the original images. I fully acknowledge that my analysis has been performed at a remove from the circumstances surrounding the placement of these images within North Korean visual culture and cannot describe the interpretations or reactions of North Korean civilians to them.

Nevertheless, I do believe that it is possible to productively read the examples that I have chosen within the framework provided by the study of totalitarian and hegemonic systems, which extends far beyond the case of the DPRK.⁵ The rise of totalitarianism in the twentieth century coincided with and was aided by the development of new

possibilities in mass dissemination, granting an ever-expanding pervasiveness to political dogma. This created a new ideological space in which representations of traditionally subjugated groups such as women could be custom tailored to further the cause of regimes and conflated with other subjects of conquest, such as land and nature. In order to understand of how various symbologies of domination and repressive power can run parallel to one another, I have found ecofeminist scholarship to be useful for the network of meanings it draws between women and the environment, facilitating a power-based analysis of the construction of alternate realities within mass media as well as their production and reproduction. In the case of the DPRK, ecofeminism provides a lens for interpreting the dichotomies drawn in state rhetoric between a passive feminine nature and a dominant masculine industrial-military complex.

The DPRK holds a unique position within the study of national cultures in that, because of political circumstances, it is largely unknowable. At its most direct, research on the DPRK has used refugee interviews to extend its ethnographic reach as far as possible into the country (Demick; Fahy; Haggard and Noland). At its worst, coverage of the DPRK is guided by Orientalist and reductionist perspectives that confuse the author's subjectivity with depictions of the truth. In my analysis of visual samples, I do not aim to construct a holistic vision of the DPRK, but rather a fragment of an interpretative Korea as it exists between the actualities of life inside the country and the outsider's limited gaze.

REVOLUTIONARY WOMEN AND THE HOMELAND MYTH In the earlier days of the Kim regime, the slogan "Let us not leave even an inch of land uncultivated!" represented the motivating ethos of North Korean agricultural policy (I. Kim 275). Intent on creating a utopia in which each citizen could "live in tile-roofed houses, wear silk clothes, eat rice and meat soup, and work together with adequate knowledge and techniques for the good of society", Kim Il-sung championed agricultural self-sufficiency so as to "make no compromise with

hunger" (257). Disregarding the lack of arable land in the DPRK – less than twenty percent is suited for farming – the regime's reckless environmental exploitation in the name of agriculture would eventually contribute to the natural disasters that decimated the countryside in the 1990s (Zellweger). Even in recent years, Party editorials have called for farmers to "strictly observe the requirements of the *juche* farming method" ("Joint New Year"). Talk of the "Party's grand nature-remaking plan" suggests that Kim Il-sung's theses on land development and productivity remain a central theme in the regime's efforts to maintain its legitimacy under Kim Jong-un's leadership ("New Year Address").

While the idea of land as a site for intervention and exploitation has figured prominently in *juche* ideology, there is also a concurrent rhetoric that encourages respect for the natural world, mythicizing it as an eternal life source. Land is often referred to in reverent tones that mirror the parent-child relationship in neo-Confucian thought. In the words of Kim Jong-il, "The homeland is everyone's mother... [from whose] bosom all true life and happiness springs" (qtd. In Myers 73). As Bruce Cumings explains, "Loyalty and filial piety form the deepest wellsprings of Korean virtue" (107). A filial model provides an analogy from which to base the relationship of the people to the land. In the context of North Korean ideology, the frequent invocation of the regime leaders as parental figures extends this relationship, setting up the land and its worship as a metaphor for reverence toward the state.

Although in theory the North Korean socialist state disposed of the remnants of traditionalist attitudes, including neo-Confucian patriarchy, such conservatism proved hard to erase from both state and societal structures and continued to inform the persistent discrimination against women in the country (Park, "Women and Revolution" 541). Much of the language used by the Kims that draws parallels between families, land, and the state has its origins in classic Confucian texts such as the *I-Ching*, which applies gendered associations and metaphors to the natural world. In that particular text, women are described as being of the earth, representing a principle of multitudes and natural



figure 2

diversity. Men, on the other hand, symbolize the heavens, which are unitary and destined for leadership. The superior, divine influence of men, with their high status, thus validates their control over lowly and unruly women (Cho 192). Prior to the socialist revolution, state-sponsored neo-Confucian ideology prohibited women from owning property or working outside the home – women and land unequivocally belonged to men. Although the early reforms of Kim Il-sung sought to dismantle some of these feudal structures and brought de jure equality to women through land redistribution programs and the passage of labor laws, many gendered social attitudes remained in place. Over time, the state's official stance also became increasingly ambivalent to women's concerns and to their place in public life (Park, "Women and Revolution" 533).

