The Arrow and the Sun: 
A Topo-mythanalysis of Pyongyang

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ABSTRACT

As the capital of the DPRK, Pyongyang fascinates with its socialist architecture and planned urbanism where propaganda and ideology are set as a *mise en scène* landscape. I propose a reading of this city from a symbolic point of view, trying to find behind the actual topography the ideological myth written by the regime since 1945. This concrete-and-marble-made narrative was built gradually. After a diachronic description of key sites, I locate topologic and symbolic structures that enable a “topo-mythanalysis,” or analysis of the imaginary (“imaginaire” in French) providing the framework for the (re)construction of Pyongyang. We find a historical axis which rotates slowly during the 1970s and 80s around a center corresponding to Mansu Hill and its Grand Monument, becoming eventually a new “axis of destiny,” or arrow, to the glory of Kim Il Sung’s personal myth. The “ideological polygon” found in the center of the city works as a rotating sun in an exclusively diurnal imaginary.

Keywords: Korea, DPRK, Pyongyang, propaganda, urban planning, imaginary

“Urbanism is the mode of appropriation of the natural and human environment by capitalism, which, true to its logical development toward absolute domination, can (and now must) refashion the totality of space into its own peculiar decor.”
(English translation by Donald Nicholson-Smith)

“Urbanism doesn’t exist: it is simply an “ideology”, in Marx’s sense of the word.”
Introduction
In the June 7, 2011 edition of the daily Rodong Sinmun (Workers’ Newspaper) Kim Jong-il declared that “Construction in Pyongyang is not simply an issue of operational economics regarding the formation of roads and construction of homes, it is an important political issue related to the prestige of Socialist Choson and the dignity of the Kim Il Sung Motherland” (my italics). Pyongyang, capital of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK–North Korea), fascinates with its socialist architecture and planned urbanism where propaganda and ideology blend into the landscape. It is one of only a few examples of ancient cities destroyed by war and then rebuilt from the ashes with a radically new face as a planned showcase for a new regime. To this end, the North Korean leaders have shown exemplary determination in etching the official ideology and the cult of personality of Kim Il Sung into the city’s layout. In this paper, I propose a symbolic reading of Pyongyang by teasing out of its current topography the ideological myth developed by the regime since 1945. As this narrative of concrete and marble was built up gradually through additions, adjustments, and palimpsests, it seems appropriate to begin with a historical overview. After a chronological description, I will identify relevant topological and symbolic structures and propose a “topo-mythanalysis,” or analysis of the imaginary (“imaginaire” in French) serving as a framework for Pyongyang’s (re)construction.

Methodological Prologue
Methodological Frame: City as Myth
My method is largely based on Gilbert Durand’s approach, which he refers to as “mythodology” (Durand 1992; 1995). According to Durand, the collective imaginary consists of a set of competing trends (bassins sémantiques) that coexist or fiercely oppose one another, with some disappearing and others emerging and struggling for dominance. At any given time, a society’s collective imaginary is the map of these competing bassins, which he calls a “topique socio-culturelle.” This word is purposely remindful of Freud’s topic or topography of the Ego, because for Gilbert Durand—himself a disciple of Jung—the individual imaginary works with the same symbols and structures as the collective one. The imaginary is a sort of interface between the subjective assimilating drives and the summons of the outside world, trying to find a resolution to contradictions and aporia, especially to the question of death. For Durand, the imaginary is led by two major “regimes” or groupings of similar structures: the diurnal regime of images which comprehends “heroic” or “schizomorphic” structures mostly attached to male-like images related to the ascendant scheme and the standing, dominant posture; and the nocturnal regime of images which includes two categories: the “mystical” structures that favour feminoid images related to the digestive reflex and the scheme of the descent, structures that are seeking the fusion of opposites into one entity; and the “synthetic” structures, also connected to feminoid images, illustrating the copulative reflex and the cyclic movements leading to the coupling of opposites (coincidentia oppositorum). Whereas the nocturnal regime of images brings images of comfort, serenity, and intimacy, it is also related to death. In
contrast, the images of the diurnal regime are mostly symbols fighting against the *theriomorphic* (or monster-like) images coming from the dark side of the nocturnal regime. This is why the diurnal regime is called schizomorphic, because it comes to existence by realizing a *split* between the dark endangering images and new heroic images. These structures and symbols are limited in number, they reproduce themselves, yet in varied and infinite assemblings, and therefore they can be called “anthropologic.”

We have just mentioned the essential affinity between the imaginary, seen as a topography, and space. It is natural that the former projects its structures in the latter, revealing shapes and forms which can be analyzed and read accordingly. In an inspiring book, James Duncan elucidates the relationship between landscape and the reproduction of political power. Using a “critical socio-semiotic theory,” he demonstrates “the tropes by which narratives are encoded in the landscape” (Duncan 2004; 1990, 4), treating the cultural landscape as a text. My analysis will draw on this semiotic reading, but I will treat the urban landscape of Pyongyang as a particular type of text: regarding the city as a myth, I will seek to articulate the “politics of landscape” as elaborated by pioneers like Walter Benjamin, Henri Lefebvre, James Duncan, and others, with the technique of mythanalysis in order to read the *mythologems* and *ideologems* (Durand 1992) carefully written by the authoritarian North Korean regime in the stones and bricks of Pyongyang. This essay of a “topo-mythanalysis” hopes to confirm through this mythological narrative the imaginary of the regime and determine whether it is representative of a totalitarian system.

The Sources and the Corpus

As one can imagine, information about Pyongyang is scarce and uncertain. In addition to the rare non-North Korean textual sources cited in the bibliography (among which is the precious report by the Seoul Municipal Development Research Institute 2007), I have relied on my own research trips to Pyongyang (2008 and 2009) as well as testimonies and comments by foreigners residing there (three NGO workers, one regularly visiting journalist, one long-term resident businessman, and one university teacher, all of who requested that their names not be disclosed. Interviews were conducted between 2008 and 2012). Testimonies like Andrei Lankov’s diary (1995) also provided useful insights. Other working documents included an American intelligence service map (1946) as a reference for liberation-era Pyongyang and a North Korean tourist map in English (undated, but published after 2001—see bibliography). I also used three North Korean travel guides as sources for what the regime wishes foreign tourists to see or at least be aware of (see primary sources). I also used the guide book translated and published by Philipp Meuser (2012). For tourist itineraries and sites *actually* visited, I compiled data from the tours organized by one of the few travel agencies specializing in North Korea (Koryo Tours, Beijing).

My aim is not to describe the whole city’s urban and geographic reality in detail (this is not an urban development study), but rather the city’s *representations* and *spectacular organization*, which means the city as it is made visible and
shown, especially to visitors. Therefore the criterion of visibility was essential in my selection of the corpus analyzed here. Crosschecking all the above references allowed me to define a list of landmarks, sites and “lieux de mémoire” which compose the ideological and symbolical landscape of Pyongyang as it is seen, used, and recorded by its residents and visitors.¹

The question of visibility brings in the cognitive dimension of the landscape: if urban landscape is a “text,” we have to determine who are the recipients of that message and how it is revealed to them. I would like to recall the “heuristic devices” proposed by Todd Henry in his inspiring article “Respatializing Chosôn's Royal Capital”: the distinction in the examination of city’s space between the “views from above” (covering what Henri Lefebvre called “spatial practices” and “representations of space,” see Lefebvre 1991) and the “view from below” (Lefebvre’s “spaces of representations”) (Henry 2008, 15). They refer both to a perspective on urban space (from above for city planners, from below for users) and to a social distinction between the deciders (power holders) and the general residents, between planning and use. These concepts could be applied easily to my study, since one can imagine in a regime like North Korea a strong separation between these two views, planned space being imposed on inhabitants. But then it wouldn’t be such a heuristic distinction in our case, since the antagonism between the two views is so obvious…

