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Zobrazení rodiny v severokorejských filmech

The Portrayal of Family in North Korean Films

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Vedoucí diplomové práce

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Severní Korea je někdy nazývána “rodinný stát”. Vůdci z rodu Kimů jsou považováni za „rodičovské vůdce“ a Severokorejci za členy velké rodiny. KLDR je postavena na ideologii *čučche*, které je v zemi podřízeno zcela vše, včetně kinematografie. Podle Kim Čong Ila, druhého severokorejského vůdce, měly filmy sloužit k poskytování obrazu ideologicky správného stylu života. Tato práce ve své teoretické části seznamuje s historií Severní Koreje, která zapříčinila vytvoření některých specifických rysů severokorejské kinematografie, jež je představena také, spolu s osobností Kim Čong Ila a jeho vlivu na severokorejské filmy v letech 1967 až 2011. Ke konci teoretické části práce představuje několik studií o vlivu médií na utváření vlastní identity člověka, jenž je jejich působení vystaven.

V praktické části práce podrobuje patnáct severokorejských filmů natočených v letech 1967 až 2011 mikroanalýze a zkoumá, jak byl v dané době zobrazován rodinný život na obrazkách tohoto “rodinného státu”. Jelikož je rodina základní jednotkou každé země a Kim Čong Il měl snahu, aby filmy sloužily jako vodítko ukazující správný způsob života, jeví se zkoumání zobrazení rodiny ve filmech zásadním pro hlubší pochopení severokorejské sociopolitické situace. Analyzovanými rysy severokorejských filmových rodin jsou struktura rodiny, volný čas, bydlení, romantické vztahy a vztahy mezi rodiči a dětmi, mateřství, čest a role vůdců v rodinách Korejských občanů.

Abstract

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North Korea is sometimes called the “family state”. Leading Kim family members are regarded as “Parental Leaders”, and the people as members of a big family. The country is built on *Chuch’e* ideology, and everything in the country is subjected to this ideology, including the cinema. According to Kim Jong Il, the second North Korean leader, films had to serve in providing an ideologically correct worldview. In its theoretical part, this work introduces North Korean history that caused the creation of some specific traits of North Korean cinema, which is introduced as well, along with Kim Jong Il’s involvement from 1967 to 2011. Lastly, studies examining the effect of the media on shaping one’s identity are observed.

In its practical part, the work subjects fifteen North Korean films made between 1967 and 2011 to a microanalysis and examines how family life was portrayed on the screens of the “family state” then. A family is the basic unit of any country, so if films made under Kim Jong Il’s supervision were to serve as a guide showing the right way to live, the way family is portrayed in films seems crucial for gaining a deeper understanding of the North Korean socio-political situation. The analyzed traits of North Korean film families are family structure, leisure time, housing, romantic and parent-child relationships, motherhood, honor, and the role of leaders in one’s family.

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Obsah

Introduction	3
1. Historical Context	6
Everyday Life in North Korea	10
Korean Cinema Before the Division of the Peninsula	11
North Korean Cinema and the North Korean Approach to Filmmaking under Kim Jong Il's Supervision	12
On the Art of Cinema	15
2. Propaganda	18
Changes in Narratives on the Korean Peninsula	19
3. Impact of Media on the Identity of the Consumer	21
4. Analysis	24
Introduction of Films	25
Findings	31
1. Housing	31
2. Leisure Time	32
3. Family Structure and Gender Roles	33
5. Parent-Child Relationship	37
6. Honor	41
7. Romantic Relationship	44
8. The Leaders' Role in One's Family	48
5. Conclusion	50
References	53

Introduction

North Korea, or the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), is a country that operates on *Chuch'e*¹—an ideology that combines Korean nationalism, socialism, and Confucianism. This ideology of self-reliance can be seen as one of the reasons North Korea is largely closed off from the rest of the world. To gain insight into life in the DPRK, one can turn to accounts of North Korean defectors, scholars, or foreign workers who have lived there or to the North Korean media. The entirety of media in North Korea is created by the state (Špitálníková, 2022, 1:00:09), and although it may not provide accurate information about people's everyday life, this thesis works with North Korean films, as they are a valuable resource for understanding North Korean socio-political situation—they provide insight into the nation's image that the government supports. Experts on North Korea, like Kim Sökyöng (2017, 2:20) and Johannes Schönherr (2012, 7), pointed out that North Korean media does not accurately depict what life in the socialist paradise is like but instead portrays what life should be like.

The *Korean Workers' Party* has established a *Propaganda and Agitation department* that oversees the implementation of state-supported narratives and approves any content before it is released to the public (Yu 1996, 243). The ultimate decision over any media production in the country has the Supreme Leader, which makes him central to the North Korean system (Frank 2011, 14). Yu Yöngku (1996, 243) stresses that due to the establishment of media regulating institutions, observation and analysis of North Korean newspapers and broadcasts are essential for understanding North Korean society.

According to Kim Sökyöng (2007, 1:14:25), North Korean films have adopted a more commercial and entertaining approach in recent years. Still, she says it was not always the case, as film screenings, reportedly especially during the 1970s and 1980s, were mandatory. Films were also reportedly primarily used for discussions at workplaces and schools. The leadership, particularly during Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il, expressed the belief that film is a powerful tool for agitation and education.

In his book *On the Art of the Cinema*, which provides a window into the ideology and regime-supported filmmaking of North Korea, Kim Jong Il (1973, 20-21) introduced what is now called the “seed theory”. He compares any artwork's core to a seed containing ideological essence, which is the source of a meaningful and clear theme.

¹ *Chu* means to have responsibility, and *ch'e* means the body

It appears that the North Korean government has been making an effort to make films easily accessible to its people. According to an article by the South Korean newspaper *Joongang Ilbo* from 2003, there were around twenty cinemas in P'yŏngyang at that time. South Korean journalist Ko Susŏk (2003) reported that many film screenings also take place outside of the capital. Johanness Schönherr (2012, 24) further specifies that schools, factories, and town halls all host film showings, and every city in North Korea has a culture hall that can serve as a screening venue. The average North Korean citizen allegedly visited the cinema 21 times a year in 1987, cites Andrei Lankov (2007, 62) the report of P'yŏngyang Radio from that year. Lankov illuminates that an average South Korean citizen visited the cinema approximately 2.3 times a year in 2007.

According to economist and expert on North Korea Rüdiger Frank (2011, 11), people in power commonly aim to influence the arts by providing money, prestige, state apparatus, or social capital. He says that not only are arts a reflection of society, but they also actively shape it. Furthermore, he identifies the arts as always political, entertaining, and educating.

Many valuable studies and books have been published on North Korea or the country's cinematography. Nina Špitálníková has introduced the lives of North Koreans to Czech readers through her bestsellers *Mezi dvěma Kimy* and *Svědectví o životě v KLLDR*. *The Origins of North Korean Cinema* by Charles Armstrong and *North Korean Cinema – History* by Johanness Schönherr have highlighted North Korean cinema's crucial milestones and traits. Kim Sŏkyŏng's book *Illusive Utopia: Theatre, Film, and Everyday Performance in North Korea* delves into the history and unique characteristics of North Korean cinema, including frequent themes and their contextual significance. Kim Imanuel's *Laughing North Koreans* analyzes North Korean comedy and the types of humor used in their films. In the book *A Kim Jong-Il Production: The Extraordinary True Story of a Kidnapped Filmmaker, His Star Actress, and Young Dictator's Rise to Power*, Fisher offers a look behind the scenes of the North Korean film industry, as seen through the perspectives of controversial figures director Sin Sangok and his wife, Ch'oe Ŭnhŭi. This work draws much information from the above presented research.

Kim Jong Il's involvement in North Korean media began even before he took control of the DPKR in 1982. In 1967, he joined the *Propaganda and Agitation Department* and allegedly confirmed every produced film until he died in 2011.

Research on the portrayal of family life in North Korean films seems to have not been conducted yet, but it is worth exploring family dynamics depicted on North Korean

screens—a family is the basic unit of any country, and how families live influences how a country runs. If North Korean films aimed to instruct citizens on proper behavior and reinforce the government’s agenda, the depiction of families in those films could reflect the regime’s desired lessons for the families and the image it wished would be adopted.

Furthermore, North Korea has a long Confucian tradition known for its strong emphasis on family relations. Kim Sŏkyŏng (2010, 4) even argues that the collectivist Confucian family tradition was the biggest reason for the success of the socialist revolution in the DPRK after the Liberation and that it had an even more significant impact on shaping modern North Korean culture than the influence of the USSR.

The work is divided into theoretical and practical parts. The theoretical part provides a brief overview of the historical circumstances that led to the creation of the People’s Democratic Republic, the background of the country’s film industry, the North Korean government’s perspective on cinema, and research on how media may influence the consumer’s identity. The practical part of this thesis analyzes fifteen North Korean films made between 1967 and 2011. The work aims to identify how films depict family life. An interdisciplinary methodology is used for the microanalysis of the chosen films. The most distinctive traits of North Korean film families and recurring themes in the portrayal of family life are categorized and introduced. Topics identified through the research are housing, family structure, leisure time, romantic relationships and parent-child relationships, motherhood, honor, and the role of leaders in one’s family.

The analyzed films are available online on *YouTube* and *Internet Archive*. North Korea classifies all the analyzed films as art films. For the purpose of this study, only films depicting family or romantic relationships are chosen for assessment.

The aim of this thesis is to identify the characteristics of the depiction of families in North Korean films produced from 1967 to 2011, a period when Kim Jong Il was believed to have authorized the films’ content. Themes portrayed in North Korean films regarding families are revealed through the film dialogues and scene descriptions.

The work uses McCune Reisschauer’s transcription method when transcribing Korean names. However, the widely used version of transcribing the names of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il is utilized instead of McCune Reisschauer’s one.

The East Asian names in this work are spelled out according to the East Asian tradition, where names typically start with the family name, followed by the given name. For example, in Kim Il Sung, Kim is the family name. The Western way is used in all

other cases, with the given name followed by the family name. For example, in Charles Armstrong, Armstrong is the family name.

All quotes in the theoretical part of the thesis are left in their original English form. Therefore, there is a case when the North Korean ideology 주체 spells as *Chuch'e* according to McCune Reisschauer's transcriptions but when quoting Kim Jong Il's book, the version used in the book—*Juche* is preserved. The dialogues introduced in the practical part are not official translations or exact versions of the hard subtitles available in most films. The dialogues are amateur attempts at translating the Korean film dialogues to convey the key messages from the characters' conversations that give insight into the most prominent themes discussed regarding family life on the screen. If only parts of a sentence or conversation are necessary for this research, the left-out parts are symbolized by square brackets with three dots inside. If a literal translation of a sentence is insufficient, additional words in square brackets are inserted into the sentence for clarification.

1. Historical Context

The Chosŏn Dynasty lasted on the Korean peninsula for over 500 years, from 1392 to 1910, when Japan annexed it (Seth M.J. 2016, 135), making it an event that still impacts relations between the countries today. Soon after the annexation, a national resistance against Japanization formed and culminated in the independence movement on March 1, 1919, after which the “cultural policy”, an adjustment of the former military policy, was implemented by the governor-general. It granted Koreans bigger creative freedom (Wells 1990, 188) that lasted until the invasion of China in 1937, after which Japan tightened its grip over the Korean people and largely began using films for war propaganda (Armstrong 2002, 4). Several screenplay writers and directors entered the propaganda machinery, which provided training for significant technical personnel which, Schönherr (2012, 26) illuminates, created the basis of the Korean film industry.

Korea was a colony until Japan's surrender in World War II on August 15, 1945. Following an agreement made before the end of the war, the Korean peninsula got divided between the Soviet Union and the USA along the 38th parallel. Both powers chose new leaders to supervise things for them on the respective halves of the peninsula. The Americans handed control over the South to Syngman Rhee, and the Soviets in the North

chose a former anti-Japanese guerilla fighter, Kim Il Sung,² soon also known as “The Great Leader” and “The Eternal President of North Korea” (Seth S. 2016, 8,11).

