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North Korea and the liberation of Southern Africa, 1960-2020

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DOCTRINE

JUCHE IDEOLOGY IN AFRICA

From the outset, ideology greased the wheels of African–North Korean diplomacy. It was a shared framework of political ideas that allowed the development of strong ties between African liberation fighters and Korean comrades. North Korea framed its charm offensive in Africa in terms of Juche Thought, an approach that was happily reciprocated by their African counterparts. Usually translated as self-reliance and understood through its main principle that ‘man is the master of all things’, Juche replaced Marxism–Leninism as the official ideology of the DPRK in 1970.³⁵⁶ This decision was essentially ‘a declaration of political independence’ from its two main communist sponsors, China and the Soviet Union.³⁵⁷

Changing the state ideology from communism to Juche made North Korea more appealing to the non-aligned countries of the African continent, which gave it a diplomatic advantage over South Korea.³⁵⁸ Precisely because Juche was vague and emphasised self-reliance, it was remarkably compatible with indigenous African development philosophies such as Kenneth Kaunda’s humanism, Kwame Nkrumah’s consciencism, Julius Nyerere’s *Ujamaa*, and Seretse Khama’s *boipelego* principle.³⁵⁹ After decades of oppression by capitalist colonisers, African nationalist elites took inspiration from socialism while their political programmes were built around ideas of political and economic independence. African desires for autonomy, anti-imperialism, and postcolonial development were echoed in Juche Thought, which hinted at socialist principles and underlined the importance of self-determination.

While it is often assumed that Juche serves as North Korea’s guiding principle for domestic policy making, and is thus closely entangled with its iconic ‘hermit kingdom’ status, Brian Myers argues that Juche ‘was never meant to work ideologically’. According to Myers, Juche is part of North Korea’s multi-track discourse, which consists of the inner track (propaganda for domestic consumption only), the outer track (propaganda for domestic consumption but aware of outside monitors), and the export track (propaganda for outsiders). Juche was specifically designed for the export track.³⁶⁰

North Korea’s main strategy for exporting Juche to Africa was the establishment of ideological institutes, or Juche Study Centres. Juche Study Centres offered ordinary Africans the opportunity to learn more about North Korea through discussions, the distribution of translated Korean literature, and the organisation of film viewings and photo exhibitions. The centres were also a gateway for travel to North Korea.

Kim Il Sung’s persona took centre stage in Juche Thought. On the surface, it may look as if comrade Kim drank deeply from the cup of vanity and envisioned the state ideology as an expression of his personality cult. The reality is more nuanced. Juche was originally designed as a way to define North Korea’s independence from the Communist Bloc, but Kim Jong Il later used Juche to protect his own status as his father’s successor. By elevating his father to the level of eternal leader, Kim Jong Il became the guardian of his father’s legacy (this is discussed further in Chapter 14).³⁶¹

In practice, the personal portraits of Kim Il Sung always loomed large over the meetings held in African Juche Study Centres, while the books containing his speeches ended up in virtually every library and archive in Southern Africa. In merging the personal with the political,

³⁵⁶ Korea Times, 27 November 2007.

³⁵⁷ Kwon and Chung 2012, p. 80.

³⁵⁸ Myers 2015, p. 5.

³⁵⁹ Chan 2021, p. 44; Manatsha 2018, p. 145.

³⁶⁰ Myers 2015.

³⁶¹ Kwon and Chung 2012.

the establishment of Juche Study Centres were a result of Kim Il Sung's invitation diplomacy that was discussed in Chapter 3, and a prerequisite of the development aid that is discussed in Chapter 5.

Today, Juche Study Centres are largely forgotten in Africa and beyond. Very little documentation and even less scholarship relating to this phenomenon exists. The analysis of this chapter is largely based on an archival treasure trove that I accidentally stumbled upon in Namibia. The archives of the former United Nations Institute for Namibia, a school in Zambia that offered training for exiled Namibians during the liberation struggle, contain an extensive collection of Cold War era editions of the *Study of the Juche Idea* journal.³⁶²

In addition to short texts by Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il, and information about the organisation of Juche Study Centres, *Study of the Juche Idea* features written contributions from foreign Juche followers. Many contributions were submitted by ordinary Africans and therefore provide a unique insight into how Juche was received and applied in Africa. The fact that an educational body in the heart of the Frontline States assembled such an extensive collection of Juche journals (with editions running from 1979 to 1990) reveals that many Africans were sympathetic to Juche Thought. I am grateful to the archivists of the University of Namibia, where this collection is housed, for access to the archives while the finding aids were not yet completed and publicly available.