It would be interesting however to try to see when and how the two views interact with each other. There is actually one type of practice where the view from below and the one from above meet, and it is in the use of the map as a location and touristic device. The map is where the city as imagined by the planners and the engineers meets the city used, imagined, and lived by the visitors and even the residents (in large cities, one has to refer regularly to maps, even simple subway maps, to find one’s way). It is this view both from below and above which characterizes the mode of discovery and appropriation of the city (space, sites, monuments, modes of transportation, streets, as well as the way the city as a whole is represented). Maps can take the form of a guide; they can include drawings, illustrations and texts. They come in various forms and are ubiquitous. This ideal bird’s-eye view approach of the map defines the cognitive perspective we have toward a city like Pyongyang—it works as a practical device and as a metaphor. It transcends the real physical perspectives and views to reach the conscious and unconscious planning of the builders on the flat surface of the blueprints. This is how Pyongyang is specifically addressed as a mythical text to the visitors and residents. This particular politics of visibility determined my corpus: Pyongyang not as it is, but as it is seen, or the city as a spectacle and a monumental mise en

¹ There is not room here for a detailed justification of my method for defining the sites I examine, which I presented on during the “Capitals of the Korean World” conference in Paris (EHESS, September 12-13, 2013) along with the question of the regimes of visibility in Pyongyang. This presentation addressed the question of the different levels of visibility in the capital depending on the viewer’s status, and also the question largely unaddressed here of the invisible sites of Pyongyang. It is part of an ongoing comparative research on the regimes of visibility and the politics of distance in Seoul and Pyongyang (publication forthcoming).
scène.

**Pyongyang—Background**

*Geography and Administration*

Pyongyang is situated along a meander bend of the Taedong River where tributaries such as the Potong (Pothong—*Po’ông*)\(^2\) feed a wide alluvial plain that was prone to flooding in the past. The Taedong provided navigable access from the city to the river’s mouth in the Yellow Sea 75 km to the west. The urban landscape is dotted with low mountains and hills (270 m at the highest point). These were ideal sites for fortresses in the past and for parks today. Within the historic center of the city, there are five main “hills”: Moranbong, Namsan, Mansudae, Haebangsan, and Changgwangsan—*Ch’anggwangsan*. In the mountains to the northeast one finds high-grade anthracite coal deposits and gold. Pyongyang has a special administrative status under which it is run by the central government. It has a landmass of 2630 \( \text{km}^2 \) which is made up of 4 municipal counties (*kun*) and 9 peripheral areas (*kuyo˘k*). The urban center has 10 areas comprising an area of 60 \( \text{km}^2 \). The estimated population of the city center was 900,000 in 1990 (Schinz and Dege 1990). The census of 2008 puts the population at 3.2 million (Central Bureau of Statistics 2009), a figure concerning the whole Pyongyang administrative territory, and not only the city center, for which we do not have a separate recent census. Taken together, this data suggests a certain stability since the 1990s.

**History**

Inhabited since Palaeolithic times, the region is one of the oldest areas of human habitation on the peninsula. In the Neolithic era, the Tungusic peoples arrived and brought a new culture to the area. In 323, the Chinese commandery of Lelang (Nangnang in Korean)\(^3\) was peacefully absorbed by the kingdom of Koguryō. In 427, following the construction of Anhak Palace to the south of the Mt. Taesong (*Taeso˘ng*) fortress, the capital of Koguryō was definitively installed at Pyongyang. A century later, the city had expanded southwest, to the south of Moran Hill. The alliance between Silla and the Chinese emperor proved fatal for the kingdom and the city, which was reduced to ashes in 668, leading to the flight of the population. Pyongyang subsequently fell dormant for several centuries.

Pyongyang was reborn in 929 as Sŏgyŏng, the second capital of the new kingdom of Koryŏ. With the foundation of the kingdom of Chosŏn in 1392, the Yi Dynasty established its capital at the site of current-day Seoul, reducing Pyongyang to the status of a mere provincial administrative center. At the time of the Japanese invasions of 1592-1598, Pyongyang had a population of only 30,000. By the end of

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\(^2\) The names of North Korean persons and places will be given here in their most common North-Korean transliterations to help identify them more easily in the various sources. When variants exist, these will be given in parentheses after the first occurrence, followed by a transliteration in italics using the McCune-Reischauer system favoured by scholars outside of North Korea. More common names such as Pyongyang, Kim Il Sung, and Kim Jong-il will be used without any variants.

\(^3\) The Chinese nature of which is challenged by the North Korean regime.
the nineteenth century Pyongyang's population had grown to 100,000. The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895 saw Pyongyang's population drop to 15,000 when the city fell in a decisive battle. As Japan took control of the peninsula, the Japanese began rebuilding and modernizing the city, which became an important strategic center on the way to Manchuria at the time of the Russo-Japanese conflict of 1904-05. The Japanese bought up land to the south of the old fortress, between the Potong and the Taedong, building a train station there for the north-south railway then under construction. This project was the cornerstone for a new Japanese city developed over the period of colonial rule (1910-1945). This Japanese city was built according to a geometrical design that saw long straight arteries emanating from the station. These arteries were lined with Western-inspired stone administrative buildings and one- and two-story private homes. This model was in sharp contrast to the maze of small streets and low, thatched cottages that made up the old Korean city. The undeveloped left bank became an industrial and commercial zone, focused particularly on coal utilization. In addition, with the stationing of an entire infantry division in Pyongyang, the city became a center for the manufacture and warehousing of military equipment, munitions in particular. As a major Japanese garrison for the northern peninsula and the road to Manchukuo, the city's landscape was characterized by vast industrial zones with petroleum storage sites for the re-supply of troops and more generally the province, as well as lumber, textile, and metallurgical production facilities. Under the Sino-Japanese name of Heijō, Pyongyang developed rapidly into Korea's second most important city. Christian missionaries, particularly American Protestants, played an important role (by 1945, a sixth of the population was Christian, see Chris Springer 2003, 48) in the areas of education and health, such that by 1911 Pyongyang had eighteen schools and two hospitals. The Japanese population was educated and held most of the important positions in the government and service sectors. By 1925, the Japanese represented 21% of Pyongyang's population, not including military personnel. Pre-war Pyongyang was a prosperous westernized city with strong industries and commerce. This all changed with the liberation of 1945, which saw the departure of the city's Japanese population, resulting in an administrative and managerial vacuum. Pyongyang became the headquarters of the communists, under the direction of the Interim People's Committee for North Korea. Kim Il Sung was installed as leader of the movement by the Soviets, who had liberated the city and taken control of the peninsula north of the 38th parallel. In 1948 Pyongyang was chosen as interim capital of the new DPRK. In 1972 Pyongyang was designated by the North as capital of the entire Korean peninsula.4

A Reading of Pre-War Pyongyang5

Pre-war Pyongyang retained the dense and diversified fabric of its ancient origins. It

4 This historical presentation depends largely on the work of Alfred Schinz and Eckart Dege (1990).
had a vibrant economy sustained by peripheral market-oriented agriculture. There was a strong emphasis on education, thanks in part to the numerous American religious missions located in the city. Though transformed by its Japanese occupiers into a modern, rationalized city, Pyongyang’s center maintained its complex and multi-layered traditional network. Development occurred mainly along the left bank, spilling over into unused agricultural and riverside areas to the north, northwest, and southeast. Given the “improvised” fabric of Pyongyang, where only the peripheral zones were subject to recent planning initiatives, a reading of the city—with all its overlapping historical strata—is no easy task. One can nevertheless identify a trend towards the concentration of educational and religious activity (particularly foreign: Shinto and Christian) in the north-central part of the city.

city, and military, transportation, and industry in the south-central area. Despite a clear south-north historical axis along the river, a reading of the modern city must be in terms of a series of concentric circles: the historic center (administration, business district, traditional dwellings, education, and culture), a first peripheral circle (industry, warehouses, rail and other transport, and armed forces), and a second peripheral circle (wooded areas, rice fields, and other agricultural land). By modernizing the ancient walled city according to its expansionist and belligerent objectives, Japanese colonization had left a strong mark on Pyongyang by the time of the city’s liberation.