Kim Il Sung spent his early years in Manchuria, where a considerable Korean minority lived. He graduated high school there, too, which Lankov (2010) stresses was an exceptionally high level of accomplishment because it was as rare as Ph.D. graduates nowadays. After the invasion of Manchuria, Kim Il Sung joined Chinese communist forces to battle the Japanese. He renamed himself Kim Il Sung around that time, in 1935 (Schönherr 2012, 27). As commander of the Chinese communist guerilla, he raided one of the Japanese-held borders in 1937, and as Schönherr (2012, 27) informs, such cross-border ambush was very courageous and earned Kim Il Sung fame among comrades but also enemies, which ultimately led him to look for a hideout in the Soviet Union. There, he was taken into a newly formed brigade in 1942 and by 1945 became a Major (Schönherr 2012, 27).

After the Liberation of Korea and Kim Il Sung’s appointment to power by the Soviet Union, he founded *Korean Workers’ Party* (KWP) on October 10, 1945 (Kim I.J. 2003, 17). Stalin allowed a certain latitude to the leaders of occupied areas in the way they governed, so as Schönherr (2012, 28) puts it, Kim Il Sung was able to start building a personality cult around himself.

In 1946, the North Korean state gained control over all organizations and private property of North Korean citizens and promulgated regulations on sexual equality (Kim I.J. 2003, 17). In February 1947, Kim Il Sung was elected chairman of the *People’s Committee*, and in February the following year, *The Korean People’s Army* (KPA) was founded (Kim I.J. 2003, 17).

On the Southern part of the peninsula, on August 15, 1948, Rhee Syngman declared the foundation of the Republic of Korea, claiming jurisdiction over the whole peninsula. On September 9, 1948, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea was established in the North, with Kim Il Sung claiming jurisdiction over the peninsula as well. Kim Il Sung became the prime minister soon after, and the Soviet occupation of the North ended, but its support for the DPRK remained. The DPRK and USSR established diplomatic relations the same year in October. With China and East Germany, diplomatic relations were established in 1949, and with Vietnam in 1950 (Kim I.J. 2003, 18).

² Kim Il Sung’s birth name was Kim Sŏngchu

On June 25, 1950, the Korean War (1950-1953) broke out after Kim Il Sung's armies attacked the South with the intention to unify the peninsula. The USSR and later China supported North Korea, whereas South Korea received assistance from the USA and the UN. The war halted, among others, the blossoming Korean filmmaking of the Liberation period and destroyed most vintage Korean films (Min, Joo, and Kwak 2002, 40). Film production in the North did not stop, however. Apart from making war newsreels, the North Korean film studio started making war films too. Three years into the war, a ceasefire agreement was signed between UNC, North Korea, and China to end the war (Kim I.J. 2003,17). North Korea's attempt to unify the peninsula was unsuccessful, but Schönherr (2012, 33) informs that all North Korean media outlets reported that Kim Il Sung had successfully defended the North against the US and South Korea, who had initiated the war.

Soon after the end of the Korean War, North Korea did economically better than its Southern counterparts, mainly because the North received aid from the Soviet Union and China. The aid came primarily as industrial machinery, which led the country to focus on heavy industry. The DPRK got skilled at using foreign technology and facilities but was reportedly unable to produce much of it themselves, which, together with problems like extreme collectivism or economic autarky, caused helplessness when losing assistance from their allies (Lee 2001, 113). The famous Chollima movement began in 1957 and organized workers into brigades to compete at increasing production. It went hand in hand with plans to develop the heavy industrial sector (Kim I.J. 2003,19). The success of this movement is occasionally remembered and re-celebrated in films as well.

In the 1960s, Kim Il Sung stopped maneuvering between The People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union and declared DPRK's independence. He did so by introducing a new North Korean version of socialism which he called *Chuch'e*, translating as "self-identity" or "self-reliance" (Frank 2011, 13). Kim Il Sung expressed the principles of *Chuch'e* in his speech *Let Us Defend the Revolutionary Spirit of Independence, Self-Reliance, and Self-defense More Thoroughly in All Field of State Activities* on December 16, 1967 (Li 1972, 149-206), where he specified that the government would consistently implement self-sustenance and self-defense actions to achieve the country's political, economic, and military independence by embodying the Party's idea of *Chuch'e* in all fields (Li 1972, 156). As Kim Il Sung's foreign policy was also based on the *Chuch'e* principles of self-reliance, the country became increasingly isolated from the outside world.

1974, April 15, Kim Il Sung's birthday was established as a national holiday. On October 10, 1980, Kim Il Sung's eldest son Kim Jong Il was formalized as the successor to his father, and on July 8, 1994, Kim Il Sung passed away.

An evident economic decline of North Korea was apparent after the collapse of the USSR in 1991, as the Soviet Union was the DPRK's major trading partner and a provider of much-needed agricultural and other subsidies. Thus, when the summer floods of 1995 stroke, North Korea entered a devastating famine period (1995-1999)³ (Goodkind and West 2001, 220-221). During the famine, in 1997, Kim Jong Il became the official head of the state and implemented *Sŏn'gun*—a military-first policy that placed the army at the forefront of the country's affairs and as the driving power of revolution. On July 9, 1997, the DPRK's own *Chuch'e* Calendar was implemented, the initial year being 1912, the birth year of Kim Il Sung. Kim Il Sung's birthday was also declared “the Day of the Sun” (Kim I.J. 2003, 19-50).

A decade of Sunshine policy began in 1997 when Kim Taechung became the president of South Korea. He and his successor No Muhyŏn both aimed to encourage the evolution of the North from 2002 to 2008. The Sunshine policy was the utilization of a soft approach to North Korea that was supposed to bring about gradual unification. The South provided the North with notable aid, and the two governments were even able to agree on establishing a tourist zone for South Koreans in North Korean Kŭmgang. North Korea was, nevertheless, mostly trying to obtain as much foreign aid with as little commitment and consequences for the regime. When South Korean presidential elections of 2008 were won by a rightist I Myŏngpak, the disinterest of South Koreans in supporting the North Korean economy became obvious. They wished to focus on their own country's economy and job opportunities. North Korea reacted to the decline of help and demands from the new South Korean government to lessen its nuclear development by launching number of testing missiles. It did not earn a fearful response from the South nor the US for that matter. On the contrary, the relationship between the South and North kept on declining. China then became more interested in the DPRK, making the trade between the two counties triple between 2006 and 2011. (Lankov 2013, 162-176) Kim Jong Il died on December 17, 2011, and his son, Kim Jong Un, became the successive leader.

³ also known as the *Arduous March*

Everyday Life in North Korea

Kim Il Sung re-modeled the society of North Korea along the lines of the *Chuch'e* ideology and rebuilt Pyongyang into a socialist capital. *Chuch'e* system is a combination of Korean nationalism, socialism, and Confucianism and consists of four main principles: man is the master of his fate; people are the masters of the revolution; the revolution must be pursued in a self-reliant manner; the crucial factor of the revolution is loyalty to the Supreme Leader (Cha 2012, 37). *Chuch'e* says that humans shape their environment and that anything is possible with good leadership and people's determination (Frank 2011, 13). This strongly nationalistic ideology gradually started permeating all aspects of North Korean people's lives, including the arts.

In the *Chuch'e* system, the North Korean rulers, the Kim family, are regarded as "Parental Leaders"⁴ and the Korean people and the media are considered members of a big family⁵ (Guyen 2019, 194). According to Kang Jin Woong (2011, 63-68), who deals with Confucianism in North Korea, forms of Confucianism, such as the practice of filial piety or the importance of loyalty to family members and the state, were used by political elites to claim domination and create the family-state. It is worth noting that South Korea also utilized Confucianism even after adopting the Western government system immediately after the peninsula's division—the government carried Confucian traits of benevolent paternal dictatorship that valued tradition, family, and armed forces from the 1950s until the 1980s (Guyen (2019, 198). Lastly, Lankov (2013, 47) says a fascinating feature of *Chuch'e* is the North Korean system of family responsibility in which the arrest of a family member for a political crime puts their entire family in a prison camp.

Ironically, contrasting with the notion of one big family, North Korea has a complicated caste system called *Sŏngbun*. The system is based on one's family's loyalties during World War II and the Korean War (Baek 2016, 7-9). *Sŏngbun* is categorized into three major classes: the core, wavering, and hostile (Baek 2016, 8), which can be further divided into 51 more castes (Špitálníková 2021, 13:20). Belonging to a particular *Sŏngbun* affects all aspects of a person's life. For instance, *Sŏngbun*, along with the ultimate decision of the *Korean Workers' Party*, determines one's housing situation, job opportunities, education, the food the people eat (Špitálníková 2021, 13:40), and even

⁴ Ŏbŏisuryŏng – every next leader became the new suryŏng

⁵ Taegajok

who they are allowed to marry (Špitálníková 2022, 1:00:03). Furthermore, it is almost only possible for one's *Sŏngbun* to go downward (Špitálníková 2020, 19).

As Kim Il Sung prohibited private trade early in his administration, he made the state the only official provider of food and other daily essentials. All non-disabled men were mandated to work for the state, and free movement between cities was outlawed, requiring a permit to travel even to nearby villages (Lankov 2013, 38). Additionally, North Koreans are only allowed to be at someone else's house after a certain time of the night with prior approval (Lankov 2013, 38-39). Lastly, there are notable differences between big cities, and smaller towns and villages. In the cities, elite families with high *Sŏngbun* can live an almost luxurious lifestyle, while those in the villages often struggle to survive each day (Špitálníková 2021, 14:42).

Korean Cinema Before the Division of the Peninsula

The first film screening in Korea is said to have taken place in 1898 when American businessmen started promoting their products through motion pictures in the country (Min, Joo, and Kwak 2002, 26). The first theatre in Korea was built in 1906 (Baxter 2008, 40). During the Japanese occupation period (1910-1945), Korean filmmaking and screening were entirely dependent on the Japanese, who owned theatres, financed and distributed films, and usually collected the profit from film screenings (Min, Joo, and Kwak 2002, 26). The first Korean film *Royal Revenge* was released in 1919 and financed by the only Korean film businessman then (Min, Joo, and Kwak 2002, 27). Korea's first sound film, *The Story of Ch'unhyang*, was shot in 1935 (Min, Joo, and Kwak 2002, 31). The leading actress in *The Story of Ch'unhyang* is Mun Yepong, who, after the Liberation, moved to North Korea and starred in *My Hometown*, earning the title "People's Actress".

The growth of Socialist influence in the 1920s and 1930s also affected Korean filmmaking, so the *Korean Artista Proletarian Federation* (KAPF) was formed in 1925. For them, films were "a weapon" to liberate Korea's peasant masses and the proletariat from colonial rulers and class oppressors (Min, Joo, and Kwak 2002, 30 and 37). The films made by the federation did not receive much attention but the KAPF filmmakers and other artists with similar ideological views made their way to the North after the Liberation, as they were welcomed there (Armstrong 2002, 6).

Around 1938, policies to eliminate Korean culture were adopted by Japan. Among many, Koreans had to change their names to Japanese-style ones, Korean newspapers or film companies were closed, and Korean dialogue was abolished in films (Min, Joo, and Kwak 2002, 31-32). Until the surrender of Japan in 1945, films in Korea, like the rest of society and economy, were subjected to the war initiative (Min, Joo, and Kwak 2002, 24-26). Films at that time were encouraging young Koreans to join the Japanese Imperial Army (*Young Form*, 1944), or they were portraying cultural assimilation (*You and I*, 1945) (Armstrong 2002, 6).

After Japan surrendered to the Allies on August 15, 1945, a division in opinions among Korean political leaders was prominent. Nationalists were awaiting the advance of Allied forces, and Communists wanted to make their own people's republic. A restoration of Korean filmmaking began with producing newsreels in cooperation with the United States Military Government (USAMGIK) shortly after 1945 (Min, Joo, and Kwak 2002, 38). The first feature film released after the Korean Liberation was *An Chungkŏn sagi* (1946), a picture about the national hero who assassinated Ito Hirobumi⁶ in 1909 (Armstrong 2002, 7). However, The film unit split into left and right. Korea News was produced in the US military-occupied area, and outside of that was the leftwing *Chosŏn Film Unit* that started making its own newsreels (Armstrong 2002, 8).

