

A Blatant Lie: The North Korean myth of Kim Il-sung liberating the country from Japan

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This article deals with one of the central historical constructs of North Korean official historiography: the myth of the Korean People's Revolutionary Army. North Korea claims that this army, led by the first ruler of North Korea Kim Il-sung, defeated the Imperial Japan. This claim is duly reflected in North Korean official publications and is taught to its citizens. The author examines origins, evolution and implications of this historical myth.

Key Words: North Korean historiography, Korean People's Revolutionary Army, DPRK, KPRA, Kim Il-sung

History is often used as a political tool, and Stalinist autocracies are notorious for such activities. In his thorough study Vadim Rogovin, a Russian historian of the Stalinist era, demonstrated how Stalin's regime systematically distorted recent historical events, aiming, above all, to aggrandize the role of Stalin in the communist revolution and the subsequent Russian Civil War, while simultaneously vilifying Stalin's political enemies (Rogovin 1994). Amy Knight's article, which analyses the role of Lavrentiy Beria in the rise of Stalin's cult, contains similar findings (Knight 1991).

North Korea adopted this Soviet practice. In the course of time, the presentation of historic events in the North Korean narrative has been systematically altered, in order to conform to the ever changing political demands of the era. In this article I will present a case study of how such changes have affected the presentation of the events of 1945 when the Japanese Empire was defeated and a new independent Korea

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was born. The events of that short period determined the subsequent course of Korean history, and as such the official presentation of this period is important for creating a desirable image of the past. The official description of events has changed at least three times, each time in order to justify changes in official policy. Thus, the study of these changing interpretations presents us with valuable insights into the way history has been manipulated and put into political use in North Korea.

Over the time, the DPRK started to claim that Japan had been defeated in 1945 by Kim Il-sung and his “Korean People’s Revolutionary Army” (KPRA). Study of evolution of this politically motivated distortion of history is the topic of this article.

As of now, falsification of history in North Korea remains largely unstudied in English-language academia, with South Korea being seemingly the only country where this problem has been studied to a large extent. Notable works on subject include Kim Pyŏng-ro’s “Explanation commentary on Works of Kim Il-sung” (1993) and Sŏ Chae-jin’s “A Study of Mythologisation of Kim Il-sung Armed Struggle against Japan” (2006). However, Kim’s work largely focus on discrepancies between various publications of Kim Il-sung’s works, while Sŏ’s – with historiography of Kim’s activities in the 1930s. Thus, this article seems to be the first publication dealing with the myth of the KPRA.

This topic, apart from empirical reasons, is also important due to the tendency in historical research to assume that there is some merit to the DPRK’s official publications of on the subject and that they should be considered historical sources. The author intends to demonstrate that this is not the case, as these are texts which content is defined purely by political reasons.

I. The Soviet-Japanese War and the Rise of Kim Il-sung

Since this article is dedicated to a study of a politically-motivated manipulation of historical narrative, it makes sense to briefly introduce the facts before proceeding.

There are multiple works on the Soviet-Japanese war of 1945 and the first months of the Soviet occupation of northern Korea. Most of these works are based on the study of the now available Soviet, American, Korean and Japanese archival documents. Among the best of them are Chŏn Hyŏn-su’s article “Arrival of the Soviet army and their policy in North Korea” (1995) and Morita Yoshio’s four-volume book “Chronicle of the End of the War in Korea” (1964). Both are based on a very extensive numbers of primary sources: Soviet and Korean in Chŏn’s case and Japanese in Morita’s. As

for the early years of Kim Il-sung, the best work on the subject, arguably, is Dae-sook Suh (Sō Tae-suk)'s "Kim Il Sung: The North Korean Leader" (1988).

Kim Il-sung as readers know, was a Korean, who moved to Manchuria in 1920s and joined the anti-Japanese guerrilla movement soon after the proclamation of Manchukuo – a puppet state of Imperial Japan. The guerrilla units Kim was fighting with were organized by and subordinated to the Chinese Communist Party. The movement was largely unsuccessful, as Japanese-Manchurian forces eventually succeeded in their crackdown on partisans. In 1940, Kim Il-sung, fearing for his life, fled Manchukuo with a few comrade-in-arms and crossed the border to the USSR. Having undergone the background check by Soviet security, Kim was accepted to the Red Army in 1942. Given the rank of captain, he served in the 88th Brigade of the Soviet army for three years.

