

Understanding the North Korean Regime



By Atsuhito Isozaki

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 THE SASAKAWA PEACE FOUNDATION

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Introduction

Since its founding in 1948, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (hereafter North Korea) has been ruled by three generations of the Kim family: Kim Il-sung, Kim Jong-il, and Kim Jong-un. In particular, the Kim Il-sung regime (1948–1994) lasted for 45 years and 10 months, an exceptionally long period even by global standards.¹ As North Korea maintained its “socialist” ideology even after the Cold War, power was successfully passed on to the Kim Jong-il administration (1994–2011) and subsequently to the Kim Jong-un administration (2011–present).² In the 1990s, there were discussions about the possibilities of the regime's collapse and political transition. Yet, in actuality, during the 20-year period that followed, there were no people's revolutions or military coups of the kind seen in Eastern Europe and the Middle East.³ Furthermore, economic reform or open market policy like those undertaken by China and Vietnam did not take place in North Korea.

In discussing the political regime of North Korea, there are two points to be made: Firstly, the Kim Jong-il and Kim Jong-un regimes are two separate phenomena. In the case of North Korea, there is no shortage of topics to discuss: nuclear missiles, three-generational hereditary succession, and human rights problems such as the defector issue. Therefore, discussions tend to focus exclusively on a particular topic and often fail to see the wood for the trees, so to speak.

Secondly, research for this book relies primarily on information released by the official North Korean media. Although information provided by defectors and unconfirmed internal documents can further

understanding of North Korea, the analysis of official documents is the basis of North Korean research. Analysis of the content of *Rodong Sinmun*, the official newspaper of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK), has been at the heart of this research. This focus was motivated by two major reasons.

First, since *Rodong Sinmun* is compulsory reading for all North Koreans, the logic that the authorities seek to instill in the people's minds can be decoded by its analysis. Second, since availability of information on North Korea is extremely limited, the only way to obtain a complete understanding of the country is to collect the individual pieces of the jigsaw puzzle. Nevertheless, the lack of information is no reason to abandon critical analysis and settle for conjecture or uninformed projections.

This book should provide a piece of the puzzle to understanding the North Korean political regime.

I Changes Around the Study of North Korea

Increase in Number of Information Sources

The state of research on North Korea's government system has undergone significant changes since 1990s. Due to the closed nature of the country, empirical research on North Korea had been considered to be problematic in the past. Tetsuo Murooka provides a detailed review of research conducted in the 1990s in Japan.⁴ Haruki Wada et al. organized book publications across a wide range of genres.⁵ Moreover, introductory texts and research guides have been compiled.⁶ According to Wada et al., research on North Korea changed significantly around 1980 when new kinds of materials such as documents obtained by the United States Army became available, thereby prompting a succession of new studies.⁷ Regarding primary sources, in addition to materials released by Kim Jong-il and Kim Il-sung,⁸ researchers have utilized news from official North Korean media outlets, including broadcasts by the Korean Central News Agency, *Rodong Sinmun* (the official newspaper of the WPK Central Committee), *Minju Choson* (a government newspaper), *Kulloja* (a theoretical magazine of the WPK Central Committee),⁹ and the *Korean Central Yearbook*. Moreover, researchers can now use various "internal documents" and diplomatic papers detailing exchanges with the Soviet Union and China.¹⁰

It is still difficult to conduct fieldwork in North Korea. Still, the strengthening of economic cooperation between North and South Korea and the advancement of satellite technology have increased the amount of information available.¹¹ In South Korea, since the late 1990s,

there has been a dramatic improvement in the quantity and quality of research on North Korea.¹² Furthermore, testimonies provided by North Korean defectors and exiles, the number of whom increased rapidly during the same period, became an indispensable resource for researchers.¹³ At the time of this writing (late February 2017), more than 30,000 North Korean defectors have already reached South Korea. This has provided access to evidences by high-level government officials, diplomats, journalists, and researchers, in addition to crucial testimonies concerning the ruler, Kim Jong-il—by his eldest son Kim Jong-nam, sister-in-law Song Hye-rang, nephew Ri Han-yong, close advisors Hwang Jang-yop and Shin Kyung-wan, famous South Korean cinema couple Choi Eun-hee and Shin Sang-ok, and Japanese sushi chef Kenji Fujimoto.¹⁴ In addition, since the turn of the century, various North Korean laws have been disclosed, and there has been progress in the compilation of databases of the main newspapers.¹⁵

Japanese researchers had played a pioneering role in North Korean research until the early 1990s, but much of this research lacked a comparative perspective with other governmental systems, partly because few individual studies were conducted at that time.¹⁶ Instead, there was a strong tendency to only emphasize the distinctiveness of the North Korean regime while failing to consider its universality. Employing ideal types would be an effective way to understand both the universality and distinctiveness of the North Korean political system.¹⁷

The “sultanistic” regime type, as proposed by Juan J. Linz has been discussed in an article in 2006.¹⁸ Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan argue that sultanistic rulers, unless they die of natural causes, tend to be overthrown by the masses, assassinated, or removed by a military coup. However, the Kim Jong-il administration ended with the natural death of the ruler, and the system of government was maintained with Kim Jong-un as its new leader.¹⁹

Limitation of North Korean Studies and the Importance of Primary Source Analysis

Over the years, books written by North Korean supreme leaders and the *Rodong Shinmun* Newspaper published by WPK have changed in the frequency and the use of certain terminology. Of course, this method is not perfect, but these sources are highly regarded within North Korea, and they provide a way to interpret the intent and ideals of the North Korean leaders.

First, the premise of the discussion about North Korean policy making must be reviewed. It is the fact that politics under Kim Jong-un are even more of a black box than it was under his father. Most observers expected that the seven high officials accompanying the motor hearse of Kim Jong-il in December 2011 would become the core supporters of the young successor, Kim Jong-un. Some even saw the possibility of the North Korea ruling system being transformed into a collective leadership. Since then, however, the most powerful figures and would-be guardians of the new supreme leader have been removed: for example, Ri Yong-ho, chief of the General Staff of the Korean People's Army, was dismissed, and Kim Jong-un's powerful uncle, Jang Song-taek, was executed.

Is political decision-making now being concentrated under Kim Jong-un? This has been an important issue, but there is not enough information to know for sure. The clearest answer is that politics under Kim Jong-un is even more of a black box than was the case under his father. This is due to the lack of information. Kim Jong-un has been in power for only five years, which is not enough time to understand his style of governance. More importantly, there is less information leaking out of North Korea than in the past.

As for Kim Jong-il, it is possible to get a better glimpse of personal details from his so-called royal family, which included people like his eldest son, Kim Jong-nam; his sister-in-law, Song Hye-rang; and his nephew, Lee Han-young; his close associates like Hwang Jang-yeop and Shin Kyung-wan, the South Korean movie director and famous actress who were kidnapped to take part in the production of a film in

Pyongyang; Shin Sang-ok; and Choi Eun-hee, as well as his Japanese sushi chef, Kenji Fujimoto who served Kim Jong-il for 13 years in Pyongyang. It was possible to cross-check all of the information and get close to the power structure of his regime. However, regarding Kim Jong-un, the available resources are limited to the time he spent studying abroad in Switzerland. In other words, there is no information except facts from his youth.

In these circumstances, the “works” (로작) such as speeches, conversations, and essays that have been published under Kim Jong-un’s name are useful for understanding the internal logic of North Korea where “words” (말씀) and “instructions” (교시) (교시) of the supreme leader are seen as absolutes. They can serve as small clues that are possible to verify. In fact, approximately 90 works of Kim Jong-un that have been published since 2012 show the striking contrast between his ideology and that of his father. The difference between Kim Jong-un and his father suggests that Kim Jong-un is a pragmatically-oriented leader. For example, the term, “*Songun* Idea, Military-first Idea” was not used even once in the many speeches, essays, and conversations that Kim Jong-un made available to the public in 2012.

The contents of the North Korean media also reveal that the Korean Workers’ Party has become more centralized in state affairs than it was under Kim Jong-il, more attention is being paid to the appearance of due process in policy-making, and there have been relatively more attempts at publicly disclosing information. But at the same time, changes in leadership personnel and policies happen quickly, and foreign policies have fluctuated widely between provoking neighbors and seeking dialogue.

Limitation of Fieldwork

Recently, interest in North Korea has increased, and it has become widely known that ordinary Japanese citizens can go to Pyongyang. Now, about 50 to 200 Japanese visit North Korea annually. Most want to set a foot in North Korea, whose true nature is unclear, and see it for themselves. Yet there are limitations.

First, simply going to North Korea will not increase knowledge. Of course any country would want to present its best to foreign visitors, but North Korea has an extreme tendency to do this. Whether it is through a package tour planned by a tourist agency or a requested tour planned by an individual tourist, the visa application requires detailed travel plans. There is no freedom of movement, and the old Soviet style of voucher travel is still the norm.²⁰ Guides will meet you at the train station or airport of Pyongyang, who will be with you from morning to night throughout the whole trip. The voucher travel system is even more restrictive than during Soviet times, which results in a very expensive trip.²¹

Travel within Pyongyang is restricted, and according to many defectors, Pyongyang residents receive training to answer foreigners a certain way. In a new style of Japanese journalism, *Rimjingang* reported on this phenomenon: the special edition titled “Capturing the conspiracy of ‘beautiful Pyongyang’” published photos including one where North Koreans with old and dirty backpacks are being pushed out from the center of Pyongyang, which is visible to foreigners.

Secondly, it is important to emphasize that some visa requests are rejected. There is no diplomatic relationship between Japan and North



Atsuhito Isozaki at the Wilson Center’s presentation on the endurance of the North Korean regime with fellow speakers, from left to right, Atsuhito Isozaki, James Person, Celeste Arrington, and Robert L. Carlin, held March 8th, 2017.

Korea, so the travel visas can be obtained in nearby cities such as Beijing, Shenyang, and Vladivostok. The problem is not only that the visa applications are rejected on a regular basis, but also that one or two people from a group application are often denied travel visas. The media are frequently denied their visas as well. Because very few Japanese have studied or traveled to North Korea, the impact of the Japanese media's coverage of North Korea in Japan is more powerful on Japanese population than in South Korea or other countries. There was a continual report about North Korea's current affairs in April, 2012 with the launch of satellite Kwangmyoungsung 3, the appointment of Kim Jong-un as the first secretary of the Worker's Party of Korea (WPK) and first chairman of the National Defense Commission, 100th Anniversary of Kim Il-sung's birth, the 80th anniversary of the founding of the North Korean People's Army, and King Jong-un's public speech following a military parade. These events opened up a way for the media to enter the country. But this permission was not granted equally. Unlike NHK, Japan TV, and TV Asahi who reported the events live from Pyongyang, Fuji TV was denied the visa and missed the opportunity to provide exclusive coverage. Whether it is against tourists or the media, there is no consistency in approval or rejection. For example, Fuji TV had to stay in Tokyo while other companies provided coverage from Pyongyang. But even those who received approval to enter North Korea had to limit their coverage so as not to lose future opportunities to cover events in North Korea. They have to be concerned about not angering Chosen-Soren, the General Association of Korean Residents in Japan, which is said to have a say in visa approval. Regardless, the Kim Jong-un regime seems to be more favorable to open-door policies.

On a different note, the North Korean travel logs published between the end of the 1950s to the 1970s were worthy of praise. These travel logs greatly influenced the Japanese's image of North Korea, especially in a time when information and traveling abroad was scarce. There were a few travel logs that had a favorable outlook on North Korea published in the 1980s, but there also were some publication that sought to be unbiased and, therefore, carried innate value. After the end of the Cold War, attracting tourists from neighboring Japan

became even more important to North Korea to promote diplomacy and to bring in foreign currency. There are multiple travel logs being published today, but most from Japan have an icy view. The Japanese view of North Korea has largely shifted from a positive image to a negative one. There is no doubt that the issue of abduction of Japanese by North Korea lies at the center of this shift.

Differences in North Korean Studies by Japan, South Korea, China and the United States

The differences in the approach to research in Japan, South Korea, and China regarding North Korea is striking. It is difficult to imagine a Japanese or Korean researcher who does not understand English at all specializing in U.S. politics. But in the United States, there are many researchers who do not understand Korean at all but still study North Korea. This is a result of the fact that the United States is a superpower. Many American researchers openly discuss and severely criticize the North Korean regime. This outlook is also a result of the fact that the United States is a superpower and is shaped by limited interaction with North Koreans.

Japanese researchers sometimes travel to North Korea unless they belong to a government organization or are denied a visa by North Korea. Even though it is difficult to visit North Korea for some researchers, there are opportunities to exchange views with North Korean researchers in other countries such as China. Furthermore, many North Koreans reside in Japan who are members of the Chosen-Soren, the General Association of Korean Residents in Japan. Japanese researchers also have opportunities for academic exchanges with the professors of Korea University, which is run by this association in Tokyo. Even in academic conferences and Japanese media, public criticism of Kim Jong-un is often met by a rebuttal from these North Korean residents in Japan.

In short, although Japanese researchers do not have empathy towards North Korea, they undoubtedly are physically closer. These research environments cause a decisive difference from the hostile stance that U.S. researchers maintain with regard to North Korea.

U.S. foreign policy considers North Korean issues to be much lower in priority compared to Japan's foreign policies. However, there are a lot of books related to North Korea that are published in the United States. These books seem to focus primarily on the country's nuclear issue and defectors. The U.S. diplomacy toward North Korea appears to prioritize nuclear issues and human rights as the main concerns. This differs from the Japanese diplomatic approach, which focuses on a human rights violation: the abduction issue. A Japanese Cabinet Office survey in January 2016 found that 83.5 percent of the public considers the abduction issue the major area of interest regarding North Korea.

In comparing North Korea researchers from Japan, South Korea, China, and the United States, it is evident that Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT) is Japan's strength. Japanese researchers have shown a superior ability to examine public information diligently and rigorously not only of quantitative nature but also qualitative. South Korea's information on North Korea is a mixture of wheat and chaff, but its strength lies in Human Intelligence (HUMINT). Highly accurate information on economic and social conditions can be obtained from defectors seeking asylum in South Korea. Chinese researchers, meanwhile, often discuss North Korea on the basis of their own experiences. Given their experiences under authoritarian and socialist systems, some of their studies are more persuasive. On the other hand, U.S. researchers also have advantages of research tools such as Imagery Intelligence analysis (IMINT).

Another important point of difference between Japanese and South Korean research towards North Korea is that research topics have been subdivided and are very specific in South Korea. U.S. researchers adopt a dynamic approach to analyze North Korea within a larger framework, taking into account broader trends in North Korea.

