

Chapter 4

Fishing in North Korea, A History and A Geography



Abstract Having considered deeply the theoretical framing of vibrant or lively matters in the previous pages, chapter four focuses directly on a territory widely considered to have a material and political relationship which is the opposite of vibrant, North Korea. With the political theorisation surrounding the politics and ideology of Pyongyang outlined in the introduction in mind, the chapter explores the intersections between fish and fishing and the developmental agendas of Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Il and now Kim Jong Un. Tracing the focus on fishing and fishing resource and the connections and enmeshing with the different periods of North Korean political and industrial development, the chapter explores this periodisation and impacts on the lively matters of North Korean fish and fishing. This history and geography reaches back to the pre-history of North Korea, examining the transformation of fishing and fishing infrastructures during the period of Korea's opening up and the colonial period under Japanese occupation. Unlike Japanese fishing practices, traditional Korean fishing was focused on the shore and the near sea, Koreans did not historically venture out into the deep sea or the wider oceans. While Japanese colonialism developed Korean fishing practices in a more extensive and technological manner, North Korean fishing following the Liberation in 1945 was still technologically and infrastructurally challenged. This became worse following the Korean War of 1950–1953, and North Korea's fishing practices and rights have since then been challenged by the post-War status quo of maritime demarcation, in particular the Northern Limit Line and more contemporary practices of sanctioning and restriction which are also produced by geo-politics. Pyongyang has therefore continually fought to extend its fishing reach, with seemingly little success, but fish and maritime resources have become much more important to North Korea following the crisis period of the early 1990s. Fish in recent North Korean history have become vital to the provision of food given the collapse in soil health and agricultural capacity and also once an important element of economic exchange given their non-sanctioned status until 2017. Following UNSC resolution 2371 in August of 2017 of course fish and maritime products have now been problematized as other North Korean matters and materials and this will also be considered by the chapter. In a later chapter a specific location and community of fish and fisherpeople will be encountered, but this chapter more

generally explores the geographies of North Korean fishing, especially those geographies which have been constructed or co-produced by the efforts, or otherwise of the state.

Keywords North Korea · North Korean fishing histories · Japanese colonialism · Environmental challenges · United Nations sanctions

So far in this book, the author has opened a wide theoretical and historical frame and comprehensive contextual setup for readers to encounter North Korea, its neighbours and their fishing and watery lives and stories. The reader will have journeyed from the first interactions with fish in the hunting practices of early humans, through subsistence fishing, the development of fishing technologies and communities, the rise of mercantilism, first wave globalisation, colonialism and the era of modernist forcing open in Asia and the Pacific. This was followed by real concrete colonisation on the Korean peninsula, then a series of painful and destructive conflagrations, followed in the 1950s and 1960s by the second wave of maritime globalisation. This second wave generated what has been referred to as an 'empire of fishing'. For Korea this was, in fact, the second empire of fishing, the first, being the Japanese Imperial efforts across the Pacific and Southwest Pacific following the assumption of the previous German territories there. This second imperial enterprise while less deliberately colonising on the surface has been much more impactful on the fish and other lively matters under the waves of the Pacific. Those vibrant watery matters around which communities and developmental practices grew along and beyond the shoreline were themselves dominated and degraded by new energetic materials and technologies derived by human hands and by the various powers and logics of capitalism.

These energies produced the post-1945 status quo, and on the Korea Peninsula the post-1953 status quo, which although fractured and challenged at times exists to the present day. These energies produced much of the military-security processes, which drove the imperial Japanese project and which drive the post-1945 imperial project of the United States. It is easy to characterise these products as being entirely focused around military capability and capacity, around security networks and the practical domination of vassal states and satellite societies, however, this was only part of the project. The most public and perhaps obvious element was to drive free-market capitalism, consumerism, commodification and liberal (and later neoliberal) logics across the globe, creating a new form of imperial subjectivity, an internalised commodified subject which would limit choice and co-opt social organisation in a new American century. However, readers will also have encountered a further element, one which utilised the preexisting focus on developing science and technological knowledge. Of course, given this book's focus, the previous chapter has considered developments in fishing science and technology. This element is itself a lively and energetic material in global processes of extraction and interaction between human and fish. However rather than focusing on material and tangible lives and things, the previous chapter has considered rather

more immaterial and intangible elements. Since 1945, statistical methodologies and practices became vital weapons in the United States efforts to dominate global fisheries.¹ Previous long-standing efforts to make the amount, behaviour and journeys of fish more knowable from both European and American scholars, which intriguingly had gained great analytic value from the two world wars, simply by dint of the fact that pressure on fish populations came to a brief halt amidst the human conflict allowing them to recover and for human impact to become obvious once fishing resumed, were displaced by new scientific practices and ambitions.²

In the lee of 1945, it was no longer important to know the details of the life of fish, of their young offspring, of their weight and travels as they grew older. It was no longer important to know their habits or their interactions, instead they became an abstracted product, a commodity of a developing global capitalist superstructure. Statistical methodologies which had sought to present a way in which the number of fish in the sea could be known, were co-opted to produce what is known as the Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY), a figure which reduced fish populations to simply non-surplus and surplus.³ MSY was then deployed across the world's oceans to serve a developing fishing industry predicated on total access, the military and diplomatic power of dominant states and powerful new technologies which would strip the world's oceans of a great percentage of its vibrant and energetic aquatic life in but a few decades.⁴ Ultimately, the dominating power of this statistical methodology was so great that it forced the destruction of the era of United States and other nations domination of all waters, and nations were required to extend their territorial waters out to 200 nautical miles, a great enclosure of the near seas.⁵ While the statistics and science which generated this situation and their extractive and accumulative energies have been mitigated by the growing horror of global populations at what was happening to the creatures of the sea, they have not gone away. Many of the presumptions of fish and other watery matters as existing only for the purposes of extraction by humans, only justified by the utility and usefulness, still exist and in fact underlay a lot of what popular culture thinks about fish, seeing them akin to a crop, to be harvested, cut down with the scythe.⁶

However, this does not sound like North Korea's story as the nation's politics and national mythology is rooted in a predication that it is different, it is something other than the conventional sovereign space. Like a mirror image of American exceptionalism, North Korea has long seen itself as a radically different state, a lodestar of revolution as Kim Il Sung once asserted.⁷ Freed from the structures of American imperialism and global capitalism by the ingenious idea of its Great

¹Finley (2011).

²Smith (1994).

³Finley (2011).

⁴Frank et al. (2005).

⁵Finley (2011, p. 100).

⁶Ibid, p. 94.

⁷Winstanley-Chesters (2014, p. 4).

Leader, Juche, North Korea is supposed to serve as an example to other developing nations of what can be achieved if one only does not kowtow to the Yankee. Its developmental myths and narrative hold to much of this as well. North Korea sees its development as a product of its own politics, its own ideology and own ideas, from local ingenuity and experiment.⁸ From mining to agriculture to architecture and urban planning, the developmental imperatives and logics which have underpinned progress north of the 38th parallel are regarded as something unique across the globe, unique enough for other nations to follow.⁹ In this, North Korea has sought to spread its agricultural methodologies globally through DPRK-Friendship Farms (which can still be found with some frequency in African countries), architectural schools and other institutions of intellectual and urban planning.¹⁰ Of course, only a little of this is true. It would take another book, or series of books to tell the history of just how integrated North Korean development and its developmental histories are with wider global narratives. While North Korea may see its approach as separate and distinct from those of capitalism and imperialism, along with the Soviet Union and other states inspired at least initially by Marxist theory, while it attempts to dispense with class systems and class dynamics, the accumulative and extractive logics at the heart of what is called State capitalism remain. In this regard, North Korea is as Capitalist as any other state.¹¹

North Korea's developmental logics, therefore, are not based on some unique, obscure and distinct web of science, but on many of the same scientific themes and presumptions as elsewhere. This is, of course, as true in the sea as it is on the land. North Korean fishing policy and practice today is predicated on many of the same extractive presumptions as those followed by other nations. Fish and aquatic creatures are simply a resource, a commodity, like grain or rice to be harvested and accumulated. Conservation of fish and of habitats in the sea is not done or conceived of simply for the sake of those lively matters and ecosystems, but to conserve a useful and functional amount of commodity to be harvested or extracted in the future. While the debates within North Korean academia are not in a conventional sense available or obvious, the policies which are driven by both national politics from Pyongyang and academic and research development hint at their content. This chapter, therefore, focuses as much on the hidden presumptions beyond those debates and intellectual directions, and their potential sources outside North Korea in the wider intellectual milieu of the era of Maximum Sustainable Yield and surplus populations, as it does on the history of North Korean fishing.

Unlike the approach of historical polities on the Korean peninsula, which it seems were either disinterested in fishing and maritime resources, incapable of developing capabilities in the field, or unwilling due to the complications of regional geopolitics, North Korea as it now exists is extremely concerned to

⁸Krishnan (1981).

⁹Kim (2013).

¹⁰Kirkwood (2013).

¹¹Lee (2016).

demonstrate a capacity for fishing in both the deep seas and around its coast.¹² This is also the case with South Korea, its estranged sibling after 1948. In a story untold by this book, though hinted at in previous chapters however, South Korea would go on after the 1960s to be one of the globally important fishing nations.¹³ Boats under the control of South Korean businesses and government would be key players in the era of Maximum Sustainable Yield, found everywhere across the planet, with the latest and most powerful technologies capable of extracting the maximum possible resources from the water.¹⁴ As the reader will suspect, this is not the case when it comes to North Korean boats.

