

2023

# Understanding North Korea



National Institute for  
Unification Education

2023

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The National Institute for Unification Education (NIU) publishes *Understanding Korean Unification* and *Understanding North Korea* to promote better understanding of Korean unification as well as the state of affairs surrounding the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) and the Korean Peninsula.

NIU sincerely hopes this publication can help educational institutions and organizations impart the required knowledge and build an appropriate public perspective on Korean unification issues and North Korea.

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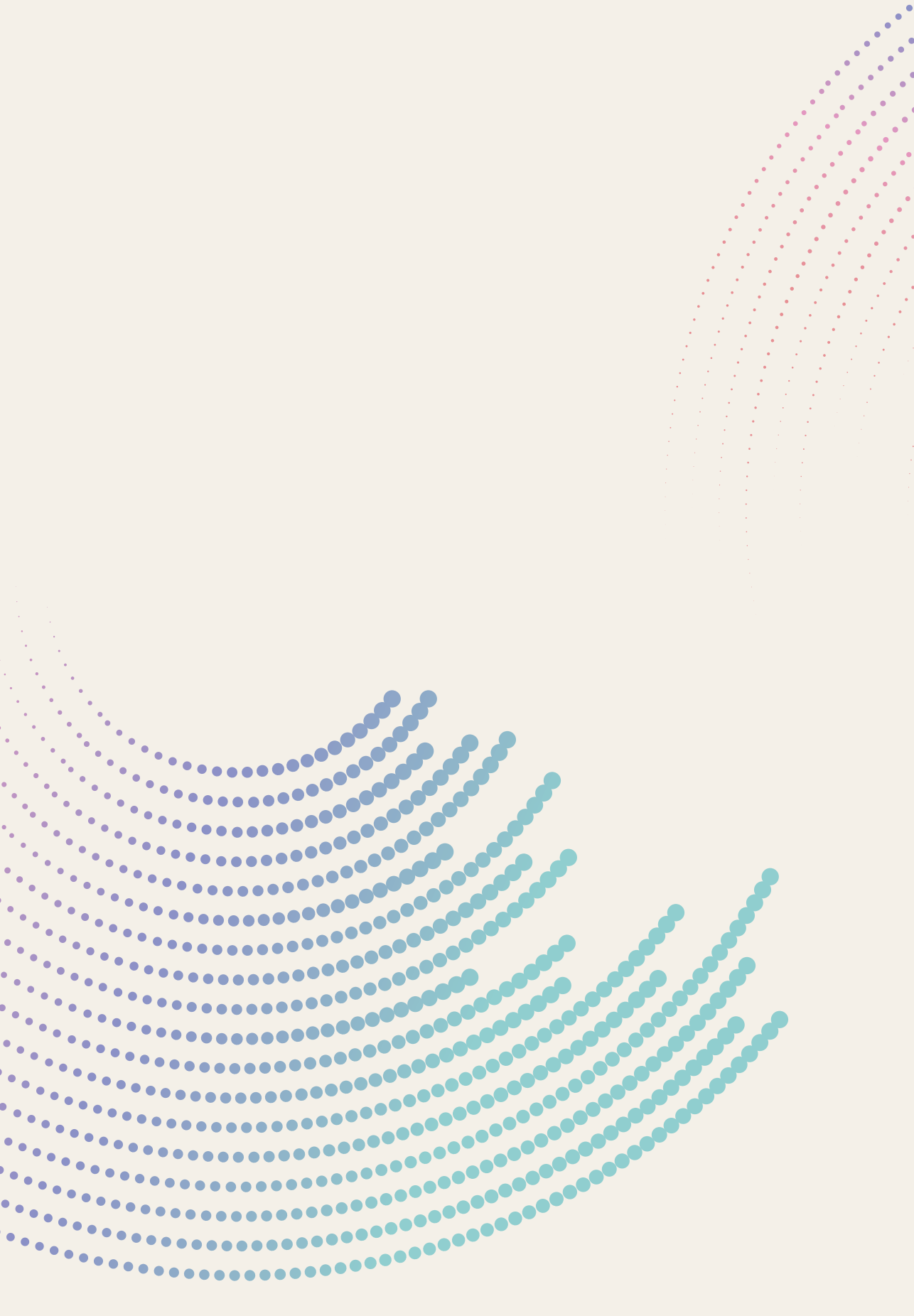
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# How Should We View North Korea?

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**Section 1.** How Should We Understand North Korea?

**Section 2.** Characteristics of the North Korean Regime

**Section 3.** Current State of the North Korean Regime

## Section 1

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# How Should We Understand North Korea?

South Korea and North Korea have once lived as one nation and are of one ethnic community that have shared the same history, culture, and language. However, division and tragedy of a war swept over the peninsula upon independence from Japanese colonial rule, and South and North Korea remain divided to this day as a relic of the Cold War. While living under different political systems for seven decades, the South and the North have confronted each other in bitter rivalry and ideological competition. At the same time, it has also sought unification through reconciliation and cooperation. Hence, North Korea presents a double-edged challenge, as it is a compatriot from a national perspective, but also a cause of threat from a security perspective.

Unfortunately, the prolonged division of the peninsula has been deepening the political difference between the two Koreas rather than emphasizing the homogeneity of the Korean people. Recent progress in the North's nuclear and missile development program

poses a significant security threat to South Korea, and the younger generation's hostility toward the North is growing accordingly. Taking matters worse, the younger generation has a tendency of viewing North Koreans as foreigners rather than those with a common national background. Like so, the long-term division of territories fuels internal conflicts and increases social costs, ultimately hindering peace and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula. Therefore it is essential to properly understand the situation and try to transform inter-Korean relations into something more viable without losing sight of our geopolitical reality. In order to normalize inter-Korean relations and achieve peaceful unification based on free democratic principles amid this double-edged challenge, one must maintain a clear position on security and North Korea.

These following points deserve particular attention to properly understand North Korea based on the Constitutional spirit of peaceful unification.

First, there is a need to recognize North Korea as ultimately a partner in building a single community. This must be approached based on a correct understanding of North Korea, which will have its duality on the divided Korean Peninsula. Perceiving the North as a partner is indeed difficult as it continues to threaten our security by developing nuclear weapons and missiles. Nevertheless, we must lead the North toward complete denuclearization, ease military tensions on the Korean Peninsula, and develop inter-Korean relations into that of reconciliation and cooperation.

Second, we must understand North Korea in an objective manner. This means the internal and external factors affecting the North as

well as detailed information on its current situation must serve as the foundation for our understanding. The North Korea we are exposed to is either the fictional society as presented by the regime or the true reality experienced by North Korean residents. North Korea's state media functions as a propaganda tool of the regime, which thereby entails a limit in objectively presenting the reality of the North. Information delivered by North Korean newspapers and TV broadcasts cannot be regarded a true portrayal of the North. Therefore one must strive to objectively understand the real-life conditions of North Korean people, in addition to what is shown by North Korean state media.

Third, one must judge the North Korean regime based on universal values. In order to properly understand the characteristics of the North Korean regime and developments in the North, one must look beyond distinct events and find the underlying factors that resulted in such phenomena. In doing so, judgments should be based on universally accepted values such as freedom, peace, human rights and the rule of law.

## Section 2

# Characteristics of the North Korean Regime

The North Korean government and regime were initially established under the direction of the Soviet Union, which occupied northern Korea after independence. North Korea imported the Soviet style of communism consisting of the one-party system, state ownership of property and planned economy. These systems, combined with North Korea's unique elements such as the *Juche* ideology, resulted in a socialist system different from that of the Soviet Union.

The North Korean regime holds elements that are both common and unseen in socialist states. Traits common to socialism include state-controlled planned economy and the supremacy of the party; meanwhile, the *suryong* (supreme leader) dictatorial system and the hereditary succession of power passed down from Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il to Kim Jong Un are unique to North Korea. As such, there have been debates on whether to identify the characteristics of the North as universal based on the framework of the Stalinist socialist

system, or to emphasize its uniqueness.<sup>1</sup>

The North Korean regime is a party-state system<sup>2</sup>. At the same time, it is distinct as it practices a system of absolute dictatorship centered around the *suryong*. To comprehensively and systematically understand the North Korean regime, this section will look into the unique political, economic and social characteristics of the North in comparison with the Soviet Union, China and Eastern Europe socialist states before regime transition and reform.

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- 1** Most studies on the North Korean regime focuses on explaining the characteristics of the regime in which a single dictator, the '*suryong*,' has absolute power that is inherited to his successors. These studies explain the regime through conceptualization, such as theocratic regime, monolithic ruling system, union-based socialist system, guerrilla state, *suryong* system and theater state.
    - Theocratic regime: The absolute power of the North Korean leader is supernatural and North Korea is a theocracy centered around a unique monotheism of the cult of Kim Il Sung. The North is neither totalitarian or socialist.
    - Monolithic ruling system: In North Korea, power is focused on the supreme leader; and the entire society is structured around this individual. This socio-political structure is even backed by a theoretical system.
    - Union-based socialist system: Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il are the pinnacle of power, and North Korea's social structure is firmly based on Confucius unionism. The Kim family, Workers' Party, partisan veterans, bureaucrats, experts, office workers, proletariat and farmers form a pyramid of hierarchy.
    - Guerrilla state: Leader Kim Il Sung is the sole supreme commander and the entire North Korean population are members of the guerrilla force. Here, the communist party, state, and social organizations form a singular structure.
    - *Suryong* system: North Korea guarantees well-organized structure and discipline through system and ideology, where the people function like a single person under the leadership of the *suryong*. North Korea has placed its supreme leader on top of the Soviet party-state system.
    - Theater state: North Korea's political power is maintained through the dissemination of propaganda in the name of mobilization of the public and political education. This may come in various forms, including songs, plays, movies, group gatherings and large-scale events.
  - 2** The party-state system is a characteristic of a socialist political system that seeks the dictatorial rule of a single political party of the proletariat class (workers). This single party is the source of power with the highest state and authority, comes before any other organization or agencies, and takes total control over the state and the society. In other words, the party supervises and controls all agencies and organizations of the state and society, and orders the implementation of all policies.

## 1 Political Characteristics

From a political standpoint, the North Korean regime is a *suryong* system based on the ruling *juche* ideology, as well as a one-party dictatorship system led by the Worker's Party. In its infancy, North Korea's ruling ideology was, similar to other socialist states, based on Marxism-Leninism. However, at the 6th Party Congress in October 1980, Kim Il Sung's *juche* ideology was declared the official guiding ideology of the Party in the Worker's Party platform. Furthermore, the April 2009 amendment of the Kim Il Sung Constitution added *songun* (military-first), a manifestation of *juche*, as part of the ruling ideology. Such chain of events led to North Korea's own unique ruling ideology, and this became the basis for the North Korean style *suryong* system.

However, later at the 4th Conference of Party Representatives in April 2012, North Korea declared Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism as the Party's eternal ruling ideology. Then in April 2019, the revised Kim Il Sung-Kim Jong Il Constitution notes Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism as the sole guiding ideology of the state, ultimately replacing *juche* and *songun* ideologies. The Workers' Party platform revised at the 8th Party Congress in January 2021 also declares Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism as the sole ruling ideology of the Party.

North Korea is an absolute dictatorial regime ruled by a single supreme leader (the *suryong*), who serves as the focal point of power governing the party-military-state system. The Party is a political organization with the *suryong* at its core, and the political system is an authoritarian, absolute dictatorship under the unrivaled leader.



The logic behind the political system centered around the *suryong* is shown clearly in the “Ten Principles for the Establishment of a Sole Ideological System” released in 1974, as well as in the 1982 essay published by Kim Jong Il entitled “On the Juche Idea.” In other words, North Korea becomes a “strong force of revolution” when the *suryong*, Party and people come together as one under the leadership and ideology of the leader. Moreover, these three organs of society must become an organized whole in accordance with the *suryong*’s Sole leadership.

North Korea instituted the socio-political body theory as a justification for its *suryong* dictatorial system. As the center of solidarity and leadership in North Korea, the *suryong* is the “supreme leader” as well as the “supreme brain of the socio-political body.” North Korea claims that the socio-political body has “eternal life and can make the masses the principal agent of revolution through forming ideological solidarity under the guidance of the Party centered around the *suryong*.” In North Korea, the *suryong* wields absolute authority as the “embodiment of the entire Party’s organized will,” is given absolute status and role as the “Party’s supreme leader” who “uniformly organizes and commands the life activities of socio-political organism as the sole center of leadership.”<sup>3</sup>

In North Korea, the title *suryong* is given only to Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Il and Kim Jong Un. The Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il Constitution

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**3** The Socio-Political Body theory is a logic for ruling the general population that is centered on the *suryong* and the Party. The theory, introduced in 1986, claims that while the physical life of an individual is limited, the socio-political life is eternal when the *suryong*, the Party and the masses are united. North Korea used the theory of the socio-political body to solidify its *suryong*-centered totalitarian dictatorship system and justify the hereditary succession of power from Kim Il Sung to Kim Jong Il. (National Institute for Unification Education, North Korea Encyclopedia, 2021, pp.406-408.)

revised in 2016 designated Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il both as the “eternal *suryong*.” Following the 7th Party Congress in May 2016, Kim Jong Un was also titled the “great leader,” elevating him to the same *suryong* status as Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il. The Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il Constitution revised in April 2019 endowed the President of North Korea with the authority to represent the state. Furthermore, Kim Jong Un was promoted to General Secretary of the Worker’s Party at the 8th Party Congress of January 2021, obtaining the authority of the supreme leader, as did Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il.

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## 2 Economic Characteristics

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North Korea’s economy is a planned economy like other socialist states in the 20th century where the state and cooperatives own the means of production and resources are distributed to the people. However, North Korea does, in a limited fashion, recognize private ownership. Private ownership is conceptualized in North Korea as “the private ownership under socialism developed on the basis of socialistic ownership of the means of production.”<sup>4</sup>

Properties that can be owned privately include wages workers receive, items distributed through the public distribution system, and consumer items purchased using such resources. To be more specific, wage, savings, household goods and other consumable items can

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<sup>4</sup> *Encyclopedia* (Vol. 3), Pyeongyang: Science Encyclopedia Publishing Company, 1983, p.530

be owned by individuals. Private properties can be disposed freely at various purchasing organizations and general market places, and inheritance rights for such properties are also recognized.<sup>5</sup>

Fundamentally, North Korea has a centralized economy, run by the central government. This means that the decision-making power for the entire economy, including the establishment of economic plans and the flow of information for such decisions, is monopolized by the central government. Meanwhile, subordinate organizations are required to obey the central government in this “centralized command economy system.” However, centralized planning of the economy based on the principles of Unified and Detailed System of Planning hit its limits due to financial crisis. As a result, apart from the key economic indexes managed by the state (defense industry, infrastructure, advanced economic indicators, etc.), organizations with jurisdictions, factories, and businesses are required to establish their own plans.<sup>6</sup>

As such, it is apparent that the North’s centralized planned economic has no longer been effective since the 1990s. Thus, North Korea emphasized the self-supporting management system organized by factory and company units, and the North Korean people now depend

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**5** The scope of private ownership in the North expanded since the spread of marketization following severe economic hardship. Crops from private farmlands (small patches of land), income earned in daily markets, and profits from intellectual property such as inventions, are now officially recognized as privately owned properties.

**6** The Unified and Detailed System of Planning refers to the method of promoting planning at every level of production by a hierarchy of organizations, ranging from the central government to individual businesses. The Unified and Detailed System of Planning is the backbone of North Korea’s planned economy. North Korea introduced the concept of unified planning in 1964, and detailed planning in 1965. (National Institute for Unification Education, North Korea Encyclopedia, 2021, pp.38-41.)

on self-grown markets such as the *jangmadang* for their livelihood.

Under these circumstances, North Korea rolled back on its public distribution system, which is the central feature of its planned economy. It also introduced the Economic Management Improvement Measures on July 1, 2002, allowing North Koreans to purchase necessities from markets and shops. This was the partial introduction of the elements of market economy into the existing centralized planned economy.<sup>7</sup>

In March 2003, North Korea installed general markets around municipalities and counties, followed by the introduction of an experimental project called the “*pojon tamdangje*” (vegetable garden responsibility system) in 2004. This project would practically allow farming by individual families in selected areas, later to be expanded to entire North Korea region.<sup>8</sup>

However, after the introduction of the Food Monopoly System in October 2005, the North Korean government continued a series of regressive attempts to put a stop to the spread of market economy and keep its centralized planned economy. It regulated private businesses and farming, announced the closing down of general markets and

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**7** This measure was introduced under the principles of “eradicating averagism” and “evaluation by the amount earned.” The four key points of this policy are as follows. First, prices were increased to make them more realistic, matching them with the prices in farmer’s markets. For this measure, the government used the prices of rice as the criterion. Second, they introduced a significant pay raise for workers, especially with a higher rate of increase for military personnel and heavy workers. Third, the autonomy and responsibilities of businesses were strengthened. Fourth, partial functions of the planned economy system were assigned to local governments and businesses.

**8** The *pojon tamdangje*, which was introduced as a pilot project in 2004, reduced the sizes of grassroot units of cooperative farms called ‘sub-workteam’ from ten to fifteen to three to four persons, who will then farm in their farm sectors (rice paddies or vegetable patches).

implemented currency reform. The currency reform introduced in November 2009 were extreme measures taken to control the expansion of market activity. However, contrary to North Korean authorities' intentions, these measures only aggravated poverty and discontent among North Koreans. Eventually, North Korea eased control, allowing market activities and tolerating the use of foreign currency from February 2010.

This led to the quantitative expansion of market economy, which further spilled over to the legal and official economy domain. Entering the Kim Jong Un regime, North Korea implemented an economic development measure called “Our Style of Economy Management,”<sup>9</sup> which was intended to keep the market under the government's control while recognizing the growing marketization trend within its border. Our Style of Economy Management Method granted more autonomy to the units of the North Korean economy and introduced material incentives.

Measures included the “*pojon tamdangje* under the *punjo* management system (2013)” for the agricultural sector and the “socialist business management program (2014)” for state-owned companies. Recently, North Korea removed the Taean work system<sup>10</sup> in its constitutional amendment in 2019 and replaced it with the “socialist

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<sup>9</sup> A New Economy Management Measure, *Choson Sinbo*, June 28, 2012.

<sup>10</sup> This means factories and businesses are to conduct their business activities under the collective leadership of the party committee, promote political projects and mobilize the workers/general public to execute given economic projects, while the ‘top’ takes responsibility in assisting the ‘bottom.’ In this industrial economic management system, which is the spirit of collectivism, the working public is effectively mobilized while enhancing their productivity and promoting political projects.

business management system.”<sup>11</sup> This indicates that the North Korean economy is a dual system – some elements of market economy are allowed to its main thought of planned economy.

### 3 Social Characteristics

The North Korean regime is a society built on the principles of collectivism, and it is a “Great Socialist Family” which places the *suryong* at its top.<sup>12</sup>

This is where North Korea differs from other socialist regimes and serves as the logic to justify absolute loyalty and worship of the *suryong*.

The rights and duties of North Koreans are founded on the principle of collectivism, saying 'One for All, All for One.' North Korea

<sup>11</sup> The socialist business management system was suggested as a new economy management method through the May 30th Announcement, titled “Regarding the Establishment of Our Style of Economy Management in Response to the Demands for Development in Reality” given during the dialogue with the executives (Responsible Workers) for the party, state, and military organizations that took place on May the 30th, 2014, as a summary of various measures that have been taken as pilot programs until the date. This program enhanced the autonomy of factories and businesses, focusing on the significant transfer of the authorities for planning and management to the relevant agencies, factories, and cooperatives and was included in the Socialist Constitution Amendment of 2019 (Chapter 2 Article 33, “The state shall conduct socialist business management programs as a part of its economy management efforts and ensure that the cost, prices, profitability, and other economic domains are utilized properly.”)

<sup>12</sup> The Great Socialist Family is a concept where they see the entirety of North Korea as a single family and considers the relationship between the *suryong*, party, and people equal to the relationship between a father, mother, and their children. Based on the Great Socialist Family theory, North Korea emphasizes that, in return of the protection and care provided by the *suryong*, the entire members of the society are naturally expected to pledge loyalty as subjects and children at the same time (National Institute of Unification Education, North Korea Encyclopedia, 2021, pp. 432-433.)

demands its people to prioritize the collective goals and values over individual goals and values and consider such individuals as ideal types of human beings.

North Korea argues that there are two types of families. One is the ordinary family composed of blood kins, and the other is the “Great Socialist Family,” where the *suryong* is the parent. Ordinary North Koreans, who are the members of this Great Socialist Family are educated in a way that they must pledge and devote their loyalty and respect to their *suryong*, as children in a normal family in an ordinary family would do to their parents. With Confucius customs and tradition still largely intact, the theory of the Great Socialist Family in North Korea is used as the concept and logic of totalitarianism that “the *suryong*, party, and people form a singular, consolidated body.”

By transforming a state into a family, the mentality of North Koreans internalized the hierarchical social relationship. This made it look natural for the officials of the party, who carry out the instructions of the three Kims that stand on top of the people in the WPK and other unions. The life in organizations which the entire North Koreans must join at the age of seven until sixty-five internalized this collective lifestyle.

The small team activities they participate in after their work hours or class hours at school or workplaces are purported to promote personal skills and talents. Ultimately, however, they are utilized in instilling the socialist system and control personal aspects of the lives of the people through collective activities. In addition, North Koreans have to participate in the weekly Life Gathering in their political organizations to perform self-criticism and mutual criticism

on whether they lived up to the policies of the party and the principles of collectivism. In this process of internalizing a value system where groups and organizations come before an individual, it is true that the basic human rights of an individual are seriously violated. It is widely believed that the level of freedom and rights in the North, including the basic human rights like the freedom of ideology, speech, and religion, as well as the fundamental rights for life, equality, travel, and living, are seriously undermined.

But the nature of the North Korean society, where group comes before the individual, appears to have changed slightly, as some elements of a market economy are recently introduced into the North Korean economy. After going through economic hardship, more and more North Korean are self-dependent, and the ideas of the outside world is flowing into the country due to the expansion of markets. This led to distrust permeating in the North Korean regime. For this reason, the government of North Korea is strengthening its control over the detachment from the regime and anti-social phenomena among its people and emphasizes reeducation to eradicate the admiration of the outside and distrust in the regime through political reeducation and controlling their group lives. However, despite these circumstances, there have been North Korean defectors who escape from North Korea into South Korea. Especially among juvenile North Korean defectors, there is a growing trend of suggesting the desire for education or interest in freedom as the main motif of escaping. This is evidence that the foundation of the North Korean society, which is the Great Socialist Family and hierarchical collectivism, is crumbling down from the very root.



## Section 3

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# Current State of the North Korean Regime

To understand the current State of the North, it is necessary to separate the nature of the regime that has been there since its foundation from the recent changes after Kim Jong Un took power. Since its early days, North Korea has maintained inflexible and isolated nature based on the *suryong* system and the theory of the Great Socialist Family. Furthermore, the collapse of the socialist states in the late 1980s and their shift to market capitalism plunged North Korea, into deeper isolation, which experienced economic crises and great famine since the mid-1990s.

The isolation from the outside world and economic crises that threatened the North Korean regime continued into the 2000s. Faced with the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the remaining socialist states like China and Vietnam turning to reform and opening, North Korea tried a way out, by itself. However, instead of an active reform and opening, it adhered to “Our Style of Socialism,” to solve the issues such as the shortage of food, energy, and foreign currency through planned

economy or self-reliance policies.

Starting from 2012, when the era of Kim Jong Un began, North Korea tried to fortify its regime by strengthening its nuclear arsenal since its declaration of the policy of simultaneously developing the economy and nuclear weapons (*Byungjin Policy*) and declared it “completed its nuclear arsenal” through a government announcement in November 2017. By the 3rd Plenary Session of the 7th Party Central Committee in April 2018, North Korea declared the completion of the *Byungjin Policy* as well as the “All-Out Policy for Socialist Economic Development.”

Additionally, in April 2019, the new amendment to the constitution included the socialist business management system, while officially endorsing economic reforms such as “the guarantee of profits,” and increasing the levels of institutionalization through a series of reforms.

Such changes in the strategic course of North Korea were to reform the parallel drive of economic revival and nuclear arms build-up. Such moves were also founded on its realization that it needed support from South Korea and Western powers, ending its isolation.<sup>13</sup>

In 2020, the government of North Korea declared that it would tackle on its problems “head on,” based on the principles of “self-empowerment” and “self-prosperity”<sup>14</sup> as it was in deeper trouble due

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**13** With regard to the reform of the policy of simultaneously developing the economy and nuclear weapons, some suggest that the emphasis of the strategy and goals of rebuilding the economy is for the sake of propaganda only, while the nuclear weapons program is their real priority.

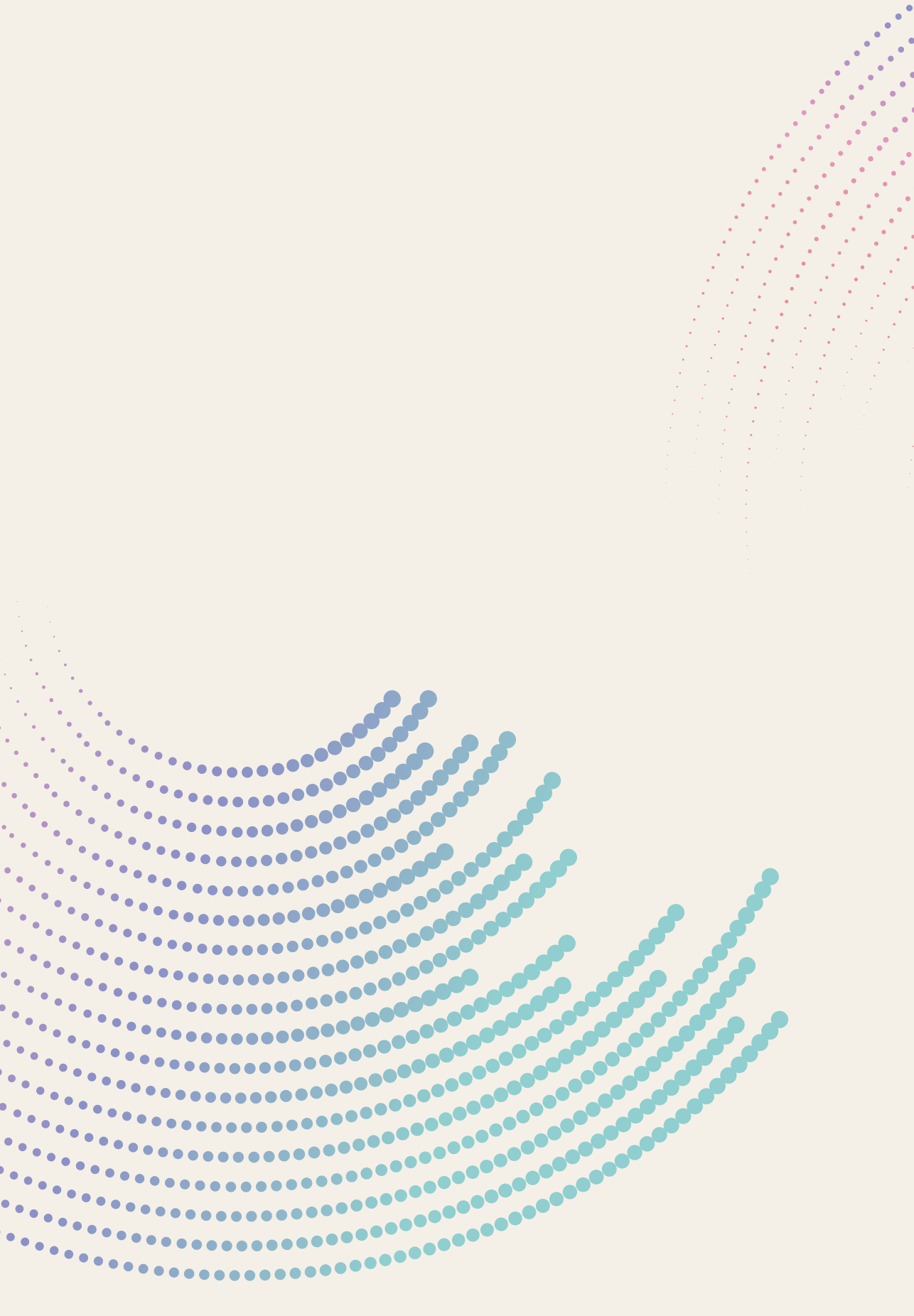
**14** After the failure in the “Hanoi Summit” with the US in February 2019, the talks of seeking a “New Path” increased significantly. During the 5th Plenary Session of the 7th Party Central Committee held over several days in December 2019, North Korea declared a “full frontal attack” for the development of economy. Kim Jong Un stressed the justification for “self-empowerment” and “self-prosperity”

to the sanctions imposed by the global society, COVID1-19 pandemic, and floods. Also, they emphasized “nuclear deterrence for self-defense.” In January 2021, they declared “self-prosperity” and “self-reliance” as their priority in order to meet the goals of the “5-Year National Economic Plan (2021 – 2025)” that was announced during the 8th Party Congress.

As such, North Korea has maintained its policy of focusing on building its economy, arguing that “the foundation for a self-sufficient economy is the talents and science technologies,” emphasizing science and education and declaring a development strategy of building a strong nation based on scientific progress-driven knowledge economy. In the 7th Convention of the 14th Period of the Supreme People’s Assembly held in September 2022, North Korea adopted a new law titled “Nuclear Forces Policy Law of the DPRK,” declared the principles on the operation, control, and use of nuclear weapons.

The characteristic of North Korea in the era of Kim Jong Un is that they are following a political process called “People-First,” to realize “total promotion and development for the realization of socialism.” The economy of North Korea looks even worse than what it was during the Arduous March in the 1990s. In 2021, Kim Jong Un mentioned the economic sanctions against North Korea, COVID-19, and natural disasters as the three causes for the country's sufferings. According to research by the Bank of Korea, the growth rate of the North Korean economy marked -4.5% in 2020, followed by -0.1% in 2021. For this reason, the suffering of ordinary North Koreans is worsening due to high inflation, food shortage, widening income inequality, etc. Here, North Korea's relations with the United States (U.S.) is further

deteriorating as it sticks close to China and Russia in the world order that is entering a new cold war.





# II

## Politics

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**Section 1.** Political System

**Section 2.** Ruling Ideology

**Section 3.** Power Structure and Government

**Section 4.** Formation and Consolidation of  
the Kim Jong Un Regime

## Section 1

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# Political System

The birth of the North Korean regime in the north of the 38 Parallel after Japan surrendered on August 15, 1945, was largely attributable to the occupation of the North by the Soviet Army. Under the leadership of the Soviet military, the communists in the North held the “Conference of Korean Communist Party Members and Enthusiasts in the Five Northwestern Provinces,” and established the “People’s Committee and Administrative Bureau of Five Provinces of North Korea” on October 28, 1945.

In February 1946, the communists founded the “Provisional People’s Committee” which served as the origin of the central administrative bodies of the country, endowing it with the responsibility to function as de facto government. Again in February 1947, the legislature, called the “People’s Assembly of North Korea” was created, which marked the beginning of the preparation for the foundation of the North Korean regime, which included the official installation of the People’s

Committee of North Korea, the drafting of the constitution, and the formation of the Korean People's Army.

On April 29, 1948, the People's Assembly of North Korea approved a draft constitution of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).<sup>1</sup> This was followed by the election to appoint members of the first Supreme People's Assembly on August 25. From September 2 to 10, the First Plenary Session of the Supreme People's Assembly was held to approve and announce the constitution (September 8) and declared the foundation of the DPRK, with Premier Kim Il Sung as the head of state.

During the Korean War (1950-1953), the power elites of North Korea experienced an internal power struggle regarding the restoration after the end of the war and the strategies for the development of the country thereafter. Such internal conflicts led to the "August Faction Incident"<sup>1</sup> in 1956, which allowed Kim Il Sung to steer his way with the policy of prioritizing heavy industry as the strategy for the development of the country and a spree of purge against his political opponents. In the midst of the ideological chasm between the Soviet Union and China that was triggered by the de-Stalinism movement of Nikita Khrushchev, Kim Il Sung sought to build a "self-autonomous socialist state," criticizing the Soviet faction and *Yanan* faction for depending on foreign powers. After the subsequent removal of these

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**1** The 'August Faction Incident' was a failed attempt to overthrow Kim Il Sung from the party leadership during the Plenary Session of the Central Committee of the party by the members of the *Yanan* faction in August 1956. After the failed attempt, the key conspirators were either arrested or had to escape. Kim Il Sung purged the *Yanan* faction as well as the Soviet faction within the party after this incident and obtained unchallenged leadership over the party, consolidating his foundation of political authority and further strengthening it.



factions, he secured his unchallenged monopoly on power.

The mid-to-late 1950s in North Korea was a period of postwar reconstruction to rebuild the devastated economy and lay the foundations for a transition into a socialist economic system. The urgency to rebuild the war-torn economy and society provided a favorable condition for developing a socialist system. As a first step, collectivization in agriculture, commerce and the handicraft industry was implemented simultaneously in these three sectors. By the end of the 1950s, North Korea had nationalized all means of production.

A policy of mass mobilization also was adopted as a measure for the postwar economic reconstruction. Classic examples of mass mobilization campaigns during this period include the *Chollima* Movement that began in 1956, the Chongsanri Spirit and the Chongsanri Method<sup>2</sup> of 1960, and the Tae'an Management System<sup>3</sup> introduced in 1961.

During the 1960s, the 15th Plenary Session of the 4th Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) served as a turning point for Kim Il Sung to pave the path to his *suryong*-centered monolithic dictatorship. On December 16th of the same year, Kim Il

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**2** The Chongsanri Spirit and Chongsanri Method refers to the basic guidance for North Korea's economic sector, introduced in the late 1950s. Agencies of higher and lower ranks, as well as individuals with higher and lower status, were to work together to fulfill the goals of the party and, based on the current status in the area, find solutions for problems, while prioritizing the political programs and other people-related programs.

**3** The Tae'an Management System refers to the economic management method of North Korea that incorporates the party's direction and guidance in economic management and operation since 1961. The Tae'an Management System describes the guiding system for production that provide uniform and comprehensive direction and guidance in planning, production, and technology through establishing a collective leadership system in every factory's party committee.

Sung was finally named as the “Great Leader (*suryong*) Comrade Kim Il Sung,” by the Supreme People’s Assembly. This was the beginning of the monolithic dictatorship of the North, with the *suryong* at the pinnacle of the power structure as the absolute ruler.

The milestone event in the establishment of the hereditary succession and the *suryong*-centered one-man dictatorship was the adoption of the Socialist Constitution in 1972. The Socialist Constitution reflects the transition process to enshrine Kim Il Sung’s monolithic system, which was achieved through purges of his political opponents. The constitution designated the *juche* ideology as the ruling ideology of the party in parallel with Marxism-Leninism. It replaced the cabinet system specified in the constitution of 1948 with a presidential system, as it placed great importance on centralizing and strengthening political power. Under these changes, the president obtained direct control over the newly found Central People’s Committee while also serving as the supreme commander of the military and chairman of the National Defense Commission, concentrating formidable power. The president is the head of state and represents the sovereignty of the state, defined as the absolute ruler who is elected by the Supreme People’s Assembly but not reporting to it.

While establishing a monolithic dictatorship, Kim Il Sung began to lay the political groundwork to transfer power to his son Kim Jong Il. For this purpose, he changed the party’s power structure and established the *suryong* system during the 2nd Party Representatives’ Conference in October 1966 and the 5th Party Congress of 1970. In November 1971, the succession of power to Kim Jong Il was reviewed during the 3rd Plenary Session of the 5th WPK Central Committee.

Under this succession structure, Kim Jong Il, who was serving as the Vice Chairman of the Publicity and Information Department and the Organization and Guidance Department, to the “Secretary of Organization and Propaganda” during the 7th Plenary Session of the 5th WPK Central Committee convened in September 1973. Subsequently, Kim Jong Il was elected as a member of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee during the 8th Plenary Session of the 5th WPK Central Committee held in February 1974, and designated as the sole successor to Kim Il Sung. The 6th Party Congress held in October 1980 consolidated this arrangement of power succession, and officialized the succession and advancement of the revolutionary tradition.

Following his ascent as the successor to the leadership, Kim Jong Il monopolized the authority to interpret the *juche* ideology by putting forward the “Revolutionary *Suryong* Theory” and “Socio-political Body Theory” to justify and legitimize Kim Il Sung’s monolithic leadership and the hereditary succession system. The presentation of these theories justified Kim Jong Il’s power succession by giving him the sole authority to interpret *juche* ideology, analogous to Kim Il Sung who claimed himself as the sole interpreter of Marxism-Leninism and the creator of *juche* ideology.

After the death of Kim Il Sung on July 8, 1994, Kim Jong Il began to form his own political system under crisis management. As the country endured a famine known as the “Arduous March” of the 1990s, Kim Jong Il built his system by way of legacy politics (*yuhun tongchi*), military buildup and systematic suppression. As stated in the 1998 constitution, Kim Jong Il’s regime was a military-dominated system centralized around the National Defense Commission (NDC), with the

presidential system and Central People's Committee abolished. The centralized military system was founded upon the *songun* (military-first) politics as a political system with the goal of "building a powerful socialist nation." The constitutional revision of 2009 strengthened *songun* politics both legally and institutionally, in addition to designating the chairman of the NDC as the supreme leader.

Meanwhile, Kim Jong Un made his official appearance on September 28, 2010, through his appointment as the Vice Chairman of the WPK Central Military Commission (CMC) which was newly set up at the 3rd conference of party representatives. Ever since, the North Korean regime strengthened the power foundation for Kim Jong Un's rule. Kim Jong Un was promoted to "the supreme leader of the party, the military, and the people" during Kim Jong Il's memorial (December 29, 2011), and crowned as the supreme commander of the KPA by the WPK Politburo (December 30, 2011). Following this, the legacy-politics propaganda campaign entitled "Kim Jong Un is Kim Jong Il" was put forth, and the Kim Jong Un regime was made official through the 4th WPK Party Representatives' Conference (April 11, 2012) and the 5th Session of the 12th SPA (April 13, 2012). This was followed by Kim Jong Un's appointment as the "Leader of the party" during the 7th Party Congress in 2016 and the "President of the State Affairs Committee" during the 4th Convention of the 13th SPA. At the 8th Party Congress held in January 2021, Kim Jong Un became the "General Secretary."

The North Korean political system is generally regarded as a totalitarian dictatorship, with the *suryong*, or the supreme leader, reigning over the party, the military, and the state. In addition to the

common character of 20th century socialist states having a “one-party ruling system,” the North Korean political system is unique in that the *suryong* has absolute ruling authority over the party as the supreme leader.

Considering the structural dimension of this unique aspect of North Korea’s political system, the *suryong*, as the nucleus of *juche*, completely dominates the party, military and government. In North Korea, the *suryong*’s authority surpasses that of institutionalized positions such as the secretary of the Workers’ Party and the President of the State Affairs Commission, and he acts as the highest seat of power.

What is noteworthy here is the logical structure that the *suryong*’s authoritarian power is supported by the establishment of the monolithic ideological system and the monolithic leadership system. Furthermore, it is evident that the guaranteed leadership with an infallibility of the party that is institutionalized in 20th century socialist politics manifests itself in North Korea’s political system as the leadership of, loyalty to, and infallibility of the *suryong*.<sup>4</sup> The *suryong* leadership of North Korea is the monolithic leadership structure of the party, and it is argued that the leadership position of the party is secured by the ideology, leadership, and absolute authority of the *suryong*. In this regard, North Korea can be understood more appropriately as “a state governed by the *suryong* who leads the party,” or one-man “*suryong* dictatorial system” rather than a “party authoritarian system” governed by the party.

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<sup>4</sup> During the 2017 New Year Address, Kim Jong Un stated that he “spent the last year with regret and self-guilt, as the competence was not up to the goal.” This allows a different interpretation from the existing *suryong* infallibility.

## Section 2

# Ruling Ideology

Kim Il Sung, who ruled with Marxism-Leninism and Stalinism during the early days of his regime, declared the *juche* ideology in the aftermath of Stalin's death in the 1950s, Sino-Soviet conflict in the 1960s, and the internal power struggles within North Korea. Later, the *juche* ideology became the official ideology of the Workers' Party of Korea during the 5th Party Congress in 1970 and transformed into an ideology that justified the monolithic dictatorship by Kim Il Sung. During the 6th Party Congress in 1980, the *juche* ideology was named the "sole doctrine" of the party and later developed into the *suryong* theory and the revolutionary *suryong* perspective to make the regime by Kim Jong Il persistent.