II The Structure of the North Korean Regime²²

This chapter provides an overview of the structure of the North Korean regime predicated on the view that the North Korean political regime has persisted owing to its robust structure.

The Supreme Leader, the Party, and the State

The Constitution of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea was formulated when the country was founded in September 1948. In 1972, the word "socialist" was added to the name of the constitution (The Socialist Constitution of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea) and the state system was significantly restructured. Since then, the Constitution has been amended several times, most recently in June 2016. The following article is particularly characteristic of the North Korean Constitution:

Article 11: The Democratic People's Republic of Korea shall conduct all activities under the leadership of the Workers' Party of Korea.

Although similar systems have also existed in other socialist nations, the rule of the WPK is enshrined in the North Korean Constitution.²³ Moreover, the term "leadership," as seen in Article 11, is only used to describe the powers of the supreme leader or the WPK, unlike other more general terms such as "direction" or "guidance." This usage is also an example of why an understanding of the Korean language is critical to conducting research on North Korea. Article 100

of the June 2016 Constitution states that “The Chairman of the State Affairs Commission of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea is the supreme leader of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.” Regarding the post of chairman of the State Affairs Commission held by Kim Jong-un, Article 102 proclaims, “The Chairman of the State Affairs Commission of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea is the supreme commander of the whole armed forces of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea and commands and directs all the armed forces of the State.” Article 103 defines the duties and authority of the chairman of the State Affairs Commission as follows:

- 1 Direct the overall affairs of the State
- 2 Personally guide the work of the State Affairs Commission
- 3 Appoint or remove key officials of the State
- 4 Ratify or rescind major treaties concluded with other countries
- 5 Exercise the right of granting special pardon
- 6 Proclaim a state of emergency, a state of war, or a mobilization order within the country
- 7 Organize and direct the National Defense Committee in wartime

Although the main subject of authority is “the overall affairs of the state,” this effectively means managing the entire state and guarantees the absolute authority of the chairman of the State Affairs Commission. Under the Kim Jong-il regime, which was centered on the National Defense Commission, the wording of Item 3 in the abovementioned article was different; it stated, “key officials in the field of national defense.” Some modifications have been made, for example, the extension of authority to “key officials of the State,” but the new Commission is only a repackaging of the National Defense Commission that existed under Kim Jong-il. Kim Jong-il assumed the post of chairman of the National Defense Commission in April 1993, when Kim Il-sung was still alive. At the time, the president was the head of state and the chairman’s post was not considered to be very significant. The provisions of the North Korean Constitution

pertaining to the head of state have been revised several times: when North Korea was founded in 1948, the Constitution declared that the Prime Minister of North Korea Kim Il-sung was the leader of the government. In the 1972 amendment, the prime minister post was made redundant, and it was replaced by the president post, which was assumed by Kim Il-sung. Until president was abolished constitutional changes in the 1998, four years after the death of Kim Il-sung, North Korea did not have any other president. In the 1998 amendment, an attempt was made to deify Kim Il-sung by designating him the “Eternal President” in the Preamble of the Constitution; however, a great deal of confusion existed regarding the presidency. Kim Jong-il exercised authority as the supreme leader of the state from his position as chairman of the National Defense Commission but only because the constitution stated that the chairman “is the supreme commander of the whole armed forces of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea and commands and directs all the armed forces of the State” (Article 102). According to a different interpretation, the president of the Presidium of the Supreme People’s Assembly may have actually been the nominal head of state as the post “represents the State and receives the credentials and letters of recall of diplomatic representatives accredited by foreign states” (Article 111). In fact, the President of the Presidium, Kim Yong-nam, has met foreign heads of state on an equal basis when representing North Korea during state visits. However, the official government newspaper *Rodong Sinmun* and several addresses by North Korean officials have indicated that, at least externally, “the chairman of the National Defense Commission is the highest position in the state.”

The Chairman of the National Defense Commission was firmly established as the supreme leader by the 2009 constitutional changes. In April 2012, after his death, Kim Jong-il was designated as the “Eternal Chairman of the National Defense Commission” in keeping with the tradition established by the deification of Kim Il-sung as the “Eternal President.” Kim Jong-un, who vacated the office of chairman of the National Defense Commission, was appointed as the “First Chairman,” a new post. Under the same logic, he also became the “First Secretary” of the WPK. This transitional regime continued

until the Seventh Congress of the WPK and the 2016 Constitution amendment. It should also be noted that the post of prime minister, defined in the constitution as the head of government until 1972, has only ever been held by Kim Il-sung. In North Korea, the post commonly referred to as “Prime Minister of North Korea” in Japanese and U.S. media is called the “Premier of the Cabinet.” North Korea clearly distinguishes between “Prime Minister” and “Premier.”

The North Korean national assembly, the Supreme People’s Assembly, is a unicameral legislature.

The elections are conducted using a “vote of confidence” system wherein a single candidate is proposed in each constituency.

Elections were held 13 times between the founding of the country in 1948 and 2014. All citizens who are 17 years and above are eligible to vote. However, the elections are conducted using a “vote of confidence” system wherein a

single candidate is proposed in each constituency. In the March 2014 election, all 687 proposed candidates were elected, with a turnout of 99.97 percent and an approval rate of 100 percent.

In North Korea, voters present identification cards and receive a ballot paper with the candidate’s name printed on it. According to North Korean election laws, voters receive the following instruction: “To approve, do not mark the paper; to disapprove, cross off the candidate’s name.” If voters wish to approve the candidate, they return the ballot paper without writing anything on it; if they disapprove of the candidate, they must cross off the candidate’s name printed on the paper. In other words, it is clear from the moment a voter picks up a pencil that he or she intends to vote against the candidate. The details of this procedure are apparent in the laws published by the North Korean government, which serve as solid evidence in support of defectors’ testimonies. Furthermore, citizens who are traveling outside the province in which they are registered as residents or who have left the country to earn money in China must return to their home address at the time of the election. Therefore, voter turnout is almost 100 percent. The elections also serve the function of controlling residents.

Thus, although the procedure seems like a sham when viewed from the outside, North Korea is serious about feigning the appearance of democratic legitimacy. Therefore, the Supreme People's Assembly has been held at least once every year with a few exceptions. Despite the WPK's one-party rule, and the Kim family's hereditary succession of power through three generations, policies are officially determined through meetings of representatives who are, to borrow the government's own words, selected in "elections that are democratic and popular." In assuming such a posture, North Korea is attempting to present itself as a democratic state. The Supreme People's Assembly also includes representatives from two other parties, the Korean Social Democratic Party and the Chondoist Chongu Party as well as a small number of independents. As mentioned above, however, the superiority of the WPK in the state is enshrined in the North Korean Constitution, and the other political parties are little more than the WPK's satellite parties. Practically speaking, it is a hegemonic party system in which there is no competition among the parties.

Ideology

To map the structure of the North Korean regime, it would be beneficial to focus on Article 3 of the Constitution:

Article 3: The Democratic People's Republic of Korea is guided in its activities by the *Juche* idea and the *Songun* idea, world outlooks centered on people, a revolutionary ideology for achieving the independence of the masses of the people.

Here, the *Juche* and *Songun* ideologies are prescribed as the North Korean state's guiding principles. The *Songun* idea was first introduced in the Constitution at the time of the 2009 amendment, whereas the *Juche* idea was added in 1972. Analyzing these two ideologies, defined as guiding principles in the Constitution, will help us understand North Korea.

In essence, *Juche* (self-reliance) can be explained in terms of four fundamental principles: ideological autonomy, political independence,

economic self-sustenance, and self-reliance in defense. Political independence refers to the ideal of developing independent political diplomacy without submitting to the great powers. However, if this approach is taken to the extreme, North Korea might end up adopting independent policies that disregard other states. Likewise, in terms of economic self-sustenance, North Korea cannot ignore the economic vitalization that occurs as a result of accepting foreign investment and technology and engaging in trade where necessary. The principle of self-reliance in defense was implemented from an early stage. Half a century after the division of the Korean Peninsula, 17,000 U.S. troops are still stationed in South Korea; in the North, however, the Soviet Union withdrew immediately after the country was founded, and the Chinese Army that fought in the Korean War withdrew completely in 1958. It is difficult for a small country like North Korea to protect itself. Therefore, North Korea has concentrated its resources on developing nuclear missiles and has sought to achieve self-reliance while brandishing its nuclear capacity. The spirit of the *Juche* idea continues to live on today.

In addition to the *Juche* idea, Kim Jong-il established the *Songun* (military-first) idea as a “guiding principle of the state.”

In addition to the *Juche* idea, Kim Jong-il established the *Songun* (military-first) idea as a “guiding principle of the state.” In North Korea, the term “*Songun* politics” gained currency around 1998. It is often translated into English

as “military-first politics” or “military-first policy.” *Songun* politics was defined as “the basic political system of the party” and was first proclaimed by Kim Jong-il during a visit to the Tabaksol guard post (Unit 214 of the Korean People’s Army) on New Year’s Day in 1995. Kim Jong-il, who had hardly appeared in public since the death of President Kim Il-sung in July 1994 (except during the memorial service), suddenly surfaced during an inspection of the army unit on New Year’s Day the following year, and this event was then retrospectively established as the inception of *Songun* politics. *Songun* subsequently came to symbolize the Kim Jong-il regime, operating in tandem with the “strong and prosperous nation” and “strong and prosperous state”

policies.²⁴ Later, from around June 1999, the term “*Songun* idea” began to be used, and it thereafter appeared alongside the *Juche* idea. *Songun* was thus upgraded to a national ideology.

Similar to the *Juche* idea, it was believed that *Songun* was initiated by President Kim Il-sung and that “the *Songun* idea is rooted in the *Juche* idea.” Moreover, in 2004, the regime began to assert that the *Songun* idea was a recapitulation of Kim Jong-il’s ideological and theoretical aspirations. On August 24, 2005, however, an alternative explanation was suddenly proposed, which claimed that the *Songun* revolutionary leadership began on August 25, 1960. According to this explanation, *Songun* politics originated when the young Kim Jong-il accompanied Kim Il-sung on an inspection of the Seoul Ryu Kyong Su Guards 105th Tank Division of the Korean People’s Army (KPA) on this day. It would seem that, by asserting that Kim Jong-il, who was born in 1942, had espoused *Songun* from the early age of 18, the regime sought to give weight to the *Songun* policy and strengthen the legitimacy of Kim Jong-il, who happened to lack military experience.

Kim Il-sung was also 18 years old when he organized the anti-Japanese national united front in Manchuria, the precursor of the KPA. The anachronization of the inception of *Songun* politics to the time when Kim Jong-il was 18 years old would seem to represent an attempt to invent a chapter in history akin to the anti-Japanese guerilla warfare fought by Kim Il-sung. The invention of this history portraying both Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il as active political leaders from the age of 18 also laid the foundation for a smooth transition of power to Kim Jong-un, who appeared in public as the successor when he was 26. Then, in the April 2009 amendment to the Constitution, North Korea finally added the *Songun* idea to its policies guiding state operation.

Why then did Kim Jong-il begin emphasizing the *Songun* idea? The idea of military-first politics is not a recent invention. The KPA seeks its origin in the anti-Japanese partisan movement led by Kim Il-sung. In North Korea, the KPA’s role in these battles and in the Korean War has been aggrandized for several years. The idea that the army is the cornerstone of the regime is deeply entrenched. The primary reason

why North Korea, having established such a political culture, began to attach greater importance to the army in the 1990s can be found in the changes around the world in 1989. In 1989, many of the socialist countries in Eastern Europe underwent a political shift. Dissatisfied with the one-party rule of the communist parties, the people demanded democracy. In November, the Berlin wall was knocked down in Germany; in December, Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu were captured and executed in Romania by an army that had aligned itself toward democratization. In North Korea, the revolutions in Eastern Europe were attributed to the “ideological defection of the military” from the party line. For example, in the December 22, 2003 edition of *Rodong Sinmun*, the following argument was presented in an editorial titled, “Let Us Glorify the Era of the *Songun* with the Armed Forces Strong in Thoughts and Faith:”

Many countries where socialism was once established failed to give due care to strengthening the political–ideological authority of the military through revolutionary movements. These countries were caught in a current of de-idealization and de-politicization, fanned by those disloyal to socialism, resulting in the ideological and spiritual disarmament of their military. Ultimately, when the gains of socialism and socialist revolution were miserably trampled down, the military was unable to fire a single shot. The deceitful acts of aggression by imperial despots developing around the globe to overthrow the sovereign states were easily carried out, and the rulers were overthrown and replaced within several days of anti-government rallies and demonstrations alone, because the entire military changed its ideology and lacked conviction.

In short, the article criticized the military for deserting their principles and supporting the civilians. It argued that the military must always be loyal to the regime advocating socialism. In June 1989, protests were held in Tiananmen Square, China. Students and members of the public gathered in the heart of Beijing to demand democracy. The Communist Party of China suppressed the protests by military force and several thousand people lost their lives. The revolutions in Eastern Europe

and the Tiananmen Square protests were undoubtedly shocking events for North Korea. In 1991, even the Soviet Union, which had supported the North Korean regime, collapsed. Kim Jong-il drew his lessons from these historical events. In other words, he realized that public dissatisfaction might increase if the system of unified control were to be maintained. If this dissatisfaction were to erupt in the form of protests, the military's response would be critical. If the military was loyal to the regime, it could maintain its grip—as seen in China; however, Kim Jong-il feared that his regime would be in danger if the military sided with the civilians. Therefore, through the means of *Songun* politics, the Kim Jong-il regime clarified its intent to prioritize the military, even if this meant sacrificing the livelihoods of North Korean civilians. Kim Il-sung invented the *Juche* idea to maintain and strengthen his own authority. Then, Kim Jong-il engineered the *Songun* idea to protect his own regime.

What kind of ideology will Kim Jong-un seek to invoke to preserve the current regime? Although this question was the center of attention at the time of the June 2016 amendments to the Constitution, the *Juche* and *Songun* ideas retained their positions as the “guiding principles” of the state as defined in Article 3. Kim Jong-un has also used and emphasized “Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism” several times. “Kimilsungism” was used temporarily in the 1970s. In February 1974, when Kim Jong-il was confirmed as heir apparent, they introduced the Kimilsungism ideology in his work titled “On Some Immediate Tasks to Be Tackled in the Party’s Ideological Work for Modelling the Whole Society on Kimilsungism.” Yet, soon thereafter, “modeling the whole society on Kimilsungism” had been replaced by “modeling the whole society on the *Juche* idea.” After Kim Jong-il’s death, Kim Jong-un proposed a new program for “modeling the whole society on Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism.”