In August 1945, the Soviet Union joined the Allies in their war against Imperial Japan and invaded Manchukuo, Korea, southern Sakhalin and Kuril Islands. Combined with atomic bombs being dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, this caused Tokyo to accept the Allies' terms and surrender. The USSR occupied the northern half of the Korean Peninsula and very soon began reorganizing its occupation zone into a communist proto-state. Kim Il-sung, who did not participate in the war with Japan, returned to Korea in September and was soon named the leader of North Korea.

II. The Falsification

However, this is not what DPRK citizens are taught. According to North Korea, the Japanese Empire was defeated by no one else than Kim Il-sung himself. Kim, DPRK publications claim, had created his Korean People's Revolutionary Army (*Chosŏn Inminhyŏkmyŏng'gun*) in 1932. He was the sole commander of this guerrilla force which, as is claimed, operated in interaction with, but largely independent from, the Chinese Communist guerrilla units. Having conducted a number of important military operations, in August 1945, the KPRA launched the "Final offensive to liberate the motherland" (*choguk haebang-ül wihan ch'oehu konggyŏk chakchŏn*). In about a week, Japan was defeated, the Japanese were driven out of Korea and jubilant Koreans embraced their liberator – the Great Leader Kim Il-sung.

This claim is, of course, a complete fabrication, as the "Korean People's Revolutionary Army" never existed, and the only army waging war against Japan in Korea was the Red Army of the Soviet Union.

The “KPRI” is never mentioned in any historical documents compiled before 1945, including, amongst them Kim Il-sung certificate of Order of the Red banner (*Nagradnoj list* 1945), which merely calls him “active participant in the partisan movement”. Diaries of Zhou Baozhong, a Chinese partisan leader who fought alongside Kim, also state that his good comrade Kim Il-sung was one of middle-ranking commanders of the partisan movement, led and directed by the Communist Party of China and do not mention anything about the “KPRI” (Zhou 1991). Furthermore, there is also the testimony of a former DPRK division commissar, who defected to China in 1969. While this man had been in the DPRK, he had talked to former members of the Kim Il-sung unit who directly stated that the “KPRI” never existed and this term was never used to address Kim Il-sung partisan units (Ryō 1991, 111-112).

However, the myth of the KPRI had become one of the foundations of the North Korean ideology and legitimacy of the rule of the Kim family, as its founding member, Kim Il-sung, is constantly hailed as a “national hero” for “liberating Korea” from the “wicked Japanese imperialists”.

In this article I intend to trace the origins and the history of the development of this falsification, and study how it influenced the relations of the DPRK with the Soviet Union as well as explaining how this myth has influenced the DPRK’s policy.

III. A Note on Sources

Since this article analyses the official North Korean propaganda discourse regarding a very important historical event it would be logical to use the DPRK’s key publications on history as sources for the article.

First, these are official histories. Such works, often consisting of many volumes, have been published multiple times and each publication reflected the contemporary state of the state ideology. The most important of these is “Complete History of Korea” – a 34-volume work published from 1979 to 1992 (*Chosŏn chŏnsa* 1979-1992). Furthermore, a shorter two-volume version also named “A Synoptic History of Korea” was published in 1987 (*Chosŏn t’ongsa* 1987).

Second, North Korea adopted the Soviet tradition of publishing books specifically devoted to the history of the Party (in case of the DPRK – the Workers’ Party of Korea, WPK), which serve as an important part of the official historical discourse. For the purpose of this research, I have used “Teaching Materials of the History of the Workers’ Party of Korea” (*Chosŏn Rodongdang ryŏksa kyojae* 1964), “A Concise

History of the Workers' Party of Korea" (*Chosŏn Rodongdang ryaksa* 1979) and "A History of the Workers' Party of Korea" (*Chosŏn Rodongdang ryŏksa* 1991).