North Korean Cinema and the North Korean Approach to Filmmaking under Kim Jong Il's Supervision

The first two North Korean leaders, Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il considered films an influential ideological tool. Kim Jong Il (1973, 145) writes in his book: "In the hands of our Party, art and literature are powerful weapons for ideological education." North Korean leaders' direct involvement and regulation of arts give a relatively clear insight into the most distinctive traits of North Korean filmmaking.

The First North Korea-produced film was *My Hometown* (1949), striking with its ability to instill new central myths of the country. It told a story about brave Koreans who did not succumb to foreign powers anymore and took the faith of their country into their

⁶ Japanese resident-general of Korea who authorized the annexation of Korea

own hands (Schönherr 2012, 4). With its portrayal of a strong nationalistic spirit, the picture set the trend in cinematic endeavors in the DPRK for the upcoming decades.

Kim Jong Il, who was the son of Kim Il Sung and the second leader of North Korea, played an influential role in shaping North Korean cinema. He shared his opinions on the arts through his essays and books, and also indirectly impacted the industry by allegedly kidnapping the famous South Korean director Sin Sangok, who helped with revolutionizing North Korean cinema by introducing new genres, or themes in the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s.⁷

Kim Jong Il graduated from *Kim Il Sung University* in 1964 and soon became the head of the *Organization and Guidance Department of the Korean Workers' Party*. His duty in this position was to communicate to the public the instructions of Kim Il Sung regarding art, literature, broadcasting, culture, and publishing. He was appointed to the *Propaganda and Agitation Department* in 1967 and became its director (Vu 2022, 8). He took control of the DPKR in 1982 and started to be called the Dear Leader (Fisher 2015, 4). When Kim Sökyöng (2007, 14:32) introduced Kim Jong Il in one of her presentations, she said that we tend to think about him as being born with a silver spoon in his mouth, but that it needs to be considered that his father was the first leader of a new country and hereditary succession of power was not officialized yet at that time. Thus, she says: “Kim Jong Il had to pave his road to power, and he was known to be an extremely talented artistic person by all accounts, and he tapped into his artistic talent to really prove his filial piety for his father, Kim Il Sung.” Kim Jong Il’s involvement in art is also seem as an effort to solidify his father’s rule and consequently secure the succession to power for himself (Frank 2011, 14).

Kim Jong was notoriously known for having a vast collection of films from around the world (Fisher 2015, 45). American soldiers who disserted to the DPRK during the Korean War and were held captive in the country for years were asked to transcribe English movie dialogs to be later translated into Korean and made into subtitles for the leader (Fowler 2017).

Kim Jong Il said that literary works and films should never be created only for the sake of entertainment (Kim J.I. 1973, 70). Though in 1983, he allegedly told director Sin Sangok that the North Korean film industry lags behind and needs improvement, which

⁷ Sin Sangok introduced the first on-screen kiss scene in North Korean in his film *Love Love My Love*. He also deviated from portraying actual events only, as Kim Jong Il initially demanded, and made a fantasy film *Pulgasari*, similar to the Japanese *Godzilla*.

is what he asked the director to bring about (Kim S.Y. 2007, 44:35). Johanness Schönherr (2012, 7) says that Sin Sangok and his wife were allowed to do anything as long as their films stuck to ideological guidelines.

Kim Jong Il was involved in creating the five famous revolutionary operas (*Sea of Blood*, *The Flower Girl*, *Tell O' the Forest*, *A True Daughter of the Party*, and *The Song of Mount Kumgang*). Kim Sökyöng (2010, 36) stresses that his presence at the creation cannot be undervalued. However, she clarifies that the information that he was at the core of the making process was heavily circulated in DPRK's media.

Kim Jong Il hosted briefings and meetings for filmmakers to propose ideas for the direction of North Korean films and even was known for visiting the sets of films in production and issuing instructions on the acting, costumes, script, or music (Kim I. 2020, 48). Furthermore, he is said to personally approve of every single film made in the DPRK until the day he died (Schönherr 2012,1). Kim Immanuel (2020, 48) introduced an article in which Ri Hüich'an, a North Korean screenwriter of the famous comedy *The Problem of Our Family*, wrote that he would not have been able to finish the script for the film was it not for the Dear General Kim Jong Il supplying him with the answers. Additionally, he credited *On the Art of Cinema* as the guide that enabled the creation of an ideologically strong plot which was the cause of the film's success.

The kidnapping of the prominent South Korean director Sin Sangok and his then ex-wife reportedly happened after Kim Jong Il allegedly started to perceive the quality of North Korean films and their repetitiveness as dispiriting and wanted to solve the issue with the help of the couple. Sin Sangok and Ch'oe Ŭnhüi ultimately agreed, and as Fisher puts it, together, they changed the course of North Korean history (2015, 5). Sin Sangok revolutionized North Korean cinema by bringing new genres to the viewers. He and his wife started Sin Film Studio in DPRK (Schönherr 2012,7) and created many well-known North Korean films.

In the 1980s, China opened its economy; in 1989, the Berlin Wall came down, and in 1991, the USSR dissolved, so North Korea needed to enhance its strategies to prevent becoming the next country to topple. During that time, the film series *Nation and Destiny* started airing and became the world's longest-running one. Schönherr (2012,7) says that North Koreans were repeatedly exposed to the idea that their country is the best through romantic comedies with repetitive themes. The clash of the film plot with the daily experiences of the viewers was, according to Schönherr, not considered important

because “the films were about how life should be, how it would soon be if everyone stayed in line and followed orders” (Schönherr 2012,7).

A challenging time for the DPKR came after the death of Kim Il Sung in 1994, which was followed by a devastating famine that took a toll on hundreds of thousands, maybe millions of North Korean lives. The film’s reaction to that was a portrayal of the hardships Kim Il Sung had to overcome when he was a guerrilla fighter and emerged undefeated, and how, in the same way, North Koreans would grow stronger from the current situation (Schönherr 2012,7).

When Kim Jong Il became the official head of the state in 1997, the DPKR became increasingly exposed to foreign VHS and DVDs that came mainly through China. Though holding such DVDs or watching them was strictly illegal, Schönherr (2012,7) reports that many North Koreans watched them and got a new outlook on what a film could deliver.

Beginning with 2000 the period of Arduous March ended and the films reacted by also celebrating Kim Il Sung’s victory in his Arduous March in 1930s (Schönherr 2012, 129). The Sunshine Policy was not mentioned in any of the films produced in 2000s, and some of them even portray the South as the enemy, along with the Japanese (Schönherr 2012, 144).

On the Art of Cinema

In 1973, Kim Jong Il’s manifesto *On the Art of Cinema* was published, and alongside a written compilation of political speeches of Kim Il Sung, titled *Duties of Literature and Arts in Our Revolution* (1972), became a guide for North Korean filmmakers (Gabor 2019, 37). *On the Art of Cinema* presents instructions for filmmaking committed to *Chuch’e* ideology. The book stresses that only an ideologically correct worldview of all people connected with film production determines the film’s quality and success (Kim J.I. 1973, 385). According to Kim Jong Il’s demand, the film crew must create artistic, ideological, and revolutionary films that provide people with “the entire armory of the Party’s monolithic ideology and imbuing the whole of society with the great concept of *Juche*.”⁸ (Kim J.I. 1973, 166).

The Leader’s orders for the filmmaking industry condensed in *On the Art of Cinema* are often called “seed theory” by scholars. According to Kim Jong Il’s demands, every

⁸ another way of transcribing *Chuch’e*

work of art must contain a convincing ideological substance at its core. The seed equals a message chosen per Party policy, and after being planted, it grows and transfers into the minds of the audience and teaches them to revolutionize themselves continuously (Kim J.I. 1973, 25-27). Gabor (2019, 37) comments that while most cinema manifestos emerge from the rail against the status quo, *On the Art of Cinema* was produced at the top of the power structure to establish or impose what would become the status quo. Thus, he calls the book a combination of orders, demands, and reflections for ideologically devoted North Korean filmmaking. At the same time, Gabor sees it as a reflection of the political and social values of the North Korean system itself. Frank (2011, 14) further specifies that *On the Art of Cinema* built concepts for arts in the country, but the principles discussed were also transferred to other fields.

On the Art of Cinema begins with a few chapters on literature and art in general. Understanding art and literature is crucial in creating revolutionary works because only revolutionary works correspond with the needs of socialist and communist society and effectively provide people with *Chuch'e*'s ideas and inspire them to put effort into tasks of revolution and construction (Kim J.I. 1973, 5). A literary work can have the power to inspire and guide people toward living a virtuous life by addressing their problems and concerns by describing the lives of noble citizens of the new era (Kim J.I. 1973, 6). The task is to provide guidance in answering people's questions regarding political integrity. The writers provide this guidance by setting high standards by concentrating on portraying people's approach to labor and political, ideological, moral, or cultural relationships in their works (Kim J.I. 1973, 9).

Film directing is what Kim Jong Il (1973, 161) calls crucial in transforming people into true communists. He extensively stresses the need for complete political and ideological conversion of the writer, director, staff, and actors if an ideologically correct and valuable film is to be made (Kim J.I. 1973, 2). The responsibility for production, creative work, film's fate, and ideological education of the film staff is put on the director, whom Kim Jong Il (1973, 175) compares to a military commander. If the director conducts regular political work and ideological education in combination with creative activities, the film crew undergoes a revolutionary transformation while working on the film and becomes a part of the working class (Kim J.I. 1973, 173).

Like the director and film crew, actors are also demanded first to have a correct outlook on the world (Kim J.I. 173, 242) in order to understand the reality and the struggles of ordinary people and be then able to portray them on the screen in a believable

manner (Kim J.I. 1973, 239). Furthermore, the way an actor portrays a character is crucial to the informative and educational roles of films:

The real objective of cinematic art is not merely to enhance people's awareness of the world but to develop them as communist revolutionaries and thereby accelerate the pace of the revolution and construction, which is achieved by using the actor's character portrayal (Kim J.I. 1973, 241).

Regarding North Korean actors, Kim Sökyöŋ (2010, 50) says: "The character's identity should spill over into the actors' daily lives so they would be perceived solely by the roles played on stage and screen." As an example, she brings up the case of Hong Yönghui, a leading actress from the revolutionary opera *Flower Girl*, who appeared on a North Korean banknote, taking on the identity of a patriotic fictional character even in real life (Kim S.Y. 2010, 51). Kim Immanuel also mentioned how Kim Seyöng, since starring as the post office Chief in the film *The Problem of Our Family*, has been referred to as the "Chief" by people who recognize him on the street (Kim I. 2020, 46). According to Kim Sökyöŋ (2010, 50) it is known that North Korea honors their actors' political correctness more than their talents and that achievements in acting are considered a collective pride in the DPRK. Actors can be awarded titles such as laudatory actor, equaling the rank of vice minister, or the most honorable rank, people's actor, equivalent to a government minister (Kim S.Y. 2010, 51). Lynn Lee and James Leong, whose documentary *Aki Ra's Boys* was invited to the P'yöngyang International Film Festival in 2008, shared that they got to see a unique film industry where the actors and directors spoke about serving their country and recognized their roles as creators of propaganda.