Post-War Pyongyang
The destruction of the Korean War (1950-1953) is difficult to quantify, but it is estimated that 90% of Pyongyang was levelled. The North Koreans claim that United Nations forces (in particular the Americans) dropped 428,000 bombs on the capital, nearly one bomb per inhabitant. With levels of destruction similar to post-war Berlin or Tokyo, the regime saw reconstruction as an opportunity for a radical reconfiguration of the urban landscape, a chance to make the city reflect the official ideology. As we shall see, certain urban axes and places of remembrance strongly connected to national identity were recovered, but by and large, Pyongyang underwent a radical makeover as part of the regime’s revolutionary objective of erasing the reactionary and colonial past.

Such vast destruction provided the authorities with an opportunity to recreate an urban landscape with clearly legible axes intended to provide a three-dimensional political education. This planned reconstruction was rolled out in several stages, starting with the liberation and lasting up to the 1990s.

From Liberation to the Korean War (1945-1953): First Urban Outlines
From the outset of the Soviet liberation of Pyongyang, the newly-formed regime began erecting key monuments. The Korean Central History Museum was established in 1945 at highly symbolic Moranbong, where several of the ancient city’s legendary sites were located (the museum would eventually be relocated in 1977). 1945 also saw the foundation of the Party and the installation of its

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6 See Kim 1999; Springer 2003.
7 Sources disagree on this question. Some indicate that only three buildings of significance survived the conflict (Springer 2003), while others suggest a higher number (Alfred Schinz and Eckart Dege 1990). In any case, it is clear that the city’s architectural and historical heritage was almost entirely annihilated.
8 Schinz and Dege (1990, 26-29) propose a four-phase reconstruction timeline that follows the economic plans (1: 1954-1956, 2: 1961-1967/1970 and 1971-1976, 3: 1978-1984, 4: 1987-1993). In addition to ending in 1993, their breakdown ignores the pre-war period and combines phases that appear to me quite distinct (in particular 1961-1976). While Schinz and Dege’s breakdown has the advantage of taking into account the launch of urban projects as part of a planned economic scheme, the one I propose here is more sensitive to the symbolic aspects of the various projects and is based on the completion or inauguration dates instead of the start of construction—which unfortunately does not provide an accurate time frame either, as some were erected quickly while others (e.g., the Ryugyong Hotel and the Kwangbok District) took a decade or more to build.
Central Committee along what is now Haebangsan Avenue, in a former Japanese administrative building. In 1970 this site became the Party Founding Museum. Kim Il Sung took up residence in a neighboring house, which would become a place of pilgrimage. In 1946 developments were undertaken along the docks of the Potong River, work began on Kim Il Sung University to the north of Moranbong, and the Liberation Tower was erected in Moran Hill Park in memory of the Soviet soldiers who liberated the nation (the tower would be enlarged in 1985). Moranbong Theatre was also built in 1946. This was an important monument to the new regime and hosted the first Supreme People’s Assembly in 1948. In 1947 Pyongyang’s film studios—of prime importance to the regime—were built northwest of the city. 1948 saw the completion of Kim Chaek Polytechnic University in the central area of Haebangsan. This was also the year when the DPRK was officially founded, and the Korean Revolution Museum erected on Moran Hill (the museum would be renamed in 1961 and relocated in 1972).

This first wave of reconstruction is marked not only by the building of headquarters for the first governing bodies of the Party, but also by the construction of sites relating to education (universities), culture (theatres), and two museums aimed at legitimizing the new regime through a re-reading of history, in particular the recent history of resistance (renamed “revolution”) and the role of Kim Il Sung.9

9 In North Korean usage, the Korean War is referred to as the “Liberation War” (from “War for the Liberation of the Motherland”) while the period of resistance against the Japanese up to the liberation of 1945 is referred to as the “Revolution.” For toponyms, we will follow the North Korean usage.
It is of particular significance that the historic center (situated near the station, and the former seat of provincial and colonial power), and especially Moran Hill, were selected for this first period of reconstruction. This placed the new center of power in the historic continuity of the city, linking it to the ancient kingdoms, particularly Koguryŏ, highly associated with sites such as the Pyongyang Fortress and the Moranbong monuments. Indeed, the new regime was eager to identify itself with Koguryŏ, which occupied a vast swath of the northern peninsula from the first century BC to the seventh century AD, by choosing Pyongyang as its capital. The choice of an elevated site—strongly symbolic in the Korean imaginary universe which values mountains—indicates the will of the fledgling regime to set itself apart from the old city center, which was strongly associated with the reactionary past of Chosŏn and Japanese rule. This symbolism also provided a more original, more essential legitimacy, because mountains are places of mythical births, such as those of Tangun and later Kim Jong-il, on T'aebaek and Paektu mountains respectively. Among others. These are the places where spirits dwell and also a source of energy in geomantic tradition. It should be recalled that upon his arrival in Pyongyang at the time of the liberation, Kim Il Sung gave a speech celebrating his installation by the Soviets at a small athletic field at the foot of Moranbong. This site would soon be rebuilt as Moranbong Stadium and then, in 1982, transformed into the gigantic Kim Il Sung stadium, with the Arch of Triumph at its side. This speech must be seen as the first step of a plan to strongly associate the new dynasty with the Moran Hill area.

This first period gave birth to a series of ascending movements in which hills and towers were emphasized. This is consistent with the *diairetic* or separating aspect of an imaginary universe increasingly influenced by the solar symbols of a diurnal regime based on heroic (or schizomorphic) structures. Also of note is the retaking of the northern zones (Moranbong, Mansudae, etc.) and the reconfiguring of the city through a new “mytho-topography” that promoted—in place of the old concentric circles (or centripetal dynamic) model—new urban axes intended to bring an entirely new dynamic to the urban fabric.

*First Phase of Reconstruction (1953-1963): The Pyongyang Station–Moranbong Axis*

While it is impossible, because of the massive destruction, to detail the full extent of post-war urban reconstruction efforts throughout North Korea, Pyongyang in particular, certain priorities can be noted. Top priority was given to the rebuilding of housing and of the transportation infrastructure (tram and railways, as well as roads). In addition to these priorities, the decade following the war also saw the completion of some of the new city’s major developments. One of the founding urban projects was the restoration of the north-south axis along the former Chŏnggŏjangjŏn Street and the old tramway line. Starting from the central station, this principal axis of the new city—comprising modern day Yonggwang (Yŏnggwang) and Sungri (Sŭngni) Streets—leads to Moran Hill and its monuments. Along the axis, at the foot of Mansu Hill, a residential area and a large art gallery were replaced in 1954 by the 75,000 square meter Kim Il Sung Square. This monument, along with the museums and enormous library built on Nam Hill in
the 1980s, would become the focal point for the display of the regime’s strength and provide a three-dimensional layout of its ideology. In 1954 the great square also became home to the Korean Art Gallery, where classic works of art are shown. Two more edifices face off across the square; when completed in 1954 these examples of Stalinist architecture were a source of great pride for the city. They are occupied by ministries, most likely agriculture, defence, and foreign trade. One of the building’s facades displayed until 2012 the portraits of Marx and Lenin (the only conspicuous traces of classic communism remaining in the city), and the other that of Kim Il Sung (which was later complemented with the portrait of his son, Kim Jong-il).

A number of other construction projects were completed during this period, including Friendship Tower in honour of the Chinese and their important role in the war (1959, Moran Park), a riverbank development project along the Taedong (1958), the Central Zoo (1959), the Children’s Palace (1963) and the People’s Army Circus (1964), precursors to the wave of construction in the 1970s that would emphasize recreation and youth activities. The Pyongyang Grand Theatre was completed in 1960 near the station, along Yonggwang Street. Designed in a neo-Korean style with eaved roofs, it represents the greatest cultural achievement of this period and manifests a desire to establish a de-Stalinized, more “national” architectural style reminiscent of the ancient palaces. While this “new” style began to flourish, socialist urbanization policies were also taking on a unique and more “Korean” face.