Third, official biographies of Kim Il-sung are other important sources. "A Short Biography of Commander Kim Il-sung" came out in 1952 (*Kim Il-sŏng changgun-ŭi ryakchŏn* 1952). In 20 years, the DPRK published "A concise biography of the respected comrade Kim Il-sung" (*Kim Il-sŏng tongji ryakchŏn* 1972). In the 1992-1998, the DPRK published a series named "With the Century", which was officially presented as Kim's autobiography (Kim, 1992-1998). Furthermore, "A concise biography of the Great Leader respected comrade Kim Il-sung" was published in 2003 (*Widaehan suryŏng Kim Il-sŏng tongji ryakchŏn* 2003) and "A concise biography of the Great Leader respected comrade Kim Il-sung (extended edition)" was published in 2012 (*Widaehan suryŏng Kim Il-sŏng tongji ryakchŏn (chŭngbop'an)* 2012).

Fourth, there are general encyclopaedia published by the DPRK, including the "General encyclopaedia" of 1980s (*Paek kwa chŏnsŏ* 1982-1984), "Big Korean Encyclopaedia" (*Chosŏn taepaek kwa sajŏn* 1995-2001) and, finally, Kwangmyŏng Encyclopaedia (*Kwangmyŏng paek kwa sajŏn* 2007-2008). These encyclopaedias reflect the official view of history at the time.

Another type of source is the Korean Central Yearbook, published by the DPRK on a yearly basis. The author used the first volume in the series, published in 1949, as it was one of the most important documents relating to the official discourse in the pre-war DPRK.

Moreover, the author used Kim Il-sung's biography "The Great Guide of the Korean Nation" (*Chosŏn minjok-ui widaehan ryŏngdoja* 1965) published by the pro-North Korean General Association of Korean Residents in Japan (*Zai-Nihon Chōsenjin Sōrengōkai*, GAKRJ), since, as this article has shown, in the 1960s the DPRK used the Association as a testing ground for its propaganda: new doctrines were first introduced to GAKRJ's textbooks and in a few years – to the DPRK itself.

IV. Stage One: from "Anti-Japanese Partisan Unit" to the "KPRA"

The origins of the Kim Il-sung cult can be traced back to the beginning of the Soviet occupation, and ironically, the term "Korean People's Revolutionary Army" was initially coined by the Soviet authorities as part of their policy to glorify Kim Il-sung whose political rise they sponsored at the time.

The Soviet Union began the creation of the official version of history very soon

after the surrender of Japan. The new version was designed to, first and foremost, serve the USSR's political goals. Thus, the Soviet-Japanese war was presented as a war of liberation and the Soviet version of history glorified the USSR and vilified imperial Japan. It should also be stressed that since the people who created this new version of history were USSR-born Koreans, the Soviet version of history had no connection with the pre-1945 colonial Korea's historiography whatsoever.

Perhaps one of the most important aspects of this activity was the erection of the Liberation Monument in central Pyongyang in 1947. The monument had the following two inscriptions on it (both in Korean and in Russian) and was supposed to serve as a reminder of the "gratitude of the Korean people for the liberation by the Soviet Army":

The great Soviet people have smashed the Japanese imperialists and liberated the Korean people. The ties of friendship between the Korean and the Soviet people are further strengthened by blood spilled by Soviet soldiers in their liberation of the Korean people. This monument is erected as a token of gratitude of all the people. August 15, 1945

and

Eternal glory to the great Soviet Army, which liberated the Korean people from the yoke of Japanese imperialism and opened the way to freedom and independence! August 15, 1945

The major problem the Soviets faced was constructing a suitable biography of the person the USSR authorities had chosen to lead North Korea: Kim Il-sung. Kim's biography was largely an exaggeration of his anti-Japanese guerrilla warfare career, an exaggeration so gross that Pyotr Pak, the Soviet Korean who was instructed to oversee the process, chose to tender his resignation on ethical grounds to his commanding officer, General Romanenko (Smirnov 1992).

Nevertheless, Kim's biography was composed and it seems that the first time when its more or less complete version was published was in the first Korean Central Yearbook, the 1949 edition. Kim Il-sung was presented as the leader of the whole anti-Japanese resistance in Manchuria. The Battle of Poch'ŏnbo – Kim Il-sung's unit's raid on a guard post at the Japanese-Manchurian border – was presented as a major event of the Korean national resistance against the Japanese yoke. Finally, the book claimed that the Japanese called Kim's unit the "Korean People's Revolutionary Army" (*Chosŏn chungang nyŏn'gam* 1949). The name itself was likely copied from the armies

of pre-1945 Soviet satellite states: armies of Mongolia, Tuva and the Far Eastern Republic were called “People’s Revolutionary Armies”. This name was to become the crucial element of the myth surrounding Kim Il-sung.

