



## THE SUN SORT-OF RISES: THE “STRONG AND PROSPEROUS” SLOGAN IN RECENT NORTH KOREAN FICTION

By Meredith Shaw

### Abstract

Kim Jong-un’s sudden ascent as leader came at a significant time for North Korea—a year that had coincidentally been long foreshadowed in state media as the “dawn of the strong and prosperous era.” Yet the new leader had different priorities and a different idea of what strength and prosperity looked like than his forebears, and this has resulted in notable changes to lifestyle and landscape. In a state notoriously resistant to policy changes, propaganda tools such as state fiction were able to repurpose the existing “strong and prosperous” slogan to lend legitimacy to new initiatives and social trends encouraged by the new leadership. Through a thematic analysis of new North Korean fiction, this paper examines how “strong and prosperous” and related buzzwords have been tied to changes in architecture, culture, science and technology, leisure, entertainment, and daily living. In addition to the author’s close reading of recent North Korean literature, this research draws upon analysis by leading South Korean analysts of North Korean literature and the testimony of North Korean defectors.

**Key Words:** North Korea, literature, propaganda, Kim Jong-un, content analysis

### Introduction

Anyone who looks at North Korean internal propaganda of the last decade will quickly become familiar with a particular phrase: “the strong and prosperous nation” (강성국가). The phrase was originally meant to denote a glorious new era that would begin on April 15th, 2012—the centennial of founder Kim Il-sung’s birth. By this date, as the ruling Korean Workers’ Party (KWP) promised, North Korea’s military deterrent would

become sufficient to counter any external threat, several major infrastructure projects would be completed, and people would finally be able to enjoy the fruits of the communist utopia they had worked so hard to build.

Many outside observers predicted that the impoverished regime’s over-promising would lead to internal unrest, particularly under the guidance of an untested young leader who had suddenly been thrust into power just months before the deadline. Veteran Pyongyang watchers called the tactic “a gamble,” reasoning “Rhetoric that is not matched by visible accomplishments will reinforce perceptions of regime weakness and increase the risk of push-back.”<sup>1</sup> But when 2012 came and went with no signs of unrest, the slogan was quickly forgotten by the outside world.

However, within the pages of North Korea’s literary magazines and other state-produced agitation materials, the slogan kept popping up for years afterward (Figure 1). Rather than sweeping the idea under the rug or moving the goalpost to a new, more distant future date, the KWP seems to have doubled down and proclaimed that the “strong and prosperous era” has indeed arrived. As intellectually honest Pyongyang watchers, we must ask: How does the regime sustain this fantasy in the face of economic sanctions and ongoing hardships?

A close reading of recent North Korean fiction can shed light on how this phrase is being reinterpreted to align with the evolving policy priorities and developments of the Kim Jong-un era. North Korea is unique among 21st century autocracies in the degree to which its regime maintains control over the creative arts—not merely censoring but actually shaping content and thematic

