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Teaching History

Volume 45 No. 4

ISSN No. 0040 602

December 2011



JOURNAL OF THE HISTORY TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION OF NSW Inc.
Registered by Australia Post as Print Post No. PP230121/00005

Fifty Years in Print

Term 4, 2011



The Australian Curriculum:

Democracy, Asian History, Closing the Achievement Gap

North Korea, Augustus, Monash, Temora Aviation Museum, National History Challenge Awards, Agrippina the Younger, Creating a Prezi, Anglo-Irish Relations, Opportunities for Teachers & Students in 2012 ...

Editorial

As the time for the introduction of the new Australian Curriculum draws nearer, two articles in this issue invite History teachers to consider the implications of the new History curriculum for their own teaching practice. These articles include Dr Matt Bailey's focus on civics and citizenship in History and Democracy, and Professor Anthony Milner's keynote address to the 2011 NSW HTA state conference in which he considers the shortcomings of the new F-10 History curriculum in promoting Asia literacy. Of more general, but compelling interest, is Professor Alan Reid's article *Closing the Achievement Gap: Will the national education agenda be a help or hindrance?* Reid's 'potted history' of attempts to deliver equity in Australian education provides a useful point of departure for his critique of the present government's strategies 'to close the achievement gap'. Those who are continuing to come to terms with the NAPLAN agenda will find this article particularly relevant.

On the subject of Asia literacy, Dr Ben Habib's analysis of North Korea's political system and the rationale behind its nuclear program in *The North Korea Story: Confucius, Communism and the Bomb*, will be of special interest in view of the recent death of Kim Jong-il. Ben lectures in Politics and International Relations at La Trobe University, Albury-Wodonga and his major research projects include the Government and Politics of Asia and the Pacific. Ben delivered this paper at a dinner forum in May 2011 organised by the Border History Teacher's Network; this is our newest regional HTA branch and it is providing valuable professional development opportunities for teachers in the Albury-Wodonga region.

HTA is preparing for another busy year in 2012 and on that note I would particularly like to congratulate Bernie Howitt on his recent election as President of HTANSW. Bernie brings a wealth of wisdom and teaching experience with him to this position and I wish him well in his leadership of the association over the next three years.

Best wishes to all for the 2012 academic year.

Toni Hurley

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Journal of the HISTORY TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION OF NSW

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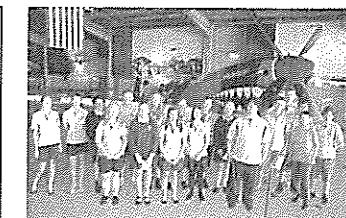
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Cover Image

Students from Junee High School at the launch of Temora Aviation Museum's Education Programs in December 2011. Full report on page 38. (Photo: David Rankine)

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Large reserves of gunpowder, stored in the Parramatta River magazines were removed to safer surroundings

There was fear of Germany, but not necessarily of all the Germans who lived in Sydney. In reality there was limited anti-German feeling on the first day of the war. A drunken British seaman attacked a shopkeeper in George Street on the suspicion that the man may have been a German. German ships were transferred to safer parts of the Harbour at a place known as Kerosene Bay, now known as Johnston's Bay. Larrikins attacked the steamer *Germania* at No 10 Brown's wharf Woolloomooloo, tore down its flag and roughed up the crew. *Germania* had to be unlucky. It had survived a typhoon then come to Sydney for repairs. Eventually it was requisitioned by the Australian government and became part of the Commonwealth fleet of steamers. It was not comfortable being German in Sydney.

In Ethel Curlewis's house in Mosman the German cook, Marie, already despondent over the war, was increasingly feeling the strain, particularly at the way she was being treated by the other household staff. Ethel Curlewis did her best to protect the girl. Germans across the city were under all manner of threat. Two Germans were caught fishing near the Hawkesbury Railway Bridge and immediately suspected of being spies. It was not a good day to have bad luck catching fish. One young German boy was reported to have been attacked by his classmates who then attempted to throw him under a train when he was on his way home from school. This event has been widely quoted but appears to have been an urban myth – however, the rumour indicates the temper of the time. There were some outbreaks of anti-German feeling and these could be easily exaggerated. It would get genuinely worse for Germans in the future.