Readers will remember the complete reconfiguration of Korean fishing infrastructures and practice during the Japanese colonial period, through both institutions on the Japanese mainland and those of the Chosen Government General. A once peripheral developmental interest, excluded and stigmatised by cultural and spiritual traditions was in this period modernised and reorganised to suit the new priorities of imperialism and capitalist commodification. At the end of this period, fishing interests and fishing capacity collapsed on the Korean peninsula as Japanese interests extracted their personnel and technology (and boats), from the peninsula and both sides of the Korean nation lapsed into a complicated and long struggle for sovereignty under occupation and geopolitical pressure, and then the disastrous violence of the Korean War. In 1953, much that had been left behind by the colonial authorities had been destroyed and Korean boats, such as there were had not been able to set to sea for some time. Both Koreas would have to completely rebuild much of their developmental infrastructure and this included that which was focused on the sea. This chapter will recount the fact that for North Korea, following 1953, fishing and maritime capacity has always been deeply important, and this importance has never diminished over the decades.

Territory both on land and at sea has been vital to North Korea's national sense of itself, especially since it was forced to define which territory it held at its inception in 1948 and then defend it against enormous odds between 1950 and 1953. The end of the Korean War was not favourable to North Korea when it came to the maritime territory. During the war, United States Naval command and dominance of the sea surrounding the peninsula was crystallised at the Korean War's armistice into the Northern Limit Line (북방한계선).¹⁵ Such an unfavourable historical gift has induced painful issues for North Korea on its western maritime boundary many times in the past. It has hugely complicated North Korea's access to deep waters and restricted its access to a very rich area of coastal waters. Recent altercations between North and South Korea, particularly Yeonpyeong/Yŏnp'yŏng Island (연평도) in 2010 and the extensive framework of United Nations Security Council sanctions in recent years have further impacted on North

¹²Sinmun (2015a).

¹³Sala et al. (2018).

¹⁴Block et al. (1998).

¹⁵Ford (2012).

Korean fishing capability.¹⁶ At the moment of writing this chapter in 2018, it is in fact according to UNSC2397 illegal for any foreign entity to purchase or trade-in any maritime or sea product from North Korea whatsoever.¹⁷ UNSC2371 even mentions specific classes of sea creature, and is surely the first instance in which aquatic invertebrates have become a sanctioned item in world politics and trade.¹⁸

It would not be surprising, if prior to the recent semi-rapprochement between the two Koreas (in 2018/2019), North Korea's fishing and maritime capabilities, capacities and rights would become a hot issue for Pyongyang and feature heavily in its media and political narratives. North Korean government and media publications, for instance, throughout the middle of the second decade of the twenty-first century produced a seemingly continuous stream of reports of Leader Kim Jong Un's interest in fishing and maritime developments. 2015's New Year Address demanded that North Korea's developmental institutions generate 'mountains and seas of gold' as part of the yearly commemoration of both the 70th anniversary of Korean Liberation and the 70th anniversary of the foundation of the Korean Workers Party.¹⁹ While it was the mountains and their forests that seemed to dominate Pyongyang's interest in the first half of the year, the second found North Korea's media outlets committing a huge variety of images of Kim Jong Un in the company of fishermen, their institutional or political leaders and sundry and varied fish species to print.²⁰

Fish were not simply of interest to Kim Jong Un and the Korean Workers Party in 2015, but appear to have been building in importance for some years previously. Fishing and fishery matters, for example, moved several notches up Pyongyang's list of priorities in 2014. *Rodong Sinmun's* announcement, 'The Party Requested, They Did It!'²¹ just before Christmas 2013, elicited a burst of piscine reportage. It has been speculated that fishing resources and the logistics of their transport to foreign markets could have been one of the reasons for the execution of Kim Jong Un's uncle, Jang Sung Taek in that year. Jang Sung Taek it is suggested, had gained some sort of control over fishery rights and resources in the West Sea or their trans-shipment across the border to Chinese interests and institutions, control that had previously been within the remit of the Korean People's Army (KPA).²² His death in this narrative represents the interests of the KPA simply re-established control over these rights. A less dramatic and blood-soaked analysis is that this emphasis on fishing might have been expected, as it had been featured as a key

¹⁶Haggard (2017).

¹⁷United Nations (2017a).

¹⁸United Nations (2017b).

¹⁹Rodong Sinmun (2015b).

²⁰Rodong Sinmun (2015c).

²¹Rodong Sinumn (2013).

²²Sang-Hun and Sanger (2013).

element of 2014's New Year Address,²³ and was deeply connected to the memorial processes revolving around the 50th anniversary of the publication of a text key to North Korean developmental history, the "*Rural Theses for the Solution of the Socialist Rural Question*".²⁴

Fish and fishing, therefore, are currently lively and active matters in the North Korean institutional mind. In this they are similar to other resources, materials and matters found in 1964's *Rural Theses*. While that important text focused mainly on developmental sectors of the economy on the land, the inclination within it to focus on a reconfiguration and reorganisation of materials and landscapes to better serve a utopian political project appears shared with contemporary North Korean fishing narratives. Moving backwards through time, this chapter is concerned with whether that has been the case throughout North Korea's fishing history, and whether given the issues with unpicking the political narratives of this nation, it is possible to discern such a history and any vibrant matters within it.

This chapter is focused on an attempt at historicising North Korean fishing endeavour. An attempt to extract North Korean conceptions not only of the importance of fishing within its national and political project, but also to consider the ideas held by Pyongyang and its institutions about the materials and matters involved in that project. In a nation where the most vibrant matters of all are the words and ideas of its leaders, is it possible to discern a concern or interest or even an acknowledgement of other energetic materials, that might even stand apart from such politics? Is it possible to discern ideas and research practices derived from elsewhere such as Maximum Sustainable Yield that would ultimately be deployed on any such acknowledged lively matter?

To construct or extract such a historicisation, the chapter will consider the narrative roots to North Korea's fishing strategy, examining the key texts and documents accredited to Kim Il Sung and their connections to the wider political structures and conceptions of Pyongyang's institutional mind. It will seek to trace along with that historical narrative inheritance the passage of those conceptions and ideas into practical policy and physical manifestations in the guise of particular sites and communities of fisherpeople. To do so, it will touch briefly on North Korean notions of central planning and economic theory and how these theories translated or otherwise into the wider frameworks of policy during the 1970s and 1980s. The chapter will consider the connections between the charismatic authority of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il and the topographies of development, both generally and more specifically in the case of fishing and maritime development. It will compare and contrast North Korean ideas and concepts related to fishing with developments from research communities the book has explored elsewhere, tracing perhaps any journeys made by important research ideas and statistical sensibilities in North

²³"New Years Address", *Rodong Sinmun*, 1st January, 2013, http://www.rodong.rep.kp/en/index.php?strPageID=SF01_02_01&newsID=2014-01-01-0001&chAction=S.

²⁴Kim Il Sung (1964). "Theses on the Socialist Rural Question in Our County," Works vol 18. Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House.

Korean fishing practice. In particular, it will attempt to discern the influence of statistical concepts related to fishing such as MSY and surplus population, from the wider world on that practice. Finally, the chapter will bring the reader up to the present, considering the outworking and impact of North Korea's maritime past in what we might term its piscicultural present through a deeper consideration of its contemporary fishing and maritime goals. In the following and penultimate chapter, the book will utilise this knowledge of North Korea's fishing history and those political narratives which address it, as well as any sense gained of North Korea's usage of foreign or global statistical or developmental theories. This will allow a much more nuanced and considered understanding of the place of particular fishing places and communities and their interactions with watery lively matters of all kinds.

4.1 A New Basis for Fishing

From the earliest years of Pyongyang's institutional and infrastructural development following the end of the Japanese colonial period, fishing, maritime development and access to the sea have been a key thematic element of that development. Just as in other sectors, this development can be periodized to form a more coherent historiography. Readers might suggest that in part this is not related to North Korea's revolutionary political ideology or sense of itself as a beacon for other politically unconventional states, but something far more conventional. The Japanese Empire, United States, the United Kingdom and other completely unrevolutionary polities, in North Korea's opinion, had simply by 1948 established some of the prerequisites for functional governmentality in modernity. One element of this was to have the capability to take to the deep seas and to become a global fishing nation. North Korea's ideological and national nemesis, Imperial Japan, had even between 1910 and 1945 done this across the Pacific and from the shores of the Korean Peninsula. If North Korea, therefore, was to ever assert a claim to political authority and legitimacy from the northern half of the Korean Peninsula, to one of the things it would have to be capable of as a nation was fishing and fishing not just around the coasts, but in the deeper waters of global oceans. As readers will have gathered, this was made all the more difficult by the removal of much of the fishing fleet by retreating Japanese institutions in 1945 and by the degradation of whatever was left between 1950 and 1953.²⁵ However, just because recent history and circumstance put Pyongyang at a disadvantage in this field of development, did not mean that North Korea wasn't determined to aim to secure its place as a global fishing powerhouse.

A peculiarity, familiar to those who watch, study and analyse North Korean matters, of North Korean historical narrative on developmental matters is for

²⁵United States Army Forces Pacific (1946, p. 30).

contemporary interests and focus on a particular theme or issue to be read or rewritten back into historical narratives from much earlier temporal frames.²⁶ Thus, the very first text which addresses the interest of political leaders of North Korea in fishing and maritime matters, actually references projects, intention and desire from long before the moment it was written.

Kim Il Sung apparently authored '*On Developing the Fishing Industry on a New Basis*' and presented it to the Central Committee of the Korean Workers Party on 8 July 1948. Some 3 years from Liberation and the formative process for the nation, in the text the reader can still discern the tensions of postcolonial issues during North Korea's early years.