This chapter offers a critical analysis of Juche Study Centres and seeks to understand why they were founded, how they operated, and their impact on the African continent.³⁶³ The subsequent section provides a basic introduction to Juche Study Centres, with an emphasis on Southern Africa. The next section examines how Juche Study Centres became a vehicle for the dissemination of North Korean soft power through literature, visual art, and travel. The subsequent section considers how African elites used Juche as inspiration for postcolonial governance. The conclusion reviews the question of whether African–North Korean friendship was motivated by ideology or whether, in the end, pragmatist motives prevailed.

Juche Study Centres

Juche Study Centres were ultimately established around the world, but the first one opened its doors in Africa – in Mali, to be precise. On 15 April 1969, the ‘Study Group of the Works of Comrade Kim Il Sung’ was founded on the occasion of the 57th birthday of Kim Il Sung.³⁶⁴ Mali was one of the first African countries to establish full diplomatic relations with North Korea, in 1960.³⁶⁵ ‘Juche’, wrote the editors of *Study of the Juche Idea*, ‘like oasis, has been flowing into the hearts of the African people who recently liberated themselves from the colonial rule of imperialism and are on the way of building a new society’. The foundational meeting was attended by several Malian intellectuals.

Mali became a model for Juche Study Centres globally. Individual Juche Study Centres became part of a National Committee – in Mali, a National Committee was established in 1985 – which, in turn, became part of a continental body. In Africa, this became the African Regional Committee for the Study of the Juche Idea. The international body that oversaw these activities was the International Institute of the Juche Idea.³⁶⁶ Approximately thirty African states hosted Juche Study Centres during the Cold War.³⁶⁷ In reality, this number might be higher, as my data

³⁶² [UNAM] PA3/6/117; PA4/5/421.

³⁶³ Parts of this chapter are based on Van der Hoog 2022c.

³⁶⁴ [UNAM] PA4/5/421: No. 45, April 1989.

³⁶⁵ [SRA] MfS – HA II. Nr. 29133.

³⁶⁶ [UNAM] PA4/5/421: No. 45, April 1989.

³⁶⁷ These countries include Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Congo Brazzaville, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Zaire, Zambia, Zimbabwe. [WCDA] MOL, XIX-J-1-j 1977, 24; [UNAM] PA4/5/421.

set is incomplete (some editions of the *Study of the Juche Idea* were not covered in the Namibian archive and are difficult to find elsewhere).

The majority of Juche Study Centres in Africa were located in West Africa, whereas relatively few centres were located in Southern Africa. This makes sense, as West Africa was the first African region to be liberated from colonialism, and Southern Africa the last. Political independence and formal diplomatic ties with North Korea were necessary requirements for the establishment and funding of Juche Study Centres – up until the end of the Cold War, when North Korea no longer had the money to fund these operations. This is why, for example, Namibia and South Africa never hosted Juche Study Centres. When these countries liberated in 1990 and 1994, it was, in a sense, too late.³⁶⁸

Exiled Southern African freedom fighters who were unable to join Juche Study Centres in their home countries frequented study groups in the liberated parts of Africa. For example, MPLA members visited Sierra Leone to join the first Pan-African Seminar on Comrade Kim Il Sung's Juche Idea in 1972, a few years before Angolan independence. The meeting was attended by fifty delegates from 16 African countries.³⁶⁹ Exiled Zimbabwean students in Sierra Leone joined the 'Group for the Study of the Immortal Juche Idea of the Supreme Leader Comrade Kim Il Sung', prior to Zimbabwean independence in 1980.³⁷⁰ SWAPO members participated in study groups in Tanzania, prior to Namibian independence in 1990.³⁷¹

The distinctions between Juche Study Centres, North Korean embassies, and friendship societies were often blurred: the embassies provided funding and reading materials for the study groups and meetings were often held on embassy premises.³⁷² Editions of the *Study of the Juche Idea* contain lavish descriptions of such meetings, which took place according to a set protocol. A portrait of Kim Il Sung was symbolically placed in the room (this is also a significant custom in North Korea), sometimes joined by Kim's translated books and photographs of the Dear Leader. A meeting sometimes consisted of a speech, sometimes a lecture, and would usually adopt a number of proposals, working plans, and letters for Kim Il Sung or Kim Jong Il (and sometimes for both). The attendance of high-ranking African officials was always highlighted in official reports.