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The North Korea Story: Confucius, Communism and the Bomb

Benjamin Habib
La Trobe University, Albury-Wodonga

Dr Habib's research projects include North Korea's motivations for nuclear proliferation, East Asian security, international politics of climate change, and undergraduate teaching pedagogy. Ben presented this paper to the Border History Teachers' Network Dinner Forum in Albury on 20 May, 2011.
(Editor's note: North Korean leader Kim Jong-il died in December 2011.)

To the casual observer, North Korea seems like an irrational beast, ruled by a confrontational nuclear-armed regime that is constantly engaged in crises with neighbouring states and the international community. Indeed, every time diplomacy heralds a new dawn for cooperation on the Korean peninsula, the regime of Kim Jong-il unleashes some new provocation that plunges the region back into uncertainty. But is this image entirely accurate? Why *Confucius, Communism and the Bomb*. For so many reasons, North Korea lends itself to provocative titles. In interrogating these three concepts I will make the case that the North Korean leadership is in fact pursuing a calculated strategy to maintain its power and preserve its unique political system intact.

Cracking the Information Blockade

How do we know what's going on in North Korea? I am often asked this question. It's a great question. It's not for nothing that North Korea is known as the "Hermit Kingdom", an isolationist totalitarian state shielded by an impenetrable information blockade, the embodiment of George Orwell's "1984". However, information does leak out, both directly and indirectly. Piecing this information together is like completing a jigsaw, where the whole picture cannot be seen without assembling all the separate pieces. This process makes the study of North Korea both incredibly challenging and immensely interesting.

The Korean peninsula remains under the influence of a strong *Confucian* tradition dating back to the late-14th century. This influence is evident in the family-based personality cult surrounding the North Korean leadership, as well as in lingering cultural customs in both Koreas today. These political and cultural traits stem from the Confucian social hierarchy based on age and deference to one's elders. It is the strong influence of Confucian customs in combination with Soviet-style totalitarian institutions that make North Korea's political system uniquely Korean. This is a key reason why the Kim regime is still in power long after the rest of the communist world has collapsed or ingratiated itself with Western capitalism.

There is another reason why North Korea survives as a twentieth century ideological throwback. North Korea's nuclear weapons program has been integral to the survival of the North's unique brand of communism because it performs a number of functions in the political economy of the North Korean state, over and beyond its obvious military purpose.

Up Close and Personal with the Hermit Kingdom
In July 2008 I embarked on a tour to the city of Kaesong, just north of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), the narrow strip of neutral land separating North and South Korea. My tour group was one of the last groups to take this tour, which was suspended after a South Korean woman was shot by North Korean guards at the tourist resort at Mount Kumgang, one of two North-South joint venture projects in North Korea.

Figure 1 depicts a section of the other North-South joint venture project, the industrial precinct outside of Kaesong, just north of the DMZ. The Kaesong industrial park is the flagship of the South's efforts to engage with North Korea, kick-started by South Korean President Kim Dae-jung in the late-1990s. Here, South Korean companies have set up factories to manufacture their wares while taking advantage of cheap North Korean labour. The North Korean government benefits from the project by taking a fifty percent slice of the workers' wages.

On any tour of North Korea, visitors are accompanied at all times by government chaperones who make sure that foreign visitors do not see, photograph or talk to anyone or anything they are not supposed to. On our departure back through the DMZ, North Korean customs officers examined every picture saved on visitors' digital cameras to check that nothing "sensitive" had been photographed. This gives some inkling as to

how the regime attempts to keep its citizens trapped in an information bubble, but this is a walk in the park compared with the social controls that ordinary North Koreans live under every day.