'Seabound on three sides, our country is very rich in marine resources. The fishing industry is a major component of our national economy and plays an important role in improving the people's living standards.'²⁷

While Kim Il Sung's assertions of fishing's importance to national development, will become familiar to the reader, the texts' distinct temporal context is clear. One of Kim Il Sung's key desires within it is to reiterate success in those tasks undertaken because of the necessity of a post-Liberation de-Japanising of the nations' economy and developmental institutions: '[W]e set up a new fishing system by reorganizing the fishing associations formed in the years of Japanese imperialism... through nationalization of fishing grounds, fishing boats, processing factories, netting plants and other fishing equipment and facilities formerly owned by Japanese imperialists, their collaborators and traitors to the nation.'²⁸

Kim Il Sung does not mention the removal of much of Korea's fishing infrastructure by retreating Japanese interests in 1945 and the complications of getting that infrastructure and capabilities back. In spite of the overtly nationalist strategy embedded in the text, it is possible to catch a brief glimpse of North Korea's post-Liberation mixed economic strategy. This developmental strategy was most overtly evident in the case of land reforms. Just as was the case in agricultural production, Pyongyang in its denuded and difficult post-Liberation state could not rely on any infrastructure or bureaucracy left behind from Chosen. Instead, and against ideological inclinations and revolutionary imperatives, North Korea was forced to utilise whatever private enterprise was left behind or had been in Korean hands at the moment of Liberation. As the reader might imagine, for Kim Il Sung and other comrades and revolutionaries, it was not the easiest and comfortable of relationships: 'Of course, we have encouraged private fishing and will do so in the future, too. But, if we rely on private fisheries alone, we shall not be able to shake off the backwardness in our fishing industry and satisfy the people's demands for marine products.'²⁹

²⁶Petrov (2004).

²⁷Kim Il Sung (1948, p. 304).

²⁸Ibid, p. 304.

²⁹Ibid, p. 306.

Whatever the discomfort involved in maintaining this relationship, it was vital for the young North Korea, in spite of whatever ideological issues it would generate. Kim Il Sung found the time to articulate some institutional themes very familiar in national narratives, such as a focus on planning from what we might consider to be more conventional North Korean development strategies: ‘a plan must always be concrete, scientific and dynamic...’;³⁰ institutional structure and connection: ‘each bureau of the People’s Committee of North Korea related to the fishing industry must shake off the tendency to narrow departmentalism...’;³¹ and the place of politics and the Korean Worker’s Party within any developmental framework: ‘the party organizations in this field must radically improve their functions...’.³²

However important, institutionally embedded or politically structured the fishing industry and its productive capacity had become to North Korea’s development, it was decimated by the destructive Korean War. It would be some years until fishing could again be the direct focus of Kim Il Sung. However, these tumultuous war years resolved through the death of some of interested parties and the further degradation of the landlord class, some of the post-Liberation and postcolonial issues mentioned by Kim in 1948. 1957’s ‘*On the Development of the Fishing Industry*’, the next key articulation of the importance of fishing to North Korean politics is remarkably different from the early statements from 1948. It is steeped in assertions of Pyongyang’s intentions such as productivity and technological development are concerned during North Korea’s post-war period of rehabilitation. This is a period, before Stalin’s death when Moscow and the Soviet Union’s technical support was most vital to North Korean policy and politics, a point of necessity and fact confirmed by the text: ‘we invited Soviet scientists who were engaged on maritime research in the Far East. They came to our country under an agreement reached when our Government delegation visited Moscow last year’. According to Kim Il Sung, these Soviet technicians and experts supported the first goal-setting focused approach from Pyongyang in the fishing sector as ‘they drew a conclusion... that we have enough fish resources to land some 500,000–600,000 tons a year in the next five years.’³³

A production goal for the extraction of some 600,000 tons of fish annually was instantly adopted by Kim and itself embedded a number of other developmental elements within the sector; from a focus on nutrition: ‘If we land 600,000 tons of fish, it will mean an average of 60 kilograms per person per year... [and] the people’s living standard will be improved considerably’³⁴; to practical strategies and methods of fishing and extensions of technical capacity: ‘[A]ll possible fishing methods including medium and small-scale, seasonal and deep sea fishing should

³⁰Ibid, p. 307.

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid, p. 308.

³³Kim Il Sung (1957, p. 96).

³⁴Ibid, p. 97.

be readily applied both in the East and the West Sea.³⁵ It is worth considering whether the equation between tonnage landed and nutritional value and this new statistical focus on special goal targets was garnered from the knowledge of those experts from the Soviet Union. It would not be many years until the infamous Rome conference in 1960. At the conference in which the United States had expected difficulty and obstruction from Moscow, much to Washington DC's surprise the Soviet Union emerged as an enthusiastic supporter of this new global fishing status quo and a useful ally in the era of MSY.³⁶ Soviet scientists were much in thrall to the developments in fishing statistical method, St. Petersburg's Fisheries Research Station having been one of the earliest places of modern maritime science.³⁷ Imperial Russia itself had been one of the primary global powerhouses of early extraction, of course, decimating the populations of Stellers' Sea Cow, Seals and Whales around Kamchatka, the Commander Islands and the Bering Strait.³⁸ It would not be surprising if some of that extractive, modernist imperative had not transferred to the ambitions of the Soviet Union.

While North Korea's developmental strategy at this moment itself seems inclusive, structured and potentially functional within a reasonable timeframe, just as its agricultural twin focused on grain production, it was not to be long lived. Stalin's death in 1956, Khrushchev's policy of De-Stalinsation and its implications for North Korea's politics and position had already laid the ground work for its abandonment.

North Korea's geopolitical triangulation towards the more ideologically favourable winds of Maoism and the People's Republic of China following Stalin's death has been well documented by a number of commentators.³⁹ The implications of this for North Korea's development have been also noted by analysts from the period.⁴⁰ However, the internal connections within the sector between developing Maoist principles and the rise and articulation of North Korea's new ideologically sound Chollima (천리마, the name literally 'thousand li horse' refers to a legendary flying horse from Chinese mythology that could fly one thousand 'li' or four thousand kilometres in a day), development concept, for example, and fishing and fisheries policy have not been subject to extensive focus.

Perhaps North Korea's commitment to the tropes and strategies of Maoist revolutionary urgency and ideological influence can be best seen, so far as fishing is concerned in the abrupt change of focus when it comes to research and technical development. North Korean commentators and readers of this chapter, even those not strongly concerned with developmental matters, will surely be aware of the acute importance to North Korea of doing things and achieving goals in a technical

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Finley (2011, p. 147).

³⁷Smith (1994, p. 39).

³⁸Tucker Jones (2014).

³⁹Prybyla (1964).

⁴⁰Kuark (1963).

or scientific manner. In the twenty-first images of scientists undertaking important work are a highly frequent trope of North Korean government imagery and narrative production.⁴¹ This has already been echoed by Pyongyang's early adaptation of fisheries science and statistics. In the blast of ideological change brought on following Mao's Great Leap Forward, Pyongyang's articulation of Chollima and its urgent harnessing of the power of mass movements and mass population, developmental texts echo this focus on the popular and the urgent rather than the organised or the scientific.

4.2 Fish Culture in North Korea

“On the Tasks of the Party Organizations in South Pyongan Province,” delivered to the Provincial Party Committee of that Province on January 7, 1960, includes the typical for the period, if extraordinary statement that: ‘We must intensify ideological education among the fishery officials and eradicate mysticism, empiricism and all other outdated ideas so that they will improve the fishing method zealously with the attitude of masters....’⁴² When reading this for the first time, the author wondered whether this really did constitute a repudiation of the high position of science, statistics and academic work related to fishing, but assertions that ‘Fish culture is a not a difficult job. A little effort and everyone will be able to...’ suggest it was so in these acute, urgent times.⁴³

As with many of the developmental strategies however, there is a sense of ‘popular schizophrenia’ about them. In an effort, again familiar to North Korean analysts everywhere from most of its historical periods, Pyongyang aimed its developmental focus so that it could be applied universally, and that a sense of urgency could be applied in all cases, all of the time. Thus, while it is clear that some element of empiricism is rejected during this period, it is not clear how categoric this rejection is, as reference is made to learning from scientists, although this learning itself is framed within a project to embed their knowledge and research within an institutional framework tasked with harnessing the energy and commitment of the masses. ‘[C]hairmen of agricultural management boards and Party committees should read a lot and learn... [about] the know-how of fish breeding and sea culture.’⁴⁴

As the impending collapse of the Great Leap Forward became clear to Pyongyang, North Korea's geopolitical adherence again shifted, and the dramatic, insistent and urgent elements within developmental praxis began to wane. Although the mid-1960s again saw fishing goals reimagined upwards along with the rest of

⁴¹Rodong Sinmun (2018).

⁴²Il Sung (1960, p. 38).

⁴³Ibid, p. 39.

⁴⁴Ibid, p. 40.

the ‘Six Goals’ (‘we should raise the production of seafood to 800,000 tons...’⁴⁵ the sector would be quickly connected to what might be termed a more ‘rational’, ‘functional’ set of developmental strategies.

Similar to undertakings in the other developmental fields such as grain production, forestry and many others, fishing and fisheries policy would be reconfigured and embedded in the late 1960s and 1970s in a thick set of connecting institutional repertoires of practice. Developmental projects and strategies would have to connect with bureaucratic and institutional structures (at all levels of governance) and ideological and theoretical progress as well as paying homage to both the Korean Workers Party and the Korean People’s Army. ‘*For Bringing About Rapid Progress in the Fishing Industry*’, apparently articulated by Kim Il Sung in early June 1968, is certainly a useful example: ‘Developing the fishing industry is of great importance in improving the diet of the working people, particularly in providing them with protein...’⁴⁶ The text also reiterated progress made and the application of institutional focus using a historical frame: ‘Our party has been paying close attention to the development of the fishing industry since immediately after liberation... within a few years after liberation the material and technical foundations of the fishing industry were laid.’⁴⁷

But ‘*For Bringing About Rapid Progress in the Fishing Industry*’ and its articulation of developmental aspiration in the age of the Six Goals appears mere subtext when compared to the far more expansive and detailed ‘*On Taking Good Care of State Property and Using It Sparingly*’, a text more concerned with rigorously critiquing past progress and outlining future infrastructure and practice rather than an expression of aspiration. As Kim Il Sung noted in the text: ‘[W]e cannot rest content with this. So far we have laid only the basic foundations of the fishing industry.’⁴⁸

Kim Il Sung’s critique and commentary surrounding institutional development in the fishing and fish-processing sector intriguingly addresses environmental issues and developments that appear to echo later ecological concerns of North Korea’s contemporary government.⁴⁹ These concerns in the developmental present surround land-based ecologies, but Kim Il Sung here focuses on the maritime environment ‘because of change in the current’ which had resulted in ‘only small numbers of Mackerel and Yellow Corbina in these waters.’⁵⁰ The text also decries the ‘frequent floods’ which fishery workers had told him they had to contend with.⁵¹

This text suggests, of course, some institutional knowledge of the connectivities between fish and animals of the sea and other vibrant matters in their ecosystem,

⁴⁵Il Sung (1961, p. 332).