To accomplish the task of “modeling the whole society on Kimilsungism,” Kim Jong-il had officially introduced the “Ten Principles for the Establishment of a Monolithic Ideological System,” which significantly influenced the lives of the North Korean people. This set of ten principles, which people had to memorize, established a standard to guide people’s behaviors, including, “We must give our

all in the struggle to unify the entire society with the revolutionary ideology of the Great Leader Kim Il-sung” (Article 1). In the Kim Jong-un era, the name was changed to “Ten Principles for the Establishment of a Monolithic Leadership System.”²⁵ Thus, the word “ideological” was replaced by the word “leadership.” This indicated that the virtue of absolute obedience to the “leadership” comprising the three generations of the Kim family—Kim Il-sung, Kim Jong-il, and Kim Jong-un—occupied a more prominent position than the Party “ideology.” The ten principles became important standards of conduct for all citizens and organizations in the country and ordinary North Koreans are now much more familiar with them than with the content of the Constitution.

The task of “modeling the whole society on Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism” was set out officially in the May 2016 revision to the WPK Charter. The regime seems to have moved away from the kind of ideology prescribed in the *Juche* era and has begun to establish an “ideology” based on the simple logic of obeying the supreme leader. The Preamble of the new WPK Charter opens with the statement, “The Workers’ Party of Korea is the great party of Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism.” The WPK’s ultimate goal is defined as “modeling the whole society on Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism and building a society in which the independence of the people is fully realized.”

It should also be noted that the WPK Charter is not generally published in full and only fragments of information are released. However, when the Charter was revised at the Seventh Congress of the WPK in May 2016, the entire document was leaked within one month of the revision. This is an example of how the state of information isolation is changing.

At the Third Congress of the WPK in September 2010, at which Kim Jong-un appeared in public as Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission, the WPK Charter was revised for the first time in 30 years. At the time, North Korea only released the Preamble to the Charter, and it showed the terms “*Songun* politics” and “*Songun* revolution” as being newly incorporated into the Charter whereas the term “communist ideology” had been deleted. It was inferred

that the Charter had been revised in preparation for the transition of power from Kim Jong-il to Kim Jong-un. This method of making necessary revisions to the Charter varied from the way in which the regime handled the succession of power by Kim Jong-il after the death of Kim Il-sung. This process-oriented style of legitimization is one of the characteristics of the regime in the Kim Jong-un era. Kim Jong-il became the general secretary of the WPK in 1997 after the mourning period. At the time, the selection method described in the WPK Charter was ignored. First, the position assumed by Kim Jong-il was problematic. Rather than assuming the post of “General Secretary of the Central Committee of the WPK” as described in the Charter, Kim Jong-il was proclaimed “General Secretary of the WPK” without conducting the required procedure of revising the Charter. Although the Japanese media referred to Kim Il-sung’s position in the party as “General Secretary of the WPK,” his official title was, in fact, “General Secretary of the Central Committee of the WPK.” Furthermore, the rule that “the General Secretary is selected by the Central Committee of the WPK” was ignored, and Kim Jong-il’s appointment as general secretary was legitimized through a series of recommendations by local party organizations.



*North Korean soldiers, officials and people participate in the Pyongyang People’s Rally to celebrate North Korea’s second nuclear test at the Pyongyang Gym May 26, 2009 in this picture released by North Korea’s official news agency KCNA early May 27, 2009
Source: Reuters*

At the Party Conference in September 2010, at which Kim Jong-un made his debut, the WPK Charter was finally revised when the decision was made to reappoint Kim Jong-il as general secretary. The new regulations proposed that the Party Congress—the highest organ of the Party— “recommend the General Secretary of the WPK” (Article 21). The authority of the Party Conference was also expanded to reflect current developments, giving it the power to “elect members of the highest party organs and revise and augment the WPK Charter” (Article 30). In the 1980 Charter, the Party Conference was only given the authority to conduct by-elections of WPK Central Committee members, whose numbers exceed 100. However, in the 2010 revision, its authority was strengthened to enable it to exercise the same authority over personnel matters as the Party Congress.

Since the changes at the end of the Kim Jong-il era, the leadership has sought to follow the necessary procedures appropriately. Although Kim Jong-il may have returned the regime to its ordinary process-oriented line after surviving the economic crisis, gripped with anxiety about his own health, he could also have emphasized formality to ensure the successor regime’s legitimacy. The evidence also suggests that the Kim Jong-un regime has followed suit in adopting this approach. The purge of former Vice Chairman of the National Defense Commission, Jang Sung-taek, in December 2013 was also announced as an official decision through meetings and a trial, although this was merely a formality.

It is also worth noting that the 2010 revision of the WPK Charter clarified the party’s hegemony over the military. Although the KPA has never been the military of the state but rather that of the WPK, the revised Charter mentions this fact numerous times. For example, this can be seen in regulations stating that the KPA is a “revolutionary military force led by comrade Kim Jong-un” and “the army of the leader, the Party, and the people” (Article 47 of the 2016 KPA Charter). The General Political Bureau, used to administer political education within the military, was defined as “an executive organ of the KPA Party Committee with the same authority as that of the WPK Central Committee” (Article 49). Moreover, the new Charter expanded the Central Military Commission’s authority and clarified that political

commissioners were to be established for KPA military units at all levels (Article 50). This can be interpreted as a reconfirmation that “*Songun* politics” would be pursued under the WPK’s direction.

At the Fourth Conference of the WPK, held in April 2012 after the death of Kim Jong-il, Kim Jong-il was declared “Eternal Secretary.” A simultaneous revision of the WPK Charter was announced, which was centered on creating the new post of “First Secretary” as the top post in the WPK. The revision of the Charter at the Seventh Congress in May 2016 gave Kim Jong-un the new title of “Chairman,” replacing the previous office of “First Secretary,” and clarified the goal of “modeling the whole society on Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism” as well as the “dual-track policy.” The revisions of the KPA Charter also marked the beginning of a new regime under Kim Jong-un.

Managing Senior Personnel

Under Kim Jong-un, an active movement of high-level personnel has been observed. The new regime appears to be organized quite differently from the model conceived by National Defense Commission Chairman Kim Jong-il. At the September 2010 Plenary Meeting of the WPK Central Committee, Kim Jong-un was appointed as vice chairman of the Central Military Commission.²⁶ He had also been made a *daejang* (four-star general) in the KPA the previous day when he was confirmed as heir apparent to Kim Jong-il. At the time, the regime emphasized the importance of continuing the military-first line. Kim Jong-un’s name was first heard in a North Korean public broadcast when he was appointed *daejang*, and the first party position he held was the vice chairman of the Central Military Commission. Both positions were military posts, a clear indication that the military would be emphasized in establishing the successor regime. The fundamental purpose of the *Songun* idea, of course, was to preserve the Kim regime. Developments such as the revisions to the KPA Charter suggest that the North Korean regime sought to revise the military-first line after having secured its safety by overcoming the economic crisis; however, to ensure a smooth transition of power to the successor regime, it also needed to retain its commitment to the

Songun ideal. Furthermore, the emphasis on the Kim family was clear, as exemplified by the appointment of Kim Jong-il's younger sister, Kim Kyong-hui, as the WPK's secretary for organization. Kim Kyong-hui was elected to the Politburo after being made a general in the KPA alongside Kim Jong-un. Kim Kyong-hui supported Kim Jong-un along with her husband Jang Sung-taek, vice chairman of the National Defense Commission, and she was thought to hold considerable influence within the regime. However, there have been no reports of her movements since the removal and execution of her husband.

The organization of personnel in the North Korean regime is characterized by its leaders declining to attribute significant power to any individual except Kim Jong-il and Kim Jong-un. The regime has refrained from naming a number two and instead encourages several influential individuals to exercise control over each other. This policy likely stemmed from the assumption that these individuals would have no choice but to shield Kim Jong-un if complications arose due to a lack of progress in the transition of power. For example, in June 2010, Jang Sung-taek was made vice chairman of the National Defense Commission. At the time, he was considered the *de facto* number two in the Kim Jong-il government; however, during the

This policy likely stemmed from the assumption that these individuals would have no choice but to shield Kim Jong-un if complications arose due to a lack of progress in the transition of power.

reshuffle of posts at the Third WPK Conference that September, he was not even appointed to the Politburo, let alone to its Presidium, the highest body of the WPK. Instead, he became an alternate member of the Politburo. After his promotion from general to vice marshal the previous day, Chief of the General Staff of the KPA, Ri Yong-ho, who had served as the vice chairman of the

Central Military Commission alongside Kim Jong-un, was elected as a member of the Presidium of the Politburo and sat between Kim Jong-il and his son during a commemorative photograph taken after the Committee meeting. Although he was observed to have strengthened

his presence as Kim Jong-un's loyal aide in the military, he was not assigned to the National Defense Commission. In terms of civilian positions, Kim Yong-nam currently occupies the post of president of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly of North Korea. He has served as North Korea's diplomatic leader, receiving foreign diplomats on state visits, has been called the "nominal head of state," and has effectively occupied the "number two" position. In the reshuffle of the Third Conference, he was appointed to the Central Presidium of the Politburo. Nevertheless, he was not assigned to the National Defense Commission or the Central Military Commission. As of September 2010, when Kim Jong-un was officially confirmed as heir, it was unclear who would be the most influential figure behind him and his father Kim Jong-il.

Top officials were repeatedly purged or removed from office subsequently, and a new lineup of replacements was announced at the Seventh WPK Congress and the Supreme People's Assembly in May and June 2016. At the time, the Politburo Presidium (the highest party organ) was comprised of five members, including Kim Jong-un. One member was Kim Yong-nam, the longstanding president of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly, and the other three were Hwang Pyong-so, director of the KPA General Political Bureau, Premier Pak Pong-ju, and KWP Secretary Choe Ryong-hae. All three of them also serve as vice chairmen of the State Affairs Commission. Choe Ryong-hae was also appointed as the vice chairman of the Central Committee of the WPK, which comprises nine members, and Hwang Pyong-so was a member of the Central Military Commission of the WPK, which has 11 members. While maintaining the policy of not establishing a number two, at least at the time of completing the writing of this book, Kim Jong-un appears to have placed great trust in these four members of the Politburo Presidium.

Managing the People

Songun is not the only reason the North Korean regime has been able to maintain its grip, overcoming the end of the Cold War and the deaths of Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il. The leadership has also

established a system of surveillance and control that encompasses every North Korean citizen. When we piece together the testimonies of several defectors regarding authorities' surveillance of citizens, we find that this system is based on a network of organizational membership. Except infants and toddlers, every North Korean citizen is a member of an organization and is controlled through that organization.

Members of the WPK belong to the Central Committee at the highest level, down through the hierarchy to the local party cells at the lowest level; workers belong to the General Federation of Trade Unions of Korea; farmers to the Union of Agricultural Workers of Korea; women to the Women's League; and youths to the Youth League. Children belong to the Children's Unit. All children join the Children's Unit in the second year of elementary school—during their compulsory education—and children who display greater loyalty are selected and enlisted a year earlier. At the age of 14, children leave the Children's Unit and join the Youth League, and again the more loyal children are enlisted a year earlier. Thus, competition over loyalty begins from an early age. Even if people are unemployed, they are required to join neighborhood units (*inminban*) in which affiliation is determined by place of residence. The units serve as a place for study and self-criticism and an instrument for controlling members' thoughts as well as terminal organizations for various mobilization activities.

These organizations play a crucial role in the surveillance system, which works by providing rewards for informants. This system has contributed to the preservation of the regime. Any behavior that opposes the regime will fail and the perpetrators will always be reported by someone else even if the action is well-planned. Therefore, even if people are dissatisfied, they have no choice but to control their feelings and survive by feigning compliance with the system.

These conditions make it extremely difficult to form the networks required to create shocks in the system through anti-establishment movements. Indeed, it is very unlikely that poverty and oppression alone would be enough to trigger an anti-establishment movement. Such movements are also related to the restrictions on methods of

communication and movement. In recent years, mobile phone use has rapidly increased; yet, the authorities can monitor all communication that occurs. This suggests that the government has approved the use of mobile phones, precisely because it is confident that they cannot be used to organize anti-establishment movements. Regulations on the movement of people between provinces and cities also exist. Although the restrictions on travel were relaxed during the economic crisis that caused the “North Korean famine,” traveling is still not completely unrestricted. The surveillance and control mechanisms still appear to function effectively as the Korean people are familiar with the informant system. Furthermore, the presence of the guilt-by-association system can be considered as a deterrent to disloyal behavior. If your crime is believed to be of a political nature, your parents or children, or even your more distant relatives, may also be punished. Therefore, understandably, very few people are prepared to sacrifice their parents and children to organize anti-establishment movements, which are believed to almost certainly fail.

The organizations responsible for managing crime and anti-establishment movements are the police and the secret police, respectively. In North Korea, the Ministry of People’s Security is responsible for policing ordinary crime while the Ministry of State Security operates the secret police, which deals with political crime. Reports suggest that each functionary in the Ministry of State Security controls 50 informants, who each monitor 20 citizens.

It is also notable that central government agencies such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Light Industry, and Ministry of Trade contain the word “ministry” in their names like in Japan. However, three agencies were using the term “department,” namely the People’s Security Department (police), State Security Department (special police), and the Military Affairs Department (Ministry of People’s Armed Forces), because under Kim Jong-il, these departments were under the National Defense Commission’s direct control as it is the highest organ of the state. This difference also highlights the emphasis on the military, police, and special police as tools for maintaining the political regime in the Kim Jong-il era. However, in 2016, it was confirmed that these three

departments had been effectively downgraded to ministries. This became apparent when the North Korean state media began referring to them as the “Ministry of People’s Security,” “Ministry of State Security,” and “Ministry of People’s Army.” These changes reflect the change of direction regarding *Songun*, which Kim Jong-il introduced as an emergency measure, and the Kim Jong-un regime’s attempt to return to a non-emergency state.

People convicted of criminal offenses are housed in facilities—correctional camps, labor-training camps, and concentration camps—operated by the Public Security Correctional Bureau. Political criminals are housed in *kwalliso* (internment camps) operated by “Bureau Seven” of the National Security Department. When criminals are imprisoned in the camps, especially for political crimes, the guilt-by-association system is applied and the entire family is imprisoned or sent to the coal mines. Details of crimes committed by family members are also included in the citizen registration records in which an individual’s *songbun* (socioeconomic class) is documented. Diplomatic telegrams sent from the German Democratic Republic Embassy in North Korea in the 1960s, which were released in the 1990s after the Cold War, include details of the guilt-by-association system.