Some meetings took the form of conferences and lasted for several days, such as 'National Meeting on Socialist Revolutionary Charter of Madagascar-Juche Idea', held in Antananarivo, Madagascar, from 31 August to 2 September 1988. Organised under the auspices of the National Committee for the Study of the Socialist Revolutionary Charter of Madagascar and the Juche Idea of the Malagasy Vanguard of Revolution (short titles were never North Korea's forte), this event was apparently visited by some 200 persons, 'including senior officials of the party and government'.³⁷³ Such gatherings were given special attention in North Korean propaganda: descriptions boasted about the number of participants and reported glowing well-wishes from foreign dignitaries for Kim Il Sung.

Soft Power

Juche Study Centres became the primary vehicle for the dissemination of North Korean soft power in Africa. While South Korea concentrated on trade diplomacy, North Korea relied 'heavily' on cultural diplomacy.³⁷⁴ Juche Study Centres were ideological spaces accessible to the wider public. From the perspective of African populations that were preoccupied with

³⁶⁸ Interview with an anonymous North Korean diplomat, Seoul, 19 July 2021.

³⁶⁹ Dobrzeniecki 2019.

³⁷⁰ [UNAM] PA4/5/421: Vol. 2, No. 1, April 1979.

³⁷¹ [UNAM] PA4/5/421: No. 48, January 1990; Vol. 2, No. 1, April 1979.

³⁷² [NAUK] FCO 95/860: Hart to Bryan, 28 September 1970; see also Dobrzeniecki 2019.

³⁷³ [UNAM] PA4/5/421: No. 24, January 1984.

³⁷⁴ Park 1978, p. 73-88; Owoeye 1991, p. 630-645.

defying colonial rule and rebuilding newly independent societies, the Korean peninsula was far away. But Juche Study Centres brought North Korea much closer to home. Through the organisation of meetings, the distribution of literature and visual art, and the opportunity for travel, Juche Study Centres became the catalyst for deeper relations between Africans and North Koreans.

Literature was perhaps the most important form of North Korean propaganda. The Pyongyang Foreign Languages House, an organisation that falls under the Propaganda and Agitation Department of the Workers' Party of Korea, translated and produced North Korean books for the global export. The majority of titles were works ostensibly written by the North Korean leadership, which often concerned the subject of Juche.³⁷⁵ The apartheid regime in South Africa and Namibia banned such books through the Suppression of Communism Act.

Kim Il Sung's speeches were translated from Korean into numerous languages, including Afrikaans, Kirundi, and Swahili, and disseminated as bound books.³⁷⁶ North Korean diplomatic personnel were extensively trained in African languages, both at home and abroad. In the 1970s, 32 North Koreans were undertaking a five-year course in Swahili and English at Tanzania's College of National Education.³⁷⁷ North Korea also distributed newspapers (such as the *Pyongyang Times*) that informed African readers about day-to-day events.³⁷⁸ In Tanzania, North Korean newspaper articles were translated into Swahili by the local journalist Peter Msungu, who was a member of a local Juche Study Centre and had visited North Korea. It is alleged, however, that Msungu 'pretended to do the work himself' and instead delegated the work to a friend, all the while cashing in on North Korea's remuneration.³⁷⁹ Another tactic was the placement of North Korean supplements in local African newspapers, such as *The People's Weekly* of Zimbabwe.³⁸⁰ In Tanzanian newspapers, some North Korean columns were 'more than twice the length of the actual newspaper', and local publications became financially dependent on the advertising income from Pyongyang.³⁸¹

In addition to books and newspapers, North Korea disseminated (trade) magazines in Africa, such as *Korea Today* or *Foreign Trade of the Democratic People's Republic*. The latter, for example, explained the rules and regulations of the DPRK on joint ventures and featured successful North Korean businesses.³⁸² This illustrates North Korea's interest in monetizing their fraternal ties with newly or soon-to-be independent nations in Africa.