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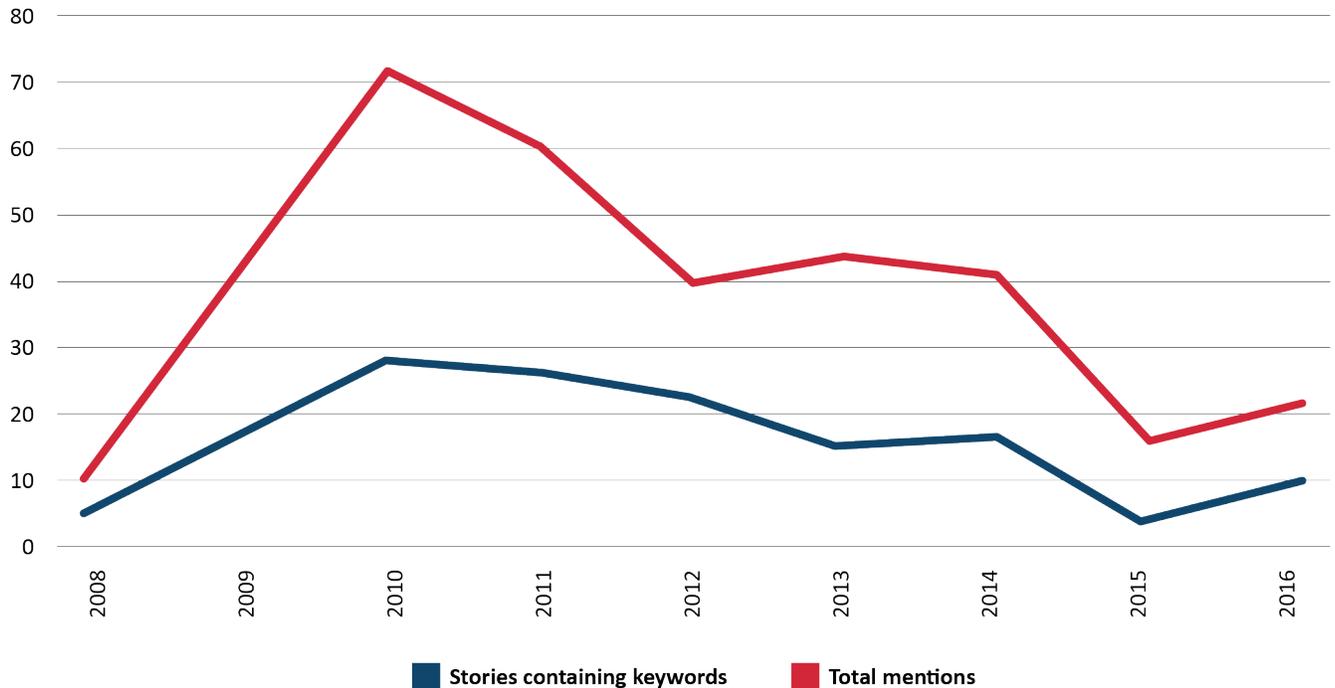
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**Figure 1. The "Strong and Prosperous" Slogan in North Korean Short Fiction, 2008-2016**

**Keywords:** *strong and prosperous nation* (강성대국, 강성국가); *strong and prosperous renewal* (강성부흥), *economically strong country* (경제강국)

**Journals searched:** *Joseon Literature*(조선문학), *Youth Literature*(청년문학)



Note to Figure 1: Complete journal contents in searchable digital format were only available through 2016. A selective reading of later stories suggests that slogan remains in use through 2018.

direction. Literature in particular has provided a foundation for the development and dissemination of core ideological concepts and propaganda messages since the country's founding.<sup>2</sup>

The extremely formulaic and micro-managed system of literary production under KWP oversight means that any change from year to year is unlikely to be accidental or a particular author's creative whim. According to Kim Ju-sŏng, a defector who once wrote fiction in North Korea, writers are organized within the Korean Writer's Union, which is a subdivision of the KWP's Agitation and Propaganda Department. Within this union, only the most elite and well-established authors, members of the "4.15 Writer's Group," are allowed to write stories depicting

the leader Kims.<sup>3</sup> The union determines the thematic direction and content of the stories published in its literary journals, with particularly stringent rules about how the leaders are to be portrayed. Therefore, while trends in North Korean fiction may tell us little about the actual demands or interests of the North Korean literary consumer, they can tell us a great deal about the policy objectives and concerns preoccupying the Party at any given time.

In pre-2012 literature, the "strong and prosperous" slogan was frequently associated with large-scale infrastructure and military projects like the Heechŏn Hydroelectric Dam and the Kwangmyŏngsŏng satellite launch and had a strong connotation



of counting down to the year 2012. Although foreign observers accurately predicted that the regime would not be able to meet its ambitious defense and economic goals by this deadline, in subsequent years the “strong and prosperous” slogan has proven helpful in other ways. It gave an aura of inevitability to the tumultuous leadership transition that year, and has placed a stamp of legitimacy on various initiatives and changes in North Korean society as the new leader cements his rule and implements his personal priorities.

### Brighter, Friendlier & More Colorful

First and foremost, the “strong and prosperous era” is marked by an emphasis on light and color. This falls in line with another new slogan, “building a nation of socialist culture.”<sup>4</sup> Whereas the Party line in the past dismissed foreign-style entertainments as “gaudy” and pleasing aesthetics as “formalism,” the new “socialist culture” line encourages people to take joy in leisure activities and praises ongoing efforts to make the country a little less grim, more chic and modern-looking, with a new pastel color palette and high-rise buildings that, when lit up, give the impression of a rising Asian metropolis.