Furthermore, in East Germany, an ally of North Korea, where secret police also monitored citizens and imprisoned political criminals, diplomats regarded the system of control in North Korean society as remarkably severe. Nevertheless, the North Korean government continues to deny the existence of the internment camps at every opportunity.

Kim Jung-un’s Foreign Policy through the Party’s Political Theory Journal

Analysis of *Kulloja*,²⁷ a monthly journal published by the Central Committee of the WPK, can provide considerable insight.²⁸ Since 1992, this publication has not been available outside of North Korea. But

most of the copies of *Kulloja* published from 1992 through 2016 have been available for research.

There are few articles on diplomacy in this magazine. North Korea prioritizes domestic politics above foreign diplomacy, but one of the most interesting articles on diplomacy was published in January 2014. The title of the article was, "Peerless Great Man Who Moves the Masses through Their Foreign Activities." The author of this article is the well-known diplomat Kang Sok-ju who served Kim Jong-il.²⁹ He wrote a paper on foreign diplomacy that revealed that he exerted a major influence on foreign policy in North Korea at the time it was published in January 2014. Traditionally, each year the January edition of the *Kulloja* begins with Kim Jong-il's "New Year Joint Editorial" and Kim Jong-un's "New Year Remarks." Any articles that appear after these are from high-ranking officials. At the time, no one other than Ri Su-yong³⁰ could possibly replace Kim Yong-nam³¹ or Kang Sok-ju.

In addition to the fact that the article was written by Kang Sok-ju, three points can be noted. First, he acknowledges that "Kim Jong-un has not had many opportunities to engage in international activities." Up to this point, Kim Jong-un has never gone overseas, and the only example that can be found of him engaging in diplomacy was with Dennis Rodman's visit to North Korea. Other diplomacy-related activities have been limited to meeting a Russian orchestra that was visiting the North Korea and toasting in the New Year with diplomats and military officers stationed in Pyongyang.

Second, Kim Jong-un's foreign activities are critiqued as "following tradition in terms of details but taking on a wholly new form." One can see his activities described using expressions such as "Kim Jong-un engages in a unique, unimaginable form of diplomacy that heavily influences diplomacy both in form and content. He conducts diplomacy by talking with people in a friendly manner."

Third, Kang Sok-ju asserts that "diplomacy separated from military power is powerless," and that "military power is most important." On this point, he has inherited Kim Jong-il's brand of "military-first" politics.

A particular article published in the December 2013 edition of *Kulloja* portrays Kim Jong-un's world view. The article was entitled "The 'Middle Eastern Storm' Pushed Upon Us by Imperialists is Primarily Targeting Youth." Just as the title implies, the article identifies the roots of the Middle East revolutions as a betrayal of the regime by youth.

Kim Il-sung planned for a "smooth resolution" to the problem of a successor, a lesson borrowed from criticisms of Stalin in the Soviet Union as well as the Lin Biao incident in China. Kim Jong-il created the concept of military-first, learning from the death of Romania's Ceaușescu in 1989 and China's Tiananmen Square incident. In contrast, having just scrapped the plans for nuclear development, Kim Jong-un appeared to take a cue from Libya's Gaddafi, with that country being driven to collapse by NATO armies. *Rodong Shinmun* actually devoted much print space to articles on Libya's situation. As will be explored in the next chapter, this article about the Middle East shows that the North Korean leaders over three generations have all extended the life of the regime by applying the lessons learned from other countries for maintaining regimes.

III

Five Lessons that North Korea Has Learned³²

The White House has launched its review of U.S. policy toward the DPRK, making it a good time to dispel with the notion that the regime is unknown and unknowable, unpredictable, and irrational, and to consider a number of international developments that dramatically shaped North Korea's national security policy and domestic political institutions. As isolationist as North Korea's leaders may be, they are nonetheless keen observers of developments around the globe. And while the regime is shaped in part by its own historical experiences and by the interpretation of Korea's own past, the character of the regime is also shaped by what three generations of supreme leaders have learned from the experiences of other states over the past seven decades. Based on an analysis of the declassified documents from the archives of North Korea's former communist allies and of North Korea's own media and publications, it is possible to understand how interpretations of these experiences shaped the current regime through five lessons.

Lesson No. 1: Beware of the pitfalls in disclosing too much information

In February 1956, Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev delivered a speech at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union denouncing the crimes and grotesque personality cult of the late dictator Joseph Stalin. The speech had far-reaching implications beyond the borders of the Soviet Union. As details of the so-called Secret Speech spread throughout the socialist camp, questions arose about the legitimacy of the Central and Eastern European regimes established under Stalin's tutelage and the policy of strictly adhering to

Soviet policies without consideration of local conditions. The negative response was sharpest in Poland and Hungary, where hundreds of thousands took to the streets in opposition to Soviet influence.

North Korean leader Kim Il Sung, himself a beneficiary of direct Soviet support after the country's liberation from Japan and also the subject of a state-sponsored personality cult which rivaled that of Joseph Stalin, observed the developments in Poland and Hungary with horror. According to Soviet sources, Kim blamed the instability on the leaders of the Polish United Workers' Party for their unwise decision to disclose the news of Khrushchev's criticism of the late Soviet dictator to lower-ranking Party members and, subsequently, to the masses. Determined to prevent a challenge to the socialist order in the DPRK, Kim concluded—incorrectly in the estimation of Soviet officials—that it would be necessary to keep news of the speech and of developments in other socialist countries from lower-ranking members of the ruling Korean Workers' Party and from the population of the DPRK.

Yet, a small group of senior officials in the Korean Workers' Party learned of the Secret Speech through their ties to the Soviet embassy in Pyongyang and criticized Kim's personality cult at a Party meeting in August 1956. The North Korean leader purged these officials, and he took steps to curtail political pluralism in the Party and to make the country impervious to foreign influences by minimizing the impact of the Soviet Union and China on the trajectory of political, cultural, and economic developments in the country. By the mid-1960s, Kim Il Sung had succeeded in eliminating political pluralism through the establishment of the Monolithic Ideological System, which made the word of the sovereign absolute.

Lesson No. 2: Choose a successor who will remain loyal

Kim Il Sung's decision to make North Korea the only communist country to adopt the feudal practice of hereditary leadership succession is tied to messy succession processes in the Soviet Union and China. As noted above, not long after Stalin died without anointing a successor, Nikita Khrushchev betrayed the late Soviet dictator's

legacy by denouncing him in his “Secret Speech” at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February 1956. Mao, by contrast, was betrayed by his appointed successor, Lin Biao, while still alive, when the latter tried to overthrow him in a failed coup. It is not difficult to imagine that Kim Il Sung—who believed himself a great revolutionary figure on par with Stalin and Mao—would seek to secure his legacy by selecting a trustworthy successor. North Korea’s own literature points to these episodes to justify the practice of hereditary leadership succession. In particular, the book *Theory of Successor*, published by Chosen-Soren, clearly shows that North Korea learned from the mistakes of the Soviet Union in leadership succession.

Despite having learned this lesson from other communist countries, Kim’s decision to appoint his son, Kim Jong Il, as successor was not welcomed by all in the socialist camp. When officially announced in 1980, the *People’s Daily*, an official newspaper of the Communist Party of China, admonished the North Koreans for adopting the feudal practice. By establishing the practice of hereditary leadership succession in North Korea, Kim Il Sung’s legacy remained intact. Indeed, the state-sponsored personality cult has developed a mythology surrounding the Kim family that extends back several generations to include his grandparents and parents with grandiose tales of staving off foreign invasion or leading resistance to Japanese authority. In doing so, the regime, now under the leadership of the third in the dynasty, Kim Jong Un, sought to reaffirm its legitimacy by demonstrating that the Kim family has fought for Korea for generations, and is, therefore, morally and politically justified to rule.

Lesson No. 3: Never entrust your national security to others

The Cuban Missile Crisis had tremendous implications for military doctrine and diplomacy for the parties immediately involved in the event that brought the world closer to the brink of nuclear conflict than any other. It also had a profound impact on North Korea’s national security policies.

Despite having signed a Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance with Moscow in June 1961, North Korea began to have doubts about Moscow's trustworthiness as security-providing ally following the Cuban Missile Crisis, which Kim Il Sung viewed as a capitulation to the United States. Kim believed that his suspicions about Moscow's credibility and commitment to Pyongyang's security were confirmed when the Soviets refused to supply the DPRK with 100 million rubles' worth of military equipment in December 1962. Therefore, from December 1962, North Korea developed autonomous defense capabilities by adopting the so-called equal emphasis policy (*Byungjin*) line, whereby heavy industry and national defense capabilities would be simultaneously developed at the expense of consumer goods and light industry. Starting in early 1963, North Korea also began to explore the possibility of developing an indigenous nuclear deterrent. By 1965, the percentage of North Korea's national budget allotted to national defense rose to nearly 30 percent, up from 4.3 percent in 1956.

North Korea continues to allocate a disproportionate percentage of the national budget to the military, and in 2013, the DPRK reintroduced the *Byungjin* line, now focusing on the simultaneous development of the nuclear program and light industry.

Lesson No. 4: Maintain the loyalty of the military

The tumultuous events surrounding the collapse of the socialist camp bore many lessons for Kim Il Sung and leader-in-waiting, Kim Jong Il. The advent of Kim Jong-Il's *Songun*, or military-first policy, can be traced back to two events in 1989. The first is the democracy movement in China, highlighted at Tiananmen Square, while the other is the execution of Romanian President Nicolai Ceaușescu and his wife. Needless to say, the Communist Party of China continues to retain control as a result of the suppression of the democracy movement by the Chinese People's Liberation Army. In contrast, President Ceaușescu and his wife were arrested and executed by the Romanian army. The North Korean media has repeatedly mentioned that socialist governments in Eastern Europe collapsed due to the



Rockets are carried by military vehicles during a military parade to celebrate the centenary of the birth of North Korea's founder Kim Il-sung in Pyongyang. Source: Reuters

betrayal of their armies. In other words, Kim Jong Il learned by contrasting the experiences of China and Romania that to preserve the regime, it was necessary to exert total control over the military. This led to the shift from a party-centered socialist system to a military-first one.

Following the death of Kim Il Sung in 1994, Kim Jong Il sought to overcome the serious economic and energy challenges caused by the collapse of socialist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as the devastating famine, to sustain the regime by manifesting the military-first policy. The concept of *Songun* is strictly “*Songun* directed by the Party.” Since the Seventh Congress of the WPK in May 2016, the word, which was the symbol of the Kim Jong Il government, has been used less and less. However, there is no change in the fact the supreme leader reigns over and frequently inspects the military. At this point, Kim Jong Un’s control over the military seems stable.

Lesson No. 5: Never give up your nukes

Kim Jong Il and his son and current North Korean leader, Kim Jong Un, took a cue from the experience of Libya’s Muammar Gaddafi, who voluntarily abandoned a nuclear weapons program in 2003 for

improved relations with the West, only to be toppled and executed by NATO-backed rebels. Based on the experience of the late Libyan strongman, the North Koreans determined that they would be toppled—if not immediately, then at some point in the future—if they abandoned their nuclear weapons program. According to a statement of a spokesperson of North Korea’s Foreign Ministry, NATO’s actions in Libya “fully exposed before the world that ‘Libya’s nuclear dismantlement’ much touted by the United States in the past turned out to be a mode of aggression whereby the latter coaxed the former with such sweet words as ‘guarantee of security’ and ‘improvement of relations’ to disarm itself and then swallowed it up by force.”

As noted above, at a 2013 meeting of the Central Committee of the Korean Worker’s Party, Kim Jong Un declared the development of nuclear weapons as a priority for the regime in re-adopting the *Byungjin* line. North Korea continues its stance on maintaining a nuclear arsenal as a deterrent and avows never to abandon its program.

It is critical to the success of future U.S. policy to better understand Pyongyang’s perceptions of its strategic environment—and how that can be impacted through the experiences of other states thousands of miles away. This requires knowledge of the complex political and historical constraints that shaped—and continue to shape—North Korean thinking on strategic priorities and nuclear weapons. American strategic thinking on North Korea has long been muddled by unproductively vague myths of irrationality, unpredictability, and aggression. These unhelpful stereotypes shape much of the conventional wisdom and writing about North Korea and inhibit more sober analysis. This limits our ability to deal with North Korea effectively and respond to the DPRK’s threats.

Through the application of a historical sensibility, it is possible to better understand the regime and to more accurately interpret contemporary actions. In each of the above five lessons, North Korea drew parallels and modified policies based on the experiences and fates of other—primarily authoritarian—regimes. All of the policies developed in response to these incidents continue to shape the regime.

IV Applying the Personal Rule Model³³

Various original models of the North Korean political system have been proposed.³⁴ However, it also seems necessary to employ ideal types that are more general and recognized in comparative political science. Many discussions to date have defined North Korea as a totalitarian regime.³⁵ Yasuhiro Takeda classifies North Korea as a totalitarian regime while organizing the types of governmental systems seen in various East Asian countries.³⁶ For example, Takeda states that North Korea is exploring the possibility of a “one-party system”; in which the Korean Social Democratic Party and the Chondoist Chongu Party still exist, indicating the system of monolithic rule where the WPK holds the ultimate power.³⁷ In addition, he argues that while the *Juche* ideology poses as the dominant ideology, the mentality of the ruler exerts a powerful influence.³⁸ If there are only totalitarian and authoritarian systems as subtypes of non-democratic political systems, I have no objection to the interpretation that North Korea falls under the category of a totalitarian regime. Nonetheless, it would also be meaningful to consider introducing other concepts to achieve a more detailed interpretation of the Kim Jong-il regime, which has not seen as many political changes as other countries’ regimes and is considered to be static.