The identification of land as maternal within the Kims' repurposing of neo-Confucianism sets up some of the feminine significations it provides. First, it establishes the natural world as a site of production and reproduction, a mother figure who "gives birth to children and brings them up... She teaches them everything necessary" (I. Kim 216). The mother-child relationship serves as a metaphor for engagement with the land as an intrinsic part of societal development. Second, the nourishment provided by the land is understood as distinctly maternal. This could either be interpreted as a complement to the "fatherly" care of the regime leaders, or, it could make the land one and the same with their rule, turning it into a symbol of the state. B.R. Myers has argued that the Kims are genderless in iconography, assuming the position of both the maternal and the paternal, giving support to the latter interpretation (93). At the same time, nature cannot equal or eclipse the power of the state, and thus must remain secondary or complementary. The need for it to be subservient leads to the last major signification, which is that the natural becomes identified with traditional feminine virtues, such as purity, chastity, and obedience, selectively drawn from neo-Confucian thinking and incorporated into Party politics.

The feminized landscape is a topic addressed in ecofeminist thought, which has argued that the

historical subjugation and domination of women runs parallel to that of the land and environment. References to the "motherland" or "mother nature" anthropomorphize the natural world, transforming it into a site of gendered social interaction and accompanying dynamics of power. As Catherine Roach puts it, "in patriarchal culture nature is overpersonified and women are underpersonified. Women are perceived to merge with nature, to be part of the nonhuman surround and only semihuman. Similarly, nature is perceived as female, as virgin resource to be exploited or raped, as sharing in woman's semihuman quality" (51). A tendency to reduce concepts such as male and female, nature and culture down to dualisms encourages dialectical antagonism within the divisions it creates and translates human features onto parallel categories. Ecofeminism suggests that the wanton use of natural resources is borne of the same mindset as a lack of appreciation for women's work, with Roach going so far as to say that the frameworks of outright exploitation are similar for both. Furthermore, the feminized, personified landscape enables its characterization as irrational and incorrigible: when nature acts in inhuman and incomprehensible ways (such as through natural disasters), it is wondered how "she" can act with such malevolence.

The perspectives provided by ecofeminist thought are pertinent here less for the framework they provide in critiquing North Korean agricultural and environmental policy than for the questions they provoke in regards to their interpretation. That is, do these policies, as exemplified by propaganda, link the feminine and the natural in ways that suggest the domination and exploitation of both? Does the portrayal of food and farming as a female occupation go hand in hand with gendered attitudes toward the land? Have the regime's official responses to the catastrophes affecting the DPRK's food supplies reflected a tendency to characterize nature as an anthropomorphized Other that can be dominated through the advent of industry or other means?

In fig. 1, a propaganda poster depicting a girlish figure cradling a baby goat, situated amongst a verdant landscape, provides a suggestive response to these questions. This poster was issued in con-

junction with a program launched by Kim Jong-il in 1996, at the height of the famine, to encourage the raising and breeding of goats. The program aimed to provide much needed supplementary milk and meat to citizens and reduce the strain on the country's grain supplies, which had been largely decimated by floods. In the long run, the goats stripped the countryside of much vegetation, worsening the cycles of flood and drought that were already afflicting the land. Having denuded the mountains, they were a symbol of the environmentally unsound practices advocated by the regime as a solution to food issues (Lee 199-200).

The poster's slogan ("Let's expand goat rearing and more grassland in accordance with the party!"), as well as its bucolic imagery, makes no reference to the environmental or provisional realities behind the goat program. Rather the image is a glimpse of a future, represented by the figure's forward-looking stare, in which grasses and trees have magically sprung up, providing ample fodder for the animals. Also of note are the electrical towers to the right of the composition, reminding viewers of the guiding presence of state-sponsored industry. These structures suggest that natural splendor cannot exist without some degree of intervention, a point made in a quote attributed to Kim Jong-il: "the nature of this land is very beautiful because the great leadership of the Party and leader has come into full bloom in all parts of our country, which are replete with their noble virtues" (qtd. in David-West 107). Although the natural does possess a certain power and hold over the people, this power is granted by and never supersedes that of the Party. This hierarchy is echoed elsewhere in state rhetoric, enforcing a sense that all things depend on the good grace of the Kims. The popular military anthem, "No Motherland Without You", goes so far as to suggest that the very existence of the country is contingent on the regime's benevolent leadership.