Kim Sökyöŋ (2010, 50) points out the usage of films as communal rituals in which the actors are the ones who study the virtues of revolutionary individuals to be able to then appear on the screen to portray them. The citizens watching the film then should emerge as the new heroes, expected to live out the collective ideal depicted in films. For this cyclical ritual to be successful, total political conversion of everyone participating in art-making is stressed as crucial in *On the Art of Cinema*:

If writers and artists are to produce works capable of affecting people's revolutionary education, the creative artists themselves should acquire revolutionary and working-class qualities and become communists before anyone else. Revolutionary works can only be produced by writers and artists who have fully established their own revolutionary world outlook. (Kim J.I. 1989, 385)

Director Sin Sangok (Sin and Ch'oe 2001 in Kim S. Y. 2010) talked about an official campaign *Struggle to Implement and Realize Ideals in Films*, through which the state involved people in creating study groups at school or the workplace so that they can learn together from films. Sin Sangok said that people compared their lives to the lives of the characters shown in films and planned on how to emulate their heroic virtues during those study sessions. The director even shared that when he got detained, a guard started to recite lines from a film when talking to him melodramatically. Kim Sökyöng (2010, 57) calls these repeated lessons “inscribed onto the bodies of North Koreans” and to be “serving as the ideological foundation of their worldview.”

2. Propaganda

Sennett (Sennett 2014, 46), in his case study, comments that propaganda is usually linked to tyrannical and authoritarian regimes and that in the English-speaking world, it is mainly associated with manipulation, concealing reality, or spreading a wrong and dangerous message. Nevertheless, propaganda has not been viewed in a negative light only. The Latin origin of the term means “propagation”, in other words, advertising. It was considered a wanted activity in the Catholic Church when spreading its faith, which is why the church established the *Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* in 1622, a sacred congregation through which it intended to oppose Protestantism and spread the Roman Catholic Church’s beliefs into the New World (Jowett and O’Donnell 2012, 2). Huxley (1936, 39 in Sennett 2014) said that political or religious propaganda could sway those already thoroughly or partially convinced of the conveyed message’s core truth:

Propaganda gives force and direction to the successive movements of popular feeling and desire, but it does not do much to create these movements. A propagandist is a man who canalizes an already existing stream. In a land where there is no water, he digs in vain.

This Huxley’s statement sheds light on the potential reason for the initial effectiveness of North Korean propaganda in the country’s first film *My Hometown* (1949). The picture introduced a different narrative regarding the country’s origins, contradicting the collective memories of the nation’s history. However, because the story might have canalized the inner hopes of North Koreans regarding their nation, the story

conveyed in *My Hometown* was able to become the official state doctrine since then (Schönherr 2012, 4).

Film historian Richard Taylor (Taylor 1979, 19) argues: “Propaganda is concerned with the transmission of ideas and/or values from one person, or group of persons, to another.” Hence propagandist is very deliberate about the message being conveyed and incorporates techniques of manipulation and persuasion to achieve their goal. Thus, propaganda cannot be communicated accidentally or unintentionally. Taylor (Taylor 1979, 19) admits that the level of success of the propaganda is another matter, but the purpose and intention are what count to label something as such.

Reeves (Reeves 1999, 239), nevertheless, illuminates that the governments of the twentieth century, anywhere from the British during World War I, the Soviet in the 1920s, or the German in the 1930s, began utilizing films as a means to spread state-supported narratives.

Changes in Narratives on the Korean Peninsula

The Korean people most likely experienced the propaganda exercised by the Japanese Imperial government during the occupation years. Since 1924, the Japanese government began censoring domestic and imported films, especially those that portrayed Western liberalism or any themes that could impede public safety, morals, or health. Censorship over motion pictures was performed (Min, Joo, and Kwak 2002, 30), and especially around the end of the colonization period, it was ensured the films promoted war and the assimilation of Koreans and the Japanese (Armstrong 2002, 6).

After the Liberation, during the years of occupation by the Red Army (1945 to 1948), North Korea adopted the Soviet filmmaking approach. The use of propaganda in Russia after the 1917 revolution began in the name of enlightenment, similar to the mission of the *Sacra Congregatio* in the seventeenth century. The Bolshevik regime was committed to the transformation of capitalism into socialism, which would give creation to a world in which people could be free and realize their humanity. Early after the USSR’s formation, Lenin said that cinema is the most important form of art (*Sovietskoye Kino 1933, 10*). Stalin later added that the cinema is the greatest means of mass agitation, and the statement was even printed on the USSR’s postal stamp in 1949 (Volstamp). It is apparent that the Soviet government did not attempt to conceal its propaganda, and

Nicholas Reeves (1999, 43) argues it was because the regime considered its ideological beliefs grounded in empirical data defined by Marx.

North Koreans initially learned from the Soviets and borrowed their form of propaganda, but Charles Armstrong (2002, 16) points out that the films North Korea began making in the 1940s primarily portrayed an attachment to the countryside, peasant life values, and nationalism centered around the founding father Kim Il Sung, which deviated from the USSR's socialist themes of class struggle, reverence for the state, and the progress toward communism. The first North Korean film, *My Hometown* (1949), did not carry distinctive Soviet traits, even though it was made under Soviet influence a mere one year after the establishment of DPRK (Kim S.Y. 2010, 34). The film never mentions the help of the Soviet Army during the act of Liberation, which Armstrong (2002, 19) calls especially striking. Moreover, the film re-interpreted the country's history and offered a new myth—the heroic Kim Il Sung and his guerrilla troopers liberated Korea from Japanese rule.

Throughout its history, the North Korean leadership has utilized varying propaganda themes in various intensities to suit its current needs (Špitálníková 2013, 54). Nina Špitálníková (2013, 47-49) identifies that the image of an enemy has been crucial for North Korean propaganda. The enemy is a foreign capitalistic bourgeoisie, mostly the Japanese and Americans (Kim S.Y. 2007, 28:40), contrasting with the hardworking Korean people. The enemy appears strong but not undefeatable, which should agitate Koreans to be more active (Špitálníková 2013, 49). North Koreans are presented as happy children living at the bosom of the Great Leader (Lankov 2013, 59). South Korea is a “puppet” of America and a lackey of capitalism (Guyen 2019, 196) that awaits to be under the care of the fatherly leader like their Norther brethren (Lankov 2013, 59). When Kim Il Sung started the great mobilization movement *Ch'ŏllima* in 1958, the propaganda accentuated the need for industrialization and collectivization, and the personality of Kim Il Sung began to be strategically modeled as well—first, he was portrayed as a builder aiding in building a bright future for the North Korean people. Then, he began to be depicted as a benevolent figure responsible for bringing prosperity and abundance to the people of North Korea. From the 1970s, propaganda started focusing on the creation of a personality cult around Kim Jong Il as well, allegedly connecting him, among others, with the sphere of literature and arts (Špitálníková 2013, 51-54).

Nina Špitálníková (2022, 1:00:09) says that the North Korean government makes any art form. Billboards, radio, TV, newspapers, books, textbooks, or paintings are all subjected to the regulations of the *Korean Workers' Party*, specifically its Propaganda Department. Therefore, the Party determines any visual or auditory perception of North Korea.

As for the case of South Korea, after the Liberation, the films started to show a more modern way of living, the influence of capitalism, marriage out of love, infidelity, prostitution, past war experiences, or the American military (Pospíšilová 2022, 73). If North Koreans were portrayed in South Korean media, they were either refugees or spies (Pospíšilová 2022, 75). The DPRK sealed its borders with the South in 1965, and Paul Fisher (2015, 32) shares that under South Korea's second president Pak Chŏnghŭi's rule, South Korea did not refer to the Northerners as Koreans but only as "Reds" or the "Northern monsters", and stories that even a few hours of exposure to communism could turn one Red were spreading. Allegedly, South Korean children at that time were shown cartoons discussing the dangers of the "Reds" and were always told to be ready to fight them if necessary (Fisher 2015, 31). Many were also taught that those living in the North looked devilish— with red skin, horns, tails, and hooves (Fisher 2015, 32). Pak Chŏnghŭi's rule, sympathizing with or praising the North, disagreement with the South Korean government's policies regarding the North, or recognizing the North as a political entity became a crime for which one could go to jail or, in some cases, even receive a death sentence (Fisher 2015, 32). Furthermore, people allegedly went to jail for listening to North Korean music, reading socialist pamphlets, or owning North Korean stamps. The South did not show Kim Il Sung's face to ordinary people to prevent anyone from sympathizing with him, and even meeting one's North Korean relatives was the most severe violation of the law (Fisher 2015, 32).

3. Impact of Media on the Identity of the Consumer

There is a timely interest in the media's influences on its consumers. Numerous studies have been conducted on the mood, opinions, and lifestyle changes the media causes to a Western audience. Bandura (2001, 271) states that much information about human values, thinking patterns, and behavior is gained from models portrayed symbolically in mass media. Educational psychologists (Clark and Paivio 1991, 165) have suggested that

effective learning occurs when information is presented verbally and visually. Therefore, films specifically, as Dermer and Hutchings (2000, 167-168) acknowledge, have an influence on cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of people's lives and provide an entertaining way to reframe, educate, create metaphors, or develop alternative solutions to one's issues. Baecker (1996, 560) says that films have the ability to convey a replicated version of reality, despite being works of fiction. Till and Vitouch (2012, 394) stress that sad plots in films can deteriorate the viewers' mood and can even potentially influence the viewers' beliefs and social values. Contrasting with that are studies on social comparison theory that Till and Vitouch (2012, 388) introduce. The theory suggests that people tend to feel better about themselves when comparing undesirable living conditions and abilities of others with their living situation. Thus, portraying, for example, suicide in a film reportedly increased distress in the viewers subjected to watching it, but at the same time, caused a rise in life satisfaction and a drop in suicidal thoughts (Till and Vitouch 2012, 388).

Till and Vitouch's research (2012, 394) presents an experiment in which two groups of people were made to watch two versions of the same film respectively. Capital punishment was portrayed in one version of the film; in the other, the death penalty was edited out and only implied. Interestingly, only the second group's attitude towards capital punishment changed, which could mean that the mere implication of the death penalty made the viewers imagine it more gruesomely than the film was able to portray. Furthermore, the stance toward capital punishment of those who viewed the scene of execution was less extreme compared to the stance of the group that was showed only an implication of it (Till and Vitouch 2012, 394). Thus, a simple imagination of an event can change behavior and attitudes (Till and Vitouch 2012, 394).

When college students were exposed to issues of homosexuality in the media, they held visibly more positive attitudes toward it (Riggle, Ellis, and Crawford 1996 in Mazur and Emmers-Sommer 2003, 158). In another study, the media was said to have played a role in the self-realization, current identity, and coming out of gay/bisexual respondents only by providing role models, such as the lesbian American talk show host Ellen Degeneres who came out publicly on TV or the gay characters in the sitcom *Will and Grace* (Gomillion and Giuliano 2011, 366). Matthews (2003, 241) talks about preschoolers' strong identification with film and TV characters, to the point of imitating those characters while playing. School-aged children would then continue to mimic film and TV characters while using them as their role models for social behavior. Boon and

Lomore's findings (2001, 433) propose that adolescents' and young adults' beloved celebrities contribute to developing one's personality characteristics and values but stress that there is no such effect on older individuals.

Identification with role models in the media, suggested by Fielitzen and Linné (Feilitzen and Linné 1975 in Gomillion, Giuliano 2011, 332), is similarity identification and wishful identification. Similarity identification is rooted in idealizing a media figure and living indirectly through the figure's activities. Wishful identification happens when an individual aspires to resemble the media figure's appealing features.

According to research on the impact of violence against women in films on male viewers, it was found that repeated exposure to such films resulted in a decrease in negative reactions towards them. The viewers perceived the films as less violent and less degrading towards women (Linz, Donnerstein, and Penrod 1984).

Regarding family portrayal in films, Zinn and Eitzen (1996) argue that the media are a force in spreading myths about family consensus or traditional family roles. Beliefs eternalized by the media about stepfamilies, specifically, were found to either promote unrealistic expectations of instant love or, on the contrary, condemn stepfamilies by portraying negative stepparent stereotypes (Kim and Angst 2005, 3). Hudock and Warden (2001, 118) analyzed the benefits a film analysis could have for therapy trainees and their patients and clearly stated that the benefits of using films to learn outweigh the drawbacks—the personal identification with the film characters' traits, with relationship dynamics, and even possible trigger situations caused by viewing family films are helpful and wanted tools for self-awareness of the trainees and their clients. Family therapists specify that films are helpful because they provide a form of safe distancing from one's problems during therapy (Denmer and Hutchings 2002, 165). Furthermore, watching films is reportedly effective because the watchers can discuss what is happening, which helps them see problems from various perspectives. Thus, films provide a common ground for group discussions (Leon and Angst 2005, 4).