⁴⁶Il Sung (1967, p. 261).

⁴⁷Il Sung (1969, p. 52).

⁴⁸Ibid, p. 53.

⁴⁹UNFCCC (2016).

⁵⁰Il Sung (1969, p. 53).

⁵¹Ibid, p. 60.

namely deep ocean and coastal currents. Harking back to research we have examined from the early twentieth century, this text also acknowledges that fish resources cannot simply be a static mass to be harvested, like rice in the field, but fluctuate and change due to forces greater than the power of the nation state. Primarily, however, Kim Il Sung's principle initial concern in the text is to critique institutional structures and participants in them, even in their responses and solutions to these environmental changes. Kim states: '[B]ecause we are inexperienced we have only prepared many nets needed for catching mackerel... since we had expected big shoals of this fish to come... we could not catch them because they did not come.... After that fishery workers are discouraged and at a loss for what to do'.⁵²

The text also critiques the sector and wider technical and strategic development in the fishing and fish processing sector. Even the fleet material sourced from foreign supporters, lauded in previous documents, is now seemingly regarded as problematic: 'The 450-ton trawler we are now producing has many shortcomings. [For example,] it can be used for fishing only in the Black Sea or the Baltic Sea... [and] it cannot be used in the Pacific Ocean where the waves are moderate'.⁵³

Kim Il Sung's plan for the sector and its infrastructure within this text, like its counterparts focused on land-based developmental repertoires, demanded a large expansion in the sector's capacity, replacing these smaller, seemingly unsatisfactory boats. But while it was an urgent matter in temporal and commitment terms, this expansion was to be carefully managed and located in a few centers of industrial excellence—for example, the Ryukdae Shipyard in the Komdok Island area. This shipyard was to serve as such a centre for the industry in the West Sea.⁵⁴

The primary geographic site for this renewal of North Korea's fishing fleet and accompanying infrastructure was located at Chongjin's historically important port, where apart from Ryukdae's efforts to build mid-range ships of some 600–1,000 tons, North Korea sought to construct much larger vessels of between 3,000 and 10,000 tons.⁵⁵ While this production was to be supported in institutional terms through the Ministry of Fisheries, the Ministry of Machine Industry Number 1, and Provincial Party Committees, other sub-sectorial elements close which Kim Il Sung was concerned with would need to involve themselves functionally in this developing. He writes: '[A]t the moment people at the ship repair yards busy themselves getting engines, spare parts and paint, only after the ships return from the deep seas. They say therefore that it takes a few months to repair a ship, and sometime it even requires 150 days. Consequently they miss the fishing season'.⁵⁶

The structural failure of supply and organisation outlined by Kim Il Sung here would, of course, not be welcome in the industrial sector of any nation for whom

⁵²Ibid, p. 54.

⁵³Ibid, p. 55.

⁵⁴Ibid, p. 57.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Ibid, p. 58.

development and progress was a concern, even less so in one for whom capacity and output is absolutely vital. Just as a reorganisation was pending and necessary within those institutions tasked with the reconstruction and reconfiguration of the fishing fleet and port and processing infrastructure, it was necessary for new bureaucratic connections and governance technologies to be made and developed at the institutional nexus between those departments and the practical projects responsible for that fleet's maintenance and support. As Kim Il Sung asserted: '[I]f we are to succeed in this work, we must have a large quantity of engines and other spare parts in stock... a ship spare parts factory should be built in Kimchaek City... then it will be easy to obtain supplies of steel from Songjin Steel Plant'.⁵⁷

This text reiterates a fact that the chapter will return to later, that for all its ambitions and planning, North Korea has to this point failed to join the technological race so far as ship size and capacity that would allow it join countries like Japan, the United States and by this point in time South Korea, in the race for MSY and the harvesting of the deep sea and the ocean floor. To this point, the largest boat it appears that North Korea has built is only some 450 tonnes and there has been no mention of the highly effective, if destructive mothership system utilised by the Soviet Union, Japan and the United States for some decades now. North Korea it seems at this point must return its catch to land for processing, rather than being processed at sea which would allow whatever fleet it had to sail further and fish for longer in international waters. At this stage, North Korea cannot have made much of an impact on the vibrant and lively matters beneath the waves as Kim Il Sung wished it to have.

Apart from these larger, national developmental scales of construction and infrastructure focused on the productivity of the deep sea and perhaps even the expanse of the Pacific Ocean, which North Korea has not yet really engaged with, '*On Developing the Fishing Industry Further*' and Kim Il Sung also perceives the possibility for connectivities and development on a smaller, more personal, local scale: 'At the moment there are many good comrades in big cities... who live on pensions because of illness... it will not be bad to engage them in fishing... they will be very pleased if they are told to catch fish with nets and rods in boats while they continue to receive the benefits from pensions'.⁵⁸ Here it seems that Kim Il Sung envisages the revival of a model of semi-informal fishing cooperatives using, marginalised, peripheral or underemployed workers. The word 'semi' is of course in this context something of an oxymoron as these workers are still conceived by the text and no doubt North Korea's bureaucracy, to be well integrated into institutional and political planning, as well as ideological expression and presentation, serving as much as part of the sectors future and interests as those facilities and sets of workers undertaking activity in the deep sea.

Beyond the developmental capacity and institutional structure of the fishing and fish-processing industries, the final key point of this text is another that would become

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Ibid, p. 61.

familiar to analysts of North Korea and scholars whose focus was agricultural development and capacity increase elsewhere in the Communist/Socialist world in the coming decade.⁵⁹ Pyongyang's developmental and infrastructural focus began to assert the categorical importance of scientific research and the place of the scientist within bureaucracies and institutional structures. On this matter, Kim Il Sung is no less assertive within '*On Developing the Fishing Industry Further*': 'It is not an exaggeration to say that the modern world is one of science and that science and technology decide everything'.⁶⁰ This scientific and empirical focus is important when it comes to the functional protection of fish stocks, the development of fishing areas and fish farm installations in freshwater environments. Science and attendant epistemic communities, it seems was to become vitally important in North Korea, not only in the fields of fishing and fisheries, but to its wider frameworks, processes and practices of politics and ideology. For example, one of Kim Il Sung's final concerns in the text is the embedding of commitment to science and scientific process within this political imperative: '[T]he fishery sector must carry out a forceful ideological struggle against the conservatives who are trying to check our advance and thus develop the science of fisheries as soon as possible....'⁶¹ Of course, the text and Kim Il Sung never fully articulate which scientific developments and concepts North Korea will be led by in the fisheries sector. It is clear that North Korea has absorbed notions of fish populations as capable of fluctuation and change due to natural conditions, but there is also a sense that the products of the sea are something of an unlimited harvest and easily translatable into less tangible nutritional values, as opposed to being living beings and communities. Even though North Korea appears interested at moments in conservation, it is quite possible the scientific imperatives behind this conservation are simply to conserve that which can be later extracted.

4.3 Blue Crabs, Gizzard Shad and Anchovy

Institutional framing of science within North Korea's focus on fishing and fisheries development becomes more politically acute as the 1970s continued, becoming located in the troublesome and contested West Sea area, still familiar to those interested in North Korea.⁶² Countering what is perceived as a world food crisis in 1977, Kim Il Sung writes: 'the world is currently experiencing an acute food shortage... according to information from abroad, as much as a quarter of the world's population is now suffering from malnutrition'.⁶³ In the text '*On the*

⁵⁹Wong, Lungfai. 1986. *Agricultural Productivity in the Socialist Countries*. Boulder, CO: Westview.

⁶⁰Il Sung (1969, p. 66).

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Kotch and Abbey (2003).

⁶³Il Sung (1977, p. 65).

Further Development of the Fishing Industry in the West Sea, from that year, Kim Il Sung sites much of future development within that most disputed of North Korea's maritime areas. However, Kim Il Sung also carries over much of the focus on small-scale fishing from earlier texts, creating a potentially enormously crowded and confusing in conceptual or functional terms, developmental space within an already complicated locale: '[I]t would be reasonable to establish fishing bases around Ongjin, Monggumpo, Sukchon and Mundok in South Pyongan and in Cholsan, Chongu, at the mouth of Chongchon River and on Sinmi Island in North Pyongan Province....'⁶⁴

While Kim Il Sung's concern to harvest the 'well known fish in this sea'⁶⁵ is clear and the focus on the West Sea areas developmental possibilities and capacity is acute, its generative capacity means that Pyongyang will see the expansive deeper spaces of the East Sea as perhaps a more long term and economically rich institutional priority. *'Let Us Develop the Fishing Industry and Increase the Catch'*, for example, draws out the importance of the East Sea as a zone of deeper pelagic exploitation as much as it reconfirms the themes of science, development, political connection and capacity increase which have marked the 1970s as a decade in policy terms, and occur in the smaller infrastructural development on the Peninsula's opposite coast: 'The fastest and most rational way of solving this problem is to catch large quantities of fish. Our country is bounded by the sea on three sides, so it is much faster and more economical to solve the protein problem by developing the fishing industry....'⁶⁶

While Kim Il Sung begins his analysis with an extremely positive note,⁶⁷ it is clear from even a brief reading of the larger body of the text that in spite of the importance of the East Sea fishery and the extent of North Korea's institutional agenda and concern shown to it, there are factors at play to thwart some of the scientific and developmental ambition, ambition which appears alas quite close to home in institutional terms. Some of the hesitancy and 'conservatism' Kim Il Sung and North Korean revolutionary politics wished to banish through the incorporation of scientific modernity and technical development appears still extant at the close of the decade: 'I have emphasised on more than one occasion that the officials in charge of fishing should study deep-sea fishing. But they have claimed there are no fish in the deep sea and have not looked into methods of detecting shoals and catching the fish. They even altered the contents of the textbooks to concur with their opinion'.⁶⁸

⁶⁴Ibid, p. 70.