Such literature found its way into African hands via Juche Study Centres, which stimulated the establishment of North Korean bookshops and libraries in Africa. In 1970s Mauritius, the Kim Il Sung Works' Library distributed all sorts of North Korean texts to the local population.³⁸³ In 1980s Zimbabwe, the Kim Il Sung Bookshop in Harare did the same. Eager customers could not only obtain copies of the *Study of the Juche Idea*, but also North Korean bulletins such as *Age of Juche* and the *Banner of Independence*. This was not

³⁷⁵ [NLN] F001 – LCA/06128; F001 – LCA/01319.

³⁷⁶ [NAN] F002-AA/0251; [NAN] F002-PA/0805; [NARA] RG 59, SNF Entry# 1613-D, Box# 2421, POL 16 KOR N -- POL KOR N-KOR S: Bujumbura to Department of State, 28 July 1971.

³⁷⁷ [NARA] RG 59, SNF Entry# 1613-D, Box# 2616, POL 19 TAIWAN -- POL 6 TANZAN: Dar es Salaam to Department of State, 6 November 1973.

³⁷⁸ Mitchell 2021, p. 225.

³⁷⁹ [NAUK] FCO 95/860.

³⁸⁰ [IISH] ZH 67293: 28 August 1985. I want to thank Brooks Marmon for sharing this file with me.

³⁸¹ Roberts 2023, p. 9; 11.

³⁸² [UNAM] PA4/5/138.

³⁸³ Young 2018, p. 106.

exceptional. In 1989, the International Institute of the Juche Idea had distributed North Korean propaganda to eighty countries across the world.³⁸⁴

In addition to Juche Study Centres, bookshops, and embassies, North Korean literature was routinely gifted to African leaders during the visits of North Korean delegations. A 1973 meeting of North Korean officials with the cabinet of Botswana resulted, in the words of the British High Commission in Gaborone, in 'a fully mounted propaganda exercise'. The North Koreans brought 'books and brochures and photographs of the illustrious (almost deified) Kim Il-Sung'. Books about Juche 'were dished out by the hundredweight to all Ministers and Senior Civil Servants and to anyone else who fancied a set of the red-covered publicity material'. In addition, the cabinet of Botswana received beautiful Korean porcelain and *hongsam* (Korean red *ginseng*), which was described as 'pieces of fabulous Korean dried root with alleged aphrodisiacal qualities'. The British diplomats gleefully added that they did not know if there 'were any private requests from Ministers for second helpings'.³⁸⁵

A British diplomat in 1982 was 'struck how frequently the works of Kim Il-sung appeared on officials' desks' in East Africa. This development worried the British Foreign Office, which called for a 'comprehensive study of the North Korean role' in Africa.³⁸⁶ Juche literature penetrated the bookshelves of many key figures of Africa's liberation struggle. Through these texts, African political elites were directly exposed to North Korean doctrine. A useful illustration is the personal papers of Mose Penaani Tjitendero, a Namibian freedom fighter who went into exile in Tanzania in 1964 and steadily climbed SWAPO's ranks. His private library included numerous North Korean books, journals, and magazines such as *Korea Today* and *Pyongyang Review*.³⁸⁷

The written word was complemented by visual art.³⁸⁸ Juche Study Centres across the continent organised public film screenings and photo exhibitions.³⁸⁹ A Zimbabwean Juche enthusiast wrote in *The Study of the Juche Idea* that 'since all the people cannot visit Korea to see the realities there, film shows were frequently arranged to show the realities of Korea where the Juche idea has been materialised and realise the correctness of the Juche idea'.³⁹⁰ The earlier-mentioned visit of North Korean officials to the cabinet of Botswana was accompanied by a film show, which was held in the Capitol Cinema in Gaborone and publicised through Radio Botswana.³⁹¹ To celebrate Kim Il Sung's 56th birthday, the North Korean embassy in Mali showed a film about his life in the Librairie Populaire. The event was open to all Malians and accompanied by photographs of Kim. American diplomats at the time were extremely sarcastic about the event, noting that the film, which was three hours and 45 minutes long, 'bored the unboreable'. Irrked by the 'verbose repetition of the party line and paucity of action', they wished that Kim 'had remained an unsung hero'. This unsolicited cinematographic review, however, is entirely beside the point. The event was successful in strengthening Malian–North Korean ties, especially as the film was accompanied by a speech from the Malian minister of

³⁸⁴ [UNAM] PA4/5/421: No. 45, April 1989.

