

Harrison Cheehyung Kim, *Heroes and Toilers: Work as Life in Postwar North Korea, 1953–1961* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).
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North Korea has often been presented as a dogmatic state that sustains its regime through acts of human rights violations against its citizens and continued development of its nuclear weapons capabilities. This portrayal may lead some to wonder whether North Korea has always existed as a stubborn and incomprehensible state. However, this book, *Heroes and Toilers: Work as Life in Postwar North Korea, 1953–1961* shows that North Korea had a lot in common with capitalist countries like South Korea, especially by focusing on how the process of industrial work helped to rebuild the nation after the Korean War. The author argues that industrialism is a crucial concept in helping to understand North Korea, especially in terms of how the state has managed people in everyday life through work. This book is written by an outstanding historian, Cheehyung Harrison Kim, currently an associate professor in the Department of History at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. His specialties are North Korea, socialism, labor, industrialism, everyday life, and transnationality.

This ambitious book is composed of five chapters in addition to the introduction and conclusion, and the author proposes four main theses (pp. 4–7). The first point is that the state of North Korea pursued unity and progress through work after the Korean War. I would say that this book itself is valuable in that it sheds light on the postwar period of North Korea, a period between 1953 and 1961 before the era of Juche, which has not received much attention. Kim's book deals with the period when Kim Il-sung and his faction just started to come to power, and it seems to fill the empty space of knowledge regarding the situation of North Korea before the Juche ideology was established and implemented all over the country. The author's interest is on how the concept of work and the need for industrialization in the postwar North Korea had been implemented in the people's daily lives, and how it motivated ordinary people to rebuild the country after the war.

The second point of this book is that the ideological traits of work—everydayness and repetition—played a crucial role for the state to increase productivity and to manage people at work as well as at home. To support this argument, the author

explores the theoretical meaning of work that had been constructed in North Korea. In chapter one, he illustrates and then compares Karl Marx's theory and Vladimir Lenin's philosophy relating to the idea of work. This chapter is very helpful even to readers who do not have background knowledge of Marx and Lenin, as Kim explains them both at an introductory level and in detail. According to the author, the concept of socialist work in North Korea was formulated and developed based on the philosophy of Lenin, who defines work as a happiness practiced through liberation from the work itself (pp. 40–43). To put it differently, the work had meaning to North Korean workers as “a sacred duty for all individuals who possessed the capacity to work” (p. 42). Under this logic, it became possible for the state to demand sacrifice from the population through the format of working.

After examining the theoretical understanding of the meaning of socialist work in North Korea, the author explores how this idea of work was practiced in the factory in the next chapter. After the war, the factory became a place where the Korean Workers' Party put its efforts to increase industrial efficiency and to educate people ideologically and politically. That is, the socialist factory where a one-person management system was practiced is “more than a production unit: it was also a site of political interaction” (p. 52). Through mass movement, such as the Chollima Movement that began in 1959 from all parts of the factory, and the party-dominated management system, the state aimed to increase production and to teach people abstract ideologies like patriotism, a sense of belonging, and responsibilities as a member of the collective (p. 45). This was practiced for the purpose of increasing production and systematically controlling people.

Meanwhile, Kim shows that the North Korean state's endeavors to manage people extended into their living environments, discussed in chapter three. Relying on Henri Lefèbvre's idea of the critique of everyday life, the author shows how hegemony penetrated people's mundane life. The features of working itself, such as everydayness and repetitive work, is a crucial channel through which the state's power spreads over the society and the totality between work and life is practiced all over the country. To the reader, this

reveals that before the establishment of Juche ideology, Kim Il-sung's faction had already established hegemony "through the integration of work and everyday life" (p. 99).

At this point, the reader may ask the question: "Did the people of North Korea have no choice but to be completely dominated by the state?" Kim responds that the citizens of North Korea did not react to the state's central plan in the way it was originally expected. This is the third main point of this book. The chapter four deals with this incomplete nature of state hegemony. As Kim explains in detail in chapters four and five, there were ordinary people like Ko Tuman and Ri Insik, considered labor heroes, who internalized the concept of work as honorable and sacred and fulfilled the state's plan by sacrificing their body in dangerous working environments. However, not all North Koreans emulated these labor heroes, but rather they responded to it dialectically and diversely. Kim acknowledges that the individual's agency cannot be completely separated from the ideology of the state (p. 6). Despite that, the author also points out that the people practiced their subjectivity not just by blindly following the state's ideology but by making a decision on how to react to the state's plan in daily life. There were workers who had chosen not to follow the state's plan and to be less obliging, which the author expresses as "resistive." That is, Kim Il-sung faction's continuous attempt to control people by totalizing their everyday life did not produce the expected results because of resistance from the society (p. 122). By analyzing several North Korean writings and the vinalon factory as a representative example in chapter five, the author illustrates the dialectical relationship between state control and individual agency.