The ability of the land to invoke overwhelming, emotional gratitude, as evidenced by the girl's expression in fig. 1, emphasizes its enveloping and all-encompassing majesty. The mountains cradle the figure just as she cradles the goat. While the roles

of the land and the figure echo each other, the figure possesses a certain innocence that makes her incapable of fully assuming a motherly role. Rather she is in the process of becoming maternal, following the example set by the motherland as well as by past generations. In a speech on the cultivation of mountainous areas, Kim Il-sung remarked, "Our forefathers also put much stress on turning the mountains to good account in our country which is mountainous" (I. Kim 27). Mountainsides embody the legacy of the past, with their continued development being "not simply work for the welfare of the present generation; it is an honorable task for the welfare of the future generations" (31). There is a correlation here between the reproductive capacities of the land and the reproduction of families. In the poster, the goats are a substitute for the figure's unborn children, who will one day thrive off of the products of the land she has strived to produce.

Within the scope of North Korean propaganda, young rural women fill a particular niche among the various models of revolutionary action. They are old enough to be active agents of the state, but still possess an immaturity that renders them impressionable. Dukalskis and Hooker note the appearance of similar characters in North Korean cinema, where they are prominent in melodramas depicting acts of self-sacrifice and selflessness. In the general absence of a strong parental figure, these female protagonists are first and foremost children of the Great Leader, whose revolutionary spirit looms over the narrative and act as a surrogate for both maternal and paternal care. "Necessarily sexless in their youthful naïveté," these women become swept up in an all-encompassing mass politics that "obliterates any possible position of a singular 'individual'" (59). The agrarian backdrop against which these stories play out is enough to remind the characters of their connections and obligations to the land and to the state as they become possessed by the virtues of the pastoral. The authors suggest that the rural acts as a source of "both material well-being and spiritual happiness, which only need be harnessed through a devotion to work on it. Behind this mandate that improving the land is improving one's devotion to the national cause, as outlined by



figure 3

juche philosophy, is also a historical reason for this focus on rural life” (60). Beyond the land itself, there is again a reminder of a genealogical past, which acts as a “repository of pure ethnic values” (60).

Fig. 1 encapsulates the symbiotic relationship between the masses and the land described by Dukalskis and Hooker in suggesting that the implementation of state directives will in return bring about unconditional love from the land and from the regime that it represents. Just as a child’s good behavior will be rewarded by its parents, the nation will also be rewarded if it adheres to *juche* principles. The possibility of the land responding to its children’s labor in any other way can only be the outcome of either an irrational response from a maternal nature, or from the inadequacies of the masses themselves in fulfilling their obligations. Indeed, Kim Jong-il was content to blame the famine on the North Korean people’s inability to follow his father’s teachings (Myers 119). By denying that it could logically act outside of the laws ascribed to

it in Kim Il-sung’s wisdom, nature becomes circumscribed by certain rules and expectations that govern its proper behavior.

The doctrinal use of *juche* principles in many ways acts as a basis for the construction of false realities propagated by the North Korean state, positioning them as the only acceptable system of belief. A poster depicting wheat-farming underscores the totalizing presence *juche* has in the practice of revolutionary agriculture (fig. 2). We see a round-faced, backlit female figure standing amidst a field of wheat, inspecting a strand with a magnifying glass while holding the collected writings of Kim Il-sung in the other. The poster’s slogan (“In agricultural production, let’s move forward in compliance with the seed of revolution!”) uses horticultural seeds (*jongja*) as a metaphor for symbolic germination, growth, and progeny. Sunlight shines down on the figure, reminding the viewer of Kim Il-sung’s radiating warmth – his name itself means “become the sun”. Kim Il-sung has a godlike

presence in the image that can be felt even with only the book as a referent: the Great Leader makes things grow, including crops, revolutionaries, and even entire revolutions. The pseudo-religious connotations here – we can almost imagine a religious text in place of the book – are suggestive of how the state has supplanted more traditional forms of worship with its own mythologies.