Ayako Masuhara states that “personal rule” can also be referred to as “sultanistic regime,” “personal dictatorship,” or “neopatrimonial dictatorship.” Furthermore, Masuhara identifies two common characteristics of personal rule regimes: (1) state power and political decision-making authority are concentrated in the ruler, and (2) the ruler monopolizes and misappropriates state power and wealth for personal ends and uses these to rule based on patron-client

relationships.³⁹ Although other scholars have addressed the concept of personal rule, I focus on Masuhara's discussion and on the categorization of personal rule into subtypes.⁴⁰ As mentioned above, the North Korean regime is static in comparison with other regimes and has yet to experience political change, let alone regime transition. Therefore, within the concept of "sultanistic" rule that was generated through a comparison with other totalitarian regimes, the North Korean case provides a useful framework for more detailed analyses that can measure subtle changes over time.⁴¹

Based on previous studies, Masuhara defines personal rule as an undemocratic political system with the following three characteristics:

First, "state authority and governmental decision-making powers are concentrated in the ruler rather than the internal group of an organization or institution such as a military or a political party."⁴² In the North Korean case, in the early years of the Kim Il-sung administration, factions such as the Partisan faction, *Namnodang*, *Yan'an*, and the Soviet faction existed. However, during the Korean War, Kim Il-sung began to purge his political opponents. The Korean War, which was framed as a "United States imperialist invasion of North Korea,"

State authority and governmental decision-making powers are concentrated in the ruler rather than the internal group of an organization or institution such as a military or a political party.

contributed to the formation of an awareness as a "community bound together by a common destiny."⁴³ Subsequently, North Korea followed the path of personal rule rather than collective leadership. In the 1970s, when it was decided unofficially that Kim Jong-il would succeed his father, the idea of authority being concentrated in the ruler became more prominent.

Several testimonies concerning Kim Jong-il have been provided by his relatives and close allies; all of these support the tone of the official North Korean press, which indicates that state authority and political decision-making power are concentrated in the hands of the ruler. This concentration of decision-making authority in the ruler has made

sudden and bold policy changes possible. Good examples include the recognition of and apology for abductions of Japanese people by Kim Jong-il himself at the Japan–North Korea summit meeting in 2002, despite previous claims that the abduction issue had been fabricated by the Japanese government, as well as the establishment of the Kaesong Industrial Region, with which large-scale investment by South Korea was accepted.⁴⁴

Second, in personal rule, “the ruler executes patrimonial control over the state.” The characteristic that the ruler monopolizes and misappropriates state power and wealth for personal ends and uses them to rule based on patron-client relationships is somewhat more difficult to verify than the first characteristic. Since, for example, all “improvements in the lives of the people” are considered to stem from the generosity of the ruler, it is reasonable to assume that the “rule is based on a patron-client relationship.”⁴⁵ However, although the official North Korean media reports that the ruler bestows numerous gifts on the people, it hardly publicizes any economic statistics and seeks to conceal the negative aspects of “monopolizing and misappropriating state power and wealth for personal ends.” To make up for this lack of information, particularly in South Korea, evidence provided by defectors has been used and defectors themselves have conducted research on North Korea. However, propaganda within North Korea portrays Kim Jong-il as a frugal man who only wears jackets and Kim Jong-un as having a humble nature,⁴⁶ and there are many cases where the information provided by defectors largely contradicts the official North Korean media.

The third characteristic is that “succession of power is not institutionalized.” In this context, “institutionalized” means that there are “certain rules in place regarding succession of supreme power, such as hierarchy and consultation among the top executives.”⁴⁷ Therefore, this third characteristic would seem to fit perfectly with the transfer of power from Kim Il-sung to Kim Jong-il and from Kim Jong-il to Kim Jong-un.⁴⁸ After Kim Il-sung’s successor was unofficially decided in 1974, there was a preparation period of six years; subsequently, in 1980, Kim Il-sung formally designated Kim Jong-il at the Sixth Congress of the WPK. With this, the deification of

the Kim family was accelerated, and a narrative extolling Kim Jong-il's character was created. The idea that "succession of power is not institutionalized" was also clearly present in the formalization of Kim Jong-un. During the first succession, propaganda centered on the idea that Kim Jong-il was qualified to succeed his father; during the formalization of Kim Jong-un, the importance of "revolution bloodline" and "family from Mangyongdae" (the birthplace of Kim Il-sung) was repeatedly emphasized.⁴⁹ At the time of Kim Jong-il's death, Kim Jong-un was not even a member of the Supreme People's Assembly, let alone a full member of the Politburo; his only officially announced key post was that of the vice chairman of the Central Military Commission of the WPK (CMC). Moreover, while Kim Jong-il was still alive, there were no clear reports that Kim Jong-un would be his successor.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, Kim Jong-un was appointed as the supreme commander of the Korean People's Army on the basis of Kim Jong-il's "dying instructions."⁵¹ Those "dying instructions" were not publicized in their entirety nor were they institutionalized.

Having confirmed that the Kim Jong-il regime corresponds to Masuhara's definition of personal rule, the four subtypes Masuhara proposes can be assessed. Masuhara identifies the two methods of rule employed by rulers in personalistic regimes, namely revenge against opponents, or "surveillance and violence," and rewards for supporters, or "patronage distribution." Four subtypes are then identified on the basis of a combination of these two methods of rule.⁵² It is well known that in North Korea, the degree of revenge against political opponents, or the "level of surveillance and violence by the state"⁵³ is extremely high.⁵⁴ During the Kim Il-sung administration, there was a succession of purges. Immediately after the Korean War, Pak Hon-yong—number two at the time—was branded a "spy of US imperialism" and sentenced to death. In December 2013, Kim Jong-un's uncle, Jang Sung-taek was executed for apparently "plotting to overthrow the government." Furthermore, the Kim regime not only has taken revenge on people belonging to its inner circles, but also has established a widespread and thorough system of surveillance to ensure the obedience of its citizens. In addition to the secret police, North Korea operates informant reward

and guilt-by-association systems covering the length and breadth of the country.

North Korea can be seen to employ an extremely wide “range of patronage distribution.” A striking example of political patronage, though perfunctory, is the regular meetings of the Supreme People’s Assembly and the election of its members. Representatives to city, county, and provincial

people’s assemblies also change continuously through local elections. In addition, under the “military-first politics” of the Kim Jong-il regime, there was an active movement of personnel, as seen in the numerous mass promotions of military officers.⁵⁵ A clear example of economic patronage is the maintenance of the rationing

system. Although the nationwide rationing system was on the brink of collapse due to the economic difficulties of the 1990s, known as the “North Korean famine,” the economy gradually recovered and rationing was again employed inclusively in the early years of the Kim Jong-un administration in the 2000s.⁵⁶

Accordingly, within Masuhara’s four-type model, North Korea has a “dividing type” of political system with a relatively high level of “surveillance and violence” and an inclusive range of “patronage distribution.” Accordingly, the North Korean regimes fall into the same category as that of F. Duvalier of Haiti, H. Asad of Syria, and Hussein of Iraq. The first Duvalier and Asad regimes ended with the natural death of the ruler, followed by hereditary succession; this was also true of the Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il regimes. Yet, the North Korean system has not been a “dividing type” for the entire period between the founding of the country and the present, and slight changes can also be observed over time. With the exception of the period from the mid- to late 1990s, when the country experienced severe famine and its credit-based social system ceased to function, the “level of surveillance and violence by the state” did not change

A striking example of political patronage, though perfunctory, is the regular meetings of the Supreme People’s Assembly and the election of its members.

significantly.⁵⁷ However, the “range of patronage distribution” became more exclusive, and the country began to display characteristics of the “terrorizing type” of regime. With regard to the economy, under the Kim Jong-il regime, the rationing system contracted, and gaps between the central and local regions widened. In addition, Kim Jong-un clarified his intention to prioritize Pyongyang.⁵⁸ However, further verification of these points is necessary.



Satellite view of Korean peninsula at night. The only dot of light in North Korea is the capital, Pyongyang. Source: NASA

V

Domestic and International Factors in the Persistence of the Regime⁵⁹

For many years, the North Korean political system has remained in place with the passing of power through three generations of the Kim family. Domestic as well as international factors have allowed this state of affairs to persist while focusing on aspects specific to the North Korean case.

Domestic Factors

The fact that North Korea has avoided revolution indicates a lack of direct factors influential enough to lead to public discontent, typically brought about by economic difficulties and fear-based politics that would destabilize the regime. One reason for this is the system of education and indoctrination in place in North Korea, which boasts a literacy rate close to 100 percent. In 2012, a bill proposed by Kim Jong-un was passed to expand compulsory education from 11 years to 12 years. In North Korea, compulsory schooling is administered under a thoroughgoing system of ideological education from the final year of kindergarten. Adult education is also provided at workplaces and in neighborhood units (*inminban*). The curricular content is based on the “Ten Principles for the Establishment of a Monolithic Ideological System” and has a strong character of a personality cult. The regime has been more than willing to falsify history in its effort to deify the Kim family. Though it is unclear whether North Korea’s citizens now actively support the regime as a result of the long-term efforts to educate and indoctrinate them, it is reasonable to assume that passive support has been obtained on the basis of the imagined reality that there is no alternative to the current system.

If education is seen as a normative instrument of rule, then the “gifts” bestowed on the people by the ruler and the extensive rationing system covering everything from food and daily necessities to housing are material instruments. Furthermore, despite being forced to make drastic cutbacks to the rationing system as the economy stagnated at the end of the Cold War, the government maintained the coercive instruments—the system of violence—that was in use at the time. Although secret police are also employed in other totalitarian regimes, the North Korean case is characterized by its guilt-by-association and informant reward mechanisms backed by the *songbun* registration system, which divides citizens into three classes. In addition, freedom of movement and communication is severely restricted. For example, licenses are required even when travelling by train outside the home province, which also functions as an administrative district.⁶⁰ Through these means, the regime makes it impossible for the population to turn its discontent into organized action.

The greatest danger to the Kim Jong-il regime—more dangerous than the North Korean famine—came in August 2008, when Kim Jong-il fell ill. At that time, the people of North Korea had not even been informed that Kim Jong-il had a son. However, beginning around the end of 2008, the official North Korean media began to indicate that a successor has been unofficially decided.⁶¹ Learning from the failures and succession problems experienced by his two allies, specifically the 1956 denunciation of Joseph Stalin in the Soviet Union and the 1971 Lin Biao incident in China, Kim Il-sung appointed his most trusted son, Kim Jong-il, as his successor while he was still alive. Subsequently, the deification of Kim Il-sung’s family progressed further, and the “revolution bloodline” became a key component of Kim Jong-il’s legitimacy. Accordingly, when Kim Jong-il was required to name his successor, his only alternative was to select a biological child who could carry forward the “revolution bloodline.”

Kim Jong-il took three main steps in laying the groundwork for succession. First, he named his successor. Despite being called inexperienced and too young both inside and outside North Korea, Kim Jong-il appointed Kim Jong-un as his official successor at the

Third Conference of the WPK in September 2010.⁶² While longevity was also a factor in the persistence of the regime in the case of Kim Il-sung, who lived till the age of 82, Kim Jong-il attempted to prolong the regime by promptly formalizing the appointment of his son as soon as his health condition had worsened. If Kim Jong-il had not named his successor while in good health, it may have been difficult for that successor to assume the post of a supreme commander after his death on the strength of his “dying instructions.” Second, Kim Jong-il appointed guardians to protect his successor. From the end of 2008, movement within the upper ranks of the North Korean regime intensified. In addition to a center-stage appearance by Kim Jong-il’s sister, Kim Kyong-hui, for the first time in 14 years, Ri Yong-ho, the chief of the General Staff of the Korean People’s Army, made a striking appearance at the Third Conference of the WPK to take office as a member of the central presidium of the WPK. Third, Kim Jong-il redefined the North Korean political system. In April 2009, the constitution was amended for the first time in 11 years, and the party rules were revised for the first time in 30 years at the Third Conference of the WPK. These changes reaffirmed the dominance of the party over the state in that “the DPRK shall conduct all activities under the leadership of the Worker’s Party of Korea” (Article 11 of the Constitution), in addition to the system in which the ruler (“*suryong*” or “supreme leader”) presides over the party.

These steps were possible precisely because Kim Jong-il had already established a system of personal rule; however, it can also be argued that this second succession posed less of a challenge than the first, in which power was passed down from Kim Il-sung to Kim Jong-il in history’s first hereditary succession of a “socialist” regime. Until the official appointment of Kim Jong-il at the Sixth Congress of the WPK in 1980 in North Korea, the regime intensified its propaganda activities and gained the support of experienced officials. However, overseas, North Korea’s ally China severely criticized hereditary succession in “socialist” states in an article in *People’s Daily*, the official newspaper of the Chinese Communist Party. Nevertheless, the second succession was regarded as the established procedure both inside and outside the country.

North Korea has avoided not only a revolution, but also a military coup. There are several theories about why there have been no military coups in North Korea.⁶³ This is mainly attributed to the strength of the party organization within the army and the dual command structure of the military.⁶⁴ Moreover, Kim Jong-il adopted the “military-first” policy (*Songun*) as the direct result of the Eastern European revolutions and Tiananmen Square protests of 1989.⁶⁵ The presidency and Central People’s Committee that had supported the Kim Il-sung regime were abolished; key officials from the army, secret police, and police were appointed en masse to the National Defense Commission, which became the backbone of the state. Army officials continued to support the system under the logic of vested interests; in 2009, Kim Jong-il’s “military-first” policy was entered into the Constitution as a “guiding principle” of the State alongside *Juche*.⁶⁶

While Kim Il-sung dismissed the influence of China and the Soviet Union as “flunkeyism” (*sadaejuu*) in favor of the *Juche* philosophy, Kim Jong-il, who ruled after the Cold War, developed the “military-first” policy in a way that built upon this influence. Moreover, in the military, a thorough system of vertically segmented administration similar to those used in other departments was constructed. In addition to adopting an extremely well-balanced personnel policy, in the later years of the Kim Jong-il regime, transfers of high-ranking officials were frequent.⁶⁷ Furthermore, the “party-led military-first policy” was strengthened to an even greater degree. At the Third Conference of the WPK, the CMC was reorganized, and Kim Jong-un was appointed to the new position of vice chairman along with Chief of the General Staff of the Korean People’s Army, Ri Yong-ho. After Kim Jong-il’s death in December 2011, Choe Ryong-hae, who had no military experience, suddenly donned a military uniform and stepped into the post of the director of the General Political Bureau of the military at the Fourth Conference of the WPK held in April 2012. Two years later in May 2014, it was the turn of Hwang Pyong-so, who held the position of deputy head of the organization as well as the Guidance Department, to appear in a military uniform and assume the same post.⁶⁸

To confirm, there have been no sudden major events, such as coups d'états or natural disasters, significant enough to bring about a regime change in North Korea. More than 30 years have passed since Kim Jong-il took over. During this period, Kim Il-sung's younger brother, Kim Yong-ju, has not appeared in public for 18 years and Kim Jong-il's younger half-brother, Kim Pyong-il, has served as an ambassador to various European countries, such as Hungary, Bulgaria, Finland, Poland, and the Czech Republic.