4. Analysis

The following part of the work aims to identify recurring themes in depicting family life in fifteen films made in the DPRK between 1967 and 2011. When analyzing family life portrayed in the films, the work also examines unmarried couples because dating in the films often does not involve only the two people in love but also their respective families. Moreover, dating portrayed in the films primarily leads to marriage and the creation of a family.

The analyzed films are available online on *YouTube* and *Internet Archive*, and family or romantic relationships have a relatively central position in their plotlines. This work introduces a small fraction of films made in the DPRK, which makes the noticed patterns most likely not the only ones that could be identified in more large-scale analysis. While focus can be put on various aspects of family life, this work highlights the most prominent ones registered: housing, leisure time, family structure, parent-child relationships, romantic relationships, motherhood, honor, and the role of the North Korean leaders in one's family.

A somewhat untypical scene sequencing in some films, a considerable language barrier, and a knowledge deficiency about all aspects of the North Korean socio-political system are why some essential elements may have been missed when analyzing the content of the films. Furthermore, a personal outlook on the issues portrayed in the films, such as what is an expression of love or honor, also limits this research in presenting complete data. The data presented in the following part were identified as the most recurring themes in depicting a family's lifestyle on North Korean screens.

Before analyzing North Korean films, considering the information presented in the theoretical part of this work, they are expected to be set in a contemporary realistic socialist background, similar to North Korea. Due to the state's complete control over media; notable usage of nationalistic and anti-capitalist propaganda; and the educational purpose of North Korean films, it is anticipated that film characters would impersonate the archetype of devoted and hard-working citizens. Furthermore, a residue of Confucian values is expected in portraying one's service to the state and family and in depicting a patriarchal family structure. Films in North Korea are divided into art, documentary, science, and children's films. Films analyzed in this work fall under the category of art film (Unikorea. n.d.).

Introduction of Films

<p>The Problem of Our Family 우리 집 문제</p>	<p>1973</p>
<p>A newspaper office chief leads the office and his family seemingly authoritatively. He treats other people from a position of certain dominance and even advises his male employee how to live in a marriage so that he can always stay in power. His wife, however, is very outspoken and intelligent. She has complete control over her husband without him ever realizing it, and anything she wants her husband to do, she can make him do. The wife enjoys a lavish lifestyle, and when she cannot afford to buy something, she borrows money from others, often being able to talk her way from paying back, too. Her scheming brings about some comical, yet for the chief, unfortunate moments. The wife's continuous problematic behavior leads to her husband's reputation downgrading to the point of being removed from his position and getting relocated to work in the countryside.</p>	

<p>Ask Yourself 자신에게 물어보라</p>	<p>1988</p>
<p>San Mae works in the countryside pasture but feels like she is sacrificing her life there. She is supposed to leave the place and go to the capital to find a husband, yet the chief of the economic guidance committee of that area decides that she cannot leave, as they need young people to work there. San Mae challenges him and pushes him to send one of his biological daughters to work in the pasture if he thinks working in the countryside is an important activity for a young person. San Mae, in the end, learns that developing the countryside is not a sacrifice and decides to spend her life there with her lover, who believes the same. The chief comes to the realization that his daughters did not receive proper education from him and his wife, as they are not willing to leave the capital to work in the village.</p>	

Family Bright with Songs 노래속에 꽃 피는 가정	1990
<p>The shipbuilding company's chief focuses on building a new ship and depends greatly on his nephew, Chŏng Hak, who works on an invention to speed up the process. Chŏng Hak falls in love with another worker, Sŏn Ŏk, a devoted worker and a great singer. The chief thinks Sŏn Ŏk is distracting Chŏng Hak from working on his research and tries to separate the two lovers. At that time, a <i>Workers' Singing Contest</i> is taking place in their area, and the chief's older brother requests the whole family to start meeting in the evenings and practice stage performance to participate in the contest. Initially, The chief has many excuses for not participating but soon learns that practicing singing helps improve their work ethic.</p>	

The Story of a Blooming Flower 꽃에 깃든 사연	1992
<p>Shimozawa is a Japanese scientist and a son of a florist who, before dying, handed over her garden and new flower species to him. Shimozawa, however, sells the patent for his mother's flower, and it becomes a kind popular between prostitutes and people living debauched lifestyles. Shimozawa, realizing that he has dishonored his mother, whose soul was permeated in that flower, decides to breed a new kind to honor her. Like the younger version of Shimozawa, his daughter Hae Na wishes to sell the patent for their successfully developing new flower as she is tempted by the profit they could make from it. Shimozawa wants to avoid making the same mistake of prioritizing money over filial piety, so he contacts his friend, a director of the International Institute of the Chuch'e Idea, to ask for advice and then even travels to DPRK to admire the country's botanical gardens, through which he comes to understand Chuch'e and decides that the flower he is breeding will no longer honor his mother. Instead, he names it Kimjongilia to honor the North Korean leader "whose hug is warmer than a hug from all mothers in the world". Shimozawa's newly found ideology and dedication make Hae Na see the reason for his actions as well.</p>	

Urban Girl Comes to Get Married 도시처녀 시집와요	1993
<p>Ri Hyang is a skilled cutter working in a P'yŏngyang clothes factory. She and her co-workers come to aid with work at a countryside farm, where Ri Hyang meets Song Sik, who seems like a typical rural boy. Song Sik's mother is fond of Ri Hyang and the two would marry. Nevertheless, Ri Hyang and Song Sik are not fond of each other because of their seemingly different lifestyles. However, they slowly learn more about each other, and Ri Hyang starts admiring Song Sik's dedication to rural life and his aim of developing the village.</p>	

Myself in the Distant Future 후날의 내 모습	1993
<p>Sin Chu takes a liking to a construction worker Su Hyang. When she decides to move back to her hometown instead of taking on an opportunity to study, Sin Chu follows her, intending to persuade her to live with him in the capital. Su Hyang, however, disapproves of Sin Chu's worldview and continuous dependence on his parents' support. While he only boasts about his family's well-being, she cares about developing her hometown. Su Hyang advises him to change his lifestyle, which makes Sin Chu indeed change his behavior, and, in the end, he moves to the countryside, not because of his love for Su Hyang but because he wants to aid in developing the village.</p>	

Two Families in Haeung-dong 해운동의 두 가정	1996
<p>A famous singer Song Yunhŭi moves with her son Pyŏl I into a new apartment building. Everyone is interested in who the singer's husband is, but the man is too busy working as a scientist, so he is not around much. Yun Hŭi soon meets the so-called harmonious couple residing in the building—Pŏm II's father and mother. Pŏm II's father has a doctorate and works as a scientist, just like Yun Hŭi's husband. However, unlike her husband, Pŏm II's father is also a very attentive to his familx, which makes Yun Hŭi dissatisfied with her situation. Initially, the residents also opposed Yun Hŭi's husband's behavior but started admiring him after listening to his speech about his commitment to the nation and his profession. Especially Pŏm II's mother, who used to adore her</p>	

family-oriented husband, suddenly realizes she is repelled by how comfortably he enjoys living. The perception of the two families is gradually changing. In the end, Yun Hŭi and her family are regarded as exemplary, while the once harmonious couple is figuring out how to live as an upright family again.

<p>A Family Basketball Team 가족농구선수단</p>	<p>1998</p>
<p>Mr. Yun is a PE teacher at a local school and has a great love for the sport, namely basketball. He forms a basketball team with his family, and they all dedicate much of their time to exercising and practicing. Mr. Yun even approves of his daughters' boyfriends based on whether they are "sporty" or not, and the only son's girlfriend is no exception. Ch'öl Yǒng is allowed to marry Söl Ŏk only if she can prove her sport skills. While practicing, Söl Ŏk learns the ideological meaning of basketball from her father-in-law and dedicates herself to becoming a valuable member of the family team. When Ch'öl Yǒng wishes to become a PE teacher at a large school instead of a local rural school like Mr. Yun advises, the two men get into an argument, but Ch'öl Yǒng eventually, much like his wife Söl Ŏk, comprehends the moral significance of his father's commitment to the rural school and basketball.</p>	

<p>The Wheels of Happiness 행복의 수레바퀴</p>	<p>2000</p>
<p>Chi Hyang is a talented architect. After giving birth to her first child, she becomes too busy balancing work and family life, so she takes maternity leave to care for her daughter and husband. While on her leave, she experiences loneliness and regret for not being able to fulfill the role of a mother while contributing to society through work like other admirable women do. Chi Hyang and her husband realize that able women should have jobs and that household chores can be shared between married partners. Furthermore, after Chi Hyang's seven-year-long maternity leave ends, she has to try very hard to prove her skills in the workplace.</p>	

Mother's Happiness 어머니의 행복	2003
<p>A widowed mother of five sons is able to send three of them to the army, where they excel as outstanding soldiers. Her two youngest sons' fates are still unsure as the youngest one, Kyōng Ho has severe health problems, and the second youngest, Chin Ho, is a troublemaker unwilling to work. The mother instructs Chin Ho to work at a construction site to instill discipline. As for Kyōng Ho, she carries him on her back through the mountains regularly so that he can receive proper treatment from a doctor. The mother's struggle to send her sons to the army and her unwavering dedication to the nation results in many people helping the family, and Kyōng Ho and Chin Ho also serving in the military.</p>	

Our Fragrance 우리의 향기	2003
<p>At a <i>ssirŭm</i>⁹ match, an older man and woman strike up a conversation and decide to introduce their grandchildren to each other and arrange their marriage. The two families' lifestyles are very different, however. The family of the elderly man lives in a very traditional Korean way, whereas the elderly woman's family engages in a somehow capitalistic lifestyle. After the young people curiously meet while walking at a wedding dress fashion show, they develop feelings for each other. P'yōng Ho's grandfather, however, sees how westernized Sae Pyōl's family is, and disapproves of the marriage until Sae Pyōl demonstrates regret for her past lifestyle choices.</p>	

A Schoolgirl's Diary 한 녀학생의 일기	2006
<p>Su Ryōn is a student who lives with her mother, grandmother, and younger sister. Her father is a scientist and rarely at home, leaving the women alone to care for the household. Su Ryōn does not understand her father, who keeps himself preoccupied with, in her eyes, little research instead of obtaining a doctorate, which would acquire their family more prestige and the option of moving out of their house into an apartment. Su Ryōn also disapproves of her mother's endless dedication to her</p>	

⁹ Korean wrestling–national sport of Korea

husband, who rarely gives them his attention in return. While for some time, Su Ryŏn is stern about not following in her father's footsteps of becoming a scientist, she changes her mind after she witnesses her father's scientific success.