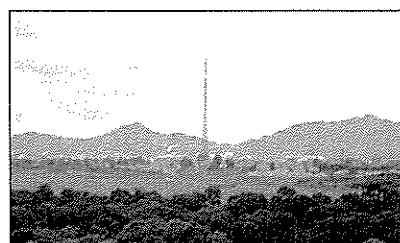
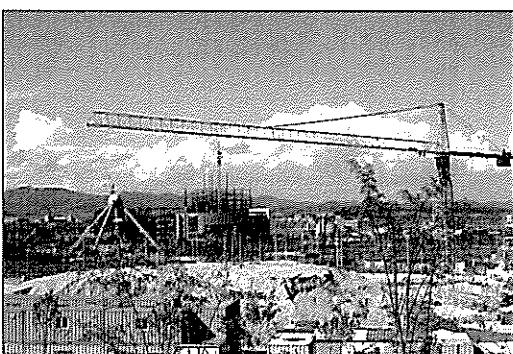
To cite a few examples: North Korean citizens must participate in regular self-criticism sessions. Discussion of politics is expressly forbidden, except to parrot official ideological dogma. They cannot travel outside their neighbourhood of residence without official permission. Their employment, education, and even survival prospects in tough times, are dictated by their party affiliation and official class designation. Breaking the rules can often lead to "disappearance" to prison camps in the mountains, or worse. Collective punishment is also used; whole families and friendship groups can be imprisoned for the transgression of an individual.¹

There is much about the way the North Korean government presents itself that is a mirage. The town depicted in *Figure 3* is the village of Kijong Dong, on the northern side of the DMZ. The trees in the foreground lie within that four-kilometre wide, heavily mined strip of land separating the two Koreas. Kijong Dong is also known as the "propaganda village" because the buildings in the foreground of Figure 4 are hollow concrete shells. They are there to demonstrate North Korea's "prosperity" and thus the superiority of the communist system.

Figure 1, lower left, the Kaesong industrial park

Figure 2, lower right, a North Korean soldier stands guard over the tour group in Kaesong

Figure 3, right, Kijong Dong, the 'propaganda village'



Indeed the DMZ is the most militarised frontier on the planet today, with thousands of troops and an even larger number of missiles and artillery batteries aligned against each other across the 38th parallel. At the "peace village" of Panmunjom in the middle of the DMZ, North and South Korean troops stare eye-to-eye.

While gunfire is exchanged from time to time in Panmunjom, this place was the scene of a "music war" in the 1980s, when loud speakers on the North Korean side blared stern communist anthems across the dividing line. Not to be outdone, the South Koreans upped the ante and responded with Michael Jackson.² It is more common today to see visiting tourists gawking at the angry-looking border guards, from both sides of the divide.

The North Korean Leadership: Nuclear Rogues or Cunning Strategists?

The popular theory floating in the public imagination is that North Korea is an out-of-control state, ruled by a 'madman'. Many readers will be familiar with the image of North Korean leader Kim Jong-il as a psychopathic puppet in the movie *Team America*, which is emblematic of the "madman" image. No doubt the North Korean state is insular and dysfunctional. It has a reprehensible human rights record and its foreign relations are characterised by repeated provocations—deliberate pinpricks—that risk an escalation of all-out war. However, this point requires clarification: an aggressive North Korea is not the same thing as

an irrational North Korea. The North's behaviour is predictable when observed from the perspective of regime survival, of a dictatorship looking to maintain a crumbling political system in the face of a hostile international neighbourhood, a chronically inefficient economy and repeated natural disasters.

North Korea's nuclear program is a rational response to adverse circumstances. Its many provocations against South Korea and the United States are the tactical manoeuvrings of this response. And while they may not be all that wise, they are far from the random acts one would expect of a sociopathic leadership. With that caveat in mind, let us recall some of the North Korean regime's recent provocations. North Korea has conducted two nuclear tests—9 October 2006 and 25 May 2009—which have successfully demonstrated its ability to detonate a nuclear device.

But the provocations do not end there. On 26 March 2010, a South Korean navy corvette named the *ROKS Cheonan* sank in the Yellow Sea after a North Korean torpedo pierced its hull, killing 46 sailors. Later in 2010, on 23 November, North Korean forces on the mainland fired around 170 artillery shells and rockets at South Korean-held Yeonpyeong Island, hitting both military and civilian targets. The international community drew its breath after the Kim regime's second nuclear test in 2009, wondering if a nuclear-armed North Korea would be a measured regional actor. The Cheonan and Yeonpyeong Island provocations would suggest the answer to that question is "no". The more important question to ask is "why"?

