

## Arirang as the Cultural Code of the 21st Century North Korea\*

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### Abstract

*Arirang* of North Korea is a major performance of the country, known externally in the form of Mass Gymnastics and Artistic Performance. It is unprecedented for a large-scale performance, as North Korea's *Arirang*, to be staged regularly for several years. The performance started in 2002, as a celebration commemorating the 90th anniversary of the birth of Kim Il-Söng. When it was first being prepared, the title of the performance was *The Song of the First Sun*. It is quite significant that North Korea changed the name of the performance from *The Song of the First Sun*, which symbolizes Kim Il-Söng, to *Arirang*, which symbolizes the sentiments of the Korean people. It is unknown when the folksong 'Arirang' started to be sung, however, it is clearly a song that reflects the age-old sentiments of the Korean people. After the song was played when athletes of the two Koreas made their joint entrance during the Sydney Olympics in September 2000, it became symbolic of the Korean people together with the Peninsula Flag, and was used whenever there was a joint entrance of North and South athletes or joint cheering of the crowds. While there are many interpretations on the origins of Arirang, it is considered, in North Korea, to be a song with nationalistic sentiments and a sense of resistance of the people.

The Mass Gymnastics and Artistic Performance *Arirang* got its motif from the song 'Arirang', which symbolizes the hardships of the Korean people. However, *Arirang* suggests that North Koreans should not simply stop at expressing sorrowful sentiments of the folksong they must venture onto the road toward a Powerful Great Nation. The performance contains the message that, just as the

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Korean people had overcome hardships and suffering by singing the 'Arirang' together, the difficulties faced by the North Korean regime should also be surmounted through *Arirang*. At the time the performance Arirang was staged, there were many artistic works including popular songs, novels and poems being created with the theme of 'Powerful and Prosperous Revival', which the essence of *Arirang*. At the same time, the performance contains the discourses of 'Arirang People' and 'People of the Sun'. North Korea's full-fledged promotion of the concept of the 'Arirang People' deviates from its previous perspective of considering North Koreans and South Koreans to be the one ethnic group. In other words, it was the starting point of North Korea strengthening a discriminatory form of nationalism, moving away from its previous perspective that the people of both Koreas constituted a single ethnic group. The two Koreas were considered to be of the same ethnicity before, but now, North Korea is trying to articulate, through *Arirang*, its idea that 'South Korean society has become multi-ethnic and lost its ethnic purity, so ethnic purity lies with the North Korean people (the Kim Il-Söng people)'.

**Keywords:** North Korea, mass gymnastics, Kim Jöng-Il, Arirang, Korean ethno-centricity

## 1. Introduction

This paper aims to analyze the politico-cultural code of Arirang by looking at the series of *Arirang*-related works that were produced in North Korea since 2000. *Arirang* is known as a mass gymnastics and artistic performance, first staged in 2002, and participated by around 100,000 people. After the first performance in 2002, the Mass Gymnastics and Artistic Performance *Arirang* (hereafter *Arirang*) was staged several times and became the most representative performance format of North Korea.<sup>1)</sup> The contents changed a little over the years, however, the overall structure continued to follow the original 2002 *Arirang*.

The staging of such a performance regularly for several consecutive years is, in itself, truly unprecedented, particularly when its sheer size is taken into account. It would not have been so surprising if the scale was smaller. There have been cases in the past, in North Korea, where mass games were held several times across one or two years, but never for several years. In terms of the number of people

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1) *Arirang* is a performance that premiered on 29th April 2002. The official label of its genre is Mass Gymnastics and Artistic Performance and the number of performers amounted to 100,000. Not only is the *Arirang* the biggest performance ever held in North Korea, it also holds a Guinness record for being the largest performance.

involved and the nature of the performance, the *Arirang* is a completely different type of work compared to the smaller satirical or revolutionary plays staged in ordinary theaters. Just the fact that this kind of mass performance was held annually for several years, in itself, is quite significant.

What is the reason North Korea held a performance as large as the *Arirang* regularly every year? Was it to show the world its unyielding power within the regime? Or was it merely a way of earning foreign currency by drawing in tourists, nothing more? In fact, the performance was too costly and far too large for it to simply be a performance staged for the sake of tourists or display of power. One could perhaps guess that it aimed to maintain control within the regime through this mass games. What then was the intended effect of trying to keep control? Was there no other aspect aside from the political aim of displaying its undying power? These questions are the starting point of this research.

In the process of preparing for the 2002 *Arirang*, the title was changed from 'The Song of the First Sun', which intended to commemorate the 90th anniversary of the birth of the late Supreme Leader Kim Il-Sŏng (hereunder Kim Il-Sŏng), to *Arirang*.<sup>2)</sup> It is quite significant that North Korea changed the name of the performance from 'The Song of the First Sun', which symbolizes Kim Il-Sŏng and congratulates the overcoming of the Arduous March and the 90th anniversary of the birth of Supreme Leader, by recruiting 100,000 performers, to 'Arirang', which symbolizes the sentiments of the Korean people. As can be seen from the fact that the title of the Mass Gymnastics and Artistic Performance in the year 2000 was *Hundred Battles and Hundred Victories of the Korean Worker's Party*, there have never been any mass games whose title included the word 'Arirang' - a word that symbolizes Korean national identity. In this regard, the title of Mass Gymnastics and Artistic Performance *Arirang*, in and of itself, has a special meaning.

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2) The 2002 *Arirang* originally was not prepared under that title. During the initial preparation of the 2002 performance, the title was The Song of the First Sun, to celebrate the 90th birthday of Kim Il-Sŏng (April 15). The title *Arirang* was given under direct orders from Kim Jŏng-Il, Chairman of the National Defense Commission. It was very unusual for a North Korean mass games to have a title that includes a word with national characteristics as is the case with *Arirang*. This change was confirmed through the testimony of Lee Chŏl-Wu, a merited artist, Vice-Director of Pyŏngyang's Yun I-Sang Music Institute and the performance planner of General Association of Korean Residents In Japan (Yonhap News 2001).