In “Our Heavens,” Kim Jong-un makes a guidance visit to the Weather Bureau. His central piece of advice? The nightly weather report needs more “friendliness” [진절성]. He elaborates, “While we must beware of the formalism of capital countries with their colorful advertisements and gaudy packaging, it would be harmful to completely prioritize content over form.”<sup>5</sup> Outside observers have indeed noted more advanced graphics in North Korean media in recent years.<sup>6</sup>

Several new works of fiction have depicted Kim Jong-un guiding important new cultural initiatives. In “Blossoming Dreams,” he is shown as both a talent scout and a gifted artist in his own right, discovering a talented young artist and encouraging him to decorate the new children’s hospital, while adding his own architectural expertise to the design of the new Rungna Amusement Park. Kim orders the hospital to be decorated in a fairytale theme, saying “These fairytale pictures are important not just for decoration; they are vital to the children’s recovery and mental development... First-rate equipment and a fanciful, childlike environment!”<sup>7</sup>

In “A Promise of Fire,” Kim Jong-un personally designs a fireworks bonanza for the 2011 Liberation Day celebration, featuring choreographed explosions timed to music. The leader remarks,

“I decided to draw them a picture in the sky with fire, a picture of the strong and prosperous nation, for all our people and all the world to see.”<sup>8</sup> In addition to the fireworks show, “A Promise of Fire” also highlights an ostentatious night illumination display that had recently been set up in the border city of Changjagang. Kim Jong-un praises the endeavor: “Chagang Province is getting brighter and brighter. Those people know better than anyone just how precious a single point of light can be. So, they labored to build the electric dams, singing patriotic songs to show their resolve to the enemies who crave our destruction, and now they have turned on the lights of paradise by their own hands. The night lights of Changjagang, built by Kanggye spirit.”<sup>9</sup> Later Kim Jong-un hears an inspiring story about a young soldier who, having seen the lights of Changjagang, took it upon himself to design and construct a similar display for his own hometown while home on leave. In a frank acknowledgment of reality, Kim Jong-un remarks: “Our night illuminations may seem plain next to other countries’ bright city lights, but they were built by our own hands with the same boundless spirit that overcame tremendous hardship.”<sup>10</sup> Clearly some in the KWP hierarchy have grown tired of hearing the foreign detractors’ refrain about how dark North Korea appears on satellite photos, particularly in contrast to its prosperous neighbors.

In a nod to the country’s recurrent power problems, several new stories feature large-scale power plant projects that always seem to be on the verge of being finished. “The Morning of Departure” shows army engineers finding various innovative ways to compensate for missing parts and insufficient materials in the wake of U.S. sanctions.<sup>11</sup> “The Old Soldier” depicts a hydroelectric dam construction site as a scene of such frenetic activity that the site managers don’t have a moment to spare for a retired sapper who offers his expertise.<sup>12</sup>

Stories like these increasingly feature young protagonists challenging antiquated styles and methods. Newer designs are described approvingly as “colorful,” “dream-like,” “childish,” and “fanciful,” consistent with the new slogan “let’s turn the whole country into a socialist fairyland.” Yet these same stories find creative ways to incorporate the “strong and prosperous” motif, making unexpected connections between military might and artistic skill. In “Blossoming Dreams,” for instance, it is revealed that the KWP’s leading architect originally honed his sense of spacing and proportion while training as an artillery gunner during his compulsory military service. In the same story, Kim



Jong-un remarks that “Even while studying military science, I feel ever more firmly committed to peace and to creating a brighter, more beautiful land.”<sup>13</sup> In this way, the regime appears to be signaling that a big part of the “strong and prosperous era” is a stylistic break from the bleak, repetitive, colorless past and a new focus on youthful creativity and aesthetic culture.