After the late 1980s, North Korea once again reinterpreted the *juche* ideology as "our style of socialism" for the sake of regime survival amid the crisis resulting from the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc at the end of the Cold War. After the death of Kim

Il Sung, Kim Jong Il's era of *songun* (military first) opened, which had its roots in the *juche* ideology and was presented as the ruling doctrine for building a strong and prosperous socialist state. Through the constitutional amendment of 2009 and the revision on the party platform in 2010, the *songun* ideology formally became the regime's ruling ideology.

Kim Jong Un's regime designated "Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism as the monolithic ruling ideology" during the 4th Party Representatives' Conference of 2012. During the 7th Party Congress of 2016 and the 8th Party Congress of 2021, the platform of the WPK was revised to designate Kim Il Sung ideology and Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism as the highest goal of the party, respectively. This resulted in the declaration of Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism as the sole governing ideology of the Kim Jong Un era, along with unification by force.

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## 1 *Juche* Ideology

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### 1) Establishment of *Juche*

In North Korea, the *juche* ideology pervades politics, economy, society, culture, values and daily life. The WPK platform and Socialist Constitution have long defined *juche* ideology as the sole doctrine and guideline for the country. Constitutional revisions in 2009 prescribed that along with the *songun* policy, "*juche* ideology should be upheld as the guideline for all activities." The preamble of the 2010 WPK platform states that "the Workers' Party of Korea is a revolutionary

party of *juche*, which upholds the *juche* ideology as its sole guiding doctrine.”

Lively debates on *juche* began to appear in North Korea in the mid-1950s. The principles of *juche* began to form with “*juche* in ideology” in 1955, “self-sufficiency in economy” in 1956, “autonomy in (domestic) politics” in 1957, “self-reliance in defense” in 1962 and “autonomy in diplomacy (foreign affairs)” in 1966. From 1967, a comprehensive concept of *juche* ideology began to formulate in an effort to create a monolithic ideological system. The 5th Party Congress in 1970 adopted *juche* as its official ideology, enabling it to stand shoulder to shoulder with Marxism-Leninism. Ten years later, at the 6th Party Congress in 1980, the *juche* ideology superseded Marxism-Leninism as an independent governing principle.

Development of *juche* ideology revealed that in its early form, *juche* was focused on enhancing the people’s awareness of the need to secure independence from external forces as a nationalistic response to the infiltration of imperialistic ideas and culture. Politically, after witnessing Khrushchev’s de-Stalinization campaign, Kim Il Sung concentrated on preventing similar criticism of one-man dictatorial ruling system inside the party and promoted one-man dictatorial rule in North Korea. Externally, Moscow and Beijing were locked in a fierce ideological debate. The *juche* ideology was born in this backdrop, as North Korea strived to secure its independence and survival by maintaining a neutral stance between the two communist powers.



## 2) Changes in Content

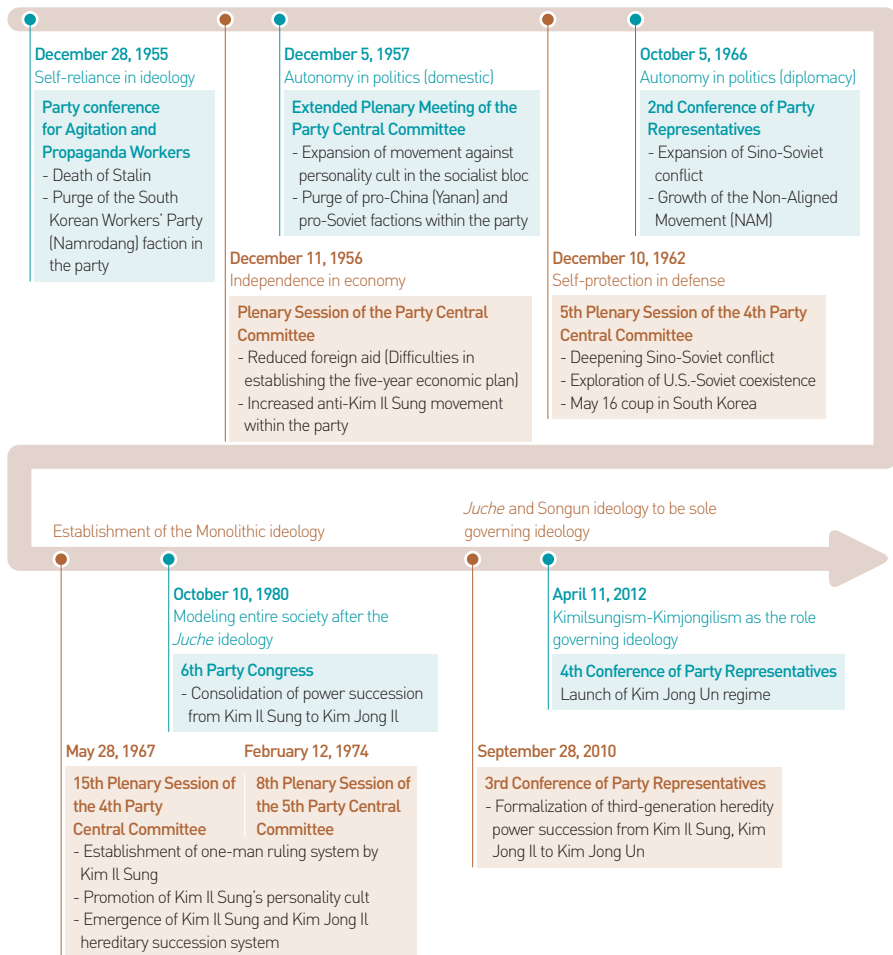
After the 1960s, North Korea embarked on a transition into a monolithic ideological system to complete the *suryong* system. The monolithic ideological system disregarded all ideology except for *juche* and indoctrinated that the guidance of the *suryong* and the party is imperative for the masses to achieve *juche*. North Korea declared *juche* ideology as the guiding principle of the party at the 5th Party Congress in November 1970 and began to combine *juche* with the concept of “monolithic leadership system” and “revolutionary *suryong* theory.” From this point on, *juche* was transformed into a governing discourse to validate Kim Il Sung’s absolute power.

After grasping de facto power, Kim Jong Il started to purge his opponents from 1974 and began to lay the groundwork for hereditary succession by promoting a campaign called “model the whole society of Kimilsungism.” In order to justify the power structure of the monolithic ruling system of Kim Il Sung and perpetuate the hereditary succession, revolutionary *suryong* theory was proposed. According to revolutionary *suryong* theory, no party or working class can exist without the supreme leader of the revolution. Similarly, the core logic of the *suryong* theory explains that the *suryong* is at the center of the masses’ fight to achieve revolution and construction, and is responsible for leading the masses as a “leader of intellect.” Ultimately, the *suryong* theory was also manifested to promote Kim Il Sung’s personality cult.

From the 1970s, the *juche* ideology began to develop meticulously under Kim Jong Il’s orders. After he was appointed as heir to Kim Il Sung within the party from February 1974, Kim Jong Il began to

monopolize the right to interpret the *juche* ideology, and developed the concepts of revolutionary *suryong* and the socio-political body, which served as a catalyst to systematize *juche* ideology into a comprehensive theory. The heart of *juche* ideology is grounded in the theory of the socio-political body from the late 1980s, which defined the basic relationship between the *suryong* and the masses as the absolute and

[Table 2-1] Formation of the Juche Ideological System



unconditional loyalty and camaraderie to the *suryong*.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc in the late 1980s was seen in Pyongyang as a threat to the regime's survival. In order to overcome the threat, North Korea came up with an alternative rationale to protect the regime, which was to reinterpret *juche* as "our style of socialism" and to emphasize the superiority of the North Korean style of socialism.

North Korea experienced the greatest threat to the regime following Kim Il Sung's death in 1994 and the severe economic crisis of the mid-1990s. The 1990s crises symbolized the grim reality that was completely opposite to the establishment of an independent and self-reliant political and economic system that was promoted by the *juche* ideology. Ultimately, this contradiction has resulted in the weakening of power of the *juche* ideology.

### 3) Limitations

This self-acclaimed ideology of *juche*, however, was affected by North Korea's dire economic situation since the mid-1990s. Confidence in *juche*, mainly consisting of ideological slogans, began to falter. Naturally, reference to *juche* diminished significantly and while it still maintained its position as the ruling ideology of the regime, other sets of political slogans began to appear such as "red flag ideology," "strong and prosperous nation," and "*songun* politics" as a strategy to attain regime stability and survival.

However, the public slogan of *juche* continues to ring hollow. These *juche* slogans contributed to the dire economic situation and regime

crisis engendered by prolonged international isolation, and failed to achieve its goal of establishing an autonomous and self-reliant political and economic system. This is a clear limitation of the *juche* ideology.

The most notable criticism of *juche* is that North Korea has abused *juche* and its socialist ideology as a political tactic to monopolize power and build a personality cult around its leader. In the face of political, economic, military and diplomatic crises in the 1990s, North Korea introduced various governing ideologies to overcome crises and ensure regime survival and strengthened ideological foundation to maintain the one-man ruling system. The problem of *juche* was that it fails to allow the masses to truly become masters of their own lives but rather forces them to succumb to a subservient role in society where one must unconditionally obey the absolute authority of the *suryong*'s leadership.

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## 2 *Songun* (Military-First) Ideology

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In the amended WPK platform in 2010, North Korea stipulated *songun* politics as “the basic political mode of socialism.” *Songun* is a mode of politics where strengthening military power becomes a priority to overcome difficulties in the path of revolution and development.

Initially *Songun* politics was introduced for internal discussions in early 1995 following Kim Il Sung's death. By 1998, it was established as North Korea's core governing ideology. *Songun* politics emphasized the military's role of leading the socialist revolution and regime survival,

going beyond the spheres of politics and the economy to encompass education, culture, arts and all domains of society. Under the banner of *songun* politics, the military solidified its status as the central institution crucial for defending the socialist regime and its leader.

*Songun* politics can be interpreted as an attempt to overcome the Arduous March by utilizing the military's resources and capacities. It sought to recover the economic situation while also hoping to revive the party's weakening social control mechanisms through military institutions. In other words, it was an effort by the regime to overcome the crises posed by a debilitated Party through strengthening the military's status and role in society.

Though the root cause of North Korea's crises of the 1990s was a political system that defied its leader, Kim Jong Il continued down the path of promoting ideological influences by relying on the military to reinforce regime protection and to consolidate his power. Under the belief that ideological and cultural infiltration of imperialism is gravely dangerous, Kim Jong Il proposed *songun* politics as a way to elevate the status of the military for regime preservation and to prevent the relaxation of social controls.

Another factor behind the rise of *songun* politics was North Korea's growing anxiety over isolation in the world theater due to its nuclear program. North Korea's diplomatic isolation deepened with the collapse of the Soviet Union and Eastern European socialist states. Major confrontation with the George W. Bush administration in Washington also resulted in the regime's reinforcement of its self-defensive military power. On the other hand, an internal factor behind the emergence of *songun* politics was the buildup of North Korea's military forces over

the decades. With North Korea lagging in the competition with the South, perhaps the only area in which it could gain a competitive edge was through the military, which is considered another factor for the promotion of *songun*.

While *juche* ideology was the governing doctrine during the Kim Il Sung era, *songun* ideology along with *juche* ideology was the ruling ideology of the Kim Jong Il era as stipulated in the guiding principle of the WPK in the revised 2009 constitution. In the wake of the collapse of the Eastern Bloc in the 1990s, Kim Jong Il sensed a need for an alternative strategy to overcome the crisis state of the country and to fill the power vacuum left by his father's death, as well as to justify the legitimacy of his rule. To preserve the system and supplement the justification of the *suryong*-centered monolithic leadership structure of the *juche* ideology, Kim Jong Il proposed *songun* ideology, rooted in *juche*, as a new doctrine to surmount the crisis through solidarity and unity under the new supreme leader.

In response to the rapidly changing international environment, Kim Jong Il's *songun* ideology was the ruling ideology that underlined the principles of *songun* revolution to build a powerful socialist nation. In particular, *songun* ideology sets forth the principle of prioritizing military matters as a basis to win the military competition. This military-first principle places its foremost priority on strengthening and development of the military and the national defense industry to realize the goals and policies of the party and the state. Furthermore, *songun* ideology served as the fundamental principle that further advanced the leadership structure by creating a state apparatus centered on national defense. In addition, with the rise of *songun* ideology, Kim Il Sung was

appointed the posthumous title of “eternal president” and the Central People’s Committee was abolished in 1998. In its place, the National Defense Commission (NDC), which was a wartime organization, became an administrative organ. After that, the NDC became a pivotal institution in providing a uniform set of guidance and instructions, under the monolithic leadership of *suryong*, to all state affairs in the administrative sector based on the military-first principles. In addition, *songun* ideology stressed that the military should become the main force of revolution, given its status, revolutionary spirit, organizational power and combat capability in accomplishing revolution and construction.

Meanwhile, in the process of preparing for the hereditary power succession, North Korea deleted all references to communism in revisions to its constitution in 2009 and the WPK platform in 2010. The regime officially proclaimed *juche* as the sole guiding ideology and *songun* ideology as the ruling ideology of the Kim Jong Il era, and ultimately proclaimed itself as a military state. In other words, these changes - deletion of communism and formalization of “*juche-songun*” ideologies for monolithic rule - were made for the purpose of justifying the hereditary succession of Kim Il Sung to Kim Jong Il.

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### 3 Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism

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North Korean regime revised the constitution in April 2012 after Kim Jong Il’s death, and pronounced “Kim Il Sung as eternal President and Kim Jong Il as eternal Chairman of the National Defense

Commission” in the preamble. On April 2012 and May 2016, the WPK platform was also revised to make Kimilsungism- Kimjongilism the guiding ideology of the party.

Right before adopting Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism as the WPK’s guiding ideology at the 4th Conference of Party Representatives on April 11, 2012, Kim Jong Un explicated in his April 6 Statement<sup>5</sup> that “Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism is entirely rooted in the tradition of *juche*, in its ideology, theory and methodology and it is a great revolutionary ideology representative of the *juche* era.” This point was reiterated in the *Rodong Sinmun* on April 24, 2014, which stated that “Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism is a revolutionary theory whose quintessence is the *juche* ideology” and “it is a revolutionary philosophy that embraces the mass-centered revolutionary theory and leadership method, in which all the related ideas and theories are organically structured to constitute an integral system.”

According to the North Korean theory, Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism in its essence, is a revolutionary philosophy aiming to achieve autonomy of the people. The doctrine also includes both the framework and substance for social reform and leadership methods for enhancing the benefits of the people, who are the main agents of such reform. The need for a new guiding ideology for solidifying the Kim Jong Un regime made the country further elaborate the idea of *juche* and *songun* into Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism through the amendment

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<sup>5</sup> This was the first published work under Kim Jong Un’s name released at the time of succession in April 2012. The announcement, titled “Let Us Serve the Great Comrade Kim Jong Il as the Eternal General Secretary of the party and Complete the Mission of the Juche Revolution; A Dialogue with the Executives of the Central Committee of the WPK (April 6, 2012).”



to the WPK platform. This effort was based on the idea that successful continuation of ideology and revolutionary thought was vital in strengthening the regime's legitimacy.

In order to implement the goal of “modeling the whole society on Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism” as a ruling rationale of the North Korean regime, it introduced the concept of “Kim Jong Il's Patriotism.” On July 26, 2012, the WPK Central Committee released an official statement entitled, “Let Us Step Up the Building of a Thriving Country by Applying Kim Jong Il's Patriotism,” in which “Kim Jong Il's Patriotism” was announced for the first time. This statement is considered a manual for “Kim Jong Il's Patriotism.” Upon this principle, Kim Jong Un tried to implement “Kim Jong Il's Patriotism” based on the late leader's thoughts on the country, the people and the coming generations by placing emphasis on “modeling the whole society on Kimilsungism- Kimjongilism.” In an effort to promote this idea, Kim Jong Un amended the WPK platform at the 4th Conference of Party Representatives. At the extended Plenary Meeting for the Cabinet held on October 22, 2012, he also called for a thorough application of “Kim Jong Il's Patriotism” while speaking on the subject of strengthening the party's role in securing the regime's solidarity and monolithic leadership structure. In his 2015 New Year's Address, Kim Jong Un emphasized “Kim Jong Il's Patriotism” as the “five-point education.” The five-point education was an expression that surfaced in late 2014, which emphasized education in the greatness of the Kim Il Sung lineage, Kim Jong Il's patriotism, revolutionary faith, anti-imperialism and morals. These five elements were updated in the amendment of the platform introduced in the 8th Party Congress held in January 2012.

In March 2016, North Korea defined Kim Jong Il's Patriotism as “a powerful ideological and psychological weapon for the prosperity of the country.”<sup>6</sup> Starting from the 7th Party Congress held in May 2016, the North started to emphasize “Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism” more, pronouncing that “modeling of the entire society based on Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism is the primary creed of our party”<sup>7</sup> and called “Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism as the eternal guidance.”<sup>8</sup> In 2017, too, North Korea called “Kim Jong Il Patriotism” the “highest level of love toward the Motherland,”<sup>9</sup> persistently describing “Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism” and “Kim Jong Il Patriotism” as the ideology for the manifestation of the regime.

In 2019, North Korea put forward “Our State First”<sup>10</sup> on the basis of the *juche* ideology starting from the new year's address. Efforts to promote this ideology further increased to make it the ruling disclose symbolizing the era of Kim Jong Un, along with the “People First”<sup>11</sup> that has also been fiercely put forward under the policy of self-prosperity.

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**6** *Rodong Sinmun*, March 10, 2016.

**7** *Rodong Sinmun*, May 17, 2016.

**8** *Rodong Sinmun*, May 13, 2016.

**9** *Rodong Sinmun*, October 1, 2017.

**10** “Our State First,” which was officially introduced in the New Year's Speech of 2019, is centered around “honoring and taking pride in the greatness of our socialist motherland” and is explained as the “strong will to build up the strength of the country to the highest level in all aspects.” So, it is a discourse of making “the strongest country in the world” to suit the “era of prosperity and strength” for the country. *Rodong Sinmun*, January 8, 2019.

**11** “People First” was introduced as the key to the “Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism” during the speech by Kim Jong Un in the 4th WPK Cell Secretary Convention on January 29, 2013. “Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism is, in its essence, an ideology of People First, where those who serve the people as the deity in heaven care for them selflessly are the true followers of these ideas.” (Kim Jong Un's speech at the 4th WPK Cell Secretary Convention) *Rodong Sinmun*, 2013.1.30.

During the 8th Party Congress in 2021, North Korea pronounced Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism as the “encyclopedia of revolution and state building solely structured on the basis of the *juche* ideology, and a revolutionary and scientific ideology of which the viability and validity have been proven in the practical struggle to realize the self-autonomy of the people.”

## Section 3

# Power Structure and Government

### 1 Power Structure

What is typically observed as the characteristics of socialist states in the 20th century is that the power of the state is concentrated on the party and the country was run under a party-state system. The common phenomena in a socialist state of a party-state system include, first, that a single political party with practical power dominates over the state and the society. Second, the state and society allow only one ideology. Third, in all political processes, media is dominated by the party of Marxism-Leninism, annihilating autonomous political and social substructures. Fourth, the state is organized around the principle of “democratic centralism”<sup>12</sup> which justifies the monopoly of political

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**12** North Korea defines Democratic Centralism as a “set of principles of activities which seamlessly combine democracy and centralism or a system where such principles are followed” and “the principles of the activities and organization of the party of the working class, government agencies, and social organizations that combine the consolidated directions from the top and the creativity from the bottom.” The Platform of WPK (1980) and the Socialist Constitution (1998) officially included these principles in their texts.

power by the communist party and embodies the “guiding role” of the Marxist-Leninist party. The principle of “democratic centralism” forms the basis of the decision-making process and organization of the communist party.

North Korea was no exception, as the Workers’ Party of Korea (WPK) served as the source of power with an unrivaled status and authority, dominating over other branches of the state and organizations. All policies were called the “party policy” and implemented under the guidance and control by the party. As the party has overall control over the political decision-making process, the Supreme People’s Assembly (SPA) with legislative functions, the State Affairs Commission (SAC) with the administrative roles, and the judicial and prosecutorial branches with judicial functions, perform the enactment, execution, and interpretation of the laws, respectively. Despite such separation of political powers in formality, it is actually impossible to observe the democratic political principles of the separation of power or checks and balances within the power structure of North Korea, which is characterized as a one-party dictatorship.

The power structure of Kim Jong Un’s regime has unfolded as a hereditary system succeeding Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il, reviving the power structure of the Kim Jong Il era that shifted to a system of *songun* politics based on the party-state system during the Kim Il Sung era. The succession of power by Kim Jong Un was officially declared during the 3rd Party Congress in 2010. In the same manner as Kim Jong Il was elected as the executive member of the party’s Political Bureau and a member of the WPK Central Military Committee, Kim Jong Un was elected as a member of the WPK Central Committee and

the Vice Chairman of the Central Military Committee during the 3rd Party Representatives' Conference and the Plenary Session of the WPK Central Military Committee on September 28, 2010, officializing the succession of power.

After the death of Kim Jong Il, the WPK platform was amended to shuffle the power structure to put Kim Jong Un at the top and strengthen his position through the 4th Party Representatives' Conference in April 2012. Also, during the 5th SPA of the 12th Period (April 2012), the amendment of the Constitution introduced a state system that was centered around Kim Jong Un and consolidated the status of late Kim Jong Il, and ended up naming Kim Jong Il as the “Eternal General Secretary of the WPK” and the “Eternal Chairman of the National Defense Commission(NDC),” while naming Kim Jong Un as the “First Secretary of the WPK” and “the First Chairman of the NDC, who is the highest protector of the state.” The Kim Jong Un regime started to reinstate the party-state system, ending the *songun* politics and the system of NDC which were specified in the 1998 Constitution and the 2009 amendment of the constitution.

Starting from 2016, the power structure of Kim Jong Un underwent a significant change, resulting in a total reshuffle of the party organs and state organs alike. First, concerning the changes in the party, the 7th Party Congress, which was held 36 years since the previous 6th Party Congress (October 1980) introduced an amendment of the party platform to name Kim Jong Un as the First Secretary of the WPK and the Chairman of the WPK, who is the highest leader of the party. Also, during the 8th Party Congress held in January 2021, the party platform was revised again to reinstate the party secretary system after

the previous party Chairman system, naming Kim Jong Un as the General Secretary of the WPK. With the state offices, the amendment of the constitution (June 29th, 2016) instated SAC instead of the NDC of the past, naming Kim Jong Un as the President of the SAC. This was followed by two amendments to the Constitution in 2019 (April 11 and August 29th, 2019,) which stated that “the President of the SAC shall be the highest leader of the DPRK representing the state.” This made it official that Chairman Kim Jong Un was the representing officer, or the head of the state of North Korea.

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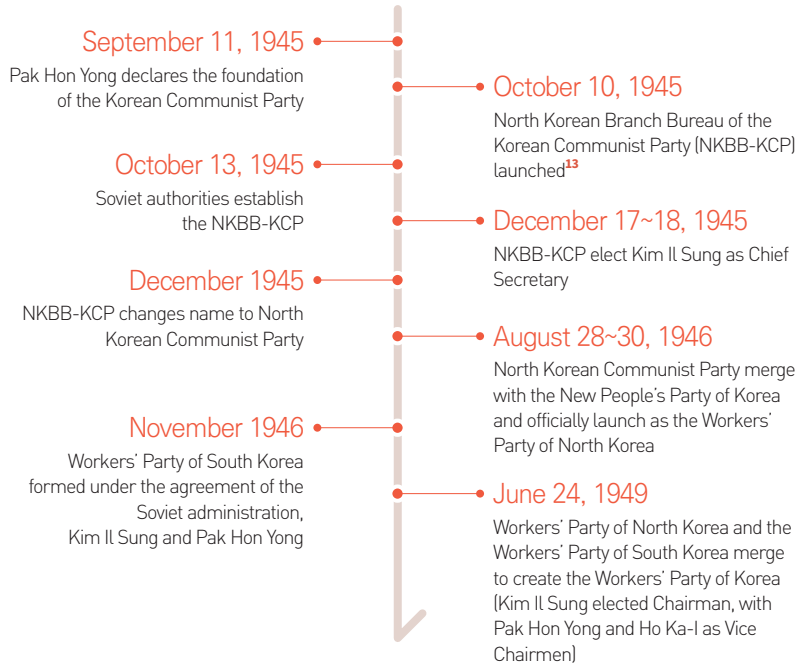
## 2 Workers’ Party of Korea

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### 1) Its Position and Nature

The Workers’ Party of Korea (WPK) has been defined as the “vanguard of the revolution, formed by the talented workers and farmers who executed the revolution and state building under the monolithic leadership of the *suryong* and guided by the revolutionary ideology of the *suryong*.” As the amended Platform of the WPK of 2010 puts it, “it is the party of the great leader Kim Il Sung,” making it clear that the party belongs to the *suryong*. Kim Jong Il defined the WPK as the “sole guiding body of a socialist state” and emphasized that the status and role of the party cannot be substituted by any other political organization. This is because he believed that “surrendering the leadership of a socialist state to any other parties than a party of the working class equals the ultimate surrender of socialism.” In this

[Table 2-2] Formation of the Workers' Party



perspective, the WPK in North Korea can be defined as an organization which guides the people under the leadership of the *suryong* within a *suryong* dictatorial system.

The 2010 amendment of the party platform changed the purpose of the WPK, reflecting the reality within North Korea. The primary goal of the party was changed from “total victory of socialism within

<sup>13</sup> The WPK was founded in June 1949. However, North Korea celebrates October 10 as the party foundation anniversary because the origin of the WPK, the North Korean Branch Bureau of the Communist Party of Korea, gathered on October 10, 1945. This date was when Kim Il Sung gave his opening speech at the Conference of Korean Communist Party Members and Enthusiasts in the Five Provinces. The North Korean Branch Bureau of the party was actually founded on October 13, in accordance with the resolution passed during the said convention.



the Northern half of the Republic” to “the building of a strong and prosperous socialist nation in the Northern half of the Republic.” Meanwhile the ultimate goal changed from “modeling all societies based on the *juche* ideology and building a communist society” to “modeling the entire society based on the *juche* ideology to fully realize the self-autonomy of the people.” And they named “securing the singularity and heredity of ideology and leadership” as the fundamental principle for the foundation of the party, making hereditary power an official institution at the party level.

After the death of Kim Jong Il, Kim Jong Un amended the party platform during the 4th Party Representatives’ Conference to form the monolithic leadership system (April 11, 2012), defining the WPK as the party of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il. And they pronounced Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism as the monolithic guiding ideology<sup>14</sup>, highlighting it as an encompassing guiding principle across the political system of the state. The amendment also obliged the party to complete the *juche* revolution under the leadership of Kim Jong Un. Meanwhile, the amendment of the party platform during the 8th Party Congress in January 2021 reconfirmed the People-First ideology and replaced “*songun* politics” with “People-First politics” as the basic mode of socialist politics.

With regard to the status of the WPK, the North Korean Constitution (amended on August 29th, 2019,) states that “the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) shall conduct all its

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**14** “The WPK is the party of the Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism and a party of revolution based on the idea of *juche*, with the Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism being its monolithic ruling ideology.”

actions under the leadership of the WPK.” The monopoly status of the party specified in the Constitution made it clear that the WPK is the source of power in North Korea, where the party stands above all other institutions. Therefore, it is stated that the WPK is “the highest-level revolutionary organization among all organizations of the workers,” having leadership over all other political organizations.

Meanwhile, with regard to the primary goals of the WPK, the party platform was amended during the 8th Party Congress in January 2021 to state that “the primary goal of the WPK is to build a socialist society in the Northern half of the Republic that is strong, prosperous, and civilized, and to realize self-autonomous and democratic progress of the society across the entire state, while the ultimate goal shall be to build a communist society where all ideals of the people are fully realized.”

However, the role of the party as the vanguard of the proletariat sought by Marxism-Leninism is, in fact, limited due to the monolithic leadership system of the *suryong*. As explained above, the *suryong* theory or the theory of socio-political body of the *juche* ideology overcharges the leadership of the *suryong*, who is like a parent, with excessive roles based on the logic of an organic social structure. As a result, the *suryong* is to indoctrinate and organize the people to unite them with his political abilities at the head of the leadership to lead the people toward a victory in their revolutionary efforts. However, with the leadership of the *suryong* expanded like this, it is unavoidable that the autonomy of the party suffers in return. Here, the principle of the dictatorship by many, realized by the party which represents all workers, is replaced by the one-man dictatorship of the *suryong*. The WPK is a high-level organization to guide the people of North Korea,

while it is a lower-level apparatus under the control by the *suryong* in reality.

## 2) Organization and Functions

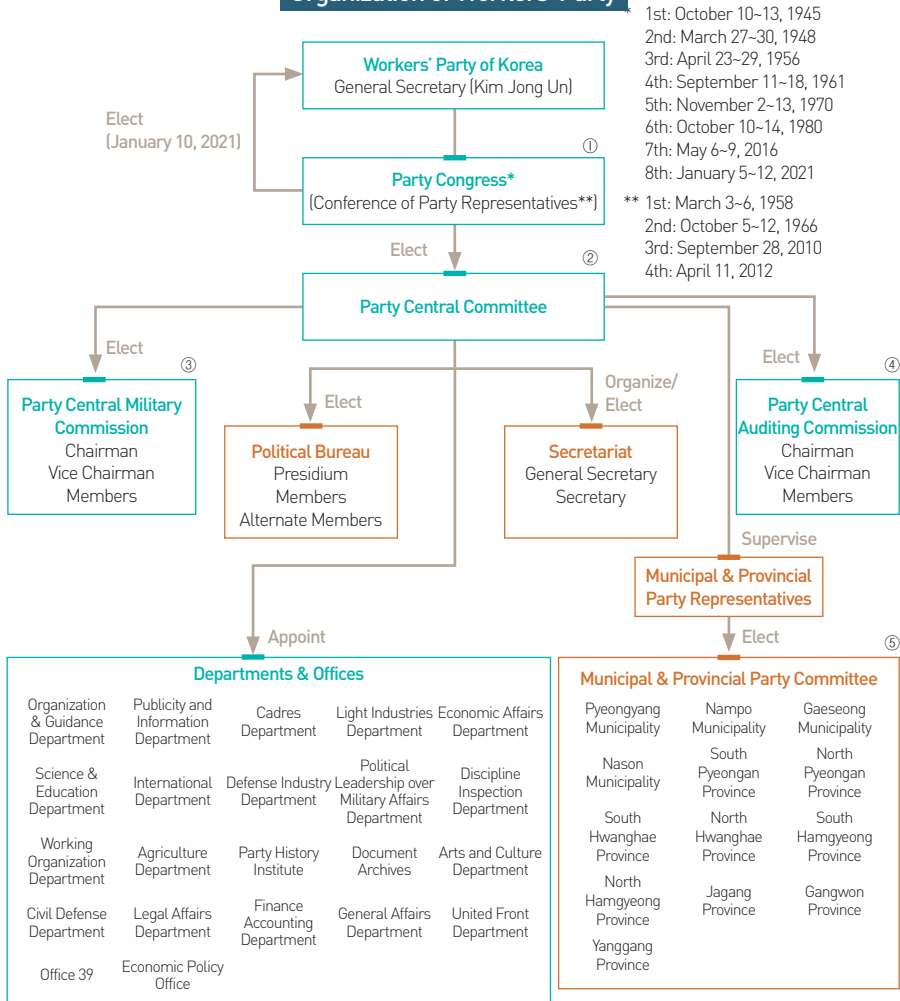
The reason why they prioritize the top-down system of centralism in the operation of the party is that they consider the primary role of the party as the apparatus to put the guidance by the *suryong* into action. The leadership role of the WPK is divided into the party life guidance and the party policy guidance. The party life guidance is again divided into the organized life guidance and the ideological life guidance. Here, the organized life guidance is the responsibility of the Organization and Guidance Department, which is a department under the WPK Central Committee, while the Publicity and Information Department takes care of for the ideological life guidance.

The party platform emphasizes the sole dictatorship ideology, along with the absolute position of the general secretary of the party and the control of the party's operation via its Organization and Guidance Department, which indicates that WPK serves the supreme leader, who has total control over the party.

### **Party Congress and Party Representatives' Conference**

The official supreme decision-making organ of the WPK is the Party Congress. In a Party Congress, the party may amend its platform and make decisions or statements on the directions, policies, strategies, or tactics of the party. In reality, the Party Congress retrospectively approves the decisions already made by the WPK Central Committee

## Organization of Workers' Party



The order of departments: Korean alphabetical order, except for the Organization and Guidance Department, Publicity and Information Department, and the Economic Policy Office.

- ① Party Congress (every five years) and Party Representatives' Conference: Establishment of the policy and direction of the party, adoption of the charter and platform, election of the General Secretary, and discussion of various party programs.
- ② WPK Central Committee: Organize and direct all programs of the party; controls the finance of the party (At least one Plenary Session to be held each year).
  - Political Bureau: Organizes and directs all programs of the party.
  - Secretariat (formerly Executive Policy Bureau): Discusses and decides on the internal programs of the party and organizes/guides their execution.
- ③ WPK Central Military Commission: The party's arm to organize and guide all military programs and activities; establishes the military policies and directions of the party and supervises defense projects.
- ④ WPK Central Auditing Commission: Audits the fiscal management of the party; supervises, audits, and reviews the disciplinary matters of the party; handles complaints.
- ⑤ Municipal and Provincial Party Representatives: The highest leadership organizations of the regional branches of the Party. Reports to the WPK Central Committee, and the meeting of the regional representatives is to be held in every five years.

**[Figure 2-1] Organization of Workers' Party**

※ Source : Ministry of Unification North Korea Information Portal, North Korean Leadership

of the WPK Political Bureau.

Until the amendment of the party platform during the 3rd Party Representatives' Conference (September 28, 2010,) the Party Congress was to be called for by the WPK Central Committee every five years. But this has rarely been upheld. Since the 1st Party Congress, a total of six party congresses had been convened until 1980. However, the Party Congress was not held over 36 years until the 7th Party Congress in 2016. For this, the North Korean regime abolished the provision on holding a Party Congress every five years during at the 3rd Party Representatives' Conference. This conference was convened for the first time in 44 years, and authorized the WPK Central Committee to call for a Party Congress, with a six-month announcement in advance.

**[Table 2-3] History of the Party Congress**

1st	Oct 10, 1945 <sup>15</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Declaration of the foundation of the party</li> <li>• Adoption of the political directions and organizational direction of the party</li> </ul>
2nd	Mar 27 to 30, 1948	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reporting on the operation of the WPK Central Committee</li> <li>• Amendment of the Party's Platform</li> <li>• Election of the party's central organs</li> </ul>
3rd	Apr 23 to 29, 1956	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluation of the activities of the WPK Central Committee and the WPK Central Auditing Commission (titled "For the Peaceful Unification of the Fatherland")</li> <li>• Amendment of the Party's Platform (pronounced Marxism-Leninism as the supreme guideline for the activities of the party)</li> <li>• Election of the party's central organs</li> </ul>

**15** According to "70 Years of Leading Korea" published in September 2015 in celebration of the foundation of the WPK and the article on *Rodong Sinmun* on January 23, 2016, North Korea calls the Conference of Korean Communist Party Members and Enthusiasts in the Five Northwestern Provinces (October 10 to 13, 1945) the first Party Congress ever.

4th	Sep 11 to 18, 1961	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluation of the activities of the WPK Central Committee and WPK Central Auditing Commission</li> <li>• Designation of the 7-Year Plan for the Development of the National Economy (1961 - 1967)</li> <li>• Amendment of the Party's Platform (added "the revolutionary tradition of the armed resistance against Japan" to the guiding ideology of the party)</li> <li>• Election of the party's central organs</li> </ul>
5th	Nov 2 to 13, 1970	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluation of the activities of the WPK Central Committee and WPK Central Auditing Commission</li> <li>• Designation of the 6-Year Plan for the Development of the National Economy (1971 - 1976)</li> <li>• Amendment of the Party's Platform (pronounced the <i>juche</i> ideology as the guiding ideology of the party)</li> <li>• Election of the party's central organs</li> </ul>
6th	Oct 10 to 14, 1980	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluation of the activities of the WPK Central Committee and WPK Central Auditing Commission (declared the 10 projected goals for the construction of socialism)</li> <li>• Amendment of the Party's Platform</li> <li>• Election of the party's central organs (Kim Jong Il elected as the Standing Committee member of the Political Bureau of the party)</li> </ul>
7th	May 6 to 9, 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluation of the activities of the WPK Central Committee and WPK Central Auditing Commission</li> <li>• Amendment of the Party's Platform</li> <li>• Election of Kim Jong Un as the head of the party (Chairman of the WPK)</li> <li>• Election of the party's central organs (reshuffle of the Political Bureau)</li> <li>• 5-Year Development Strategy for the National Economy</li> </ul>
8th	Jan 5 to 12, 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluation of the activities of the WPK Central Committee and WPK Central Auditing Commission</li> <li>• Amendment of the Party's Platform</li> <li>• Election of Kim Jong Un as the General Secretary of the WPK</li> <li>• Election of the party's central organs (reshuffle of the Secretariat)</li> <li>• 5-Year Development Strategy for the National Economy</li> </ul>

At the 7th Party Congress (May 6-9, 2016), the party amended its platform to rename the title of the head of the party from "First Secretary" to "Chairman of the Party," while restructuring the Secretariat into the State Affairs Commission. Additional amendment included the *Byungjin Policy* while improving the organization and operation system of the party and its members.

North Korea convened the 6th Plenary Session of the 7th WPK Central Committee (August 19, 2020) to announce its decision to hold

the 8th Party Congress in January 2021, which was less than five years from the 7th Party Congress. The 8th Party Congress was held during January 5 to 12, 2021.



8th Party Congress (Jan 5-12, 2021)

The slogans of the 8th Party Congress included the three ideologies of “People Equals the Heaven (*iminwicheon*),” “Solidarity as One (*ilsimdangyeol*),” “Self Reliance (*jaryeokgaengsaeng*).” It also prioritized improving the ailing economy, declaring its stance on continued development of the “new strategy” to overcome the economic hardship.

**[Table 2-4] History of the Party Representatives’ Conference**

1st	Mar 3-6, 1958	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1st Five-Year Economic Development Plan (1957 - 1961)</li> <li>• Reinforcement of party solidarity and unity</li> <li>• Matters of the party organization</li> </ul>
2nd	Oct 5-12, 1966	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current political environment and the missions of the party <i>Byungjin</i> Policy of the defense and economy)</li> <li>• Urgent tasks for building a socialist economy (extending the Seven-Year Economic Development Plan by three years)</li> <li>• Adopted the Party Representatives’ Conference Statement on the matters related to Vietnam</li> <li>• Matters of the party organization (abolition of the position of the Chairman of the WPK Central Committee and reorganized into a structure with a position for the General Secretary, election)</li> </ul>
3rd	Sep 28, 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Re-election of Kim Jong Il to General Secretary</li> <li>• Appointment of Kim Jong Un as Vice Chairman of the CMC</li> <li>• Revision of party platform (WPK Conference given authority to revise party platform)</li> <li>• Election of central organs and the Central Committee</li> </ul>
4th	Apr 11, 2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Election of Kim Il Sung as eternal <i>surjong</i> and Kim Jong Il as eternal general secretary</li> <li>• Stipulation of Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism as the monolithic ruling ideology of the party</li> <li>• Newly instated the position of the First Secretary. Kim Jong Un was elected as the First Secretary, a member of the Political Bureau, a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau, and the Chairman of the WPK Central Military Commission</li> </ul>

It also pronounced the strategies for the advancement of its nuclear program and development of defense industries, along with a novel “5-Year National Economic Plan.” The economic strategy under the said five year plan was defined as the step-by-step “improvement strategy” and the “reinforcement strategy.”

The Party Representatives’ Conference discusses and decides on the urgent issues for the directions, policies, strategies, and tactics of the party between Party Congresses, where the party leadership summons the members and elect vacancies. A Party Representatives’ Conference is to be called for by the WPK Central Committee. During the 3rd Party Representatives’ Conference of 2010, the position of the Vice Chairman of the WPK Central Military Commission was introduced; Kim Jong Un was appointed Vice Chairman; the party platform was amended; and the election of the leadership was held. The results of the Party Representatives’ Conference included the “officialization of the 3rd-generation succession of power by Kim Jong Un” and a reshuffle of the leadership of the party including the members of the WPK Central Committee, Political Bureau, Secretariat, and WPK Central Military Commission, etc. The Party Representatives’ Conference during the era of Kim Il Sung mainly covered the international politics and the responses to the political environments inside and outside North Korea, while those during the eras of Kim Jong Il and Kim Jong Un focused mainly on the succession of power. To make the party system institutionalized and more efficient, the WPK amended its Platform to endow the Party Representatives’ Conference with the authority to hold the elections for the leadership of the party and amend the party platform. The 2016 Amendment of the Platform specified the status



of the Chairman of WPK instead of the General Secretary of the party and pronounced that this position could also serve as the Chairman of the WPK Central Military Commission, while defining its authorities in a way to strengthen the party's control over the military. In addition, the amendment of the Platform during the 8th Party Congress made both Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism and the "People First" ideology as the supreme doctrine and political method, and also specified the mission of completing unification backed by the "military power."