⁶⁵These are listed as "planktonic shrimps, prawns, *Acetes chinensis*, Blue Crabs, Gizzard Shad, Yellow Corbina, *Setipinna gilberti*, Anchovy, Sand Ell and Grey Mullet." Ibid, p. 67.

⁶⁶Il Sung (1978, p. 86).

⁶⁷It reads: "A large amount of Pollack was caught by our fishermen last winter. The catch is large every year, but last winter was an all-time high...." Ibid.

⁶⁸Ibid, p. 88.

Despite some two decades of development, political impetus, and imperative it is in a sense a little astonishing that Kim Il Sung in 1978 could determine that ‘since summer fishing has never been organised on the East Sea, we have no clear idea of what kinds of fish are living in the East Sea and what kinds of migratory fish visit it’.⁶⁹ It appears that it is not only the research and knowledge basis that is weak, but even the developed infrastructure, and the institutional ambition behind it has been neglected, half-heartedly undertaken or confused by bureaucratic failures and disruptions. Far in fact from the early aspirations to the building of 10,000 tonne ships, Kim Il Sung almost balefully recalls that ‘some years ago a 1,000 ton fishing vessel was built, but some officials of the fishing industry said that it was unserviceable even before it was used’.⁷⁰

Ultimately, while political drive and ideological embedding and reconfiguration served to push along North Korea’s developmental narratives, within the fishing sector the 1970s, according even to Kim Il Sung’s own assertions, ended on a downbeat and disappointing tone. Whatever has happened and whatever was demanded in the previous decade, scientific development and research as envisaged had not occurred, institutional connections remained counterproductive and diffuse, and both capacity and actual productivity and catch appeared substantially disappointing. It is fairly extraordinary by this point that North Korea appeared to have no sense of what was present or not present in the East Sea (known to non-Koreans as the Sea of Japan). While by the 1970s, these waters would have been quite heavily exploited and denuded of fish given the power of the Japanese fishing effort, there was much publicly available data by this point in time.⁷¹ Japanese, American and Soviet fishing research through the North Pacific Anadromous Fisheries Commission had engaged in a systematic field analysis of stocks and fish migration in the Pacific, and Japan had included the waters of the East Sea (Sea of Japan) in that analysis.⁷² It seems unlikely that North Korean scientists, even simply through their connections with Soviet research institutions did not have access to this research. Perhaps they did not, though the next section of this chapter suggests that cannot have been possible, but for whatever reason, Kim Il Sung has opted not to mention this wider body of knowledge. This lack of knowledge or access to it or capability with it is reflective of many of the issues North Korean fisheries science and development faced at this point. It is apparent that many of the same drag factors, research and knowledge gaps and inefficiencies that beset the agricultural sector on land and crippled North Korea’s industrial and economic productivity had been present in the fishing sector as well.⁷³

‘Pollack is a very good fish. Because it contains less fat and more protein than other fish, it is not only palatable but also good for the health.... From olden times,

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Ibid, p. 93.

⁷¹International North Pacific Fisheries Commission (1971).

⁷²International North Pacific Fisheries Commission and Fisheries Agency of Japan (1955).

⁷³Rhee (1987).

therefore Koreans have offered it at the altar. It seems that our ancestors also like Pollack....⁷⁴ While Pollack may well have been Kim Il Sung's fish of choice and deep and frequent catches an aspiration of Pyongyang's fishing fleet in the 1970s, the era of the 'Six Goals' and 'Great Tasks' (though primarily on land), would soon fall given these diminishing and seemingly unrealizable tasks. The Party Congress of 1980 would abandon the comprehensive, dramatic wider strategies and goal setting for the next decade, determining that perhaps it was better to focus on simply achieving what was possible given the resources available, despite inefficiency and incapability. Maritime production and the fishery sector were as subject to this abandonment as were the national framework of forestry goals and tidal reclamation.

4.4 Politics and Pollack

Following the abandonment of most developmental goals in the 1980s and North Korea's period of stagnation and near collapse in the 1990s, there would be a time when policy directed at fisheries and maritime infrastructure would again in the post Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il eras connect with North Korea's institutional priorities and newly articulated developmental agenda. Fishing and extracting value from the sea has been brought back into focus during the era of Kim Jong Un. Particularly in 2014, these appeared to be because of revitalisation and reconnection of North Korea developmental policy with the agricultural narratives and political impetus generated by the Rural Theses and their 50th anniversary. The appearance of fishing in 2014's New Year Address, along with a call for both memorialization and actualization of the goals previously articulated in the Rural Theses, frames the development of the fisheries sector within the mould of contemporary North Korean politics. Kim Jong Un's words from the New Year Address, that the state 'should take measures to bolster up the fishing sector and that it should follow the example of those institutions within the Korean People's Army tasked with the exploitation of the sea and other maritime resources. The KPA's Fishery Stations has apparently had enormous success and landed a 'huge haul of fishes by carrying out the order of the Supreme Commander unto death'.⁷⁵ This had the effect, in common with many other elements of North Korean economics and development following the famine period, of asserting and demonstrating the important, functionality and relevance of military participation in the fishing industry, as well as their absolute commitment to carrying out the requirements of the 'Supreme Commander' and this maintaining a close connection to the Kim dynasty itself. Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il's conceptions of fishing issues were while they were alive, vital to its continued institutional importance, and their revolutionary charisma served to drive forward and further

⁷⁴Ibid, p. 98.

⁷⁵Rodong Sinmun (2014a).

increase the impetus for the development of the sector. 2014 and 2015 would certainly see that political charisma and its power within the developmental field and specifically the fisheries sector, being harnessed by Kim Jong Un in the present.

Kim Jong Un's order following the New Year Address in 2014 to modernise fishing vessels and infrastructure and to 'launch a dynamic fishing campaign by scientific methods...' while potentially capable of deriving from any era of North Korean development, places the sector firmly in a framework of technical and institutional approach that is intrinsically modern, and very much of the political moment in the North Korean sense. Similar strategies have been deployed in institutions responsible for fungal development, turf and grass production, and those tasked with weather forecasting and more long-range meteorology⁷⁶. While the fishing industry within this campaign was to have the KPA and its institutions with their 'unusual resolve and stubborn practice'⁷⁷ as a model, it seems more important to North Korean politics, its agenda and development for it not to fall into the traps of institutional stasis which Kim Il Sung critiqued in the 1960s.⁷⁸

4.5 2014: The January 8 Fisheries Station

Kim Jong Un's first official moment of 'on the spot guidance' in 2014 was focused on this paradigm of modernised, scientific approach to piscine resource management. However, Kim also sought to make connections and useful examples of previous development to the articulation of this new paradigm. These examples could then serve as historiographic vectors through which past authority and success in developmental terms could be deployed on the maritime projects of the present. *Rodong Sinmun* for instance recounted Kim Jong Un's visit to KPA Unit 534's 'Aquatic Products Refrigeration Facility' on 8 January⁷⁹. This visit served for North Korea's institutions and the writers of the report to underscore and reiterate the 'need to make the flames of the innovation drive in the fisheries field of the People's Army rage furiously in the fisheries across the country'. Perhaps in light of past notions of revolutionary urgency, which North Korea ultimately sought to avoid in the era of the Great Leap Forward, it is interesting to consider the level of functionality within the developmental project given that its projects must be undertaken in the midst of such a furious, urgent rage; 'Kim Jong Un demanded that the KPA unit undertake the building of a fishing port facility to supply the refrigeration facility, and ostensibly complete its construction 'before the Day of the Sun and start the fish supply from coming autumn'.⁸⁰

⁷⁶Rodong Sinmun (2014b).

⁷⁷Rodong Sinmun (2014c).

⁷⁸Il Sung (1964).

⁷⁹Rodong Sinmun (2014).

⁸⁰Ibid.

The ‘January 8 Fisheries Station’ and its workers are required to connect not only the charismatic threads of the Kim dynasty’s political authority, military urgency and technological development; it is also bound to absorb those elements of previous rhetoric derived from the Kim Jong Il’s intent to create a ‘strong and prosperous state’. *Rodong Sinmun*’s 30 January 2014 editorial⁸¹ reviewing those developments and progress linked to the project asserts, for example, ‘Fishery plays an important role in improving the standards of people’s living’, and, ‘To shore up the fishing industry is not simply an economic task, it is a political task to carry out the behests of the great generalissimos and our Party’s intention to make our people live better off’. Doing so at such a dramatic and urgent pace does not (in theory, at least) militate a reduction in technical or research focus; however, for a project built at a revolutionary pace must not neglect research or technical competence,⁸² since ‘Fishing operation today is in a certain sense a brain’s warfare and technical warfare. Therefore, it requires of us to keep the fishing industry scientifically and technically update’.