There is something of a moral lesson contained in the image, which is represented by the observational powers of the magnifying glass. The glass is suggestive of Kim Il-sung's thesis that revolutionary agriculture must be practiced through strict objectivity and full immersion in the field. In a speech delivered to agricultural workers, Kim Il-sung proposes "approaching reality in the true sense of the word means seeing personally, with your own eyes, all the means of production, such as land, farm machines, draught animals, fertilizer and seeds, making concrete calculations, laying down a correct policy to suit actual conditions

and untying knotty problems on the spot" (I. Kim 267). To simply theorize an approach to farm labor is not enough, as "one who works in a subjective and bureaucratic way is liable to commit errors" (266). In the context of North Korean agricultural practice, however, objectivity does not simply refer to scientific rationalism. Objectivity, instead, is Kim Il-sungism, or reality viewed through a *juche* lens. In state media, the Kims are frequently shown in going on field trips to farms, factories, and other state owned factories, offering on-the-spot "guidance" based on their all-knowing, observational wisdom, which is then propagated as truth. The strong sunlight in the poster, which shines through the magnifying glass, emphasizes the illuminating, truth-revealing powers of Kim Il-sung's "guidance", which acts as the light and the reality through which revolutionaries are able to see.

The bestowal of wisdom on the female figure in the image, as symbolized by the light, also raises implications about the revolutionary capacities



figure 3

of rural women laborers within the *juche* scheme. "Like other socialist states," Haggard and Noland write, "North Korea has maintained a de jure commitment to women's rights, though actual practices have fallen far short of the rhetoric" (61). Within the Party's official messages, women are capable of becoming revolutionary fighters, but only within certain contexts that in actuality exclude the majority of them. By necessity, a woman revolutionary cannot be tempted by distractions such as modernity, urbanity, and perhaps even motherhood. Rather, she must possess the purity and whole-hearted diligence represented by the peasant spirit. The figure in the wheat poster embodies this with her slightly androgynous uniform and appearance as well as her youthful features, creating a heightened sense of anonymity and sexlessness that prevent her from achieving any distinct identity and make her an appropriate subject of the state's mass politics.

In an article on women's fashion in the DPRK, Suk-Young Kim questions the ability of North Korean women to emulate these idealized feminine models: "No matter how intensively visual media created simulacra of female warriors, their impersonation presented a tough challenge for North Korean women, because the gap between themselves and such theatrical characters was a wide one. When everyday life is so distanced from its representations, the ability of visual media to present a credible model is diminished" (S. Kim 172). In a sense, the false worlds in North Korean propaganda create an imagined space where women exercise their revolutionary agency, unburdened by the tolls of domestic life and labor. Ordinary women are intended to identify or empathize with these idealized characters, whose gender roles fit neatly into the well-oiled schematics of Kim Il-sungism. In the absence of a meaningful system for coping with the difficulties of agricultural life, these archetypes push aspirational models further into the realm of the abstract.

Within the scope of North Korean propaganda, the young female revolutionary is almost by default agrarian and the agrarian is young and female.⁷ Haggard and Noland note that following the shifts triggered by the events of the 1990s, however, the

myth of the devoted woman farmer holds less and less currency. The breakdown of state-owned enterprises such as cooperative farms disproportionately forced women into unemployment and all but obliterated the state-run food distribution system. Many women turned to market-oriented employ in the aftermath. Although, according to Haggard and Noland, the informal markets have eclipsed state distribution as citizens' primary source of food, the government maintains an inhospitable attitude towards these spaces and has sought to limit and control their growth. By insisting that women's involvement in the food system must be primarily agrarian, the politically transgressive nature of alternative paths is reinforced. Even in a poster released this year, on the sixtieth anniversary of the DPRK's self-proclaimed "victory" in the Korean War, the same Demeter-esque icons are employed and invocations are made of past successes rather than current conditions. This not to say that party ideology and rhetoric are entirely static - in fact, they appear to be undergoing slight transitional changes, as Haggard and Noland's research demonstrates. Nevertheless, the party depends on strict archetypes and repetition in order to give the appearance of consistency and stability that contrast the reality of chaos on the ground.

