

# Understanding the North Korean Regime



By Atsuhito Isozaki

W | son  
Center

SPF THE SASAKAWA PEACE FOUNDATION

# Understanding the North Korean Regime

Atsuhito Isozaki

Asia Program  
Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars  
One Woodrow Wilson Plaza  
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20004-3027

[www.wilsoncenter.org/asia](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/asia)

 [asia@wilsoncenter.org](mailto:asia@wilsoncenter.org)

[facebook.com/AsiaProgram](https://www.facebook.com/AsiaProgram)

 [@AsiaProgram](https://twitter.com/AsiaProgram)

202.691.4020

ISBN: 978-1-938027-69-7

April, 2017

# Table of Contents

Introduction .....	1
Changes Around the Study of North Korea .....	3
The Structure of the North Korean Regime .....	11
Five Lessons that North Korea Has Learned (written with James Person) .....	31
Applying the Personal Rule Model .....	37
Domestic and International Factors in the Persistence of the Regime .....	43
Afterword .....	51
Notes .....	54
Acknowledgement .....	66
Author .....	67

# 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.<sup>1</sup> 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).<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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 uncorroborated 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

## 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.<sup>4</sup> Haruki Wada et al. organized book publications across a wide range of genres.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, introductory texts and research guides have been compiled.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> Regarding primary sources, in addition to materials released by Kim Jong-il and Kim Il-sung,<sup>8</sup> 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),<sup>9</sup> and the Korean Central Yearbook. Moreover, researchers can now use various "internal documents" and diplomatic papers detailing exchanges with the Soviet Union and China.<sup>10</sup>

It is still difficult to conduct fieldwork in North Korea. Still, the strengthening of economic cooperation between North and South

there has been a dramatic improvement in the quantity and quality of research on North Korea.<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup> 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 of cials, 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.<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup>

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.<sup>16</sup> 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



## Limitation of North Korean Studies and the

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” u such as speeches, conversations,

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.<sup>20</sup> 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.

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 Kim 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.



**T**his 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

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



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 formally 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 con dence” 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 con dence” 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, dea wt

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 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.<sup>24</sup> 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

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



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.”<sup>25</sup> 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

At the Party Conference in September 2010, at which Kim Jong-un made his debut, the WPK Charter was formally 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



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



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

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

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*,<sup>27</sup> a monthly journal published by the Central Committee of the WPK, can provide considerable insight.<sup>28</sup> 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.<sup>29</sup> 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-yong

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.

**T**he White House has launched its review of U.S. policy toward the DPRK, making it a good time to dispel with the notion that

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 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 Succession*, 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

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

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 lessons, North Korea drew parallels and modified policies based on the experiences and fates of other—



Various original models of the North Korean political system have been proposed.<sup>34</sup> However, it also seems necessary to employ ideal types that are more general and recognized in comparative political science. Mt



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.<sup>44</sup>

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.”<sup>45</sup> 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,<sup>46</sup> 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.”<sup>47</sup> 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.<sup>48</sup> 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 designation 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.<sup>49</sup> 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

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.<sup>55</sup> 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.<sup>56</sup>