<p>Kite Flying in the Sky 저 하늘의 연</p>	<p>2007</p>
<p>Se Yŏn is an aspiring marathon runner who receives career support from her village friends. When she grows up, she discovers that her bus conductor friend died trying to save children caught in a building fire. This friend had two children and a husband, who are now left alone. At that moment, Se Yŏn decides to give up her marathon career and instead marries her friend's husband and adopts her children to help them like her friend helped those children caught up in a fire. From then on, Se Yŏn and her husband take in many more orphaned children. Through her exemplary behavior as a mother and a citizen, Se Yŏn motivates all her children to serve in the army, earning respect from people around for elevating the General's burdens through her deeds.</p>	

<p>The First Year After Wedding 결혼 후 첫해</p>	<p>2007</p>
<p>Hyŏn Ŏk is a university graduate and a "seaweed breeding enthusiast" who marries Chin Kyu, a farming expert. When they were dating, he used to support her passion for seaweed breeding, but after the marriage, he suddenly demands that she is more invested in household chores than her dreams. When Chin Kyu's father comes to live with them, Hyŏn Ŏk does not perform her daughter-in-law's duties well due to her preoccupation with her work which leads to many arguments between Hyŏn Ŏk and Chin Kyu. Hyŏn Ŏk ultimately states that she would be willing to become a housewife and give up her job, but because she resides near the sea, breeding seaweed is her duty to the nation, and she cannot do otherwise. Chin Kyu, in the end, realizes how Hyŏn Ŏk's devotion to her job serves the country and begins to support her again.</p>	

Flower in Snow 눈속에 핀 꽃	2011
<p>In Sŏn is a young woman who got appointed as a local wool factory's manager. She has many revolutionary ideas, including demolishing their old factory and building a new, bigger one. In Sŏn does not consider one's age or gender to be a factor of importance and treats everyone equally while devoting all her attention to work and learning about the General. When In Sŏn breaks up with her boyfriend Myŏng Sik, it is not to burden him with her decision to adopt her late co-worker's orphaned children, whom she wishes to raise into devoted workers like their late mother used to be.</p>	

Findings

1. Housing

The type of housing a family has can reveal a contrast between favorable and unfavorable lifestyles. Such contrast is particularly depicted in *Our Fragrance*, *Myself in the Distant Future*, and *The Wheels of Happiness*. For instance, in *Our Fragrance*, P'yŏng Ho and his family reside in a family house where they eat Korean cuisine while seated on the floor. Furthermore, they honor Korean customs, such as bowing to elders during the Lunar New Year and serving them at a separate table from the rest of the family. On the contrary, Sae Pyŏl and her family live in an apartment and follow a highly Westernized lifestyle. They sit on chairs instead of the floor, eat foreign meals, and eagerly buy new furniture or clothes. Sae Pyŏl's family is the one that needs to undergo a change for P'yŏng Ho to be allowed to marry her.

Families that live in a rather traditionally Korean way, in family houses, often with gardens where they raise domestic animals, are those in *A Family Bright with Songs*, *A Family Basketball Tea*, Sŏn Ch'o in *The Wheels of Happiness*, *A Schoolgirl's Diary*, *Mother's Happiness*, *First Year After the Wedding*, P'yŏng Ho's Family in *Our Fragrance*.

While it is assumed that families that live in apartments must have significantly contributed to the state to earn the privilege of residence, there still appear to be some moral issues that those families need to address. Except for Pyŏl I's family in *Two Families in Haeun-dong*, and *The Kite Flying in the Sky*, those who have lived in

apartments for a long time have gotten too comfortable and started seeking individual comfort (*The Problem of My Family*, Pöm Il's family in *Two Families in Haeun-dong*, *Myself in the Distant Future*, *The Wheels of Happiness*, *Our Fragrance*). Su Ryön from *A Schoolgirl's Diary* lives with her family in a family house, but until her worldview shifts into being more in resonance with the state's needs, she wishes to move into an apartment. The contribution to Shimozawa and his family's Westernized lifestyle seems to be their Japanese origin.

*Immiban*¹⁰ meetings are portrayed in *The Problem of Our Family* and *Two Families in Haeung-dong*. The way resident women keep each other accountable through these sessions is shown through their discussions of other families' issues and other disturbances to the building order.

2. Leisure Time

Many bonding opportunities for a family come through sports or group work, which seems particularly important for igniting the family spirit and improving one's character. Furthermore, by participating in competitive family events, families show appreciation towards the Party and positively contribute to society. The following section introduces dialogues and scene descriptions from the analyzed films that illuminate the importance of spending time on family activities.

a. A Family Bright with Songs

- “We will do this [the contest] to do our work better. We can practice at night.” (47:39) says the eldest brother after signing up his family for a family singing contest, even though some of the members protested due to being busy with work.
- “Do you think I, in my 70s, would be doing this to get famous and win a prize? We could not even think about singing back in the day, but now the Party tells us to sing with all our hearts. We could not imagine this without our Party. I suggested joining since I am thankful for it.” (54:35)

¹⁰ “people's group” made with the aim of surveillance. Typically consists of 20 to 40 families from one neighborhood. There are also smaller *immibans* established in buildings. Each *immiban* has an official leader. The groups discuss the duties regarding neighborhood maintenance but also spy on each other as the members are encouraged to report any suspicious behavior during regular group meetings (Lankov 2013, 39).

- The ship factory chief, who was reluctant to join the singing contest: “Today, I was able to sing my heart out on this stage with my seventy years old brother, children, and grandchildren. This could happen thanks to the Party.” (1:08:58)
- b. A Family Basketball Team
- “The most talented players were the center of the game in the past, but these days all players respectively gather their strengths and attack together.” (50:09). This may be a metaphor explaining why Mr. Yun considers it essential that his family learns basketball.
 - Before participating in a basketball *Family Match*, the head of the family says: “If we show a good score, we may contribute to developing basketball as a mass sport. That is more important to me than winning or losing.” (53:21)
- c. Two Families in Haeun-dong
- Põm Il and her father are following a morning radio exercise routine together, looking very happy together. (34:00)
- d. A Schoolgirl’s Diary
- Su Ők participates in a friendly football match between her father and his co-workers. This moment presented a valuable chance for the father and daughters to strengthen their bond, especially since their relationship was not very good until then. (1:18:51)

3. Family Structure and Gender Roles

There is not a specific portrayal of family structure in the analyzed North Korean films. Many families are nuclear—consisting of children and parents, occasionally some are extended with grandparents living under the same roof (*The Problem of Our Family*, *Ask Yourself*, *The Story of a Blooming Flower*, *Two Families in Haeun-dong*, *Myself in the Distant Future*, *The Wheels of Happiness*, *Our Fragrance*, *A Schoolgirl’s Diary*, *The Kite Flying in the Sky*). When a family is notably patriarchal, the man who is the head of the family is responsible for decision-making and is mostly characterized as kind and wise (*Family Bright with Songs*, *Family Basketball Team*, *Our Fragrance*). The film that

depicts a strict and irritable head of the family is *The Problem of Our Family* solely. There are also families consisting of married couples who do not have children (*Our Fragrance*, *The First Year After the Wedding*), families with adopted children (*The Kite Flying in the Sky*, *Flower in The Snow*), and families of widowed mothers and her sons (*Mother's Happiness*).

When women get portrayed as deviating from the more traditional homemaker roles, they do so intending to focus on their citizen and worker duties (*The Wheels of Happiness*, *The First Year After Wedding*, *A Flower in the Snow*). The following section explores family relationship dynamics portrayed through dialogues and scene descriptions.

3.1. Traditional Family Structure

a. The Problem of Our Family

- The chief is lecturing his young male employee: “Since you are the head of the family now, you should be responsible for disciplining your wife. Some men behave bravely outside but cannot control their wives. Then people start talking. Moreover, they [such men] make mistakes at work too. Some men got ruined because of their wives.” (29:59)

b. Family Bright with Songs

- The eldest man in the family wishes the whole family would participate in a singing contest. Most other men seem obligated to agree with the eldest man's idea. (45:59)
- When distributing musical instruments: “The drum is essential because our song is a cheerful one. Therefore, it is important to choose who will play the drum [...] the eldest, the uncle should play it.” (55:40)

c. A Family Basketball Team

- The whole family mostly listens to what Mr. Yun demands of them. He assigns roles to his family members when working on the field (21:14) or when playing basketball. (53:36)
- Mr. Yun asks his son's future employee to send his son to work in a small village school instead of the big one his son Ch'öl Yǒng wishes to work for. Mr. Yun's wish for Ch'öl Yǒng's future job is respected over what Ch'öl Yǒng wants. (39:44)

d. Mother's Happiness

- After the father dies, the eldest son takes on the role of the head of the household, instructing his mother how to raise her other sons, and she listens to him. (5:54)

e. Our Fragrance

- P'yŏng Ho's grandfather is the head of their family, and P'yŏng Ho says it is their family's custom to listen to him. (11:35)
- The grandfather gets to choose a potential wife for his grandson (11:12) and has the right to oppose the marriage, too. In addition, Sae Pyŏl's family must appeal to the grandfather for the wedding to be allowed. (53:02)

The majority of the men portrayed above lead their families with composure toward a morally good life, but the chief in *The Problem of Our Family* looks foolish as he lectures his employee to be cautious not to get ruined by his wife, while others perceive him as precisely such a man. The toll the wife's outlandish behavior takes on her husband's ability to work and the family's status is stressed when he is relocated to work in the countryside. The importance of an orderly family life may be summarized by an employee of the chief from *The Problem of Our Family*: "Family problem. I didn't know. Even such a sincerely working person can fail when listening to his wife. One family's problem stands in the way of revolution. People always talk about other people's household problems, but aren't such problems in every family? Above all, I shall write about revolutionizing the family." (1:38:41)

3.2. Women's Deviation from Homemaker Roles

a. The Wheels of Happiness

- "I realize now that woman's true happiness is not only in having a harmonious family but also in working like rain for the society and community." (37:36)

b. The First Year After the Wedding

- Conversation between Chin Kyu and Sun Hyang: "You are now a daughter-in-law, a housewife taking care of our household. Do you have any interest in that?"

[...] “You want me to give up breeding and focus on work around the house. I can stand it if you say that. However, I cannot stand it if you tell me to live against the benefit of our country. If all men thought like you, what would our society become?” (49:21)

- Young couple Yǒng Ran and Man Pok's conversation: “It seems that even the kindest men change after they get married.” [...] “Yǒng Ran, if we get married, I will help you. I will cook or do the laundry if I come home sooner than you. Yǒng Ran, let's help each other.” “It seems like you would pick a star from the sky for me, right? I enjoy working hard during my young years more, though.”
- c. A Flower in the Snow
- In Sǒn breaks up with her boyfriend and decides never to get married, as she wants to focus on rebuilding the factory and raising her adopted children. (37:07)

4. Motherhood

Motherhood was a central topic in *Mother's Happiness*, where the widowed mother's determination to send all her sons to the military was highlighted. In *The Wheels of Happiness*, the negative aspects of motherhood are portrayed: the mother takes maternity leave, and her skills necessary for when she returns to work, along with her social status, dramatically decrease. Motherhood in the context of adoption appears in *Flower in The Snow*, and *Kite Flying in The Sky*. The act of adoption is not done primarily out of love for the children or a need to fulfill the woman's desire to become a mother; rather, it is a form of sacrifice the woman does for her community and the regime to decrease possible burdens that arise from having to deal with orphaned children. The following passage explores the film characters' attitudes toward motherhood.