V. Stage Two: the KPRA as the Red Army’s Assistant Force

The Soviet version of history remained official for about a few years, while the USSR was firmly in control of North Korea.

The situation began to change in 1952, as the DPRK was preparing to celebrate the 40th birthday of Kim Il-sung. In a book published to commemorate this event Kim’s army was mentioned as an assistance force of the Red Army (*Kim Il-sŏng changgun-ŭi ryakchŏn* 1952, 32):

On August 9, 1945, the great Army of the Soviet Union entered the war against Japan and started battling the Japanese imperialism. The commander’s attack teams were rapidly mobilised and, becoming a new unstoppable force, with the Soviet Army participated in battles to annihilate the mortal enemy of the Korean people – the Japanese imperialism.

This was one of the first manifestations of the new era, where Kim Il-sung cautiously and ultimately successfully became politically independent from the USSR. In the mid-1950s, he launched a campaign aimed at reducing the cultural and ultimately political influence of the Soviet Union in North Korea, as the DPRK stopped translating current Soviet literature, and some North Korean officials started to occasionally disobey Soviet instructions (Myers 2015, 34; Gabroussenko 2011, 275-302).

The first partial correction of the earlier KPRA myth was one of the first indicators of this campaign. Before that, the KPRA was portrayed as an important guerilla unit, which nevertheless had not taken part in the war with Japan in Korea in August 1945, a war carried out solely by the Red Army. In this new version of history, however, the KPRA was presented as actually assisting the Soviet Army in the war, to show that the “liberation of Korea” should not be attributed entirely to the Soviets. Thus Kim Il-sung, who was also to be credited for the restoration of Korea’s statehood, was given himself more legitimacy for more independent policy.

This claim, duly reflected in the contemporary DPRK documents, such as a high school textbook, published in 1955 (*Chosŏn ryŏksa. Kogŭp chung* 1955, 115, 117),

successfully survived the political turmoil North Korea faced in the mid-1950s. The series of events when following the de-Stalinization in the USSR a group of Party functionaries unsuccessfully tried to remove Kim Il-sung from power (Lankov 2007; Shimotomai 2006) did not affect the state of the KPRA myth.

Even until the 1960s the new discourse remained the same. In 1964, “Teaching Materials of the History of the Workers’ Party of Korea” reiterated this revised narrative (*Chosŏn Rodongdang ryŏksa kyojae* 1964, 111-112):

On August 9, 1945, the Soviet Union entered the war against Japan. The entry of the USSR had a decisive effect on speeding the defeat of Japan.

The People’s Revolutionary Army after completing all preparations, participated in the battle to completely destroy Japanese imperialism.

On August 15, 1945 Japanese imperialists finally announced their unconditional surrender and the Second World War had come to an end.

As one can see, an important part of the new version of the KPRA myth was that the “assistant role” of the KPRA was usually mentioned with merely one sentence, while the Red Army was still explicitly recognized as the main fighting force and no cult surrounding the “KPRA’s offensive” had been created yet. One may say that this intermediate version reflected the new, increasingly independent position of the DPRK within the communist camp. However, Kim Il-sung’s cult was still restricted and while this image of history was much more flattering for him, he still did not dare to claim the credit for Korea’s independence solely for himself. This was to change in a few years.

VI. Stage Three: the KPRA as the Liberator of Korea

The third version of the events of 1945 claimed that the KPRA was the main force that crushed Japan, while the Soviet Union played only a secondary, supporting role. Before being published in the DPRK proper, the new version had been propagated in Japan amongst the GAKRJ members as early as 1965 (*Chosŏn minjok-ui widaehan ryŏngdoja* 1965, 138). This choice looks somewhat counter-intuitive, as the GAKRJ’s members lived in Japan and thus were much more exposed to the outside information than the DPRK residents. However, these were the people who had made a conscious choice to support North Korea and since they had believed the propaganda before, Pyongyang could have assumed that they would continue to do so.