The Roots of North Korea's Isolation

To answer this question, we first need to delve into a little history. Today's national division is an aberration. Prior to 1945, Korea had been a single political entity under the Koryo and Choson dynasties for over a thousand years. The road to division began with the Japanese annexation of Korea in 1910. The Japanese occupation was a traumatic period for the Koreans. During this period, Korean males were conscripted into the Japanese imperial army while females were pressed into service as comfort women. Both men and women were brought to Japan as indentured labourers. Japan used Korea as an industrial base for its expansion into

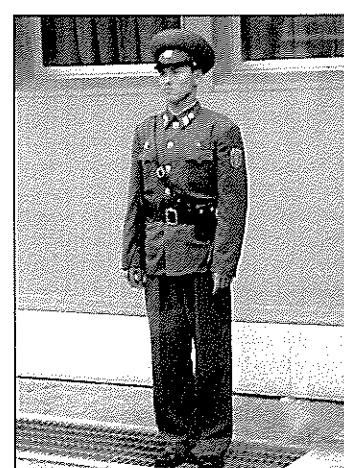


Figure 4: A North Korean border guard at Panmunjom.

Manchuria and China, as well as a source of food for the Japanese home islands.³

The occupation ended in 1945 with Japan's defeat in the Pacific war. Russian and American forces raced to take control of Korea as the war drew to a close. The division we know today at the 38th parallel was created by US General John Hodge, who out of expediency and ignorance drew a line through a map to delineate the areas of responsibility for the US-Soviet joint trusteeship of Korea. Through the late-1940s, the Americans and Russians both set up puppet regimes which competed to become the legitimate government of united Korea. This competition became hot in 1950 when North Korean leader, Kim Il-sung ordered his troops to invade the South. After three years of fighting and millions of deaths, the sides ended up exactly where they started, at the 38th parallel.⁴

After the war, Kim Il-sung began reforming the North Korean state along Stalinist lines, by collectivising agriculture, taking over industrial facilities, implementing a centrally-planned economy, and purging political rivals. Initially this system enjoyed a degree of success, as the country rebuilt from the ruins of the Korean War. However, by 1970 the inefficiencies of the command economy began to be felt. Also, being a small resource-poor country resource poor, the North was heavily dependent on inputs from the Communist bloc to fuel its mechanised agricultural system and industrial economy. Through the 1980s, the North became increasingly reliant on aid and subsidised trade from the Soviet Union. The Soviet collapse in 1991 was a disaster for North Korea, closing off its primary source of imported products and commodities. The industrial sector ground to a halt and agricultural output declined precipitously, which exaggerated food shortages that were already becoming apparent prior to 1991. By 1994 the country was in famine, state institutions were failing and to make matters worse, the death of regime founder Kim Il-sung brought on a power transition at the worst possible time. In addition, a series of natural disasters compounded these problems and led directly to the great famine of 1995-98 during which approximately 600,000 North Koreans died of starvation and hunger-related causes.

Consolidating Power under Extreme Duress

Kim Il-sung, the "Great Leader" and founder of the regime, died in 1994. His son, Kim Jong-il, rose to

the leadership after two decades of careful grooming. Despite his long apprenticeship, however, the new leader needed to cement his power and stop the implosion of the North Korean state. This is where nuclear weapons enter the equation.

The obvious motivation for nuclear proliferation is for national security, to deter attack from an adversary. North Korea can present a convincing argument to justify its need for a nuclear deterrent, given the forces arrayed against it south of the DMZ and over half a century of US nuclear threats. However, an American invasion was the least of Kim Jong-il's concerns in the late-1990s. After taking power, Kim Jong-il had a choice: he could try and prop up his father's failing institutional network, based around the Korean Workers Party, or he could reorganise the state in a new way to consolidate his power. He chose the latter option, placing himself at the head of a new apparatus centred on the military. This new system privileged the military as the primary institution of the state and as the engine that would drive the country's economic recovery, thus safeguarding Kim Jong-il's leadership. It is in this context that we should understand the North Korean "bomb", because the nuclear program performs three important functions that help to prop up this military-first system.⁵