### **Party Central Committee**

Between Party Congresses, the WPK Central Committee is entrusted with the authority of the top leadership apparatus of the party and oversees the entire activities of the party. While it is required for the WPK Central Committee to hold a Plenary Session at least once every year, that authority is entrusted to the Political Bureau between such Plenary Sessions. The WPK Central Committee is composed of members and alternate members elected at the Party Congress. The Plenary Sessions of the WPK Central Committee, where all members are to participate, discuss and decide upon the issues inside and outside of the party.

Furthermore, the Plenary Session, elect the Political Bureau and its Standing Committee, the First Secretary and secretaries of the WPK Central Committee, the WPK Central Military Commission, and the WPK Central Auditing Commission. It is The Plenary Session is also endowed with the authority to organize the Secretariat and amend the party platform. However, during the era of Kim Jong Il, no Plenary Sessions was held between the 21st session of the 6th period in 1993

and the Plenary Session in 2010. Then, the 3rd Party Representatives' Conference and the Plenary Session of the WPK Central Committee were held in September 2010 to adopt the third-generation power succession by Kim Jong Un and establish its institutional basis. Over the three decades during which Party Congress was not held, only 60 of the members of the WPK Central Committee remained. However, 124 were newly elected during the 3rd Party Representatives' Conference. In addition, the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the WPK Central Committee and the Political Bureau, which were left vacant, were filled up. Also, the Secretariat of the WPK Central Committee and the WPK Central Military Commission were newly established.

On March 31, 2013, a Plenary Session of the WPK Central Committee was held to adopt the "*Byungjin Policy*." On May 9, 2016, during the 7th Party Congress, the 1st Plenary Session was held. This accompanied the election of the secretaries of the Political Bureau and its Standing Committee, as well as Vice Chairman (now secretary) of the WPK Central Committee, along with the organization of the State Affairs Commission (now Secretariat) and the WPK Central Military Commission.

The 2nd Plenary Session on October 7, 2017 continued the *Byungjin Policy* and emphasized the overcoming of the sanctions against the North through self-sufficiency. This was accompanied by a reshuffle of the members of the WPK Central Committee and the WPK Central Military Commission. On April 20, 2018, the 3rd Plenary Session adopted the "New Strategic Direction" to declare the success of the previous *Byungjin Policy* and their plan to focus on building the

economy. The 4th Plenary Session of the 7th Party Central Committee held on April 10, 2019, instructed a total mobilization to meet the goals of the “5-Year Strategy,” and ordered to strengthen the roles of the state institutions in the direction of “consolidating the party and the state.” Eight months after the 4th Plenary Session, North Korea held the 5th Plenary Session to pronounce the “New Path” with self-sufficiency, military-backed politics and diplomacy, and control by the party as the key elements. They also officially admitted the damage from the prolonged sanctions on North Korea and stressed the protection of their rights for self-protection and right for survival by means of expanding their military capabilities. This was followed by the 5th Plenary Session, where a total of 77 positions were elected including the members of the Political Bureau and the positions in the state institutions such as the cabinet.

On August 19, 2020, the 6th WPK Central Committee Plenary Session for the 7th Period was held. During this session, they stated that “a failure to improve of the economy resulted in significant shortfalls in the growth goals of the country, and the life of the people did not improve noticeably,” officially admitting their unsatisfactory economic performance. It was also decided to hold the 8th Party Congress in January 2021.

The 1st Plenary Session of the 8th Party Central Committee on January 10 elected the members of the Political Bureau of the WPK Central Committee and the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau. The 2nd Plenary Session of the 8th Party Central Committee on February 8th through 11th discussed the 2021 project plans to ensure the completion of the strategic missions issued during the 8th Party

Congress. The 3rd Plenary Session of the 8th Party Central Committee on June 15 through 18 made an interim evaluation of the progress of the key policies of the party and the state. The 4th Plenary Session of the 8th Party Central Committee on December 27 through 31 to evaluated the performance of projects in 2021 and the priority tasks to solve the socialist agricultural issues, as well as the project plans for 2022.

In 2022, the 5th Plenary Session of the 8th Party Central Committee on June 8 through 10 gave a positive recognition to the achievements of policy implementation during the first half of 2022 (construction projects and COVID-19 control), while declaring “hard on hard, head to head principles in conflict” concerning the international security environment. On December 26 through 31, the 6th Plenary Session of the 8th Party Central Committee evaluated the 2022 performance and 2023 project plans. The reference to the economy and the quality of life of the people decreased significantly, and there was no mention to the detailed plans outside the construction sector in 2023. The Supreme Leader himself mentioned “fighting the enemies” and pronounced goals such as mass production of novel ICBM and tactical nuclear weapons, including an exponential increase in the number of nuclear warheads. This entailed their announcement of the plans to strengthen the control over the party membership and large-scale events mobilizing the public.

### **The Political Bureau Central Committee and the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau**

In the prolonged absence of Party Congresses or the Plenary Sessions

of the WPK Central Committee, the decision-making power resides with the Political Bureau of WPK Central Committee, which was newly created during the 6th Party Congress of 1980. However, under the regime of Kim Jong Il, the Political Bureau was virtually dormant. The change of the status of the Political Bureau overlapped with the power succession phase. The Political Bureau of the Central Committee decided to call for the 3rd Party Representatives' Conference on September 28, 2010. Especially after Kim Jong Un's taking office, key agenda such as the purge of Ri Yong Ho and Jang Song Thaek were decided during the Political Bureau meetings or expanded meetings, indicating the restoration of its privilege. During the 7th Party Congress in 2016, the members of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau were shuffled to include the five new members of Kim Jong Un, Kim Yong Nam, Hwang Pyong So, Pak Pong Ju, and Choe Ryong Hae. On April 9, 2018, a meeting of the Political Bureau discussed the agreements made during the inter-Korean Summit of 2018 and the dialogue with the U.S. also on the agenda. During the Expanded Meeting of the Political Bureau held on April 9, 2019 approved the budget plan to be submitted to the Supreme People's Assembly and decided hold the 4th Plenary Session of the 7th WPK Central Committee on April 10.

The Political Bureau meetings of 2020, which showed more activities than ever since the beginning of the Kim Jong Un regime, were focused on "how to respond to and contain the spread of COVID-19." The Expanded Meeting of the Political Bureau on February 29 discussed state-level control measures against COVID-19. This was followed by a flurry of Political Bureau meetings, in which North Korea checked its progress with its COVID-19 measures and reinforced state-

level disease control system. In addition, restoration from floods and disaster prevention measures against typhoons were dealt with during these meetings, along with decisions to call for the 8th Party Congress and the execution of the “80-Day Battle.”

The party platform were amended during the 8th Party Congress held in January 2021 - the Political Bureau was now to convene a Plenary Session of the WPK Central Committee (Article 27). In addition, the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau will now discuss and decide upon urgent and important matters, as well as the appointment or dismissal of key state and party officials. Members of the Standing Committee can also moderate the meetings of the Political Bureau (Article 28) with their expanded authorities.

The 1st Political Bureau meeting of the 8th Period on June 4, 2021, gave an interim evaluation of the implementation of the policies of the party and the state, while discussing additional state-level measures regarding the economy and life of the people. On June 29, the 2nd Political Bureau meeting was held to discuss how to respond to the prolonged “state emergency disease control campaign” due to COVID-19. On September 2, the 3rd Expanded Meeting of the Political Bureau ordered the strengthening of the “state disease control measures” and actions to resolve food shortage.

The three members of the Political Bureau Standing Committee as of July 2020 were Kim Jong Un, Choi Ryong Hae, and Park Bong Ju. However, it was expanded to five members after the 8th Party Congress in January 2021, composed of Kim Jong Un, Choe Ryong Hae, Ri Pyong Chol, Kim Tok Hun, and Jo Yong Won. After the 2nd Political Bureau meeting on June 29, Ri Pyong Chol was recalled and replaced

by Pak Jong Chon as the member of the Political Bureau Standing Committee, according to the September gazette of the Political Bureau of the party. After the celebration of the 90th anniversary of the Korean People's Revolutionary Army on April 25, 2022, Ri Pyong Chol was reinstated as a member of the Political Bureau Standing Committee, expanding the Political Bureau to six members including Kim Jong Un. However, Pak Jong Chon was dismissed from the Standing Committee during the 6th Plenary Session of the 8th Party Central Committee, rolling the number back to five.

On January 18, 2022, the 6th Political Bureau of the 8th Period signaled the scrapping of the moratorium on nuclear weapons test and ICBM launches. On May 12, the 8th Political Bureau meeting of the 8th Period admitted the outbreak of COVID-19 officially and decided to shift to the "maximum disease control step." This was followed by a Political Bureau Standing Committee meeting on May 17 to discuss the issue of emergency disease control. The 10th Political Bureau meeting of the 8th Period on September 25 discussed and checked the status of agriculture in 2022 and adopted key decision statements. The 11th Political Bureau meeting of the 8th Period on November 30th touched on the principal issues to establish key policies of the party and the state. During the 6th Plenary Session of the 8th Period in late December 2022 the 12th Political Bureau Meeting reviewed the decisions and budget plans to be submitted to the Plenary Session, along with decisions made on the key economic measures for 2023.

### **Secretariat of the Central Committee**

The key power institution taking leadership in all political decisions

in the WPK was the Political Bureau of the party and the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau. However, since the death of Kim Il Sung and O Jin U, the Standing Committee of Political Bureau diminished to a single member, Kim Jong Il, virtually putting the committee into a coma. This caused the Secretariat, instead of the Political Bureau Standing Committee, to become the practical leader of the WPK Central Committee. The Secretariat was formed during the 2nd Party Representatives' Conference of October 1996 and the 14th Plenary Session of the WPK Central Committee of the 4th Period (October 12), for the purpose of consolidating the *suryong* dictatorial system and the succession of power by Kim Jong Il. This Secretariat was then restructured into the State Affairs Commission during the 7th Party Congress of 2016.

However, the 8th Party Congress in January 2021 amended the party platform to rename the State Affairs Commission back into the Secretariat. The Secretariat of the WPK Central Committee is the practical executive branch which organizes and guides all activities of the party between the Party Congresses. The Secretariat of WPK Central Committee also discusses and decides upon the internal operation of the party and other practical matters, while organizing and supervising the party itself as its core department.

Before its conversion to the Secretariat in 2021, three meetings of the State Affairs Commission were held in 2020. The 4th State Affairs Commission meeting of the 7th WPK Central Committee discussed the disease control measures against COVID-19 in the city of Gaeseong. The 5th State Affairs Commission meeting of the 7th Period on August 25 discussed the practical matters related to the 8th Party Congress



(organization of the Preparation Committee, etc.) The expanded meeting of the State Affairs Commission on September 5 heard reports on the damage caused by a typhoon and discussed restoration.

The Secretariat meeting of June 12, 2022, discussed restoring discipline within the party and declared an intense campaign against “counter-revolutionary actions.” What was noteworthy about this meeting was that it declared the “key strategic party building ideology of the Comrade General Secretary, Chairman Kim Jong Un of the State Affairs Commission (*Rodong Sinmun*, June 13, 2022). An expanded meeting of the Secretariat on June 27, 2022 discussed the improvement of project implementation systems of the party leadership organizations of each level, strengthening political activities, and making adjustments to the organizations to the departments of the WPK Central Committee. As of December 31, 2022, the Secretariat of the party is composed of eight members : the General Secretary Kim Jong Un, Jo Yong Won, Ri Yong Gil, Ri Pyong Chol, Ri Il Hwan, Kim Jae Ryong, Jon Hyon Chol and Pak Thae Song.

### **Central Military Commission**

The Central Military Commission of the WPK was established following the decisions to build up military strength, including the adoption of the “4-Point Military Guidelines” suggested by Kim Il Sung during the 5th Plenary Session of the 4th WPK Central Committee in December 1962. The Central Military Commission, which was a sub-branch of the Central Committee, was promoted and renamed as the Central Military Commission in 1982. The Central Military Commission played a pivotal role in executing the “4-Point Military

Guidelines,” which turned the entire North Korea into a militarized camp. There were regional military commissions in every province, municipality, and county in the country.<sup>16</sup>

The Central Military Commission did not receive much attention until September 2010. However, even during the era of Kim Jong Il, the commission was endowed with the authority to manage military officers, and issue orders, instructions, and decisions on its own regarding military commands and policies. Since the 3rd Party Representatives’ Conference in 2010, when Kim Jong Un was appointed as the Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission, it was promoted to the practically highest-level military leadership apparatus within the party. Especially since Kim Jong Un’s regime, the Central Military Commission started to hold its weight as the highest-level authority concerning security and military matters.

Under Kim Jong Un’s regime, the Central Military Commission (expanded meetings) were held frequently in 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015 (August 20 and 27), appearing to play an important policy decision-making role within North Korean politics. On May 17, 2018, the 1st expanded meeting of the 7th WPK Central Military Commission discussed the roles of the military to realize the “new strategic directions” suggested during the Plenary Session in April.

Four sessions of the WPK Central Military Commission were held in 2020. The 4th expanded meeting of the 7th WPK Central Military Commission held on May 23 pronounced the reinforcement of the national defense capabilities and war deterrence. The preliminary

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<sup>16</sup> National Institution of Unification Education, *North Korea Encyclopedia*, 2021, p. 198.

meeting for the 5th Meeting of the 7th Period on June 23 pronounced strengthening deterrence against war. On the other hand, through the amendment of the Party platform in January 2021, the WPK Central Military Commission was now able to discuss and decide upon measures to fulfill the politics and military directions of the party; taking command over the military forces of the Republic; and take the party leadership over the entire projects to develop defense industries and other defense projects. This redefined its role as the supreme military supervision institution between Party Congresses. The members were to be elected during expanded meetings of the WPK Central Committee. Also, the requirements of quorum to hold a WPK Central Military Commission meeting was abolished, stating that “a meeting can be called for with only the necessary members” (Article 30), making it possible to make military policy decisions in an emergency with only a small number of members.

After the revision of the party platform on February 24, 2021, the 1st expanded meeting of the 8th WPK Central Military Commission was held. During this meeting, the Commission stressed to all party organizations and political arms on the missions to manifest the “moral and mental superiority” by building up combat capabilities while the consolidating the control over the military by the central leadership of the party. The second expanded meeting on June 11 briefed on the political environment around the peninsula, according to *Rodong Sinmun* (June 12, 2021.)

From June 21 through 23, 2022, the 3rd expanded meeting of the 8th WPK Central Military Commission reshuffled the WPK Central Military Commission to reinstate Ri Pyong Chol as the Vice Chairman,

while increasing the total number of Vice Chairman Positions to two. The meeting also covered the review of the military and political activities of the first half of 2022, along with some key political decisions regarding national military buildup.

### **Central Auditing Commission**

The Auditory Committee of the WPK was established during the second Party Congress in March 1948. The WPK Central Auditing Commission has been responsible for the auditing of the finance and accounting of the party. Originally, the WPK Central Inspection Committee, in charge of the disciplinary actions against violation of the party platform by party members, reviewing and handling the petitions or complaints from regional committees, existed as a separate organization.

As Kim Jong Un emphasized the fight against corruption, bureaucratism and abuse of power during the 8th Party Congress in January 2021, the party platform was amended to integrate the Central Inspection Committee with the Central Auditing Commission. As a result, the Central Auditing Commission was now entitled to audit the financial activities of the party, as well as the “audit and investigation of the violations of party platform, review of party discipline issues, and handling of complaints and petitions” with expanded power and functions. Also, a change was made to elect the members of the Central Auditing Commission not by the previous Party Congress but the Plenary Session of the WPK Central Committee, for the sake of fast and efficient operation. The first expanded meeting of the 8th WPK Central Committee, which was held as the last step of the 8th Party Congress,

newly established the Discipline Inspection Department and the Legal Affairs Department, to be solely responsible for auditory investigation for strengthening the discipline within the party. The Chairman and Vice Chairman of the WPK Central Auditing Commission were also to be filled by a member of Political Bureau or an alternate member of the Political Bureau, further strengthening its status.

### **Local Party Organizations**

The local organizations of the WPK form a multi-level structure containing both vertical and horizontal control arrangements. In other words, different levels of party committees form strict hierarchy with upper and lower-level party committees, while having absolute dominance over other organizations or social groups of the same level.

The WPK does not disclose detailed statistics of its lower-level organizations. In accordance with the party organization which is formed based on the jurisdictions and administrative units, there are thirteen provincial committees, and 200 municipal committees, along with thousands of grass-root party committees and tens of thousands of party cells. There are also separate party committee levels over the People's Army, party committees, and provincial and central levels. The power within a jurisdiction is usually concentrated on the head of the organization of the relevant party committee (party secretary.)

## **3) Relationship between Administration, Military and Social Organizations**

### **Party-State Relationship**

The power structure of North Korea is centered around the party.

Therefore, government institutions are responsible for making the “party policies” into laws and execute them. The party’s control over government agencies is executed in the form of a party official holding an administrative position, in addition to having corresponding organizations within the party match each and every department of the government. North Korea emphasizes that strengthening the controlling grip of the party over the administration of the government ensures the maintenance and development of the socialist regime. For this purpose, party organizations are closely connected to the administrative and economic programs.

### **Party-Military Relationship**

Even in the relationship with the military, the party is in the position of controlling the military, in accordance with the platform and principles. With the amendment of the platform in January 2021, the WPK Central Military Commission was defined as the highest-level military guidance apparatus between Party Congresses. Also, the Central Military Commission was designated to review and decide on the policies and directions of the party on military issues, take command of the armed forces, and take the party leadership over the entire national programs, including the projects to promote defense industries (Article 30). To control the military, the party dispatches commissars as the representatives of the party and instates party organizations in every level of the armed forces. Within the Korean People’s Army, there is the General Political Bureau that leads and manages the military programs of the party. This General Political Bureau also directs the party committees of different levels and

organizations within the Korean People's Army.

Directions and controls over the North Korean military by the WPK Central Committee are usually through the special departments under the Central Committee. For example, the Organization and Guidance Department of the Central Committee has been controlling and supervising the North Korean military through the Guidance, Inspection, Executive Divisions of the General Political Bureau. This means that the Organization and Guidance Department of the Central Committee and the Guidance Division of the General Political Bureau have been controlling and guiding the lives of the political officers and commanders of the North Korean military within the party through the organization departments. In addition, the Ministry of Defense, which is in charge of the administration of the military, and the General Staff Department, which is responsible for the military chain of command, are the responsibilities of the Political Leadership over Military Affairs Department under the Central Committee.

Of course, there have been some changes in the relationship between the party and the military since the official inauguration of the Kim Il Sung regime. With the amended Constitutions of 1998 and 2009, the status of the National Defense Commission, which was directly controlled by Kim Jong Il, has been strengthened steadily. And, with the continued adherence to the *songun* politics by Kim Jong Il, the influence of the military appeared to have been increased. The Ministry of People's Armed Forces (now the Department of Defense) came under the jurisdiction of the National Defense Commission, and this caused some to believe that the party's control over the military weakened than in the past. However, the organization of the General

Political Bureau of the North Korean military is formed across the entire chain of command of the military, from individual companies to the General Staff Department and the Ministry of Defense, to match them one on one at every level. In this regard, the structure of “the party’s control over the military” still appears to be in effect.

On the other hand, the Supreme People’s Assembly held its 4th session for the 13th Period on June 29, 2015, to newly establish the “State Affairs Commission” to expand the function of the “National Defense Commission,” which was previously limited to the domain of defense, to diplomacy, unification, and economy, in a move to become a “normal state” with a “party-state system” rather than the previous transitional system of the country that was heavily centered on the military. At the same time, they tried to strengthen the control by the WPK on the military by newly establishing the Political Leadership over Military Affairs Department during the 5th Plenary Session of the 7th Period of the Central Committee in December 2019. This was followed by an amendment of the party platform to degrade the General Political Bureau, which was at the same level with other departments of the Central Committee, to a level of an executive department under a municipal and provincial party committee, while ordering it to “operate under the supervision by the WPK Central Committee.” This weakened the status and roles of the General Political Bureau of the Korean People’s Army significantly.

### **Party-Social Organization Relationship**

The WPK guides and controls social groups and organizations. According to the North Korean Constitution, “the state guarantees free



activities of democratic political parties and social groups.” However, many of the political and social groups in North Korea exist only on paper or under control by the WPK. Some of the groups that they call minority political parties in North Korea, such as the “Korean Social Democratic Party” or “Chondoist Chongu Party” are only considered as satellite parties of the WPK.

Worker’s organizations include the Socialist Alliance of Patriotic Youth League (formerly Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism Youth League), the General Federation of Trade Union of Korea, the Union of Agricultural Workers of Korea, and the Socialist Women’s Union of Korea (formerly Korean Democratic Women’s Union). These organizations are satellite bodies of the WPK and function as the linkage between the party and the people, meaning they take the leading role in the ideological enrichment of the people and serve as the loyal vanguard of the party. In addition, there are the Korea Asia-Pacific Peace Committee, the Democratic Front for the Reunification of the Fatherland, and the National Reconciliation Council which are responsible with the interactions with the South under the party’s command. During the 4th session of the 13th Supreme People’s Assembly held on June 29th, 2016, the “National Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland” was renamed as what is technically a state organization, rather than a satellite organization of the party. However, this particular organization is still operating under the supervision by the WPK due to the nature of the party-state country.

### 3 Central Institutions

The major organizations of the state that carry out the operational doctrines of the government as specified in the Constitution under the leadership of the WPK in North Korea consist of the State Affairs Commission (SAC), which is the highest-level policy leadership institution; the Supreme People's Assembly (SPA), which is the top sovereignty and legislative institution; the Cabinet, which is the executive branch under the sovereignty; and judicial institutions.

#### 1) State Affairs Commission

During the 4th session of the SPA of the 13th Period, held on June 29, 2016, North Korea amended its Constitution to expand and restructure its National Defense Commission (NDC) into the SAC and elected Kim Jong Un as the President.

The SAC is the highest-level political leadership institution under the sovereignty of the state and is responsible for reviewing and deciding upon key policies of the state, including military build-up projects. It provides oversight over the execution of the orders of the President and the decisions and instructions issued by the SAC and decides upon necessary actions to take. It is also authorized and responsible for the abolition of the decisions and instructions of state institutions that are not in line with the orders of the President of the SAC or the decisions of the SAC.

The President of the SAC is the supreme leader of North Korea and the commander-in-chief, commanding and leading the entire military

might of the country. The President takes leadership and directs the entirety of the internal and external actions of the state projects, as well as the operation of the SAC itself. The President also has the power to appoint or dismiss key officials; appoint or recall diplomatic representatives to be stationed abroad; approve or terminate key treaties with foreign countries; issue special pardons; and organize the war-time National Defense Committee.

The August 2019 amendment of the constitution named the President of the SAC as the “supreme leader of the DPRK and the representative of the state.” It also states that (the President is to be) “elected by the SPA in accordance with the collective will of the people of North Korea and is not elected as a regular member of the SPA.” The overall role and power given to this position expanded to “appoint or recall the diplomatic representatives abroad.”

As of December 31, 2022, the SAC is headed by the President, Kim Jong Un, and the members are Choe Ryong Hae (who serves as the 1st vice President,) Kim Tok Hun (vice President,) and other members such as Jo Yong Won, Pak Jong Chon, Kim Yong Chol, Ri Son Gwon, Kim Song Nam, Kim Yo Jong, Pak Su Il, Ri Chang Dae, and Choe Son Hui.

## 2) Supreme People’s Assembly

The SPA is the North Korean equivalent of the South Korean National Assembly. But the power of SPA falls far too short of that of its Southern counterpart as the SPA only approves what has already been decided by the WPK. This is apparent when you see the unanimous voting structure where the members of the commission hold up

their cards of membership all at once in favor without exception in Pyongyang's Mansudae Assembly Hall. Each member of the assembly serves a term of five years, and a total 687 members for the 14th Period have been elected. The regular sessions include Presidium meetings, held once or twice a year. Special sessions can be called for as deemed necessary by the Presidium of the SPA, or with the votes in favor of at least one third of the assembly. The quorum for a meeting is two thirds of the entire members of the assembly.

The Presidium of the SPA is composed of the chairman, vice chairman, secretaries, and members. Key responsibilities and authorities include calling for SPA sessions; reviewing and adopting amendments or supplementary propositions between SPA sessions; interpreting the Constitution, laws, and regulations that are currently in effect; establishing or abolishing departments or committees of the Cabinet; approving or terminating treaties with foreign countries; and working with the legislature of other countries or international legislatures. The Chairman of the Presidium of the SPA receives the ambassador's credentials from foreign states as the representative in North Korea. As of 2022, Choe Ryong Hae serves as Chairman of the SPA Presidium.

The authorities of the SPA include enacting, amending, and complementing the constitution and other laws; establishing the fundamental principles for the domestic and international policies; electing and recalling the President of the SAC and its members; electing and recalling the Chairman of the SPA Presidium and its members, as well as the premier of the Cabinet and the President of the Central Court. The assembly is also responsible for the appointment of Cabinet members recommended by the premier as well as the



Mansudae Assembly Hall, ©Nicor

appointment and dismissal of the director of the Central Prosecutor's Office. In addition, the SPA reviews and approves the development plans for the national economy, national budgets and can approve or terminate treaties (non-critical treaties).<sup>17</sup> Votes on the laws and agenda reviewed during a session are cast by raising hands, and a majority vote among the members present in the session is needed to pass the bill. However, an amendment of the constitution requires at least two-thirds of the votes of the regular membership in favor.

The 5th session of the 12th held on April 13, 2012, elected Kim Jong Un for the new top leadership post of North Korea, which was the first Chairman of the National Defense Commission. The session also passed an amendment to the Socialist Constitution to clearly state that North Korea was a nuclear power. Also, it named Kim Il Sung as the “eternal

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**17** In its 2009 amendment of the constitution, North Korea introduced the new “chairman of the National Defense Commission (NDC)” position to strengthen the representing authority of the Chairman of the said committee and separated the authorities to authorize or terminate treaties with foreign countries, which originally belonged to the Presidium of the SPA. The Chairman of the NDC has the authority to approve or terminate “key treaties,” while the Presidium has authority to approve or terminate “treaties,” separating them based on their level of importance (Article 103, Item 4, the Socialist Constitution of 2009). The revised constitution of June 2016 also endowed the President of SAC with the authorities to approve or terminate “key treated with foreign countries.”

leader” and Kim Jong Il as the “eternal Chairman of the NDC,” while newly instating the post of the first Chairman of the NDC to succeed the authorities of the Chairman of the NDC for state institutions.

The 7th session of the 12th SPA in 2013 (April 1, 2013) discussed and passed eight resolutions as follow-up measures for the resolutions adopted by the Plenary Session of the WPK Central Committee (March 31). These included the amendment of the constitution, introduction of new laws, and shuffling of positions. The bills passed included the officialization of the state as a nuclear power in law, introduction of the “Space Development Law,” establishment of the Bureau of Space Development, and reappointment of Pak Pong Ju as the premier of the Cabinet, for the purpose of bossing the momentum for the “*byungjin* policies policies for the economy and nuclear weapons.” The bill for the new “Kumsusan Palace of the Sun Law” was also passed during the same session.

The 1st session of the 13th SPA (April 9, 2014) re-elected Kim Jong Un as the first Chairman of the NDC. Apart from this reappointment, there was not much changes among the members of the SPA and the Cabinet, indicating that the intent behind this session was to stabilize the power structure. The 13th SPA was composed of 687 delegates, and only about 55% of the total membership, 376 delegates, were new faces to the assembly.

The 4th session of the 13th SPA, held on June 29th, 2016, passed an amendment to the Socialist Constitution. The agenda for the session included the election of Kim Jong Un to the President of the SAC, which expanded and restructured the NDC to the SAC. In addition, the National Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland

was established as a state institution and touched on the government organization by renaming the Supreme Court and Public Prosecutor's Office as the Central Court and Prosecutor's Office. On April 11, 2017, the 5th session of the 13th SPA was held to reinstate the "Diplomatic Committee," which was originally established in 1989 and abolished in 1998.

The 1st session of the 14th SPA held on April 11, 2019, saw an amendment to the Socialist Constitution, which maintained the overall framework of the original constitution and removed only one clause (related to the honorary vice Chairman of the Presidium of the SPA,) revising the Constitution to 171 clauses in total. In addition, Kim Jong Un started to use the title of the "Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces of the DPRK" for the first time and was re-elected as the President of the SAC, which accompanied his use of the title, "the Supreme Representative of all North Koreans." In line with such a representative position of the country, Kim Jong Un gave a state administration speech for the first time since the beginning of his regime as the head of state. This was followed by the 2nd session of the 14th SPA in August 2019 and the 3rd session of 14th SPA in April 2020, where the issues of COVID-19 and the economy policy of the Cabinet to overcome the economic crisis were discussed. Since 2020, the Plenary Session of the SPA Presidium passed the bills for the "Smoke-free Law," "Reactionary Ideology and Culture Rejection Law" and "Enterprise Law."

In 2021, the 4th session of 14th SPA was held on January 17, immediately after the 8th Party Congress. The agenda reviewed and passed included organizational issues such as the appointment of

deputy premier of the Cabinet; reports on the Cabinet's programs including the 5-Year National Economic Plan; and closing reviews and budget plants for the state. The 5th session of 14th SPA was held from September 28 to 29. During this meeting, Kim Jong Un participated in giving a state of administration speech and made staff shuffles for various agencies. Also, the bills for the new "Law on the Development of Municipalities" and the "Youth Education Guarantee Law" were passed, while the "National Economic Planning Law" was amended and complemented.

The 6th session of the 14th SPA was held on February 6 and 7, 2022. During this session, various laws were enacted and adopted, including the national budget for 2022, "Childcare Law" and "Law on the Protections of the Rights and Interest of Koreans on Foreign Soil." The 7th session of the 14th SPA held on September 7 and 8 adopted the laws titled "Socialist Rural Community Development Law" and "Law on Nuclear Forces Policy of DPRK." On October 6, the 22nd Plenary Session of the 14th SPA Presidium was held to pass the bills for the "Crisis Management Law" and "Purchase Law." The 23rd Plenary Session of the 14th SPA on December 6 passed the "Social Food Provision Law." On January 17 and 18, 2023, the 8th session of the 14th SPA passed the "Pyeongyang Cultural Language Protection Law" and approved the budget for economy and defense.

### 3) Cabinet

The Cabinet is the "executive branch of the sovereignty of the state and the agency responsible for the overall administration of



the country.” The Cabinet was renamed as the “State Administration Council” in conjunction with the amendment of the “Socialist Constitution” in 1972 and restored to its original name, the “Cabinet,” with the 1998 amendment of the constitution. Here, the Cabinet acquired partial responsibilities and authorities of the abolished post of President and Central People’s Committee. As a result, the function as the “administrative executive branch,” originally from the Administrative Council, was expanded with the authorities for “the overall administration of the state.”

The Cabinet of North Korea is responsible for the following, according to the Constitution; Planning the implementation of the policies of the state; adoption, complementation, and amendment of the platform and regulations of administration of the state in accordance with the constitution and laws; supervision of the operation of the committees within the Cabinet and its regional subordinate organizations; supervision of the activities of regional People’s Committees; establishment and disbandment of the direct subordinate organizations and key administrative and economic agencies, as well as businesses; planning for the improvement of the national administrative bodies; preparation of the national economic development plans and measures for their execution; planning the budget and its expenditure for the state; organization and execution of government programs in the sectors of industry, agriculture, construction, transportation, post services, commerce, trade, land management, urban management, education, science, culture, health care, sports, labor administration, environment protection, tourism; planning for the establishment of currency and banking system; censorship and control for the

order of state administration; preserving social order and protection of the properties and interests of the state and unions; measures for the protection of the rights of the people; entering into treaties with foreign countries and international programs; abolition of the decisions and instructions of administrative agencies that are in conflict with the decisions and instructions by the Cabinet; and many other administrative and economic programs outside of the defense area.

The members of the Cabinet include the premier, deputy premier, chairs of the committees and ministers, along with other necessary members. The term of a Cabinet members is five years, as is the case with the SPA. The premier is responsible for organizing and commanding the operations of the Cabinet and represents the government of North Korea. The premier hosts the Plenary Sessions, where all members of the Cabinet are to participate. Also, there are sectional meetings which are attended by the premier, deputy premier, and other members designated by the premier. The Plenary Session reviews and decides upon the critical issues of the administrative and economic programs, while the sectional meetings review and decide upon the issues entrusted by the Plenary Session. The sectional executive branches of the Cabinet, that is, the committees and ministries, are defined as the sectional administrative bodies of the central government. The committees and ministries of the Cabinet are to have comprehensive control and provide management and guidance for the operations of the relevant sector under the Cabinet's supervision.

There are ten committees of the Cabinet which include the State Price Commission, State Inspection Commission, State Planning Commission, State Emergency and Disaster Commission, National

Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland, and more. The Ministries in the Cabinet include the Ministry of Light Industry, Ministry of Metallurgical Industry, Ministry of Labor, Ministry of External Economic Relations, Foreign Ministry, Ministry of Finance, and Ministry of Railways, etc. The Cabinet also includes the Central Bureau of State Planning, Central Bureau of Statistics, National Aerospace Development Administration, State Academy of Sciences, and the Central Bank. The Secretariat and the Political Bureau of the Cabinet coordinates the entire instruments of the Cabinet. As of December 2022, Kim Tok Hun is the Premier of the Cabinet.

#### 4) Judicial Institutions

##### **Prosecution Institutions**

North Korea has introduced detailed rules and regulations on the organization, missions, and internal relationships of the prosecution institutions in their constitution. The reason why the constitution provides such details is because of the special functions such prosecution institutions hold in a socialist state. The prosecution institutions of North Korea carries out functions not only as the executors of the law but also the protector of the system.

The prosecution institutions of North Korea include the City and Provincial Public Prosecutor's Office, County and City Public Prosecutor's Office, and Special Public Prosecutor's Office under the jurisdiction of the Central Prosecutor's Office. The prosecution institutions of North Korea are subject to the "principles of Centralism," where a lower-level office is to give total and absolute obedience to

superior-level offices. The Head of the Central Prosecutor's Office is, technically, appointed and dismissed by the SPA. The Central Prosecutor's Office is to appoint and dismiss individual prosecutors of the offices of different levels. Moreover, the Central Prosecutor's Office is directly responsible to the SPA.

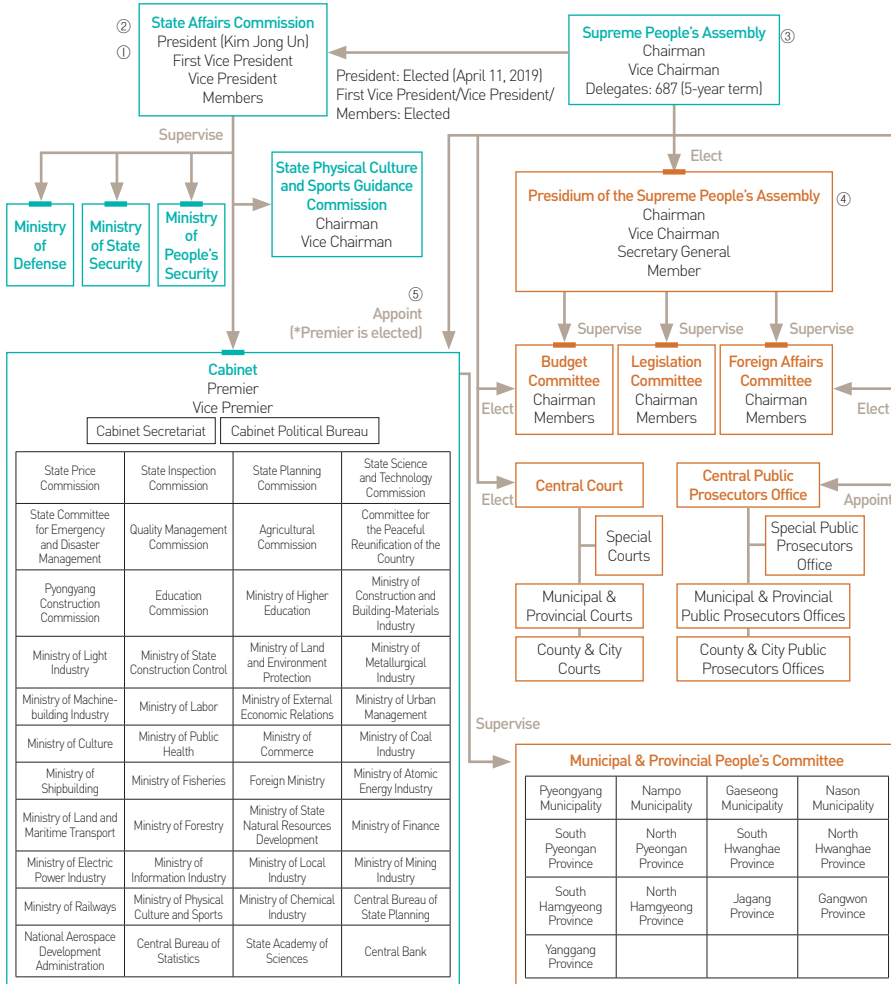
### **Court Institutions**

Similar to the prosecution institutions in North Korea, the court institutions are structured in a way where there is the Central Court, under which there are City and Provincial People's Court. In addition, there are military courts and railway courts as special courts. A trial is typically presided by one judge and two People's jurors. Some special trials can be presided by three judges.

The Central Court is composed of the President, who is elected by the SPA, along with the judges who were elected by the Presidium of the SPA and People's jurors, to supervise the trials of lower-level agencies, while guiding and monitoring the judicial administration. They conduct hearings of the emergency appeals of concluded cases and judgments, as well as the appeals and complaints of courts and special courts. The Central Court reports to the SPA.

The court institutions of North Korea are entirely under the control of the party. Therefore, it is impossible to expect independent and fair trials. Especially, the special trials which are conducted based on the decisions made by the Ministry of State Security are expedited, concluded only with a single trial. For example, Jang Song Thaek was executed without delay after being given a death sentence for conspiring a high treason, according to Article 60 of the Criminal

## Organization of Government



- ① President of the State Affairs Commission: Responsible for the directing of overall state operations; appointment and recalling of the key government officials; approval and termination of treaties; declaration of mobilization in an emergency or a war; formation and direction of the National Defense Committee in war.
- ② The State Affairs Commission: The highest political leadership organization, where key policies of the state are discussed and decided.
- ③ Supreme People's Assembly: Enactment, amendment, and supplementation of the constitution and other laws; establishment of the core principles of the domestic and international policies of the state.
- ④ Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly: Amendment and supplementation of the bills for each sector; audits agencies for their compliance with the law. [The Presidium is to organize and appoint the Cabinet between Supreme People's Assembly meetings].
- ⑤ Cabinet: Implementation of the policies of the government; budget planning, and overall administrative works.

**[Figure 2-2] Organization of Government**

※ Source : Ministry of Unification North Korea Information Portal, *North Korean Leadership*

Law by a special military tribunal of the Political Security Agency (now Ministry of State Security) on December 12, 2013, which was only three days after the decision was made to purge him during an expanded meeting of the Political Bureau of the party.

## Section 4

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# Formation and Consolidation of the Kim Jong Un Regime

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### 1 Formation of the Kim Jong Un Regime

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Kim Jong Un's regime consolidated into an absolute power through a succession process, as it secured the control of the party; monopolized the authority to interpret the ideology; and secured control over the military branch. It appears that the preparation to build Kim Jong Un's regime started in 2009. Kim Jong Un was actually named the successor in 2009, when the song "Footsteps," known as the propaganda theme song to praise Kim Jong Un, was promoted widely. Also, in the national meetings in celebration of the anniversary of the birth of Kim Il Sung, which was held on April 14, the chant, "Protect the WPK Central Committee with your life" was used for the first time after many years.

Kim Jong Un was promoted to four-star general on September 27, 2010, which was followed by his promotion to the vice Chairman of



The military parade in celebration of the 65th anniversary of the WPK (Oct. 10, 2010)

the WPK Central Military Commission (CMC) during the 3rd Party Representatives' Conference, making the succession of power to Kim Jong Un official. These steps were necessary to formalize the power succession to Kim Jong Un by laying the

institutional groundwork, which consisted of reorganizing the party leadership and revising the party platform to further solidify the power base for his new regime. With the new title of vice Chairman of the CMC, Kim Jong Un attended the military parade on October 10, 2010 in celebration of the 65th anniversary of the WPK. Here he put on display his image as a competent figurehead of the North Korean military and enhanced the military's allegiance and loyalty.