In fact, in North Korea, it would have been impossible for a title, *The Song of the First Sun*, which symbolizes the Supreme Leader, to be changed to *Arirang* if there was no special meaning to the change. Considering North Korean sentiments, it is unconvincing that 'Sun' was changed to 'Arirang' merely based on nationalistic sentiments. The change was possible because there was consensus within the North Korean society in regard to the sentiment and symbolism of *Arirang*. North Korea's first mass gymnastics and artistic performance is considered to be *Pride of Chosŏn*, performed in November 1930. Later, the *Song of Liberation*, staged in August 1955, started to use the Paekyŏngdae (a mass-scale card stunt forming a background to the performance), and with the 1961 *The Era of the Workers Party*, performances began to be divided into acts and scenes as they are today. A total of 84 performances were held since 1945 until the *Arirang* performance in 2002, to mark important commemorative celebrations of the state. The titles of all performances had words such as 'Party', 'Supreme Leader' and 'Workers Party' but never words like 'Arirang'.<sup>3)</sup>

Furthermore, the fact that the Mass Gymnastics and Artistic Performance *Arirang* continued to be performed, since its first staging in 2002, until even after 2010, albeit minor revisions to parts of the content, itself is quite significant. Of course, it is often the case that the same performance is staged several times. However, this can only happen in the case of completed works. This particular mass gymnastics and artistic performance continues under the same title, with some changes in the content. This is indeed unprecedented for a performance the scale of *Arirang*, especially for a mass gymnastics and artistic performance. A mass gymnastics and artistic performance is a genre that is performed on meaningful national holidays or in a particular historically significant year. The fact that there have not been any major changes to the performance until now since the premiere in 2002 manifests that it has significance beyond commemorating a certain event (xth anniversary of the founding of Party, for example). It is also meaningful that, unlike other performances that targeted the North Korean population, *Arirang* is being promoted externally as a tourism product. Along with the attempt to earn

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3) There are many notable research on *Arirang* of North Korea. (Park 2007a; Park 2007b; Park 2007d; Kim Yeon-Gab 2002; Jeon 2010; Jeon 2002)

an income, North Korea is trying to embed the concept of 'Arirang' as referring to North Korea itself.

What is interesting is that, along side the Mass Gymnastics and Artistic Performance *Arirang*, various songs, novels and other type of works by ordinary North Koreans titled 'Arirang' are being created and enjoyed through the media. 'Arirang', through these processes, was becoming a cultural code representing 21st century North Korea. At the same time, phrases such as 'Military First (Sŏnkun) Arirang' and 'Arirang People (minjok)' were beginning to become natural phenomena inside North Korean society.

What is certain is that North Korea's *Arirang* is being interpreted and performed within the context of contemporary North Korean society. This is the particular point this paper will focus on, highlighting what the series of *Arirang*-related works produced in North Korea since 2000 mean and what ends the concept of 'Arirang People', related to *Arirang*, serves. The various versions of Arirang in North Korea, which have been interpreted in the modern way, reflect the sentiments of North and South Koreans that have, in fact, diverged widely due to the long period of the division of the Peninsula. At the same time, however, they also allow us to gauge the possibilities of cultural integration in the future. In this regard, I believe this article can contribute to forming a basis upon which to diagnose present day Korean sentiments and to searching for a culture of unification.

## 2. The Sentiments of 'Arirang' and the Mass Gymnastics and Artistic Performance *Arirang*

### a) Sentiments of the Folksong 'Arirang'

The Mass Gymnastics and Artistic Performance *Arirang* is a work modeled on the folksong 'Arirang'.<sup>4)</sup> It is unknown when this folksong started to be sung,

4) "The Mass Gymnastics and Artistic Performance *Arirang*, to be Premiered During Spring 2002", *Korean Central News Agency*, 7th November 2001. "This work is based on Korea's famous folksong 'Arirang'. Among various folksongs that are orally passed on through generations and shared widely, there are many

however, it is clearly a song that reflects the age-old sentiments of the Korean people. The original refrain had probably changed over the years and different refrains and words developed in different regions. As a result, 'Arirang' has become a song that exists in various forms in all places where there are Koreans, whether it be the North of the Korean Peninsula, the South or overseas.<sup>5)</sup> Although it is not known through what route Arirang started to be sung, the sentiment behind it has become one that is shared by all Koreans, after having been dispersed to all regions, different versions developed according to the various circumstances faced by people in all walks of life, and revised several times.

The folksong known most widely is the 'New Folksong (Sinminyo) Arirang'. New Folksongs are songs that were based on the folksongs created and widely sung during the period between the late 1920's until just before liberation. The New Folksong Arirang is considered to express the love between a man and a woman as well as reflect the frustration and sorrow of the general populace.<sup>6)</sup>

In North Korea, New Folksongs were considered to express the beautiful nature of the fatherland and simple everyday emotions, through a soft tune that resonated with the Korean people. Although it was loved by the general public, it was unable to explicitly express political ideologies and anti-Japanese feelings due to oppressive Japanese colonialism. It nonetheless played a definitely role in raising the sense of nationalism and anti-Japanese sentiments.<sup>7)</sup> In other words, although

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that follow the 'Arirang' melody, filled with tears, laughter and happiness. The mass gymnastics and artistic performance presently being created also follows the theme of 'Arirang' and will mesmerizingly express the destined history and present day social circumstances of our people, through a work that is commensurate to an epic poem (Korean Central News Agency 2001)."

- 5) 'Arirang' can be divided into the widely known folksong 'Arirang' (Boncho Arirang) and other variations with another word or name in front of 'Arirang', whose chorus consists of 'arirang' or 'arari'. However, there are also other versions with varying lyrics and melodies from different eras and regions. The wide distribution of 'Arirang' has led to many different interpretations on the origins of the song. *Arirangsŏl*, *Ainongsŏl* and *Arangchŏnsŏl* are some of the stories that are considered to tell the origins of the song.
- 6) "Arirang songs, while basically expressing the love between a man and a woman, also reflect the various everyday emotions of the people living in the relevant era. In other words, among the various versions of the folksong, the New Arirang focuses on the gloominess of our people who were experiencing colonial rule by imperialist Japan while the Long Arirang contains the sad and anguish of the people who had to travel long distances in order to find ways to survive (Kwahak paekgwa sachŏn ch'ulpansa, ed. 1993a, 154)."
- 7) "Songs that were based on folksongs created and widely sung during the period between late 1920's until before liberation. Before liberation, many songs criticizing Japan's colonial rule and the society of that time, and expressing deep sorrow of losing one's country were composed in Korea. Among these songs, there were many that followed the clear, light, soft and merry melodies typical to Korean traditional folksongs,

'Arirang' was unable to overtly express nationalistic feeling due to oppression of Japanese imperialism, it indirectly brought out the feelings of the Korean people, thereby stimulating nationalist anti-Japanese sentiments. The song 'Arirang' is positively viewed in North Korea as expressing nationalistic emotions and the hardships of the Korean people - the suffering, sorrow and the anguish of being colonized, and yearning and longing for a happier life.<sup>8)</sup>

In fact, the folksong 'Arirang' came to symbolize the tragedy of the Korean people largely due to the influence of the movie *Arirang*. The 1926 movie *Arirang*, written, directed and produced by Ch'unsa Nah Un-Kyu, recorded a huge hit, and the song 'Arirang', the main theme music of the movie, became widely popular among the general public.<sup>9)</sup> The song 'Arirang' soon became a song symbolizing the tragedy of the Korean people, a song representing the Korean people.

On both sides of the Korean Peninsula, 'Arirang' has become a song of the Korean people rather than of a particular state. During the Sydney Olympics in September 2000, the song was played when athletes of the two Koreas made their joint entrance. Together with the Peninsula Flag, the song became symbolic of the Korean people, and was used whenever there was a joint entrance of North and South athletes or joint cheering of the crowds. Although, in North Korea, there are various theories on the origin of 'Arirang', it has come to be known as a song containing the sentiments and resistance of the Korean people.