Firstly, the nuclear program is the tool Pyongyang uses to obtain inputs from the international community. I have previously noted the gaping hole left in the economy by the cessation of Soviet imports. The North lacks sufficient food, energy supplies and manufactured consumables to service its economy. Additionally, the government has little desire to make the economic reforms necessary to obtain these goods in the international market. The regime plugs these holes through the tactic of coercive bargaining, where it engineers crises in order to extract concessions from the international community, including aid packages of grain, fertilisers and oil, as well as direct cash payments. Many of the North's provocations need to be seen in this light, including nuclear tests, missile tests, and nuclear threats, as well as the recent *Cheonan* and *Yeonpyeong* Island events. North Korea can use this tactic because it has all the leverage: the international community wants it to relinquish its nuclear program but has no credible military option, nor sufficient economic leverage to compel Pyongyang to do so, and because neighbouring states fear the consequences of an enormous refugee exodus from a collapsed North Korea.

The second key point to consider is institutional momentum and the maintenance costs of total control. While North Korea may be a dictatorship, absolute power does have maintenance costs. In this respect, the nuclear program plays an important role in buying the loyalty of regime elites. Kim Jong-il is surrounded by a core of loyal supporters whom he has cultivated over a long period of time. The elite is essentially a network of clients whose loyalty he buys with imported luxuries and lifestyle comforts, which contrast vastly with the privations endured by ordinary North Koreans. Aid payments made in cash are obtained through coercive bargaining, the fruit of its nuclear provocations. These payments are reportedly funneled directly into a slush fund which Kim uses to pay for his patronage network.

Yet even if he wanted to, Kim Jong-il would find it difficult to shut down the nuclear program. As a rule, every large institutional structure has an inherent momentum toward self-preservation and the North's nuclear program is no exception. For starters, there is the sunk cost of the physical infrastructure of the entire nuclear fuel cycle—including reactors, mines, reprocessing and enrichment facilities, fuel fabrication plants, laboratories and storage sites—scattered around the country. There are the people employed at these facilities, including numerous technicians and scientists. Without employment in the nuclear program, these people would be a flight risk. They and their detailed knowledge of the nuclear program would be a prized catch for American and South Korean intelligence agencies if they chose to defect.

We also need to consider the large bureaucracy that oversees the nuclear program, stretching all the way up to the heights of the National Defence Commission, the country's peak military organ. It seems inconceivable then that the regime would choose to dismantle a program of such size. Finally, the nuclear program plays an important role in the ideological legitimisation of Kim Jong-il's military-first system. During the famine, when the old ideologies of the state were largely discredited, one idea remained standing: anti-Americanism. By appealing to anti-Americanism and positioning the nuclear program as the regime's tool for defence against the enemy, the nuclear program legitimises the military's monopolisation of the state's resources and gives the people a justification for their privations.

Without this, the military-first system would be far less stable than it might otherwise be.⁶

Conclusion: Keeping it in the Family

In summary, there are many reasons why North Korea has chosen to proliferate nuclear weapons. It provides the regime with a powerful tool for ideological legitimisation through anti-imperialism and bureaucratic cohesion through *Songun* politics, as well as economic stability through the importation of goods to plug holes in the multi-headed economic system. For the Kim regime, nuclear weapons are the tool of this dynastic survival strategy. This has become especially important in light of Kim Jong-il's poor health and the impending leadership transition to his youngest son and designated successor, Kim Jong-un. It is all about ensuring the integrity of the Confucian dynastic succession and preserving North Korea's unique take on communism.

Endnotes

1. There are several excellent works describing the social controls placed on North Korean citizens: Haggard, S., & Noland, M. (2011). *Witness to Transformation: Refugee Insights into North Korea*. Peterson Institute for International Economics, Washington DC; Lankov, A. (2007). *North of the DMZ: Essays on Daily Life in North Korea*. Jefferson, NC, McFarland & Company; Kang, C., & Rigoulet, P. (2001). *The Aquariums of Pyongyang: Ten Years in a North Korean Gulag*. New York, Basic Books.
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