A little over a month later in 2014, Kim Jong Un was again present on the grounds of the ‘January 8 Fishing Station’, visiting on or around 24 February 2014.⁸³ This second visit both reiterated the urgency of the project and the importance of the Korean People’s Army as a trusted and privileged institution within the developmental remit; a point that it is interesting to note in light of previous speculation as to the place of developmental issues and their co-option by Jang Sung Taek and his supporters: ‘I thought of the service personnel of the KPA who had carried out any task assigned to them, when I was making up my mind to build a modern fishery station here, and so, I declared I would entrust to them the project to which the party attached importance...’⁸⁴

Kim Jong Un’s statement about the Korean People’s Army’s importance serves to reassert the structures of institutional hierarchy in North Korea’s developmental strategy. In this, the KPA serves as the key tool in the state’s bureaucracy to support the will and direction of the Korean Workers’ Party as it is applied within the remit of the nation’s wider institutional ecosystem. This was reinforced in the reporting of the event, by the presence of several important individuals from the KWP: one Central Committee department director and at least two vice-directors. *Rodong Sinmun*’s recounting of Kim Jong Un’s visit concludes with a reminder of both the specific urgency involved in the planning for the project and the future planning required for its successful utilisation. Only 2 months since Kim Jong Un first articulated and asserted the need for this particular project, Central Government and developmental institutions focused on the sea were looking towards the long term, officials being given instructions ‘to select captains and fishermen and prepare them

⁸¹Rodong Sinmun (2014).

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Rodong Sinmun (2014f).

⁸⁴Ibid.

as all-round fishermen in advance so that they may go out for a fishing operation right after the completion of the project'.⁸⁵

It would, in fact, be only 5 months between the narrative initiation and infrastructural completion of the January 8 Fisheries Station. The Station's construction and development was apparently successfully achieved on 30 April 2014.⁸⁶ As was the case throughout the period of its construction, multiple narrative and developmental streams converge upon the project, reinforcing and supporting each other, as is the case in many such projects in the fishing sector. Connecting the charismatic authority of Kim Jong Un, the political-ideological framework provided by Kimism and the Korean Workers' Party and the efficiency and brute strength of the Korean People's Army, it is apparent that the impetus for the project is conceptualised within a wider framework of revolutionary and narrative urgency. Such projects are thus undertaken beyond the bounds of normal/non-revolutionary time: 'This is another miracle and a model of creation of speed of Korea which can be created only by the Korean People's Army possessed of indomitable fighting spirit and heroic fighting traits'.⁸⁷ They operate in, as if it were possible, charismatic time. Yet in spite of their charismatic tone and content, they are also conceptualised within a more mundane, frame, one in which 'it is aimed to supply fishes to baby homes, orphanages, orphans' primary and secondary schools and old folks' homes across the country.'

North Korean maritime exploration and exploitation have even more recently continued to develop in both institutional and narrative importance. 2015's New Year Address⁸⁸ suggested that developmental sectors should create 'seas of gold' following the suggested institutional model of that year and Kim Jong Un's New Year Address for 2016 demanded that; 'fishing sectors ... should ramp up production as soon as possible and see to it that the fish farms ... built across the country pay off ...'.⁸⁹ Kim Jong Un, in fact, made a series of visits to fish-processing and equipment-production facilities in late 2015, just before the generation of new developmental themes for the next year.⁹⁰ Having done much of an aquacultural nature in a year that was both the 70th anniversary of Liberation from Japanese rule and the 70th anniversary of the foundation of the Korean Workers Party Kim's concern later in the year served to reiterate both the role of the Workers Party and the Korean Peoples' Army within the framework of North Korean bureaucracy.⁹¹ The KPA Fishery Station no. 15⁹² and August 25 Fishery Station.⁹³ were the sites of

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶Rodong Sinmun (2014g).

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸Rodong Sinmun (2015a).

⁸⁹Rodong Sinmun (2016)

⁹⁰Rodong Sinmun (2015d).

⁹¹Ibid.

⁹²Rodong Sinmun (2015).

⁹³Rodong Sinmun (2015).

Pyongyang's much-vaunted success in bringing home 'great fish hauls.' Kim Jong Un certainly made sure to mention fishing in the New Year Addresses of 2017, 2018 and most recently 2019 and these will be considered further in the concluding chapter of this book.

4.6 External Sources (Soviet and WCPFC)

Aside from the repeated failures and complications of development, when it comes these historical narratives of fishing from North Korea, another familiarity to those versed in North Korean developmental history will be its opacity. How can we as external readers and analysts possibly trust a North Korean historiography, when we know that such narratives are so often written, rewritten and written again.⁹⁴ Can we get any corroborating evidence or account of North Korea's fishing history from elsewhere or outside the nation itself?

The reality is that to this point it has been nigh on impossible to get a coherent sense of the reality of North Korea's fishing history from other sources. In nearly every other nation's case researchers would turn to the statistical yearbooks produced by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). It is worth remembering that FAO fisheries statistics are notoriously complicated and troublesome from this period, their methodologies being reconfigured every few years.⁹⁵ However, when it comes to North Korea, the FAO received one set of statistics in 1957 which were so outlandish and ridiculous that from that point til now the organisation simply estimates and extrapolates the nation's statistics based on the level of economic development of the country, its population and geographic position.⁹⁶ Looking elsewhere to the statistics of the various commissions which manage the pelagic and anadromous fishing stocks of the Pacific, such as the North Pacific Anadromous Fisheries Commission (NPF), North Korean boats make no appearance, not even as illegal fishers (Taiwanese boats being the prime concern of the authorities of Japan, the United States and Canada). Thus while boats from the Soviet Union, the German Democratic Republic and the People's Republic of Poland are all accounted within the documents by the NPF, Pyongyang's boats are nowhere to be found.⁹⁷ Fish for North Korea's institutions and government have always been an important, lively matter, but perhaps Pyongyang has never been successful at all in extracting them and connecting with their vibrancy. But it is unclear whether these statistics cover all the fishing effort in these waters, or whether they can ever do so, so we cannot discount entirely North Korean presence somewhere in the Pacific.

⁹⁴Petrov (2004).

⁹⁵Pauly and Froese (2012).

⁹⁶FAO (1972).

⁹⁷North Pacific Fisheries Commission (1972).

To get a sense of North Korean capabilities and interests in the Pacific and perhaps elsewhere the author of this book turned to the archives of the former Soviet Union. The author's interest on these archives was first piqued a couple of years ago when North Korea's national newspaper *Rodong Sinmun* reported on a meeting of the Joint Fisheries Commission of the Russian Federation and North Korea. A reading of past North Korean media reports suggested this commission had met for many years, but its publications and minutes were never publicly available and certainly not made available by North Korea. North Korea and the Soviet Union had in fact set up the commission's predecessor in the late 1960s following some 20 years of attempts at engagement on Moscow's part. This author had in fact never seen any of the reports issued by these committees, however visits to the Russian Federation's State Archive of the Economy in Moscow gave the author access to the committees' previous reports and the documents that surround them. These certainly give an external, Soviet perspective on North Korea's fishing interests history and particularly its success or otherwise in the eyes of Moscow's institutions.

The Soviet Union appeared concerned to develop conservation and management of fisheries stocks, counter to the extractive imperatives of Maximum Sustainable Yield, capitalist, socialist or communist rationalism focused on appropriating resource from the sea at this time. The Soviet Union was very concerned to support North Korea's own efforts to develop its fishing capabilities and capacities, perhaps to mitigate the cost of the various loans, credits and exchanges offered to Pyongyang by Moscow following the Korean War and to support relations between the two during the difficult politics following the death of Stalin and North Korea's engagement with China. Reports from the Ministry of Fisheries and VNIRO (Russian Research Institute of Fisheries and Oceanography) (ВНИРО or Всероссийский научно-исследовательский институт рыбного хозяйства и океанографии) suggest that the Soviet Union had sought to connect with North Korean fisheries throughout most of the 1960s, especially to engage in researcher swaps and exchanges on each other's boats and ships.⁹⁸ But contrary to Kim Il Sung's assertions in previous decades of how much North Korea wanted this to happen, and that readers will have encountered previously in this chapter, they had never happened. Vladivostok's branch of VNIRO and the Russian Academy of Sciences Fisheries Section were especially concerned to develop joint projects in the Sea of Okhotsk, as North Korea sought valuable Snow and other crabs for local markets and that stocks had declined within its territorial waters.⁹⁹ There were it seems also a number of instances of illegal and dangerous fishing practices by North Korean boats in or near Soviet declared or territorial waters. After much negotiation and many false starts, North Korea and the Soviet Union signed a

⁹⁸The Soviet Union delegation's account of work on session of Joint Soviet—North Korean Fisheries Commission' 1970, p. 3. Soviet Union Ministry of Fisheries Archive, Russian State Archive of the Economy, Fondy, 8202-20-2323.

⁹⁹Ibid, p. 2.

protocol on the 5 September 1969, which established the joint Soviet-North Korea Fisheries Commission.¹⁰⁰ The first meeting of the commission was delayed by Pyongyang's preparations for a Workers Party of Korea Congress (the 5th, eventually held in November 1970), but was finally held between 26 February and 10 March 1970.¹⁰¹

Soviet reports on the commission's meetings give a fairly thorough and frustrated view of a complicated and difficult series of exchanges. North Korea's representatives are described as intransigent, taking an entire day to set the agenda and being extremely reluctant to discuss the practical procedure.¹⁰² The Soviet Union, on the other hand, had wanted to discuss the granular details of fish stocks and North Korea's perception of their own stocks and the framework of management and administrative principles governing joint exercises. North Korea, however, was determined to discuss potential joint collaboration and interactions as soon as possible.¹⁰³ The Soviet Union it appears, already had a considered and complicated network of restrictions and management around Kamchatka, the Sea of Okhotsk and Sakhalin and even joint agreements on stock capacity with Japan (with whom, even in spite of very difficult relations given the post-war status quo of Sakhalin and the Kuriles, the Soviet Union had a joint fisheries commission), which North Korea was keen to avoid being constrained by.¹⁰⁴ After much discussion, the North Korean side agreed to abide by the wider restrictions on salmon fishing across the Western Pacific which the Soviet Union subscribed to in collaboration with the Japanese (also quite possibly to avoid complicating relations with the United States and Canada on the subject of fishing for anadromous species in the Pacific), as well as restrictions on crab fishing around Kamchatka, trawling the mid-sea on the west coast of Kamchatka and herring fishing in the Gulf of Shelikov between mid-April and mid-July (herring fry season).¹⁰⁵ In exchange, the Soviet Union allowed Pyongyang to access the inshore waters of the Commander Islands, fish for flatfish around Kamchatka and Sakhalin and access the herring fisheries of the Soviet area of the Bering Sea.¹⁰⁶

In exchange for these supplementary rights, North Korea supplied the Soviet side with the details of its fleet and catch. According to the Korean side, its fishing fleet in 1969 had been some 35 boats, half medium-sized trawlers and some purse seine boats.¹⁰⁷ North Korea also claimed to have four mother ships and four transport ships (having even bought two mother ships from the Netherlands) and

¹⁰⁰Ibid, p. 1.