The above-mentioned projects were completed either within the city or in its
immediate periphery. But one of the most significant projects was the statue of the legendary Chollima (Chŏllima) or “thousand mile horse,” which soars 46 m above Moran Hill. The statue was erected in 1961 in celebration of Kim Il Sung’s forty-ninth birthday. Along with the great square of Kim Il Sung, the statue of Chollima was intended as a standard bearer of the economic and social revolution underway at the time.10 As such it is not only one the regime’s most symbolic monuments along the north-south axis but also along the “ideological polygon” that was slowly taking shape (see map 2).

The 1970s: The Dynastic Cult, Sports, and Culture

The 1970s saw a fundamental change both in the cult of personality around Kim Il Sung, whose propaganda was directed by his son Kim Jong-il, and in the city’s monumental and urban policies. The greatest project of this period was the Mansudae complex, completed in 1972. Set atop a small hill that was once the symbolic center of western education, as well as site of the ancient Koguryŏ palace, this complex would become a “must see” for all visitors to Pyongyang, both Korean and foreign. The entire hill is terraced and covered with granite steps and landings. At the summit stands a mammoth bronze statue of Kim Il Sung raising his right arm, eyes fixed on the horizon (flanked since 2012 by a statue of Kim Jong-il). It is customary for visitors to lay flowers at the monument and to pay their respects. Mansu Hill—Mansu, “10,000 years,” symbolizing the eternalness of the President and his regime—is also home to the Korean Revolution Museum. Situated behind an immense mosaic mural that provides a backdrop to the statue of Kim Il Sung, the museum was relocated here from Moranbong in 1972. Thus the resistance movement against the Japanese can be seen as physically (topographically) linked to the Great Leader, whose power literally rests upon the backdrop of this founding act. The site is key to the cult of personality; indeed, Mansudae’s “Grand Monument” has become the new affective and ideological heart of the city. It is situated along the axis that passes Kim Il Sung Square at the south end and, to the north the Chollima statue, the ancient city gate of Chilsong (Ch'ilsong, or Big Dipper), and the Moran Theatre. Another key historiographical site for the regime was established along this same axis: the former headquarters of the Central Committee was transformed in 1970 into the Party Founding Museum, and in 1975 a monument was erected to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of the Party. In 1977 the Central History Museum was also transferred to this same axis, from Moran Hill to Kim Il Sung Square, establishing symmetry with the Art Gallery. It would seem that Moranbong was cleansed of its pre-Kim historical elements to become a sort of mythical beacon. What remained was the stuff of legend (the Chollima horse, the Big Dipper, etc.), the aura of Koguryŏ, and structures relating to the regime’s origins (Moran theatre and stadium), which were thus intentionally given a legendary spin. Indeed the history of Korea as it had now been re-written

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10 The Chollima Movement was launched in 1957 to promote such feats as the construction of “one flat in 14 minutes…20,000 flats [built] with materials and funds [for only] 7,000…one man builds four flats” (Schinz and Dege 1990, 27). The regime came to dub this policy in English as “Pyongyang Speed.”
was better suited to Kim Il Sung Square, which came to symbolize the “culture” of the new Korean people. This history is nevertheless set to appear both anterior and subordinate to the recent history of resistance and revolution led by President Kim, whose figure looms from Mansudae, over the Great Square, history, and the classic arts. In this way, the traditional vertical axis from the Central Station to Moranbong was given an orientation through a soteriological discourse, from south to north (history, Revolution, and Liberation myths). But it was Mansudae that would serve as an intersection for other symbolic axes under construction. For if Kim Il Sung Square was the physical center of the city, Mansudae had by now become the symbolic and ideological heart of Pyongyang.11

During this period the dynastic cult was also reinforced by the development of Mangyong Hill (Man’gyŏng, “hill of 10,000 views”), the historic site of Kim Il Sung’s birth. Whether a deliberate choice or not, the name echoes the “man-” of Mansudae and underscores the classic notion of “view” or horizon-landscape that would come to occupy such an important place in Pyongyang’s urban aesthetic. A number of monuments were erected in 1970 at this “revolutionary site” (all sites relating to the story of Kim Il Sung and his dynasty are “revolutionary”), including a “restored” version of the cottage of his birth, a park, and the Mangyong Revolutionary Museum.

Two similar sites were completed during this period. In 1972 the Chilgol Revolutionary Site (Ch’ilgol, “Seven Hamlets”) was erected as a monument to Kim Il Sung’s mother in her village of birth, north of Mangyongdae. The Ponghwa Revolutionary Site 49 km northeast of the center was dedicated to Kim Il Sung’s father and his resistance activities from 1916 to 1917. A museum was built at Ponghwa in 1973, and then in 1977 a monument commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of the Korean National Association, an anti-Japanese resistance group supposedly started by Kim’s father. It is interesting to note that in the 1990s, the tomb of the legendary founder Tungun—another father of the nation—was “discovered” not far from Ponghwa. The theogonic geography of the regime was thus confirmed, with a maternal center to the west of the city and a paternal one to the east. This new bibliographical (or “destiny”) axis for Kim—Mangyongdae-Mansudae-Moranbong—traced the axis along which the major projects of the 1980s would be built.

On the far eastern end of this axis sits Mount Taesong with its fortress dating back to Koguryo. The fortress and its southern gate were restored in 1978. Also in this area, not far from the zoo built in the 1950s, the highly symbolic Revolutionary Martyrs Cemetery was completed in 1975. With the completion in 1977 of an amusement park and central botanical gardens, the Taesongsan area became a popular place of remembrance and leisure for the residents of Pyongyang. This can be seen as part of a growing trend towards making the ideological more playful and recreational. As Peter Atkins puts it, “The surreal content of heritage

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11 As validation for this, I would cite the recent projects planned in commemoration of Kim Il Sung’s one-hundredth birthday (2012). These were intended to provide Pyongyang with a new physiognomy and largely planned for the area around Mansudae.
and leisure sites is paralleled on a larger, heroic scale in the extravagance of the city plan which has emerged as a self-conscious epic” (1996, 205).

As for cultural projects, the Mansudae Theatre was built in 1976-1977, between Mansudae and Kim Il Sung Square. This gigantic cultural center, along with its spectacular fountains, attracted hundreds of Pyongyang residents each night (Lankov 1995). The April 25 House of Culture, the city’s largest theatre and opera house, was built in 1974-1975 to the north of Moranbong (April 25, 1932 is the date celebrated as the “founding” of the North Korea People’s Army). The People’s Palace of Culture was built in 1974. Despite its name, it is used mainly for official receptions and international conferences, though it also houses two cinemas. It is located near Potong Gate in the Changgwang area. The adjacent Palace of Sports was built in 1973. This former military zone was thus transformed into a new center for sports and recreation, enabling Pyongyang to host large-scale international events of the non-aligned countries. The Liberation War Museum to the northwest was entirely renovated, enlarged, and reopened in 1974. It is also worth noting the opening in 1971 of the Mangyongdae Summer Camp at the foot of the hill. The camp can accommodate up to 25,000 school children. Such facilities highlight the importance of youth in the regime’s ideological policies, policies which must be seen as part of the full array of representations associated with the cult of personality crystallizing around President Kim during this period. Because the President was considered the Father (or sometimes the Mother) of the nation and the people his children, Korean youth were particularly doted on by the regime’s propaganda. While the military regimes of the South were emphasizing sports and entertainment to support their authoritarian rule (the so-called “3 S” policy), the North was also developing a cult of physical activity, reducing socialist culture to sports and propagandistic entertainment such as revolutionary opera and theatre, film, mass games, and to a lesser degree, literature.

In the 1970s new areas were developed in outlying areas or previously undeveloped urban or agricultural zones. One example was the development of the Potong River Zone, prone to flooding with the slightest rainfall (the river was nicknamed “river of tears”). In 1971 a commemorative tower and a park were completed, with all requisite praise being heaped upon Kim Il Sung for his role in the project. This project celebrated the opening up of new fronts for expansion to the west, north and, to a lesser extent, to the east.