MODELS OF CONSUMPTION AND THE URBAN FEMALE In stark contrast to the iconography of agricultural production, propaganda posters depicting food consumption tend to feature women who are less youthful than their rural counterparts and unambiguously inscribed in their maternal roles. Showcasing an array of colorful packaged foodstuffs, these posters also include backdrops with markers of urban settings: tall buildings, supermarket shelves, and industrial smoke stacks. Although upon first glance the images appear to depict a model of consumption defined by cosmopolitanism, closer analysis reveals an emphasis on the collective creation of goods, turning the focus back on the means of production. Promoting objectives of material affluence and abundance, the posters appear to be directed less at the urban consumers of food than at agricultural or rural industrial

workers producing goods for an urban audience.

The related campaigns for these posters championed efforts to provision all members of society by increasing domestic production. But beneath their inspirational messages are veiled justifications for the state's practices in redistributing domestic products and food aid, which allegedly favored those closest to the regime while shutting out the rural poor. By depicting the urban elite as part of the masses, these images normalize Party officials' lives within the revolutionary struggle.⁸ Humanitarian workers deployed in the region around the time of the famine came to suspect that the government disproportionately allocated resources toward Party members in Pyongyang, with the trickle of food going to the provinces barely making an impact in most households (Lee 195; Haggard and Noland 55). The rural / urban divide in the DPRK exposed an ever increasing conflict of class and geographic inequalities in a theoretically classless nation, reinforcing the second-rate position of the countryside. This reality contrasts with Party logic that suggests, "conflict is not 'typical' of North Korean life and therefore unworthy of depiction. There are few of the harsh clashes between rural and urban values, older and younger generations, chauvinist husbands and progressive wives" (Myers 92). Discord cannot exist within the national, social, and racial unity brought about by *juche*, which emphasizes Korean ethnic identity as a driving force behind individual revolutionary initiative.

The portrait of maternity in fig. 3 demonstrates such negation of gender and social divides through an iconography that establishes women's roles amongst a modern, urban context. The abstract maternal care of the land in figs. 1 and 2 is given embodiment here by the mother guiding her child against a snowy backdrop, creating an analogous, recontextualized depiction of the instructive parent-child relationship. The accompanying slogan implores "improving the livelihood of the people!", emphasizing abundance as a collective cause. In Kim Il-sung's visions of a materially productive society, not only is "no one is allowed to live in affluence for himself", but mothers must also serve as exemplars of this selflessness (I. Kim

258). Addressing a women's union, he explained, "You cannot simply ask your children to become good people, while you yourselves avoid work and study, and behave selfishly" (218). Selflessness is also not only a precondition for the proper education of a mother's own children, but also the nation's: "When communist society is achieved, the whole society will turn into a family and people will love and care for all children equally whether they are their own or others" (214-215). Any possibility that the urban mother in fig. 3 could represent selfish materialism is dismantled by the understanding that her welfare and concerns are intrinsically bound up with those of the nation.

Another notable feature in fig. 3, also present in fig. 4, is the incongruity between the frontal and the background scenes, which do not have the same compositional unity of the rural images. In contrast to the strong, opaque colors that fill in the figures and products, the backgrounds are faintly rendered and somewhat abstract. We can barely make out the impression of tall buildings in fig. 3, while in fig. 4, factories are merely suggested by a silhouette and a gridded plane resembles a broad field nearly as much as it does a street grid. By deemphasizing the severity of the urban landscape, focus is brought to the scenes of nurturing at the forefront (the woman in fig. 4 appears to be wearing a nurse's uniform). This technique creates a sense of displacement for the women, as if their feminine, caring natures are somehow difficult to reconcile with austere urbanity. Although they are not quite as spirited as the female peasant archetypes, they resist complete identification with cosmopolitanism or the loss of innocence it represents. Neither fully rural nor urban, these women bring consumption into a space that exists away from the farm (the locus of production) and away from the alienating connotations of the city (the locus of industry). This space, as suggested by the slogans' emphasis on the creation of goods, is still inherently tied to rural production, however, in that it is a site for the appreciation and enjoyment of domestic products.

By attempting to blur the boundaries between the rural and the urban and between production

and consumption, these images obliterate the possibility of internal struggle and promote a veneer of uniformity. Maternal figures in propaganda images create an image of stability, projecting the order and guidance provided by the state onto recognizable and humanized archetypes. But the inseparability of care from the maternal, particularly in the dynamics of provisioning, suggests an essentializing view of the roles and capabilities of women in the eyes of the regime that ultimately throws the existence of gender equality into doubt. As keepers of domestic peace, both in the sense of the household and the homeland, women are precluded from the more outward looking projects of the regime, such as militarism and Anti-Americanism. With such a limited and distinct feminine iconography in its propaganda, the possibility then arises of a gendered approach to repression in the DPRK, creating separate models and approaches to normative masculinity and femininity.