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and these were referred to as New Folksongs. 'The Nodöl Riverside' is an example of a New Folksong. The New Folksongs were loved by the people because it portrayed, through soft typically Korean melodies, the beautiful nature of our fatherland and simple everyday emotions. Due to circumstance of the times, limited perspective of the songwriters and harsh oppression from the Japanese colonists, the New Folksongs were unable to explicitly express ideology and proactive anti-Japanese sentiments. However, they reflected the emotional lamentation Koreans had about the deprivation of rights and the decadent society, and thus were able to play a certain role in raising nationalist awareness and anti-Japanese feelings. In particular, the New Folksongs were based on the melodies of our traditional folksongs and therefore contributed to the development of Korean national music (Kwahak paekgwǎ sachön ch'ulpansa, ed. 1993b)."

- 8) "Arirang has [...] numerous variations, however, the underlying story is consistent - almost in all cases, love forms the basis, and the love and resentment for the one who had left and hope for the future are also common elements. From the surface, the song may seem like a simple love song, however, in essence, it contains the Korean people's suffering, sorrow and the anguish of being colonized, and yearning and longing for a happier life (Eom 1992, 191)."
- 9) "The movie 'Arirang' used the folksong Arirang as background music during its last scene. In this scene, Yöng-Chin, who is charged with murder of his sister's rapist, is arrested by the police, and the song Arirang is sung as villagers sadly watch the police take him across the Arirang Hill. Yöng-Chin, who is mentally ill, was returning to his home village after being forced to quit attending a private university due to his inability to pay tuition, when he witnesses Oh Ki-Ho trying to rape his sister. He stabs Oh Ki-Ho to death, at which his mental sickness is cured. However, he is caught by the police (Jeon 2002, 137)."

## b) The Theme of Mass Gymnastics and Artistic Performance *Arirang*

The Mass Gymnastics and Artistic Performance *Arirang* took its motif from the song 'Arirang', symbolizing the suffering of the Korean people.<sup>10)</sup> In its 8th May 2002 editorial, "A Strong Clarion Call of the Arirang People", the *Chosŏn Sinbo* affirmed, "The performance *Arirang* is a work that has the strongest nationalistic characteristics compared to any other mass games that were held in Korea in the past (*Chosŏn Sinbo* 2002)."

"Nationalistic characteristics" refer to nationalistic sentiments. However, the Mass Gymnastics and Artistic Performance *Arirang* goes much beyond expressing the sorrowful emotions of the folksong 'Arirang', to calling upon North Koreans to venture onto the road leading to a powerful and prosperous revival. The year 2002, when the mass games *Arirang* was being created, was characterized as a period of hardship of the Korean people. Just as the Korean people had overcome the difficulties and suffering by singing 'Arirang' together, the hardships faced by the North Korean regime should also be overcome through the performance *Arirang*. This is the message of the performance.<sup>11)</sup>

The Mass Gymnastics and Artistic Performance *Arirang*, which premiered in 2002, continued to be staged with slight revisions to the contents. In 2002, the *Arirang* performance consisted of an Introduction, a Prologue, Act 1 Arirang People, Act 2 Military First Arirang, Act 3 Arirang Rainbow, Act 4 Arirang of Unification and then the Epilogue. Under Act 1 Arirang People, there were four

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10) "Our Dear General, despite being heavily engaged as the Military First Revolutionary Leader, on 4th September of the 90th Year of Juch'e (2001), he looked into the concrete issues arising in relation to the production of the Mass Gymnastics and Artistic Performance and suggested ways to excellently complete the work and make it into a masterpiece of the new century. On this day, Dear General, with deep wisdom and extraordinary insight, taught us that the folksong 'Arirang', much enjoyed by our people, should be used as the main theme of the work and that the title should also be changed to Arirang. The folksong 'Arirang', as well as other famous pieces of music composed during the era of the Workers Party, should be inserted into the performance to create a masterpiece that is perfect in terms of ideology and art (Paek 2009)."

11) The Standing Committee of the Supreme People's Council of North Korea, on 12th June 2002, issued a decree awarding the Mass Gymnastics and Artistic Performance *Arirang* the Kim Il-Sŏng Prize, saying, "It made into a masterpiece, through a great epic story, the long history of struggles and achievements of the Party and the people." It thus "gave the people a sense of pride and honor." It explained that the performance "powerfully manifested to the entire world the force of one mind and unity of the revolutionary ranks." (*Yonhap News* 2002a)



scenes - Across the Tuman River, Star of Korea, My Fatherland and Our Arms.

“Star of Korea” came from a poem by Kim Hyök of the same title.<sup>12)</sup> Act 2 Military First Arirang, Act 3 Arirang Rainbow and Act 4 Arirang of Unification refer to the period after 2000 in North Korea, which is the 'Military First Era', and how this style of Kim Jung-Il's politics had brought about 'happiness of the people'. The Epilogue Arirang of Powerful and Prosperous Revival aims to exhibit the Military First politics as leading to a powerful and prosperous revival of the nation. Building a strong great nation has been the future emphasized by North Korea since 2000. Based on such symbolism, Act 1 Arirang People can be interpreted as containing the 'Idea of the Chosen People (Sönminsasang)' according to which the difficulties encountered by the North Korean people were overcome through the anti-Japan revolution of Kim Il-Söng. In short, *Arirang* can be seen as painting the future of the Korean people.

Although the performance was staged several times, the contents did not change very much. Upon comparing performances held in 2002 and 2005, it is possible to see that one act was completely eliminated, and the only newly inserted part was Act 3 Scene 1. The overall structure of the work remained almost the same.

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12) 'Star of Korea' is a poem by Kim Hyök and is known to be North Korea's first revolutionary hymn and the first literary work idolizing the Great Leader. The poem articulates the way the Great Leader should be revered and holds an absolute position within North Korean literature and arts. According to Yun Ki-Dök (1991, 242-244), “The revolutionary movie *Star of Korea* has, as its philosophical and ideological core, the issue of revolutionary perspective on the Great Leader and the revolutionary comradeship that comes out of it. The issues of the revolutionary perspective on the Great Leader and revolutionary comradeship have deep philosophical implications because they are related to the essence of the communist movement as well as to the fate of the working class revolution and the fate of the working populations. [...] The fact that the revolutionary movie *Star of Korea* contains such philosophical core is significant in the sense that it powerfully manifests the essence of the revolutionary history made by the Dear Leader's activities during the early periods of the revolution and its great socio-political implications. It also reaffirms the eminence of the Great Leader on a high ideological artistic dimension.”