Finally, one must also note the completion of Pyongyang’s metro system during this period (line 1 in 1973 and line 2 in 1978). As with the Moscow metro, Pyongyang’s was built as a showcase for the regime. Buried 100 m below the surface, it was also intended for use as a bomb shelter. Line 1 follows the traditional south-north axis, while Line 2 reinforces the new west-east axis, as we shall see below.

12 See Myers 2010.
The Great Ideological Works of the 1980s

The decade of the 1980s saw a continuation of the large works projects of the 1970s. From 1982 to 1985 the completion of a number of highly symbolic projects put the finishing touches on the dynasty’s unique urban plan. With these new sites, the Kims’ dream city opened itself up to new perspectives with a Hausmanian understanding of urban landscape and of the monumental and spectacular.

A number of Pyongyang's iconic monuments were completed during the 1980s, including the major landmarks constituting the first four vertices of what would become the “ideological hexagon” in the north-central part of the city. On Nam Hill to the west of Kim Il Sung Square, the Grand People's Study House, the massive library and pedagogical center from which the Leader watched the annual military parades, was completed in 1982. Opposite the library, on the other side of the perspective created by the square and the river, stands the immense Tower of the Juche Idea, crowned with an illuminated torch reminiscent of the one held by New York’s Statue of Liberty (for a description of its symbolism, see Peter Atkins 1996, 202). The tower and its wide esplanade were completed in 1982 as part of an extensive development project along the Taedong’s left bank during the 1970s and especially the 1980s. The Juche Idea Tower, along with the Study House and Mansudae’s Grand Monument to Kim Il Sung, formed an initial ideological


13 I distinguish here between perspective (a physical tract that is visible to the eye) and axis (abstract “bee line” on a map).
triangle that definitively relocated the city's symbolic center to the north and along the Taedong. Kim Il Sung Square came to represent both history, with the Korean revolution firmly rooted therein, and study, which forms the permanent ideal basis of that revolution (isomorphism between study//youth//science). Study, as symbolized by the Great Study House, links the past (the history of Korea is presented in the museums, Marxism-Leninism was symbolized by the portraits on the square until 2012) to the future. The future is represented by the torch of the Juche Tower, since it is to be nourished by the study of the Juche idea. This ideology, as revealed by the Great Leader, forms a horizon, both physically and symbolically. As in the Buddhist metaphor that places Enlightenment on the other side of the river, the Juche Idea rises as a promise and an ideal on the other side of the Taedong. This link between past and future takes on human form: the colossal statue of Kim on Mansudae, standing at the vertex of the triangle. He looks across the river to an ideological horizon that encompasses the Juche Tower on the right and the Party Founding Monument directly opposite, both visible from the Mansudae esplanade. His outstretched hand indicates the direction of this glorious future under the aegis of the Party as it works to accomplish the Juche Idea. 

Behind the statue, as discussed above, a museum was dedicated to the glory of the legend from which his legitimacy derives, the legend of the resistance he led against the Japanese. In 1984-1985 the Mansudae Assembly Hall was erected nearby, serving as home to the People's Supreme Assembly and hosting large Party gatherings, among others. Seat of the country's "political life" as presided over by the leader in power, this impressive marble palace is clearly overshadowed by the statue of Kim: it is no secret that the Assembly has no real power. From Mansudae, an avenue heading north traces another visual perspective leading to the fourth vertex of an ideological trapezoid: the Arch of Triumph, also opened in 1982, represents the victories of Kim Il Sung while implicitly comparing them to those of another great despot: Napoleon. The Pyongyang Arch of Triumph was indeed built on the model of the Parisian arch, but is actually larger. The Arch was erected on a square originally dedicated in 1954 at the place where the triumphant Kim II Sung was said to have first entered Pyongyang at the time of liberation in 1945. It should be noted that these key monuments were publicly unveiled in 1982 for the seventieth birthday of Kim Il Sung, just as the Grand Monument (his statue) was inaugurated in 1972. Taken as a whole, these sites clearly attest to the monumentalization of the cult of personality and its translation into urban forms and landscapes.

During this period other landmarks were developed along the west-east axis (Mangyongdae-Moranbong-Taesongsan): Kim Il Sung Stadium, formerly Moranbong, was enlarged and modernized in 1982. As mentioned above, this was the site of Kim's great speech upon his installation in 1945. It was here that military and other national parades took place prior to the construction of the Study House at Kim Il Sung Square. Rungna Island saw the completion in 1989 of the gigantic May Day Stadium, designed as the venue for the great national festival referred to as the Mass Games, as well as for the thirteenth World Festival of Youth and Students (see below). The stadium and its glorification of the regime thus
established the river as a new front that would help define a new urban geometry. At the end of the east-west axis the Revolutionary Martyrs Cemetery, another key site of remembrance, was enlarged and redesigned in 1985.

The 1980s can thus be seen as a time of re-drafting the city around the regime's major historical events. The two monuments preserving the memory of the Chinese and Soviet collaborations were also renovated during the 1980s. Despite the regime's growing isolation vis-à-vis its former allies, brief periods of warmer relations resulted in an augmentation of the Friendship Tower in 1984—bringing it to a height of 30 metres to match that of the Liberation Tower—and an enlargement of the Liberation Tower in 1985.

To improve its international standing, North Korea began hosting events of the non-aligned nations, such as the thirteenth World Festival of Youth and Students in 1989 (which as some observers such as Chris Springer suggest, was to make up for the dashed hopes of hosting the 1988 Olympic Games, which went to Seoul). This event was a strong motivating factor for the urban planning of the 1980s that would profoundly transform the city. The regime also launched a number of festivals, including the International Film Festival held every two years on Yanggak Island. The island was renovated during the 1980s and became the site of the International Cinema House erected for the inaugural festival in 1989. A football stadium was also completed there in the same year. Once again, the river and its islands are clearly associated with sports and with spectacle in general.

In addition, in 1989 the immense Chongchun (Ch’ŏngch’un), or Youth, Sports Village was completed to the south-west, between Mangyongdae and the city center. It boasts nine gymnasiums built along wide, rectilinear avenues. This new complex, which includes two international hotels, was built symbolically along the Mangyongdae-Moranbong axis discussed above. In the same vein, the International House of Culture and the International Communications Center were built (in 1988 and 1989, respectively) to welcome foreign youth wishing to study Juche thought.

Indeed, government policies continued to support large-scale projects geared towards recreation, sport, and youth. Near Moranbong, the Kaeson (Kaesŏn) Youth Funfair opened in 1984, and an immense ice rink was inaugurated in 1982 in the Changgwang area. Nearby, the giant Changgwang Health Complex was inaugurated in 1980; it is claimed that the complex's saunas and pools can handle up to 16,000 visitors per day. The culmination of the Changgwang sports and culture area, the construction of which began in the 1970s, was the complete makeover (1980-1985) of the street of the same name. The old buildings had come to be considered too “Soviet” in style; they were replaced with quality high-rise structures with spacious apartments. A different section of the same street is closed to the public. Reserved for high-level public servants and officials of the regime, it is referred to as the “Party Area” (or, by foreigners, as the “Forbidden City,” see Lankov 1995). This is the capital's true political and power center. It is important to note that it is completely off limits and thus invisible not only to tourists but also to ordinary citizens. This, along with the fact that ministries and public institutions post no signs to indicate their presence, gives the city a “depoliticized” dimension.
(with the leadership operating from places that are not only inaccessible but also hidden), even as the ideological dimension is so clearly built up. The “Party Neighbourhood” is nevertheless situated on the west-east “destiny” axis. In this central area, it is also interesting to note the construction of the Koryo Hotel in 1985, the city’s finest, with its arts and crafts store that has become an obligatory stop for tourists, along with other facilities, such as the Mansudae Art Studio. In addition, Department Store No. 1, built in 1982 at the site of the former Hwasin store that had survived the war, provides an entirely fake showcase for the country’s economy, intended to impress visitors and to cater to apparatchiks.

