

# Art and Religious Authority in Modern North Korea

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**Abstract:** North Korean society is changing. It still stays at an Ethiopian level of poverty, but people are experimenting with various new forms of economic activity, which are separate, or only partially coexist within the traditional socialist command economy controlled by the state. Simultaneously their possibilities of access to the outside world are widening because of increasing movement of people over both sides of the Chinese border, with accompanying flows of information, including South Korean and Chinese cultural items, such as TV dramas and music. This means that governing this society has become more complicated.

Since the sudden death of Kim Jong-il (김정일, 金正日) in 17 December 2011 there has also been important changes in the governing system, which appears to be in a flux. There are persistent doubts about the secular position of his successor Kim Jong-un (김정은, 金正恩), even though his religious position as the third physical incarnation of the reigning Kimist dynasty is promoted ceaselessly. Popular art, nowadays especially music, is an essential tool here, the most important innovation being the rise of the Moranbong Band (모란봉악단, 牡丹峰音楽団, モランボン楽団).

Another change is greatly increased North Korean international visibility via internet fora such as Youtube, Google+ and Facebook. Popular music is used here as a way of creating sympathy in the outside world. Use of the internet in this way began already during the Kim Jong-il era, roughly in 2010, but in a rather amateurish fashion. During the Kim Jong-un era this has become more professional, and again the Moranbong Band is on the vanguard of this change, already with a fair number of international fans.

What happens when this situation is analyzed with the help of Platon's and Jacques Rancière's theories of art, and Maruyama Masao's (丸山眞男) theory of the Japanese emperor system, will be heard during the lecture.

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