North Korea. At the Sources of External and Internal Isolation

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea is not only the most isolated state in the world, but its citizens also constitute the society most divorced from any external contacts whatsoever. The self-isolation of the DPRK is a unique case, even when compared to other communist regimes of the former camp. In terms of scale and intensity, the specific nature of the state’s external, and the citizens’ internal, isolation matches neither the political practice and realities of the failed former regimes in the Central and East European states nor the practice of the communist states in Asia, such as China, Vietnam, Laos, or Cambodia after the overthrow of Pol Pot. The specific nature of North Korea’s isolation consisted in building on the centuries-long, historical tradition of insulating the Korean state against any outside influences. After 1945, the external and internal isolation were elevated to the rank of a legal standard, with the ruling communists finding both theoretical and legal justification for that norm. Like that of earlier centuries, the purpose of isolation in modern times was to prevent the inflow of any external thoughts, ideas and habits which might jeopardise the internal stability of the state and the permanence of the rule of the political elites. Echoing the centuries-old perception, to the Kim family clan which rules the DPRK, the world outside is bad, alien and unfriendly toward the ‘pure, innocent Korean race’.

Tags: internal isolation, external isolation, permanent control, North Korea