I have found that Kim's work offers enlightening and important perspectives on North Korea as he dismantles people's strongly held prejudices towards the country. It is true that North Korea has been overly simplified (p. 42) as Kim notes in the book. The North Korean people have been portrayed as thoroughly brainwashed by the state, having lost the ability to make up their own minds. However, the historical resources Kim provides regarding the individuals' subjectivity show that such conventional thought is simply

not true, and the historical reality is more complex than previously understood. Historical evidence in this book tells us that the North Korean state's dominance and individuals' agency were actively intertwined.

Personally, I think that the effectiveness and uniqueness of this book come from the last main thesis: "North Korea's postwar industrialization, while expanding the authority of the state and nation, was a process of further integration with capitalism" (p. 7). In this book, it is said that capitalism and socialism are closely connected through the concept of industrialism. As explained above, the author explores various historical events, especially those used to educate people ideologically in the process of socialist production and to increase industrial efficacy to rebuild the country. What I want to emphasize here is that the author defines two such features of socialist production, not only applicable to North Korea, but also to the universal aspects of industrialism itself (p. 44). Regardless of the political format of the country, whether it be capitalism or socialism, as long as countries pursue modernity, industrialism is necessary. It is very intriguing to me that Kim posits North Korea's postwar industrialism within the universal framework of capitalism (p. 68). The common goal of capitalist and socialist countries is to appropriate surplus values and accumulate capital. The only difference between them is the mediating agent: private firms in capitalism versus the state in socialism.

I would say that this approach is original and astonishing in that it demonstrates to the readers that North Korea would have had a lot in common with other countries, if only they experienced industrialism within modern history. The author's argument is persuasive but not credible. As I followed Kim's thesis about the contextualization of North Korea in capitalism, I began to appreciate the connection between two different political and economic systems that seemed to have no common ground before. North Korea is just another example of an industrialized country where it was natural for the state to exert heavy dominance on people's work and daily life to increase productivity. In other words, the features of the North Korean socialist factory—the labor hero's strong faith to overcome a risky environment

for work, and the state's attempts to control people through work—are traits of industrialism and modernity that have spread all over the world. In this context, Kim's critique of postwar North Korea can be construed as that of industrialism and modernity themselves (pp. 169–170).

Overall, this book offers well-established and convincing analyses and arguments. One improvement that would have more convincingly supported the author's thesis is the examples of capitalist countries that demonstrate the close relationship between capitalism and socialism in terms of industrialism. For example, the human resources office in market-based countries such as the United States, South Korea, and Japan, is used as an example equivalent to the Korean Workers' Party in the factory (p. 59). Promoting a sense of belonging in the group, emphasizing responsibility and work efficiency, and raising morale of the population are what the party and human resources departments do to increase production in North Korea and in corporations. Furthermore, Kim illustrates South Korea's capitalist conglomerates as an analogical example to the Kim Il-sung regime (p. 14). The hereditary succession of Kim Il-sung's regime corresponds to the trend of family members inheriting leadership positions in South Korean companies. The author also argues that advertising campaigns in market-based countries are similar to the use of propaganda in North Korea.

At first glance, these instances seem to be reasonable to some extent. However, although I enjoyed reading this book, I could not help but question the adequacy of the comparisons between the postwar North Korean regime and current South Korean capitalist conglomerates. I would say that if he provided a contemporary example of a capitalist country during the postwar period, the argument would be much stronger. Kim instead uses abstract and broad descriptions of capitalist corporations as an equivalent comparison to North Korea without offering specific and historical examples. A more detailed analysis of the exact historical examples of capitalist countries would increase the validity of Kim's argument. That is, I would say including the case of postwar South Korean industrialism or the process of industrialization in South Korea would be much more appropriate to verify the

close resemblance between capitalism and socialism.

To conclude, Kim's book is essential to someone who has an interest in subjects like postwar North Korea, the relationship between individual agency and state power, the meaning of work in socialist countries, industrialism in socialist countries, and the dynamic relationship between capitalism and socialism. It not only offers a history of postwar North Korea, but also offers to the readers the features and critiques of industrialism in modern history at a global level. After reading this book, a few questions came to my mind that I would want to pursue. Then, what is the distinctiveness of postwar North Korean industrialism? After the establishment of the Juche ideology, how has the continuous process of industrialism in North Korea changed? Or, was it similar to that of the postwar period? Then, can we still say that the North Korea of today is analogous with the capitalist South Korea in terms of industrialism? Kim's book offers a deep potential for North Korea to be understood from multiple perspectives.