**<Table 1>** Comparison of Act and Scene Composition of *Arirang* (Park 2007c, 5)

2002 Arirang	2005 Arirang	Note
Introduction Prologue: Arirang	Introduction Prologue: Arirang	
Act 1: Arirang People Scene 1: Across the Tuman River Scene 2: Star of Korea Scene 3: My fatherland Scene 4: Our arms	Act 1: Arirang People Scene 1: Across the Tuman River Scene 2: Star of Korea Scene 3: My fatherland Scene 4: Our arms	
Act 2: Military First Arirang Scene 1: Oh, bright moon of our Fatherland Scene 2: Smile widely Scene 3: Drum beats of our country A: Creation of a new world B: My flourishing country C: Even higher, even faster Scene 4: Army of the People	Act 2: Military First Arirang Scene 1: Oh, bright moon of our homeland Scene 2: Smile widely Scene 3: Creation of a new world Scene 4: My flourishing country Scene 5: Even higher, even faster Scene 6: Army of the People	Slight change to the scenes
Act 3: Arirang Rainbow Scene 1: Isönnam Waterfalls Scene 2: Paradise of happiness Scene 3: One heart	Act 3: Arirang of happiness Scene 1: Wullim Waterfalls Scene 2: Song of paradise Scene 3: One heart	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Title of the Act changed</li> <li>• Contents of Scene 1 completely changed</li> <li>• Title of Scene 2 changed</li> </ul>
Act 4: Arirang of Unification	Act 4: Arirang of Unification	
Epilogue: Arirang of Powerful and Prosperous Revival	Epilogue: Arirang of Powerful and Prosperous Revival	

Whereas the 2002 *Arirang* portrayed the beautiful scenery of the Isönnam Waterfalls of Mt.Myohyang, the 2005 version changed the scene entirely, to Wullim Waterfalls, located in Pöbtong-kun in Gangwon Province, known as one of the Eight Scenic Wonders of North Korea. However, this switch does not at all affect the overall storyline of *Arirang*, which basically paints the history of North Korea of the 20th century. In fact, just as the performance *Hundred Battles and Hundred*

*Victories of the Korean Workers Party* used to contain a scene about Mt. Myohyang's Great Ryongmun Caves, this particular part can continuously change depending on the performance (Park 2007c, 5). Upon comparing the structure of the 2002 and the 2005 versions of the *Arirang* performance, one can see that the overall flow, as well as the various elements such as the songs, dances, gymnastics, acrobatics, the Paekyongdae art, videos and the narratives did not change. The later performances also continued to maintain the same overall structure.

The underlying idea or code behind the unchanged Acts of Arirang People, Military First Arirang, Arirang of Unification and the Epilogue Arirang of Powerful and Prosperous Revival can be encapsulated as 'Let us, the Arirang People, attain a powerful and prosperous revival through Military First'. In short, the performance *Arirang*, while highlighting the hardships of North Korea as symbolized by the folksong 'Arirang', seeks to instill the sense of duty that the Arirang of tears must now be transformed into an Arirang of unification and hope. It is a work showing the future of North Korea as a powerful great nation, by equating its external crisis with the crisis the Korean people faced and by promoting nationalistic sentiments that all difficulties can be overcome.

Alongside the Mass Gymnastics and Artistic Performance *Arirang*, various other artistic works with the theme of 'powerful and prosperous revival', which is also the core of *Arirang*, were written at the time. Popular songs with the theme of Arirang were written, and the Mansu Arts Company also produced the 'multi-series, sequential, large-scale Korean painting' also titled 'Arirang'. According to news reports, the Mansu Arts Company's large-scale Korean painting, 'Arirang', has two themes - 'Arirang of Good Leadership Fortune' and 'Military First Arirang'. Under the former, there are Korean paintings titled 'Arirang of Blood and Tears', 'Arirang of the Liberated People' and 'Arirang of the People of the Sun'. The latter includes works such as 'Arirang of Victorious War' (*Yonhap News* 2002b). Furthermore, many novels depicted the origins of 'Arirang' around this time, and magazines such as *Children's Literature* and *Youth Literature* held public writing contests and published lyrics and poems on the theme of Arirang.

### 3. The Essence of *Arirang* and Its Modernization

#### a) Popular music 'Arirang of Unification' and 'Arirang of Powerful and Prosperous Revival'

It is possible to verify through various channels that there were indeed attempts to transform and spread the symbolism of *Arirang*, from one that was of the history of hardship to one of powerful and prosperous revival. Poems and novels about the Mass Gymnastic and Artistic Performance *Arirang* were written, and many popular music with the word 'Arirang' included in the title were composed and widely sung.<sup>13)</sup> These popular songs are about unification and powerful and prosperous revival. Major examples would be 'Arirang to Celebrate Unification' and 'Arirang of Powerful and Prosperous Revival'. These two songs, symbolizing unification and powerful and prosperous revival, have been repeatedly broadcasted and reported by the media and are broadly enjoyed.

##### 1) Popular music 'Arirang of Unification'

The popular song 'Arirang of Unification' (lyrics by Pak Du-Chŏn, music by Kim Un-Ryong) is a work described as “inspiringly showing the will and the hopes of the Korean people yearning for unification, which is the ultimate task endowed upon the Korean people, as well as the fiery determination and will of the 70 million Koreans who desperately want the fatherland to be unified.” It is also evaluated to be a work “that articulates the folksong-like melody befitting to the sentimental significance of 'Arirang', the representative Korean folksong, and thereby all the more highlights the feelings of the Korean people (Roh 2009).” Lyrics of 'Arirang of Unification' is as follows.

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13) Even before 2000, 'Arirang' was sung in various forms. Based on the New Folksong version of 'Arirang', it was arranged into a symphony, another type of folksong, electronic music or instrumental music. Among more modernized versions of 'Arirang' are examples such as the Symphony Arirang, played by the North Korea National Symphony Orchestra, the folksong repertoire of Li Kyŏng-Suk and the Poch'ŏnpo Electronic Music Ensemble - a version described as 'Korean-style electronic instrumental music of unique characteristics' and many others. These works are based on and arrangements of the folksong 'Arirang' and were a part of the attempts to musically diversity it.

1st Verse: Separated for a long time, arirang arirang  
 The agony of a half century hit my heart, hit my heart  
 Refrain: Arirang arirang arirang of unification  
 3,000 ri of my country, 3,000 ri of my country  
 Arirang of unification

2nd Verse: Cannot bear this any longer, arirang arirang  
 Break down the barrier and let's become one, become one  
 (Refrain)

3rd Verse: All people hand in hand, arirang arirang  
 Let's bring on a new day of self-reliance  
 (Refrain)

This song was introduced through broadcasting and newspapers since 2000 amid a social atmosphere emphasizing unification.

Another popular song with the theme of unification, and which is based on folkmusic, is 'Unification Tontollari', announced in 2001. 'Unification Tontollari' uses the rhythm of the folksong 'Tontollari', with the lyrics changed to "I see in front of me the day of unification dawning, lighting up this land / All people of the country, unite, break down the barrier and embrace unification"

## 2) Popular music 'Arirang of Powerful and Prosperous Revival'

The tune of the popular song 'Arirang of Powerful and Prosperous Revival' was composed by Yun Du-Kŭn, a composer affiliated to the Korean People's Army Song and Dance Ensemble and the lyrics written by An Chŏng-Ho, a member of the Poch'ŏnpo Electronic Music Ensemble. The lyrics are as follows.