CONCLUSION As Hazel Smith has argued, the DPRK is frequently discussed within a securitizing framework that reduces all information about the country down to concerns regarding military policy and security issues, ultimately conceiving of the regime and its leaders as irrational and diabolical. Through the analysis of propaganda, however, a DPRK beyond the nuclear programs and military displays comes into view, revealing a carefully organized and highly regulated system in which all official messages are didactic. The North Korean government has focused inward in its efforts to control possible dissent arising from the food problem and related environmental issues, invoking narratives of gender and responsibility to encourage mass cooperation. Although these narratives obscure injustices within North Korean society, they nonetheless provide an ideological space in which problems from within can be dealt with only on the most euphemistic and non-pragmatic terms.

My account cannot describe the effect or reception of these propaganda examples within the DPRK, nor can it claim their messages as being representative of individuals' beliefs or thoughts.

Sandra Fahy has shown that a unique and distinct method of discourse has emerged among North Koreans, indicating some level of resistance to indoctrination. Such forms of sub-governmental communication are critical to survival in the DPRK as it undergoes economic transition while keeping more or less uniform social policies in place. Although the simulacra constructed by state propaganda have stifled the development of alternative thought, the traumatic repercussions of this very system also raise the possibility of questioning its righteousness from within.

It is hardly surprising that the food problem has become inextricably bound with women's issues and dealt with in patriarchal terms. My analysis has proposed that the attitudes governing women's status and engagement in food related activities have deep-seated and multifaceted roots that at times can be contradictory or questionable. The evidence discussed here represents a very small fraction of a complex and largely difficult situation to know. Nevertheless, I would suggest that it is possible to recognize a trace of familiarity in the gender issues evoked by North Korean propaganda and I argue that it should not be evaluated at a distance set by lingering narratives of Cold War threat. Rather, issues concerning the propagation and regulation of ideas and knowledge in the DPRK should be understood as an instance of the use of myth to maintain power structures. Women give personified form as mothers or daughters to the narratives of filial obedience and bonding that have propped up the Kim regime, signifying indefatigable devotion, even against a silent backdrop of strife. By representing the production and consumption of food as distinctly feminine activities and mining the notion that women are simultaneously dependent on masculine authority yet also responsible for their own undoing, North Korean state media has succeeded in overshadowing a language of hunger with one of unwavering loyalty. ■

NOTES

1. See Andray Abrahamian's North Korea and Documentary Film for a description and critical analysis of recent documentary coverage of the DPRK.
2. Sandra Fahy notes that this term carries connotations of Kim Il-sung's fight against Japanese colonial rule, effectively reframing the problems of the present within "culturally conditioned ways of engaging with tried and tested means of surviving struggles" (541).
3. This summary of *juche* hardly gives any clarification as to its meaning and place within state ideology. I am disinclined to attempt any further explanation of the concept, as scholars such as Cumings and Myers have pointed out its incomprehensibility and indefinability, both within and outside state rhetoric. When referred to in this essay, I simply intend invoke its prominence as a uniting catchphrase.
4. Kyung Ae Park has shown that Kim Il-sung's political theory and the policies concerning women's rights enacted during his rule follow a fairly close reading of Engels, Marx, and Lenin's statements against capitalist patriarchy, even if in practice they run up against remnant elements of neo-Confucian conservatism.
5. Dukalskis and Hooker provide a thorough argument for understanding how the regime has enforced its legitimacy via totalitarian means and injected totalizing ideological control into state-sanctioned media (54-56).
6. For a discussion of the problems regarding coverage of North Korea, see Abrahamian.
7. Male farmers do appear in some propaganda posters, a few examples of which appear in Heather and De Ceuster. But as Katharina Zellweger confirms, the majority of agriculturally themed images focus on women.
8. The North Korean government strictly controls where citizens are allowed to live based on class position. Only elites with connections to the regime are permitted to live in Pyongyang, while anyone considered potentially hostile to the government is banished to the countryside (Byman and Lind 61).

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