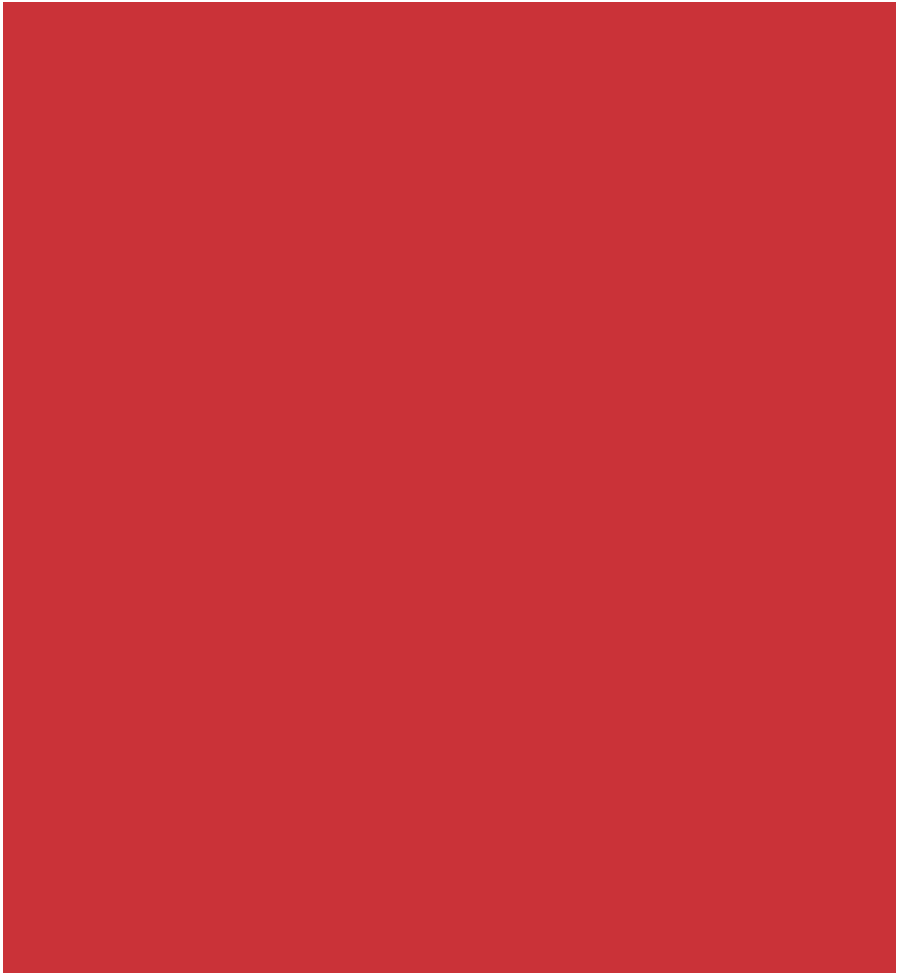
---

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

---

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

significantly.<sup>57</sup> 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.<sup>58</sup> However, further verification of these points is necessary.



F





Third Conference of the WPK in September 2010.<sup>62</sup> 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.<sup>63</sup> This is mainly attributed to the strength of the party organization within the army and the dual command structure of the military.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, Kim Jong-il adopted the “military- first” policy (

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 Factors<sup>69</sup>

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.<sup>70</sup> 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

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.”<sup>72</sup> The ruler himself recognized that the country’s nuclear capability was a factor in the persistence of the regime.<sup>73</sup>

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.<sup>74</sup> 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.



# Afterword

---

**K**im 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.



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 recognized. 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 t ôchisha wo kennky surunoka [Studies on Rulers in Sub-Saharan Africa: Background, Objective, and Perspective],” in Akira Sato (ed.), *T ôchisha to Kokka: Afurika no Kojin-shihai Saik ô* [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

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 kenky



(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 Š'Kakekomi' no imi o ch shin ni" [The North Korean Defector Problem: Focusing

- 18 Atsuhito Isozaki, “Kitach ôsen seiji taiseiron no ken Z E ô L ô 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 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 “g Ŭ Ŭ [ g Ŭ Ŭ Ŭ [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 ( Z a l i • E p ç 8 ] a 4 ’ [ [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 Chair - man 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, “Kitach ôsen niokeru kojinsugitaisei” [Personal Rule in North Korea], *Journal of Law, Politics, and Sociology*, 89/ 3, pp. 161-184.
- 34 Cited previously, Atsuhito Isozaki, “Kitach ôsen seiji taiseiron no L F O L Z E ô L ô to ‘surutan shugi’” [Developments in Research on the North Korean Political Regime and “Sultanism”].
- 35 For example, Dal-Joong Chang, “, J N V K P O J S V U B J T F J U P T I V U B J C J K U ô T P T I J U F H V O T I P D I T I J O O J” [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 kitach ôsen* [North Korea under Kim Jong-il], Tokyo: Keio University Press, 2004; Kenji Onuma, *Kitach ôsen zentai shugi shihai taisei* [The North Korean Totalitarian Regime], *The Newsletter of the CLPS, Senshu University*, 27 (2003), pp. 38–78; Takeshi Nakai, *Kitach ôsen 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 saik ô* [What Is Asian Politics?], Tokyo: Chuokoron-sha, 2009, p. 240).





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



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-irst” Politics], in Masao Okonogi (ed.), *JLJ OP \$I Ô TFO IBO U Ô* [The Korean Peninsula in Crisis], Tokyo: Keio University Press, 2006, pp. 283–304.
- 66 Atsuhito Isozaki, “*JNV KPOJSV UP JEFSPHâ%o, JUBDI Ô TFO ATFO NJDIJw <, JN +POH JM BOE \*EFPMPHZ 5IF 3PBE UP .JMJU OP LZ Ô Z Ô HBLV* [Liberal Arts of Keio], Tokyo: Keio University Press, 2009, pp. 59–92.
- 67 Atsuhito Isozaki, “Dai 3 kai DI Ô TFO S Ô E Ô U Ô EB JIZ Ô TIBLBJ niokeru kimu jonuruk ôshiki 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-irst” Policy], Masao Okonogi et al. (eds.), *CI Ô TFO IBO U Ô no chitsujo 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

---

- 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 unification,” while 65.6% wanted “progressive unification” and 10.7% wanted to “maintain the current state.”
- 71 Atsuhito Isozaki, “Kitach ôsen” [North Korea], *Shogaikoku to chûgoku—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, *SHUNJI HIRAIWA NO TIV TIVHJ KJONJO LZÔXBLPLV UP DI LB KJONJO LZÔXBLP OP LÔ [Ô UP IFOZ Ô* [The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea and The People’s Republic of China: The Construction and Transformation of a Dependent Relationship], Tokyo: Seiri 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 “r ôsaku” kensh ô” [Examination of the 2013 “Works” of Kim Jong-un], pp. 23–25.
- 73 Previously cited, Atsuhito Isozaki, “Kimu Jonun seiken shoki niokeru DIÔTFO