In the DPRK itself, it was not introduced for a few more years. On the twenty-first anniversary of Japan's announcement of surrender, i.e. on August 15, 1966, the country's main newspaper Rodong shinmun still stated that "we do not forget that the Soviet people and its great armed forces vanquished the Japanese imperialism and liberated our people" (*Ch'angjo-wa pönyöng-üi sümul han hae* 1966).

This was seemingly the last time the Soviets were called "liberators" in North Korea, as very soon after the country experienced a dramatic change. After the purge of disloyal elements at the Second Party Conference in 1966, the "monolithic ideological system of the Party" was proclaimed on the Fifteenth Plenum of the Fourth Central Committee in May 1967, and was further cemented by Kim Il-sung's speech "On the Immediate Tasks in the Directions of the Party's Propaganda Work" (also known as the "May 25th Instructions"). The introduction of this system resulted in intensification of internal surveillance and censorship, a dramatic increase in the intensity of the personality cult and the new version of history being introduced (Tertitskiy 2016). On August 15, 1967, Rodong shinmun claimed that Korean "anti-Japanese partisans" "crushed the Japanese imperialists" together with the Soviet army and thus "achieved a historical victory" back in 1945 (*T'ujaeng-gwa süngri-üi sümul tu hae* 1967). The Red Army was no longer presented even as the main fighting force.

The proclamation of the "monolithic ideological system" led to a massive library purge, officially called "arrangement of books" (*tosö chöngri saöp*) (*O.io kyosi-ga Pukhan sahoe-e mich'i-n yöngnyang* 2014); this campaign resulted in all old books contradicting the new historical viewpoint being removed from the public domain.

All the new publications, meanwhile, reiterated the new version of history. Among them one should mention Kim Il-sung's official biography published in 1972 (*Kim Il-söng tongji ryakchön* 1972, 289-291), "A Concise History of Korea" of 1987 (*Chosön t'ongsa* 1987, 275-279), the 1979 edition of the "Concise History of the Workers' Party of Korea" (*Chosön Rodongdang ryöksa* 1991, 144-148), "Complete History of Korea" (*Chosön chönsa 22* 1981, 118-133) and "General encyclopaedia" of 1983 (*Paekkwa chönsö 4* 1983, 600-601).

The story they told can be summarized in the following paragraph:

When fascist¹ Germany was finally defeated, the Great Leader's Korean People's Revolutionary Army got an opportunity to attack Japan. On August 9, 1945, the

1. The Nazis were usually somewhat incorrectly called "fascists" in the Soviet Union and the DPRK adopted the term.

Great Leader issued an order to all units of the KPRA to begin the Final Offensive to liberate the motherland. The Korean People's Revolutionary Army, coordinating its actions with the Soviets, who has also entered the war with Japan, conducted landings in Unggi, Rajin and Chongjin. They crushed the so-called "impregnable fortifications" erected by the enemy and very soon the Japanese imperialists announced their unconditional surrender. The Korean people, overwhelmed with joy, shouted: "Long live the Commander Kim Il-sung!" and "Long live the Korean People's Revolutionary Army!"

Perhaps the most interesting bit of all this is that Kim Il-sung "appropriated" the three landing operations of the Red Army, claiming that the landings in Unggi, Rajin and Chongjin were in fact were conducted by the KPRA. If we compare it to the per-1967 stage, we can see that the narrative was reversed: before that, it was the KPRA who was mentioned with only one sentence; now it was the Soviet Army.

VII. Stage Four: Kim Il-sung as the Mentor of the Red Army

The key event of the final stage was the publication of the eight-volume book "With the Century" in the 1990s. Signed by Kim Il-sung, this book was presented as his autobiography, covering the events before 1945. The book was translated into many languages, including English, but for accuracy's sake, the author used the Korean original, particularly, the eighth volume, which deals with the events of 1945. It should be noticed that this volume was published in 1998, i.e. four years after Kim Il-sung died (Kim 1998, 448-466).

The story the "memoirs" presented was arguably even further from the historical truth than the previous North Korean publications. "With the Century" claimed that Kim Il-sung was in Manchuria in 1940 and visited Khabarovsk "from time to time" before the attack on Japan had begun. According to the book, he met some of the top Soviet military commanders – including Marshals Aleksandr Vasilevskiy, Kirill Meretskov and Rodion Malinovskiy – and "befriended" the latter. Meretskov, the book claims, told Kim: "In a war against Japanese imperialists, Korean comrades are our seniors. The role of Korean comrades in military operations against Japanese is very important, we have high hopes for you".