¹⁰¹Ibid, p. 4.

¹⁰²Ibid, p. 5.

¹⁰³Ibid, p. 6.

¹⁰⁴Ibid, p. 8.

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

¹⁰⁶Ibid.

¹⁰⁷Ibid, p. 7.

had plans to two large trawlers with refrigeration capacity.¹⁰⁸ These boats had caught in 1969 according to the North Korean fishing experts, some 11000 tons of flatfish and 25000 tons of herring in the Sea of Okhotsk. In the Sea of Japan, North Korea claimed to have caught 1000 tons of Pink Salmon, 400000 tons of Pollack, up to 60000 tons of squid and 15000 tons of crab (both Hairy Crab and Snow Crab).¹⁰⁹ The Soviet side thought these figures an understatement and that North Korea, in spite of its consent to restrictions, sought to exploit Pacific salmon resources as much as possible and to exploit the highly endangered Fur Seal populations on Tyuleny Island off Sakhalin.¹¹⁰

Despite their own concerns and lack of trust in the North Koreans, the Soviet Union in the joint commissions sought to negotiate joint research collaborations between fishing experts of both countries in 1970. While this seemed very difficult to set up in 1970 owing to the demands of the forthcoming Workers Party Congress on North Korea's scientific bureaucracy, the commission managed to come to an arrangement.¹¹¹ Many complex challenges were overcome when it came to matters of responsibility and lines of control and even the issue raised by the North Koreans, that Soviet ships in the Pacific were subject to mandatory boarding rights in certain areas by foreign powers and Pyongyang was absolutely keen to avoid any circumstance where hostile or unfriendly agencies might have access to North Korean workers and operatives on board Soviet ships far from its control. These joint exercises were to begin in late September 1970, the culmination of many years of effort on the part of the bureaucrats, diplomats and scientists from the various Soviet institutions.¹¹²

These potentials for collaboration between the two nations was severely challenged on 28 September 1970 when a highly urgent telegram found its way onto many bureaucratic desks across the Soviet Union. In the week that research cooperation efforts were supposed to begin on ships of both the USSR and North Korea, the telegram reported that a North Korean purse seine boat with its identifying marks illegally disguised, had attempted to set its own nets across and above the nets of the Soviet Union's chief research ship, damaging the them and the Soviet boat's floats beyond repair.¹¹³ Responses to the initial telegram revealed that this was not an isolated incident and that in fact North Korean boats had been repeatedly disguising their identification marks and using incorrect or impossible to

¹⁰⁸Ibid.

¹⁰⁹Ibid.

¹¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹¹Ibid, p. 4.

¹¹²Urgent Telegram from USSR Ministry of Communications 'Urgent Moscow Harbour to Ishkov Dal'ryba (FarEastFish) to Starzinskiy,' 28th September, 1970, Soviet Union Ministry of Fisheries Archive, Russian State Archive of the Economy, Fondy, 8202-20-2323.

¹¹³'Letter to D. Gafin from Volkov A.A,' 28th September, 1970, Soviet Union Ministry of Fisheries Archive, Russian State Archive of the Economy, Fondy, 8202-20-2323.

decipher marks on their nets and floats in the Sea of Okhotsk.¹¹⁴ Further telegrams from ‘Far East Fish’ the ‘Fishing Cooperative of Kamchatka’ reported near collisions and other dangerous interactions between North Korean boats and tugboats, an ocean-going barge, the *Dagystanka* and a fishing trawler, the *Kammeniy*. Unsurprisingly, interactions between the research institutions of the Soviet Union and North Korea which had been very carefully organised and negotiated earlier in the year were curtailed for the moment while authorities in Moscow reconsidered how to approach and engage a partner like Pyongyang.¹¹⁵

In spite of this bizarre and destructive behaviour on North Korea’s part, while activities at sea were restricted in 1970 the Soviet Union decided to allow North Korean researchers to engage on land with the Ministry of Fisheries institutions near Vladivostok in Nakhodka. North Korean researchers were in the Soviet Union between the 15 December 1970 and the 16 January 1971 for what was a fact-finding mission for the Koreans and an exercise in epistemological training from the Soviets—according to the accounts it was an extremely difficult month.¹¹⁶ The events of the previous year, which the Soviet institutions had essentially put down to some form of industrial sabotage, coupled with the complication of the discussions surrounding the joint research efforts had soured the mood between the two nations. The Soviet side considered the reasons for some of the more difficult moments in the discussions, such as North Korea’s lack of willingness to allow any reciprocity in contract arrangement and complex negotiation over the legal framework and responsibilities for any of that nation’s citizens on Soviet boats as exposing its institutions to moral hazard.¹¹⁷ It appeared that there was a high-security risk in engagements with North Korean institutions and that under the guise of interest in fishing, Pyongyang could send intelligence operatives and engage primarily in industrial espionage on Soviet infrastructure and factories in the far east, but also to extract knowledge not available to it on fishing stocks and fishing areas in the Sea of Okhotsk and in the wider Pacific.

The exchange in 1970/1971 certainly did not begin in the most comfortable manner. In order to avoid issues of subterfuge, espionage and security threat, the Soviet Union stipulated that none of the researchers or technicians sent by North Korea should have visited the area before or been involved in the institutions on the Soviet side in the past. Certainly none should have security or intelligence

¹¹⁴A list of violations committed by DPRK boats fishing in the Sea of Okhotsk regarding the Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea and the fisheries regulations,’ October, 1970, Soviet Union Ministry of Fisheries Archive, Russian State Archive of the Economy, Fondy, 8202-20-2323.

¹¹⁵Ibid.

¹¹⁶‘A report on the work with Korean delegation during a period of 15 December 1970 until 16 January 1971,’ 29th January, 1971, Soviet Union Ministry of Fisheries Archive, Russian State Archive of the Economy, Fondy, 8202-22-468.

¹¹⁷‘The Soviet Union delegation’s account of work on session of Joint Soviet—North Korean Fisheries Commission’ 1970, p. 4. Soviet Union Ministry of Fisheries Archive, Russian State Archive of the Economy, Fondy, 8202-20-2323.

background and essentially all should have fishing and fishing research experience. North Korea, of course, claimed that none of its researchers had ever been in the Soviet Union before and all were trained and experienced fishing experts, but Soviet intelligence soon reported that one had been to college in the USSR and two had worked in their consulate in Vladivostok—a fourth member of the Korean team it was decided actually had nothing to do with the fishing industry and knew nothing about fishing at all.¹¹⁸ The Ministry of Fisheries efforts to entertain the North Koreans continued to be combined with a concern for security and the obvious dangers of their potential efforts at subterfuge and espionage, concern which only grew when the Koreans appeared to be fairly consumed by the technological aspects of their visit to the extent that when they demanded the blueprints and layouts for the machinery in the various canning and preparation facilities they visited, the Soviet side actually restricted access.¹¹⁹ Eventually, a reasonable negotiation of the problems was done by the Soviet side, with extensive reports in the documents of the North Korean's being refused visits to irrelevant infrastructure and careful management of their visits to technical or research institutions, so that they could not extract data or spend too long with technology that was delicate when it came to security matters. The documents also report a number of moments of push back from the North Koreans and frequent returns to their hotel rooms following difficult moments with their hosts, to review material at length or to communicate with North Korea.¹²⁰ Finally in scenes familiar to watchers of North Korea in the present, the researchers aside from their focus on machinery and technology, were fascinated by shopping opportunities in the fishing towns they visited—The Soviet Union's Ministry of Fishing even sent the North Koreans back to their own country with an extensive supply of Soviet Crab, Caviar, Shrimp and Herring.¹²¹

The records of the Joint Soviet Union North Korean Fisheries Commission which met on average every 4 years following the initial 1970 meeting record more or less similar interactions between the two countries and their fishing industries for the next two decades. Undoubtedly on the surface, Soviet efforts to develop North Korea's behaviour and technical capacity worked to mitigate the security and espionage risks it generate, Pyongyang's desires to fish illegally and exploit what was not within its property or remit for the 1970s (though it could never seem to diminish Pyongyang's ambition to extract whatever it could from Japanese stocks), though it cannot be said that efforts from Moscow's researchers and academics supported much in the way of practical development when it came to North Korean fishing capacity. Nor can it be said that North Korea ever managed to extract by

¹¹⁸Ibid, p. 6.

¹¹⁹Ibid, p. 2.

¹²⁰'A report on the work with Korean delegation during a period of 15 December 1970 until 16 January 1971,' 29th January, 1971, Soviet Union Ministry of Fisheries Archive, Russian State Archive of the Economy, Fondy, 8202-22-468.

¹²¹Hong (1995, pp. 97–113).

means of subterfuge or espionage any information or technology that would later drive success or development in its fishing industry or its fishing catches.