The North Korean regime focused on stability in the aftermath of the death of Kim Jong Il and attempted to consolidate Kim Jong Un's rule leveraging on the will of Kim Jong Il, legitimacy of the regime, control over the armed forces, and inducing solidarity within North Korea. During the memorial service for Kim Jong Il on December 29th, 2011, Kim Jong Un was declared as the 'supreme leader of the party, military, and people.' Kim Jong Un was also elected as the Supreme Commander of the People's Army by the will of Kim Jong Il (October 8, 2011) during the meeting of the WPK Central Committee Political Bureau held on December 30.

The joint editorial column for the new year in 2010 emphasized



legacy politics (*yuhun tongchi*), titled “Kim Jong Un equals Kim Jong Il.” This was followed by his promotion to the highest positions in the state and the party during the 4th Party Representatives’ Conference (April 11, 2012) and the 5th session of SPA (April 13, 2012,) completing the succession of the power. Later, he was elected as the “Supreme Leader of the Republic” (July 17, 2012) officially heralding the new “Kim Jong Un era.”

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## 2 Kim Jong Un’s Power Consolidation

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With the 4th Party Representatives’ Conference and the 5th session of the 12th SPA in April 2012 that officially announced the beginning of the Kim Jong Un regime, the power structure of North Korea was reorganized with Kim Jong Un at the helm. With the amendment of the platform of WPK and the constitution, Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism was named the monolithic ruling ideology, and “modeling the whole society on Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism” was set as the highest doctrine of the party, as an effort to build the institutional and ideological foundation of the Kim Jong Un regime.

The power of North Korea is centered around the party leadership organs (WPK Central Committee, Central Military Commission, Politburo, Secretariat, etc.) and the state leadership organ (State Affairs Commission). The political elites of North Korea can be divided into different generations, such as the Anti-Japanese Partisan Generation (1st revolutionary generation), *Chollima* Generation (*Chollima* Movement

generation of the 1950s and 60s), the 3rd Revolutionary Generation (leading the 3 revolutionary teams in the 1970s), and the Generation of the Arduous March (1990s). Not only the now-aged 1st generation of the revolution, but even some of the *Chollima* Generation were retiring from key positions in the power structure. The 3rd Revolutionary Generation, in their 50s and 60s who received elite education became the new power elite of the Kim Jong Un era. They started to rise as the power elite by the end of the Kim Jong Il regime. Many of them were formerly members of party leadership or the experts who could help Kim Jong Un complete his succession of power. The officers in their 40s and 50s from the party, government, and military were promoted in large numbers after the completion of power succession, indicating a generational take over within the power elites of the North.

The Kim Jong Un regime declared *Byungjin* Policy as their new strategic direction through the Plenary Session of the WPK Central Committee (March 31, 2013) and the 7th session of the 12th SPA. This was followed by a restructuring of the organizations and enactment to execute their decisions. What is noteworthy in this process is that the status of the WPK gained further weight, unlike what happened in the past. In addition, to consolidate a monolithic ruling system centered on Kim Jong Un, the regime was focused on strengthening the country's military power through generational change that retired a large number of senior military commanders.

The preface of the 2012 amendment of the WPK platform officially pronounced "Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism as the monolithic guidance ideology." In June 2013, this was followed by the first amendment of the "Ten Principles for the Establishment of a Monolithic Ideological

System,” which comes even before the constitution or the platform of WPK, into the “Ten Principles for the Establishment of the Eternal Monolithic Leadership System.” This was to prevent any possibility of threats from the power elite against the regime, while strengthening the authority of Kim Jong Un and reinforcing the one-man dictatorship. In 2013, *Rodong Sinmun* (December 6, 2013) named Kim Jong Un the “great leader” instead of the ‘supreme leader.’ During the memorial service of the second anniversary of the death of Kim Jong Il (December 17, 2013,) Choe Ryong Hae gave a speech saying that Kim Jong Un was “a new history to realize the eternal legacy of the *suryong*.” The leadership of North Korea emphasized absolute loyalty to Kim Jong Un and sought to build and secure the one-man dictatorship through a competition among the elites to prove who was the most loyal.

During the 7th Party Congress on May 9, 2016, Kim Jong Un was elected as the “Chairman of the WPK,” which was followed by his promotion to the “President of the SAC” during the 4th session of the 13th SPA. In 2017, Kim Jong Un held the 2nd Plenary Session of the 7th WPK Central Committee on October 7 to introduce staff reshuffle of the WPK Central Committee and the WPK CMC at the same time to further strengthen his grip over the WPK.

In 2018, the institutions of the Party Congress were used to make key decisions, and the party-state system with Kim Jong Un at the helm gained further strength. On April 9, a Politburo session of the WPK Central Committee was held, and the Plenary Session of the Central Committee held on April 20 declared a “New Strategic Direction” to focus on the economy. On May 17, the expanded meeting of the WPK Central Military Commission was held to emphasize the roles of the

military for the new strategic direction, putting further emphasis on the execution of policies through the party-state system.

In 2018, Kim Jong Un successfully stabilized the power structure centered around him in all sectors of the government and military, with the WPK in the center. A staff reshuffle of the Organization and Guidance Department was carried out to gain control over the entire party organizations, while making it possible to supervise and monitor the entire administrative process by state institutions, stabilizing the power structure. The director of General Political Bureau, premier of People's Armed Forces (now Ministry of Defense) and other key military positions were replaced by figures with economic background who can follow the "new strategic direction" suggested during the Plenary Session held in April. In April 2019, a reshuffle of the party and state institutions took place for a generation change. Also, they introduced the position of the first vice President of the SAC, further expanding the privilege of the SAC. In December, the 5th Plenary Session of the 7th Period was held to emphasize the strengthened leadership of the WPK, along with a major staff reshuffle of the party and state organizations. With this process, the Kim Jong Un regime in 2020 further consolidated its power, not only in the power structure of the party-state system but also in the execution of national economic plans.

During the 8th Party Congress held in January 2021, Kim Jong Un became the "General Secretary." Kim Jong Un participated in the military parade in celebration of the 90th anniversary of the Korean People's Revolutionary Army on April 25, 2022, wearing the white uniform of a marshal. This signifies that Kim Jong Un now gained the

same level of prestige as his predecessors, Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il.

Especially, in 2022, North Korea held the Plenary Sessions and Political Bureau sessions of the WPK, and other party level gatherings more frequently to focus on strengthening the WPK. In a bid to overcome the challenges posed by the spread of COVID-19 and natural disasters such as typhoon and flood, they pronounced the ideology of “People First” to enhance the solidarity within the regime with Kim Jong Un at the helm.



## Military

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**Section 1.** Characteristics and Role

**Section 2.** Changes in Military Policy

**Section 3.** Chain of Command and  
Military Capabilities

## Section 1

# Characteristics and Role

The Korean People's Army (KPA) of North Korea were founded on February 8, 1948, about 7 months before the foundation of the North Korean regime.<sup>1</sup> The fact that the armed forces were founded ahead of the government indicates that the armed forces of North Korea threw a significant weight across the society during the nation-building process after independence. “*Songun* (military-first) politics” becoming an important ruling ideology during the era of Kim Jong Il shows that the military in North Korea has a unique role and high prestige.

The “Platform of the Workers’ Party of Korea (WPK)” amended in January 2021 removed the phrases “the army of the *suryong*,” “the army of the party,” and the “army of the people” in Article 47 and

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**1** North Korea changed the foundation day of the Korean People's Army from February 8, 1948, to April 25, 1932, in 1978. However, they reinstated February 8, 1948, as the foundation day in 2018. And the previous “Korean People's Army Foundation Day” that had been celebrated, which was April 25, 1932, was designated as the foundation day of the “Korean People's Revolutionary Army,” which was an anti-Japanese guerrilla force.

defines the military as the “revolutionary armed forces of the Workers’ Party of Korea to protect the party and revolution of the socialist fatherland as the mainstay of the military might of the revolution and the primary defense capability of the state, ready to follow any orders given by the party.” It states also that the military “shall perform all military and political activities under the leadership of the party,” to make it clear that the party has control over the military.

Unlike democratic states where the military is banned from participating in or intervening with politics, the military throws far more weight around the politics in socialist states. There are three key roles of the KPA.

The first is the fundamental role of a regular military armed force. The KPA is charged with the duties to defend the territories of North Korea and protect the life and properties of North Koreans, as a guardian of the security. Especially, since North Korea views the state, socialist system, and its supreme leader to be of the same privilege, it is one of the primary objectives of the KPA to follow the leadership of the WPK, centered around its leader, general secretary Kim Jong Un.

The second is the political role of the military. The Korean War boosted the political influence of the North Korean military. During the economic crises that followed the death of Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Il, who rose to the position of the supreme leader in 1998, ran his country centered around the ideologies of “*songun* (Military-First) politics” and “*songun* ideology,” which shed light on the political roles of the military centered around the National Defense Commission (NDC) once again. In May 2016, Kim Jong Un abolished the NDC and established the State Affairs Commission (SAC), which oversaw not



only the defense area but also unification, diplomacy, and economy, through the expansion of its functions and roles.

The third is the roles of the military in economy and society. After the Korean War, the military was employed as a main element of the post-war reconstruction efforts. Military organizations were mobilized in large-scale civil engineering projects and state reconstruction projects. Especially, Kim Jong Il used the military during the “Arduous March” to achieve various economic successes.<sup>2</sup> This tendency continued in the Kim Jong Un era, as the military is taking the leading roles in the building of 100,000 residential units in Pyeongyang; construction of Wonsan Kalma Coastal Tourism District; construction of the tourist districts in Samjiyon and Yangdok Hot Springs Area; construction of Tanchon Power Station; and restoration efforts for the damages caused by typhoons.

As such, the military has been paraded as the most professional, model organization within North Korean society. The role of the military in the North Korean society is still significant, as it has been known that one has to serve in the military to become a member of the WPK.

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**2** During the reign of Kim Jong Il, the military was in the front line of economy building, as they emphasized the “Spirit of the Arduous March.” The military builders constructed the Youth Power Station in Anbyon and the Wonsan-Mt. Geumgang Railway. Kim Jong Il emphasized the Spirit of the Arduous March in all sectors of the society, including sports, science, and literal arts, in his attempt for a general mobilization.

## Section 2

# Changes in Military Policy

### 1 Kim Il Sung Era

The military policies during the era of Kim Il Sung were closely connected with the Korean War. Three years of the Korean War led to an inevitable growth of the KPA in its size and capabilities. The size of the KPA, which was about 200,000 before the start of the war, grew to about 300,000 at the signing of the Armistice in 1953. This grew further to more than 400,000 by 1955. In addition, the withdrawal of the Chinese forces that were stationed in the North left a good part of the supplies and equipment to North Korea free of charge, which resulted in the enhancement and expansion of hardware, as well.

The KPA policy during the era of Kim Il Sung can be described as the “4-Point Military Guidelines.” The 4-Point Military Guidelines, which was introduced in the 1960s, is a policy of military buildup as a state strategy in the midst of security concerns during the Sino-

**[Table 3-1] North Korea’s 4-Point Military Guidelines**

Guideline	Policy Goals
Army of Officers	All soldiers are to be upgraded in terms of political ideology and military skills to perform the tasks suitable for superiors by at least one rank or more in a war
People at Arms	The entirety of the working class, including not only military personnel but also workers and farmers, etc., are to be armed in terms of political ideology and military skills
Modernized Forces	The armed forces are to be equipped with modernized weapons and combat technologies, and gain proficiency in the latest weapons, modern military science and technology
Fortified Country	Large-scale defense positions are to be built across the country to turn the entire country into impenetrable fortresses

Soviet Conflict, even sacrificing the economy and concentrating limited resources to heavy industries, including defense industries.

Of the four guidelines, the remaining three other than the “Modernized Forces” were declared for the first time during the 5th Plenary Session of the 4th WPK Central Committee, The last of the four guidelines, which was “Modernized Forces” was declared during the 2nd Party Representatives’ Conference in October 1966. The 4-Point Military Guidelines was also pronounced during the 5th Party Congress in 1970 and officially stipulated in the 1992 amendment of the constitution. As such, Kim Il Sung emphasized the 4-Point Military Guidelines to expand the military forces and develop key hardware independently.

During Kim Il Sung’s reign, North Korea established a dedicated organization responsible for the defense industry to manufacture key suppliers and hardware independently. Around 1967, North Korea established a ministry dedicated to defense industries as a part of the Cabinet and named it the “2nd Ministry of Mechanical Industries.” By 1972, it was reported that the 2nd Ministry of Mechanical Industries

was spun off from the Cabinet and expanded and restructured as the “2nd Economic Committee.” Under the 2nd Economic Committee, there are the National Defense Science Institute (formerly the 2nd Natural Science Institute) responsible for the research and development of various weapons system and suppliers and several bureaus responsible for the production of weapons and suppliers of different areas, along with hundreds of military production facilities, independently controlling the defense economy which was prioritized over the regular economy.

It is believed that, in the 1970s, North Korea developed its independent defense production capabilities to build key land weapons systems such as tanks, self-propelled guns, and armored vehicles, as well as submarines and combat vessels such as fast attack crafts. In the mid and late-1980s, the development of nuclear weapons and missiles began in earnest.

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## **2** Kim Jong Il Era

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The Kim Jong Il regime continued its effort to build up its conventional military capabilities, even in the midst of widespread, systematic economic hardships. A comparison between 1994 and 2012 revealed that the number of Mechanized Corps, which are under direct command of the General Staff Department, decreased from four to two, while a new mechanized division and four mechanized infantry divisions were newly added. In addition, during the 18 years of Kim Jong Il’s regime, North Korea secured 400 more tanks and 2,600 more

units of artillery. The new 170mm SPGs were newly manufactured and deployed, while an upgraded version of Cheonma tanks, which were knock-offs of Soviet T-72s were manufactured and deployed, as they continued their effort to modernize their military hardware.

The North Korean Navy saw a reduction in the number of their squadrons, from 16 in 1994 to 13 in 2012. But the number of submarines increased from a mere 26 to more than 70, while the number of landing crafts increased from 120 hover crafts to more than 260, hover crafts and fast landing crafts combined. As for the North Korean Air Force, the three air wings in 1994 increased to five air divisions and one tactical logistics brigade, two air force sniping brigades, and air-defense units in 2016. However, due to the lack of their capabilities to build up their air force without external assistance, the increase in their hardware was of a limited scale. As such, the changes in the conventional forces of the North Korean military were limited due to the lack of resources and economic hardships. However, the efforts to enhance their military capabilities through independent defense industries continued.

Along with the efforts to build up their military might, the Kim Jong Il era saw an all-out launching of nuclear weapons and missiles development programs. The Kim Jong Il regime built on the achievements made during the reign of Kim Il Sung, namely Scud-B (range 300km), Scud-C (range 500km), Rodong (range 1,000km to 1,300 km) missiles technologies, and eventually launched Taepodong-1 missile, which is considered as a intermediate to long-range missile, claiming it as a satellite launch. In 2006, during what was claimed as a military drill, North Korea launched Taepodong-2 missile, which failed.

In 2009, North Korea launched Eunha-2 long-range rocket, claiming as a space development program. In addition, the Kim Jong Il regime of North Korea started their development program for solid fuel missiles program (KN-02) in the mid-2000s to overcome the vulnerabilities of liquid fuel missiles based on the Scud technology.

The Kim Jong Il regime also made progress with the nuclear weapons program in conjunction with missile programs. In the process of resolving the 2nd North Korean Nuclear Crisis of 2002, the U.S. toughened financial sanctions against North Korea. In response, the North surprised the world with its first nuclear test on October 9, 2006. With the de-facto demise of the Six Parties Talk with the last chief representatives talks in December 2008, North Korea conducted its second nuclear test on May 25, 2009. In November 2010, North Korea revealed their uranium enrichment program, displaying their centrifuge to the nuclear scientists of the U.S. they invited to North Korea.

The Kim Jong Un regime launched a long-range missile two to three months before each of the first and second nuclear tests, demonstrating its intention to link the nuclear programs and their missiles to the world.

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### **3** Kim Jong Un Era

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While maintaining the 4-Point Military Guidelines, Kim Jong Un declared the “4-Point Strategic Guidelines” as the “strategic guidelines for making a more powerful army of the people.” The 4-point Strategic

Guidelines included “Strengthening Political Ideology,” “Strengthening Morality,” “Strengthening Tactics,” and “Diversification of Forces.” During the new year’s speech of 2015, Kim Jong Un mentioned these four strategic guidelines. This was followed by the new year’s speech in 2019, when he emphasized the “four guidelines to strengthen the military” as the first mission to enhance the defense capability of the country.

Of these, Kim Jong Un particularly emphasized the strengthening of political ideology and morality. In his visit to the Ministry of People’s Armed Forces (now Ministry of Defense) in celebration of the 71st anniversary of the People’s Army on February 8, 2019, Kim Jong Un instructed that “the strengthening of political ideologies and morality must be considered as the two pillars as we embark on ideological programs with more fierceness, diversity, and variety.” The strengthening of the tactics and diversification of the forces can be understood to be regarding the operation of asymmetric powers, such as the nuclear weapons and missiles, which were advancing in his regime. In addition, North Korea is developing its defense industries, which is the ‘second economy’ to support its military policies, while training scientists for defense areas and modernizing its defense science technologies.

The most profound characteristic of the Kim Jong Un era’s military policy is the advancement of nuclear weapons and missiles. Compared to two nuclear tests by Kim Jong Il, Kim Jong Un conducted four more tests in his regime. In addition, the adoption of the *Byungjin* Policy (March 2013) by the North was immediately followed by its declaration to fully reactivate the nuclear facilities of Yongbyon, which

included the 5MWe reactor (capable of producing plutonium) and uranium enrichment facilities (capable of producing highly enriched uranium).

North Korea succeeded in extending the ranges of ground-to-ground ballistic missiles and making a significant progress in the development of solid fuel missiles. North Korea conducted tests for new large liquid fuel engines in April 2016 and March 2017. This was accompanied by test launches of Hwasong-10, Hwasong -12, Hwasong-14, and Hwasong-15 missiles over 2016 to 2017, showing off its capability to reach mainland U.S.

Starting from 2015, North Korea conducted test launches of solid-fuel SLBM named the Pukguksong (North Star), followed by a test launch of Pukguksong-2, a mid-range IRBM and an upgraded version of the previous Pukguksong, in February 2017. Since May 2019, North Korea has been conducting test launches of various types of short-ranged weapons systems, such as multiple rocket launchers. In October 2019, a new SLBM, Pukguksong-3, was test-launched, landing on the exclusive economic zone of Japan. In 2020, they conducted test launches of super-sized multiple rocket launcher systems and short-ranged projectiles, as well as cruise and ballistic missile launches and launches of Hwasong-8, an SLBM, and medium-range IRBM, etc. in 2021 and 2022, as they continued their test launches of ballistic missiles. Especially, starting with the launch of semi-mid-range ballistic missile (which the North claims to be a hypersonic missile,) North Korea launched more than 70 missiles in 2022 alone, including the launch of an SLBM across the NLL in the East Sea in November for the first time after the separation of Koreas, further aggravating tension on



the peninsula.

At the same time, Kim Jong Un upgraded conventional hardware as well. The obsolete T-54/55 tanks were replaced with new *Songun-ho* and *Junma-ho*. The Air Force and Navy are upgrading their arsenal, too. It was reported that a total of 11 new conventional weapon systems were introduced during the military parade in October 2020, which was held in celebration of the 75th anniversary of the foundation of the WPK.

The military policies of the Kim Jong Un era went through four milestone changes. The first was the adoption of the *Byungjin* Policy in March 2013. With the simultaneous nuclear and economic development, Kim Jong Un declared his intention to upgrade and advance his “nuclear forces” while, at the same time, developing the economy to build a “strong and prosperous socialist.” The second milestone was the 7th Party Congress in May 2016. With the 7th Party Congress, the WPK Central Military Commission was restructured, while the National Defense Commission was abolished by the Supreme People’s Assembly in June, newly instating the State Affairs Commission, as an institutional mechanism to distance itself from military-first politics. The third milestone happened with the declaration of the termination of the *Byungjin* Policy in April 2018. The WPK adopted a resolution titled “Declaration of a Great Victory with the *Byungjin* Policy during the 3rd Plenary Session of the 7th WPK Central Committee in which Kim Jong Un participated. This declaration of “victory” was accompanied by the declaration of a new policy, which was “Focusing on Building a Socialist Economy.” The fourth milestone was the 8th Party Congress in January 2021, when

Kim Jong Un declared “uninterrupted development of nuclear forces” and a “campaign to advance nuclear power” during the operational report session. He also declared that, as they succeeded in making their nuclear weapons more compact, standardized, and tactical, they could focus on advancing their capabilities for preemptive and retaliatory nuclear strikes, by means of making “more powerful nuclear warheads” and developing ‘state-of-the-art tactical nuclear weapons.’<sup>3</sup> On October 11, 2021, North Korea held its first defense progress exhibition event called “Self-Defense-2021,” which exhibited new weapons systems developed for the past five years to show off its military might. On March 24, 2022, North Korea launched an ICBM for the first time in four years and four months, withdrawing its declaration of moratorium on nuclear and ICBM tests in April 2018 and returning to non-compromising nuclear development strategy. Also, the 7th session of the Party Congress of the 14th Period on September 8, 2022, adopted “Law on Nuclear Forces Policy of DPRK” as a law to legalize the policy of preemptive nuclear strikes, ten years after officially naming itself as

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**3** In his General Report, Kim Jong Un argued that the “Hwasong” series mid-range and inter-continental ballistic rockets, the “Pukguksong” series underwater and land-launched ballistic rockets, and nuclear weapons became more compact and standardized and were now available as tactical weapons, along with their intercontinental rocket, “Hwasong-15”, which raised North Korea’s position as a recognizable rocket force in the world and completed the development of the nuclear arsenal. The new rocket, which was unveiled during the military parade in celebration of the 75th anniversary of the WPK in 2020 was argued as the highest level of modern technology for a nuclear weapon. In addition, he mentioned that their anti-air rocket systems, self-propelled anti-aircrafts, and anti-armor weapons were now of a world-class level, adding that the multi-warhead guidance technology and the research projects for the new warheads to be loaded on the new ballistic rockets were on their final stages.

a nuclear power in its Constitution.<sup>4</sup> On the same day, Kim Jong Un emphasized that “with the introduction of this new law, our state as a nuclear power became irreversible,” adding “we shall never surrender nuclear arms or denuclearize first.” This was covered by North Korean media on the occasion of the 74th anniversary of the foundation of their regime.

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**4** During the 7th Convention of the 14th SPA, they replaced the law titled “Law on the Fortification of the Status as a Self-Defending Nuclear Power” with “Law on Nuclear Forces Policy of DPRK,” legalizing preemptive nuclear strikes under five conditions. Especially, while the law introduced in 2013 limited the condition which allowed the use of a nuclear weapon to “a situation in which a nuclear power invades or attacks,” the new law included “a situation in which a nuclear or non-nuclear attack took place or is deemed imminent,” legalizing preemptive nuclear strikes. They also introduced a new clause, making it clear that they will automatically launch a nuclear retaliatory attack when Kim Jong Un, who has command and control over nuclear weapons, is attacked.

## Section 3

# Chain of Command and Military Capabilities

### 1 Chain of Command

The key military institutions of North Korea include the WPK Central Military Commission (CMC), State Affairs Commission (SAC), Political Bureau, General Staff Department (GSD), and Ministry of Defense. The key organizations and roles of each of these institutions are as follows.

First, the CMC is the highest-level military institution of the WPK. Article 30 of the January 2021 amendment of the WPK platform specifies that, regarding the functions and status of the CMC, it is “the highest-level military guidance institution of the party between the Party Congresses” and “responsible for the party’s leadership of the entire defense operations including taking commands of the armed forces of the republic, projects on the development of defense industries, and reviewing and deciding upon the actions to realize the

military policies and directives of the party.”

The SAC was established as a result of the restructuring of the National Defense Commission through the June 2016 amendment of the constitution and is now the highest policy guidance institution of the North Korea. The August 2019 amendment of the constitution defines the “highest-level policy guidance institution of the sovereignty of the state” (Article 107) where “key policies of the state are discussed and decided upon (Article 110), while also designated the President of the SAC as the “commander-in-chief of the armed forces” who “commands the entirety of the armed forces of the state.”

The organizations and roles of the internal institutions of the military chain of command of North Korea are as shown in [Figure 3-1].

As shown in [Figure 3-1], the military chain of command in North Korea is composed of the Supreme Commander, which is the highest rank in the military, the General Political Bureau (GPB), which is the executive institution of the WPK, the GSD which is the executive arm that carries out the commands given by the Supreme Commander, and the Ministry of Defense, which is responsible for the external affairs of the military, military supply, and finance.

The Supreme Commander is the highest position in the North Korea military where the singular command of the military by the supreme leader is guaranteed. The Supreme Command was organized as an emergency institution with one-man command for fast decision making during the Korean War. The supreme commander has the control over the regular military forces in a war and the authority to issue and cancel a general mobilization order. In war, the authority of this position is further expanded to controlling the entire party, military

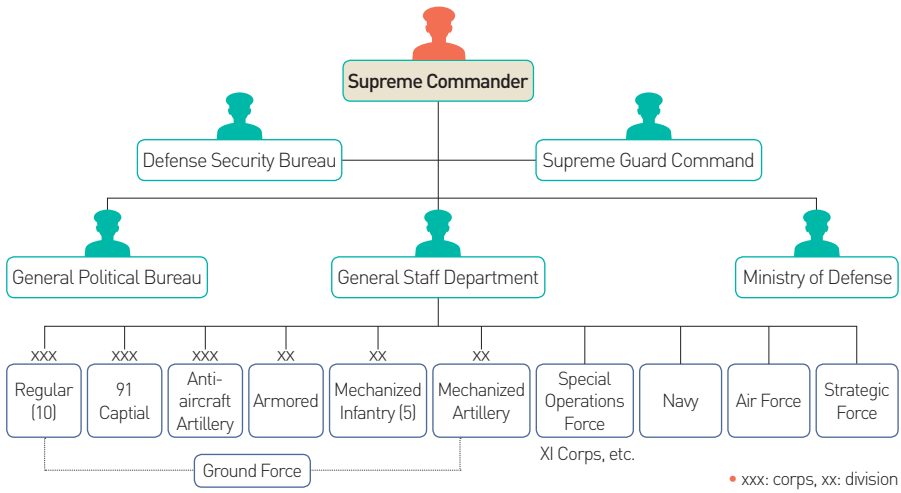
forces, and people beyond the law, making it de facto the highest-level executive institution of the military.

The GPB is the executive branch of the WPK which is responsible for the party organizations within the military and political operations. Since North Korea is a party state, the army is under the party's control, as well. North Korea has the WPK-CMC<sup>5</sup> in the party and the GPB in the military for the control of the military forces. The GPB is a party institution within the military and responsible for the party's political programs within the military, appointment of military officers, and implementing the party's control over written military operation commands, practically exerting the control by the WPK-CMC. The GPB is an executive branch of the party and the military, and run directly by the party committee of the Korean People's Army (KPA), which reviews the decisions of the party. It is also under the control by the party through the WPK-CMC, the Political Leadership over Military Affairs Department and the Organization and Guidance Department, taking the political leadership over the armed forces. North Korea recently established the Political Leadership over Military Affairs Department, as one of its departments within the party, to further strengthen the party's control over the armed forces.

The GSD is the highest-level military executive organization to take the overall control over the entire armed forces of North Korea under the strict supervision by the party. They are the organization that

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**5** The WPK-CMC is responsible for the highest level decision-making and reviewing, as they discuss and decide upon how the military policies of the party will be carried out; organize/direct the projects for strengthen the arsenal of the entire military force of the North including the People's Army and developing the defense ministry; and command the military forces.



**[Figure 3-1] Command Structure of North Korean military**

※ Source: Ministry of National Defense, *2022 Defense White Paper*, p. 26.

actually carries out the command issued by the Supreme Commander and direct, manage, and lead the overall plans of military operations and military strategies of the Army, Navy, and Air Force.

Under the GSD, there are, as shown in Figure 3-1, 10 regular corps, 91 capital defense corps, anti-aircraft corps, one armored division, five mechanized infantry divisions, and one mechanized artillery division (Army), Naval Command, Air Force Command, and the Strategic Force<sup>6</sup>. The GSD is responsible for setting up the operational plans in war or training plans in peace for various level of military units, training camps, commands of each branch of the military and serves the preparation of the order by the Chairman of the WPK-CMC, which

<sup>6</sup> The Strategic Force was renamed from the existing Strategic Rocket Command to the Strategic Force in 2014 and was promoted to a military branch command equivalent to the Army, Navy, and Air Force.

is issued annually, to direct and control the units under its command.

The Ministry of Defense represents the military and takes responsibility in the administration of the forces, including handling external affairs, logistics, and finance. The ministry is considered as an equal with the GPB and the GSD on the chain of command. The GPB is responsible for the management of the party organizations within the military and political programs, as well as the management of personnel and guidance on external affairs, ensuring the party's leadership over the military. The Ministry of Defense is responsible for construction and behind-the-line activities, as well as logistics.<sup>7</sup> The Ministry of Defense currently functions as the representative of the military and is considered as an equal to the GSD and the GPB in the chain of command. However, its role is limited to the administration of the military. While the GPB is responsible for the party organization in the military, political programs, personnel management, and guidance to external affairs to have practical control over the administration of the armed forces, the Ministry of Defense is known for being responsible for supporting roles, such as the supply of food, clothing, fuel, and medical care of the military personnel.

The Guard Command, which is responsible for the protection of the supreme leader, squashes any attempt at a coup, protects the supreme leader and their family members and guards their residences, and more. The Guard Command is of a high privilege, considering that they are responsible for the sake of the supreme leader himself.

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<sup>7</sup> The Ministry of Defense was founded as the Ministry of National Security in 1948 and renamed as the Ministry of People's Arms, followed by further name changes. In 2020, the name changed from the Ministry of People's Armed Forces to the Ministry of Defense.



The Military Security Command is responsible for the investigation, preliminary trials, and execution for military crimes within the entire armed forces. Its main responsibilities also include detecting and punishing espionage and counter-regime activities.

Immediately following the death of Kim Jong Il, Kim Jong Un was elected as the supreme commander of the People's Army during the WPK Central Committee Political Bureau meeting held on December 30, 2011 and secured the authorities and positions to control the military organizations such as the GPB, General Staff Department, and the Ministry of Defense as the supreme commander as well as the direct command over the Guard Command and the Military Security Command. As of 2022, Kim Jong Un's titles include the general secretary of the WPK, Chairman of the WPK-CMC, President of the SAC, supreme commander of all the armed forces of North Korea, and the field marshal of the Republic, seizing the top positions of the party, government, and military forces and thereby all vehicles of state force and the authorities for military administration and command.

During the 5th Plenary Session of the 8th Period, North Korea mentioned the "principle of hard-on-hard and head-to-head confrontation" to emphasize the need to strengthen the military forces and defend their right to protect themselves. During the 6th Plenary Session of the 8th Period in December 2022, South Korea was named as a 'self-obvious enemy,' along with the mentioning of "fighting the enemy" and clear statement of actions against their enemies. Then, North Korea made a reshuffle of the top brass of the military at the interval of only six months, filling the front with the figures for strengthening the military might in consideration of the face-off with the U.S. and South Korea.

## 2 Military Capabilities

The military forces of North Korea, as of December 2022, can be summarized as 1.1 million personnel in the Army, 60,000 in the Navy, 110,000 in the Air Force, and 10,000 in the Strategic Force, totaling approximately 1.28 million. This is more than double the number of the entire South Korean military. This is their regular military personnel alone. In addition to this number there are some 620,000 in the Reserve Military Training Units (RMTU), 5.72 million in the Worker-Peasant Red Guard (WPRG), 940,000 in the Young Red Guards (YRG), and 340,000 in paramilitary organizations such as the Guard Command. The total available fighting forces, therefore, is as many as 7.62 million.

The Center for Strategic and International Studies, a U.S. think tank, announced South Korea as the 6th in terms of the world's military forces in 2020. North Korea ranked 25th. According to the global military force ranking by Global Fire Power (GFP), an American private military force evaluation institution, South Korea ranked 6th out of 142 countries excluding nuclear weapons. North Korea ranked 30th on the list.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The GFP, which is an indicator of the military strength, is calculated based on 48 factors, including the size of the forces, such as the population, armed men/women, equipment, weapons, etc., along with the defense budget of the country, the amount of strategic supplies in stock, the ability to continue fighting a war, the area of the country, and the length of waterways, etc. Nuclear weapons, however, are not included. See GFP website ([www.globalfirepower.com](http://www.globalfirepower.com))-"2022 Military Strength Ranking."

**[Table 3-2] Force Posture of the Two Koreas (as of December 2022)**

South Korea	Classification	North Korea
Military forces (peacetime)		
More than 500,000	Total	More than 1.28 million
More than 365,000	Army	More than 1.1 million
More than 70,000 (including 29,000 in the Marine Corp)	Navy	More than 60,000
More than 65,000	Air Force	More than 110,000
-	Strategic Force	More than 10,000
Key forces		
Army		
Units		
12 (including the Marine Corp)	Corps (or equivalent)	15
36 (including the Marine Corp)	Divisions	84
32 (including the Marine Corp)	Bridge (Separate Brigades)	117
Equipment		
More than 2,200 (including the Marine Corp)	Tanks	More than 4,300
More than 3,100 (including the Marine Corp)	Armored Vehicles	More than 2,600
More than 5,600 pieces (including the Marine Corp)	Field artillery pieces	More than 8,800
More than 310	Multiple Rocket Launchers	More than 5,500
More than 60 launchers	Guided ground-to-ground weapons	More than 100 launchers (Strategic Force)
Navy		
Surface vessels		
More than 90	Combat vessels	More than 420
More than 10	Landing crafts	More than 250
More than 10	Mine sweepers	More than 20
More than 20	Support vessels	More than 40
More than 10	Submarines	More than 70
Air Force		
More than 410	Combat Aircrafts	More than 810
More than 70 (including the Navy)	Surveillance and command aircrafts	More than 30 (recon aircrafts)
More than 50	Airlifts (AN-2 included)	More than 350
More than 190	Training aircrafts	More than 80
More than 700	Rotor wings (including the Army, Navy, and Air Force)	More than 290
More than 3.1 million (including military cadets, war-time mobilized laborers, converted/ alternative servicemen included)	Reserves	More than 7.62 million (RMTU, WPRA, YRG, etc., all combined)

※ Source: Ministry of National Defense, "2022 Defense White Paper," p. 334.

\* The units and equipment of other branches of the military were included in the units and equipment of the Army to compare the North and South in their military strength.

## 1) Army

The Army has 10 regular front line and backup corps under the GSD, as well as 91 capital defense corps, one anti-aircraft corps, one armored division, 5 mechanized infantry divisions, and one mechanized artillery division.

Especially, about 70% of the total forces of the Army are deployed forward near the front line, south of the line between Pyongyang and Wonsan, indicating their readiness for a surprise attack.

The Army of North Korea are centered around their tanks and

**[Table 3-3] Major Ground Force Equipment of the Two Koreas**

South Korea	Equipment (North)	North Korea
More than 2,200 (including the Marine Corp)	Tanks 	More than 4,300
More than 3,100 (including the Marine Corp)	Armored Vehicles 	More than 2,600
More than 5,600 pieces (including the Marine Corp)	Field artillery pieces 	More than 8,800
More than 310 pieces (including the Marine Corp)	MLRS/MRL 	More than 5,500
More than 60 launchers	Ground-to-ground missiles 	More than 100 launchers (Strategic Force)

※ Source: Ministry of National Defense, 2022 Defense White Paper, p. 27, p. 334.

special forces. North Korea concluded that mechanized and tank divisions were suitable for operations in the terrains of the Korean Peninsula and restructured them to brigade-sized units over the past few years, composed of tank units, mechanized units, and missile units, etc., to optimize their forces for modern warfare. The armored and mechanized units have more than 6,900 tanks and armored vehicles. Some of their obsolete hardware is being replaced with the new tanks with higher mobility as well as armored vehicles with various anti-tank missiles and mobile guns that they developed.

## 2) Navy and Air Force

The Navy is composed of two Fleet Commands for the East Sea and the West Sea under the Naval Command, along with 13 squadrons and two naval sniping brigades. The Navy has about 60% of all its forces deployed forward in the south of the Pyeongyang-Wonsan line, standing ready to launch a surprise attack at any moment. However, they are mainly composed of smaller fast attack ships, limiting their off-coast operation capabilities.

The underwater fleets include Romeo-class submarines and submersibles, totaling 60 sea crafts. Their missions include disrupting maritime traffic, laying mines, attacking surface vessels, and supporting the infiltration of special force units. They are building up these fleets by building new submarines that can be equipped with SLBMs.





The Air Force is composed of the Air Force Command and five Air Divisions, one tactical logistics brigade, and two air force sniping brigades, as well as air defense units.

The Air Force of North Korea has more than 810 combat aircrafts, more than 30 surveillance and command aircrafts, more than 350 airlifts, more than 290 rotor wing aircrafts, and more than 80 training aircrafts. The Air Force is deployed in four sectors, which cover the entire North Korea. The total number of aircraft is more than 1,570.

**[Table 3-4]** Key Naval Vessels of the South and North Navy

South Korea	Equipment (North)	North Korea
More than 90		More than 420
	Combat vessels	
More than 10		More than 250
	Landing crafts	
More than 20		More than 40
	Support vessels	
More than 10		More than 70
	Submarines	
More than 10	Mine sweepers	More than 20

**[Table 3-5]** Key Aircraft of the South and North Air Forces

South Korea	Equipment (North)	North Korea
More than 410		More than 810
	Combat Aircrafts	
More than 70 (Including naval aircrafts)		More than 30 (recon aircrafts)
	Surveillance and command aircrafts	
More than 50		More than 350
	Airlifts (AN-2 included)	
More than 700		More than 290
	Rotor wings (including the Army, Navy, and Air Force)	
More than 190	Training aircrafts	More than 80

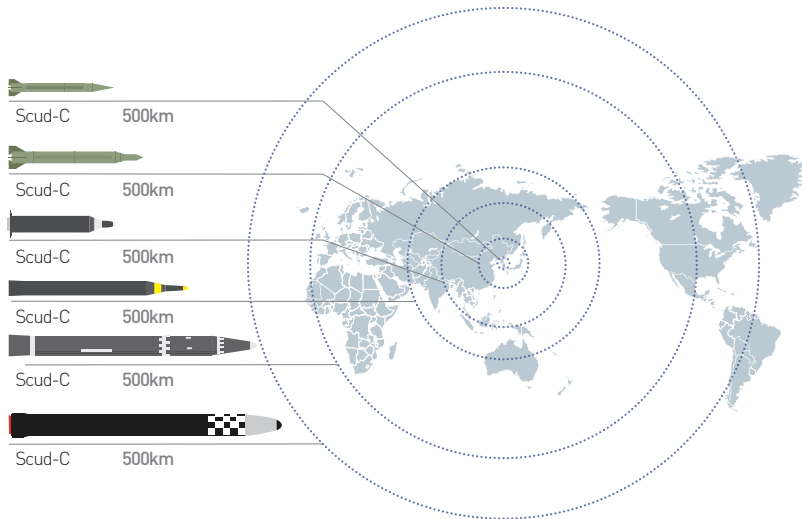
\* Ministry of National Defense, "2022 Defense White Paper," p. 28-29, p. 334.

Of more than 810 combat aircraft, about 40% are in south of the Pyongyang-Wonsan line to launch their strikes at the moment's notice.

The air defense system is established as integrated units around the Air Force Command and composed of aircrafts, surface-to-air missiles, AA guns, and radar units. And it is presumed that they have developed a variety of radio jamming devices, including GPS jammers, for their air defense.

### 3) Strategic Forces and Special Operations

North Korea expanded its existing Strategic Rocket Command to the Strategic Force in 2014 as the fourth arm of the armed forces after the Army, Navy, and Air Force. This new arm is the command in charge of nuclear weapons and missiles, under which there are



**[Figure 3-2]** Ranges of North Korean Ballistic Missiles

\* Ministry of National Defense, 2022 Defense White Paper, p. 32.

13 missile brigades, armed with Scuds, Rodong, Musudan, etc. The Strategic Force is expected to play roles similar to the Rocket Force of the China and the Strategic Rocket Force of Russia.

To reinforce its strategic attack capabilities, North Korea is continuing development programs for nuclear weapons, ballistic missiles, and bio-chemical weapons.

By reprocessing the depleted fuel rods of the 5MWe reactor in Yongbyon, it is expected that the North has secured more than 70kg of weapons-grade plutonium. It is also suspected that they have secured a significant amount of highly enriched uranium through their uranium enrichment program.