This flattery was only the beginning. According to "With the Century", Kim Il-sung also visited Moscow and met Politburo member Andrei Zhdanov, who told Kim, among

other things that “Stalin had told him of a Korean partisan Kim Il-sung” and was delighted to hear from Kim that Koreans did not need any aid in national construction.

The story of the Final Offensive is described in a way which is similar, but not quite identical to previous publications. The book still claims that Kim Il-sung’s order on the Final Offensive was issued on August 9, but the further narrative became more detailed. According to the book, Kim Il-sung instructed the command of the Soviet First Far Eastern front on the tactics of war, and the KPRA not only liberated Korea, but also participated in the war against the Kwantung Army in Manchuria. “With the Century” names Jinchang, Dongning, Muling and Mudanjiang among the Manchurian cities “liberated by the KPRA”. Soviet soldiers were apparently overwhelmed with respect and told Kim that “Korean guerillas are the greatest”. The story of the Final Offensive ends with the following claim:

The liberation of our country was thus achieved by the Korean People’s Revolutionary Army, which made strong blows against the Japanese imperialists over 15 years and shook their very foundation, and by mobilizing all the population to the war of resistance. The Soviet operation managed to end so quickly only thanks to the long struggle of our army and our people (Kim 1998, 466).

This extremely self-aggrandizing story is, of course, completely false, since, as readers remember, Kim defected from Manchukuo in 1940, was accepted in the Red Army in 1942 and was serving in it as a captain and a battalion commander. Neither he, nor his battalion, participated in the war with Japan whatsoever.

Some readers may assume that since the last volume of the “memoirs” were published after Kim Il-sung’s death, the memoirs are probably a creation of Kim Jong-il, not Kim Il-sung. However, the first publication with a similar narrative was the Party history of 1991 (*Chosŏn Rodongdang ryŏksa* 1991, 156-159). It mentions the “Khabarovsk meeting”, where Kim Il-sung allegedly met with high-ranking Soviet officials, and this meeting, while being described in the memoirs, was not a part of the previous stage of the KPRA myth. Hence, we can surmise, that while the memoirs themselves were published under Kim Jong-il, at the very least their contents and basic narrative were authorised by Kim Il-sung.

From then on, the entire North Korean narrative of events of August 1945 was based on the narrative of “With the Century”. Both the 2003 (*Widaehan suryŏng Kim Il-sŏng tongji ryakchŏn* 2003, 239-241) and 2012 (*Widaehan suryŏng Kim Il-sŏng tongji ryakchŏn(chŭngbop’an)* 2012, 238-242) editions of Kim Il-sung’s biography duly

reflected this narrative, as did the “Big Korean Encyclopaedia” (*Chosŏn taepaekkwa sajŏn 19* 2000, 135-136) and Kwangmyŏng Encyclopaedia (*Kwangmyŏng paekkwa sajŏn 1* 2007, 494-496).

VIII. The Soviet Reaction

The KPRA myth did not merely glorify Kim Il-sung; it also indirectly attacked the Soviet Union, as the efforts of the Red Army in the war against Japan were recognised in the DPRK less and less.² The Soviets – largely unsuccessfully – tried to counteract the creation of the myth with their own publications.

After the deterioration of Soviet-North Korean relations in the 1950s and the DPRK openly supporting the People's Republic of China after the Sino-Soviet split in the early 1960s, the USSR quietly authorized a series of memories about the Soviet-Japanese war and the first years of North Korean history (Vanin 2004, 155-212). As the Soviet Union did not want to antagonize North Korea directly, no accusations of “distorting history” were made explicitly, however, the contents of memoirs, naturally, did not have any references to the KPRA (Uspenskiy 1964; *Vo imya druzhby s narodom Koreii. Vospominaniya i stat'i.* 1965).

In 1981 the USSR went as far as declassifying some of the historical documents related to the period and publishing them in a collection called “Relations of the Soviet Union and the People's Korea. 1945-1980” (*Ontosheniya Sovetskogo Soyuzsya s narodnoj Koreej. 1945-1980. Dokumenty i materialy* 1981). Among the documents were the proclamation of the commanding officer of the Soviet armed force in the Far East Marshal Vasilevskiy, reports on some of the battles in the Soviet-Japanese war and partially published orders by Stalin regarding the occupation policy in Korea. This publication, too, was aimed at attacking the DPRK's state history.