Finally, in North Korea, Confucian traditions remain strong. The country has never experienced democracy, moving forward unchanged from the time of the Joseon Dynasty to the Korean Empire, the Japanese occupation, and the period of Soviet influence before arriving at the current system. Although it is not possible to verify this with certainty, it is likely that this historical background has also contributed to the entrenchment of personal rule.

International Factors⁶⁹

In addition to regime changes caused by domestic factors, such as revolutions and military coups, there are cases where regimes have perished due to external attacks. The following paragraphs discuss the international factors that have facilitated the persistence of the North Korean regime.

First, since North Korea is one-half of a divided nation, the relationship with its counterpart, South Korea, tends to play a determinative role in the various scenarios it faces. Unlike East and West Germany, North and South Korea have been at direct war with each other; as a result, the level of mutual distrust and caution is extremely high, making North Korea a breeding ground for anti-American nationalism and anti-South Korean sentiment. North Korea calls the Korean War the "Great Fatherland Liberation War" and claims that it was caused by United States and South Korea. Moreover, for many years, the war has been used to cultivate awareness as a "community bound together by a common destiny" as well as a sense of crisis.

Across the border, various censuses have revealed that many South Koreans do not wish for immediate reunification.⁷⁰ This is because people feel that given the current state of the North Korean economy, reunification by absorption would result in enormous reunification costs. In terms of disparities, the economy in the South is said to be approximately 40 times larger than that in the North. In addition, the inability of defectors granted asylum in South Korea to adapt to life there has become a social problem. More than half a century has passed since the division of Korean peninsula, and the social customs of the North and South have also diverged considerably. Since reunification is considered to be problematic, the Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun governments expanded economic cooperation with North Korea through the Mount Kumgang Tourist Region and the Kaesong Industrial Region projects and the North Korea–South Korea railway link, and the Lee Myung-bak administration introduced the idea of a “reunification tax.”

Elsewhere, since 1961, China has maintained a military alliance with North Korea for over half a century and has continued its policy of economic cooperation. In 2013, despite North Korea’s underground nuclear test, the total trade turnover between China and North Korea reached the highest level ever at 6.5 billion dollars with China commanding an overwhelming share in North Korea’s foreign trade. However, although the scale of trade has continued to expand for over 10 years, to say that North Korea is fully reliant on the Chinese superpower would be an overstatement, since, for example, there have been no summit meetings with the “ally” for more than four years. In North Korea, there is a deep-seated distrust and apprehension toward China.⁷¹

On the other hand, China seems to be concerned that a destabilization of the North Korean regime would cause an influx of armed defectors across the border. Though China has not officially commented on the possibility of a regime change and the future that lies beyond it, it has voiced strong criticism of the defectors, refusing to grant them refugee status and instead calling them “illegal immigrants.” Moreover, from the perspective of China, North Korea effectively serves as a buffer zone between itself and South Korea where the U.S. Army is

stationed. In addition, given its ethnic minorities problem, China must exercise caution regarding the large Korean population close to the North Korean border; although there are currently no movements to incorporate these areas into the Korean Peninsula—with North Korea being helpless politically and economically—such a possibility could exist if reunification were somehow to be realized. Though these background explanations are debatable, China has consistently called for the “peace and safety of the Korean Peninsula” while shepherding North Korea in the direction of economic reform and opening-up.

Next, U.S. policy on North Korea, be it “intervention,” “containment,” or “strategic patience,” has never sought to force political transformation on the North Korean regime. To begin with, North Korea is merely a small country in the Far East without a rich endowment of natural resources worth going to war over and is, therefore, low on Washington’s list of priorities. Nuclear tests were carried out twice under Kim Jong-il in October 2006 and May 2009 and once under Kim Jong-un in February 2013. The 2012 amendment to the Constitution of North Korea proudly announced that the country was a “nuclear-armed state” in possession of a “nuclear deterrent.” The situation in North Korea is different from that in countries such as Iraq under Saddam Hussein, where weapons of mass destruction were not found, or Gadhafi’s Libya, which abandoned its nuclear weapons program. In March 2013, Kim Jong-un declared his intention to pursue “simultaneous economic construction and nuclear weapons development” and spoke for the first time about how North Korea had acquired its nuclear capability while vowing to “learn from the experiences of the countries in the Middle East.”⁷² The ruler himself recognized that the country’s nuclear capability was a factor in the persistence of the regime.⁷³

Finally, although North Korea has not established friendly relations with Japan or the United States, it engages in diplomacy with more than 160 countries worldwide. Some countries have also set up embassies in Pyongyang, including Germany, the United Kingdom, and Sweden.⁷⁴ Thus, North Korea’s efforts to engage in multilateral diplomacy as a way of avoiding “international isolation” can also be included in the list of international factors that have allowed the regime to persist.



위대한 김일성동지와 김정일동지는 영원히 우리와 함께 계



Afterword

Kim Jong-il sought to overcome the crisis facing the regime by introducing the *Songun* idea and organizing a crisis management system centered on the National Defense Commission and its Chairman. This book is part of a body of research findings that verify this theory.

Despite the lack of core evidence regarding the decision-making processes and other inner workings of the regime under Kim Jong-un, the Kim Il-sung, and Kim Jong-il eras can be examined through the materials obtained by the U.S. Army, documents from Russia and Eastern Europe, the theoretical magazine of the ruling party, and databases of key newspapers. Furthermore, information pertaining to these periods can be obtained through various laws and ordinances, the testimonies of defectors, and publications by the rulers themselves. With a more diverse range of materials available, there is now considerable basis to discuss North Korea's political system within the framework of comparative politics. Since the characteristics of the North Korean system cannot be identified solely by exclusively focusing on its distinctiveness, it is worthwhile to apply concepts used in research on other countries and regions to the North Korean case.

To examine the North Korean political system, *Rodong Sinmun*, the daily newspaper published by the WPK, can be a source of information, as well *Kulloja*, the monthly magazine published by the WPK, which is a more recent material. In actual practice, however, current findings suggest that the results are quite similar when analyzing both the *Kulloja* and *Rodong Sinmun*, and there are hardly any surprises in the findings. Nonetheless, this fact itself is

significant. If the overall messages are the same for both publications, it means that it is sufficient to analyze *Rodong Sinmun*—a public resource—without reading *Kulloja*—an internal document. Through the discussions presented in each chapter, the importance of analyzing public information when examining “black boxes” such as North Korea have been outlined.

When Ayako Masuhara’s model of personal rule was applied to the North Korean case, the Kim Il-sung regime was identified as a “dividing type,” in which the ruler expands his power base by distributing patronage widely while simultaneously relying on violence, thereby preventing the formation of extensive anti-government coalitions. On the other hand, under Kim Jong-il, the level of surveillance and violence was firmly maintained while the regime also began to display characteristics of the “terrorizing type” of regime. The categorization as sultanistic regime or “dividing type” is also useful in the case of the North Korean regime given that Kim Jong-il’s rule ended with the natural death of the ruler. This is because Masuhara’s “dividing type” of regime cites as its main examples F. Duvalier of Haiti and H. al-Assad of Syria—two regimes that also ended with the natural death of the ruler. Moreover, these various concepts can be used as effective indicators for dynamically exploring subtle changes in static systems such as that of North Korea.

The unique domestic factors that have allowed the North Korean regime to remain in place include an exhaustive system of lifelong education and indoctrination, extreme restrictions on communication and movement, and the guilt-by-association system. In addition, the longevity of Kim Il-sung, who dismissed the influence of China and the Soviet Union as “flunkeyism” and authored the *Juche* ideology, can be considered to have contributed to the entrenchment of the regime. After Kim Jong-il was unofficially appointed as his successor, there was a 20-year period of preparation for succession before Kim Il-sung’s death, during which any momentum to publically oppose the transfer of power to Kim Jong-il was completely extinguished. Because the Kim Il-sung regime chose to undertake the first hereditary succession

in the history of socialism, pursuing the deification of the ruling family as a means of legitimizing this transfer, Kim Jong-il had no alternative but to uphold this precedent. Thus, by hereditary succession through three generations, the Kim regime has managed to maintain its grip on the country without seeing any of its rulers being rejected.

In terms of international factors, North Korea's distinctive characteristic as half of a divided nation is reconfirmed. Given the state of the North Korean economy, reunification would be extremely costly to the South, making the idea of reunification by absorption into South Korea unrealistic. This also prevents the United States, South Korea's ally, from orchestrating the collapse of the North Korean regime. Finally, the presence of North Korea's "socialist" ally, China, is also identified as an international factor.

Endnotes

- 1 Akira Sato, “Imanaze ahurika no tōchisha wo kennkyū surunoka [Studies on Rulers in Sub-Saharan Africa: Background, Objective, and Perspective],” in Akira Sato (ed.), *Tōchisha to Kokka: Afurika no Kojin-shihai Saikō [Ruler and State: Personal Rule in Africa Reconsidered]*, Tokyo: Institute of Developing Economies, 2007, p. 12, 14. According to Sato, Kim Il-sung enjoyed an extraordinarily long reign comparable with that of Fidel Castro in Cuba.
- 2 The Kim Jong-il administration was officially inaugurated when he was appointed as the General Secretary of the Workers’ Party of Korea in October 1997 and re-elected as the Chairman of the National Defense Commission in September 1998. The Kim Jong-un administration was officially inaugurated when he was appointed as the First Chairman of the National Defense Commission in April 2012. However, since the North Korean media began referring to the new rulers as “supreme leader (최고령도자)” immediately after the deaths of their predecessors, I have marked the beginning of their assumption of the role as 1994 and 2011, respectively.
- 3 Motoi Tamaki and Toshio Watanabe, *Kitachōsen: Hōrakuka sabaibaruka [North Korea: Collapse or Survival?]*, Tokyo: Simul Press, 1993). The editors state the following in the epilogue: “Will internal breakdown come first, or will the regime destroy itself by accidentally firing on the outside? Or will it rely on prolonging its life by taking shelter behind the United States, China, Japan, or Korea? The Kim family’s power in North Korea is now balanced on a tightrope, a hairbreadth away from internal conflict.” Furthermore, Masao Okonogi identifies three possible scenarios, “each with different timeframes,” namely (1) war, (2) internal breakdown, and (3) peaceful unification (“Chōsenhantō—Mitsu no shinario e no taiō” [The Korean Peninsula: Responding to Three Scenarios], in Tomoyuki Kojima [ed.], *Higashi Ajia kiki no kōzu [Composition of Crisis in East Asia]*, Tokyo: Toyo Keizai, 1997). Although these analyses were developed in a logical manner and formed the mainstream of the discussion about the rule in North Korea, they do not address the issue of Kim Jong-il’s health problems or the possibility of a third succession and are, therefore, indicative of the difficulties inherent in scenario planning and future projections.
- 4 Tetsuo Murooka, “Nippon niokeru kitachōsen kenkyū—20 seiki saigo no 10 nenkan o chūshin ni” [North Korea Research in Japan: Focusing on the Last 10 Years of the 20th Century], *Gendaikankoku chosenkenkyū [The Journal of Con-*

temporary Korean Studies], vol. 1, pp. 23–32. For a review of trends in South Korean research on North Korea, see Tetsuo Murooka, “Kankoku no ‘hokkan kenkyū,’ nippon no ‘kitachōsen kenkyū’” [North Korea Research in South Korea, North Korea Research in Japan], *Toa [East Asia]*, vol.462 (December 2005), pp. 8–9. Murooka’s work was groundbreaking and allowed “newcomers” easy access to the relevant information.

- 5 Haruki Wada and Soji Takasaki, *Kitachōsenbon o dō yomu ka [How to Read Books on North Korea]*, Tokyo: Akashi Shoten, 2003.
- 6 In addition to the sources discussed in this article, Masao Okonogi, *Kitachōsen handobokku [The North Korea Handbook]*, Tokyo: Kodansha, 1997. Masayuki Suzuki, “Kitachōsen” [North Korea], *Ajiagaku no mikata [The Perspective of Asian Studies]*, Tokyo: AERA Mook, 1998. Haruki Wada, *Kitachōsen gendai-shi [Modern History of North Korea]*, Tokyo: Iwanami Shinsho, 2012. Shunji Hiraiwa, *Kitachōsen: Henbō o tsuzukeru dokusai kokka [North Korea: Ever Changing Dictatorship]*, Tokyo: Chuko Shinsho, 2013. Furthermore, the following titles serve as guides to North Korea research: Hiroshi Furuta and Kizo Ogura (eds.), *Kankoku-gaku no subete [Handbook for Korean Studies]*, Tokyo: Shinshokan, 2002; Kan Kimura, *Chōsen hantō o dō miru ka [How to View the Korean Peninsula]*, Tokyo: Shueisha Shinsho, 2004. The following Korean-language publication is also useful: Kyungnam University Graduate School of North Korean Studies (ed.), *Pukhanyongu pangboplon [Methodology of North Korean Studies]*, Seoul: Hanul, 2003.
- 7 Haruki Wada, “Kitachōsen kenkyū” [North Korea Research], in Haruki Wada and Koichi Ishizaka (eds.) *Gendai kankoku/chōsen [Modern North and South Korea]*, Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2002, p. 46.
- 8 《김일성선집》 [*Selected Works of Kim Il-sung*] (1954 edition), 4 volumes; 《김일성선집》 [*Selected Works of Kim Il-sung*] (1960 edition), 6 volumes; 《김일성저작선집》 [*Collection of Writings by Kim Il-sung*], 50 volumes; 《김일성저작집》 [*Selection of Writings by Kim Il Sung*], 10 volumes; 《김일성전집》 [*Complete Works of Kim Il-sung*], 100 volumes. 《김정일선집》 [*Selected Works of Kim Jong-il*], 15 volumes published from May 1992 to the time of writing; 《김정일선집 (증보판)》 [*Selected Works of Kim Jong-il (augmented edition)*], 25 volumes published from June 2009; 《김정일전집》 [*Complete Works of Kim Jong-il*], 15 volumes published from January 2012 to present.
- 9 Atsuhito Isozaki, “Kimu jonun seiken shoki niokeru chōsen rōdōtō chūō īnkai kikanshi” [Organs of the Workers’ Party of Korea Central Committee in the Early Stages of the Kim Jong-un Administration], *Kyoyo-Ronso*, vol.137 (2016).