### “Cutting Edge” Science and Technology

If Kim Jong-il’s image was built upon his purported strategic genius in foreign diplomacy, his son’s image has been strongly associated with technological savvy. A key buzzword of the Kim Jong-un era is “cutting edge breakthrough” (최첨단의 돌파구).<sup>14</sup> With the ascent of a younger, presumably more innovative leader, both real and imaginary technological advances are getting more attention. The lead engineers of successful projects are being lauded as never before, with parades in Pyongyang, lavish awards ceremonies, and exemption from military service.<sup>15</sup> The regime has also prioritized the construction of new scientific research facilities, luxurious housing along the new “Future Scientists Street” in Pyongyang, and a flashy beach resort for scientists at Yŏnp’oongho.

Recent fiction has helped to trumpet new achievements in science and technology, with the young leader always at the heart of the action. Recent stories have highlighted advances in meteorology, rocket launches, botany and alternative energy development. A typical story will follow one of the country’s top scientists as she struggles to solve a tough problem, with the young leader swooping in at key moments to provide just the guiding nudge she needs to make a breakthrough.

Through state fiction, recent scientific advances have been explicitly associated with a new embrace of youth and innovation under Kim Jong-un’s leadership.<sup>16</sup> In contrast to older science stories, which typically depicted older, more experienced engineers and Party cadres making breakthroughs together (after extensive guidance from the Leader), the newer stories tend to show youths leading the way. For example, “Sky, Land and Sea,” a story about North Korea’s 2009 satellite launch, emphasized the young ages of the scientists and technicians working at the P’unggyeri launch facility. After the satellite is launched (successfully, in the story), the Leader praises the young rocket scientists by telling them that they are “knocking on the door of the strong and prosperous nation.”<sup>17</sup> In “Path of Our Lives,” a young factory worker at a food processing plant inspires her co-workers to work harder by mentioning that the Leader had

“compared automated food processing to unmanned space satellites, the pinnacle of cutting-edge technology,” the idea being that North Korea’s achievements in space flight should motivate workers involved in more prosaic engineering tasks.<sup>18</sup>

In fictional depictions, Kim Jong-un’s chief method of supporting science seems to be gifting researchers with luxurious housing and leisure facilities in which to seek inspiration. “White Cobblestones” tells the story of the construction of a large new residential area for satellite/missile engineers in the Ŭnjŏng District of Pyongyang and a new seaside resort created exclusively for scientists in Yŏnp’oongho.<sup>19</sup> In the story, Kim Jong-un learns from the head of the National Science Research Institute that some 4,000 scientists’ households in the Ŭnjŏng District lack sufficient housing. Even though the science minister insists that the nation’s scientific research infrastructure has more urgent problems, the leader overrides him and designs a sprawling luxury complex featuring not only abundant housing units but also a library, a school, and leisure facilities.<sup>20</sup>

Kim Jong-un himself is depicted as a scientist and innovator par excellence, able to deploy his skills in a wide variety of fields. In “Green Mountains, Green Fields” the leader meets with the country’s leading botanist, who is struggling to find a way to solve the country’s severe deforestation problem, and schools him with an obscure reference to the work of a 19th century Russian botanist.<sup>21</sup> In “A Promise of Fire,” Kim Jong-un stays up late for many nights personally devising a new type of fireworks display using artillery in a way that has never been attempted before. Explaining to an underling, Kim Jong-un remarks, “This artillery salute is our way of showing the world the reality of our strong and prosperous nation; how can we do that using another’s technology and not our own?”<sup>22</sup> “Sky, Land and Sea” does double duty by displaying Kim Jong-un’s military chops alongside the country’s technological advances. In this story, not only does the new leader run circles around his senior military advisors in his knowledge of strategic deployments and satellite technology, at one point he casually examines an X-ray and correctly diagnoses a woman’s heart condition.

### Tyranny of Nature

When North Korean authors write about the uses of science and technology, they are not nearly as martial as an outsider might expect. There are of course stories touting glorious successes in nuclear and satellite (a thin veil for missile) technology, but more often science stories showcase how new technology will help



improve people's daily lives. Most recently, this means helping them deal with the severe environmental problems—chiefly flooding and deforestation—that have devastated the country.