It should be noted that this campaign should not be viewed as a pure and unadulterated quest for historic truth: The Soviet Union merely advocated its own version of history, which, admittedly, was closer to the real one, but still quite different from what had really happened. The Soviet Union was still portrayed as a great liberator, North Korea – as a junior, but definitely a positive socialist state, with Imperial Japan, the United States after World War II and South Korea – as forces of almost pure

2. As for United States, Great Britain and Republic of China, North Korea ceased to recognize them as “liberators” after the beginning of the Cold War.

evil. Basically, this was just the old Soviet version of history, which had been taught in North Korea in 1940s, reiterated again – with some new documents and testimonies presented, but only as long as they could have been interpreted to support the state-sanctioned narrative.

This campaign had largely ended in failure, producing little noticeable effect on the North Korean presentation of events. However, the Soviet diplomats still managed to secure a major success: The Liberation Monument, which had been built by the Soviet Army, was preserved. It still stands in Pyongyang and the city's residents can come to it and read the statement about the Soviet army liberating Korea – a statement which sharply contradicts everything North Korea teaches from the late 1960s.

IX. The Underdevelopment of the Myth

Historical research is based on analysis of sources and a fake history would normally require falsified sources to substitute it. North Korea has produced a number of falsifications to substitute its historical claims. Collections of Kim Il-sung works published after 1967 include a number of speeches either heavily edited or completely falsified. Historical photographs are also heavily retouched, with Soviet officers, purged officials and even traditional Korean flag being removed from them (Tertitskiy 2016, 265-284).

However, very little has been produced to substitute the myth of the Final Offensive. As a matter of fact, the DPRK's efforts regarding this particular subject were limited to creating one document – an order which the DPRK claims Kim Il-sung gave on August 9, 1945.

The order was published in the first volume of the “Complete Works of Kim Il-sung” in 1995. It should be noted that that this volume, which contains works allegedly created by Kim Il-sung, was published after volumes 2-12 had already appeared in print. Judging by the fact that most of the contents of the first volume had never been published before, and that some, if not most of the documents in it, sharply contradict established historical facts (such as Kim Il-sung “giving orders” to guerrillas in 1943 (Kim 1995, 546-571), despite in reality being an officer of the Red Army at that time), one can surmise that the documents were falsified, so the delay in publication was caused by the need to prepare the fakes and have them approved by the DPRK's top leadership.

The order on the Final Offensive is the last “document” of the first volume. As it is quite short, the author decided to include its full translation in the present article

(Kim 1995, 572-573):

ORDER

On the commencement of the general offensive to liberate the motherland

August 9, 1945

Commanders and soldiers of all units of the Korean People's Revolutionary Army!

The moment our nation had awaited so dearly has arrived, the moment when we will fulfil the historical great deed of the restoration of the Motherland.

The Soviet Army has already crushed the fascist Germany and declared war to annihilate the Japanese aggressors. With the entry of the Soviet Union into the war, the political and military situation in the Far East changes fundamentally. A beneficial situation for own nation to complete the historical deed of the restoration of the Motherland is coming.

In this solemn and decisive time, I command the following to commanders of all units and all soldiers of the Korean People's Revolutionary Army.

First, all commanders and soldiers of the KPRA shall launch a final offensive to liberate the soil of the Motherland from Japanese imperialist aggressors.

All commanders and soldiers – be brave and loyal patriots in the fight against the Japanese army! The blood of our people spilt by the Japanese imperialist aggressors flows in the rivers of our ancient land. Crush them mercilessly with an iron fist; give them retribution so that not a single bastard survives!

Second, all small units and groups of the KPRA acting inside the country and members of revolutionary organizations shall assist the KPRA in their final offensive in organizing all the people for the anti-Japanese fight. Lead all workers, farmers and all the anti-Japanese fighters onwards on the path to victory, the path of brilliant exploits!

Third, small units of the KPRA and the people's militia who are fighting inside the country shall unify with the advancing KPRA, and shall boldly attack the enemy's rear. Small units of the KPRA and the people's militia, attack the enemy's army and objects of military purposes, paralyze their chain of command, and take the initiative from the bastards!