There are a number of other noteworthy sites along the west-east axis, including the Mangyongdae Funfair (1982) and, in the Kwangbok area—originally built to accommodate participants of the 1989 festival and then transformed into a large residential complex of 25,000 apartments—the Mangyongdae Schoolchildren’s Palace and the Pyongyang Circus (both completed in 1989).

On the other side of the river, a number of similar complexes were erected, including the Central Youth Hall (1989), the East Pyongyang Grand Theatre (1989), and, in terms of health-care infrastructure, the Pyongyang Maternity Hospital (1980). Designed for foreign residents and diplomats, the development of the left bank’s Munsu area emphasized single-family houses and modern apartment buildings. These various elements confirm that new urban fronts were being developed as a spectacular mise en scène of the regime’s values, using themes of youth, sports, and culture (operas, mass games, shows at the Children’s Palace, etc.). In addition, new apartment complexes were built to replace rundown housing tracts dating back to the 1950s and 1960s, giving rise to new neighbourhoods that were fully integrated into the city’s ideological landscape. These included the areas of Kwangbok, Chongchun, Changgwang, and, on the left bank (Pyongyang-East), the large residential complex of Tongil, second only to Kwangbok.

One structure nicely sums up the megalomania of the large construction projects of the 1980s: the Ryugyong (Ryugyŏng) Hotel, work on which began in 1987 and was still incomplete as of 2013. Intended as the world’s largest and tallest hotel, this 105-floor pyramid-shaped tower is situated on the Potong’s right bank, atop a former cemetery near the old colonial-era shantytown of Ragwon-dong. The sheer mass of the structure dominates the city’s landscape.

The 1990s: Consolidation of the Founding Myth and the Return of Historicism

The 1990s were marked by economic hardship and years of terrible famine; politically, the death of Kim Il Sung in 1994 was particularly significant, along with infighting over his succession (actually begun in the 1980s); internationally, the nuclear crisis led to the further isolation of North Korea. The large-scale ideological projects were completed; it was now time to consolidate the regime by means of a monumental mise en scène of the founding myths. A new historiography was put in place, one that reinstated figures once considered reactionary, such as King Tongmyong, founder of Koguryŏ, whose mausoleum was “renovated” in 1993, 25 km east of Pyongyang, and Tangun, mythical founder of Korea, whose tomb was “discovered” in the outskirts of Pyongyang the same year, not far from Kim Il
Sung’s father’s village of Ponghwa, which had been built up in the 1970s. The sites of these two founding fathers thus became stops along educational and edifying outings proposed to Pyongyang’s residents beginning in 1994 (with the opening of Tangun’s tomb to the public).

On the other side of the Potong the Monument to the Victorious Fatherland Liberation War was erected in a large park in 1993, while the north-eastern area of the left bank saw the erection of the iconic Monument to the Party Founding, represented by three raised fists holding a hammer, a sickle, and a writing brush. This latter monument, facing Mansudae from the opposite bank, constituted a new vertex of the ideological polygon, a perfect trapezoid formed with the Grand Monument of Kim Il Sung, and on the lower side, Kim Il Sung Square and the Juche Tower. A horizontal axis was thus formed, traversing Mansudae and ending at the incomplete backdrop provided by the Ryugyong Hotel (incomplete, though the Orascom construction company has recently completed the installation of the building’s glass façade). The hotel can be seen from a number of the city’s strategic sites. Its mountainous pyramidal form (a giant peak in the middle with two smaller peaks to either side) provides a symbolic background to Mansudae’s monument. Just as the throne of the Chosŏn sovereigns stood before painted screens depicting mountain scenery dotted with Taoist symbols of longevity and prosperity (shibijangsudo), the statue of Kim stands before the backdrop of the mountain of concrete that is the Ryugyong Hotel. Furthermore, the hotel opens up an interesting visual perspective from the avenue that leads to the renovated Potong Gate, one of the city’s few vestiges of Chosŏn, and which evokes the Koguryŏ fortress. The avenue and the gate lie on an imaginary line that extends to Kim Il Sung Square. With the inclusion of the Gate, the city’s hexagonal “ideological heart”—with Mansudae as the axis of rotation—is now fully delineated by six vertices.

But the regime’s most important and affectively charged project of the 1990s was the conversion starting in 1994 of the Kumsusan (Kŭmsusan) memorial into a mausoleum for the Great Leader’s embalmed body. This site was Kim’s former residence, completed in 1976. The choice of this grand marble palace was a symbolic one. Firstly, it confirms the quasi-divine immortality of the Great Leader, enshrining him as the “eternal leader” who shall rule for all time from this former hall of power. In addition, the site is located exactly on the west-east axis described above. This is clearly an “axis of destiny”: to the west, Mangyongdae, Chilgol, and the maternal-birth sites; to the east, symbolizing death, the Kumsusan mausoleum, and further along, the national cemetery at Taesong, where the memory of the revolutionary heroes is glorified; farther still, Tangun at Ponghwa, and the sites of the founding Fathers. The Kumsusan site is above all a symbol of completion: completion of power when it served as extra-mural presidential palace; completion of the apotheosis (the ruler transformed into an eternal god) when it was transformed into a mausoleum. The site would be sublimated once again with the death in December 2011 of Kim Jong-il, whose remains came to rest at the mausoleum after a circular funeral procession starting and ending at Kumsusan.

Also in the Kumsusan area, the large Avenue of September 9 (9.9 chŏl’gŏri, the official founding day of the DPRK), opening the perspective, was completed in
1998. During this period, signs of changing times would also begin to appear: the traditional, pre-revolutionary past was reinstated through certain sites that had long been stigmatized as reactionary, such as Christian churches and Buddhist temples, including the Kwangbop Temple that was “renovated” in 1990, the Kumgang (Ku˘mgang) Temple in 1998, and the Chilgol Church in 1992. It seems clear that such changes in policy were due to pressure from foreign religious groups, particularly South Korean, who were bringing investments to the North.

As another sign of change, the only major recreational facility built during the 1990s was the Pyongyang Bowling Alley, opened in 1994. Thus, this “Yankee” sport now had a shrine in Pyongyang that in the 2000s would become a trendy hangout for the children of the DPRK’s elite classes, not to mention a “must see” on Koryo Tours itineraries.

The 2000s: Confirmation and Renovation
There was no new construction of major structures or monuments during the first decade of 2000. Nevertheless, in spite of increasing economic hardship, the regime was able to find funds (including from foreign investors, particularly Chinese) to build new apartment complexes and to renovate a number of symbolic buildings. It is difficult to analyse the regime’s choices, which tended to baffle foreign observers who regularly suggested that bankruptcy was just around the corner. In the 2000s a number of sites were successfully renovated. These sites related to culture in the most conventional, bourgeois sense of the term: the Moranbong Theatre (2009), the Taedongmun Cinema (2008), and the Grand Theatre of Pyongyang (2011). The Ryugyong Hotel, which many believed was doomed to dilapidation, was entirely covered with glass. Even if it will never be fully occupied—it is likely the hotel, when opened, will only use the lower and upper floors—the structure’s formerly ghostly and taboo image has given way to that of a proud figure rising high above Pyongyang. Beginning in the Spring of 2012, the structure is supposed to have been partly converted into office space. Though it is often described abroad as a disaster, the city is in reality a giant construction site with work underway day and night. The capital has indeed started to receive a surprising new face in 2012, a year of change, as pronounced by the regime, in honour of the hundredth birthday of the Great Leader. Officially, 100,000 apartments have been built, with 3,000 alone on Changjon (Changjón) street. It is interesting to note that this project is located in the area around Mansudae. The ten-hectare planned urban and architectural zone was intended to be as “revolutionary” as the Changgwang and Kwangbok projects of the 1980s. Even though it was not completed in time for the Great Leader’s birthday (the opening celebration was held in June 2012), this area did eventually launch a new “face” of Pyongyang’s ideological center. Some see this as a way to strengthen the image of the new leader Kim Jong-un by linking him to the figure of his grandfather, the great architect and principal hero of modern Pyongyang.

