

# The importance of the Confucian values during the Kim Jong Il's system.

A comparison with the Kim Il Sung's system

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# 1. An overview of the Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism in the Historical Korea

❖ Confucianism was introduced to Koguryo (고구려) in the fourth century by China. **Confucianism is a Chinese ethical and philosophical system developed from the teachings of the Chinese philosopher Confucius. The core of Confucianism is humanism, the belief that human beings are teachable and that a considered society can reach the harmony in a peaceful way.** Confucianism focuses on the cultivation of virtue and maintenance of ethics. **Confucianism is dealing with the concepts of hierarchy, cult of the elders, isolation,...**

❖ The Neo-Confucianism is a branch of Confucianism. Neo-Confucianism defines social relations not in terms of satisfaction of the individuals involved, but in terms of the harmonious integration of individuals into a collective whole which present the harmony of the natural order. **The doctrine emphasized hierarchy in human relations.**

❖ The North Korean society is often described as being Confucian or Neo-Confucian. It seems that **this system has borrows a lot from the ideology known as “Legalism”** which was adopted by the Wei State of the first Chinese emperor. **Legalism define more precisely the role of the ruler.**

## 2. Aspects of Confucianism during the Kim Il Sung's era

- ❖ At the beginning of the existence of North Korea, the regime's **first** reforms promulgated by Kim Il Sung was processed through land reform which aims at **destroying the colonial institutions (North Korea was less communist than South Korea and more open to world trends).**
- ❖ The North Korean constitution eliminated all traces of feudalism and focused on the party and **Suryŏng** (the leader) while being in revolutionary service to the socialist state. **Despite the initiatives of the domestic policy mentioned before, the ancestral Confucian cultural system centered on patriarchy was maintained in North Korea.** Fundamental Confucian system (the subordination of women and the notion of filial piety in patriarchy) thus conflicting with the ideal logic of state reform.
- ❖ Traditional Korea, in other words, was a 'Family-State' that equated loyalty to the king (patriotism) with filial piety. **Kim Jong Il made therefore the cult of Kim Il Sung the most extreme in the world. In the early 1970's, he created and organized the "4.15 Creation Group" named after Kim Il Sung's April 15 birthday which created classics believed to be written directly by Kim Il Sung.** For Kim Il Sung's seventieth birthday, Kim Jong Il managed the construction of the Kim Il Sung stadium. **Kim Jong Il wanted in this way to demonstrated that his filial piety was greater than the one of the population.**

### 3. Aspects of Confucianism during the Kim Jong Il's era (1/2)

❖ From the late 1960's, at the time when Kim Jong Il emerged at the head of the Organization and Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the Korean Workers Party, the state-dominated discourse about Confucian culture entered into active political discourse.

❖ For the first time "Ŏbŏi" (아버이/Father or even Parents) discourse emerged and was linked to full-scale ideological legitimization of the stable socialist family-state.

❖ Starting in the 1970's (when Kim Jong Il started to work in the Organization and Leadership Department of the Central Committee of the Korean Worker's Party, i.e. the most powerful organization in North Korea), **children were taught by their parents. but also the parents of Kim Jong Il an**



### 3. Aspects of Confucianism during the Kim Jong Il's era (2/2)

- ❖ **On economic issues, the presence of Confucian values is also strong:**
  - During the Kim Jong Il's era, especially in the 1980's and 1990's, North Korea has definitely used some of the anti-mercantile elements of the Confucian tradition: the authoritarianism has been strengthened.
- ❖ **Confucian values are also transposed on the organizations of North Korean Companies.** The North Korean state is controlling most industries and had the monopoly over the distribution of commodities like salt.
- ❖ **Concerning the question of equality between men and women, the notion of the subordination of women has been also strengthened during the Kim Jong Il's reign.**
- ❖ **Respect for elders was emphasized (i.e. old leadership) during the Kim Jong Il era.**

# Conclusion

- **The Confucianism is not the State Ideology of North Korea**
- **North Korea is more a fascist than a Confucian country?**