“Our Heavens” focuses on how investing in more accurate meteorological technology will help improve people's lives, citing the examples of crops withering in a drought and construction materials getting ruined in an unexpected downpour. The main character struggles to develop a data processing system fast enough to handle “the predictive models used by advanced countries,” and another character travels abroad to purchase more advanced meteorological equipment. “Silver Lining” opens with a devastating scene where a town is washed away in a flood, and then glowingly depicts the army-led reconstruction efforts in its wake.<sup>23</sup> Leading the flood relief effort, Kim Jong-un is described like a general leading his troops into battle. Most strikingly, Kim explains his decision to deploy troops for flood relief by declaring that they are “going to war against nature's tyranny” (자연의 횡포) and repeatedly refers to the flood zone as the “front lines” (전선) or the “point of battle” (공격지점).

“Green Mountains, Green Fields” follows a top ecologist struggling to devise an effective plan for rapidly re-growing the country's vanished forests. The story briefly touches on the origins of the country's serious ecological problems, noting that during the 1990s famine certain selfish people cut down trees “to fill their bellies” and that “when the forests disappeared, the animals did too.” The story suggests that the regime plans to rapidly regrow its forests using specially bred trees from the Central Tree Nursery and stock them with animals from the Central Zoo. “The Morning of Departure” also touches on the deforestation problem in the context of flood control and hydroelectric dam construction, praising the “national land management mobilization” (국토관리총동원운동열성자대회) campaign that Kim Jong-un has purportedly championed.

Each of these stories is written in a relentlessly optimistic style, focusing on how the environmental situation is improving every day through the ceaseless efforts of the Leader and the Party, while paying very little attention to how the problems started in the first place. Deforestation and flooding are still mainly depicted as problems that occur mysteriously, without human help. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that an increasing number of stories do make occasional reference to “the difficult period” of the famine and certain ongoing ecological changes that have perhaps become too obvious to ignore.

### Revolutionary Love and Faith

New stories in the Kim Jong-un era make frequent mention of love—love of country and the leader, but also love of family, friends and coworkers. Several stories repeat the slogan “opening up a new chapter in the people's love” (*inmin sarang ūi saeroun chang*)—another phrase associated with the Kim Jong-un era. At one point in “Sky, Land and Sea,” a senior official is embarrassed that the leader has learned of his daughter's hospitalization and assures the leader that it will not distract him from the important work of serving the country. Kim responds that it is right and good to make time for family: “How can love of family be a minor detail? It's the most important thing. It's where love of country begins. Never forget - if we go to war, we must do it with great love in our hearts.”<sup>24</sup> In “Green Mountains, Green Fields,” Kim Jong-un learns that the head zookeeper was planning to resign so that one of her hardworking underlings could have a chance at the glory of meeting the Leader, whom she had already met several times. Instead of punishing her as she expects, he praises her, saying, “Only a mother could be so generous. After all, a team leader thinks of her team members as her children. She raises them to be healthy and strong and supports them to the end.”<sup>25</sup>

In “Our Heavens” when Kim instructs the Weather Bureau workers to put more “kindness” into their reporting, he clarifies: “Kindness is an expression of love. The sort of kindness I'm talking about is fundamentally different from capitalist kindness, which is only a tool for making money. Our kindness must be clearly rooted in love for our people and all humanity.”<sup>26</sup> At the climactic moment of the story, Kim reveals to the workers at the Weather Bureau the real reason why their reports are so often wrong: “You must remember that the work you do has a deep impact on everyday people's lives. Every line of the weather report must be inscribed with deep love for the people.” The missing ingredient is love!

In many new stories of the Kim Jong-un era, the personal and emotional are emphasized. Kim Jong-un is frequently depicted longing for his late mother or tearfully remembering some unsung sacrifice his father made for the people. In “Sky, Land and Sea” he speaks to a sprig of azaleas as if it were his mother, and in “Green Mountains, Green Fields” he makes a pretend phone call to his late father. On both occasions, he wants them to know that he is carrying out their wishes and running the country as they



would have wanted. He is frequently moved to tears when, after some major accomplishment, he suddenly recalls that his father is not alive to see it finished. He comes across as very talented but emotionally hurting and in need of the people's unwavering support.

The Agitation and Propaganda Department seems to be trying to rebrand some of its old slogans in new ways that appear to give people a little more slack, a little more room to experiment and make mistakes. In "Our Heavens" when Kim Jong-un criticizes the Weather Bureau of a "lack of kindness" (*ch'injŏlsŏng ŭi pujok*), this is an intentional echo of the buzzword "lack of personal responsibility" (*ch'aekimsŏng ŭi pujok*) that has often been cited in the past as an explanation for departmental purges.