14 Some secondary “cultural” landmarks were added, like the Monument to the Three Charters for National Reunification (2001), the Kimilsungia and Kimjongilia Exhibition Halls (2002), and a dolphinarium (2012).
whose bronze statue was recently renovated in the very same area of Mansu-dong, coupled with the newly erected statue of his late father Kim Jong-il.

Towards a “Topo-Mythanalysis”

The above diachronic analysis of Pyongyang’s reconstruction identified three major periods: reconstruction/founding (1950-1960), ideological works (1970-1980), and consolidation (1990-2000). This chronological approach allowed us to follow the slow relocation of the former royal and colonial city center towards what I have referred to as the “ideological polygon,” formed through the addition of successive triangles. This hexagon has as its center the Grand Monument of Mansudae, which radiates like a shining star (or sun) through its six vertices: Kim Il Sung Square, the Ryugyong Hotel, the Arch of Triumph, the Kumsusan Memorial, the Party Founding Monument, and the Juche Tower. But the polygon represents more than just a star. It can be seen as a solar system revolving around the star that is Kim Il Sung (whose birthday is called “Day of the Sun”) at Mansudae. Clearly, Pyongyang as the capital of the new regime has become the city of Kim Il Sung, built up gradually in honour of the glory of his myth. The triangles making up the polygon highlight the significance of the trinity in the regime’s imaginary universe. As early as the 1960s the regime was building up a dynastic cult, through the three figures of Kim Il Sung, his son Kim Jong-il, and, following Kim Il Sung’s death, of his first wife Kim Jong Suk. This polygon in the northern part of Pyongyang is probably more significant in terms of its quasi-circular or ovoid aspect than in terms of its

six axes. Indeed, it is essential to point out the cyclic dominance in the myth (in the sense of an eternal return of the Same) as laid out in the city’s urban planning.

Rotating around the new focus of Nam Hill-Mansudae—first traced in 1954 and then fully fleshed out in the 1970s and 1980s, particularly 1972 and 1982—are two axes, or more precisely, the re-located historical south-north axis (Central Station—Moranbong), which was transformed into a southwest-northeast axis. Geometrically, the rotation center is around Mansudae. This translated axis, which first appeared in the 1970s, would become an “axis of destiny” dedicated to the life of Kim Il Sung, which in this mythography should be taken metonymically for the nation and all its citizens.

The first axis, “historical” in that it drew from the city’s past (from the royal and colonial periods, with symbols such as the central station, the tramway path that would become Yonggwang and Sungri Streets, the old pavilions, the Moranbong Fortress, etc.), was actually more ideological insomuch as it related to the key “moments” of the regime’s history (revolution, liberation, education, etc.). The second axis is more biographical, hagiographic or even theogonic: it is the axis of the cult of personality and the slow and gradual deification of Kim Il Sung and his family. The ideological aspects (communism followed by Juchism, but also the justifying phases of the resistance and the war) are less important than the symbolic phases of the hero’s personal journey. And of course his journey is inseparable from that of the nation he created; the great monuments symbolizing the ideology itself are included on this axis by means of the “polygon” that encompasses them.

This axis begins with the birth of the tutelary figures of Kim and his mother and passes through symbols of Youth (the areas of Kwangbok and Chongchun, which represent metonymically the youth of the Father, fortified by the childhood of the people—they are, after all, his children—as well as the myth of the resistance as embodied in the name Kwangbok). It then passes through the “ideological polygon” of the mature era (i.e., the large-scale Juche projects, based on the Revolution and the Liberation War), which is itself inscribed in the city’s legendry (Koguryo and Choson, by way of Moranbong). Finally, the axis ends with symbols of Death: Kumsusan Memorial where lies the Father, and the other guardian heroes of the Nation (the father of the Father himself at Ponghwa, the founding father Tangun, and the war heroes at Taesongsan). Similar to heroic myths, the axis starts with a birth (in a humble mountain cottage) and follows the epic deeds into immortality. The presence of the other tutelary figures, all heroic and paternal, in this north-eastern sector serves to confirm, through their redundancy, the trans-historic and meta-temporal authority of Kim Il Sung. Dead and deified in Kumsusan, he is transcended by the vicinity of these figures. The usual east-west axis (path of the Sun, Buddhist paradise of the western pure land, etc.) thus seems reversed. Confirmation of this may be found in the Hyoksin metro line that follows this axis. Opened in 1978, the line progresses through a series of stations with names like Kwangbok (Fatherland Liberation), Construction of the Nation, Innovation, Light (Kwangmyong—Kwangmyŏng, the station at Kumsusan) and Paradise (Ragwon), the last station at Taesongsan! From the cottage to Kumsusan's
shining marble palace, the city’s layout is etched with a veritable apotheosis.

As if to defiantly turn its back on the “West,” the polygon, like the statue of the Grand Monument, is aligned towards the east—here the direction of hope and of the future (Daoist traditions place the Fortunate Isles to the east, in a mythical land called Tongguk, or Eastern Country, which is how Korea was referred to by the Chinese, who saw themselves at the center of the world). After 1994 however—assuming one accepts the circular aspect of the “ideological polygon” as a representation of mythical time itself—this axis can be read backwards according to the “natural” order of the landscape (flow of the river, path of the sun). In this way, the axis becomes part of the mythical and heroic history of the country (Tangun and the other founding Fathers), flowing down the river, regressing into youth, childhood, birth—or rather re-birth. It is interesting to note that everything in Pyongyang turns around the figure of the Father; the legend of his son, Kim Jong-il, is situated either outside the city or along its periphery (Paektusan, Kim Il Sung University, etc.). It is as if the re-birth (or birth of a new generation in power) could happen only in opposition to the Father upon his death. In any case, a strongly morbid character can be detected at the north-by-north-east pole of this new Pyongyang axis.

It is important to keep in mind the progressively diachronic aspect of the politicization of the city, upon which the regime gradually applied its urban plan while at the same time it built the official ideology, manufactured the cult of personality, and produced and disseminated the hagiography of Kim. This is embodied in the transformations of the “ideological polygon,” which over the span of forty years was shaped into a star, or better yet, a radiant sun. There is in all this a link, hidden but nevertheless significant, to colonial and pre-modern Pyongyang. The urban developments of the former Japanese city (between modern-day Changgwang and Yonggwang Avenues, the area of P’yo˘ngch’on, etc.) were replaced by apartment blocks that made no symbolic contribution to the city’s landscape, located as they were at the periphery of the significant axes. The new regime had little by little, and in a very clear manner, re-located the city center to the north (Moranbong-Mansudae) and to the northeast (to Kumsusan and beyond, and also to East Pyongyang). Thus, the regime abandoned the former centers of power (the City Hall, the provincial administration office, the Governor’s residence, etc.) and set up new ones that were in fact de-politicized, in the sense that the actual places of power (e.g., government ministries, Kim’s residences) were kept secret and inaccessible. Only the original Party headquarters had been located in a colonial administrative building, and this was later transformed into a museum of only secondary importance. Lying on the first, “historic” axis with the Central Station as point of departure, it remains on the periphery of the “axis of destiny.”