³⁸⁵ [NAUK] FCO 45/1283: Anderson to Cook, 8 March 1973.

³⁸⁶ [NAUK] FCO 21/2319: Wenban-Smith to Elliot, 29 October 1982.

³⁸⁷ [UNAM] PA3/6/67; [UNAM] PA3/5/3/273.

³⁸⁸ Another feature of North Korean art was the deployment of performing troupes, which regularly travelled to African countries. For example, in 1975 North Korean artists visited ten African states in just six months' time. See Suh 1988, p. 266.

³⁸⁹ [NAUK] FCO 31/948; [NAUK] FCO 105/1889; [NAUK] FCO 106/850; [NAUK] FCO 36/2764.

³⁹⁰ [UNAM] PA4/5/421: No. 33, April 1986.

³⁹¹ [NAUK] FCO 45/1283; [NARA] RG 59, SNF Entry# 1613-D, Box# 2420, POL 32-4 KOR -- POL 16 KOR N: Gaborone to Department of State, 5 March 1973.

justice, who praised Kim Il Sung.³⁹² North Korean films were also screened in other parts of Africa, including in Burundi, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Somalia, and Uganda.³⁹³

The North Korean leadership, and in particular Kim Jong Il, loved film.³⁹⁴ The medium was ‘the preferred genre of the state’ and played a vital role in the propaganda machine that churned out stories of the regime’s heroic exploits.³⁹⁵ North Korean films highlighted the amazing qualities of Kim Il Sung and were famously anti-American.³⁹⁶ The first ever Non-Aligned Movement Film Festival was held in Pyongyang, in 1987, and was organised around the theme of ‘The Role of the Film Industry in the Anti-Imperialist Struggles’.³⁹⁷ As highlighted in Chapter 3, the visits of African leaders to Pyongyang were captured in documentaries.

In some cases, North Korean teams produced films in Africa. In Tanzania, for example, a North Korean camera crew shot the Swahili documentary *Tanzania Yasonga Mbele* (‘Tanzania Forges Ahead’).³⁹⁸ The film featured Saba Saba celebrations, life in *Ujamaa* villages, and milestones of ‘the ever advancing revolution in Tanzania’.³⁹⁹ British diplomats called it ‘an effective piece of propaganda’ because it showed ‘Tanzanians parading in the North Korean way’. Tanzania’s film industry was relatively young, and the documentary was seen as a pioneering step in an upcoming industry.⁴⁰⁰

For selected devotees, Juche Study Centres offered the opportunity for ideological training in Pyongyang. In the 1980s alone, at least 200 students from various African countries (including Madagascar, Tanzania, and Zambia) travelled to Pyongyang to attend Juche courses.⁴⁰¹ Some of them stayed in North Korea for up to three months at a time.⁴⁰² The *Study of the Juche Idea* journal occasionally featured travel reports from African visitors, which reveals that visitors were mostly well-established men in high-ranking positions in society: journalists; ruling party officials; members of parliament; and university employees.

North Korean propaganda can be dull and monotonous, but the descriptions in the *Study of the Juche Idea* are written by real people who were excited about travelling to distant destinations. The director of a Togolese research institute, Sossa Kounoutcho, attended the International Seminar of the Juche Idea in 1977 and enthusiastically described how he was able to shake hands with Kim Il Sung. E. S. Mushi, an Inspector of Schools for the Ministry of Education in Tanzania, visited North Korea twice to learn about Juche education in the 1980s and was ‘deeply impressed’ by what he saw.⁴⁰³

O. T. Mupawaenda, a librarian at the University of Zimbabwe, visited North Korea for a month in 1986 together with two other Zimbabweans (a lecturer in law and an officer of the Ministry of Justice).⁴⁰⁴ Mupawaenda wrote about his experiences in *Study of the Juche Idea*, but also in an American journal under the title ‘A Zimbabwean Librarian Visits North Korea’.

³⁹² [NARA] RG 59, SNF Entry# 1613-C, Box# 2263, POL KOR N-AFR -- POL 31-1 KOR N-US: Bamako to Department of State, 1 May 1968.