The North has developed and secured ground-to-ground ballistic missiles of various ranges, covering short, medium, and long ranges. As for the ranges, the Scud-B/C missiles and the new solid fuel ground-to-ground missiles are believed to have South Korea well within their range, while their Scud-ER and Rodong missiles can cover Japan and Hwasong-10 (Musudan) and Hwasong-12 missiles can reach Guam and the north-western sectors of the Pacific. Hwasong-14 and Hwasong-15 can be a threat to the mainland U.S. During the military parade in celebration of the 75th anniversary of the WPK that took place on October 10, 2020, new ICBMs; new SLBMs marked “Pukguksong-4 ㄸ”, new large-caliber guided MLRs, and the North Korean version of ATACMS were unveiled. And, the military parade in celebration of the 8th Party Congress on January 14, 2021, unveiled another new SLBM, marked “Pukguksong-5 ㄸ.” During the military parade in celebration of the 90th anniversary of the foundation of the KPA, another large-sized SLBM, suspected to be a new model, was unveiled.



To advance the status of the special operations forces, North Korea classified the “Special Operations Forces” as another arm of the military forces. Their special operations units include the 11th Corp, special operations battalions, front line light infantry divisions and brigades, sniping brigades, sniping brigades of the Navy and the Air Force, and light infantry regiments of front-line divisions, across the entire military forces, totaling more than 200,000 man strong.

During the war time, special operations units are expected to use the underground tunnels, submarines, hover crafts, AN-2 aircrafts, rotor wings, and other infiltration vehicles to carry out strikes on key military units and facilities, assassination missions, and sabotage missions. They are conducting attack drills using mock-ups of the target facilities in addition to land, sea, and air infiltration drills, while modernizing their armaments and equipment as a part of their continued efforts to strengthen their capabilities.<sup>9</sup>

#### 4) Reserves

North Korea mobilized more than 7.62 million men and women, aged between 14 and 60 and accounting for about 30% of the total population, to man the Reserve Military Training Units, Worker-Peasant Red Guard (workplace and community level units,) Young Red Guards (military organizations of secondary schools) and paramilitary organizations as their reserve forces. Their Reserve Training Units, which an reinforce the regular combat units in a war, stand more than

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<sup>9</sup> Ministry of National Defense, *2022 Defense White Paper*, p. 25.

**[Table 3-6] Reserve forces of North Korea**

Classification	Men	Remarks
Reserve Military Training Units	More than 620,000	Similar to the South's post-conscript reserves (Men between 17 and 50 and single women of 17 to 30)
Worker-Peasant Red Army	More than 5.72 million strong	Regional reserve forces (Men between 17 and 60, and women who are not assigned to Reserve Training Units aged between 17 and 30)
Red Youth Guards	More than 940,000	Military organization within secondary schools (Men and women, aged between 14 and 16)
Paramilitary units	More than 340,000	Guard Commend, Ministry of Security Administrations, etc.
Total	More than 7.62 million	

\* Ministry of National Defense, *2022 Defense White Paper*, p. 32.

600,000 men strong, and they maintain a regular-army level training at all times.

It is suspected that the North has stocked up wartime supplies that can sustain their operation for one to three months.

There are more than 100 civilian factories that can be converted in a short notice, in addition to more than 300 defense manufacturing facilities. They also have established a war-time mobilization system that can switch to the production of war supplies promptly. The key military supply manufacturing facilities and storages are suspected to have the manufacturing capabilities for weapons and ammunitions. However, with the prolonged sanctions against the North, it is presumed that they would face difficulties in sustained development of defense manufacturing capabilities ensuring sustained operations in a war.

#### 1) Military Services

North Korea introduced its “Bylaws for Service in the Korea People’s Army” as an order issued by the Ministry of National Security in 1956. It maintained what is technically a voluntary system but has been running a de-facto conscript system. With the Cabinet Resolution No. 148 issued in 1958, the durations of services were set to three years and six months for the Army and four years for the Navy and Air Force. In reality, service men stayed in the military for five to six years in case of the Army and eight years in the Navy and Air Force. Technical specialists served eight to nine years. After several changes, the introduction of the “ten-year service program”<sup>10</sup> in April 1993 extended the service term to ten years for conscripted men and seven years for volunteering women. The service bylaw was amended in 1996, so that military service personnel now serve by their ages, men serving until 30 and women until 26.<sup>11</sup>

Until 2003, North Korea had implemented the *chomo* (recruitment) program.<sup>12</sup> All North Korean men are registered as *chomo* candidates

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**10** “10-year Service Program” is a system where you have to serve for ten years regardless of your age at the time of signing up. With North Korea’s withdrawal from the NPT in 1993, a semi-state-of-war was declared. This resulted in selection of the majority of the people except for those who were recommended for an admission into a college for a ten-year mandatory military service.

**11** Jaehong Goh, *The Changes and Future Prospect of the Term of Military Services in the North Korean Military*, INSS Strategic Report, 2018-21, National Security Strategy Research Institute, 2018, pp. 5-7.

**12** A “*chomo*” is a process where the military selects those who will be serving in the military among voluntary candidates, which in its form a volunteer system. However, the reality is that everyone at the eligible age for *chomo* ends up serving in the military, unless he/she is declared physically unfit for service, workers in specific industries and a areas, or eligible for certain exemptions (such as Safety Officers; essential workers in the fields of science, technology, and industry; administrative personnel for art and education; college students who passed the exam for military studies; students of special schools or schools for gifted students, only children whose parents are of an old age), disqualifying individuals due to their family origins, or college students.



North Korean female artillery crew in a drill

at the age of 14 and receive two draft physical exams. Once they graduated from secondary school, they are enlisted in divisions or corps. To serve, a candidate must be 150cm or higher and weigh 48kg, at least. But as the food shortage caused the youth to shrink in their height and weight, the requirements were lowered to 148cm and 43kg, starting from August 1994.

During the 6th session of the 10th Supreme People's Assembly (SPA) on March 26, 2003, North Korea enacted the "Military Service Law" and introduced mandatory military service for all North Koreans. With the mandatory service requirement in effect, men are known to serve for ten, while women are serving seven years.

All military service men and women must follow "Ten Creeds of Military Service."<sup>13</sup> Any violation of the code will result in

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**13** The ten creeds of military service are as follows; (1) absolute compliance with the military regulations; (2) proficiency and meticulous maintenance of weapons; (3) absolute obedience to military orders; (4) fair compensation and rewarding in the party and political organizations; (5) protection of the classified state and military information, as well as confidential information of the party; (6) absolute compliance with the socialist law and order; (7) participation in military political training; (8) love of the people and protection of the properties of the people; (9) absolute protection and saving of the state properties and military supplies; and (10) solidarity within the military and good conduct, etc.

disadvantages in their career even after they are discharged from the military service, and this goes for both officers and enlisted service men. One regular leave is allowed, according to the service rules, for fifteen days every year. Special leaves are given for ten to fifteen days for citations, wedding, or death of parents. But in many cases, these rules are not followed. In reality, soldiers are given a ten-day leave when their parents pass away or for the purpose of purchasing supplies to be used by the unit. It is estimated that only about 20% of service men visit their parents during their military service.

North Korean servicemen are to be mobilized for construction, farming, or other non-military activities for about one third to two thirds in a year. Special forces are exempted from these duties. The food supply for the military improved a little bit during the early 2000s due to external support. But with missile launches and nuclear tests, the support from the international community dwindled or stopped completely, causing them to cut back on food supplies again. While the grains are being supplied, secondary food materials are purchased by the units themselves or secured in different ways, including farming, fishing, or picking, depending on the environment they are stationed in. For protein supplies, many units raise farm animals such as goats or pigs and grow peas, in an effort to tackle food shortage with different approaches.

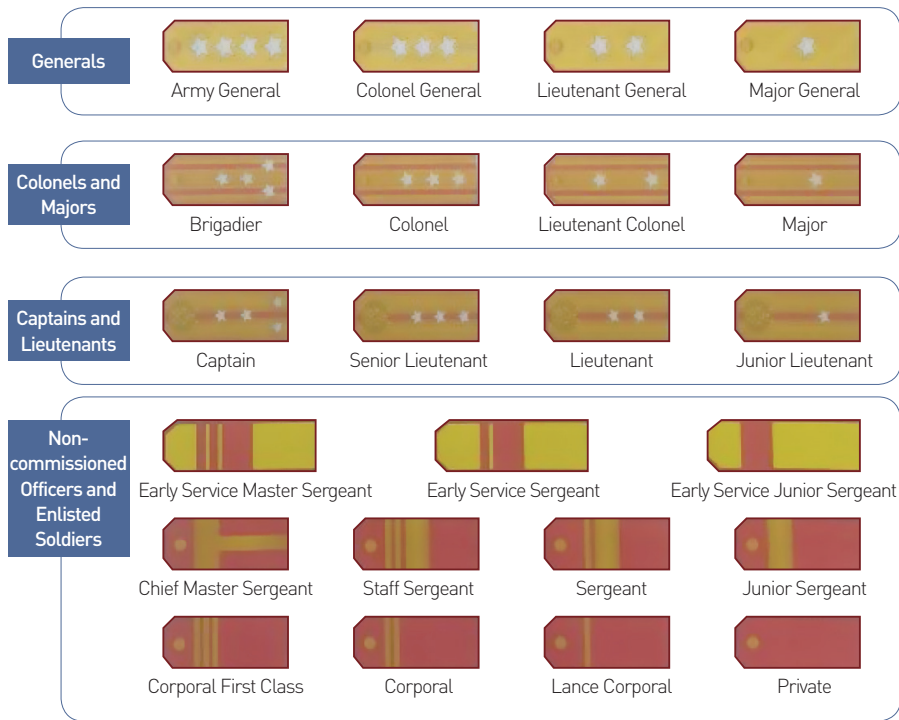
Even after the “July 1 Economic Management Improvement Measure” introduced in 2002, much of what is needed to run the military had to be secured by themselves. As a result, the supply of essential items and secondary food materials was far from enough, and this led to misconduct of some of the service personnel, which damaged the relationship between the military and the people. For this,

the military is rattling big sticks against such misconducts damaging the bonds with the people, in an effort to eradicate the burden on civilians imposed by the military and prevent other misconducts.

## 2) Ranks

The ranks of the North Korean military are called “military titles.” There are twelve ranks for gungwan (officers) and eight ranks for “hajonsa” (non-commissioned officers and enlisted men). As for the officers, ① Daejang (Army General), Sangjang (Colonel General), Chungjang (Lieutenant General), Sojang (Major General); ② Daechwa, Sangjwa (Colonel), Chungjwa (Lieutenant Colonel), and Sojwa (Major); ③ Taewi, Sangwi (Captain), Chungwi (First Lieutenant), and Sowi (Second Lieutenant). Hajonsa is a class of military titles that compass South Korea’s non-commissioned officers (busagwan) and enlisted men (byeongsa), composed of Tukmusangsa (Sergeant Major), Sangsa (Master Sergeant), Chungsa (First Sergeant), Hasa (Staff sergeant), Sanggup Pyongsa (Sergeant), Chunggup Pyongsa (Corporal), Chogup Pyongsa (Private First Class), and Pyongsa (Private).

On April 13, 1992, two days before the 80th birthday of Kim Il Sung, he was promoted to the “Grand Marshal of the DPRK,” while Kim Jong Il was promoted to the “Grand Marshal of the DPRK” on February 14, 2012, which was after his death on December 17, 2011. Kim Jong Un was given the title of the “Marshal of the DPRK” on July



**[Figure 3-3]** North Korean Military Rank Insignia (Epaulette)<sup>13</sup>

17, 2012.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Kim Jong Un, who received the title of Army General (Daejang) during the Party Representatives' Conference in September 2010, skipped the rank of a Vice Marshal (Chasu) to get another promotion in just another two years. Both Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il earned the title of "Marshal of the DPRK," followed by the "Grand Marshal of DPRK." The decision of Kim Jong Un being titled a "Marshal of the DPRK" was made jointly under the name of the Central Committee of the WPK, the Central Military Committee of the Party, National Defense Commission, and the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly.

<sup>15</sup> Of the badges of a sergeant, the Early Service Master Sergeant, Early Service First Sergeant, and Early Service Sergeant are not separate military ranks. The Early Service Sergeant program introduced in North Korea since 1957 is a program where the soldiers who served in specific areas such as radar, communication equipment, etc., were to serve an extended term to remove gaps and maintain expertise. [National Institute of Unification Education. North Korea Encyclopedia. 2021. pp.101-102.]

## 4 Characteristics of Military Forces

### 1) Developing Weapons of Mass Destruction

To secure their strategic weapons, North Korea has been continuing its Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) development programs to manufacture nuclear weapons, ballistic missiles, and bio-chemical weapons. This is to gain superiority in military power as a leverage in their negotiations, while internally securing solidarity among its people.

Starting with its first in October 2006, North Korea conducted a total of six nuclear weapons tests in May 2009, February 2013, January and September 2016, and September 2017. In addition, the North has fired their long-range missiles many times over a decade. Nuclear tests and the launching of long-range missiles are considered as a significant defiance of international non-proliferation regimes for WMDs, causing international criticism and sanctions by the United Nations and the internal community.

#### **Nuclear Weapons**

In 1945, North Korea signed the “Nuclear Treaty between North Korea and the Soviet Union” and sent its scientists to Dubna Nuclear Research Institute of Soviet Union to acquire advanced technologies and build the foundation to train experts. The North signed another nuclear treaty with China in 1959. With the help from the Soviet Union, North Korea adopted IRT-2000 research nuclear reactor in 1963 and started to build a large-scale nuclear compound in Yongbyon, North Pyongan Province, in 1965.



It is believed that in the 1980s, North Korea started to build up the essential infrastructure for its nuclear weapons program, including the facilities to produce nuclear materials, training of nuclear experts, and construction of a nuclear test site, etc. As a result, the 5MWe reactor, which is the essential facility to produce plutonium, was constructed in Yongbyon nuclear compound, followed by the spent fuel rod reprocessing facilities and nuclear fuel rod production factories.

The nuclear compound in Yongbyon was detected by a commercial satellite of France in 1989, which raised suspicion that North Korea was developing nuclear weapons in the international community. North Korea received inspections according to the Safeguard Agreement with the IAEA signed in 1991. However, the IAEA inspection revealed that there were significant discrepancies in the reports of North Korea, and the “1st North Korean Nuclear Crisis” became a hot topic across the world. The 1st North Korean Nuclear Crisis was defused when the North signed the “Agreed Framework”<sup>16</sup> with the U.S. in 1994, which froze the nuclear activities of the North until 2002.

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**16** The conditions of the Agreed Framework between the U.S. of America and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea were as follows; First, the 5MWe nuclear reactor, which was the only active reactor in North Korea, shall be frozen, while the construction of two other reactors in the country must be suspended. In the meantime, all nuclear facilities within North Korea shall be under the surveillance by IAEA. Second, the U.S. shall support the formation of an international consortium, for the purpose of constructing a light-water nuclear power plant of 2 million Kw capacity in North Korea by 2003, and, during the construction phase of the said light-water reactor, the U.S. shall provide 500,000 tons of diesel fuel to the North every year to ease the energy shortage of the country. Third, the U.S. shall expand diplomatic relationships in order to normalize the relationship between the U.S. and North Korea. Fourth, prior to the completion of the light-water reactor, North Korea agreed to receive a mandatory special inspection. Once the light-water reactor is completed, the current 5MWe reactor and the other two reactors under construction shall be terminated. (Ministry of Unification North Korea Information Portal -South-NorthRelationship Encyclopedia)

In October 2002, the Bush Administration announced that “North Korea admitted that it was running a secret nuclear weapons development project based on a highly enriched uranium program,” which marked the beginning of the “2nd North Korean Nuclear Crisis.” The Bush Administration suspended the provision of diesel fuel and the construction of the light water reactor, scrapping the “Agreed Framework,” to which North Korea responded by expelling the inspectors of the IAEA, reactivating the nuclear compound of Yongbyon, and starting the reprocessing of spent fuel rods.

The Six-Party Talks commenced in August 2003 to resolve the 2nd North Korean Nuclear Crisis. This led to the signing of the “September 19 Joint Statement” in 2005, the “February 13 Agreement” and the “October 3 Agreement” in 2007, etc. However, the Six-Party Talks have not been held any further after the Chief Representatives Meeting in December 2008. Meanwhile, North Korea conducted its 1st nuclear test without warning on October 9, 2006, which was followed by five more nuclear tests until September 2017, to strengthen the nuclear capability of North Korea.

During the 3rd Plenary Session of the 7th WPK Central Committee held on April 20, 2018, President Kim Jong Un, declared the practical completion of the *Byungjin* Policy that had been implemented since April 2013, along with the announcement of the decommissioning of the Punggyeri Nuclear Test Site and suspension of nuclear tests and ICBM launches. President Kim Jong Un promised “complete denuclearization” at the three rounds of inter-Korean Summits in 2018 and the first U.S.-North Korea Summit ever in history. In May 2018, he ordered to demolish the Punggyeri Nuclear Test Site with explosives.

**[Table 3-7] North Korea’s Nuclear Development Timeline**

December 12, 1985	North Korea signs Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)
December 31, 1991	South and North Korea sign Joint Declaration for the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula
March 12, 1993	North Korea declares withdrawal from the NPT
October 21, 1994	U.S. and North Korea sign Agreed Framework in Geneva
November 1, 1994	North Korea pledges to freeze nuclear activities
March 9, 1995	Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) established
October 3, 2002	U.S. Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly visits North Korea
December 12, 2002	North Korea lifts freeze on nuclear operations
August 27, 2003	First round of Six-Party Talks takes place
February 10, 2005	North Korea seeks to expand its nuclear arsenal
May 11, 2005	North Korea announces it has completed extraction of 8,000 spent fuel rods from its 5Kw Yongbyon nuclear reactor
September 19, 2005	Six parties adopt joint statement in which North Korea committed to “abandoning all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs”
October 9, 2006	North Korea conducts first nuclear test
February 13, 2007	North Korea agrees at Six-Party Talks to shut down and seal for the purpose of abandoning the Yongbyon nuclear facility
July 15, 2007	Yongbyon nuclear facility shut down
October 3, 2007	North Korea agrees at Six-Party Talks to disable all nuclear facilities and declare its nuclear programs
June 27, 2008	North Korea destroys water cooling tower at Yongbyon nuclear facility
September 2, 2008	North Korea commences restoration at Yongbyon nuclear facility
May 25, 2009	North Korea conducts second nuclear test
November 3, 2009	North Korea announces completion of reprocessing 8,000 spent fuel rods
February 12, 2013	North Korea conducts third nuclear test
April 2, 2013	North Korea announces it will restart Yongbyon nuclear reactor
January 6, 2016	North Korea conducts fourth nuclear test; Korean Central Television declares “first hydrogen bomb test a success”
September 9, 2016	North Korea conducts fifth nuclear test
September 3, 2017	North Korea conducts sixth nuclear test; Korean Central Television declares “a successful hydrogen warhead test”
April 20, 2018	North Korea declares suspension of nuclear tests and ICBM launches; announces it will demolish nuclear test site
May 24, 2018	North Korea openly demolishes Punggyeri Nuclear Test Site
January 8, 2021	North Korea declares Fight to Advance Nuclear Armed Forces during the 8th Party Congress
September 8, 2022	Supreme People’s Assembly announces North Korea as a nuclear power and adopts laws on nuclear weapons including principles for use

But when the 2nd U.S.-North Korea Summit in Hanoi, Vietnam fell apart in February 2019, North Korea reactivated its programs to advance the nuclear and ballistic weapons systems that it and suspended. North Korea mentioned “nuclear deterrence” during the 4th Expanded Meeting of the 7th WPK Central Military Commission (CMC) in 2020, along with the announcement by the Minister of Foreign Affairs Ri Son Gwon at the second anniversary of the Hanoi Summit, and the Veterans’ Conference in celebration of the 67th anniversary of the “Armistice,” still emphasizing the achievement of deterrence through nuclear weapons. At the 8th Party Congress in January 2021, the North emphasized its status as a nuclear power, declaring “a fight for enhancing our nuclear weapons.”

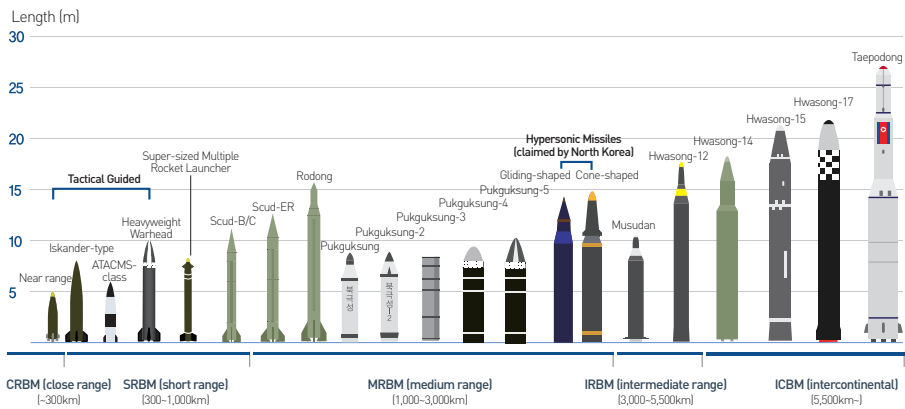
In addition, Kim Jong Un mentioned the strategic achievements and critical plans to upgrade North Korea’s defense industry during the 8th Party Congress, pronouncing the 5 priorities in the sectors of strategic weapons within the “5-Year Plan for the Development of Defense Science and Weapons Systems.” They were the development and deployment of the hypersonic missiles, solid fuel ICBMs launchable both on land surface and underwater, obtaining nuclear subs and underwater-launched strategic nuclear weapons, production of ultra-sized nuclear warheads, and enhancement of the accuracy of their ballistic missiles up to a range of 15,000 km. North Korea conducted a test launch of its newly developed hypersonic missile, called “Hwasong-8” on September 28, 2021. This was followed by another test launch of a hypersonic missile as Kim Jong Un watched himself, on January 5 and January 11 of 2022. Regarding these launches, on January 12, *Rodong Sinmun* reported that “We have achieved a great

success in the development of hypersonic missiles, which are of the most important and strategic value, among all five key tasks of the 5-year plan for developing defense capabilities.”

Concern is spreading across the world about the likelihood for the 7th nuclear test of North Korea. During the 6th Political Bureau session of the 8th WPK Central Committee held on January 19, 2022, Kim Jong Un ordered to reconsider all trust-building measures and review the issue of reactivating all suspended activities. Thereafter ICMB test launches practically shattered the moratorium. During the military parade in celebration of the 90th anniversary of the foundation of the armed forces on April 25, 2022, Kim Jong Un underlined that they must enhance and strengthen their nuclear capabilities. In September, he held a Supreme People’s Assembly to legalize the policy of nuclear weapons and gave his state administration speech to express his will to continue upgrading nuclear and missiles capabilities.

### **Missiles**

North Korea started its ballistic missiles programs to secure the delivery vehicles of nuclear weapons and ability to launch a long-ranged strike starting from the 1970s. In mid-1980s, the North deployed Scud-B with a 300km range and Scud-C with a 500km range. In the late 1990s, North Korea deployed Rodong missiles, with a range of 1,300km, followed by Scud-ER missiles, which extended the ranges of previous Scud missiles. In 2007, North Korea deployed Musudan missiles (or Hwasong-10), which is an intermediate-range ballistic missile with a range of 3,000km. Starting from the mid-2000s, the North has been working on developing ballistic missiles that use solid fuel.



[Figure 3-4] Ballistic Missiles of North Korea

\* Source: Ministry of National Defense, 2022 Defense White Paper, p. 31.

North Korea has demonstrated its long-range ballistic missiles on the occasions of anniversaries and military parades. Starting from 2012, they test-launched long-range rockets and ballistic missiles in what they claimed as satellite launches. Especially, in 2017, the North tested Hwasong-12, Hwasong-14, and Hwasong-15, which are considered as intermediate/long-range ballistic missiles. It is believed to show off the North’s capability to strike U.S. territories in the Pacific and mainland U.S.<sup>17</sup> In 2019, North Korea test-launched “Pukguksong-3,” which was a new intermediate-range SLBM, which was followed by a barrage of short-ranged systems and large-caliber multiple rocket launchers. In 2021, the North conducted several test launches of cruise missiles and ballistic missiles. On September 28, “Hwasong-8” was launched,

<sup>17</sup> On November 29th, 2017, North Korea declared its “completion of nuclear arsenal” after its test launch of the ICBM “Hwasong-15” which has the mainland U.S. within its range.

followed by a test launch of a new SLBM on October 19th. In 2022, North Korea conducted more than 30 test launches of various ballistic missiles, including “Hwasong-17” ICBM, hypersonic missiles, large-caliber multiple rocket launchers, and more.

### **Bio-Chemical Weapons**

Until now, the issue of the bio-chemical weapons of the North received less attention due to the more prominent nuclear and missile issues. But this type of WMD is a potential grave military threat. It is believed that North Korea secured about 2,500 to 5,000 tons of chemical weapons that it started producing since the 1980s. In addition, they are known to have the capabilities to cultivate and produce biological weapons of various kinds, including anthrax, smallpox, and plague.

## **2) Oversizing of the Defense Industries and Building Up Cyber Warfare Capabilities**

### **Oversized Defense Industries**

In addition to the principles of Army of Officers, People at Arms, and Fortified Country, North Korea added the fourth principle of Modernized Forces to complete its Four-Point Military Guidelines in October 1966 and established the 2nd Ministry of Machine-building Industry under the Cabinet. This was followed by the separation of the 2nd Ministry of Machine-building Industry from the Cabinet and the establishment of the 2nd Economic Committee, which integrated all defense-industries-related organizations. Now, the 2nd Economic

Committee is separated from the Cabinet and known to have its own system to govern the planning, production, distribution, and international trades independently. North Korea distributes the funds and resources to the defense industry with priority over the general economy. The 2nd Economic Committee is known to be funding a part of its financial needs by itself through the institutions engaged in earning foreign currency and trading companies.

The defense industry of the north is divided into the specialized defense sector, which manufactures various weapons systems and equipment and the general defense supply sectors that manufacture essential items needed by the military. This also includes the “defense industry workplaces” set up within civilian factories. Under the 2nd Economic Committee, it is estimated that there are hundreds of military production facilities and businesses. North Korea is using these factories and businesses to develop and manufacture most of the supplies and hardware needed to sustain their military, except for some weapons system that require advanced technologies.

The heavy industry-centered policies of the 1960s in North Korea were to lay the foundation for independent defense industries. However, the expansion of production capabilities depending on quantitative mobilization distorted the North Korean economy in the end and compromised their overall economy. Despite this, North Korea continued their policy of prioritizing investment in defense industries over civilian industries. This led to overexpansion of the defense industries that have little to do with the general economy and civilian industries. It is estimated that the North's defense industry accounts for a large portion of its economy, but it is difficult to determine the exact size.



## Building up the Cyber Warfare Capabilities

Since the mid-1980s, North Korea has been building up the cyber warfare capabilities in parallel with their nuclear and missiles programs. When they established the “Command Automation College,” or so-called “Mirim College” in 1986, their efforts to train cyberwarfare manpower began in earnest, and it has been reported that they have been teaching these trainees the skills for data hacking and cyber operation. Kim Jong Un designated cyberwarfare as one of three means of warfare,<sup>18</sup> calling it “a versatile sword of magic that will ensure the capabilities of the North Korean military to render merciless strikes upon its enemies in addition to nuclear missiles.” Since cyber-attacks require little investment, is difficult to find who is responsible, and does not have effective deterrence against it. North Korea sees it as a profound example of asymmetric strategy along with the nuclear and missiles systems. Therefore it is hard at work to build up this capability.

With more than 6,800 cyber-warfare experts<sup>19</sup> they have trained so far, North Korea has been continuing its attacks on the administrative institutions or military organizations of South Korea, as well as the defense contractors and financial systems of its Southern rival for the purpose of stealing confidential information or paralyzing computer infrastructures. Recently, they are using their hacking activities and ransomware attacks on international payment systems and cryptocurrency exchanges to steal digital funds illegally. Especially,

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<sup>18</sup> Bomi Kim and Ilseok Oh, *The Cyber Threat of North Korea in the Kim Jong Un Era and the Response from Key Countries*, INSS Strategic Report, No. 147, National Security Strategy Research Institute, 2021. pp.2-8.

<sup>19</sup> Ministry of National Defense, *2022 Defense White Paper*, p. 25.

the official name of the Bureau 121 under the General Bureau of Reconnaissance is the Bureau of Technological Reconnaissance. Under this particular bureau, there are hacking groups known as the Lazarus and Kimsuky, operating outside of the border of North Korea.<sup>20</sup> The illegal funds and information stolen from cyber space are used to earn foreign currency bypassing international economic sanctions and fund the development projects for nuclear weapons, missiles, and other weapons of mass destruction. The total amount of the virtual assets North Korea stole across the world starting from 2017 is believed to be more than 1.5 trillion won, and it is known that they stole more than 800 billion won in 2022 alone. In response, South Korean government designated the Bureau of Technological Reconnaissance under the General Bureau of Reconnaissance, Laboratory 110, and the Control Automation College, which have been suspected of funding the nuclear and missile programs of the North through illegal cyber activities as targets of independent sanctions by South Korea on February 10, 2023.<sup>21</sup>

### 3) Chief of General Staff Department Takes Command and Controls the Army Corps

As we can see in the chain of command chart (Figure 3-1), North Korea has Naval Commander and Air Force Commander, while there is no Army Commander, who is an equivalent to the Army Joint Chief

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<sup>20</sup> U.S. Army Headquarters, *North Korean Tactics*, July 2020, p.E-2.

<sup>21</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, press release, Preventing Illegal Foreign Currency Income of North Korea in Cyberspaces, 2023.2.9

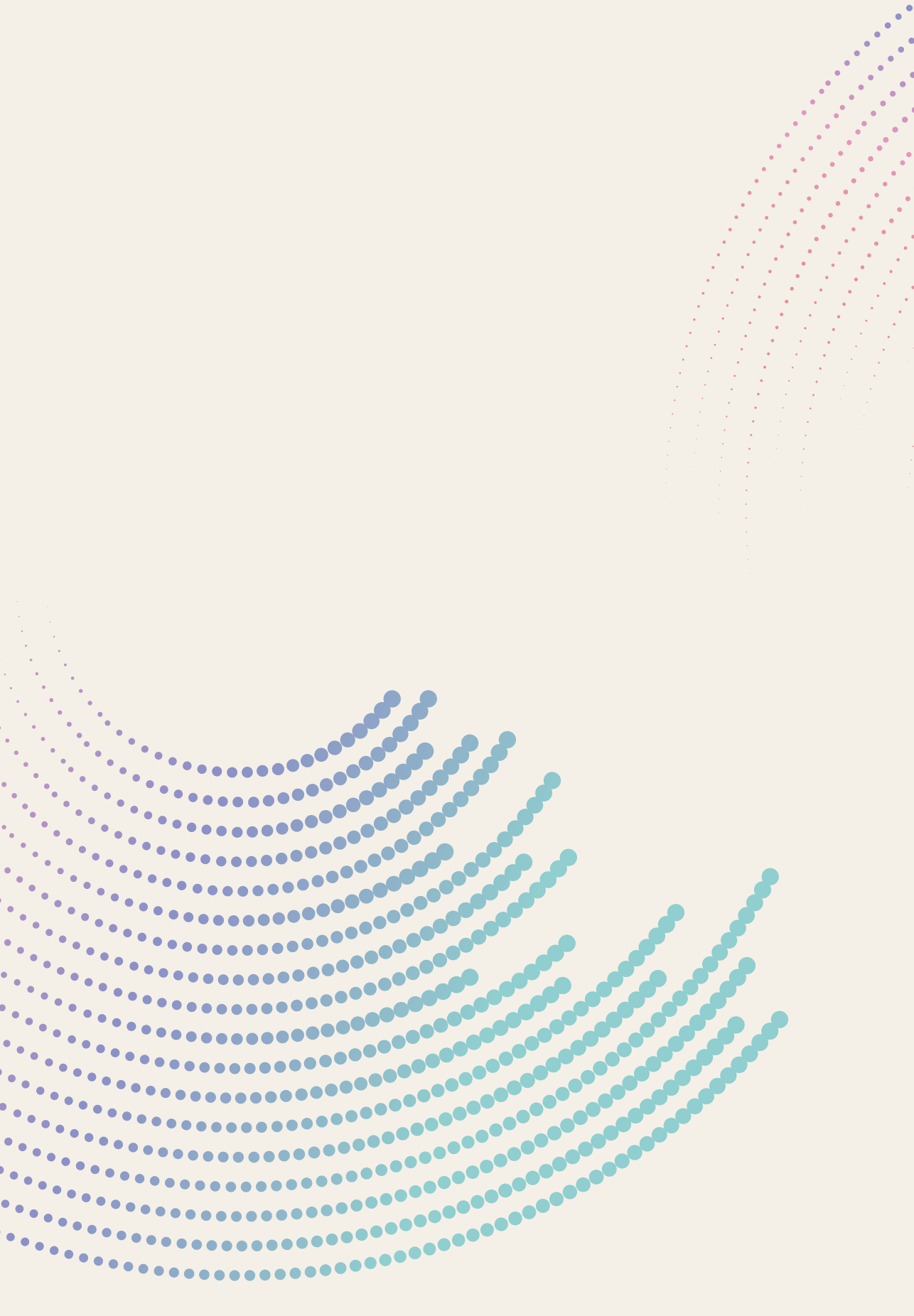
of Staff of the South. Instead, the Chief of General Staff Department (GSD), which is an equivalent to the South Korean Joint Chief of Staff, has the supreme command over the entire North Korean military, controlling and taking command of regular army corps, armored and mechanized infantry divisions, as well as mechanized artillery divisions directly.

Within the chain of command of the North Korean military, the regular army corps, armored and mechanized infantry divisions, as well as the mechanized artillery divisions are on the same level as the Naval Command and the Air Force Command, which are the command of the relevant branch of the armed forces. This differs from what would have been happening in other military forces, in which the Chief of GSD has command over branches of armed forces, such as the Army, Navy, and Air Force, while the commanders of each branch control and take command of the subordinate units. This is one of the unique characteristics of the North Korean military.

As such, the fact that the Chief of GSD takes command of Army corps and divisions directly indicates that the North Korean military puts the Army in its center and that the Army is densely concentrated. The Army is the centerpiece of the North Korean military, as it accounts for 86% of all forces. The Navy and Air Force account for only 4.7% and 8.6%, respectively.

Also, North Korea has also deployed four regular Army divisions in the front-line areas, and 70% of the entire Army force is deployed in the south of the Pyeongyang-Wonsan line. In consideration of such aggressive military deployment, the actual operational system of the North Korean military is that the regular corps of the Army are used

as a type of Sectoral Command, and the Commander of the sector operates not only the forces under his command but also other forces within his jurisdiction in an integrated manner, thus forming an “integrated force” system.





# IV

## Foreign Policy

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**Section 1.** Characteristics of Foreign Policy

**Section 2.** Changes in Foreign Policy

**Section 3.** History of Foreign Relations

## Section 1

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# Characteristics of Foreign Policy

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### 1 Ideology and Policy

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The fundamental values behind the foreign policy of North Korea are autonomy, peace, and friendship. Such basic principles of its foreign policy are stipulated in the platform of the party and the constitution. The platform of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) made it clear that the principal values of foreign policies are "autonomy, peace, and friendship." Especially, the platform emphasized "strengthening the solidarity of the anti-imperialist capacities, objection to the invasion and warmongering by imperialists, and progress in the world's socialist movements" with regard to their foreign policies. The "Socialist Constitution" also stipulates in its Article 17 that the three values in the platform of the party are the principles of foreign policy. In addition, it emphasizes "equality, independence, mutual respect, non-intervention in internal affairs, and principle of reciprocity" along with "the objection

to the interference with the internal affairs” and the “fight for realizing independence and liberation of the nation and the class.”<sup>1</sup>

Faced with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the communist states in Eastern Europe, along with the reform and opening of the China and other changes in the international environment, the WPK changed its principles for foreign policy in 1998. They removed the existing principle of “Marxism-Leninism and Proletariat Internationalism” and added “solidarity with the people of the world who advocate independence, peace, and friendship.” This revised principle of foreign policy updated in 1998 is still maintained in the Kim Jong Un era.<sup>2</sup>

But the actual foreign policy of North Korea were rooted in pragmatism, unlike what is declared in their basic ideology. In the early 1990s, the fall of the Soviet Union, which had been the primary economic patron of North Korea and other socialist states in the Eastern Europe, placed the North Korean economy in a dire situation. Meanwhile, in the early 1990s, South Korea, an ideological rival of the North, succeeded in establishing diplomatic ties with the Soviet Union and the China, which were powerful sponsors of the North during the earlier days of the Cold War. Due to such changes in the international

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**1** During the 6th Party Congress of the WPK in October 1980, North Korea set the “objection of the invasion by foreign countries and meddling with internal politics, realizing independence and liberation of the nation and the class” as the goals of their foreign policy.

**2** In the new year’s speech for 2019, Kim Jong Un also mentioned that he would seek foreign relations in accordance with the ideology of “independence, peace, and friendship.” (“Our party and the government of the republic shall, in accordance with the ideology of independence, peace, and friendship, strengthen solidarity and cooperation with socialist states to further the relationship with the countries that are friendly to us.”)



environment, North Korea proceeded with pragmatic diplomacy to secure its regime and overcome economic crises during the post-Cold War era.

The primary goals of the pragmatic diplomacy of North Korea were to improve its relationship with the West and diversify its foreign relations. Especially, North Korea prioritized normalizing its relationship with the U.S. in order to develop its economy and ensure the safety of the regime by means of lifting economic sanctions. North Korea also wanted to sign a peace agreement through a direct negotiation with the U.S. However, North Korea continued to develop nuclear weapons and missiles, while negotiating denuclearization and lifting the sanctions with the rest of the world. However, due to the repeated breakdowns in the negotiations, none of the major Western allies, including the U.S., normalized their relationships with North Korea.<sup>3</sup>

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## 2 Foreign Policy Decision-Making Structure

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Since the North abolished the position of the President with the amendment of its constitution in 1998, the Chairman of the Presidium

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**3** After six nuclear tests (in October 2006, May 2009, February 2013, January 2016, September 2016, and September 2017) and test launches of missiles, North Korea has been subject to sanctions by the UN Security Council and the U.S., among others. During the final days of the Cold War, North Korea was isolated due to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the reform/opening of the China. This caused them to seek the survival of their regime through the development of nuclear weapons and missiles, based on their brinkmanship tactics for their nuclear negotiations, put their foreign relations in a more stringent situation.

of the Supreme People's Assembly (SPA) served as the “representative of the state,” until it amended its constitution once again to strengthen the role of the President of the State Affairs Commission (SAC). First, the June 2016 amendment of the constitution endowed the President of the SAC with the authority to approve or terminate the key treaties with foreign states and the authority to send special envoys, which normally pertain to the power of the head of states in normal countries. Another amendment of the constitution in April 2019 added the “representative of the state” to the privileges of the President of the SAC. Yet another amendment of the constitution in August of the same year moved the “authority to appoint or recall the diplomatic representatives of the country to be assigned overseas” from the Presidium of the SPA to the President of the SAC. The current North Korean constitution lays down that the Chairman of the Presidium is to receive diplomatic credentials and summons.

Diplomatic activities of North Korea are carried out by the party, state, and private sector,<sup>4</sup> etc. The International Department of the WPK is responsible for the diplomacy between political parties. Parliamentary diplomacy is conducted by the Foreign Affairs Committee under the SPA. North Korea removed its Foreign Affairs Committee with its 1998 amendment of the constitution, only to reinstate it during the 5th SPA of the 13th Period in 2017. The April 2019 amendment of the constitution reflected this reinstatement. With

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<sup>4</sup> Due to the nature of the North Korean regime, the private sectors can be regarded as the governments’ puppet organizations. These are mainly responsible for the diplomacy with private organizations of foreign countries.

the conversion of socialist states in early 1990s, the diplomatic activities with political parties decreased in the foreign relations of North Korea, while the diplomacy with foreign governments became more important. With this, the Foreign Ministry, which is responsible for the diplomacy between governments, became more prestigious. The Foreign Ministry is responsible for establishing diplomatic ties with foreign countries, concluding treaties, and operating embassies. Civilian diplomacy is mainly the tasks of the Asia-Pacific Peace Committee and the Committee for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, which are satellite organizations of the party. Unions, such as the Socialist Patriotic Youth League and the General Federation of Trade Unions, also take part in civilian diplomacy.