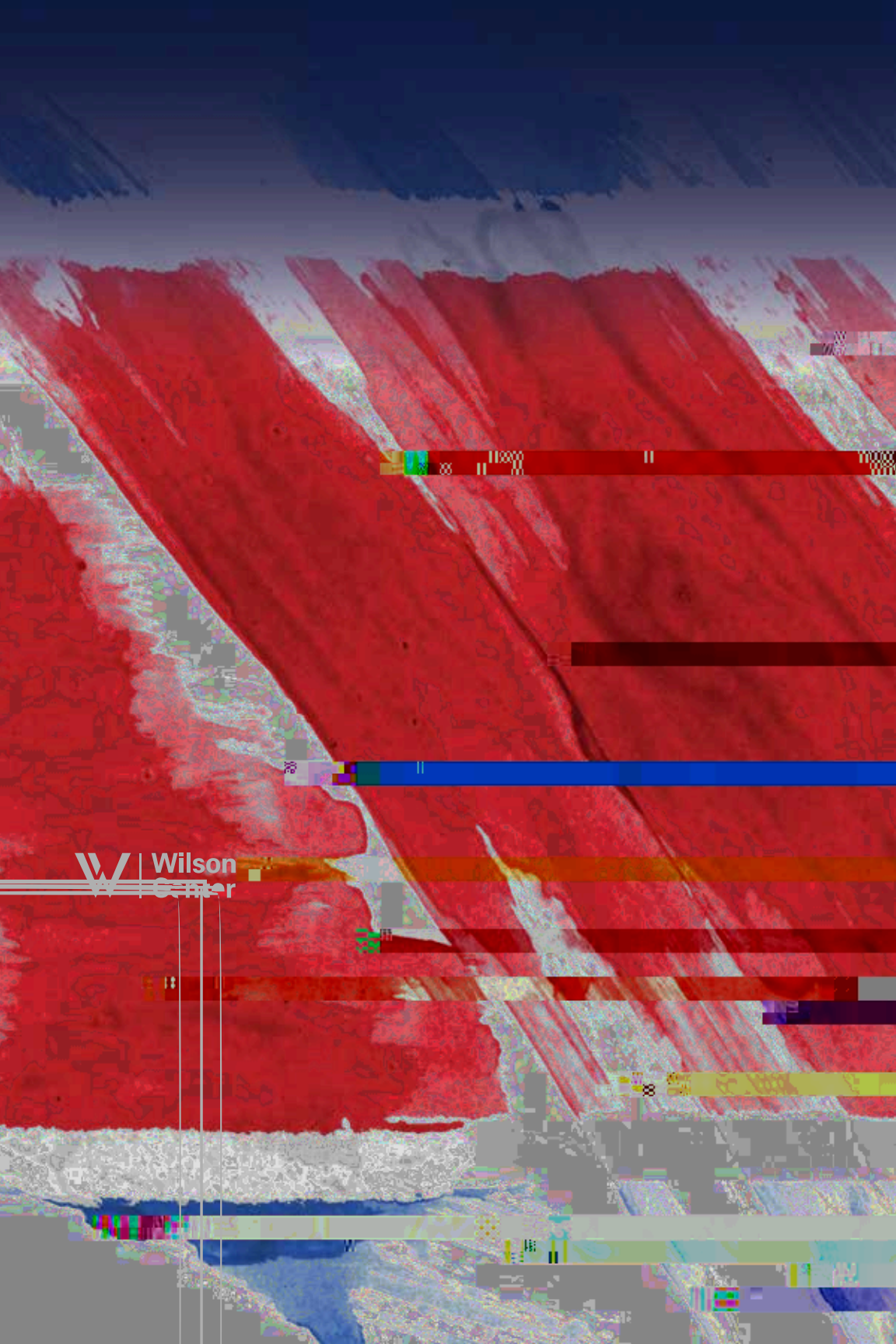
This study was made possible by the generous support from the Sasakawa Peace Foundation in Tokyo. Chapter 3 was coauthored with Dr. James Person, and there was a lot of help from Mr. Katsumi Sawada and Mr. Tetsuo Murooka in writing other parts of the publication. The author would also like to express heartfelt gratitude to Ms. Nancy Yeon Joo Kim, Ms. Shihoko Goto, Mr. Robert Carlin, Prof. Celeste Arrington, Dr. Alexandre Mansourov, Ms. Mary Ratliff, Mr. Joshua Spooner and Mrs. Rose Nelan for their waon, Dr. 5 would also especn1mjQe to e

## Author

Atsuhito Isozaki is the Wilson Center's Japan Scholar and an associate professor of North Korean studies at Japan's Keio University. He has also been a special analyst on North Korean politics with the Intelligence and Analysis Service of Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and was also a senior researcher on North Korean politics at the







**W** | Wilson  
**Center**