³⁹³ For example, in Young 2018, p. 107-08.

³⁹⁴ Kim 1989.

³⁹⁵ Yoon 2014; Kim 2010, p. 13.

³⁹⁶ Young 2018, p. 110-11.

³⁹⁷ [UNAM] PA3/6/89: Vol 5 No 2, September-December 1987.

³⁹⁸ [NAUK] FCO 31/692, Hart to Bryan, 17 April 1970.

³⁹⁹ [NARA] RG 59, SNF Entry# 1613-D, Box# 2616, POL 19 TAIWAN -- POL 6 TANZAN: Dar es Salaam to Department of State, 31 March 1970.

⁴⁰⁰ [NAUK] FCO 31/692, Hart to Bryan, 17 April 1970.

⁴⁰¹ Dobrzeniecki 2019.

⁴⁰² [UNAM] PA4/5/421: No. 33, April 1986.

⁴⁰³ [UNAM] PA4/5/421.

⁴⁰⁴ [UNAM] PA4/5/421: No. 46, April 1989.

‘The Korean experience’, according to Mupawaenda, ‘was far more rewarding, gratifying and interesting than previous visits to other countries, socialist, capitalist or non-aligned’.⁴⁰⁵

Inspiration for Postcolonial Rule

Juche stimulated African ideas about postcolonial rule. In *The Study of the Juche Idea* African contributions applied Juche to domestic policy making, for example in the fields of education, agriculture, and industry. Importantly, Juche also influenced ideas about political power. In Southern Africa, the majority of independent states were ruled by former liberation movements that believed that they were destined to rule. To this end, African elites found inspiration in Juche Thought. Juche emphasised the importance of a glorious revolution and the importance of a single, united organisation that remained in charge of this revolutionary heritage.⁴⁰⁶ North Korea embodied this ideal – despite tremendous internal and external pressure, the Workers’ Party of Korea had governed North Korea since its inception in 1948, on the basis of the heroic exploits of the struggle against Japanese colonisation and American imperialism.⁴⁰⁷

Kim Jong Il famously said that for a revolution to succeed, the masses ‘must be united into one organisation ... under the guidance of the party and the leader’.⁴⁰⁸ Newly independent African states were often ruled by a single powerful regime. Zambia, for example, became a one-party state in 1972 when Kaunda’s UNIP banned rival political parties.⁴⁰⁹ In a 1988 edition of *Study of the Juche Idea*, lecturers at a UNIP school underlined the similarities between Zambian humanism and Kim Jong Il’s teachings. The dean of the UNIP school wrote that the ‘principle of revolutionary duty and comradeship’ revolves around unity and ‘the cohesion of the leader, the party and the masses’. A colleague argued that the University of Zambia should award Kim an honorary degree.⁴¹⁰

Similar proceedings can be observed in the case of Zimbabwe, where Mugabe’s ZANU sought to sideline its political competition, particularly the rivalling ZAPU. ZANU officials had intimate knowledge of Juche Thought. Seminars of local Juche Study Centres were sponsored by the Zimbabwean Ministry of Education and the Department of Information of ZANU, and were visited by high-ranking government officials and party members. ‘In the coming years, under the guidance of the ZANU (PF)’, the deputy chairman of the National Committee for the Study of the Juche Idea promised in Zimbabwe, ‘we will further deepen our study of the Juche idea’.⁴¹¹

One example of a dedicated ZANU member with an interest in Juche was Edson Shiriuru, a member of parliament in the 1980s who later became the deputy director of the Central Intelligence Organisation. He had attended Juche seminars in Nigeria before establishing the National Committee in Zimbabwe.⁴¹² Echoing the blood-related discourse of this era, Shiriuru advocated for ‘the building of a new society by enhancing the function and role of state won at the cost of blood’. In a 1981 edition of the *Study of the Juche Idea*, Shiriuru praised the ideas of Kim Il Sung and concluded that it was ‘very important to use state power as a powerful weapon’ to consolidate national independence – a telling statement by the man who would lead the Zimbabwean secret services.⁴¹³

A professor at the University of Zimbabwe argued that Juche ‘provides us with powerful theoretical and practical weapons capable of building up the firm independent subject of the

⁴⁰⁵ Mupawaenda 1987, p. 44-45.