"Faith in the Party" has always been emphasized, but newer stories take it to a new level, implying that individuals who display sufficient faith may be forgiven for almost anything. For instance, in "Silver Lining," a story about the flood recovery efforts in the northeast, Kim Jong-un learns that the army has done such a fantastic job of building cozy new homes for affected people that one citizen wrecked his own undamaged home on purpose in hopes of getting a new one. The accompanying Party cadres are appalled, but instead of punishing the man, Kim Jong-un praises him: "I see this man's destructive act as a sign of his faith in the Party. He could not have done such a thing unless he trusted in the Party like a mother. For people with such faith, we should move heaven and earth to do whatever they ask. Let's give this man a new home too, without discrimination."<sup>27</sup> Similarly, in "Our Heavens" Kim recalls how, during the 1990's famine, a senior weather bureau official was caught overspending on meteorological equipment to improve the country's weather prediction capability. Instead of punishing him, Kim Jong-il praised him, saying "Even though he made a mistake, his faith in the future is admirable. People who are uncertain about the future do not make plans for tomorrow... Does a mother blame her child for wanting more?"<sup>28</sup> In "Green Mountains, Green Fields," when an elderly botanist complains that his grandson has been misbehaving at school, Kim Jong-un replies, "It's good to misbehave. The new generation must be bold and gutsy enough in their hopes and ideals to conquer and rule the world."<sup>29</sup>

Time will tell whether these stories reflect an actual change in policy or mere wishful thinking. This is not the first time a new North Korean leader has attempted to lighten things up a bit—veteran Pyongyang watchers will perhaps remember the "Don't Make Internal Enemies" policy of the early Kim Jong-il era. It is worth noting that recent fiction has established a clear image of

Kim Jong-un as the sole source of all forgiveness; he is surrounded by senior cadres who are ever-ready to impose punishment but are held back by the Leader's benevolent hand.

### Recreation and Cultural Life

The most prominent visible symbols of the "strong and prosperous era" are a series of shiny new housing and leisure facilities in the capital, such as the Rungna Amusement Park, Future Scientists Street, and the Changjŏn and Ryŏmyŏng high-rise apartment complexes. As if by decree, nearly every story in the main KWP journal *Chosŏn Munhak* since 2013 makes at least fleeting reference to one or more of these facilities. As a consequence, newer stories are increasingly set in the capital, where these new architectural wonders can serve as a backdrop to the characters' improved lives. This contrasts strikingly with past fiction, which often depicted city folks traveling to the provinces to learn important lessons about the value of rural traditions. As a Pyongyang native, Kim Jong-un is depicted navigating confidently around the showcase city and taking pride in both new construction and historic sites, often driving his own vehicle and noting both new and old structures by name as he passes them.

"Teachers" tells the story of a lucky family of teachers who are allotted one of the coveted third-floor apartments in the shiny new Changjŏn high-rise. This astonishes them, because it is common knowledge that model workers from core industries are to get first priority at Changjŏn. At the climactic point of the story, Kim Jong-un himself visits the family and tells them, "Teachers should be given the highest respect in our society, so it's only natural that you should have such a home."<sup>30</sup> "The Old Soldier" shows elderly war veterans being transported en masse to the capital for the National Veteran's Festival, where they are feted at the famous Okryugwan and Ch'ŏngryugwan restaurants before being treated to a dolphin show at the new Rungna Dolphinarium.

The Ryŏmyŏng apartment complex for scientists has been featured in several recent stories. The name itself means "sunrise" and has been explicitly linked to the "strong and prosperous country" slogan. In "Sunrise," Kim Jong-un talks about the special meaning behind the Ryŏmyŏng complex's name:

"I am reminded of the General [Kim Jong-il]'s words not long ago. Seeing a new day bathed in the light of the rising sun, he said that it was 'the sunrise of the strong and prosperous era [강성대국의 려명].'"