Fourth, political workers of the KPRA shall actively call their fighters to the holy war to eradicate the enemy, shall more vigorously conduct political agitation in the liberated areas. They shall call the people to create their own self-governing institutions, hinder the reactionaries' manoeuvres, and, as one man keep order and start working on the creation of the new social order.

Commanders and soldiers of the Korean People's Revolutionary Army!

Let us achieve a great success and commit great deeds in the holy war for the liberation of the Motherland!

I am sure that all the units and all the commanders and soldiers of the KPRA will crush

the abominable Japanese imperialistic regime and will gloriously finish the great historical deed of the liberation of the Motherland.

Victory will be ours. Onwards, for the final victory in the anti-Japanese war!

Apart from this “document”, however, no falsifications to support the myth of the Final Offensive have been made. There are no monuments to soldiers of the KPRA who “died” in the Final Offensive, no “records” on when a particular town or city was liberated by the KPRA and by which unit and finally, in addition, no real explanation why the Americans were allowed to occupy South Korea is provided. North Koreans are supposed to take the story for granted and all potential disbelief is suppressed by the secret police.

X. Conclusion: The Evolution of the KPRA Myth in the North Korean Ideology

The myth of the Korean People’s Revolutionary Army evolved through four stages, with each consecutive stage being further from the historical truth and more flattering to Kim Il-sung. The evolution of the cult was closely tied to major events of North Korean history and to a large extent was a manifestation of the political changes the country experienced and were directly linked to the political role and image of Kim Il-sung.

The Soviet Union’s policy of creating a “national hero” out of Kim resulted in the first step of the myth’s development, when the importance of Kim’s guerilla unit was purposely exaggerated and the term “KPRA” was created. The USSR needed the new leader of their client state to be a popular man – and thus he was presented as a far more important figure in the anti-Japanese movement than he actually was.

Kim Il-sung’s gradual escape from Soviet political control in the 1950s resulted in the second stage, when the KPRA began to be presented as the Soviet Army’s assistant. Yet, since the personality cult of Kim Il-sung had to be toned down at the time under the impact of Soviet de-Stalinization, this was mentioned only very briefly in the DPRK’s historical books.

The introduction of the “monolithic ideological system” in 1967 resulted in an overwhelming and omnipresent cult of Kim and a dramatic increase in the repressiveness of the political regime in North Korea. The KPRA myth was also radically altered,

as from then on North Korea stated that it was Kim Il-sung and his guerilla army who had defeated the Imperial Japan. This reflected the near godlike position his image occupied in the state propaganda.

The final stage was caused not by a political change but rather by a publication of a new ideological document: Kim Il-sung's alleged memoirs, which the state's historical narrative had to follow. This version was even more flattering to Kim; not only was the KPRA described as a "liberator of Korea", but the whole Soviet Army in the Far East was reduced to the position of merely junior partners of Kim, who had provided Soviet generals with wise instructions and deep insights.

Of course, all these developments were made due to absence of freedom of speech and expression in North Korea, as the state, being in direct control of all the media and publications, could have manipulated the historiography to serve its political goals. The first stage of the falsification was directed by the Soviets, who wielded the real power in the new-born country, but as the time went by, Kim Il-sung took over and used the same mechanism to further adjust the historical narrative to suit his political needs – establishment of an independent autocracy with himself as its central figure.

XI. Historiographical Implications.

This article's findings show that the presentation of history and construction of historical memory of the 1940s in North Korea was different during its history and the changes in in were motivated by political circumstances.

However, in many cases historians who studied the history of the 1940s have assumed that there is some merit to the official Pyongyang narrative of history and thus used Kim Il-sung's "memoirs" and other official DPRK publications on the subject as a historical source. Unfortunately, even the most thorough and deep works dedicated to the early history of North Korea occasionally felt victim to this tendency (Kim Kwang-un 2003, 50; Sö Tong-man 2005, 64).

While normally this would have been a legitimate approach, in this particular case – the DPRK's presentation of the myth of the KPRA and related events – it is unjustified, as North Korean publications on the subject are driven not by a quest for the historical truth, but by the ever changing political goals of the DPRK leadership.

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Received 10 December 2017

Received in revised form 11 February 2018

Accepted 2 May 2018