⁴⁰⁶ [UNAM] PA4/5/421: No. 40, January 1988.

⁴⁰⁷ Kwon and Chung 2012.

⁴⁰⁸ [UNAM] PA4/5/421: No. 40, January 1988.

⁴⁰⁹ Larmer 2008.

⁴¹⁰ [UNAM] PA4/5/421: No. 40, January 1988.

⁴¹¹ [UNAM] PA4/5/421: No. 33, April 1986.

⁴¹² [UNAM] PA4/5/421: No. 33, April 1986.

⁴¹³ [UNAM] PA4/5/421: Vol. 4, No. 3, October 1981.

revolution'.⁴¹⁴ Shirihuru's Juche-inspired argument that state power is a powerful weapon for the consolidation of independence eerily foreshadows the establishment of the Fifth Brigade that is discussed in Chapter 9. During the Zimbabwean liberation struggle, Shirihuru was part of the 'Crocodile Gang' together with Emmerson Mnangagwa, who played a vital role in the training of the Fifth Brigade.⁴¹⁵

Conclusion

A question that pervades this book is whether African–North Korean cooperation was motivated by ideology or pragmatism. Ideology, as Christopher Clapham argues, 'is not merely an alien imposition on willing Africans. It also strikes a local resonance, and serves to build moral linkages that extend beyond mere economic interests'.⁴¹⁶ This chapter showed that numerous African elites were receptive to the ideas of Juche Thought, as it resonated with domestic issues, most notably the challenges of postcolonial rule.

Juche was thus instrumental in creating a shared ideological framework that brought the distant political struggles of African liberation movements and North Korea closer together. This, in turn, allowed the development of practical connections that benefited all sides. As subsequent chapters demonstrate, African elites benefited from all sorts of material and military support that would have been difficult to materialise without Juche. North Korea, on the other hand, reaped the propaganda benefits of the numerous Juche Study Centres that existed in the African continent.

Yet, the reach of Juche certainly had its limits. There is no evidence of genuine collaboration between North Korean and African followers of Juche Thought. African citizens travelled to North Korea for ideological education, but regular North Korean citizens were never allowed to travel the other way around. There are no examples of articles or books jointly written by African and Korean authors. The appeal of Juche was apparently limited to certain African elites who were closely intertwined with the prevailing regimes of their countries, and did not reach the masses.

Moreover, North Korea abandoned its African Juche Study Centres when it faced economic hardship at the end of the Cold War. Kim Jong Il no longer had the money to bankroll such elaborate displays of soft power. As a result, Juche Study Centres largely disappeared in Africa. Today, no party or government official in Southern Africa is involved in the development of Juche Thought, and references to North Korea have largely vanished from public discourse.

Nevertheless, a few local Juche chapters continue to exist in Africa. Despite the odds, in recent years, loyal followers of the Kim family have organised meetings in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Guinea, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda.⁴¹⁷ It can be difficult to appreciate the wisdom of a philosophy that is often defined through indecipherable statements, such as Kim Jong Un's dictum that 'even an egg, charged with ideology, can break a rock'.⁴¹⁸ At the same time its impact should not be underestimated. Juche has proven to be an effective tool for the North Korean brand.

Although the Juche Idea has become a niche phenomenon in the world, it remains alive in certain parts of Africa. In 2023, for example, the Congolese professor of philosophy Jean Mallaud Mbongo Pasi Udumbula Pambi published a treatise on how Juche could be applied to ideas about African sovereignty. Pambi compares Juche to African philosophies such as Senghor's ideas about African socialism and *Ujamaa*. Titled *L'imaginaire politique Nord-*

⁴¹⁴ [UNAM] PA4/5/421: No. 40, January 1988.

⁴¹⁵ The Herald, 24 November 2017.

⁴¹⁶ Clapham 2008, p. 364.

⁴¹⁷ Data from 2018, see Dobrzeniecki 2019; and also www.juchea.com.

⁴¹⁸ Hirai 2023.

Coréen, the book highlights a continuing African interest in North Korean political thought. The book is dedicated to *Mzee* Laurent Désiré Kabila, the former president of Congo, who is now immortalised via a grandiose personal statue – naturally designed by a North Korean art studio.⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁹ Pambi 2023, especially p. 177-235.