Aside from North Korea's efforts recorded in the archives of the Soviet Union, another small glimpse of its capabilities and efforts at sea can be garnered from the single fisheries commission that Pyongyang successfully became involved with (and there were a number of fisheries commissions in the Pacific. Readers will remember both Japan's great efforts and success at harvesting tuna and other larger species in the deeper seas of the Pacific. They will also remember the intense desire of Pyongyang to not just engage in its coastal waters, and to extract from the waters of neighbour countries as suggested by the documents from the Soviet Union, but to engage in the deep sea and aim for tuna. North Korea in the past decade has made a concerted effort to join the West and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), which is tasked with managing the deep-sea resources of that area of the Pacific and the waters of small island nations such as the Federated Republic of Micronesia, Vanuatu and Nauru. The Commission's own records document the complicated and lengthy process surrounding North Korea's membership. Pyongyang had its application rejected several years in a row, before external pressure forced a compromise in which North Korea could join as an associate on condition of paying a fee and submitting data on its current fishing interests in the area. Unsurprisingly to North Korean watchers perhaps, Pyongyang failed to pay the fee or submit its documents on time and in English in 2013 but was allowed to join anyway as an associate member. Finally in 2014 after many years of diplomatic push and pull, North Korea joined the WCPFC and submitted useful and legitimate data on its fishing efforts in the area.¹²² Extraordinarily this North Korea did, providing what to this date are the only reasonable and functional statistics on its fishing efforts and catch size in the Pacific Ocean since its submission to the Soviet Joint Commission in the 1970s. These statistics reveal the miniscule scale of North Korea's contemporary fishing capabilities and effort in the area, comprising only two small purse seine boats and one long line boat, collecting in total a sum of some 368 tonnes of tuna in 2014.¹²³

The inclusion of North Korean fishing rights as an intangible sanctioned item or category in UNSC2397 suggests some value in these to Pyongyang, beyond which as an alternative to that which its institutions and organisations could catch themselves. Bo Gao has in fact recently suggested several reasons for the value of such rights.¹²⁴ As readers may have already gathered and if not they will certainly have by the end of the following chapter, China's territorial and home waters are under considerable environmental pressure from both overfishing and pollution. The Chinese waters of the Bohai Sea are in particular famous for algal and pollution blooms famously known as red tides. This has led to much pressure on Chinese fishing enterprises to fish in South Korean and North Pacific waters. However the

¹²²Western and Central Fisheries Commission (2014).

¹²³Western and Central Fisheries Commission (2014).

¹²⁴Gao (2019).

signing of the China-South Korea fisheries agreement in 2001 mean that South Korean waters were now primarily closed to Chinese boats. Likewise, the Fukushima Nuclear Incident after the 3/11 earthquake in 2011 meant that a great deal of radioactive pollution was discharged from Japan into the currents of the northern Pacific.¹²⁵ Specifically, this radioactivity would pool in the bodies of molluscs and squid species highly sought after by Chinese fishermen. While North Korea's waters even in the eastern edges of the Bohai Sea and at the mouth of Amnok/Yalu estuary are far from pristine, they are preferable for Chinese companies and state enterprises to breaching the terms of the China-South Korea fisheries agreement and to fishing in waters felt to be radioactively polluted by Fukushima.¹²⁶ Bo Gao thus records a burst in interest from Chinese fishing organisations after both 2001 and 2011 in purchasing fishing licences from North Korean institutions such as the North Korea Fishery Association.¹²⁷ This interest has been pressured by both the impositions of United Nations sanctions and by the various difficulties generated institutionally by a series of kidnappings of Chinese boats by North Korean interests around the mouth of the Amnok/Yalu, the first of which was known as the 5.8 Fishery Incident.¹²⁸ This again perhaps suggests that engaging with North Korea's small fishing resource is as fraught to with difficulty in recent years as it was for the Soviet Union in 1971.

4.7 Fishing Matters and Multiple Scales

By the conclusion of this chapter, the reader will now have something of a sense of North Korea's sense of its own fishing history as well as the briefest of glimpses into the reality of its endeavours allowed by corroborative evidence from elsewhere. As much as it is clear that fishing and watery matters were hugely important to North Korea and its political, governmental and national sense of self, it is also clear that its ambitions have not been realised. But given this fact, how might they be conceptualised within Pyongyang's politics Fishery projects and the developmental, environmental or agricultural sectors in which they are placed essentially function on multiple scales, as indeed do the politics and ideology of North Korea. All ultimately connect with the narratological strands serving to underpin, define and legitimate the charismatic political form; all strands lead to the Kims or conceptions or ideas of there are own conception, and thus all are transformed by that charisma and those narratives into something a little close to transcendent or miraculous. This narrative element of mythos and the miraculous creates a

¹²⁵Ibid. p. 61.

¹²⁶Ibid. p. 58.

¹²⁷Ibid. p. 62.

¹²⁸Ibid. p. 55.

developmental mythography.¹²⁹ In this North Korea's fishery projects and processes and those participating in them as exist in a revolutionary charismatic time, in which projects such as the January 8 Fisheries Station and other fishing projects can be achieved at infeasible yet 'realistic' speeds. At the same moment, there exists a more mundane chronological plane, a timescale of everyday commitment, toil and dedication. This is the domain of the (soldier) builders and the shock brigaders, of the provincial party members, the institutional apparatchiks and bureaucrats, all those that are charged with bringing narrative, assertion and aspiration to practical reality.

In a sense neither of these chronologies and categories of spatial relationship or engagement are disconnected from the carrier signal of North Korea's charismatic politics, both being vectors by which its historical and ideological narratives must be embedded or developed. This is where the interplay lies between Kim Il Sung's postcolonial assertions from 1948, his call for ship development at Ryukdae and Chongjin shipyards in 1969, the reality of North Korea's fishing capabilities at the time as shown by the Soviet documents and Kim Jong Un's desire for a 'miracle' of institutional construction and development in this decade; a liminality, slipperiness and transferability across institutional scales, developmental epochs and politico-narratological forms.

Perhaps as external readers and observers, we will never fully know whether North Korea's claims to have entered an era of 'big' or 'unprecedented' fish hauls are to be trusted, whether the 'fish flavour of socialism' can ever be tasted,¹³⁰ not until its archives and databases, are opened up. In spite of the appearance of vast piles of fish and fish products in the photographic records provided by North Korea in recent years, some of it held and personally encountered by Kim Jong Un during his on the spot guidance sessions,¹³¹ an assessment of the real volumes of its fishing sectors catch is extraordinarily difficult. Perhaps what is most extraordinary and important about North Korean accounts of fishing and maritime efforts not just in 2015 and 2016 but throughout its history is their continued portrayal of a particular form of landscape and spatiality. While much of North Korean development leads a lot to be desired in terms of output and development, projects seeming neglected or half-finished, output lacklustre or product amateur or mediocre in production,¹³² fishing and the focus on the sea allows Pyongyang's institutions an open and accessible space to articulate continued utopic, ambitious claims which connect to the most charismatic and dramatic of its political and ideological ambitions. In our contemporary world of contested politics, the liminal maritime landscape allows a North Korea in danger of severe sanction on account of its nuclear and space exploration ambitions, and even more severe censure as a result of the activities of

¹²⁹Winstanley-Chesters (2015).

¹³⁰Rodong Sinmun (2016).

¹³¹Rodong Sinmun (2015).

¹³²Winstanley-Chesters (2014).

the United Nations Commission of Inquiry (COI),¹³³ a little space in which its institutions and imagination can extend despite a myriad of troubles on land. While North Korea's revolutionary claims may reside in many cases in the charismatic, narrative past, the contemporary era of the 'big fish hauls' allows just a little bit of that revolutionary possibility to leach out into the present. Just as the KPA's dam builders in 1997 battled against the West Sea's waves to rebuild the breakwaters at Taegyedo reclamation site,¹³⁴ protecting hard-won new land for the revolution, so the fishing boats of North Korea's Fishing Stations are tasked still with forging socialist promise from the water.

North Korea as the reader of this book may realise by now, may never reach the heights of extraction from the commons of the sea managed by the Soviet Union during its existence. The Soviet Union and perhaps unlikely partners such as the Polish Democratic Republic and the German Democratic Republic would join the United States, Japan, South Korea and Canada in the 1970s and 1980s as a global fishing power, the ships of these nations found across the seas of the earth and at their farthest reaches. North Korea, in spite of efforts made in the 1970s as recounted by this chapter would never be a great success. However, that has never stopped it aspiring to such success as seen in 2015's New Year Address from Kim Jong Un, and in following years, which features seas (and mountains) of gold as developmental imperative.¹³⁵ As much as Kim Il Sung wanted, desired and demanded it, North Korean fishing success on a global scale has never happened. The institutional redesign, scientific focus and technological jump required by North Korea's fishing strategy in the late 1960s and 1970s produced very little. North Korea fishing boats seldom top 1000 tonnes (Whereas South Korea's are in the tens of thousands).

The notion that fishing landscapes are still under construction in North Korea, still in engagement with the lively matters of the sea, at least in the institutional mind is fascinating. This chapter as well as the at times mythic history of North Korean fishing has touched on the reality of that history through the use of archival materials from the Soviet Union. Readers would have read a lot about not just watery matters and the vibrancy of fish and fish products in North Korea's view, but also about the spaces and geographies in which that matters would be captured, harnessed and produced. The shipyards of Chongjin and other fishing places are hugely important to these narratives, deeply embedded in the narratives and in the ideology of North Korean developmentalism. However, these narrative and historical landscapes cannot really tell anything like the entire story of the nation's engagement with its fishing matters and so it is vital for this book to go into the field and to explore the reality of fishing spaces as they are in reality. Just as it is impossible to consider North Korea's fishing history without considering the deeper and wider fishing histories of its neighbours, so North Korean fishing landscapes

¹³³United Nations (Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights) (2014).

¹³⁴KCNA (1997).

¹³⁵Rodong Sinmun (2015).

and places, particularly at the community level will give the reader a more holistic sense of the engagement between space, community and the lively matters of fish and fishing. Just as this book as used the wider history of fishing and its application in the East Asian region to frame the watery histories of North Korea, so it will encounter the reality of communities focused on fish and products from the sea and coast by shifting the frame again back to North Korea's neighbours. The next chapter does that through recounting fieldwork done in fishing communities in the People's Republic of China and South Korea, places and populations who are challenged by many of the same environmental problems that fishing communities in North Korea will be, but whose political and economic frameworks will be considerably different.

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