## Section 2

# Changes in Foreign Policy

### 1 Kim Il Sung Era

The primary goal of the foreign policy of North Korea during the Cold War was to strengthen their ties with the Soviet Union and other socialist states while emphasizing independence. Foreign Policy during the era of Kim Il Sung, which included the Korea War and fierce stand-offs between the Soviet Union and the U.S., demonstrated the following characteristics.

#### 1) 1948 to Early 1950s: Diplomacy within the Socialist Block

North Korea established the foundation for its diplomacy in the socialist block through the Korean War of the 1950s. During the earlier days of the regime in 1948, North Korea was totally dependent on the Soviet Union for its politics, economy, and military. For North

Korea, the diplomacy with the China was as important as that with Soviet Union. Especially with China joining the Korean War, the relationship between the North and China became a blood alliance. From the foundation of the regime in September 1948 to the signing of the Armistice in July 1953, North Korea formed diplomatic ties with twelve countries, which included the Soviet Union, China, and Eastern European countries. After the signing of the Armistice in 1953, North Korea focused its diplomatic effort on obtaining the free aid from the Soviet Union and China.

## 2) Mid-1950s to 1960s: Diplomacy with Non-Aligned Countries

With the changing foreign policy for the Soviet Union during the early 1950s and the ideological conflict between China and the Soviet Union, North Korea started to seek non-aligned diplomacy. After the death of Stalin in 1953, the Khrushchev regime of the Soviet Union declared the policy of peaceful coexistence with the West, and this led to the emergence of the conflict between China and the Soviet Union regarding socialist ideologies.<sup>5</sup>

North Korea also objected to the Soviet's policy of peaceful coexistence with the West and joined the band of non-aligned diplomacy. The Non-Aligned Movement, led by the former President of Indonesia, Sukarno, was based on the "Ten Principles of Bandung," which was also called "The Joint Declaration on the Promotion of World Peace and Cooperation" adopted at the Asia - Africa Conference held in

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<sup>5</sup> During the 20th Communist Party Congress of the Soviet Union held in February 1956, Khrushchev denounced Stalin and declared his policy of peaceful co-existence with the West.

Bandung, Indonesia in April 1955. The key points of the Ten Principles of Bandung were world peace, anti-colonialism, and strengthening of the ties between Asia and Africa.<sup>6</sup>

North Korea officially declared its non-aligned foreign policy principles during its Party Congresses. North Korea adopted its policy of diversifying its foreign policy at the 3rd Party Congress in 1956. This was followed by the emphasis on solidarity with other socialist states; fight against the imperialist bloc; and the relationship with newborn independent states, at the 4th Party Congress in 1961.<sup>7</sup>

North Korea chose the equal-distance policy between the Soviet Union and China during the 1960s and signed a mutual friendship and support agreement with both countries, including clauses of automatic military assistance. Especially, during the border conflict between China and the USSR in 1962, North Korea maintained neutrality.

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**6** The newborn countries in Africa that achieved their independence at the end of the 1950s adopted the Ten Principles of Bandung as the foundation of their diplomacy. These ten principles also served as the leading principles of the Non-Aligned movement. These included (1) respecting the purpose and principles of the basic human rights and the charter of the United Nations; (2) respecting sovereignty and integrity of territory; (3) equality among all races and nations; (4) non-interference with the internal politics, (4) respecting the individual and collective rights for self-protection in accordance with the charter of the UN; (6) no participation in collective defense resolutions (group military alliance) for the interest of powerful countries; (7) mutual non-invasion; (8) resolution of international conflicts in a peaceful manner; (9) promoting mutual cooperation; and (10) respecting justice and international duties, etc.

**7** With the start of the de-Stalinist movement in the Soviet Union in March 1956, the Soviet faction and the Yanan faction tried to denounce the personal idolization of Kim Il Sung during the 3rd Party Congress of the WPK, which was stopped before happening. During the visit to the Eastern Europe in the August of the same year, the Yanan faction openly criticized Kim Il Sung, only to be purged during the Plenary Session of the Party Central Committee in December 1956. After the factional conflict in 1956, Kim Il Sung and his leadership group purged the Yanan faction and the Soviet faction, before it started the negotiation for the withdrawal of the Chinese reinforcement force from North Korea. And North Korea and China reached an agreement on the complete withdrawal of the Chinese Army within North Korea in 1958.

Also, the North signed the “Sino-Korean Border Agreement” to remove any potential seed of border disputes. In August 1966, North Korea declared an independent foreign policy principle, pronouncing “non-interference with domestic affairs and reciprocal equality,” and joined the Non-Aligned Movement along with other developing countries of the Third World.<sup>8</sup>

The choice of the non-alignment policy was made mainly for gaining more support from the international community and gaining the upper hand in its competition with South Korea.

### 3) 1970s: Independent Diplomacy

During the 1970s, North Korea chose to strengthen independent foreign policy and economic pragmatism as their goals of its foreign policy. China joined the United Nations in September 1971 and established diplomatic relations with Japan in 1972. In 1979, it did so with the U.S. With the thawing of the Sino-American relations and other changes in the international environments, North Korea also sought to change its foreign policy. From the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, North Korea focused on improving its relations with the western capitalist countries. However, with the provocations against South Korea in the late 1970s, problems of with repaying foreign debts, currency forgery, and smuggling by diplomats, the improvement of relations with the West that the North sought staggered.

North Korea still continued to expand its non-alignment diplomacy

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<sup>8</sup> “Protect our independence,” *Rodong Sinmun*, 1966.8.12.

during the 1970s. As a result, after the 5th Party Congress of 1970, North Korea established diplomatic relations with 66 countries until the 6th Party Congress in 1980. This resulted in a reduced level of dependency upon its diplomacy with socialist bloc. Also during this period, the expanded diplomatic ties with the non-aligned countries served as the basis for its independent diplomacy with the countries of the Third World in the future.<sup>9</sup>

#### 4) 1980s and Beyond: Pragmatic Diplomacy with the West

The conversion of socialist states began in the 1980s. Socialist states were either faced with a crisis due to their planned economy or started to introduce market economy voluntarily. The Soviet Union and Eastern Europe went through a drastic shift of the regime, while China and Vietnam chose gradual transformation in their economy.<sup>10</sup> North Korea, too, was facing prolonged economic stagnation due to the accumulated dilemmas of socialist planned economy. As a solution, the North chose the policy of building an autarkic economy for the nation, prioritizing heavy industries, and simultaneous development of the economy and defense. However, like other socialist states, North Korea, could not overcome the inherent shortcomings of a planned economy.

North Korea took a more friendly diplomatic stance with the

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**9** North Korea became a regular member of the “Non-Aligned Conference” during the Foreign Affairs Minister’s Conference of the Non-Aligned Conference held in Lima, the capital of Peru, in August 1975.

**10** In 1978, the China began their introduction of market economy and opening of their country since the 3rd Plenary Session of the Central Committee of the 11th Communist Party in 1978. Vietnam, too, embarked on its own reform, named Doi Moi since 1986.



Western capitalist countries to overcome its economic hardship. During this period, North Korea maintained its non-aligned foreign policy and its diplomacy with the existing socialist friends, while trying to improve its relations with the Western capitalist states and cooperate with them in the economic sector. However, with the “Rangoon Bombing” in 1983 and the “Bombing of Korean Air Flight 858” in 1987, their place in the international community was severely damaged, and North Korea was isolated from the West. As a result, the diplomatic pragmatism of North Korea, aimed to introduce the technologies and capital of the advanced capitalist economies did not yield any tangible results.

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## 2 Kim Jong Il Era

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During the early 1990s, North Korea had to confront challenges both inside and outside due to the rapid change in its external environment. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the transformation of the communist bloc, the U.S. became the sole superpower of the world. South Korea established diplomatic ties with the USSR in 1990 and China in 1992. This further aggravated the isolation of North Korea, with the economic aids from outside mostly cut off, making its economic crisis even more devastating.

Meanwhile, Kim Il Sung died in 1994 and, following four years of the legacy rule (*yuhun tongchi*), Kim Jong Il's regime was officially inaugurated in September 1998. In addition to the isolation from the international community, North Korea suffered a historic flood in the mid-1990, causing many North Koreans to perish in hunger. During

this period, North Korea prioritized expanding its diplomatic relations with the capitalist states of the West. In the 1990s, the North sought to normalize its relations with U.S. and Japan, which was followed by its all diplomacy to secure support from the international community since the 2000s.

### 1) 1990s: Seeking to Normalizing Relations with the U.S. and Japan

North Korea started its talks and negotiations with the U.S. since the beginning of the 1990s. North Korea had demanded that the U.S. sign a peace treaty with North Korea during the 1970s and 1980s. And they proceeded with bilateral talks with the U.S. during the first nuclear crisis in the 1990s. With many rounds of high-level talks between North Korea and the U.S., they signed the “Agreed Framework” in 1994.<sup>11</sup> In the meantime, North Korea launched its program to search for and return the remains of fallen U.S. soldiers since the 1990s and continued talks with the U.S., to returned the remains of more than 200 U.S. soldiers until 1998. With the Perry Process during the Clinton Administration, it appeared that the resolution of the North Korean nuclear weapons and missile issues was within a reach. In fact, North Korea sent Vice Marshal Jo Myong Rok to Washington D.C. in October 2000 to adopt the “U.S.-DPRK Joint Communiqué” and the “Anti-

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**11** Agreed Framework: A diplomatic agreement between North Korea and the U.S. on the North Korean nuclear weapons issue, signed on October 21, 1994. The key points of the agreement included freezing North Korea’s nuclear weapons programs, providing a light water reactor to North Korea, and normalizing the U.S.-North Korean relationship. Berlin Accords: The U.S. and North Korea agreed upon lifting the economic sanction against North Korea, while the North agreed to stop further launches of long-range missiles during a high-level talk held in Berlin, on September 12, 1999.

terrorism Joint Statement.” These documents encompassed various issues, including the ending of hostilities and other significant matters.

North Korea started to work on normalizing its relations with Japan. North Korea held eight rounds of negotiations with Japan in 1991 and 1992 combined. In March 1995, the WPK agreed with the ruling coalition of Japan to restart their talks to normalize their diplomatic relations, which was followed by a food aid of 500,000 tons over 1995 and 1996. Normalization efforts continued, with two “Japanese Wife Home Visit Programs” between North Korea and Japan and the visit by the leadership of Japan’s Liberal Democratic Party to Pyongyang.

However, the process stalled due to the launch of another North Korean missile, which flew over the sovereign airspace of Japan in August 1998, and the relations further deteriorated in August 1998, when North Korea demanded reparation and apology for the Japanese colonial rule. However, with the “Berlin Accord” between the U.S. and North Korea signed in September 1999, the relations between the North and Japan showed a sign of thawing.

## 2) 2000s: All-Round diplomacy

The Kim Jong Il regime sought an all-round foreign policy since the beginning of the 2000s. To overcome its economic crisis, North Korea desperately needed international aid. North Korea prioritized the improvement of relations with the U.S., while strengthening its ties with its long-time allies, China and Russia. Also, it tried to improve relations with Japan and the European Union, while actively engaging in diplomatic activities with Southeast Asian countries, such as

Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.

During the Kim Jong Il era, North Korea used its “brinkmanship tactics” by utilizing its nuclear weapons as a negotiating card along with its all-round diplomacy. Since the inauguration of the Bush Administration in January 2002, the US-North Korean relationship deteriorated once again due to the beginning of the second North Korean Nuclear Crisis, among other things. Several talks were held to defuse the second North Korean Nuclear Crisis, which resulted in the Joint Declaration of September 19, 2005. However, the U.S. and the North failed to bridge their gaps, and the relationship between the two countries did not improve.

The Kim Jong Il regime tried to improve its relationship with its traditional allies, such as China and Russia. Especially, North Korea strengthened its top-level diplomacy with China and Russia in order to respond to the pressure from the U.S. and secure economic aids. Since the beginning of the 2000s, North Korea invested more diplomatic efforts on its relationship with China, and the leadership of the two countries visited each other over more than one occasion.<sup>12</sup> Russia also restored its traditional diplomatic ties with the North, through the attempt to realize mutual visits by their top leaders.<sup>13</sup>

The Kim Jong Il regime established its diplomatic ties with 25

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<sup>12</sup> While in his office, Kim Jong Il visited China eight times (May 2000, Jan. 2001, Apr. 2004, Jan. 2006, May 2010, Aug. 2018, May 2011, and Aug. 2011). Jiang Zemin (Sep. 2001) and Hu Jintao (Oct. 2005) visited North Korea once, respectively. Xie Jinping, who visited North Korea as the Vice President in 2008 visited North Korea once again as the President (Jun.2019).

<sup>13</sup> Putin's visit to North Korea (Jul. 2000) and Kim Jong Il's visit to Russia (Jul. 2001, Aug. 2002, and Aug. 2011) happened during this period.

member states of the European Union (excluding France and Estonia) by 2010, with the thawing of its relationship with the South in the 2000s. Starting with the ambassador-level diplomatic relationship with Italy (Jan. 2000,) North Korea established diplomatic relations with the UK (Dec. 2000) and Germany (Mar. 2001). In 2002, North Korea decided to use euros instead of USD for its international payments. However, due to its nuclear tests and human right abuses, their attempt to improve the relationship with the EU also hit the wall.

In the 2000s, too, North Korea actively sought to strengthen its ties with Southeast Asian countries. Especially, the North tried to invite SE Asian leaders to North Korea and used other means to improve its relationship with its neighbors.<sup>14</sup> However, the North Korean nuclear weapons tests and the food loans, among other things, spoiled its efforts to improve relations with the Southeast Asian countries.

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### 3 Kim Jong Un Era

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From the beginning, Kim Jong Un's regime sought a confrontational foreign policy through the development of their nuclear weapons. In March 2013, the Plenary Session of the WPK Central Committee adopted the *Byungjin* policy. The Kim Jong Un regime sought confrontational diplomatic strategies as they continued their nuclear

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**14** In July 2001, Kim Yong Nam, the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly visited Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, which was followed by his visits to Thailand and Malaysia in March 2002. Also, they invited President Megawati of Indonesia, Ten Deuk Ruong, the President of Vietnam, and the Prime Minister of Laos to North Korea in 2002.

weapons tests and long-range missile tests under this simultaneous nuclear and economic development policy. After the 6th nuclear test of North Korea in 2017, the UN Security Council passed its resolution to impose sanctions against North Korea (Resolution No. 2375,) and the U.S. toughened its unilateral sanctions against North Korean individuals and organs. This UN resolution also included, for the first time, the limitations in the amount of oil to be exported to North Korea and total ban on the transaction of garments. With the completion of the 6th nuclear weapons test and the long-range ballistic missile test (Hwasong-15), which were necessary to develop strategic nuclear weapons, North Korea declared “the completion of the nuclear forces of the country” (November 29, 2017) and sought to negotiate with the U.S.

From 2018 to 2019, North Korea took a softer stance in its diplomatic strategy. At the 3rd Plenary Session of the 7th WPK Central Committee held on April 20, 2018, North Korea declared “total focus on building a socialist economy” and started its negotiation with the U.S. for denuclearization and guarantee of its security.<sup>15</sup> Kim Jong Un, the President of the SAC, emphasized the “will of complete denuclearization” and “establishing a new relationship with the U.S.” With these friendly gestures and atmosphere for a talk, North Korea held a series of summit talks with the countries surrounding the

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**15** During the 3rd Plenary Session of the 7th Period, Kim Jong Un said, “Now, we need no more nuclear weapons tests or test launches of mid/long-range or intercontinental ballistic missiles. As such, the Northern Nuclear Weapons test sight finally served its purpose,” emphasizing the “solidarity” *Byungjin* Policy. Also, he declared, “All of the efforts of the party and the state will be directed to the construction of the socialist economy,” pronouncing a new strategic policy of “total focus on building a socialist economy.”

Korean Peninsula, including the U.S. and China. North Korea discussed the topic of denuclearization during the summits with the United States and Russia, while raising the issue of guaranteeing the security of the regime. President Kim Jong Un held two summits with the U.S. with the Trump Administration in June 2018 and February 2019. In the meantime, it held five summits with President Xi Jinping in 2018 and 2019, revitalizing the traditional ties with China which had stalled since 2014. To restore its relationship with Russia, North Korea held a summit with President Putin in April 2019, which was followed by high-level interactions and cooperation.

Since December 2019, North Korea has adopted a “head-on approach” to strengthen its nuclear arsenal rather than seeking friendly talks.<sup>16</sup> In 2020, North Korea attempted to strengthen its traditional ties with China and Russia while trying to resume talks with the U.S. But it saw no progress in terms of reopening talks with the U.S. With the inauguration of the Suga Administration in Japan in September 2020, which was followed by the inauguration of the Biden Administration in January 2021, when the U.S. declared “a total review of the North Korea policy” and “a new strategy for North Korean nuclear weapons program,” the environment surrounding the foreign policy of North Korea changed. At the 8th Party Congress held in January 2021, North Korea emphasized the strategic relationship with China, the relations with other socialist states, and strengthening the capabilities to fight the imperialists, under the principle of independence in foreign policy.

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<sup>16</sup> North Korea declared a “head-on approach” during the 5th central Plenary Session for the 7th Period, in December 2019.

Especially, North Korea designated the development of the friendly relationship with China as a critical element of the development of socialist and declared “tit for tat” as the principle of its relationship with the U.S. During the 3rd Plenary Session of the WPK Central Committee for the 8th period held in June, Kim Jong Un said, “To ensure the safety of the country, one has to be ready to fight and talk at the same time. Especially more so for a confrontation.”

In addition, during his speech at the 5th session of the 14th SPA held on September 29th, 2021, Kim Jong Un said, “We will develop a friendly relations with any country in the world that respect our independence and treats us with friendship,” reaffirming its existing stance in foreign policy.

North Korea enacted its nuclear weapons policy in 2022. With the law titled “Law on Nuclear Forces Policy of DPRK” passed during the 7th meeting of the 14th SPA in September 2022, North Korea specified the conditions for first use of nuclear weapons. In his state administration speech, Kim Jong Un declared that “whatever happens, there is no way we could give up our nuclear weapons.” This was followed by a barrage of mid and long-range missile tests of various types.

Concerning Russia’s invasion of Ukraine that started in February 2022, North Korea scrapped its previous stance against any invasive wars and joined the band of countries that supported Russia. North Korea objected to the resolution of the UN that condemned the invasion by Russia and demanded Russia’s withdrawal, thus joining Belarus, Syria, and Eritrea and approving the independence of Donetsk and Luhansk regions. North Korea refused America’s invitation to



talks and churned out abusing criticizing statements against multi-party military drills, UN's resolution against North Korea's human right situations, suspicions on the cyberattacks, and theft of cryptocurrency by North Korea. Also, when faced by Japan's criticism on the abduction issue and missile tests, North Korea responded by condemning Japan for its military expansionism, pointing to the reshuffle of the unit operation policy of the Self Defense Force of Japan. As for its relationship with China, North Korea delivered oral messages for Beijing's Winter Olympic Games and its national holiday to China stressing the importance of its relationship with Beijing and supported China by criticizing America's meddling with the Taiwan issue. North Korea maintained its friendly relations with non-aligned countries by delivering the usual oral messages, while it countered the EU for its submission of the human rights resolution with a statement of condemnation.

## Section 3

# History of Foreign Relations

### 1 Relations with the U.S.

#### 1) Kim Il Sung-Kim Jong Il Era

North Korea sought the lifting of the sanctions by the UN and the U.S., while trying to secure its safety by improving its relationship with the U.S. North Korea proposed a peace treaty between North Korea and South Korea in 1962<sup>17</sup>. However, it later switched its strategy to talk to the U.S. only, starting from 1974.<sup>18</sup> Until today, signing of a

<sup>17</sup> North Korea suggested a South-North Peace Treaty through the state administration speech by Kim Il Sung during the 1st meeting of the 3rd Supreme People's Assembly, held on October 22, 1962.

<sup>18</sup> North Korea sent an official written proposition for a U.S.-North Korea Peace Treaty under the name of the 3rd Supreme People's Assembly of the 5th Period on March 25, 1974. The content of the proposition was as follows; (1) a written pledge of non-aggression and removal of all risks of an armed conflict; (2) stopping the expansion of military forces and arms race, while stopping any weapons, operational equipment, or military supplies being brought into Korea; (3) disbanding of the UN forces within South Korea and withdrawal thereof; (4) withdrawal of any foreign forces in South Korea and objecting military fortification by foreign states.

peace treaty is one of the key agenda of North Korean diplomacy with the U.S.

North Korea tried to resolve the nuclear weapons issue and normalize relations at the same time through a direct negotiation with the U.S. from the 1990s.<sup>19</sup> The nuclear weapons issue of North Korea was discussed within the framework of the six-party talks, joined by the countries with interest in the matter, over the period from 2003 to 2008. With the inauguration of the Obama Administration in 2009, North Korea expressed its hope for a progress with the Six-Party Talks, but the Obama Administration made it clear that normalizing relations with the North cannot happen without complete denuclearization and halt on nuclear proliferation.

After this, North Korea expedited its nuclear weapons and long-range missiles development. North Korea launched a long-range missile on April 5, 2009, and conducted its second nuclear weapon test on May 25, 2009. This was followed by the declaration of its completion of the reprocessing of depleted fuel rods in 2009 and the disclosure of the uranium enrichment facility in 2010.

## 2) Kim Jong Un Era

Kim Jong Un continued his tests to improve North Korea's nuclear weapons and long-range missiles, to which the U.S. responded with even more stringent sanctions. After Kim Jong Un took office, the U.S. and North Korea signed the "Leap Day Agreement," where the two

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<sup>19</sup> Agreed Framework between the U.S. and North Korea in 1994; the four-party talk in 1996; Berlin Conference in 1999 (missile issues)

parties agreed to halt the development of nuclear weapons and missiles and resuming aid by the U.S. for North Korea. This agreement was scrapped once again, when the North violated the Leap Day agreement and fired another long-range missile. The UN Security Council adopted its resolution on a sanction against North Korea (No. 2087) on January 22, 2013, which led to the North's 3rd nuclear weapon test on February 12, 2013. For this, the UN Security Council adopted a severe resolution on sanction against North Korea (No. 2094). Later, there were talks between the U.S. and North Korea to resume Six-Party Talks, only to reaffirm their differences of positions. After the 4th and 5th nuclear weapon tests of North Korea, the U.S. initiated yet more UNSC resolutions on sanctions No. 2270 and 2321.

The Trump Administration strengthened its own sanctions against North Korea starting with its proposition for sanctions against individuals and government agencies of North Korea in March 2017. Regarding North Korea's ballistic missile launches that started in May 2017, the U.S. led the UNSC to adopt its Resolution No. 2371, banning the export of North Korean coal and iron ore, etc. In the same year, on September 3, North Korea conducted its 6th nuclear test, which resulted in the UN, under the initiative by the U.S., limiting the supply of crude oil to North Korea and banning the export of North Korea's textile products by adopting UNSC Resolution No. 2375. However, North Korea launched its Hwasong-15 missile yet again in November 2017, which introduced even severer limitations imposed on the oil supply to North Korea, with more items banned from export, by the adoption of the UNSC Resolution No. 2397 at the U.S. initiative.

North Korea pursued denuclearization negotiations with the Trump

**[Table 4-1] UN Security Council Resolutions on Sanctions against North Korea**

Classification	Cause	Description
No. 825 (May 11, 1993)	North Korea withdrew from the NPT (March 12, 1993)	Urged North Korea to reconsider its withdrawal from the NPT.
No. 1695 (July 15, 2006)	North Korea launched of its missiles (July 5, 2006)	Condemned North Korea for its provocations and banned the transfer of the suppliers, goods, technologies, and funds related to missiles to North Korea.
No. 1718 (October 14, 2006)	North Korea conducts first nuclear test (2006.10.9)	Implemented physical regulations (conventional arms, supplies related to WMDs, and luxury goods, etc.), financial regulations, travel regulations, cargo searches, and other sanctions against North Korea.
No. 1874 (June 12, 2009)	North Korea conducted second nuclear test (May 25, 2009)	Added sanctions to the existing resolution No. 1718, including more stringent cargo and maritime searches, strengthened financial sanctions, and expanded ban on weapons trade, etc.
No. 2087 (January 22, 2013)	North Korea launched long-range missiles (December 12, 2012)	Additional sanctions to the existing resolutions No. 1718 and 1874 to broaden range of targets, increased surveillance on the activities of financial institutions and more stringent export control toward North Korea.
No. 2094 (March 7, 2013)	North Korea conducted third nuclear test (February 12, 2013)	Expanded list of sanctioned items; strengthened sanctions regarding finance, cargo search, flight bans, and trade bans (calling for the implementation of the catch-all measure), etc.
No. 2270 (March 2, 2016)	North Korea conducted fourth nuclear test (January 6, 2016) and launch long-range missiles (February 7, 2016)	Called for total inspection of North Korea's export and import cargo and blockage of transportation; banned the entry of vessels and airplanes from passing its airspace; implemented financial sanctions, trade sanctions (excluding essential items for its people), trade ban and banned items related to weapons that could be used in nuclear weapons and missiles.
No. 2321 (November 30, 2016)	North Korea conducted fifth nuclear test (September 9, 2016)	Coal export limits for North Korea; added additional export bans to the mineral export of North Korea (silver, copper, zinc, and nickel); ban on the supply, sales, and used of sculptures; banning the financial institutions of member states from opening an office in North Korea or opening bank accounts within North Korea; reducing the size of the embassies of the member states within North Korea; banning the rental of aircrafts, ships, or crews to North Korea (the provision that excluded those essential for the livelihood of the people was removed); added more individuals and organizations to the target list of sanctions; ban on the cooperation with North Korea in science and technology.
No. 2356 (June 2, 2017)	North Korea launchd ballistic missiles (October 15, 2017)	Expanded the target list of sanctions related to the development of nuclear weapons and missiles (14 individuals and 4 organizations)
No. 2371 (August 5, 2017)	North Korea launched its long-range missile, "Hwasong-14" (July 4-28, 2017)	Banned North Korea from exporting its coal, steel, iron ore, seafoods, lead, and lead ore (regardless of the country of origin); added more items to the list of the controlled dual-purpose items that could be used in WMD and conventional weapons; froze the number of the expat workers of North Korea to the current number at the time of the adoption of the resolution (exemptions granted by the Sanctions Committee for humanitarian reasons); the duty to observe the ban on the financial transactions with North Korea that could contribute to the development of WMDs was expanded to the clearing of funds through member states.
No. 2375 (September 11, 2017)	North Korea conducted sixth nuclear test (September 3, 2017)	Restricted in the crude oil supply to North Korea (freezing the supply volume of crude oil to the current level; reduction of refined oil supply; banning the supply of condensates and LNG); banning the exportation of the textile products of North Korea (regardless of the country of origin, with a 90-day grace period); banning the issuance of new employment permit for the expat workers of North Korea (and no extension of existing contracts); banning the existing and new joint ventures with North Korea (to be closed down within 120 days); adding more items to the dual-purpose items for WMD and conventional arms; strengthening vessel search requirements; addition of more items to the sanctions list. One individual (Pak Yong Sik), three organizations (WPK Central Military Commission; Organization and Guidance Department, Publicity and Information Department); the Sanctions Committee may impose any actions in the resolution as exceptional measures as necessary.
No. 2397 (December 22, 2017)	North Korea launched its long-range missile, "Hwasong-15" (November 29, 2017)	Strengthened the restrictions on oil supply; all expat workers to be sent home within 24 months (2 years); expansion of the export/import ban list; strengthening the maritime blockage measure; addition of 16 individual and a group (Ministry of People's Armed Forces) to the sanctions lists.

Administration since 2018. In its new year's speech, North Korea announced its intention to participate in the Pyeongchang Winter Olympic Games. This led to an inter-Korean Summit on April 27 and the U.S.-North Korea Summit in Singapore on June 12. North Korea stated that, if the U.S. lifts its hostile policy against North Korea and its security can be ensured without nuclear weapons, North Korea would "endeavor to realize denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula." During the U.S.-North Korea Summit in June, the two leaders pronounced in the joint communique that the two countries will work together for the "establishment of a new relationship that is faced on peace and prosperity," "establish a sustainable and stabilized peace arrangement," and "reaffirm the Panmunjeom Declaration," while North Korea will endeavor for the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. The two leaders also agreed to "the recovery of the remains, and return the remains of the prisoners of war and those missing in action immediately."

The U.S. and North Korea implemented the measures agreed during the Singapore Summit in a stepwise manner. Before the summit with the U.S., North Korea demolished its Punggyeri test site on May 24, 2018, and returned the remains of the first 55 U.S. soldiers on July 27. President Trump Administration suspended the U.S.-South Korea joint military drills and announced its intention to hold the 2nd summit with the North to negotiate denuclearization.

However, the two governments failed to reach an agreement due to the differences of positions on denuclearization and the scope of sanctions to be lifted at the 2nd summit held in Hanoi, Vietnam in February 2019. The relationship between the two countries were in a

stalemate for some time, until they agreed to resume working-level talks to break out of the stalemate during the meeting between the leaders of the U.S., North Korea, and South Korea in June 2019. However, the working-level talks that was held between the U.S.



The U.S.-North Korea Summit (Feb. 27 - 28, 2019, Hanoi)

and North Korea in Stockholm, Sweden in October, did not yield any noticeable results.

Denuclearization negotiation between the U.S. and North Korea did not go anywhere in 2020, as well. North Korea refrained from making provocative moves around the Presidential election of the U.S., while still emphasizing that no talk would be possible before the U.S. withdraws its hostile policy over several statements.<sup>20</sup> Especially, the North emphasized once again that the U.S. should “withdraw its hostile policy” and reaffirmed the principle of “tit for tat” during the 8th Party Congress held in January 2021. With the inauguration of the Biden Administration in January 2021, North Korea found itself in a new environment regarding its relationship with the U.S. The Biden Administration pronounced a new North Korea strategy and a general review of its North Korea policy.

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**20** Even though North Korea stated its intention for the “total denuclearization” during its new year’s speech in 2019, this implied the “denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.” And, in December, North Korea declared a “head-on approach” during the 5th central Plenary Session of the 7th Period and made it clear that there “will not be any meaningful conversation unless the U.S. does not withdraw its hostile policy first.”

With the inauguration of the Biden Administration in 2021, the U.S. sought a new North Korea policy. As a result, the spokesperson of the White House announced a new North Korea policy guideline of a “calibrated, practical approach.” Later in May, Secretary Blinken said, “The new North Korea policy is a very clear policy focused on diplomacy,” making it clear that “whether there will be an intervention is up to North Korea.” At the U.S.-South Korea Summit in May, President Biden appointed Seong Kim as the special envoy to North Korea, proposing complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, seeking diplomacy with North Korea, and respecting the existing agreements (Singapore Agreement and Panmunjeom Declaration), emphasizing diplomatic talks with the North.

After the “review of North Korean policy” of the U.S., Kim Jong Un said, during the 3rd Plenary Session of the WPK Central Committee held in June, “We need to be prepared for talks and confrontation alike.” This was followed by his remark during the state administration speech (Sep. 29, 2021) of the Supreme People’s Assembly (SPA) that “talks without diplomatic interventions or premises are only an extension of the hostility policy of the U.S.” While maintaining such a stance, North Korea test launched Hwasong-8 in Sep. 28, 2021, an submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) in Oct. 19, 2021 and condemned the call for the UNSC meeting (1st, 10th, and 20th of October 2021) as “violation of sovereignty” and based on a “double-standard.”

North Korea's relations with the U.S. did not make any progress in 2022. The Biden Administration maintained its stance on “unconditional talks,” keeping the signal that it is willing to talk with



North Korea. However, North Korea did not accept this proposal and launched ballistic missiles on more than 30 occasions. In June and July, the U.S. conducted multinational joint military drills (RIMPAC and Pitch Black,) to which North Korea protested by test launching mid-range ballistic missiles and sending its military aircraft close to the special monitoring line set by the South Korean military. Also, North Korean Foreign Ministry made a statement to condemn the military drills by the U.S. around the peninsula<sup>21</sup> and suspension of Russia's membership in the Human Rights Council<sup>22</sup>, while suggesting America's responsibility for the war in Ukraine.

The U.S. maintained stringent sanctions against North Korea through the extension of the designation as a state sponsor of terrorism and publishing a report on human trafficking. North Korea used the publication of its human trafficking report and the response to the cyber issues calling it “meddling with the internal affairs,” and a “manifestation of a hostility policy.”<sup>23</sup> In addition, North Korea made a statement under the name of the Director of Media of the Foreign Ministry to condemn the U.S. by means of supporting the stance of China regarding the visit by the House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> October 6, October 31, and November 4, 2022. Foreign Ministry website.

<sup>22</sup> April 11, 2022. Korean Central News Agency.

<sup>23</sup> July 21, 2022. Korean Central News Agency, September 14. Foreign Ministry website.

<sup>24</sup> August 6, 2022. Korean Central News Agency.

## 2 Relations with Japan

### 1) Kim Il Sung - Kim Jong Il Era

The relationship between North Korea and Japan started to improve during the détente between the East and the West in the 1970s and the talks between North and South Korea. North Korea held eleven rounds of talks with Japan to establish diplomatic relations with Japan from January 1991 to November 2000. The two countries started to discuss the establishment of diplomatic ties starting from the 1990s in earnest. On September 17, 2002, Chairman Kim Jong Il and Prime Minister Goizumi made the “North Korea-Japan Pyongyang Declaration” after the Pyeongyang Summit.

During the summit, Japan expressed regrets and apologized for the colonial rule, and the two countries agreed on economic cooperation including financial aids to the North and humanitarian aids. North Korea apologized for the abduction of Japanese and promised prevention of recurrence. They also agreed to extend the suspension of missile launches until 2003 and respect international agreements.

This was followed by the 2nd Summit after one year and eight months, on May 22, 2004, where they agreed to resume talks to establish diplomatic ties. However, the North Korea-Japanese relationship did not make any progress due to the nuclear and missiles issues and the abduction issue.

### 2) Kim Jong Un Era

During the era of Kim Jong Un, the foreign policy of North Korea

on Japan tended to focus on economic pragmatism and diversion from total dependence on China.<sup>25</sup> It appeared that North Korea was seeking a diversified foreign policy, as it tried to reduce its dependence on China, which proactively joined the band of sanctions by the UN after the 3rd nuclear test, by means of strengthening the relationship with Japan. Japan, too, had a need for keeping the China in check and strengthening its position in the East Asia by improving its relationship with North Korea. However, during the Abe Administration of Japan, there were internal political situations which prevented Japan from lifting its own sanctions against North Korea without resolving the abduction issues and the nuclear weapons issues.

During the Abe Administration, North Korea made some bold moves to improve their relationship. In May 2013, Chief Cabinet Secretary Ijima (Advisor) visited North Korea to discuss the abductee issue, and there were several rounds of director-level talks between the two countries in 2014 (Mar. 2014, May 2014, and July 2014). Especially, North Korea announced that, in its “Stockholm Agreement” announced after the director-level talks between North Korea and Japan held in Sweden from May 26 to 28, 2014, they agreed to form a “special investigation committee” to investigate the entirety of the Japanese abductees including those who went missing and investigate the remains of the Japanese in North Korea.

Japan joined the UN sanctions against North Korea for its nuclear

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**25** See Daegyoo Yoon et al., *A Review on the Improvement of the Relationship Between North Korea and Japan and the East Asian Strategy of Japan*, Assessment and Prospect of the Changes in the East Asia, pp. 140-166.

and missile tests, in addition to its own sanctions. In August 2016, a North Korean missile fell within the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of Japan for the first time in history. And both of the intermediate-range missiles tested by North Korea in August and September, 2017, passed through the airspace of Japan. The Abe Administration condemned North Korea in fury, and a joint military drill between the U.S. and Japan was conducted near the Korean Peninsula. Also, Japan announced its own sanctions against North Korea and implemented the UNSC Resolutions No. 2375 and 2397 to impose sanctions on North Korea.

The relationship between North Korea and Japan did not make any progress in 2018 and beyond. North Korea claimed that the issue of abduction was completely resolved and warned Japan that it would be left out of the political changes in the Korean Peninsula.

In the meantime, Prime Minister Abe was successfully reelected for his third term and announced that he would participate in the negotiations for North Korea's denuclearization actively. After the summit between the U.S. and North Korea, he also announced his intention to hold a "summit with no strings attached." In September 2019, a delegation from Yamanashi Prefecture for the Friendship Between North Korea and Japan, headed by Ganemaru Shingo of the Liberal Democratic Party, visited North Korea for six days. But there was no progress in the diplomatic relations between the two countries.

In May 2019, Prime Minister Abe discarded his previous stance that a summit could only happen after there was progress in the abduction issue and announced that he was ready for a summit with North Korea without any conditions. However, North Korea ignored this proposition

and continued condemning Japan for issues concerning history sex slaves during Japanese colonial rule, Dokdo, and military buildup. With the inauguration of the Suga Administration in September 2020, the new Japanese government proposed a “talk without any conditions” to North Korea, showing interest in resolving the abduction issue. But North Korea did not respond.

On September 24, 2021, Prime Minister Suga gave an online speech at the UN to state that the ballistic missile launches by North Korea was a threat to the peace of Japan and the world, North Korea condemned the statement, saying it was a manifestation of a hostility policy. Prime Minister Suga took every opportunity to propose a “talk without conditions” with Chairman Kim Jong Un, to which North Korea did not show any responses. In addition, North Korea decided not to participate in Tokyo Olympic Games, claiming the need to protect its athletes from COVID-19. Subsequently, the IOC suspended North Korea from participating in Olympic Games until the end of 2022.

Prime Minister Kishida Fumio, who took office in October 2021, stated that he would attempt to comprehensively resolve the abduction issue and the nuclear issue based on the North Korea-Japan Pyongyang Declaration during his first address to the Diet on October 8. Especially, Prime Minister Kishida stated that the abduction issue was of the highest priority and showed his intention to meet Chairman Kim Jong Un to achieve the normalization of the relationship with North Korea. However, North Korea claimed, through the website of its Foreign Ministry, that the abduction issue had already been resolved, demanding Japan’s apology and reparation for the past crimes during Japanese colonial rule.

In February 2022, North Korea launched missiles over East Sea and called the missile test “a self-defense measure.”<sup>26</sup> Also, North Korea condemned Japan that Japan was “building up its military and completing its preparation for a war”, and seeking a justification to become a military power by supporting Ukraine and reorganizing the administration of the units of the Self Defense Force.<sup>27</sup> In addition, when Japan raised the issue of the abduction of Japanese citizens jointly with the U.S., Australia, and the EU in the UN, North Korea reiterated its previous stance that the abduction issue had been fully resolved and no longer existed.<sup>28</sup> Prime Minister Kishida Fumio expressed his intention to meet Chairman Kim Jong Un of North Korea without any conditions during his speech at the UN General Assembly meeting on September 20, 2022. However, North Korea responded with a intermediate-range ballistic missile, which passed through the airspace of Japan in October. Japan fiercely condemned the move and imposed further sanctions of its own.

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### 3 Relations with China

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#### 1) Kim Il Sung - Kim Jong Il Era

The tie between North Korea and China sometimes loosened over the seven decades since the foundation of the North Korean regime.

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<sup>26</sup> March 7, 2022. Foreign Ministry website.

<sup>27</sup> May 20, 2022. Foreign Ministry website.

<sup>28</sup> June 27, 2022. Foreign Ministry website.

However, historically, North Korea and China have been very close in terms of politics, economy, and military, sometimes being compared to the relationship between teeth and lips. During the Cold War, North Korea and China remained allies in blood through the ideology of socialism. However, the relationship between North Korea and China started to change since the beginning of the 1990s. China set economic development as its priority since its reform and opening. And, its foreign policy also shifted from ideologies to pragmatism. China abandoned its barter trade system which it maintained within the framework of socialist economy in dealing with North Korea starting from 1991 and demanded payment in hard currency. It was a critical blow to the North-China relationship when South Korea established a formal diplomatic relations with China in August 1992.

With the formal inauguration of the Kim Jong Il regime in September 1998, North Korea invested tremendous efforts to normalize its relationship with China. The normalization of the relationship with China was essential to not only for the restoration of a traditional friendly relationship but also to overcome its economic hardship and international isolation. Chairman Kim Jong Il visited China eight times from May 2000 to 2011. Chinese leaders such as Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao also visited North Korea in September 2001 and October 2005, which strengthened the ties between the two countries. During the North Korea-China summit held in China in May 2011, President Hu Jintao emphasized the friendship between the two countries saying, “We highly respect the spirit of the party leader’s assembly of North Korea,” expressing his support of the Kim Jong Il and his leadership.