But not all of the past was completely ignored. The “ideological polygon” was built in the area that was formerly home to the American Protestant missions (Yangchon) and to the old centers of knowledge and western “science” that were synonymous with progress. Despite the persistent—though sometimes openly criticized—Stalinistic models of architecture, urban planning, and governance, the western and Protestant Christian models left a strong imprint on the regime’s
psyche. Science and the notion of progress occupy a central place in the strongly Promethean imaginary universe of the Communists. In the North Korean context in particular, it seemed natural to recover such sites and to make them over into the new ideological core of the city, not in the least because they were situated between three hills (Mansudae, Namsan, and Moranbong), which as we have seen are strongly symbolic in the Korean imaginary universe. The imagery of mountains brings us to the recurrent features of the city’s key monuments: verticality and enormous scale. The various towers, skyscrapers, columns, fountains, and colossal statues discussed above show the strong resonance of the theme of verticality. We also have seen that the city was laid out around a number of perspectives, and that the sense of view, associated in the imaginary with the vertical scheme, was of prime importance in Pyongyang. Indeed, the “views” opened up by the different perspectives set up symmetries punctuated by the massive, vertical monuments intended to idealize Kim Il Sung and his life. Adding up the various elements discussed here—the theme of verticality, high-low (and pure-impure) archetypes, significance of view, enormous proportions, symmetry, geometrism, idealization, polemical antithesis (North-South, US imperialism vs. communism, etc.)—we find all the features of the schizomorphic (or heroic) structures of a diurnal imaginary universe (Durand 1997). This universe is characterized by a tendency towards heterogenizing objectification and homogenizing subjectification (what Durand calls “autistic distance”); identity (national or individual) is defined as a homomorphic relationship to oneself and a rejection of the other circumscribed by his radical otherness. These are the traits underlying the Juche ideology itself. Such an imaginary universe promotes a dramatic sense of narrative that demonizes the other, with whom one must necessarily enter into battle (e.g., South Korea, the United States of America, and Japan). But, despite the “Promethean” aspect discussed above (i.e., fascination with science and progress), this type of universe is not conducive to a dialectical view of history. Instead, the promise falls short of history: the Juche Idea of progress that came with the revolution (= Kim Il Sung) brings about a cyclical regression of rebirth of the Same (Kim as eternal president taking the form of his avatars-descendants). Here the relationship between the Son and the Father is simple, unlike Christianity with its complex dialectic of the

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15 This scheme of verticality is in part based on Hong Kal’s analysis (2011) of the “changing modality of seeing” brought by the Japanese colonial planning of Seoul and in a more general way, the (Western-influenced) modernization of Korea. As she says, at that time in Seoul, “as the symbol of power was shifted from one of depth to that of the surface, the image of the city was transformed from concealment to exhibition, from enclosure to spectacle, and from low to high cityscape” (Hong Kal 2011, 46). The monumentality of Pyongyang has roots in Soviet architecture, as we know that North Korean most influential architect Kim Ch’ông-hui studied in Moscow. It is to be linked therefore to other socialist, and certainly also to other totalitarian capitals. But the more general context of capitalist modernity as implemented through the Japanese colonial hand and of its “hidden” heritage would also have to be assessed in the symbolic reconstruction of modern Pyongyang—even if it clearly turned its back to the feudal and colonial central district.

16 See B.R. Myers’s The Cleanest Race for further development of these concepts (2010).

17 The word juche (chuch’e) means “subject, substance, identity” and the concept refers to notions of self-determination.
same and the other at play in the mystery of the Trinity. Here the Son is the Father, because the Father is all-powerful and immortal.

There is in all this a clearly internal, hidden aspect, in opposition to the uranic or diurnal dimension: the subterranean (cf. the Moranbong Theatre), the mountain tombs (Tongmyong, Tangun, Revolutionary Martyrs Cemetery, Kumsusan—the mausoleum named after a mountain, -san), the hidden wives, and so forth—all chthonian and feminoid images. There seems to be a reactivation here of the “Tangun cave complex,” the myth of the national origin in which the she-bear Ungnyo leaves her cave after being transformed into a woman. She then marries Hwanung, the son of Heaven, and gives birth to Tangun. The north-eastern zone is associated with death, but it is also a place of gestation that transforms Father into Son, making him immortal, like the phoenix rising from its ashes. It amounts to the “repressed nocturnal mystery” of the regime’s imaginary universe. Supporting the idea of the regime’s mythology as a uranic theogony, the Son, Kim Jong-il—referred to in the official propaganda as the “Sun of the 21st Century”—was born on Mount Paektu (in the northern part of North Korea). In the official portrait hung in all embassies of the DPRK, father and son are depicted standing together atop Mount Paektu, which is the very place where Hwanung descended to Earth. Following the death of Kim Jong-il, it remains unclear which images will be used to portray the heir to power, the grandson Kim Jong-un. One can nevertheless see a strong campaign in place to identify him with his grandfather Kim Il Sung. This demonstrates the diurnal aspect of the North Korean imaginary universe, in which the feminine, the nocturnal, the Other, is merely a transitional means towards the Same. Again, from this point of view, the Son is only a hypotyposis, or even a mere avatar, of the Father-as-the-Same. The number three—the significance of which was pointed out above—is not used here as a symbol with a tripartite structure; rather it resolves to the One. Obviously this “trinitary mystery” was not easy to grasp, with its internal contradictions and its hesitations. Kim Jong-il had to assert his power all the while affirming, and building, the cult of personality of his father. A difficult position to maintain, both psychologically and politically, but one which attests to a high degree of filial piety. As gleaned from the urban plan implemented by the regime, the entire city was offered up to the apotheosis of the Father.

Modern Pyongyang has been rebuilt as an open book. Such an elaborate and precise narrative transcription of the nation’s ideological mythology into a city’s space is rare in the twentieth century. It was quite common in highly centralized states of pre-modern times (pharaohs’ Egypt, ancient Rome, pre-Columbian kingdoms, the Khmer Empire, Louis XIV’s Versailles, etc.), and despite strict control of symbolic urban development in many modern cities (Paris, Washington, Brasilia, etc.), the only similar example during the twentieth century, on a much smaller scale, could be Mussolini’s Rome. Gilbert Durand evokes the unbalanced diurnal and autistic imaginary of fascist Europe of the 1920s and 1930s (Durand 1995). From an anthropological point of view, it is quite interesting to find through this topo-mythanalysis of post-war Pyongyang, inscribed in concrete and marble, the same structure of the imaginary and a similar totalitarian desire to control together
images, ideology, and space.

Conclusion

Pyongyang's unique landscape can be read as a completely diurnal imaginary world that emphasizes the masculine imagery of heroic structures. Modern Pyongyang is not a feminoid city like Paris, which is associated with the nocturnal image of a “womb.” Instead of a labyrinth of dark alleys, the North Korean capital has opted for wide, bright avenues. While Pyongyang draws on its history (through the mythico-historic heritage of Moranbong and the positivist dream represented by Yangchon and the Mansudae area), it also attempts to deny part of it, by turning its back on the prestige of the colonial city (by relocating the center of power) and by transforming its former shanty-towns into model residential areas. The new city would seek during the period of the 1990s to reach out once again to the country's blazing past, from the regime's nationalistic perspective; but it would continue to ignore the colonial city as a sort of repressed memory, a blank area, magically erased by the bombings. The old development fronts around the periphery were no longer agricultural or industrial (these activities were pushed back to far-removed suburbs); they were transformed into places of recreation, education, and ideology. The entire city center—at least those parts that can be visited—was de-politicized and partially de-commercialized and de-industrialized.

The new post-war city is oriented around two key images: the arrow (south-west/north-east axis) and the sun (the “ideological polygon”). Both are strong schizomorphic images that evoke, in particular, the isomorphism, in the imaginary, of the eye and the sun (the rays of which are often in fact associated with arrows intended to punish the wicked—Apollo, for example). Pyongyang is entirely laid out around perspectives intended to stimulate the sense of vision. This is because the entire city is symbolically and politically under the symbolic Eye of the Father, the Sun on Earth. Perhaps what is disturbing (and fascinating) about these great grandiloquent avenues is the excess of control and geometry, the “autistic” rigidity that characterizes such exclusively diurnal imaginary worlds. But this is just the kind of imaginary world that we would expect from a regime described as totalitarian. Pyongyang may have taken large Soviet and Chinese cities as models, or perhaps even bore a resemblance to other totalitarian cities like Hitler's Berlin, but in turn it became the model of the propaganda city for others (Romania in particular). The city made strides to move away from a too-literal Soviet-style architecture and to “nationalize” its basic components; the grammar nevertheless remained the same. What was new however was the radicalization of the urbanistic/ideological discourse which was pushed to the extreme with the complete transcription of the dynastic mythology into the urban landscape. As Andrei Lankov (1995) writes, we have here a (monumental) “exercise in monumental propaganda.”
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