- a. The Wheels of Happiness
- Chi Hyang, when deciding to take a leave from work: “I want to become a good mother to [our] Kyǒng Min.” (30:54)
 - Chi Hyang, realizing that being a mother only is insufficient, tells her female friend: “Pu Nǚi, listen to me. Because of my bad decision, I have walked back a

long way. I left my real happiness behind; that is what I am saying. I have many regrets. I wish you do not have to live with regrets like me.” (38:40)

b. Kites Flying in the Sky

- Se Yŏn adopts her fiend’s orphaned daughter and son in order to become noble like their late mother, who attempted to save students from a school fire as if they were her own. (23:24)
- Adopting children makes Se Yŏn not want children of her own as she worries that she would love them more than her adoptive ones. (44:38)

c. Flower in the Snow

- In Sŏn takes in five children whose mother she used to know as a very dedicated worker: “When your mother was alive, she asked me to take care of you. [...] we are all one family now.” (14:12)
- In Sŏn seeks advice from her elderly mother when she experiences difficulties in raising her adopted children: “Mother, after my father died, you remained alone for twenty years. Worried that your love for me would lessen, you refused all men.” “That is because I am your mother.” “I want to be a mother like you.” (37:44)
- In Sŏn’s adoptive daughter to In Sŏn: “I regained that warm look of a mother I thought I had lost forever. Our manager, after she comes late home from work, forgets her worries when she looks at us sleeping and smiles happily. For a long time, I desired to call you Mother. Mother. Mom. Mom.” (1:18:28)

5. Parent-Child Relationship

5.1. Upbringing

Proper upbringing is especially stressed for its crucial role in raising people ready for life in North Korean society. Furthermore, North Korean parents take responsibility for their children’s flaws and wrongdoings.

a. Ask Yourself

- Mother to her daughters, who all decline to move from the city to work in a countryside pasture: “I did not do well as your mother. I fed and dressed you better

than others, thinking that it's happiness [...] It is my great sin to raise young people who hate cold winds." (1:19:21)

- "Comrade secretary, I did not educate my children well. In the era of revolution, I wrongly thought that my children would grow up to be the successors of the revolution." (1:16:33)

b. Myself in Distant Future

- Sin Ch'un's father complains about his son's attitude to life: "Not long ago, the General said *What our generation could not have finished doing will be done by our children*, but if they are not properly educated, who will be there to do it?" Sin Ch'un's mother: "It is my fault." (14:04)
- Su Hyang's father: "Think about your leaders first. The martyr's spirit, ready to sacrifice for the nation, is essential in your generation as well." (1:13:00)
- Sin Ch'un's father: "Ch'un, your grandfather is respected till this day because he devoted himself to the country's [prosperous] future during a difficult time back then. If a person does not follow the spirit of the times, he is as good as dead." (1:19:19)

c. Mother's Happiness

- A mother and soldier conversation: "How could I send a son with flaws to the army [...] He is a troublemaker not only at home but also in society. So, my conscience does not allow me to send him." "You are right. If young people are not educated well before joining the army, educating them there will take too long. As a result, the combat ability decreases." (23:27)
- After Chin Ho gets detained at the police station, his mother says: "He will not be able to execute his duty. It is my fault. I gave birth to a child with poor character." (32:55)

d. Our Fragrance

- "It felt like I visited foreigners' home [when you invited me for dinner]," says P'yöng Ho's grandfather, to which Sae Pyöl's grandmother answers: "I have nothing more to say. It is my fault as a parent that my children became like this." (1:02:56)

The emphasis on familial ties might reflect the already outlined Confucian tradition. Also, the North Korean laws about family responsibility and generational punishments may cause bigger cautiousness when raising one's child.

5.2. Learning From One's Parents

Some children portrayed in North Korean films go through phases when they rebel or do not conform to societal standards. They display childish behavior and flaws, yet can be led on the, so to say, right path if provided with proper guidance toward a righteous lifestyle. Typically, their parents become role models through their exemplary and moral behavior. Shimosawa and then his daughter in *The Story of a Blooming Flower*, Su Ryŏn in *A Schoolgirl's Diary*, Se Yŏn's adoptive children in *Kite Flying in the Sky*, and Chin Ho in *Mother's Happiness* carry these characteristics. The children, who initially do not understand their parent's behavior, ultimately aspire to live similarly to them. The text below provides examples of scenes and dialogues that explain these processes concretely.

a. The Story of a Blooming Flower

- Shimosawa understands what his friend is teaching him about Chuch'e and tells his daughter: "Hae Na, I know you blame me, but I did not breed the flower for money." "I know, but is there a world that would value your will more than gold?" "There is one. [...] I also used to wish for a luxurious life, but that would make me a merchant, eager for money, and you, a daughter of such a father. This flower is my soul and heart, and I will name it after a man who is like the mother of all mothers. [...] This is the greatest love your father can give you" "Father, forgive me, please. I did not understand your deep thoughts and only made you anxious. I was an unfilial daughter. Forgive me, please." (1:18:33)

b. Mother's Happiness

- Chin Ho contemplates his younger years: "Mothers of our country find pride and happiness when they raise their children competent for our country. Like others, my mother also wished for this all her life, but I did not understand my mother when I was younger. She was worried about me a lot." (2:48)

- Chin Ho carries his disabled brother on his back instead of their mother, who fell sick that day. When the younger brother asks if he is heavy, the conversation unfolds: “Yeah, you are. [...] Our mom must have carried all of us [brothers] on her back like this, right? I can feel her hardships now. I feel bad for causing trouble.” “Brother, I think I was born only to cause mom to suffer. When I think about it, it makes me want to go far away from her.” “Do not speak so weakly. Now we simply have to think about how to join the army so that we can make her happy.” (51:46)

c. A Schoolgirl’s Diary

- Su Ryōn changes from despising her parents to admiring her mother’s positive attitude to life: “Despite all her [mother’s] suffering, she always transforms her tears into smiles. [...] I have decided to help my mother and look after my family instead of my father.” (40:30)
- During a conversation with her father, Su Ryōn shares her desire to follow in his footsteps, but only if he lives the life she approves of: “Father, a bird can fly because there is a sky. A train can move forward because there are rails. [...] I will follow your steps if you get your doctorate.” “One does not study only to obtain a doctorate.” (24:41)
- After Su Ryōn witnesses her father’s success with his invention and how he is needed at his workplace, she understands the meaning of living such a busy and humble life. (1:17:13)
- Su Ryōn in a letter to her parents: “Father, mother, the path you are choosing to walk is the path of love and sacrifice. You follow Father General with open hearts until the end of your lives.” (1:27:14)

d. The Kite Flying in the Sky

- Se Yōn selflessly donates a part of her eye to her adoptive daughter so that she can become a violinist. To that, Se Yōn’s adoptive son says: “If Song Sun’s eyesight is recovered, our [late] mother’s wish [of Song Sun becoming a violinist] could be fulfilled, but how can we take your eye? Why do you not know this as an adult?” (26:29)

- Se Yŏn sacrifices are made in hopes of raising her adoptive children into honorable people, and the children seem to follow in her steps of elevating the General’s burdens. Song Sun, for instance, who was supposed to go study in university, decides not to attend it and go to the army instead, where she wants to play the violin for the leader when he visits her base. (1:14:00)

6. Honor

Honoring one’s parents and family is primarily done through committing good deeds and being devoted to the state. Being unfilial on the contrary manifests as disobeying parents and bringing shame to the family.

6.1. Honoring One’s Family

a. The Story of Blooming Flower

- Shimozawa wants to restore his mother’s honor that he tainted with greed: “I will create an ideal flower to honor mankind and our mothers.” (23:30)
- Shimozawa discusses his plan with an older friend: “I will create a flower that carries my mother’s soul.” “You are a dutiful son.” (23:44)

b. Myself in the Distant Future

- Sin Ch’un’s grandmother is delighted that her grandson is starting to exhibit a sense of responsibility toward carrying out his work duties with more responsibility. (1:06:40)

c. Two Families in Haeun-dong

- Pŏm Il’s father forgot his mother’s birthday due to working too much: “Is not a filial son the one who raises the national flag [...] not the one who makes his mother happy on her birthday?” (58:08)

d. Mother's Happiness

- Chin Ho contemplates his younger years: “Mothers of our country find pride and happiness when they raise their children competent for our country. Like others, my mother also wished for this all her life.” (2:48)
- One of the sons gets photographed with the leader, causing the mother to weep in joy and all the neighbors to congratulate her. (36:46)
- When the eldest son dies, his mother says: “The child who died before their parents was called unfilial in the past. However, I do not think like that. Although my eldest left forever, he did not leave only sadness behind. For his devotion to the country, he is a great son. Is not this happiness?” (48:02) “I am proud. [...] If you came back alive but could not have fulfilled your duty, how sad would I have been as a mother of such a child. But you only made me proud.” (49:04)
- Chin Ho gifts his mother a medal he received for his military service. (1:17:50)

e. Kites Flying in the Sky

- Se Yŏn's children stand in front of her in their military uniforms, making her proud. (1:10:45)
- Il Chin, Se Yŏn's son, gifts her a medal he received for his outstanding military service. (1:19:16)

6.2. Dishonoring One's Family

a. Ask Yourself

- The countryside is experiencing a shortage of young workers, but the committee chief's daughters are determined to stay in P'yŏngyang nevertheless. Their mother expresses how ashamed she feels in front of other mothers whose sons, unlike her daughters, serve the state by being in the army. (1:19:11)

b. The Story of a Blooming Flower

- Shimosawa's mother gives a speech: “Mothers are obliged to raise their children to be great people. Nevertheless, the US Air Force pilot who dropped the bomb at Hiroshima wrote his mother's name, Enola Gray, on his plane. Dropping a bomb is a big sin but writing his mother's name on it is a sin and disgrace even bigger.

It is an unbearable insult to mothers. I want to ask his mother *What do you think about raising such a son?*” (21:21)

- “Mother, I disgraced the flower of your soul. I am an unfilial son, not much different from that American pilot.” (22:49)

c. A Family Basketball Team

- Mr. Yun is angry at his son Ch’öl Yǒng who persists in wanting to work as a teacher at the big school instead of following his father’s guidance and working in the village’s school: “How ungrateful [...] he has no right to be a part of our family team anymore.” (55:33)
- Ch’öl Yǒng’s wife: “I was heartbroken watching your father sitting up all night thinking about you. You cannot be his son if you do not know your father’s feelings. Please follow us. It is not too late yet.” (59:54)

d. Myself in The Distant Future

- Sun Hyang advises Sin Ch’un to leave her village because she doubts he can work there after giving up once already. She says it would only disgrace his parents if he gave up the second time. (59:55)

e. Mother’s Happiness

- Chin Ho’s mother leaves in shame after witnessing her son slacking off at work and Chin Ho’s friend scolds: “Why are you always doing something else when others are working? Do you know that your mother went home because you disgraced her?” (30:26)
- During an encounter with Chin Ho, a police officer criticizes him for making his mother address him “son”, stating that he had humiliated her by misbehaving. (32:17)

7. Romantic Relationship

7.1. Love

North Korean films show conversations about love and depict physical touch as a way of expressing affection. Still, sexual intercourse is rarely even implied (*Two Families in Haeun-dong* 10:31, *Schoolgirl's Diary* 26:31). Love and attraction between a man and a woman often depend on whether they or their families perceive each other as having a positive work attitude and a compatible worldview. Additionally, one or both individuals forming the couple may need to adjust their personality to be accepted by the other or their family (*Urban Girl Comes to Get Married*, *Myself in The Distant Future*, *Two Families in Haeun-dong*, *Our Fragrance*). The following passage introduces scenes portraying romantic relationships or dialogues in which the characters seem to express their fondness for each other or what they find likable in a partner.

a. Ask Yourself

- San Mae is complaining about her difficult life in the pasture, so T'ae U tells her: “To be honest, I came to like and respect you, comrade, who left the sparkly city to be here. [...], But I misjudged you.” (51:36)

b. Urban Girl Comes to Get Married

- Ri Hyang realizes that Song Sik is her ideal type—A devoted, hard-working man. (30:30), (39:24)
- Ri Hyang and Song Sik's conversation: “We can build an ideal communist village here if we make an effort” “I would like to help you with that!” (46:25)
- Song Sik wants to spare Ri Hyang from the uncomfortable life in the countryside: “I must say farewell because I love you.” (1:05:55)
- Song Sik and Ri Hyang's conversation near the film's end: “Forgive me, but I am determined to do farming all my life here.” “Do you think I came back here because I like you, comrade? [...] I came for a man who considers his village the most important.” (1:09:05)

c. Myself In the Distant Future

- Young female workers wonder if they could sacrifice themselves to live with a man in a wheelchair, to which Sun Hyang responds that living with a great man is not a sacrifice. (16:58)
- Su Hyang liked Sin Ch'un because he came to do hard work in the countryside during his vacation. Thus, she is disappointed when he tells her he went to help there only to see her. When he asks her to move with him to the capital, she does not want to: "I am not asking you to change your life for the worse. I am asking you to go to P'yŏngyang with me. Everybody wants to go to P'yŏngyang." "Yeah, you could not find a person that would not want to go to P'yŏngyang. But if I decided to go to P'yŏngyang, I would not go with a person like you." (38:32)
- Su Hyang does not agree to marry Sin Ch'un even when he boasts about inheriting his parents' assets when they pass away. (46:18)
- Su Hyang advises Sin Ch'un to change his worldview and gifts him a book that transforms his outlook on life. (51:02)
- After Sin Ch'un comes to the village again, he proves to Su Hyang, through relentless labor, that he is not there because of his feeling for her anymore, which she starts admiring him for (1:21:25), (1:36:25), (1:23:33)