With the cooperation with China, North Korea tried to create

a favorable environment to complete its mission to build a strong country in 2012, while trying to soften the sanctions against itself imposed by the UNSC by means of resuming talks with the U.S. and the Six-Party Talks. On December 19, 2011, which was two days after the death of Chairman Kim Jong Il, China announced that North Korea and China would “strengthen and advance the relationships between the parties, states, and people in the future and contribute proactively to the stability and peace in the Korean Peninsula and East Asia.”

## 2) Kim Jong Un Era

The China policy of the Kim Jong Un regime has been focused on the goal of “friendship and cooperation between North Korea and China.” The Xi Jinping Regime of China which started in November 2012 aimed to establish a relationship between normal states rather than allies in blood. However, China is still seeking a friendly relationship with North Korea for the sake of the economy and security of China. China has been against the military provocations by the North, such as its nuclear tests and missile launches. However, it has not been enthusiastic in the implementation of sanctions against North Korea which could result in the unsettling of North Korean regime.

In May 2013, North Korea sent Choi Ryong Hae, the Director of the General Political Bureau of the Korean People’s Army as a special envoy of President Kim Jong Un. However, the relationship between North Korea and China cooled down abruptly when President Xi Jinping visited South Korea first in July 2014. However, the relationship between two countries restored a little, when Choe Ryong Hae, now a



Secretary of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK), visited China to attend the Chinese memorial celebration in September 2015, which led to a visit by Liu Yunshan, an Executive Member of the Communist Party of China (CPC), in celebration of the 70th anniversary of the WPK in October.

When North Korea conducted its third nuclear test in 2013, China started to join the rest of the world to impose sanctions on North Korea. Especially, China strongly condemned the third nuclear test of the North and did not veto the Resolution of the UNSC to impose sanctions against North Korea. China further strengthened its pressure on North Korea by joining the UNSC resolution for sanctions on North Korea in response to the 4th through 6th nuclear tests and long-range missile launches by North Korea since 2016.

Especially, China supported the UNSC Resolution No. 2375, which was initiated by the U.S. after the 6th nuclear test of North Korea in 2017. For the first time, this resolution included restrictions on the items and quantity in the import of coal and textile products, which were key export items of North Korean economy, as well as other restrictive measures such as reduction of oil import by 30% from the previous volume and banning issuance of new work permits to North Korean abroad. North Korea then criticized China for joining the sanctions and emphasized an autonomous economy.

However, from 2018 to 2019, North Korea held five summits with China to strengthen its ties with Beijing. Especially, through the North Korea-China summit around the North's talks with the U.S., North Korea emphasized its friendship with China, using expressions such as "comrades, family members, and a very special relationship."



North Korea – China Summit  
(June 20 and 21, 2019, Pyeongyang)

North Korea and China also engaged in cultural and personnel exchanges. An art troupe visited North Korea, led by Foreign Liaison Director Song Tao, in April 2018. Then, North Korea's art troupe, led by the Director of WPK International Department, Ri

Su Yong, visited China in return in January 2019 to stage cultural performances to boost friendship between the two countries. In addition, North Korea sent its Friendship Observation Party (May 2018) and Minister of External Economic Relations (April 2019 and August 2019) to the China to expand its exchanges with China in terms of personnel resources.

Especially, with the inauguration of President Xi Jinping in June 2019 and his first visit to Pyeongyang since taking office, along with the ceremonial visit to each other for the 70th anniversary of the diplomatic ties between the two countries (Oct. 6), the two countries agreed to strengthen their exchange and cooperation programs in terms of the economy, livelihood of the people, education, sanitary issues, sports, media, youth, and local communities. While the exchanges become livelier between them in various fields, both countries have also solidified their friendly relations through the exchange of congratulatory messages between their leaders on significant commemorative occasions, such as North Korea's Foundation Day (September 9), China's National Day (October 1), and the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic

relations between North Korea and China (October 6). With COVID-19, North Korea closed its border with China starting from January 29, 2020. But the leaderships of the two countries exchanged oral messages related to COVID-19 in May and took every opportunity to exchange congratulatory letters to confirm their traditional friendship.

In 2021, too, the border between North Korea and China remained closed. However, the two countries continued their efforts to maintain their friendly relations. They held a joint talk session (June 21) in celebration of the reciprocal visits between the heads of the two states, while the ambassadors of the two countries contributed articles (June 21) to emphasize the history of the alliance in blood between the two countries and the direction of their development, highlighting their amicable relationship. Also, in celebration of the 100th anniversary of the CPC (July 1) and the 60th anniversary of the North Korea-China Treaty of Friendship (July 11), among other key events in July, the two countries bragged mutual support and friendship.

Kim Jong Un called the success of the Beijing Winter Olympic Games held in February 2022 as the victory of the socialism and the CPC, while emphasizing the friendly relationship between North Korea and China. However, due to the disciplinary actions imposed on it following the boycott of Tokyo Olympic Games in 2020 and COVID-19, North Korea did not participate in the Beijing Winter Olympic games. Kim Jong Un sent a condolence message for the crash of a passenger airplane in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region that happened on March 21, while Ri Yong Gil, the Minister of Defense, sent a congratulatory message in celebration of the 95th anniversary of the foundation of the People's Liberation Army of China, stressing the

joint operations in tactics and strategies between the armies of the two countries.<sup>29</sup>

In addition, on August 3, 2022, the spokesperson of the Foreign Ministry of North Korea fiercely condemned the visit by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan, in the form of an interview between the spokesperson and a reporter from “Korea Central News Agency,” while sending a letter with a similar message to the CPC under the name of the WPK Central Committee on the 9th. President Kim Jong Un sent a congratulatory message to the 3rd consecutive term of Xi Jinping, which was decided during the 20th Party Congress of the CPC, saying, “the reappointment of the General Secretary to the important leadership position of the CPC shows the steadfast trust, support, and expectation on him from the entire party members and people.”<sup>30</sup> When the spread of COVID-19 slowed down, the trade between North Korea and China in July 2022 soared by 237.93% compared to the previous month, followed by another increase of 24.21% in August.

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## 4 Relations with Russia

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### 1) Kim Il Sung-Kim Jong Il Era

During the Cold War era, North Korea and the Soviet Union maintained time-honored cooperative relationship. Since the end of

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<sup>29</sup> Aug 1, 2022. Korea Central News Agency

<sup>30</sup> Oct 23, 2022. Korea Central News Agency; Oct 24, 2022. *Rodong Sinmun*

the Cold War, Russia sought a balanced diplomatic approach in the Korean Peninsula. This forced North Korea to set up a new relationship with Russia.

With the earnest commencement of the economic cooperation, including the North Korea – Russia Joint Economic Committee meeting, the political relationship between the two countries gradually recovered. North Korea and Russia officially signed the “DPRK-Russia Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighborliness and Cooperation” on February 9, 2000, to form a new relationship as not only military partners but also as economic partners. For the first time as the head of state of Russia, President Putin visited North Korea in July 2000, to lay the foundation to strengthen the cooperation with North Korea. Chairman Kim Jong Il and President Putin held one-on-one talks followed by an extended summit talk to adopt the “North Korea-Russia Joint Declaration,” which touched on mutual cooperation and support, along with North Korea’s missile issues.

Chairman Kim Jong Il made an official visit to Russia from July 26 to August 18 in 2001, in response to President Putin’s visit in July 2000. This served as an opportunity to reduce the distance between the two countries since the establishment of the diplomatic relationship between Russia and South Korea, while establishing a framework to work with Russia in the fields of diplomacy and economy. Especially, the “North Korea-Russia Moscow Declaration” announced at the summit of two leaders (August 4, 2001) included agreements on the restoration of the cooperative relationship between the two countries, connecting Trans-Korea Railway (TKR) and Trans-Siberia Railway (TSR), was aligned response to the U.S., and politics surrounding Korean Peninsula.

In the meantime, Russia partially accepted the stance of North Korea in the process of agreeing upon the “Initial Actions for Implementing the September 19th Joint Statement” and the “2nd Phase Actions for the September 19 Joint Statement” on October 3, 2007, to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue on February 13, 2007. The two countries held the groundbreaking ceremony for the Najin-Khasan Railway and the reconstruction of Najin Port in 2008. This was followed by the signing of the agreement to cancel the debts of North Korea to Russia in 2012.

## 2) Kim Jong Un Era

During the Kim Jong Un era, North Korea and Russia have been tightening their political and economic relations. Russia supported the UNSC Resolution in response to the 3rd North Korean nuclear test in February 2013, seemingly causing the relationship between the two countries to decline. However, North Korea-Russia Joint Economic Committee meetings were held in 2014 and 2015, while high-ranking officials were visiting Russia every year, showing that the close ties between North Korea and Russia were still intact.<sup>31</sup>

Russia and North Korea declared “the Year of Friendship” in March 2015 and adopted a joint declaration. This was followed by the signing of the “Agreement and Protocol on the Movement and Reception of Illegal Immigrants.” Russia and North Korea also agreed to open a land and maritime route for international tourism that would connect North

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**31** In May 2015, Kim Yong Nam, the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme People’s Assembly of North Korea, participated in the 70th Anniversary of the Victory Day event of Russia (May 9th) to talk with President Putin.

Korea, China, and Russia in July 2016. The two countries opened the road between Najin and Khasan, and starting from 2016 began the administrative process to open a new course between Najin and Vladivostok and commence a regular operation thereof.

Since 2018, North Korea has been closer with Russia. On May 31, 2018, Lavrov, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia, visited North Korea with a letter of invitation from President Putin inviting Kim Jong Un. As a result, Kim Jong Un visited Russia for the first time after taking office on April 25, 2019, to have a summit talk with President Putin in Vladivostok. During this talk, the two heads of state discussed regular mutual visits of high-level officials of the two countries; cooperation in commerce, economy, science, and technology; assessment of the political environments surrounding the Korean Peninsula; and the strategies to strengthen the communication between the two countries. The talk immediately led to President Putin's suggestion of the need to guarantee the security of the North Korean regime. In 2020, the diplomacy between North Korea and Russia was not as active as before due to COVID-19. However, the two countries still maintained their friendship through exchanges of the congratulatory messages for the head of the state on the occasions of the Russia Day (June 12), North Korea's Foundation Day (September 9), and more.

In 2021, Russia maintained its stance that the North Korea nuclear issue has to be resolved not through sanctions but through the guarantee of security, arguing that the sanctions of the UNSC must be eased. Especially, during the international forum held in St. Petersburg in June 2021, President Putin of Russia said, "We expect a three-party cooperation project between Russia, North Korea, and South



North Korea – Russia Summit (April 25, 2019, Vladivostok)

Korea along with the easing of the sanctions against North Korea.”<sup>32</sup> In celebration of the 2nd anniversary of the summit between North Korea and Russia, North Korea held Joint Debate with Russian Political Parties and Organizations (April 8,) and sent Kim Jong Un’s

congratulatory message for the Russia Day (June 12,) continuing the friendship-based activities between North Korea and Russia. The key cooperation projects suggested by Putin were connecting gas pipelines, electricity, and the TSR. In celebration of the 20th anniversary of Kim Jong Il’s visit to Russia in August 2021, the Russian Embassy in North Korea held a photo exhibition event, highlighting the friendship between North Korea and Russia.<sup>33</sup>

North Korea expressed its support for and solidarity with Russia with regard to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, calling it a “Special Military Operation.” According to TASS on July 12, Minister of Foreign Affairs Nataliya of Donetsk People’s Republic said, “Donetsk

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**32** In this forum, Putin said patience and care is needed as one approaches this issue, which must be done after guaranteeing the safety of the people of North Korea, while Russia is against the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

**33** On August 4, 2021, Korea Central News Agency reported, “On August 3, in celebration of the 20th anniversary of the historic visit to Russia by Comrade Kim Jong Il and the 10th anniversary of the visit to Siberia and the Far East, a photo exhibition was held in the Embassy of the Federation of Russia in our country. This event was attended by HE Ambassador Alexander Machegora to North Korea, and while Im Chon Il, North Korea’s Vice Minister of Foreign for Russia, etc. were invited.



negotiated with the Ambassador of North Korea for rebuilding Donetsk over several locations,” while Korean Central News Agency of North Korea reported on July 14 that “Minister of Foreign Affairs Choe Son Hui of the DPRK sent a letter to the Foreign Ministers of Donetsk People’s Republic and Luhansk Republic yesterday.”<sup>34</sup> In addition, Ambassador Olga Makeeva of Donetsk People’s Republic to Russia visited Ambassador Sin Hong Chol of North Korea to Russia, where the North Korean Ambassador provided a letter recognizing the independence of the Republic. North Korea is considering the sector of infrastructure as a possible area of cooperation with Russia, while North Korea and Russia is considering a project to build a road to cross the Tumen River and another to connect the Tumen River–Hunchun–Kraskino.<sup>35</sup>

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## 5 Relations with the European Union

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### 1) Kim Il Sung–Kim Jong Il Era

Since the late 1990s, North Korea actively sought to improve its relationship with European countries. In September 1999, before the 54th UN General Assembly, North Korea suggested Foreign Minister

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**34** Korea Central News Agency reported that Minister of Foreign Choe Son Hui mentioned in the letter that “The government of DPRK notified its decision to recognize the independence of the People’s Republic of Donetsk and the People’s Republic of Luhansk,” adding that the letter also “showed the intention to to develop the international relationships with these countries based on independence, peace, and friendship.”

**35** In an interview with a Russian monthly magazine “Okno ATR” (A Window to Asia Pacific,) Ambassador Machegora of Russia to North Korea mentioned various economic cooperation programs with North Korea.

talks with most of the EU member states and opened embassy-level diplomatic relations with Italy on January 4, 2000. In September of the same year, North Korea proposed diplomatic ties with seven member states out of the fifteen of the EU. The EU, too, started to respond to the propositions of North Korea. Since the 3rd Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Summit held in Seoul in October 2000, some EU countries such as Germany and Spain declared their intention to form a diplomatic tie with North Korea. This was followed by a visit by the EU delegation to North Korea, led by Prime Minister Persson of Sweden, who was also the Chairman of the EU, to hold a summit talk with Kim Jong Il for the first time ever as a head of a western state. On May 14 of the same year, the European Commission made an announcement that it decided to form diplomatic relations with North Korea.<sup>36</sup>

The EU is keenly interested in the human right issues of North Korea. The EU has been the pen holder state preparing the UN's Resolutions on the human right situations in North Korea from 2003 till today. Such activities for the improvement of human rights in North Korea by the EU caused a cessation of direct talks between the two sides.<sup>37</sup>

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**36** During this talk the EU delegation was given a confirmation that the missile launches of North Korea was suspended until 2003, while they also discussed the human right issues of the North Korea. Also, they agreed that North Korea send an economy survey group to the EU.

**37** The human right issues of North Korea were discussed for the first time during the human rights talks between North Korea and the EU held in Geneva, Swiss, in 2001. Since then, the talks stopped when the EU led a UN human right resolution and North Korea refused it. The discussion on the issue resumed during the director-level political talk between North Korea and the EU (June 2015, Pyongyang), but the talk did not lead to any results since North Korea did not move from its previous stance.

## 2) Kim Jong Un Era

North Korea continued its interactions with the EU to restore its relationship with them. In March 2011, Choe Thae Bok, the Chairman of the Supreme People's Assembly (SPA), visited the UK, which was followed by Kang Sok Ju, a Secretary of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK), visiting Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, and Italy in September, while the members of parliaments of the EU member states or a delegation from the European Parliament visited North Korea as well. By 2013, North Korea formed diplomatic ties with 26 member states of the EU, leaving only France and Estonia out. In June 2015, North Korea and the EU also discussed the human right issues, nuclear weapons, and missiles at the 14th Pyeongyang director-level talk, without any progress.

With the sanctions imposed by the EU against the continued nuclear and missile tests of North Korea, the relationship between the two parties suffered. The EU adopted its own sanctions covering financial and trade restrictions, in addition to the sanctions imposed by the UN after the 3rd nuclear test in February 2013.<sup>38</sup> After the 4th nuclear test of North Korea, the Council of the European Union again expanded its sanctions list to include 16 individuals and 12 organizations. As a response to the 6th nuclear test by North Korea on October 16, 2017, it adopted its own sanctions against North Korea, including reducing the amount of allowed remittance to North

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**38** The EU started its sanctions against North Korea in December 2006, after the 1st North Korean nuclear test in October of the same year. Even after the 2nd nuclear test of North Korea, the EU imposed its solitary sanctions in addition to the United Nations Security Council sanctions.

Korea by individuals; total ban on the investment into North Korea and export of crude oil to North Korea; and ban on renewing the work permits to the North Korean workers.<sup>39</sup> The EU adopted its own sanctions four more times in 2018, and the proposed sanctions included, by the end of 2020, 84 organizations and 137 individuals of North Korea (including the sanctions imposed by the UN).

The Council of the EU decided to impose sanctions on eleven individuals and four organizations and six countries, such as North Korea, China, Russia, Libya, Eritrea, and South Sudan for their violations of human rights. The sanctioned individuals of North Korea were Jong Kyong Thae, the Minister of State Security; Ri Yong Gil, the Minister of People's Security; and the Central Prosecutor's Office.

The UK, France, and other member states of the EU also called for a non-disclosed meeting of the Security Council concerning the new tactical guided missile and the test launch of "Hwasong-8" of North Korea, while the 3rd Committee of the UN General Assembly jointly proposed a North Korean human rights resolution. North Korea condemned the actions of the EU member states as a "hostility policy," "double standard," and "violation of sovereignty."

On March 23, 2022, the EU submitted a North Korean human rights resolution (draft) to strongly condemn the human rights situation of North Korea to the UN Human Rights Council. Also, the EU called for safeguarding the fundamental rights of the people of North

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<sup>39</sup> The remittance limit for individuals was reduced to one third of the previous limit (EUR 15,000 to EUR 5,000) while three more individuals and six organizations, including the Ministry of People's Armed Forces (now the Ministry of Defense) were newly added to the sanctions list.

Korea who were suffering from COVID-19 and promoting cooperation to provide them with vaccine. Also, the European Parliament adopted another resolution to condemn the human rights violation and suppression of religions on April 7. North Korea condemned this move as aiming for a “foreign interference and misleading of the global opinion” (March 18 and April 7, 2022 Foreign Ministry website).

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## **6** Relations with Non-Aligned Countries

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### 1) Kim Il Sung-Kim Jong Il Era

North Korea has been seeking diplomatic ties with the non-aligned countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. In the early 1980s, North Korea pronounced its fundamental principles for foreign policy, which were “independence, peace, and friendship” as it continued diplomatic relations with non-aligned countries. Especially during the early 1990s, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the communist bloc in Eastern Europe collapsed, restructuring the international order and bringing end of the Cold War. In this process, it became more critical for North Korea to maintain its diplomatic ties with the non-aligned countries, since the survival of the regime itself was the priority. To compensate for its disadvantage in diplomacy and ideological rivalry with South Korea in the United Nations and other international organizations, North Korea needed sponsor states. Under these circumstances, North Korea strengthened its diplomatic toward for non-aligned countries.

Since the 2000s, North Korea emphasized to the non-aligned countries in Asia and Africa that its nuclear weapons program was for self-defense measures. However, with the launch of the long-range missile in 2006 and the 1st nuclear test, the non-aligned diplomacy of North Korea stalled. Then, with the long-range missile launch in 2009 and the 2nd nuclear test, the UN Security Council's resolutions for sanctions were adopted, jeopardizing the relations between North Korea and non-aligned countries.

## 2) Kim Jong Un Era

The Kim Jong Un regime actively sought non-aligned diplomacy to overcome its disadvantages due to sanctions.<sup>40</sup> However, after the 6th nuclear test, even the non-aligned countries of the Third World joined the band of sanctions against North Korea. The ten member states of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) expressed their concern over the nuclear and missiles tests of North Korea in August 2017 and called for an irreversible dismantling of nuclear weapons. In September of the same year, the government of the Philippines, which was the Chair of ASEAN at the time, announced that it would stop any trades with North Korea to comply with the sanctions against North Korea

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**40** After the 3rd nuclear test in February 2013, the Chief of General Staff Kim Kyok Sik visited Cuba in June, while Pak Ui Chun, the Minister of Foreign, participated in the 20th ARF to strengthen North Korea's ties with the non-aligned countries. In March 2013, Kim Yong Nam, the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly, attended the inauguration ceremony for the Iranian President, which was followed by his visits to African countries in October 2014. Then, in April 2015, he participated in the Asia-Africa Summit (in celebration of the 60th anniversary of Bandung Conference) to give a speech and participated in the conference of non-aligned countries held in September 2016 with Ri Yong Ho, the Minister of Foreign.

imposed by the UN Security Council (UNSC).<sup>41</sup> However, the ministers of ASEAN did not raise any issues with the qualification of North Korea as a member state of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), despite the announcement made by the representative of the U.S. concerning the discussions on disqualifying North Korea as a member state.

Since 2018, North Korea strengthened its bond with non-aligned countries and traditional allies to focus on the improvement of its international conditions. Especially, they reactivated their diplomatic activities focusing on the friendly countries in Eastern Europe, Africa, and ASEAN region. Ri Su Yong, the Vice Chairman of the Party, visited Cuba in July 2018 to sign an “Agreement for the Exchanges and Cooperation.” In November, the Chair of the National Assembly of Cuba, Miguel Diaz-Canel, visited North Korea to have a talk with President Kim Jong Un. The Kim Jong Un regime continued its friendly relationships with the non-aligned countries of the Third World. Immediately after the Hanoi Summit between the U.S. and North Korea (Feb. 27 and 28), President Kim Jong Un had a summit with General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong in March 2019. Venezuela opened its embassy in Pyongyang in August 2019. Diosdado Cabello, the Speaker of the Parliament visited North Korea in September to sign an agreement for the cooperation in the field of technology, industry, and military.

The Foreign Ministry of North Korea declared that they terminated

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**41** As of 2017, the Philippines was the fourth largest trade partner of North Korea and its export to North Korea amounted to 13.84 million, while import was 5.7 million dollars. However, when North Korea conducted its nuclear tests and launched its Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBM) and sanctioned by the UNSC (No. 2397, Dec. 22, 2017), the trade between North Korea and the Philippines decreased rapidly.

their diplomatic relations with Malaysia, which is a member state of ASEAN, in protest against the case where a North Korean businessman, Mun Chol Myung, was handed over to the U.S. as a suspect of illegal money laundering, etc. On the same day, Malaysia announced that it officially withdrew its embassy in Pyongyang, after it remained unofficially closed since the assassination of Kim Jong Nam in 2017.

In 2021, North Korea still tried to make and strengthen its friendship and solidarity with the non-aligned countries. When the countries with diplomatic relations with them had a national holiday, or on the occasion of the anniversary of the foundation of the North Korean regime (September 9), the anniversary of the foundation of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) (October 10), or on other memorable days, North Korea exchanged congratulatory messages with socialist friends such as Cuba, Vietnam, and Laos, or non-aligned countries such as Iran and Indonesia, under the name of President Kim Jong Un, in an effort to maintain friendly relations.

On July 14, 2021, the North Korean representative to the UN joined an online meeting of the foreign ministers of non-aligned countries to emphasize the solidarity among to overcome the health crisis posed by the COVID-19 and condemned the political pressure from the West.<sup>42</sup> On September 1, it also emphasized the significance of the

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<sup>42</sup> On July 20, 2021, the Foreign Ministry of North Korea stated that "It must not be allowed that human rights, which must be used to preserve human dignity and progress, are used as the excuses to advance the political goals of the conspiring West, and we must object using human rights to advance political agenda or applying selectivity or double standards," adding "All countries must share their experience of emergency disease control and lessons to ensure the benefits of healthcare can be enjoyed equally by every person, to contribute to the international efforts to end the crisis caused by a malicious virus that poses a serious threat to the survival of humanity as soon as possible."



non-alignment movement based on the ten principles of Bandung, in celebration of the 60th anniversary of the movement.<sup>43</sup>

The North Korean representative to ASEAN attended an online meeting of the ARF and emphasized “the peace and stability of the Korean Peninsula,” while the Foreign Ministry of North Korea published an article celebrating the 54th anniversary of ASEAN on its website on August 8.<sup>44</sup>

North Korea maintained its friendly relations with non-aligned countries through congratulatory messages and talks. Chairman Kim Jong Un sent a celebratory message to the President of Syria for the 59th anniversary of the March 8 Revolution (March 9, 2022, *Rodong Sinmun*) and a congratulatory message to the President of Namibia for the 32nd anniversary of independence (March 21, 2022, Foreign Ministry website). Also, they held a celebration event to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the visit by President Megawati Sukarnoputri of Indonesia. North Korea’s Ambassador to Mongolia met the Minister of Foreign Relations of Mongolia to discuss how to advance their cooperation and the intention to strengthen their friendly relationship (June 23, 2022, Foreign Ministry website).

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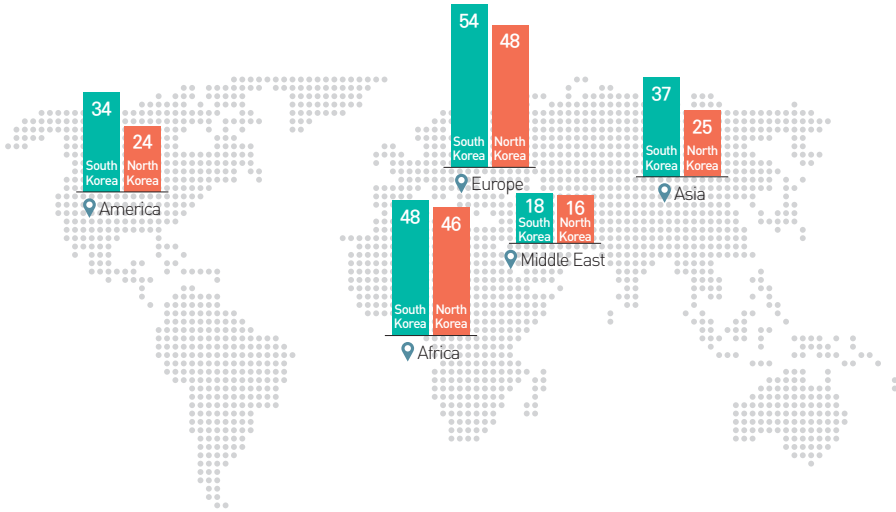
**43** On September 1, 2021, the Foreign Ministry of North Korea published an article titled “60 Years of Fight for Independence, Justice, and Peace” and argued that the 60 years of non-aligned movement “evidences the justice and tenacity of the ideologies and principles of the movement based on the ten principles of Bandung, including the respect of independence and territorial integrity, prohibition of meddling with internal affairs, and strengthening international cooperation, etc.”

**44** The Foreign Ministry of North Korea published an article titled “ASEAN, Endeavoring to Realize the Peace, Stability, and Prosperity of the Region” where they said “We have been respecting and supporting the activities of ASEAN and its foundational principles of the respect of independence, equality, and no meddling with internal politics based on our ideologies of foreign policy, which are independence, peace, and friendship.”

North Korea published a statement under the name of the Director of Southeast Asia to evaluate the 14 years of membership in the “Treaty of Cooperation and Friendship with Southeast Asia” (July 24) and the 22nd anniversary of joining the ARF (July 27). The director said, “Based on its independent and precise understanding of the origin of the political situation in the Korean Peninsula and the surrounding regions and upholding of the fundamental principles of the respect for independence, no meddling with internal affairs, equality, and mutual respect, ASEAN’s maintenance of fairness and objectivity in the world has contributed to the maintenance of peace and stability in the Asia Pacific Region.” (July 20, 2022, Korea Central News Agency).

North Korea severed its diplomatic tie with Ukraine when it recognized the independence of Donbas region in 2022. As a result, the number of countries with diplomatic ties with North Korea decreased to 159.

[Table 4-2] Diplomatic Ties of the South and North (as of December 2022)



Region	Countries with diplomatic ties		Ties with both Koreas	Ties with only one of the two Koreas	
	South Korea	North Korea		South Korea	North Korea
Asia	37	25	25	12	0
America	34	24	23	11	1(Cuba)
European	54	48	48	6	0
Middle East	18	16	14	4	2(Syria, Palestine)
Africa	48	46	46	2	0
Total	191	159	156	35	3

※ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as of December 2022



# V

## Economy

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**Section 1.** Characteristics of the Economic System and Direction of Policies

**Section 2.** Status of Macroeconomy and Key Economic Sectors

**Section 3.** Changes in Economic Policy

## Section 1

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# Characteristics of the Economic System and Direction of Policies

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### 1 Characteristics of the Economic System

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The economic system of North Korea is a planned economy based on the socialist ownership system. A socialist ownership system means a system where all means of production are owned by the entire society or collectively. The Socialist Constitution of North Korea states that all means of production are owned by the state and social cooperatives (Article 20), and this indicates that the social ownership of the means of production is divided into the state ownership (Article 21) and the ownership by social cooperatives (Article 22).

The state ownership means the properties are owned by the entire people of the country. This means that all natural resources of the country, as well as its railroads, airlines, post offices, transportation networks, key factories, businesses, ports, and banks, etc., are owned by the state and thus the properties of the entire people. And it is stated

that there are no limitations on the scope of such state ownership. Ownership by social cooperatives means the property is collectively owned by the workers who are members of the organization. The items that could be owned in this way include land, farming equipment, ships, small or medium-sized factories and businesses. One of the best-known examples of cooperative ownership is the collective farm. On the other hand, North Korea emphasized that the socialist ownership must be focused on the state ownership, that is, “ownership by the masses.” The constitution states, “The State must protect and develop state ownership that plays the leading role in the development of the economy with priority” (Article 21), adding “if the members of a cooperative are willing, the properties of a cooperative shall be transferred to the people’s ownership in a gradual manner” (Article 23).

However, since the dysfunction of the planned economy starting from the 1990s and the spread of market economy, North Korea revised its Socialist Constitution in 1998 and has been expanding collective and individual ownership in part. That is, the constitution now recognized individual ownership and inheritance of the “income from legal economic activities” (Article 24) to include the income from the commercial activities in marketplaces or the product from personal gardening patches (small patch farming) as well as the income from intellectual properties such as an invention that can be owned by an individual.

With this, it became possible for the North Koreans to conduct private economic activities and possess wealth in the form of monetary assets or even invest in out-of-operation factories, businesses, or commercial organizations. In this process, some means of production

are owned by individuals. While the system does not allow the private ownership of real estate such as housing, but the government unofficially allows dealings of houses between individuals. North Koreans buy and sell homes by changing the names of the “house use permits (move-in permit)” by bribing the responsible offices.

Since the 1990s, North Korean economy no longer has a working central management and planning system that used to be stringent in the past. With the financial crisis, the centralized planning, based on the principle of “centralization and specification of the plan” itself, hit its limit. After the July 1 Measures of 2002, the North Korean government now manages only the key indicators which are of a strategic significance and need the state’s attention (such as defense industries, infrastructure, and the economic sectors of the preceding economic areas) through the National Planning Committee in the central government. Other sectors (local sectors, small business sectors) are up to the local economic planning organizations, factories, and businesses to plan and execute their operation. As for the outcomes, shifting from in-kind plans to monetary (amount-based) plans was allowed.<sup>1</sup>

Since the beginning of Kim Jong Un’s regime, North Korea made so-called “May 30th Statement” in 2014 to introduce the “Socialist Business Management System,” and added the three amendments of the “Socialist Business Law” in 2014, 2015, and 2020 to give more freedom to the operation of factories and businesses. The planning

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<sup>1</sup> The monetary plan (amount-based plan) is based on the amount calculated by multiplying the production volume of the plan indicators with the wholesale prices.

authority is now divided, so that the plans by the businesses themselves are admitted to a certain degree to utilize the market.

In conclusion, the socialist economy of North Korea maintains the planned economy and socialist ownership in theory, with marketization spreading in real economy to make it a dual structure where the plans and markets coexist.

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## 2 Direction of Economic Policies

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North Korea chose the policies of “Building an Autonomous National Economy,” “*Byungjin* Policy” as the key directions of its economic policy.

According to North Korea, the policy of “Building an Autonomous National Economy” is an “economic development policy to create an economy that operates without being subjugated by others, an economy that works for its own people and grows with the power of the people of the country and resources of the country.”<sup>2</sup> Also, “Prioritizing the Development of Heavy Industries” means that “the key of the socialist industrialization is to focus on heavy industries as its priority. Powerful heavy industries focused on machine-building industries must be created to build an autonomous industrial system.”<sup>3</sup> The next is the “*Byungjin* Policy”, which seeks the development of the

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<sup>2</sup> *Economy Encyclopedia 2*, Social Science Publishing House, 1985, p. 208.

<sup>3</sup> *Economy Encyclopedia 2*, Social Science Publishing House, 1985, pp. 715-716.



economy along with strengthening of the military at the same time. This was the very policy that developed the industries in North Korea as a military-industrial complex type and allowed the defense economy to become an autonomous economic structure detached from the general economy within the North Korean economy.

During the era of Kim Jong Il, North Korea chose “*songun* policy” as its key direction of economic development to further strengthen the “*Byungjin* Policy” of the Kim Il Sung era. Since the economic crisis in the mid-1990s, they did not try to make any changes with the fundamental policy of its economy.

The Kim Jong Un regime chose the “*Byungjin* Policy” through the decision made during a Plenary Session of the Party Central Committee on March 31, 2013, as the direction of its economic policy. At that time, North Korea said that strengthening the nuclear arsenal was “the legal requirement for the progress of the revolution,” which North Korea will never give up but only continue to develop, while they endeavor to build up its economy, too. Such parallelism resulted in overinvestment of the resources in the defense sector, destroying the balance in the industrial sector and shrinking the development of the consumer goods industries. Also, it caused worldwide sanctions against North Korea to make the economy suffer even further.

This was followed by the announcement of a new strategic policy that it would “focus on the construction of the socialist economy in line with the higher-level requirements for the progress of the revolution” during the 3rd Plenary Session of the 7th Workers’ Party of Korea (WPK) Central Committee on April 20, 2018. With its continued development efforts of nuclear weapons and missiles, North Korea

has been under severe sanctions imposed upon it by the UN Security Council (UNSC).

Since the beginning of the Kim Jong Un regime, the most important economic goals are the “5-Year Economic Strategy (2016-2020)” and the “5-Year Economic Plan (2021-2025)”. The “5-Year Economic Plan” was proposed at the 7th Party Congress of the WPK held in 2016. As the primary goals, the plan focused on the normalization of the production by factories, while its long-term goals were to achieve a high level of autonomy, modernization, informationization, and scientification. To be more specific, first, they intend to solve the power shortage problem by the year of 2016 to 2020; second, groundbreaking development in the areas of coal, metal, and railway transportation; third, the development of mechanical, chemical, construction, and construction materials industries; fourth, the development in the fields of agriculture, fishery, and light industries; fifth, expansion and development of the international economic relations, such as trade, joint venture, and economic development zones; sixth, enhancing the effectiveness of the socialist business management program.

North Korea wished to fulfill these goals in celebration of the 75th anniversary of the party. For this, it pronounced the “head-on approach”<sup>4</sup> and ‘self-prosperity.’ However, the sanctions against North Korea, COVID-19, and natural disasters haunted the North Korean economy all at the same time, making it impossible to meet its goals. For this, North Korea admitted its “failure in the economic policy”<sup>5</sup> and

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<sup>4</sup> The 5th Plenary Session of the 7th WPK Central Committee (Dec. 28 - 31, 2019).

<sup>5</sup> The 5th Plenary Session of the 7th WPK Central Committee (August 19th, 2020).

held the 8th Party Congress of the WPK in January 2021 to announce a new “5-Year Economic Plan.”

North Korea announced that these 5-Year Economic Plan contain the important objectives of, first, improving and reinforcing the structure of economic autonomy; second, increasing domestic production to reduce the dependence on imported goods; third, improving the quality of life for North Koreans. As the key task of the new 5-Year Economic Plan, North Korea focused its investment on the fundamental industrial sectors of the metallurgy and chemistry, etc., from 2021 to 2025, for the purpose of normalizing production across the economy, while emphasizing that it would create the material and technology foundation in the agricultural sector; and, make the raw materials domestically and recycle the resources for the light industries sector to increase the production of the consumer items for North Koreans. On the other hand, it was announced that the internal potential for an autonomous economy must be reinforced and supplemented as a prerequisite.

The Kim Jong Un regime pronounced “self-prosperity”<sup>6</sup> and “self-sufficiency” as the centerpiece for meeting the 5-Year Economic Plan goals. At the 4th Plenary Session of the 8th WPK Central Committee held on December 27, 2021, an emphasis was made on resolving the people’s livelihood issues and boosting production volumes in all industries, including the base industries. They pronounced the

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**6** During the 8th Party Congress of the WPK, General Secretary Kim Jong Un commented on self-prosperity that, “the self-prosperity during the new forecast period must be developed as the state-level self-prosperity, planned self-prosperity, and scientific self-prosperity.”

“resolution of the issues of the socialist rural communities” as a key objective, with the specific tasks of enhancing the political awareness of agricultural workers, total resolution of the food shortage issues, and improvement of the living environment of the residents of rural communities, etc.

In addition, at the 6th Supreme People’s Assembly of the 14th Period on February 6, 2022, he announced that “we will continue the projects to restore the sole trade system of the country in the field of international commerce,” indicating North Korea’s intent to restore the “centralized trade system” instead of “allowing self-autonomous trades by businesses.” This is in line with North Korea’s emphasis on the centralized management of businesses through the “cabinet government system,” unified guidance by the state, and strengthening solitary control system, to highlight the compliance with the principles of community economy during the 8th Party Congress of the WPK.

Such a tendency still continues in 2022, up to the 5th and 6th Plenary Session. In this process, the importance of agriculture, light industry, and construction, which correspond to the food, clothes, and houses, was further emphasized. It appears that these sectors are encouraged to achieve results ahead of other industries. In reality, the economic policies of the Kim Jong Un regime appeared to be focusing on the people’s livelihood. In fact, however, it is fair to say that the economic policy is more focused on the maintenance of the political system.

## Section 2

# Status of Macroeconomy and Key Economic Sectors

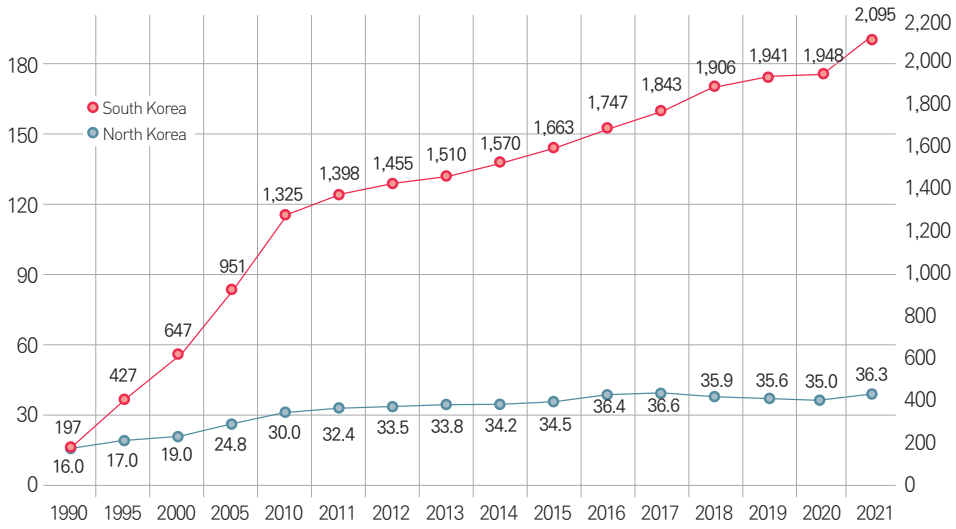
### 1 Current Macroeconomic Conditions

The Bank of Korea announces key estimates such as the estimated national income and economic growth rate of North Korea based on our industries correlation table and the System of National Accounts of the United Nations since 1991. These values are estimates on the basis of the prices and VAT rates of South Korea; it must be noted that the actual statistics of the North Korean economy may be somewhat different.

#### 1) GNI and economic growth rate

The nominal gross national income (GNI) of North Korea in 2021 was, 36.6 trillion won (in KRW), while the GNI per capita was 1.423 million won (KRW). The trends of the changes in the GNI of North Korea are as shown in Table 5-1.

**[Table 5-1] Trends in North Korea’s Gross National Income**



Year	'05	'06	'07	'08	'09	'10	'11	'12	'13	'14	'15	'16	'17	'18	'19	'20	'21
Nominal GNI	24.8	24.4	24.8	27.3	28.6	30.0	32.4	33.5	33.8	34.2	34.5	36.4	36.6	35.9	35.6	35.0	36.3

\* Source: Korea Statistical Information Service, Major Statistical Indicators of North Korea in 2022, 2022 (Unit: 1 trillion won).