1st Verse: Flowers of utopia bloom. How joyful, arirang  
 Build utopia with our own power. How wonderful, arirang  
 Refrain: Under the General's guidance, a self-reliant powerful nation flaps her wings

Ari ari a-ri-rang sŭri sŭri sŭ-ri-rang  
Powerful and prosperous revival a-ri-rang

2nd Verse: United as one, we have nothing to fear, Arirang  
We are strong, we will withstand, Arirang  
(Refrain)

3rd Verse: The Korea of the Sun becomes stronger, its dignity higher, arirang  
The People of the Sun is thriving, living better, arirang  
(Refrain)

The 'Arirang of Powerful and Prosperous Revival' has been acclaimed as a song that instills faith and optimism about the idea of the 'powerful and prosperous revival' into the people, “a song ... of the Korean people that tells the entire world the great pride, endless joy and optimism of the Kim Il-Sŏng Korea and Kim Il-Sŏng People” , “a new Arirang created during the period of the Great Kim Jong-II - song of a victorious war waged by heroic people, who, under the wise guidance of the Dear General, successfully and sternly overcame the Arduous March through perseverance and determination” . It was also proactively promoted through the media.

The *Rodong Sinmun*, in its 26th August 2001 article titled “Arirang of Powerful and Prosperous Revival' is a Masterpiece in the Era of the General and a Monumental Work for National Pride” commented, “The song 'Arirang of Powerful and Prosperous Revival' by the Poch'ŏnpo Electronic Music Ensemble tells the entire world the great pride, endless joy and optimism of the Kim Il-Sŏng Korea and Kim Il-Sŏng People.” It also mentioned that it is “a new 'Arirang' created during the period of the Great Kim Jong-II - song of a victorious war waged by heroic people, who, under the wise guidance of the Dear General, successfully and sternly overcame the Arduous March through perseverance and determination.” It went on to say that this version of the 'Arirang' “transforms the Korean 'Arirang' of the past, which was sung in tears, into an 'Arirang' of happiness, under the wise guidance and generous love of the Great Leader.” “This song is an 'Arirang'

of ever-lasting victory of the Kim Il-Sŏng People, who march forward bravely and strongly toward the bright future, with great ambitions and ideals in their hearts.”

“The song revives the structure and tunes of traditional Korean folksongs but at the same time has become a new masterpiece version of our age-old traditional music 'Arirang'. It has been created to fit the ideological sentiments and emotional tastes of the people of our times (*Rodong Sinmun* 2001).”

There were also other accolades about the 'Arirang of Powerful and Prosperous Revival' - that it is a work “that sowed the philosophical and romantic seeds of the idea that it is truly joyful to see our nation powerfully and prosperously revive during our era, the era of Kim Jong-Il, and the seeds have blossomed ideologically and artistically (*Korean Arts* 2001).” It is “a song praising and encouraging the struggles to build a powerful great nation for our army and our people. It is a song of victory (Li 2002).”

### 3) Popular music (song and dance music) 'Arirang Echoing from Kansam Peak'

The 'Arirang Echoing from Kansam Peak' is a popular song that was written by the Poch'ŏnpo Electronic Music Ensemble and is about Kim Chŏng-Suk. 'Arirang Echoing from Kansam Peak' has been acclaimed as “resonating deeply with our military and our people, as a musical work of uniqueness created during the Military First Era (Kim, Kwang-Mun 2007).” The lyrics of the popular song 'Arirang Echoing from Kansam Peak' is as follows.

1st Verse: The revolutionary army which has lit a flame in Poch'ŏnpo shows high vigor  
At the battlefield of Kansam Peak, the song rings out loudly  
Arirang, sung first by the women partisan warriors  
At every peak, along every ridge, it rings out like a thunder

Refrain: Arirang arirang  
Rain of fire falls on Kansam Peak, leading to arari

2nd Verse: Arirang sung silently in Toch'ŏnri  
Rings out loudly like an echo at the battlefield

Hitting every target, throwing thunderbolts of fire  
The women partisan warriors protect the military headquarters

(Refrain)

3rd Verse: Lightnings strike in the sky, guns flash in the battlefield  
At the arirang of women warriors, the Japanese die out  
Blood flows far and wide, and all Japanese  
Will be completely defeated and our country will be liberated

(Refrain)

The 'Arirang Echoing from Kansam Peak' received the accolade, "The 'Arirang Echoing from Kansam Peak', a popular song created and performed by the Poch'ŏnpo Electronic Music Ensemble, is a masterpiece of this new era, portraying the legendary women warriors of Mt.Paekdu, whose names the Japanese imperialists all shudder at, and the revolutionary life of our mother who sacrificed everything for the sake of the fatherland, the Korean people and the revolution (Kim, Kwang-Mun 2007)." In particular, it was praised as a major work that articulated the sense of sacrifice of the Military First Era, through the figure of Kim Chŏng-Suk.<sup>14)</sup>

In light of the fact that the popular music 'Arirang Echoing from Kansam Peak' was first introduced in 2007, it seems that it was also created in that year. In the beginning, it was introduced as a 'popular music (kayo)' but after a few months, it came to be known as a 'song and dance music'.<sup>15)</sup> This change was not due to an error but due to the fact the development of a new genre, 'song and dance music', had to be emphasized. 'Song and dance music' was adopted as a new format where songs were not only sung but also danced to.<sup>16)</sup>

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14) "The Arirang our mothers sang that day, resonating throughout the entire world, was one of new history of the Arirang People, who are rising up under the Military First ideology. This is the fierce breath of the Military First Era through which the people's hopes are realized and the continuing victory of Arirang echoes back from every single peak of Mt. Paekdu. Indeed, the song 'Arirang Echoing From Kansam Peak' philosophically articulates well the fact that the great history of the Mt.Paekdu generals is a history of the revival of the Arirang People and a history of victory." (Kim, Kwang-Mun 2007)

15) Whereas the article written by Kim Kwang-Mun (2007) referred to the song as popular music, Sin Hyo-Kyŏng (2007) called it a 'song and dance music'.

16) "Among the different types of past musical and artistic works, there was no such genre as a song and



## b) Works of Literature

### 1) Children's Poems

It is possible to verify through many channels that North Korea attempted to transform and spread the image of 'Arirang' as one depicting the tragic history of the Korean people to one of unification and powerful and prosperous revival. As I have pointed out in this paper, novels were written with titles containing 'Arirang', and many children's poems, poem collections and various Arirang lyrics written by the public and selected through contests were published in magazines such as *Children's Literature* and *Ch'ŏnrima*.

Works related to 'Arirang', introduced by *Children's Literature*, include a children's poem by Kim Hak-Kŭn, "The Curtains of Arirang Do Not Come Down", published in Volume 10 of 2005, series of co-written poems by the title of "Big Strides by a Unification Baby" ("Did You Know", "Don't Forget", "Come Back" and "Big Strides by a Unification Baby") published in Volume 6 of 2006, the lyrical epic poem "Scenes of 'Arirang'" by Sŏng Yŏn-Il, published in Volume 9 of 2006, and the collection of children's poems with the title "Sing the 'Arirang'" ("Holding the 'Arirang' Invitation High", "'Arirang' Hill", "Bundle of Azaleas", "Who Should I Side With" and "Promise That Day", published in Volume 6 of 2007, and others.