The sunrise of the strong and prosperous era - This is the glorious outcome of the iron will and firm ideals of our General, who even under the dark clouds of U.S. imperialism developed the unprecedented path of the *sǎngun* warrior, mobilizing our people and military together to launch satellites over the land and sea and brighten the whole world with a self-defensive nuclear flash.”<sup>31</sup>

Such natural metaphors of rebirth are commonly employed to describe the new era: the “bright sunrise” after the “dark clouds” of U.S. imperialism, the “spring” after the “long winter” of frozen North-South relations,<sup>32</sup> “green sprouts” growing from the ashes of the past.<sup>33</sup> Nature metaphors are an established feature of North Korea’s literary tradition dating back to early post-war fiction, when springtime metaphors were big.<sup>34</sup> Thus it appears that the Party is encouraging people to associate the current “strong and prosperous era” with the high-growth period of postwar reconstruction.

Next to housing, new amusement facilities have also become popular settings for recent fiction. “Green Mountains, Green Fields” follows Kim Jong-un and his aides on a tour of the Pyongyang Central Zoo, culminating in his proposal to modernize the zoo to keep speed with “evolving trends in the global concept of zoos.” Kim notes “Our General [Kim Jong-il] said that the Central Zoo is not just a treasure to be passed on to future generations, but a center of cultural and emotional life and learning (문화정서생활과 교육교양) for our youths and workers.”<sup>35</sup> “Cultural and emotional life” is another KWP buzzword, strongly associated in fiction with new leisure facilities and the recent emphasis on sports culture. In “Path of our Lives” a team manager at a foodstuffs factory encourages her workers to pursue entertainment and sports activities after work, saying “In the cutting-edge era, we must strictly observe the 8-hour work day.”<sup>36</sup> Hyŏn In-ae catalogues the numerous ways that the country invested in its sports and athletic infrastructure in the first years of Kim Jong-un’s reign, including new sports universities in every prefecture and new facilities like the Mirim Equestrian Club, the Mashikryŏng Ski Resort and the Unification Street Fitness Center. “In the North Korean system, if the leader is interested in athletics then the entire Party and nation are also in athletics.”<sup>37</sup>

## Conclusion

The third-generation leadership seems much less cautious about promoting change, at least in certain superficial aspects, as long as it contributes to public faith in a new “strong and prosperous

era.” Bright lights, modern architecture, strange foreign sports, cosmopolitan fashions, and colorful artwork are presented as evidence that a new era has arrived. The “strong and prosperous nation” is supposed to be a place where people can love both the Party and their family, where they can make mistakes and be forgiven, where “kindness” trumps “responsibility,” where form does not always have to be sacrificed for substance, where young people can teach their elders better ways of doing things.

This marks a significant departure in propaganda strategy. The first two generations of leadership always understood that they could not base their legitimacy on technological development or quality of life, and thus took care to emphasize the value of independence, cultural purity and traditional practices. The new message is that North Korea’s new technology may be quaint by global standards, but it has inherent value in being created “by our own efforts” and “in our own style.” This has non-trivial implications for the regime’s ongoing survival strategy: they have temporarily pleased a public that is increasingly aware of outside technology by emphasizing their own country’s autonomy and creativity, while building an expectation of more positive changes to come. They will need to provide more than superficial pastel paint and dolphin shows if they are to maintain the current mobilization efforts.

Most South Korean analysts express skepticism about this apparent change in attitude. In his analysis of recent North Korean poetry, Oh Tae-ho notes the same thematic emphasis on “improving people’s lives” and “the people’s love,” but tempers this with the observation that the classic “leader idolization” motif remains dominant.<sup>38</sup> Hyŏn In-ae observes that the initial surge in enthusiasm for culture, sports and leisure activities has dampened since 2016, and concludes that the new regime has “run up against reality” that real substantive changes in these areas are simply not possible under the current isolated system.<sup>39</sup>

For the time being, the KWP will be in the market for more bright shiny objects to wave before its domestic audience. The major summits of 2018 served this purpose well, as have the recent inter-Korean exchanges and athletic events. In the new era, people are being encouraged to mentally associate technology with better living, change with improvement, and young minds with great new things. Kim’s father and grandfather understood that such associations were inherently dangerous; only time will tell if they were correct to think so.



## Endnotes

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