d. Two Families in Haeun-dong

- Pŏm Il's mother realizes her husband is not as dedicated to his job as he used to be: "Honey, I miss your old self. [...] You were busy with your work [...] Your older brother even complained that you forgot about your mother's birthday [...] I fell for you at that time. Honey, I will wait for you to be that man again." (58:08)
- Pŏm Il's mother to her husband: "I want to receive true love like Pyŏl I's mom. [...] As time passes, the way I see you is worse and worse. What do you live for?" (1:10:25)
- One of the building residents previously complained about her own husband and mockingly compared him to the ever-so-busy Pyŏl I's father. However, after seeing how praiseworthy Pyŏl I's father is for his work ethic, she starts appreciating her husband. (1:16:40)

e. Our Fragrance

- P’yŏng Ho to Sae Pyŏl: “I realize we are like water and fire. You deceived me by appearing in Korean dress [...] Me and my grandfather both liked you that way. But clothes cannot hide one’s true nature.” (1:04 00)

f. Schoolgirl’s Diary

- Su Ryŏn’s mother falls sick but keeps on translating books for her husband’s research (1:15:02). She supports her husband’s work and understands that “A scientist cannot succeed if he must look after his family.” (59:05)

g. Flower in the Snow

- In Sŏn breaks up with Myŏng Sik to take care of her adopted children and focus on managing her factory. Myŏng Sik decides to express his love by helping her with what is the most important to her—build the factory: “The problem with transport was solved?” “Yes, comrade Myŏng Sik tried very hard to get us the truck we needed.” (1:02:02)

h. The Wheels of Happiness

- Disabled husband to his wife: “I am worried you might neglect your work because of my issue.” “You are more important than my work.” “Then I am a burden to you.” (1:00:23)

7.2. Marriage

Young people in the films usually date thanks to other people’s, mainly older relatives’, match-making efforts. If a couple happens to meet naturally, the lovers seek their families’ blessing before getting married. Men wear western-looking suits at a wedding, while women always wear casual hanbok¹¹ (*Urban Girl Comes to Get Married*, *Family Basketball Team*, *Our Fragrance*, *Flower in The Snow*). The following passage introduces scenes and dialogues related to marriage.

¹¹ Korean traditional attire

- a. The Story of a Blooming Flower
 - Hae Na’s boyfriend’s grandmother disapproves of Hae Na being his future wife because she is not from a good family. (47:55)

- b. Urban Girl Comes to Get Married
 - Song Sik’s mother and Ry Hyang’s boss keep on attempting to arrange a date for the two. (7:47)

- c. A Family Bright with Songs
 - Chǒng Hak’s uncle disapproves of Sǒn Ŏk and Chǒng Hak’s marriage until he hears her speak about the General and the importance of devoting oneself to the cause of revolution. (1:04:15)

- d. A Family Basketball team
 - Ch’öl Yǒng’s father disapproves of Ch’öl Yǒng and Sǒl Ŏk’s marriage until she proves her skills in some sport. (4:53)

- e. Our Fragrance
 - P’yǒng Ho’s grandfather and Sae Pyǒl’s grandmother try to arrange a date for their grandchildren (9:34), but the grandfather approves of Sae Pyǒl only after she repents for getting too Westernized.

7.3. In-laws

The parents-in-law portrayed in the films always have a good relationship with their daughters-in-law and sons-in-law (*Family Bright with Songs*, *Urban Girl Comes to Get Married*, *Myself in the Distant Future*, *Two Families in Haeung-dong*, *Family Basketball Team*, *Schoolgirl’s Diary*, *The First Year After the Wedding*, *Flower in the Snow*).

8. The Leaders' Role in One's Family

The film characters often contemplate the difficult responsibilities that come with being the ruler of their nation. As a result, these characters strive to alleviate some of the burdens placed upon their leaders. Some films emphasize the parental role of the leaders and even elevate them above one's biological parents (*The Story of Blooming Flower*, *Mother's Happiness*, *Flower in the Snow*). Furthermore, it is generally preferable to prioritize one's duties toward the leaders and country over some immediate responsibilities to the family. The following passage introduces the above-outlined patterns.

a. Story of a Blooming Flower

- Shimosawa to his daughter: “This flower is my soul and my heart, and I will name it after a man who is like the mother of all mothers.” (1:18:33)
- “I wished to present [this flower] to all the mothers who raise children and spread warmth, but I have come to know men whose hug is warmer than that of all mothers in this world. [...] Therefore, I name this flower Kimjongilia.” (1:25:46)

b. Two Families in Haeun-dong

- Pyöl I's father has a mission in life that does not concern only his family but also the General: “Honey, I feel sorry to you and our Pyöl I [...] but how can I only seek my comfort? Have I ever helped our people or given any happiness to our General? [...] It is my wish to give even a small pleasure to our General. [...] It is said he only sleeps for two hours during the night to make us all happy. Are we scientists unable to make him have more hours of sleep? I must do my best to lessen his burden at least a little.” (1:17:47)

c. Mother's Happiness

- Kyöng Ho and his mother had an accident while she was carrying him on her back on their way to see a doctor: “Mother, let's stop everything.” “Kyöng Ho, I am tired too, but you saw it on the TV, right? We cannot go over this small hill, but our General has to surmount higher mountains. We have a warm floor when we come home, but I am worried our General would not have that. Nonetheless, the General continues his journey for the happiness of all the people in this country.

It is my desire and responsibility as a citizen of this country to have my son serve our General. When you all [my sons] have worn military uniforms to be our General's soldiers, I will be the happiest mother in the world." "Mother, let's go [to the doctor]." (55:17)

- Chin Ho gifts his mother a medal he received for bravery during his service: "Chin Ho, our General has made you into a hero." (1:18:28)

d. Schoolgirl's Diary

- Message to Su Ryōn from her father: "Su Ryōn, you must know that the General is also an ordinary man with a family, but he travels away from home 365 days a year. If my path can resemble his path and lead to the well-being of our people and the nation, I would wish for nothing else." (1:25:03)

e. Kite Flying in the Sky

- A bus conductress gave the General instructions on what bus he should take: "After hearing my answers, he praised me and wanted me to serve people well. Just like a father asking a favor to his daughter." (16:17)
- Song Sun explains why she decided to serve in the military instead of attending university: "When I see our Father General visiting frontline units, no matter if it rains or snows, I think about how hard it must be on him. Moreover, you, mother, always tell us that if there were not Father General, we would not exist either." (1:15:16)
- "When I saw the General on TV, I cried. Although he was smiling at the children, I could see he was tired. [...] When a father is in pain, what daughter would feel indifferent? Seeing a parent suffer, what child's heart would not be in pain? I want to ease my father's burden even a bit." (1:03:06)
- Se Yōn's children discovered that the General went to a province where the temperature fell below thirty degrees Celsius. They flock to a telephone booth, persistent to call "Father" and ask if he is all right. (1:03:42)

f. The First Year After the Wedding

- Hyōn Ōk: "Sometimes I want to give up everything and live comfortably taking care of the household, but our leader has told us to use the sea. So, letting a father

see his daughter just sitting is not something my conscience allows me to do.”
(44:03)

g. Flower in The Snow

- Recalling the General’s words: “Officials have to go through any hardship just like mothers dedicating themselves to the well-being of their children.” (27:24)
- In Sŏn uses rubber bands to tie her daughters’ hair while they work. The General sends hairpins to all the workers in In Sŏn’s factory one day and instructs In Sŏn to put the hairpins in their hair. In Sŏn voices: “Myŏng Ok, I thought I did my duty as a mother by tying your hair with a rubber band. I had no idea our Father General would be so concerned seeing those rubber bands. Children, your true mother is our General.” (1:24:44)

5. Conclusion

This work introduces North Korean historical background that has been shaping the North Korean approach to filmmaking and pinpoints the most recurring themes in the portrayal of families on North Korean screens from 1967 to 2011. Housing, leisure time, family structure, parent-child relationships, motherhood, romantic relationships, honor, and the role of the leaders in one’s family are identified as the most frequented themes in the depiction of a family.

North Korean film families mostly seem to showcase a contrast between what is wanted and unwanted behavior in North Korean society. The North Korean ideology appears to underline most interactions between the film characters, though they do not specifically refer to *Chuch’e* in most cases. More often, the characters talk about the leaders, Party, or unnamed heroes when discussing moral questions. The family serves as an environment where the characters can practice and assert their ideological beliefs, practically making the family relationships secondary to the state and ideology. The family circle appears like a cell that must be orderly because only then can their beloved nation prosper.

The film characters frequently struggle to evolve into better workers and citizens. One’s family members may take on the role of moral guides to help others achieve that. If a parent and child relationship is central in the story, it is largely portrayed as a

relationship between a mentor and a student—the parents’ unwavering dedication to the state instills a sense of respect in their child, who eventually learns to model similar behaviors.

Love and attraction between a man and a woman are almost always based on whether they perceive each other as having a correct worldview. Whether a couple can get married depends on their respective families, whose blessing is crucial for younger couples. The pattern of a mentor and student is also noticeable in romantic relationships—one partner may exhibit certain moral shortcomings that the other partner cannot condone, leading to those issues being addressed and corrected.

Quarrels between in-laws are not a theme shown in the films even once. Moreover, relationships between parents-in-law and children-in-law are notably harmonious. The sibling relationship is not the central topic in any of the analyzed films.

The films repeat the theme of noble sacrifice for the nation. There are two most noticeable types of sacrifice affecting family life dynamics. First, a sacrifice in the form of adoption alleviates the burden on the state that would otherwise have to suffer finding a solution for the situation of the orphaned children. Second, prioritizing the state’s interests over the comfort and safety of one’s children. This may involve difficult decisions such as sending a child to the army instead of university or being willing to accept a son’s heroic death for the good of the nation.

Striving to establish harmony and seeking comfort in one’s family is frowned upon if the family forgets to care for the higher good of society. Typically, families are encouraged to be humble, which should show through the appearance of their homes or through their meal or clothes choices. Furthermore, group activities like sports or singing serve to enhance the film characters’ morals and work ethics.

Contrary to the initial assumption of this author (JM), Confucian values or portrayal of patriarchal social structures are not dominating the analyzed films. Moreover, the portrayal of patriarchal families in earlier films has been replaced by a portrayal of gender equality and independent women in films produced in the 2000s.

North Korea operates on ideology that permeates every aspect of life in the country. Film production in North Korea is under the government’s control, and Kim Jong Il numerously expressed that films should focus on creating educational, revolutionary content that agitates and inspires the people within the North Korean borders. It is difficult to say if all North Korean films are made to educate and to what extent they would be effective in doing so. However, the North Korean leadership’s official demands for it to

be so allow room for speculation. The power films may have held during Kim Jong Il's involvement in the film industry is illuminated through director Sin Sangok who shared his experience from a detention center where he witnessed an officer rehearsing film lines. If Kim Jong Il aimed to alter the behavior of North Koreans through the films, then the way families are depicted in them may reveal what he wanted, and ultimately, what behavior some real North Korean families may have been prompted to reenact.

This work aimed to identify and describe some recurring themes in the portrayal of families in North Korean films made from 1967 to 2011, and the goal was achieved.

Závěr

Tato práce představuje historické pozadí Severní Koreje, které utvářelo severokorejský přístup k filmové tvorbě. Práce identifikuje opakující se rysy při zobrazování rodin na severokorejských obrazovkách v letech 1967 až 2011. Bydlení, volný čas, struktura rodiny, vztahy mezi rodiči a dětmi, mateřství, milostné vztahy, čest a role vůdců v rodinách občanů jsou označena jako nejfrekventovanější témata zobrazující život severokorejských filmových rodin. Práce popisem scén a zakomponováním dialogů představuje konkrétně, jak se tato témata ve filmech projevují a jak utváří obraz rodiny. Cíle identifikovat tendence při zobrazování rodin ve filmech se podařilo dosáhnout.

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