"The Curtains of Arirang Do Not Come Down", a children's poem by Kim Hak-Kŭn, is about the Mass Gymnastics and Artistic Performance *Arirang*, and was written after watching the October staging of the performance. "Bright night in October / Sea of laughter haha hoho / At the May 1st Stadium / The curtains of 'Arirang' went up / Lost our country, lost our homes / Those were the days we were always chased / Those were the days that were so dangerous / The

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dance music. There was only dance music, which was instrumental music for mass dances. Such instrumental dance music was not played for the sake of singing, but basically for dancing. However, the Song and Dance Music 'Arirang Echoing from Kansam Peak', as can be seen from its title, is music that can be sung as well as danced to. In this regard, it is completely different from the dance music created in the past. Song and Dance Music 'Arirang Echoing from Kansam Peak' is a new type of music that has further developed the dance music of the past to fit the demands and trends of today." (Sin 2007)

'Arirang' Hill of bloody tears / [...] / Let's be proud, comrade / It's the night of the great festival endowed upon us by the General / Laughter becomes louder / The curtains of Arirang do not come down” are the words of the poem. It basically means that the 'Arirang' Hill of bloody tears has become a world of flowers during the Military First Era led by the General in the footsteps of the Great Leader.

“Big Strides by a Unification Baby” (Munhakesul ch'ulpana, ed. 2006) is a series of poems about a South Korean woman, who had visited the North, giving birth to a child. The series is composed of “Did You Know” , “Don't Forget” , “Come Back” and “Big Strides by a Unification Baby” . A part of the poem is as follows. “Over the wall of the Demarkation Line / Where your mommy and daddy live is not the only hometown / [...] / The blossoms of flowers in the North, the South and overseas / Pyöngyang calls on them to hold hands and come / That's right, even if you go back home / Wherever you are in this world, don't forget / That your home, you lucky unification baby / is Pyöngyang, the place of the Military First Sun (Don't Forget)”

“Scenes of *Arirang*” by Söng Yön-II (2006) is a lyrical epic poem (epic poem in terms of format, lyrical poem in terms of tone) based on the stories of children who participated in the performance. It is in the form of the story about a child called Söng-Ok from Ranam, who gets to participate in the *Arirang* performance.

“Among them all / there is the girl from Ranam called Söng-Ok / Her page-boy hair flies in the air / In the heart of Söng-Ok / There rises, like a fountain / All sort of stories...” are some of the opening words.

The contents of each part are as follows: (1) “Upon coming to Pyöngyang with his sister / Söng-Nam is placed in the acrobatic gymnastics part” . One day, he goes to his sister Söng-Ok crying and tells her that people are worried. The siblings have to play a part considered a 'comprehensive technique', and Söng-Nam had come across people who had skeptically said, “Can you really manageö” Upon hearing this, Söng-Ok and her friends go to their teacher, determined, and say, “We will definitely give enjoyment to the General.” (2) Söng-Ok carries an egg in her pocket to give to her teacher, who is hoarse from shouting orders through the megaphone during training. Afraid that the egg will break inside her pocket, she carefully walks toward her teacher, but then, trips and falls. The egg breaks,

and the teacher helps her up and comforts her. (3) Sŏng-Nam, who should be focusing on his training, is nowhere to be seen, so Sŏng-Ok goes out to look for him. Upon hearing that Sŏng-Nam had gone to the recording studio, she gets angry and goes to fetch him. “He may be young / but how can he be so immature and play.” Sŏng-Ok had thought that her brother was watching a movie, but opening the door of the studio, she finds him watching “only the scenes / of world famous acrobatic gymnasts.” Sŏng-Nam was watching the motions of famous gymnasts in order to improve his skills. (4) The General comes to the stadium and praises the performers, at which there is a salute of the guns in the stadium. “'Arirang' satiates this land filled with vengeance / That was chained and writhing / The People of 'Arirang' roaming around to find ways to survive / After having left their homes and their fatherland / Sing aloud the 'Arirang' / Look, people of the world / In the cloudless sky you see above you / There, today's 'Arirang' of happiness will rise.”

“Sing the 'Arirang'” (Munhakyoesul ch'ulpansa, ed. 2007) is a collection of poems for children consisting of “Holding the *Arirang* Invitation High” , “'Arirang' Hill” , “Bundle of Azaleas” , “Who Should I Side With” and “Promise That Day” . “Holding the *Arirang* Invitation High” is a poem calling on people to come and see the *Arirang* performance, whether it be on a ship, a train or an airplane, holding the invitation card in their hands. “'Arirang' Hill” is about a child, listening to the sad story of the 'Arirang' Hill told by his grandmother, of the hill being one of tears, and thinks, “If it weren't for the Great Leader / My sister / Would have become a lass of tears / On the 'Arirang' hill of farewell” . “Bundle of Azaleas” is about seeing azaleas in the morning and thinking, “Like mother, I too / Want to give / A bundle of azaleas / to the Father General / Who has come back from the frontier / With all of my heart / With all of world's heart” . “Who Should I Side With” is about watching the various scenes of the *Arirang* performance and thinking which scene is the best, who should one side with. “Promise That Day” is about watching a *Arirang* scene consisting of skipping rope and hoping, “Flower ropes that are fun / Holding hands with comrades from the South / Same mind, same footstep / I want to jump together” .

## 2) Novels

*Arirang* (short story) by Kim Won-Chong, *Arirang* (novella) by Pak Chong-Ch'öl, *Praise of Pyöngyang Arirang* (collection of short stories) are some examples of contemporary literature with 'Arirang' as the title. Kim Won-Chong's *Arirang* is a short story in the *Collection of Short Stories Arirang*, edited by Kim Su-Pong (1989). The novella *Arirang* by Pak Chong-Ch'öl was published by Literature and Arts General Publishers in 2001. It is about Söng-Bu and Rirang, whose story is considered to be the main legend behind Arirang in North Korea. *Praise of Pyöngyang Arirang* is the title of a collection of 3 short stories - *Unification Arirang* by Chang Su-Bong, *Something Lost and Something Earned* by Kim Süng-Ki and *Taking Parents On Vacation* by Hyön Myöng-Su - which are included in *Collection of Short Stories Starting Point* (2007). The book also introduces other essays and stories related to Arirang.

### c) Literature and Artistic Works Created by Ordinary Citizens

*Youth Literature*, which is the only popular magazine in North Korea, published many lyrics under the title of 'Arirang', selected through writing contests for ordinary citizens. *Youth Literature* Volume 9 of 2006 published "*Lyrics 'Arirang of Happiness Overflowing in Our Home'*" written by Kim Ch'un-Suk (47 Namchöng-ku, Suan-kun, Hwanghaepuk Province), Volume 5 of 2009 "*Lyrics 'Taehongtan Arirang'*" by Li Chöng-Hi (26 Könkuk 2-dong, Hangukuyök, Nampo City, Pyöng'annam Province), and Volume 11 of 2009 "*The Aim of Youths is Becoming a Hero of Teens and Those in Their 20's! Lyrics 'Waterfall of Coal Arirang'*" by Kim Hyön-A (Ryongsüng Middle School, Kuchang-kun, Pyöng'anbuk Province).