- 10 Recently, in addition to diplomatic documents, party papers, and Stasi documents from East Germany, New China News Agency, People's Daily, Russian News Agency TASS, and The People's Korea have stationed special correspondents in Pyongyang, and there are now more foreign articles providing honest reports on the state of North Korea. Moreover, in Japan, bookstores specializing in North Korea-related titles have played a significant role. Specific examples include the Korea Specialty Bookstore, Rainbow Trading Co., which opened in May 1992 (in Asao-ku, Kawasaki, Kanagawa Prefecture under the name Togen Tsusho, then in Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo in December 1994, Kochi, Kochi Prefecture in August 2010, and in Sakawa, Takaoka District, Kochi Prefecture in July 2014), as well as the Korea Book Center, which opened in November 1995 (Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo, closed in June 2015). In addition, regarding Chinese documents related to North Korea, see Atsuhito Isozaki, "Chūgoku nioke-ru kitachōsen kanren shiryō" [North Korea-related materials in China], *The Journal of Contemporary Korean Studies*, vol.8 (2008), pp. 48–50. For "internal documents" see Atsuhito Isozaki, "Kitachōsen no 'tagen shugi'—Shikan to yokusei" ["Pluralism" in North Korea: Relaxation and Control], *Toa [East Asia]*, vol.476 (February 2007), pp. 28–38.
- 11 Regarding the limitations of fieldwork in North Korea, see Atsuhito Isozaki, "Kitachōsen kankō annai/ryokōki hensenshi" [History of North Korean Tourist Guides and Travel Diaries], in Kizo Ogura (ed.) *Shinbun/terebi ga tsutaenakatta kitachōsen—Shimin keizai to taishū bunka ga akiraka ni suru shinjitsu no sugata* [The North Korea Not Portrayed in the Newspapers or on Television: The True State Revealing the People's Economy and Popular Culture], Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 2012, pp. 223–257; Atsuhito Isozaki, "Kitachōsen no nipponjin kankō kyaku ūkeire" [North Korea's Acceptance of Japanese Tourists], *Kokusai Kanko Joho [International Tourism Information]*, April 2007, pp. 7–16; Atsuhito Isozaki, "Tayōka suru kitachōsen kankō to sono mondaiten" [The Diversification of North Korean Tourism and Its Problems], *Kokusai Kanko Joho [International Tourism Information]*, May 2007, pp. 14–22.
- 12 In 1989, the Information Center on North Korea was established by the National Unification Board (now the Ministry of Unification), and it gradually became easier to access materials on North Korea in South Korea. In 2003, the "Special Materials Access Permit" system was also abolished (*White Paper on Korean Unification 2005*, Seoul: Ministry of Unification, Unification Policy Office, 2005, pp. 243–247). Regarding North Korea research in South Korea up to the 1990s, see Hak-joon Kim, 《한국정치론사전》 [Dictionary of Korean Politics], Seoul: Han'gilsa, 1990. The Korean Association of North Korean Studies (ed.), 《분단반세기 북한연구사》 [History of North Korean Studies for the Divided Half Century], Seoul: Hanul, 1999. In December 1996, the Korean Association of North Korean Studies was established by Sung-yun Kang, a professor at Dongguk University. The Association currently has around 500 members and publishes the *North Korean Review Journal*. Moreover, it is now possible to use various databases of academic papers, including DBPia

(dbpia.co.kr), KISS (Korean studies Information Service System; kiss.ksstudy.com), and Kyobo Scholar (scholar.dkyobobook.co.kr). Furthermore, bookstores dealing in North Korean titles, such as Asia Journal (asiajournal.co.kr) and NSL Korea (nslkorea.co.kr), and the auction site NK Auction (nkauktion.com) have opened in South Korea. In addition, North Korean studies departments have been established at about 10 universities. However, due to continuous shortages in student numbers, these programs have often been discontinued at the undergraduate level or incorporated into other departments. One attempt to move South Korea toward the center of North Korean studies is the joint hosting of the International Conference on Korean Studies by the Ministry of Unification and the Korean Association of North Korean Studies from 2014.

- 13 Regarding the defector issue, see Atsuhito Isozaki, “Dappokusha mondai—‘Kakekomī’ no imi o chūshin ni” [The North Korean Defector Problem: Focusing on the Meaning of “Seeking Refuge”], in Masao Okonogi and Atsuhito Isozaki (eds.), *Kitachōsen to ningen no anzen hoshō* [North Korea and Human Security], Tokyo: Keio University Press, 2009, pp. 139–160. Atsuhito Isozaki, “Dappokusha mondai o meguru chūgoku/kitachōsen/kankoku kankei” [Relations among China, North Korea, and South Korea Concerning the North Korean Defector Problem], *Kiho Kokusai Josei*, vol. 75 (2005), pp. 85–96.
- 14 Publications written in Japanese are organized in Atsuhito Isozaki and Katsumi Sawada, *Kitachōsen nyūmon* [Introduction to North Korea], Tokyo: Toyo Keizai, 2010, pp. 328–329.
- 15 For example, 《조선민주주의인민공화국법전 (대중용)》 [DPRK Code: For Public Use], Pyongyang: DPRK Law Publishing Co., 2004; 《조선민주주의인민공화국법전》 [DPRK Code], Pyongyang: Law Publishing Co., 2012. The main newspaper database is the KPM North Korea Newspaper and Journal Database (dprkmedia.com). Moreover, the South Korean Ministry of Unification and Dongguk University are compiling their own databases.
- 16 Cited previously, Tetsuo Murooka, “Nippon niokeru kitachōsen kenkyū” [North Korea Research in Japan], p. 32. For prominent studies conducted by Japanese researchers, see Masayuki Suzuki, *Kitachōsen—shakai shugi to dentō no kyōmei* [North Korea: Concurrence of Socialism and Tradition], Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1992. In South Korea, this was published in 1994 as Masayuki Suzuki, 《김정일과 수령제 사회주의》 [Kim Jong Il and North Korean Socialism], Seoul: Joongang Ilbo. This book has been used as a textbook on North Korean studies for many years. For the augmented edition, see Masayuki Suzuki, *Kitachōsen shuryōsei no keisei to henyō—Kimu Iruson, Kimu Jon’iru kara Kimu Jon’un e* [Formation and Change in the North Korean Regime: From Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il to Kim Jong-un], Tokyo: Akashi Shoten, 2014.
- 17 Jong-suk Lee, 《새로 쓴 현대북한의 이해》 [A Newly Written Understanding of Modern North Korea], Seoul: Yeoksabipyeong, 2000, p. 114.

- 18 Atsuhito Isozaki, “Kitachōsen seiji taiseiron no kenkyū dōkō to ‘surutan shugi’” [Developments in Research on the North Korean Political Regime and “Sultanism”] *Kiho Kokusai Josei*, 76 (2006), pp. 107–119. In the paper, I argue that the Kim Jong-il regime is a “hybrid-type” totalitarian regime (while at the time I used the term “sultanistic regime”). Since there are aspects for which boundaries between the two are not always clear, I propose that it would be possible to understand whether changes in the various dimensions of the static regime could be observed by examining the North Korean regime from the four perspectives of pluralism, ideology, mobilization, and leadership when classifying these aspects rather than adopting a dualist approach.
- 19 Juan J. Linz & Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*, Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press. 1996, p. 70.
- 20 Voucher travel refers to a method of travel used in countries like the Soviet Union or Burma (currently Myanmar) where the traveler must reserve a round-trip flight ticket, main method of travel within the country, and lodging prior to applying for a travel visa.
- 21 Visit the Koryo Tours (<http://www.koryogroup.com/>) and Chugai Travel Co. (<http://www.chugai-trv.co.jp/>) website for more information on the cost of traveling to North Korea.
- 22 Sections 1 to 4 in this chapter is a substantial revision of a part of Chapter 6 of Atsuhito Isozaki and Katsumi Sawada, *Shimpan Kitachosen Numon [New Introduction to North Korean Studies]* (Tokyo: Toyo Keizai, 2010).
- 23 Article 11 of the Constitution (2016) was formulated in its current form in the 1992 amendment. However, the WPK’s supremacy in the state system had already been established in the 1972 Constitution, which stated that “The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea is guided in its activity by the *Juche* idea of the Workers’ Party of Korea, a creative application of Marxism–Leninism to the conditions of our country” (Article 4).
- 24 Neither at the 7th Congress of the WPK in May 2016 nor at the New Year’s Day speech in January, 2017 did Kim Jong-un mention the “강성국가/강성대국 [strong and prosperous state]” policy, which instead became a legacy of the Kim Jong-il period.
- 25 The Ten Principles for the Establishment of a Monolithic Ideological System that guide the lives of the people of Korea according to the Constitution of North Korea and the rules of the WPK are as follows (《당의 유일적령도체계 확립의 10대 원칙》 [*Ten Principles for the Establishment of a Monolithic Ideological System*], Pyongyang: WPK Publishing, 2013):
1. We must give our all in the struggle to model the whole society on Kimilsungism–Kimjongilism.

2. We must honor the Great Leader comrade Kim Il Sung and comrade Kim Jong-il with all our loyalty as the eternal leaders of the Party and people and as the sun of *Juche*.
3. We must make absolute the authority of the Great Leader comrade Kim Il-sung and comrade Kim Jong-il and the authority of the Party and defend it to death.
4. We must arm ourselves firmly with the revolutionary ideas of the Great Leader comrade Kim Il-sung and comrade Kim Jong-il and with the party lines and policies, which are the incarnations of these ideas.
5. We must adhere strictly to the principle of unconditional obedience in carrying out the teachings of the Great Leader comrade Kim Il-sung and comrade Kim Jong-il and accomplishing the Party lines and policies.
6. We must strengthen from all sides the entire party's ideology and will-power and revolutionary unity, centering on the Leader.
7. We must follow the example of Great Leader comrade Kim Il-sung and comrade Kim Jong-il and adopt a dignified spiritual and moral look, revolutionary work methods, and people-oriented work style.
8. We must hold dearly the political life we were given by the Party and the Leader and loyally repay the Party's political trust and thoughtfulness with heightened political awareness and work results.
9. We must establish strong organizational regulations so that the entire Party, nation, and military move as one under the sole leadership of the Party.
10. We must pass down the great achievements of the *Juche* revolution and *Songun* revolution pioneered by Great Leader comrade Kim Il-sung and led by comrades Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il, inheriting and completing it to the end.

"Sole leadership" refers to a system wherein the entire Party, military, and populace regard the leaders (Kim Il-sung, Kim Jong-il, and Kim Jong-un) as absolute authorities and follow their orders and instructions. Moreover, the expression "pass down" (Article 10) also serves to legitimize the act of hereditary succession.

- 26 Although this Committee confirmed the appointment of Kim Jong-il as Chairman in February 2009, it was also considered to have been inactive after that.
- 27 *Kulloja* was founded on October 25, 1946. As the Party's political theory journal, it received large and direct attention from Kim Il-sung, Kim Jung-il, and Kim Jung-un. Ju Chang-Il, "Kulloja, the Party's Political Theory Journal, is a Powerful Weapon to Promote Kim Jung-il's Theories." *Kulloja* vol.10, no. 894: pp. 10-12.

- 28 Some parts of the research findings have been published already. Atsuhito Isozaki “Kimu Jon’un Seiken syoki-ni okeru chosenrodoto chuoiinkai kikanishi [Organs of the Worker’s Party of Korea Central Committee in the Early Stages of the Kim Jong-un Administration],” *Kyoyo-Ronso*, vol.137, February 2016, pp.235-271.
- 29 Kang Sok-ju is thought to have left the front lines of foreign diplomacy after rising as far as deputy prime minister under Kim Jong-il and then Kim Jong-un before he died on May 20, 2016.
- 30 Ri Su-yong is the Vice Chairman of the Central Committee of the Worker’s Party of Korea since 2016. Previously, he served as the Minister of Foreign Affairs of North Korea from April 2014 until May 2016. He has served as a diplomat to Switzerland, and has represented North Korea at the United Nations mission in Geneva as the name of Ri Chol.
- 31 Kim Yong-nam is the President of the Presidium of the Supreme People’s Assembly of the DPRK since 1998. Previously, he served as Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1983 to 1998.
- 32 This chapter is a revision of the article “Want To Be a Successful Dictator? Copy North Korea” by Atsuhito Isozaki and James Person. Originally published by The National Interest on March 9, 2017.
- 33 This chapter is a substantial revision of a part of Atsuhito Isozaki, “Kitachōsen niokeru kojinsugitaisei’ [Personal Rule in North Korea], *Journal of Law, Politics, and Sociology*, 89/ 3, pp. 161-184.
- 34 Cited previously, Atsuhito Isozaki, “Kitachōsen seiji taiseiron no kenkyū dōkō to ‘surutan shugi’” [Developments in Research on the North Korean Political Regime and “Sultanism”].
- 35 For example, Dal-Joong Chang, “Kimu joniru taisei to shutai bijon—Ideorogī, tō, soshite gunshū o chūshin ni” [The Kim Jong-il Regime and the *Juche* Vision: Ideology, the Party, and the People], in Hajime Izumi and Dal-Joong Chang (eds.), *Kimu joniru taisei no kitachōsen [North Korea under Kim Jong-il]*, Tokyo: Keio University Press, 2004; Kenji Onuma, Kitachōsen zentai shugi shihai taisei [The North Korean Totalitarian Regime], *The Newsletter of the CLPS, Senshu University*, 27 (2003), pp. 38–78; Takeshi Nakai, Kitachōsen wa zentai shugi kokka ka? [Is North Korea a Totalitarian State?], *The Newsletter of the CLPS, Senshu University*, 27 (2003), pp. 18–37. Nakai, who had conducted research on Germany, identifies as many as 13 unique indicators for totalitarian theory and states that each of these apply to the North Korean regime. However, he does not comment on the concept of sultanistic rule. Ikuo Iwasaki also interprets North Korea as a totalitarian regime (Ikuo Iwasaki, *Ajia seiji to wa nani ka—Kaihatsu/minshuka/minshushugi saikō [What Is Asian Politics?]*, Tokyo: Chuokoron-sha, 2009, p. 240).