"*Lyrics 'Arirang of Happiness Overflowing in Our Home'*" written by Kim Ch'un-Suk (47 Namchöng-ku, Suan-kun, Hwanghaebuk Province), published in *Youth Literature* Volume 9 of 2006, was chosen among works submitted by ordinary citizens and is about 'our home filled with happiness'. The words are lyrics to the refrain 'Arirang arirang arirang of happiness'.

“Lyrics ‘Taehongtan Arirang’” by Li Chǒng-Hi (26 Kǒnkuk 2-dong, Hangkukuyǒk, Nampo City, Pyǒng’annam Province), also an ordinary citizen, was published in *Youth Literature* Volume 5 of 2009. It is about the Taehongtan Agricultural Cooperative - “Taehongtan was a place considered uninhabitable and abandoned by people a long time ago” but “The Great Leader made it into a new place.” Such lyrics have been created to fit the Arirang refrain. “The wide fields of Taehongtan, created by the Great Leader” had “Become a paradise, through the General” . It talks of happiness - “Taehongtan becomes better as time goes by” and “The paradise of the people, this is where I live” .

“Lyrics ‘Waterfall of Coal Arirang’” by Kim Hyǒn-A (Ryongsǔng Middle School, Kuchang-kun, Pyǒng’anbuk Province) published in *Youth Literature* Volume 11 of 2009, also has a subtitle “The Aim of Youths is Becoming a Hero of Teens and Those in Their 20’s!” The writer, upon seeing the coal pour onto a conveyor belt like a waterfall, thinks of the Arirang of a great and powerful nation. The lyrics are composed of 3 verses, with a repeating refrain “Arirang arirang sŭrirang sŭrirang, a waterfall of coal, Arirang”

Though not a work written by an ordinary citizen, the short story “The Voice I Want to Hear” by Pyǒn Ch’ang-Ryul, published in *Chosǒn Literature*, Volume 7 of 2006, also includes a newly created lyrics to the song ‘Arirang’.

Ari ari rang sŭri sŭri rang

My collective's farm is my own farm

Hundreds of things to do on the farm, which I will do diligently

Our collective, our livelihood, it's all blossoming

After busy singing and dancing, weeding the paddies, and repetitive bending and straightening her body, Sin Ch’ang-Ok’s face became very sweaty (Pyǒn 2006, 56).

In the novel, this ‘Arirang’ is sung by a group of farmers belonging to an agricultural cooperative and enjoying their labor.

#### 4. Nationalistic Discourse of 'Arirang'

The codes of Military First, unification and powerful and prosperous revival that constitute the core of *Arirang*, have spread in diverse new formats including the 'Arirang of Unification' and 'Arirang of Powerful and Prosperous Revival'. Such dissemination was a part of the attempts to build a common awareness about Arirang, and various works were introduced through magazines and the media such as *Korean Arts*, *Rodong Sinmun*, *Children's Literature*, and *Ch'ŏnrima*, in the form of essays and reviews of relevant works. Such attempts went beyond merely reporting on *Arirang* - they aimed to spread the sentiments of *Arirang* through the media and magazines, in the form of children's poems, poetry collections and poems submitted by ordinary citizens.

At the center of the dissemination of 'Arirang' lies the concept of the 'Korean people (minjok)'. In North Korea, *Arirang* refers to the People of Arirang and acts as a mechanism to legitimize the hopes and prospects toward unification and a powerful and prosperous revival. The attempt to overcome the crisis faced by the North Korean regime by promoting nationalistic sentiments and culture has become a characteristic feature of the country after Korean ethno-centricity was strengthened. Since the mid-1980's, North Korea has been strengthening its 'Kim Il-Sŏng Nationalism', which combines the legitimacies of national culture and of the lineage of the Kim Il-Sŏng family. The fact that concepts such as 'Kim Il-Sŏng People', 'Sun of the Korean People', 'Language of the Kim Il-Sŏng People' became widespread since 1990's symbolizes that the revolutionary culture and arts of the North Korean leader Kim Il-Sŏng had started to be incorporated into the sphere of Korean national culture, in order to legitimize the family lineage on top of the legitimacy of the Korean people.

After the death of Kim Il-Sŏng, the adoption of the Juch'e calendar, designation of the Day of the Sun, erection of Kim Il-Sŏng Towers of Eternal Life and the introduction of the International Kim Il-Sŏng Awards became examples of the attempts to put more spotlight on Kim Il-Sŏng and to articulate the equation 'Kim Il-Sŏng = Korean people'. On 28th July 1997, the North Korean Academy of Social Sciences hosted an event, "Academic Symposium on Linguistics", during which

the language used in North Korea was labelled as 'national language of the Kim Il-Sŏng People' and participants resolved to strengthen education on language etiquette. These moves were based on the Idea of the Chosen People (Sŏnminsasang), whose core is the supremacy of the 'Kim Il-Sŏng People (People of the Sun)'.

The concept of 'Arirang People', which is the title of Act 1 in Mass Gymnastics and Artistic Performance *Arirang*, has become a general phrase used in the media and in everyday life, as revealed by the *Chosŏn Sinbo* editorial, "A Strong Clarion Call of the Arirang People" (8th May, 2002).

A song only the People of the Sun possess. Indeed, the 'Arirang of Powerful and Prosperous Revival' is the Arirang of the People of the Sun. We will make the world shake by singing the 'Arirang of Powerful and Prosperous Revival' with national pride that raises up high the name of the General, the sun of humanity (Cho, Myŏng-Kwan<sup>17</sup>) 2001).

Korea's joy and style are the best in the world. Under the good fortune of being guided by the Great Leader and of living in good times, Arirang has captured the excitement and style of the **People of the Sun**, born anew from the sadness and remorse of the past few hundred years, and this gives great endless joy to the people (Cho, Chŏng-Rim<sup>18</sup>) 2001).

At the same time, the dignity of the **People of the Sun** is directly being sung. The sentiments of the popular music, which proceeds without any fine expressions or rhetoric, express the reality of our fatherland as it is - fatherland led by our Dear General (Korean Arts 2001).

The first and the second verses of the lyrics show today's reality in which we have our arms in front of us to build a powerful great nation, and the third verse is like a great painting of colors expressing the hopeful and bright future of our

17) Chakangto Farming Accountancy Committee Vice-Chairman.

18) Conductor of the Mansu Arts Company.

fatherland, which is spreading to the entire world the dignity and the honor of the **Korea of the Sun** and the **People of the Sun** (Li 2002).

**Korea of the Sun** becomes stronger and its dignity higher, arirang  
**People of the Sun** becomes more prosperous and is living well, arirang  
- From the popular song 'Arirang of Powerful and Prosperous Revival'

Korean people of today are not yesterday's '**Arirang People**'. The most prominent leader, the most magnificent ideology, the most powerful military, and the most superior system have made our people become the most powerful People of the Sun. Indeed, the **Arirang People of today are the People of the Sun** (*Rodong Sinmun* 2002).

Why then are the **Korean people referred to as the 'Arirang People'**? In all places inhabited by Koreans, there is 'Arirang', and all Koreans are familiar with it. [...] Like in the past, today's 'Arirang' songs are loved and enjoyed by the people. Koreans, whether in the North or the South or overseas, sing 'Arirang' on top of their voice to proudly show that they are Korean. Thus, in international sports events, 'Arirang' was the anthem of the North and South Korean joint team and is played as the opening to various unification-related events. Indeed, in this day and age, 'Arirang' has become representative of Korea and the main popular song symbolizing the Korean people (Pak 2005).

Arirang's melody, which used to be tainted with the national remorse of having been deprived of our own nation, became, through the legendary generals of Mt Paekdu, a loud heralding sound echoing through the entire nation, awakening the people and making the invaders from the islands shiver. The Arirang that was sung by the women partisan warriors was the song of a new history, breaking away from the Arirang that had been filled with tragedy and sadness. It was one of unrelenting determination to win back our lost nation and make the **Arirang People** rise. The Arirang our mothers sang that day, resonating throughout the entire world, was one of new history of the Arirang People, who are rising up under the Military First



ideology. This is the fierce breath of the Military First Era through which the people's hopes of the century are realized and is the continuing victory of Arirang echoing back from every single peak of Mt. Paekdu (Kim, Kwang-Mun 2007).

The signal fire of 'Arirang' that lights the world is the conviction and volition of the Great General's torch and the flame of wide ambition and optimism that lets the world know the dignity of Kim Il-Sŏng Korea and Kim Il-Sŏng People. It brings the zenith of the great and powerful nation to this land. Though an hour and a half in everyday life is such a short period of time, the Arirang People's 100-year history has unfolded within it! Through graceful musical dances and vigorous group gymnastics, extra-large screens, the Paekyŏngdae, luxurious electric lights and laser lighting, a rapturous art mystery is unveiled massively in three dimensions (Kwon 2008).

This year, which marks the year of transformations taking place in the form of great innovations and great progress in all fronts of building a powerful great nation, the Mass Gymnastics and Artistic Performance *Arirang* will be staged, with all its magnificence, in the elegant and graceful Rŭng'rado Mayday Stadium. *Arirang* will show the imperishable achievements of the Dear General leading the great renaissance of the Juch'e culture and arts of the Military First Era, and will once again demonstrate most clearly to the world the dignity and the splendor of the People of the Sun (Paek 2009).

This kind of discussion on Arirang shows that concepts expressing the legitimacy and the purity of the Korean people such as 'Arirang People' and 'People of the Sun' are more developed forms of the Korean ethno-centricity. 'Kim Il-Sŏng People' emerged during the 1990's as a way of responding to the fall of socialism. It was an attempt to emphasize the ethnic difference among peoples. However, with power being inherited for the third generation, there was a need for a new type of nationalism based on bloodline. The second succession was justifiable in the sense the son was a living legacy of the Juch'e Ideology but the third succession had to be justified in terms of purity of blood. If more emphasis is put on bloodline,

then a new form of nationalism identifying the entire North Korea as Kim Il-Sŏng People (Arirang People) can very well emerge. Such possibility is evident in the discourse on 'People of the Sun' or 'Arirang People' in relation to 'Arirang'.

The emergence of the so-called Arirang People (or Kim Il-Sŏng People) is, in fact, moving away from the existing perspective that saw people of both the South and the North to be the same ethnic group. It is comparable to viewing North Korea as whole of Korea. By emphasizing the purity of the Kim Il-Sŏng People, North Korea, in the medium-term, is seeking to gain an advantageous footing in the inter-Korean debate about Korean ethnicity, and in the long-run, to use it as a defense during discussions on national integration.

It seems that North Korea is trying to strengthen a discriminatory form of nationalism, moving away from its previous perspective that the people of both Koreas constituted a single ethnic group. In other words, the two Koreas were considered to be of the same ethnicity before, but now, North Korea can argue that South Korean society has become multi-ethnic and lost its ethnic purity. Therefore only North Koreans (Kim Il-Sŏng People) maintain purity. Such kind of argument, until now, was not very convincing and many had objected to the emphasis on a differentiated ethnic group. However, one cannot now rule out the possibility that, in response to South Korea's shift to a multicultural society, North Korea is propagating the idea of 'Arirang People' in order to gain superiority in terms of ethnicity and blood, and start a discourse on a new ethnic group.

## 5. Conclusion

National culture becomes more widely significant only when it, by going through many changes, integrates with contemporary mentality, rather than by simply depending on the succession of national cultural heritage. For example, if *Ch'unhyangchŏn* had stopped at just one version of Ch'unhyang, then it would not have been able to correspond to the concurrent times, nor would it have been able to be passed onto today's generation as a cultural asset. The reason why 'Arirang' is still being sung as a song that represents the entire Korean people, as a part

of the national cultural heritage, is because there have been various different works of creativity using the motif of Arirang, that sought to correspond to today's era. The diverse attempts to modernize 'Arirang' in the North can also be understood as thus.

North Korea needs a symbolic set of codes to overcome the crisis within its regime and to show off its power to the outside world. By using the code of 'Arirang', which used to symbolize the tragic history of the Korean people under Japanese colonialism, it is trying switch its systemic crisis into an issue of ethnicity and suffering of the people rather than a political crisis faced by the regime. The North's performance *Arirang* has become a festival that epitomizes its cultural achievements. Furthermore, Arirang is not just an artistic performance in the North - it has become a part of the discourse on mentality of the current times.

It could be understood as a cultural discourse of the Military First theory, combining the Military First politics and nationalism after 2000. In order to spread the idea of the Military First Era as a cultural discourse, in addition to a political discourse, North Korea is trying to look for its theory of Military First politics from within national tradition. Such trend can be verified by the fact that the North is also trying to combine the militarism from Kokuryu? period with its Military First politics to theoretically legitimize the latter, or by the fact that it is arguing its idea of a powerful great nation originated from the theory of the National Prosperity and Military Power of the Realist School of Confucianism. The move to converge Military First politics and nationalism can be interpreted as a strategy to turn Military First into an ideology of ethnicity, by emphasizing that nationalism is not a product of modernity but something that is innate within a certain ethnic group.

Furthermore, concepts like 'Arirang People' and 'Kim Il-Sŏng People' that emerged during the process of highlighting national sentiment can be seen as attempts to gain ethnic superiority. North Korea underwent a power succession for the third time and at the same time tried to legitimize its ethnic superiority by stressing the idea of 'Kim Il-Sŏng People'. North Korea has continuously emphasized ethnic homogeneity but if unstable political circumstances persist, then it is expected that it will strengthen its ideology of its ethnic superiority.

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