- 36 Yasuhiro Takeda, *Minshuka no hikaku-seiji—Higashiajia shokoku no taisei hendō katei [Comparative Politics of Democratization: The Process of Regime Change in East Asian Nations]*, Tokyo: Minerva Shobo, 2001, pp. 11–40.
- 37 *Ibid.*, pp. 20–21, 105.
- 38 *Ibid.*, pp. 22.
- 39 Ayako Masuhara, *Suharto taisei no indonesia—kojin shihai no henyō to ichi kyū hachi nen seihen [The End of Personal Rule in Indonesia: Golkar and the Transformation of the Suharto Regime]*, Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 2010, p. 16.
- 40 Yasuhiro Takeda identifies two characteristics of personalistic regimes: (1) support of the regime is based on rewards for personal loyalty to the ruler and the fear of revenge for disobedience, and (2) the boundaries between the state and the regime are obscure, and public and private realms are fused together. On the other hand, he argues that this is different from a “sultanistic regime” in that the ruler’s discretion exists alongside legal systems and norms (cited previously, Yasuhiro Takeda, pp. 29–30).
- 41 For an example of a study that adopted Masuhara’s model to examine temporal changes in a single personalistic regime, see Yuki Tanaka, “Ribia niokeru keni shugi taisei sonzoku mekanizumu: Kazzāfi taisei (1969-2011) no kenkyū” [The Libyan Authoritarian Regime from 1969 to 2011: How Muammar al-Gaddafi Maintained One of the World’s Longest-lasting Regime in Power], *Bulletin of the Graduate School of Social and Cultural Studies*, Kyushu University, vol. 34 (2013), pp. 25–38.
- 42 Cited previously, Ayako Masuhara, pp. 22–23.
- 43 Atsuhito Isozaki, “‘Sokoku kaihō sensō’ no dōin taisei [Mobilization System in the “Great Fatherland Liberation War”], in Kanji Akagi (ed.), *Chōsen sensō—Kyūsen 50 shūnen no kenshō hantō no uchi to soto kara [Fifty Years on from the Korean War: Inside and Outside the Peninsula]*, Tokyo: Keio University Press, 2003, pp. 43–66.
- 44 Atsuhito Isozaki, “Kitachōsen no shiten kara mita 2007 nen nanboku shunō kaidan” [The 2007 Inter-Korean Summit from the Perspective of North Korea], *Kiyo Kokusai Josei*, vol. 78 (2008), pp. 115–128. Atsuhito Isozaki, “Kitachōsen kaijō kankō jigyō—Chūdan made no kiseki” [Tourism in Kaesong, North Korea: Up to Discontinuation], *Kiyo Kokusai Josei*, vol. 79 (2009), pp. 85–101.
- 45 Atsuhito Isozaki, “Kitachōsen jūmin no ishiki dōtai—Chūseishin no yukue” [The Changing State of Citizen Consciousness in North Korea: Whereabouts of Loyalty], in Masao Okonogi, *Kankoku niokeru shimin ishiki no dōtai [The Changing State of Citizen Consciousness in Korea]*, Tokyo: Keio University Press, 2005. In this article, I indicate that in addition to “normative instruments” such as

education and propaganda and the “coercive instrument” of violence, North Korea’s rulers have controlled citizens using “material instruments,” such as rationing systems and gifts.

- 46 For example, Bang Sung-hua, “Political Discussion—Always a Man of the People,” *Rodong Sinmun*, April 14, 2014. “Words spoken by the great leader comrade Kim Jong-il about the greatness of Kim Jong-un” (excerpt), *Kulloja*, May 2013 edition (total 853 edition). pp. 3–4.
- 47 Cited previously, Ayako Masuhara, p. 23.
- 48 Regarding Kim Jong-il’s successor problem, see Atsuhito Isozaki “Kimu jonun taisei no kōchiku katei—2008 nen~2012 nen [The Process of Constructing the Kim Jong-un Regime: 2008 to 2012], in Hiroko Imamura (ed.), *Higashiajia bundan kokka—chūtai/nanbokuchōsen no kyōsei wa kanō ka [The Divided States in East Asia: Is Coexistence of a Taiwan, China, and North and South Korea Possible?]*, Tokyo: Hara Shobo, 2013, pp. 131–178.
- 49 Atsuhito Isozaki, “Kitachōsen media ga anji suru kōkeisha no sonzai—2009 nen no ‘Kimu Jonon’” [The North Korean Media’s Implication of the Existence of a Successor: “Kim Jong-un” in 2009], *Kiyo Kokusai Josei*, 80 (2010), pp. 93–107.
- 50 Atsuhito Isozaki, “Kōshiki ka izen no Kimu Jonon—Kimu Joniru sō shoki no kōkeishada to kakujitsushi saretai haikai” [Kim Jong-un before Officialization: Why Kim Jong-un was Viewed as Successor of Kim Jong-il], *Journal of Law, Politics, and Sociology*, 83, pp. 317–349.
- 51 Cited previously, Atsuhito Isozaki, “Kimu jonun taisei no kōchiku katei” [The Process of Constructing the Kim Jong-un Regime], pp. 150–155.
- 52 Cited previously, Ayako Masuhara, pp. 24–40.
- 53 *Ibid.*, pp. 24–27.
- 54 Atsuhito Isozaki, “Tōsei shakai no kitachōsen—kanshi to dōin” [North Korea’s Controlled Society: Surveillance and Mobilization], in Masao Okonogi and Atsuhito Isozaki (eds.), *Kitachōsen to ningen no anzen hoshō [North Korea and Human Security]*, pp. 25–47.
- 55 Atsuhito Isozaki, “Kimu joniru taisei no shuppan—‘kunan no kōgun’ kara ‘kyoseitaikoku’ ron e” [Departure of the Kim Jong-il Regime: From the Arduous March to the Plans for a Strong and Prosperous Nation], in Masayuki Suzuki, Shunji Hiraiwa, and Hideya Kurata (eds.), *Chōsen hantō to kokusai seiji—Reisen no tenkai to henyō [The Korean Peninsula and International Politics: Developments and Changes of the Cold War]*, Tokyo: Keio University Press, 2005, pp. 171–194.

- 56 Prominent studies on the North Korean economy under Kim Jong-il include those by Teruo Komaki and the Economic Research Institute for Northeast Asia (eds.), *Keizai kara mita kitachōsen—Hokutō ajia keizai kyōryoku no shiten kara* [North Korea Viewed through its Economy: From the Perspective of Economic Cooperation in Northeast Asia], Tokyo: Akashi Shoten, 2010. Moon-soo Yang, *Kitachōsen keizairon—Keizai teimei no mekanizumu* [North Korea Economy: Mechanism of Economic Depression], Tokyo: Shinzansha, 2000. Hiroko Imamura, *Chūgoku kara mita kitachōsen keizai jijō* [North Korean Economic Conditions Viewed from China], Tokyo: Asahi Shimbunsha, 2000.
- 57 Regarding the dissolution of the credit system, see Masayuki Suzuki, “Kitachōsen no seiji taisei to reisen—Shuryōsei kokka niokeru chūsei no keisei to yōkai o chūshin ni” [North Korean Political System and the Cold War: The Formation and Dissolution of Loyalty under the Suryongjae System], *The Journal of National Defense*, 25(1) (1997), pp. 24–40.
- 58 Kim Jong-un, “About the Task to Bring about a Revolutionary Change in National Territory Management Proper for the Demand for the Construction of a Socialist Kangsong Taeguk: Kim Jong-un’s Remarks Made before a Group of Party Members, Economists, and Workers’ Association Activists,” *Rodong Sinmun*, May 9, 2012. For a review of these remarks, see Atsuhito Isozaki, “2012 nen no kimu jonun ‘rōsaku’ kenshō” [Examination of the 2012 “Works” of Kim Jong-un], *Kiyo Kokusai Josei*, vol. 83 (2013), pp. 15–16. For further details of the conversation, see Atsuhito Isozaki, “2013 nen no kimu jonun ‘rōsaku’ kenshō” [Examination of the 2013 “Works” of Kim Jong-un], *Kiyo Kokusai Josei*, vol. 84 (2014), pp. 13–31. Atsuhito Isozaki, “The Relationship between Japan and North Korea in the Early Stages of the Kim Jong-un Administration,” *Kyōyo-Ronso*, vol. 136 (2015), pp. 121–139.
- 59 This chapter is a substantial revision of a part of Atsuhito Isozaki, “Kitachōsen niokeru kojinsugitaisei” [Personal Rule in North Korea], *Journal of Law, Politics, and Sociology*, 89/3, pp. 161–184.
- 60 Previously cited, Atsuhito Isozaki, “Tōsei shakai no kitachōsen” [North Korea’s Controlled Society], pp. 30–32.
- 61 Previously cited, Atsuhito Isozaki, “Kitachōsen media ga anji suru kōkeisha no sonzai” [The North Korean Media’s Implication of the Existence of a Successor].
- 62 It is thought that Kim Jong-un was 27 years old when he was officially appointed as his father’s successor. It should also be noted that Kim Il-sung was 33 years old at the time of his triumphant return to the homeland and 36 when North Korea was formed in 1948; Kim Jong-il was 32 years old when he was unofficially appointed and 38 when he was officially named as successor.
- 63 Prominent examples include Satoru Miyamoto, *Kitachōsen de wa naze gunji kūdetā ga okinai no ka?*, Tokyo: Ushio Shobo Kojinsha, 2012; Dae-keun Lee,

Why Doesn't The Korean People's Army Make A Coup?, Seoul: Hanul Academy, 2009.

- 64 Previously cited, Satoru Miyamoto, pp. 253–259.
- 65 Atsuhito Isozaki, “Kimu joniru ‘sengun seiji’ no honshitsu” [The Real Nature of Kim Jong-il’s “Military-first” Politics], in Masao Okonogi (ed.), *Kiki no Chōsen hantō* [The Korean Peninsula in Crisis], Tokyo: Keio University Press, 2006, pp. 283–304.
- 66 Atsuhito Isozaki, “Kimu joniru to ideorogī—Kitachōsen ‘sengun shisō’ e no michi” [Kim Jong-il and Ideology: The Road to Military-first Philosophy], *Keiō no kyōyōgaku* [Liberal Arts of Keio], Tokyo: Keio University Press, 2009, pp. 59–92.
- 67 Atsuhito Isozaki, “Dai 3 kai chōsen rōdōtō daihyōshakai niokeru kimu jonun kōshiki ka to ‘sengun’ no keizoku ishi” [The Official Appointment of Kim Jong-un at the Third Conference of the WPK and the Intention to Continue Pursuing “Military-first” Policy], Masao Okonogi et al. (eds.), *Chōsen hantō no chitsujō saihen* [Changing Order on the Korean Peninsula], 2013, pp. 59–88. In the later years of the Kim Jong-il administration, the holders of the following three key military posts changed frequently (underlined parts indicate the time of Kim Jong-il’s death).

Director of the KPA General Political Bureau: O Jin-u (1967–); Jo Myong-rok (October 1995–); [vacant post] (November 2010–); Choe Ryong-hae (April 2012–); Hwang Pyong-so (May 2014–).

Chief of the General staff of the KPA: Choe Kwang (February 1988–); Kim Yong-chun (October 1995–); Kim Kyok-sik (April 2007–); Ri Yong-ho (February 2009–); Hyon Yong-chol (July 2012–); Kim Kyok-sik (May 2013–); Ri Yong-gil (August 2013–); Ri Myong-su (February 2016 [confirmed] –).

Minister of People’s Armed Forces (National Defense Commission): O Jin-u (May 1976–); Choe Kwang (October 1995–); Kim Il-chol (February 1997–); Kim Yong-chun (February 2009–); Kim Jong-gak (April 2012–); Kim Kyok-sik (April 2013–); Jang Jong-nam (May 2013–); Hyon Yong-chol (June 2014–); Pak Yong-sik (July 2015 [confirmed] –).

- 68 Linz and Stepan state that in a sultanistic regime not only are the private and the public fused, but also the civilian and the military. They argue that “theoretically, it is hard to classify sultanism as either a military- or civilian-led regime” (previously cited, J. Linz and A. Stepan, p. 152).
- 69 Regarding the major areas for discussion in this section, see previously cited, Atsuhito Isozaki and Katsumi Sawada, *Kitachōsen Nyūmon* [Introduction to North Korea], pp. 199–294.

- 70 For example, in a census by the Advisory Council on Democratic and Peaceful Unification (conducted at the beginning of March 2010), 17.4% of South Koreans indicated that they wanted “immediate reunification,” while 65.6% wanted “progressive unification” and 10.7% wanted to “maintain the current state.”
- 71 Atsuhito Isozaki, “Kitachōsen” [North Korea], *Shogaikoku to chūgoku—Seiji, keizai, shakai bunka kankei [Foreign countries and China: Political, Economic, Social, and Cultural Relations]*, Tokyo: National Diet Library Research and Legislative Reference Bureau, 2010, pp. 12–14. For a prominent study of the relationship between China and North Korea, see Shunji Hiraiwa, *Chōsen minshu shugi jinmin kyōwakoku to chūka jinmin kyōwakoku—‘shinshi’ no kankei no kōzō to henyō [The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea and The People’s Republic of China: The Construction and Transformation of a Dependent Relationship]*, Tokyo: Seori Shobo, 2010.
- 72 “Dear Comrade Kim Jong-un’s Report at the Plenary Meeting of the Central Committee of the WPK,” *Rodong Sinmun*, April 2, 2013. “Dear Comrade Kim Jong-un’s Conclusion at the Plenary Meeting of the Central Committee of the WPK,” *Rodong Sinmun*, April 2, 2013. For an overview, see previously cited, Atsuhito Isozaki, “2013 nen no kimu jonun “rōsaku” kenshō” [Examination of the 2013 “Works” of Kim Jong-un], pp. 23–25.
- 73 Previously cited, Atsuhito Isozaki, “Kimu Jonun seiken shoki niokeru chōsen rōdōtō chūō ōnkaikikanshi” [Organs of the Workers’ Party of Korea Central Committee in the Early Stages of the Kim Jong-un Administration]. Learning from the criticism of Joseph Stalin in the Soviet Union and the Lin Biao incident, Kim Il-sung sought to arrange an “amicable settlement” to the succession problem. Learning from the 1989 execution of Ceaușescu in Romania and the Tiananmen Square protests in China, Kim Jong-il engineered the concept of *Songun* (military-first policy). In contrast, Kim Jong-un seems to have drawn lessons from the Gadhafi regime in Libya, which was toppled by NATO armed forces as soon as it abolished its nuclear weapons program. In fact, during the same period, an extensive article explaining the situation in Libya was published in *Rodong Sinmun* (“Lessons Learned from the Situation in Libya,” *Rodong Sinmun*, April 18, 2013). All three generations of rulers have sought to prolong the regime by applying lessons learned from foreign regimes to the North Korean regime.
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Atsuhito Isozaki speaking at the Wilson Center on March 8th, 2017.

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