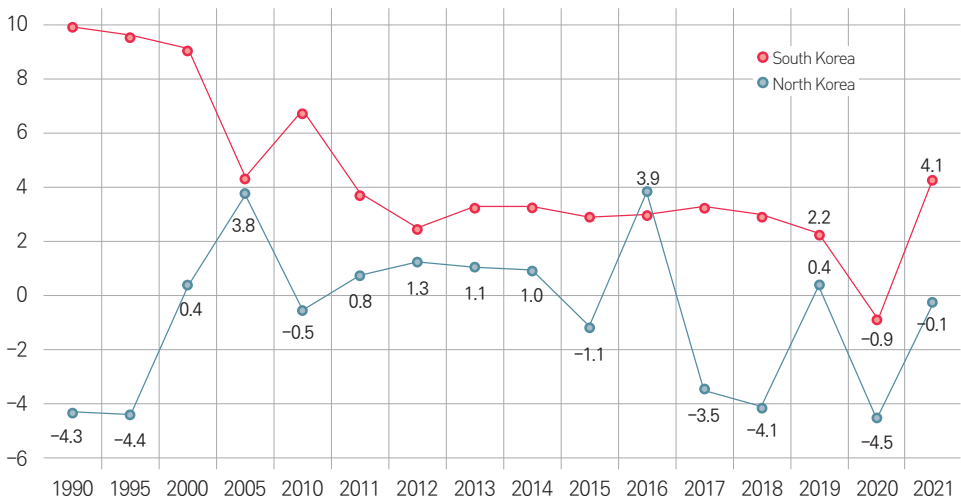
The GNI of North Korea recorded some growth after the economic crisis in the 1990s when the 2000s began. But the growth was negligible, and the GNI of 2021 was 1/58 of that of South Korea, while the GNI per capita was 1/28 of that of South Korea.

[Table 5-2] shows the economic growth rate of North Korea since the 1990s (the growth rate of the real GDP). The trend reveals that, since the collapse of the socialist bloc in the early 1990s, the average annual growth rate from 1990 to 1998 was -3.8%, indicating that the overall production capability shrunk to less than half compared to the late 1980s. During this period, which was named as the “Arduous March” by North Korea, the entire industries of North Korea collapsed

except for the defense industry. This economic crisis aggravated when trade with the USSR and other socialist economies shrunk or came to a stop.

Since 1999, the macroeconomy of North Korea appeared to have stopped its consecutive negative growths. But it does not show any signs of recovery, either. While there was a positive growth of 2.2% in average per year from 1999 to 2005, the average growth rate shrunk to 0.1% from 2006 to 2010 and 0.6% from 2011 to 2015. This is followed by 3.9% in 2016, -3.5% in 2017, -4.1% in 2018, and 0.4% in 2019, and -4.5% in 2020, and -0.1% in 2021.

**[Table 5-2]** Trends in North Korea's Economic Growth Rate



Real growth rate (%)	Year	'90	'95	'00	'05	'10	'11	'12	'13	'14	'15	'16	'17	'18	'19	'20	'21
South		9.9	9.6	9.1	4.3	6.8	3.7	2.4	3.2	3.2	2.8	2.9	3.2	2.9	2.2	-0.9	4.1
North		-4.3	-4.4	0.4	3.8	-0.5	0.8	1.3	1.1	1.0	-1.1	3.9	-3.5	-4.1	0.4	-4.5	-0.1

\* Source: Bank of Korea, An Estimate Result of the Economic Growth Rate of North Korea, for each year (increase/decrease rate from the previous year, %)

Since the inauguration of Kim Jong Un, the North Korean economy showed negative growth in 2015, 2017, 2018, 2020, and 2021. During the earlier days of his rule, the economy showed a positive growth with the policy to utilize marketplaces and some improvement measures for trade and economy. However, due to the impact of the sanctions on North Korea, the economy is now showing negative growth. In 2019, there was a minor positive growth. But this appears to be due to the baseline effect of the negative growth in 2017 and 2018, rather than the actual growth of the North Korean economy.

The Kim Jong Un regime has been using economic policy to expand its finance and maintain the regime by using marketplaces. However, the partial vigor in the North Korean economy that appeared after Kim Jong Un took office was mainly focused on service sectors, retail, construction, and non-official economy, while there were no significant results to be observed in the real industrial economies, such as manufacturing and mining. Also, it has been known that the regional economy and the situation of the basic infrastructure in the non-capital areas outside of Pyongyang are in a very poor condition.

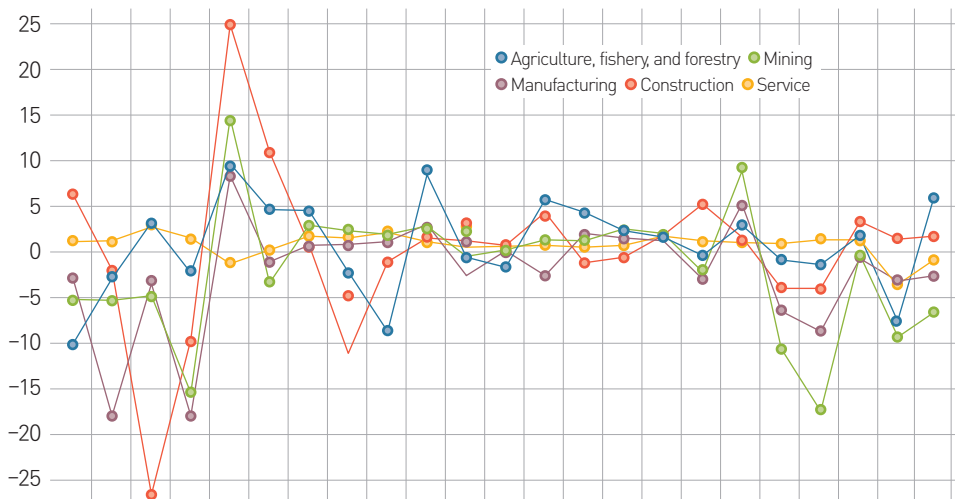
## 2) Industrial Growth Rate

The industries of North Korea have seen their productivities to plummet as late as the 1980s. During this period, despite insufficient investment and outdated technologies which took their tolls in the forms of efficiency and productivity, they still had a reproduction structure, where most of the industrial correlations were maintained. During the early 1990s, the import volume of crude oil decreased to 1/5



compared to the end of the 1980s, which marked the beginning of the crisis for the industries of North Korea. The reduced crude oil import resulted in the shortage of power and raw materials, causing a crisis situation in the production of the semi-products, which eventually led to the decrease of the supply of consumer goods, indicating a

**[Table 5-3] Growth Trends in North Korea's Key Industries**



Industry	'90	'92	'94	'97	'99	'02	'04	'06	'07	'08	'09	'10	'11	'12	'13	'14	'15	'16	'17	'18	'19	'20	'21
Agriculture, fishery, and forestry	-10.5	-3.3	2.8	-2.7	9.2	4.2	4.1	-2.6	-9.1	8.0	-1.0	-2.1	5.3	3.9	1.9	1.2	-0.8	2.5	-1.3	-1.8	1.4	-7.6	6.2
Mining	-5.6	-5.7	-5.2	-15.8	14.2	-3.8	2.5	1.9	1.5	2.4	-0.9	-0.2	0.9	0.8	2.1	1.6	-2.6	8.4	-11.0	-17.8	-0.7	-9.6	-6.5
Manufacturing	-3.2	-18.3	-3.9	-18.3	7.9	-1.5	0.3	0.4	0.7	2.6	-3.0	-0.3	-3.0	1.6	1.1	0.8	-3.4	4.8	-6.9	-9.1	-1.1	-3.8	-3.3
(Light industry)	0.9	-7.6	0.1	-14.2	2.9	2.7	-0.2	-0.6	-2.2	1.3	-2.1	-1.4	-0.1	4.7	1.4	1.5	-0.8	1.1	0.1	-2.6	1.0	-7.5	-2.6
(Heavy industry)	-4.1	21.3	-5.5	-20.3	10.4	-3.9	0.6	1.0	2.2	3.2	-3.5	0.1	-4.2	0.2	1.0	0.5	-4.6	6.7	-10.4	-12.4	-2.3	-1.6	-3.7
Construction	5.9	-2.4	-26.9	-10.0	24.4	10.5	0.4	-11.5	-1.5	1.1	0.8	0.3	3.9	-1.6	-1.0	1.4	4.8	1.2	-4.4	-4.4	2.9	1.3	1.8
Service industry	0.7	0.8	2.3	1.1	-1.7	-0.2	1.3	1.1	1.7	0.7	0.1	0.2	0.3	0.1	0.3	1.3	0.8	0.6	0.5	0.9	-4.0	-0.4	

\* Source: Bank of Korea, Result of the Estimation of the Economic Growth Rate of North Korea, by years (increase/decrease rate from the previous year, %)

widespread severance of industrial correlations.

As shown in [Table 5-3], which indicates the growth rates of key industries of North Korea, it appears that most of the industries in the 1990s showed a negative growth. The period during which a low industrial growth was achieved was 1997, when the growth rate of the mining industry was -15.8% compared to the preceding year, while the growth rate of the manufacturing sector was as low as -18.3%. This caused the operation rate of the manufacturing sector of North Korea during the mid and late 1990s to fall to about 20%.

At that time, the regime of Kim Jong Il focused on restoring the correlations between industries and discarded or shut down the equipment of the severely obsolete factories and businesses as they went through the “Arduous March” under the name of the “technological improvement policy”<sup>7</sup>, while they improved or restructured other factories or businesses as they were classified as targets for technological improvement or expansion.

However, due to the insufficiency of their capital, it was difficult to invest in alternative or new facilities for the core base industries such as the basic energy sector. The “technological improvement policy” which was implemented under these circumstances was limited to the normalization of the “four priority sectors,” which were power, coal, railway transportation, and metallurgy. In addition, the Kim Jong Il regime chose its *songun* policy as the basis of its economic policy,

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<sup>7</sup> Some well-known examples are the shut-down of Tae-an Glass Factory (2000), shutting down of the Nampo Phosphate Fertilizer Plant (2000), and demolition of the Sariwon Potassic/Potash Fertilizer Plant (2005.)

concentrating on the normalization of the industrial sectors that were related to defense industries. As a result, the mining and manufacturing sectors of North Korea since the 2000s showed signs of recovery from the severe deterioration of the industrial production capacity in the 1990s.

In the 2000s, the industrial growth rate of North Korea was still negative until 2003, followed by cycles of 1% growth per year followed by some -2% level in every three to four years since 2004. In 2012, the Kim Jong Un regime showed a slight growth in the mining and manufacturing sector, only to get a minus growth in 2015, followed by 8.4% and 4.8% growths in 2016, which were rather high. However, since 2017, it has been displaying a downward trend once again.

The partial progress in the manufacturing sector after Kim Jong Un took office is believed to be the result of selecting more pragmatic industrial policies compared to the past. The increased import of machinery, equipment, and materials expanded the production basis of some of their factories, while the policy to replace imported goods and the focus on science and technology, and the policy of using marketplaces based on the roles of the “*donju*” (money lenders) are believed to have contributed as combined. Kim Jong Un’s regime put priority to construction projects which could yield results faster (Paektusan Heroic Youth Power Station, Future Scientists’ Street, Yeomyung Street, Pyeongyang apartment projects, Munsu Waterpark, Masikryong Ski Course, and Ryugyong Service Complex, along with many other leisure venues) in addition to technological improvement of some light-industry factories for cosmetics, stationery, shoes, garments, and household food products.

During the 7th Party Congress in May 2016, North Korea announced its “5-Year Economic Plan” (2016 - 2020), that put emphasis on the normalization of the base industries and the resolution of energy shortage as the primary targets to build a prosperous and strong socialist state. Also, they considered normalization of the base energy and materials sector as the prerequisites for the invigoration of an industrial economy, such that Kim Jong Un mentioned, during the Summary Report of Operations in 7th Party Congress, “In our overall economy, some sectors are pathetically underdeveloped, and there is no guarantee of balance between different sectors of the economy. At the same time, the advance sectors are not making enough progress, delaying the development of the economy as a whole.”

During the 8th Party Congress in January 2021, too, North Korea pronounced its “5-Year Economic Plan” (2021 - 2025) to direct its investment on metallurgy and chemical industries as main targets to lead the overall growth of its economy.

However, their industrial operation rate is dipping due to the prolonged sanctions against North Korea by the rest of the world and the COVID-19 situation that started since 2020, making it difficult to expect any meaningful development of an industrial economy within North Korea. North Korea has been stressing policies of “head-on approach,” “self-prosperity,” “self-sufficiency,” and “mobilizing the internal reserves,” to overcome its crisis in the industrial economy. But it is difficult to expect any recovery from the economic malaise without solving the fundamental shortage of inputs including capital.

### 1) Energy

The collapse of the industrial production capabilities of North Korea in the 1990s was the result of a rapid collapse of the energy supply chain, which was based on the system of “coal first, oil second (*jutanjonyu*).”<sup>8</sup>

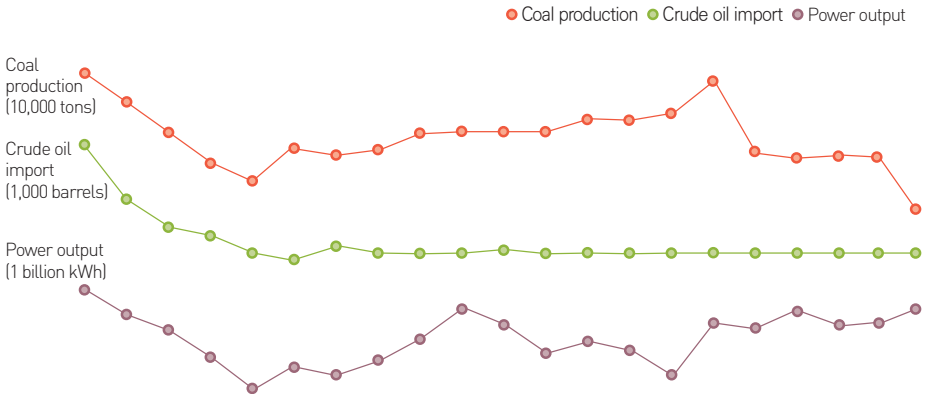
Since the beginning of the Kim Jong Il’s regime in the 1990s, North Korea emphasized the industrial correlations as well as the normalization of energy supply chain in their new year’s editorial, announcements by the Supreme People’s Assembly, and the announcement of the 5-Year National Economic Plan as the priorities. However, normalization of its energy is still far from reality.

According to the statistics in [Table 5-4] by Korea Statistical Information Services, the import volume of coal/oil and power generation in 1998 fell by 56.1%, 19.9%, and 74.8% compared to 1990. Since the beginning of the 2000s, North Korea’s economy gradually got out of the tunnel of the “Arduous March,” with a slight increase in the production of coal and power output. However, insufficient capital and technology, difficulties in maintaining the industries related to the energy sector and focus on the production of coal for exportation to earn foreign currency, among other issues, prevented a noticeable improvement in its energy sector. As of 2020, the importation of crude oil was only 21.1% of 1990, power output 86.3%, and coal production

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<sup>8</sup> The primary energy source of North Korea is coal, while oil is of a supplementary position.

**[Table 5-4] Trends in Energy Supply**



Energy	'90	'92	'94	'96	'98	'00	'02	'04	'06	'08	'10	'12	'13	'14	'15	'16	'17	'18	'19	'20	'21
Coal production	3,315	2,920	2,540	2,100	1,860	2,250	2,190	2,280	2,468	2,506	2,500	2,580	2,660	2,709	2,749	3,106	2,166	1,808	2,021	1,900	1,560
Crude oil import	18,472	11,142	6,670	6,861	3,694	2,851	4,376	3,900	3,841	3,878	3,870	3,834	4,237	3,885	3,885	3,885	3,885	3,885	3,885	3,885	-
Power output	277	247	231	213	170	194	190	206	225	255	237	215	221	216	190	239	235	249	238	239	255

\* Source: Korea Statistical Information Service, Major Statistical Indicators of North Korea, based on the year-by-year data  
 \* Note: China announced its oil supply volume to North Korea only until 2013. Therefore, the oil importation volume of North Korea in 2014 and beyond is estimated based on the customary supply volume in the past.

57.3%, which all fell below the levels of 1990.

### Power Generation

North Korea’s power stations have received almost no investment and modernization of their facilities since the 1970s, and the facilities are aging at an accelerated pace. As for the thermal power stations such as East Pyeongyang, Pyeongyang, Bukchang, and Chongjin, the operation of the power stations had to suffer due to the reduced coal production. With the increased amount of coal mining, the ratio of low-calory coal had to be increased, which necessitated the use of

heavy oil to ignite the coal to operate a thermal power plant. The power generation sector of North Korea actually recorded a lower output for its production capacity compared to other industrial sectors. As early as the 1980s, the actual production was below 50% of the production capacity. In the early 1990s, the crude oil import fell to 1/5 of what it was in the late 1980s, while the production of coal fell to less than 50%.

Since the end of the 1990s North Korea constructed more than 6,800 small and medium sized hydropower stations (average capacity 11kwh), along with more than 20 medium/large sized hydropower stations. However, due to the obsolete equipment and outdated technologies, combined with inconsistent rainfall, there was no noteworthy increase in power output. The Kim Jong Un regime is currently renovating hydro and thermal power plants and replacing their turbines, while building many more hydro power stations such as Wonsan Gunmin Power Station, Huichon Power Plant No. 3 to 12, Paektusan Hero Youth Power Station, Ryesonggang Youth No. 5 Power Station, and more. In December 2018, North Korea expanded the power generation facilities of Pukchang Power Station and held an opening ceremony.

However, due to the rushed construction and outdated technologies, it is said that their generation output is known to be less than the design capacity. Also, these stations suffer from frequent stoppages, such that these hydro power stations built by investing a lot of efforts are not functioning up to their expectation.

The power generation output which was on the rise in the 2000s has been repeatedly going up and down since 2009, until it started

to recover its 2008 level in 2018. North Korea designated the power sector as the key base industry in its “5-Year National Economic Plan” and encouraged more power generation, but the situation is still dire.

With the state-level activities to restore the power industries did not yield any result, a private energy market is forming within North Korea. Households, small service facilities, or factories imported small solar panels of 11W, 50W, and 100W, as well as batteries and transformers from China to get the power to meet the energy needs for the household, operation of organizations, and small factories for themselves. With the increased demand for solar panels, North Korea started to manufacture and supply some solar panels two to three years ago.

### Coal Production

With the shortage of foreign currency since the 1990s preventing North Korea from importing significantly larger amounts of crude oil, the North Korea believed normalization of its industries depended on the normalization of its coal production. They emphasized, as a result, that coal was the “food for the industry and the lifeline for the national economy.” However, most of the large-scale coal mines of North Korea collapsed during the three consecutive years of flooding in the mid-1990s. In response, North Korea turned to the development of small to medium-sized mines to normalize its coal industry. After ten years from the flood damages in mines, most of the affected mines were restored, and some of the mines got equipment investment from Chinese capital, which pushed up the coal output gradually since the mid-2000s. According to defectors, some “*donju*” invested in closed small mines, which contributed a limited increase in coal production.



Since Kim Jong Un took office, the coal production volume of North Korea until 2016 increased, so that it ranked No. 1 among the export items to China. The production increased from 25.8 million tons in 2012 to 31.06 million tons in 2016, which pushed up the export of coal to China from 4.64 million tons (390 million dollars) in 2010 to 22.49 million tons (1.18 billion dollars) in 2016. However, due to the impact of the sanctions against North Korea, coal production dropped to 21.66 million tons in 2017, 18.08 million tons in 2018, 20.21 million tons in 2019, 19 million tons in 2020, and 15.60 million tons in 2021, down by 17.9% from the previous year.

The coal industry of North Korea is a key export industry of the country and mainly controlled by prestigious organizations such as the party or the military. These agencies only focused their efforts on earning foreign currencies, without making organized investment efforts to normalize its coal industry. The coal industry of North Korea was affected by the UNSC Sanction No. 2371, which imposed a total restriction on North Korea's coal export (Aug. 5, 2017), and it is expected that they would have continued downward impact on the industry. It is believed that North Korea has switched a part of its coal for export to domestic consumption.

### **Crude Oil Importation**

During the Cold War, the Soviet Union supplied about 80% of North Korea's crude oil imports in the socialist friendship trade, which was at a lower price than the world market price. By the end of the 1980s, the oil import volume of North Korea was around 2.5 million tons. However, since the 1990s and the end of the socialist regime in

the USSR, North Korea had to purchase their oil at the world market price, paying with hard currencies. Due to the shortage of foreign currencies, the import volume of their crude oil shrunk drastically.

Since the 1990s, North Korea has depended on China for its crude oil imports, and China has been supplying the North worth about 500,000 tons according to the official statistics. The crude oil supply from China has been maintained at almost the same level since the mid-1990s, while China stopped its disclosure of oil supply volume to North Korea since 2014. The Ponghwa Chemical Factory located in North Pyongan Province was in normal operation, and *jangmadang* retail price of oil remained stable by the end of 2017, which implied that China had been supplying North Korea with crude oil and other oil-related products after they stopped the disclosure of the statistics, possibly outside of the official trade channels, using free-of-charge aids, long-term loans, or smuggling. In the meantime, North Korea has been known to bring in refined oil products from Russia, through commercial and non-commercial means, using the ocean trade routes between Vladivostok and Sonbong or the railway connecting the two countries. In consideration of this, it is believed that North Korea has brought in a significant amount of crude oil from outside by the end of 2016. However, the import volume of crude oil and other oil-related products of North Korea shrunk significantly due to the UN Sanctions No. 2375 (Sep. 11, 2017) and 2397 (Dec. 22, 2017), with the limit of refined oil products decreasing from what was 2 million barrels before to 500,000 barrels and the crude oil supply limit being set to 4 million barrels per year. However, it is believed that crude oil is still being smuggled into North Korea via a non-official route, by means of transferring the cargo in international waters.

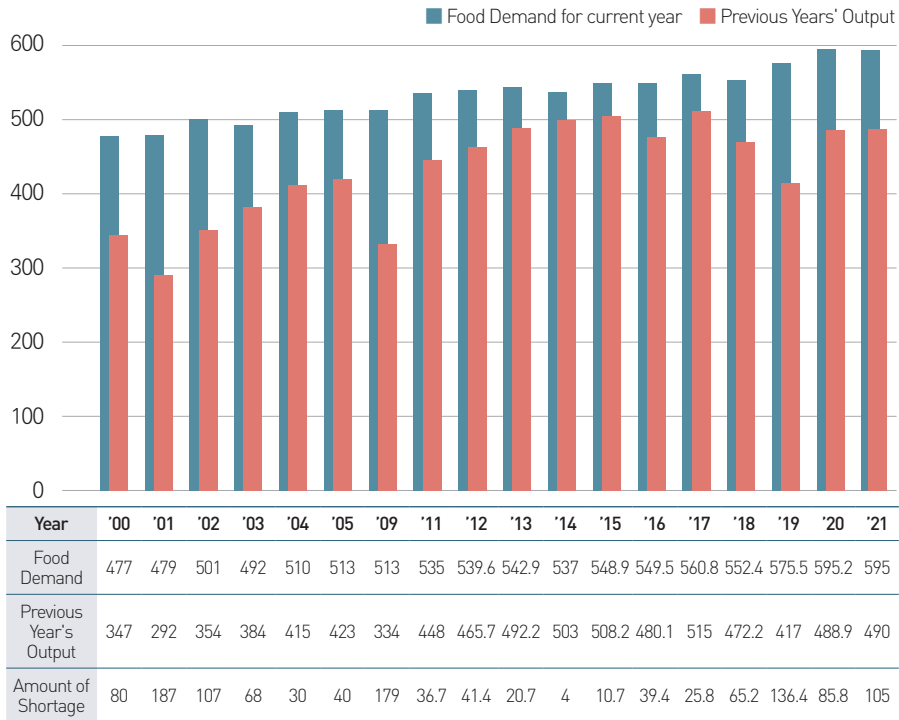
## 2) Food

The food crisis of North Korea has been underway after the failure of the agricultural policy called “*juche* farming method” introduced during the mid-1970s and the deterioration of the agricultural output due to the socialist collective farming methods in the mid-1980s. In the 1980s, North Korea’s food production was a mere 4.28 million tons, which was already more than 1.6 million tons short of the standard ration demands. Thanks to this shortage of supply, North Korea reduced the ration to each worker from an average of 700g to 546g, down by 22%. However, this was before their food crisis began in earnest, due to the support from the USSR and other socialist states.

However, with the support and “friendship trade” with the USSR and other socialist states drying up in the 1990s and the economic crisis deteriorating the production of raw materials for agriculture, along with continued natural disasters, the food production of North Korea shrunk to less than 4 million tons. During the peak of famine, which was the three years from 1995 to 1997, the average food production got as low as 3.54 million tons. As a result, the shortage of food reached an average of 2.1 million ton even compared with the reduced rationing amount (22%).

Since the beginning of the 2000s, North Korea restored its food production to more than 4 million tons due to the favorable weather condition, continued support of fertilizers from South Korea, agricultural cooperation from other countries, and the efforts to restore and build agricultural infrastructure by North Korea (natural flow water channel constructions and land improvement projects).

**[Table 5-5] Trends in Food Supply and Demand**



\* Source: WFP/FAO

\* Note:

- ① The WFP/FAO did not publish the data for 2006, 2007, 2008, 2010, and 2020.
- ② The demand for the current year – (previous year's output + food secured from outside) = shortage of current year.
- ③ The Rural Development Administration estimates the production of grains in a different way from the FAO's method and publishes the data every year. The production volumes of the recent three years were 4.64 million tons in 2019, 4.4 million tons in 2020, 4.68 million tons in 2021, and 4.51 million tons in 2022.
- ④ In the VNR (Voluntary National Review, submitted in July 2021) submitted by the North Korea to the United Nations, the grain productions were reported as 4.95 million tons in 2018, 6.55 million tons in 2019, 5.52 million tons in 2020.



A propaganda poster to encourage production of food



North Korea's slash-and-burn field

Especially since the beginning of the Kim Jong Un regime, in 2012, they have been maintaining an annual average production of 4.8 million tons, approximately, to lower the shortage of food down to 530,000 tons in average per year. Considering the commercial food import from China every year and the crops from the slash-and-burn fields of the people, the shortage would be even smaller. However, it is too soon to assume that the food supply in North Korea has stabilized.

It is because of the poor agricultural infrastructure and the dependency on the intense investment of labor. The product is still under the severe influence of the changing climate condition. As a result, Kim Jong Un's regime set the total resolution of the food issue as the top priority in the agricultural sector in the "5-Year Economic Plan" (2016 - 2020). The "5-Year Economic Plan" (2021 - 2025) pronounced in the 8th Party Congress in January 2021 also included the boosting of food production and establishment of the material and technological foundation of agriculture as key objectives.<sup>9</sup> The food production estimate in Table 5-5 is based on the minimum calories. It must be considered that the food shortage of North Korea can be even more serious, if one considers the normal caloric requirements. The FAO published its estimate for the food production of North Korea in two years since May 2019 (June 14, 2021) and designated North Korea still in need of "food support" due to a shortage of more than 1 million tons, as the production (4.9 million tons) fell short of the demand (5.95 million tons).

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<sup>9</sup> Summary report during the 8th Party Congress: "In the agricultural sector, we successfully boosted grain production to an unprecedented level in the midst of a severe drought, flood, and shortage of almost everything, thank to scientific agricultural methods and the campaign of harvest boots."

Since the beginning of Kim Jong Un's regime, North Korea has been emphasizing boosting food production and has implemented "farming land management program (*pojon tamdangje*) within a group management system (*punjo*)" along with other agricultural policies, which fell short of achieving a sufficient level of food self-sufficiency.

### 3) Trade

During the Cold War, the self-reliance (*jaryokgaengsaeng*) development policy of North Korea became one of the core elements of its economic policies and caused the country to keep the international trade to the bare minimum. North Korea's dependency on trade was very low, and the highest amount of trade before the beginning of the economic crisis was 4.2 billion dollars. Crude oil or other strategic materials that could not be produced within North Korea were supplied by the "friendship trade" with the USSR and other socialist states. Hence, the Soviet Union accounted for about 80% of the total trade volume of North Korea.

However, with the collapse of the socialist bloc in the 1990s, trade volume of North Korea shrunk to 1.44 billion dollars in 1998. After the end of the Cold War, North Korea had to adapt to the world now integrated under market economy and seek a new international economic relations with capitalist market economies. Due to the delays in their reform and opening, the trade partnership solely concentrated on the former socialist bloc was destined to crumble down, and North Korea faced a severe shortage of foreign currency.

Since the 2000s, North Korea's international trade grew at a

**[Table 5-6]** North Korea's Trade Balance with China and the World

(Unit: USD 1 million)

Year	Export		Import		Trade Balance	
	China	World	China	World	China	World
2000	37	556	451	1,413	- 414	- 857
2002	271	735	467	1,525	- 196	- 790
2004	582	1,020	795	1,837	- 213	- 817
2006	468	947	1,232	2,049	- 764	- 1,102
2008	754	1,130	2,033	2,686	- 1,279	- 1,556
2010	1,188	1,513	2,278	2,660	- 1,090	- 1,147
2012	2,485	2,880	3,528	3,931	- 1,043	- 1,051
2014	2,841	3,164	4,023	4,446	- 1,182	- 1,282
2015	2,484	2,696	3,226	3,555	- 742	- 859
2016	2,634	2,820	3,422	3,710	- 788	- 890
2017	1,650	1,772	3,608	3,778	-1,958	-2,006
2018	195	243	2,528	2,601	-2,334	-2,358
2019	216	277	2,879	2,967	-2,663	-2,689
2020	48	89	713	774	-665	-684
2021	58	82	624	631	-566	-549

\* Source: Korea International Trade Association (KITA)

relatively higher rate unlike its economic growth figures. The trade volume, which was a mere 1.97 billion dollars in 2000, grew to 3 billion dollars in 2005, 4.17 billion dollars in 2010, and 7.61 billion dollars in 2014. Even with the tightening grip of sanctions, the trade volume marked 6.53 billion dollars in 2016. However, starting from 2017, the trade volume of North Korea decreased by more than 15% from the previous year, marking 5.55 billion dollars (excluding the trade with South Korea). In 2018, the volume was 2.84 billion dollars, down by 48.5% from the previous year. On the other hand, North



Chinese cargo vehicles before the customs office in Hunchun, China



Railroad cars loaded with trade goods on top of the railway bridge over the Yalu River between Dandong and Sinuiju

Korea's trade volume in 2019 was 3.24 billion dollars (0.28 billion in export, 2.97 billion in import), up by 14.1% from the previous year. The figures were 860 million dollars in 2020 (Export 89 million, importation 774 million) and 710 million dollars for 2021 (Export 80 million, importation 630 million), down by 17.3% from the previous year.

In sum, since the inauguration of Kim Jong Un's regime, the average trade volume per year of North Korea was 6.82 billion dollars over the period from 2011 to 2016 (excluding 2017), which was about double of 3.47 billion dollars by the later years of Kim Jong Il's regime (2006 - 2010).

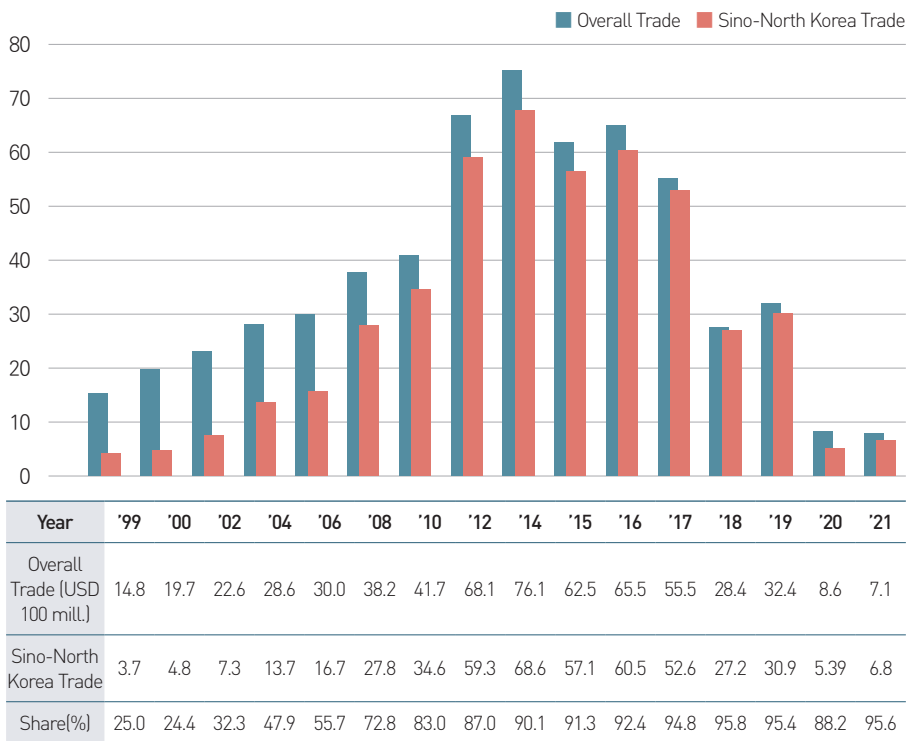
This was due to, first, North Korea increased its export of mineral resources (such as hard coal) and sending workers abroad, and the resultant foreign currency earned expanded their capability to import. Second, the quantitative and qualitative growth of the market expanded the domestic market and consumer market, which further pushed up the demands for trade. Lastly, Kim Jong Un introduced more autonomy in trade, focusing on earning foreign currency and



diversifying the channels to this end.

However, since the beginning of Kim Jong Un’s regime, the quantitative growth in trade from 2011 to 2016 cannot be seen as to be based on the recovery of production capacity of the North Korean economy. This is because, first, this does not reflect the fact that North Korea was continuously in a trade deficit. The trade deficit of North Korea swelled from what was 490 million dollars in average per year during the 1990s to 800 million - 1.5 billion dollars every year since

**[Table 5-7]** Share of Trade with China in North Korea’s Total External Trade



\* Source: Korea Trade Investment Promotion Agency [KOTRA], Trends of North Korea’s Trade, by years

\* Note: The estimate of the trade volume between China and North Korea since 2015 included the estimated amount of crude oil (300 million dollars in 2015, 230 million dollars in 2016).

2000. North Korea never showed a trade surplus, ever. Experts believe that North Korea has been compensating for the accumulating trade deficits with non-trade balances (sending of workers abroad and tourism income, etc.)

Second, the growth of the trade volume was dependent upon the trade structure, with mineral resources, export of the products after outsourced processing and the import of all kinds of manufactured goods, food, crude oil, and strategic materials, resembling that of an underdeveloped country in a persistent way. Before the strengthening of the sanctions against North Korea in 2017, hard coal, iron ore, zinc, and other minerals accounted for 55% to 65% of total export every year, followed by the outsourced processing of labor intensive garments, in the 2nd place and fishery goods in the 3rd among all export items. In terms of import, grain, fertilizer, and other items related to the livelihood of the people, or the items that could not be manufactured in North Korea such as machines, semi-products, and the raw materials for outsourced processing businesses such as textile were of the highest share.

Third, the trade partners of North Korea were limited to a handful of the countries, with absolute dependency on China. North Korea's dependency on China grew from what was 24.4% in 2000 to 92.7% in 2016, 94.8% in 2017, 95.8% in 2018, 95.4% in 2019, 88.2% in 2020 (See Table 5-7), so that North Korea's international trade is persistently dominated by China. The reasons for this phenomenon include the balloon effect after the trades with South Korea and Japan came to a halt, demands between the local economy in the three prefectures in the North-Eastern region of China and the North Korean economy,

and China's strategic consideration toward North Korea, etc., which all worked in a comprehensive manner.

Since the latter half of 2017, the international trade of North Korea appeared to have been impacted by the sanctions imposed by the UN Resolution No. 2375 which was adopted due to the 6th nuclear test of North Korea. This was because, after the adoption of the resolution No. 2375, North Korea was now banned from exporting minerals, outsourced textile products, fishery goods, as well as sending its workers. Also, the UN Resolution No. 2397 to impose sanctions due to the launch of long-range missiles banned the import of goods that were essential for industrial development, such as industrial machines, steel, etc. As a result, the international trade volume of North Korea in 2018 was cut down by half from the previous year (48.8%).

In the meantime, because North Korea closed down its border voluntarily from January 2020 due to COVID-19, most international trades grounded to a halt. While some import of food materials from China was allowed since May, the restrictions were toughened once again starting from August 2020, which reduced the total trade between China and North Korea by 82.6% from 2019. After this, the total trade of 2021 abruptly shrunk to 17% of the volume of the previous year, while the trade volume with China increased by 26.2%.

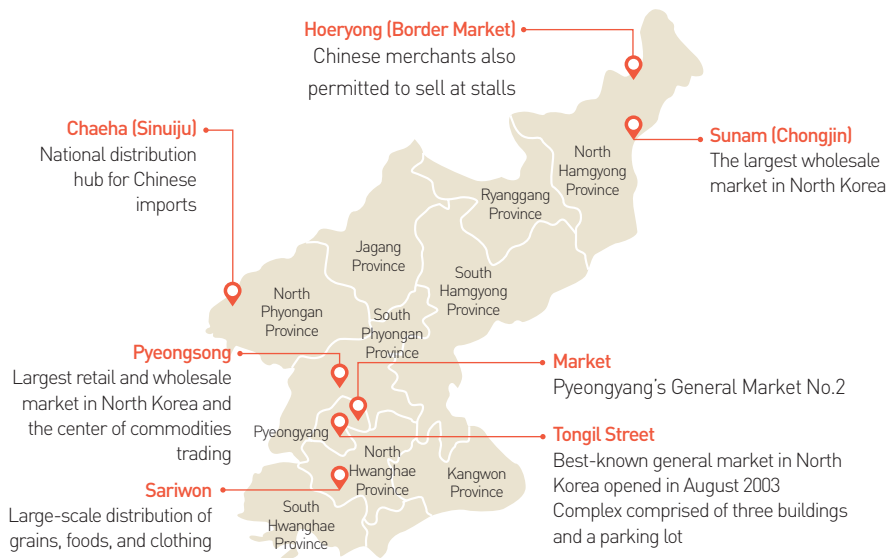
## Section 3

# Changes in Economic Policy

### 1 Socialist Market Economy and Domestic Policies

#### 1) Marketization

The marketization within North Korea started in earnest when the planned economy stopped functioning properly during the mid and late 1980s. In the 1990s, too, the shortage in supplies obstructed the rationing programs and supply of materials. As a result, in 2003, the North Korean government decided to keep the farmers markets, which used to be open every ten days, open at all times. Farmers markets were official marketplaces under the planned economic system. But since the economic crisis in the mid-1990s, they developed into black markets, called “night markets” or “*jangmadang*” (market plaza). They served as the marketplace for food such as rice and corn, which are illegal in those markets, and other manufactured goods.



[Figure 5-1] Well-known General Markets in North Korea



Tongil Street General Marketplace, Pyeongyang



A local *jangmadang*

North Koreans entered the farmers markets as “elementary participants” to secure food for survival when the ration system collapsed. However, when a sufficient amount of wealth was accumulated through repeated transactions, some of them grew into a “*donju*.” Markets supplied items stolen from factories or businesses, other spoils, products from small gardens and farmlands, personal

belongings, international aid goods, or other merchandises secured through legal or illegal trades with China in a large quantity.

Faced with food shortage and the collapse of the planned economy system in the mid-1990s, North Korea opened a channel of commerce at the border with China. In addition to the government's trade agencies, which were the licensed trade merchants of the state, provincial and local governments, as well as military units, municipal and provincial people's committee, factories, and businesses were now allowed to participate in international trade.

As a result, the spread of markets in North Korea by the end of the 1990s developed into the formation of the nationwide distribution network. There were large-scale wholesale markets in key cities and provinces, and specialized markets also developed (See Figure 5-1). The way residents conducted their retail businesses evolved from "backpack business" to "circulation business" where the businessmen distributed the goods in shortage in a certain place to get the margin, and "running business and vehicle business" which are a wholesale business using railways or vehicles. After the introduction of the full-time markets in 2003, there also were "stall businesses" where the merchants sold their goods while seated on their stools.

Currently, the only market that is allowed under the planned economy principle is the products market. The markets for production elements (capital, labor, and land) are not allowed officially, at least. So, these markets are run by individuals who accumulated wealth unofficially.

The products markets across North Korea include the socialist exchanges and general markets. As of 2022, it is estimated that there

**[Table 5-8] Market Rice Price in Key Cities**

(Unit: won/1kg)

Period	Pyeongyang	Sinuiju	Hyesan
March 20, 2022.	4,940	5,100	5,200
May 30, 2022.	5,000	5,200	5,300
July 26, 2022	6,280	6,300	6,800
September 18, 2022.	5,600	5,800	6,000
November 27, 2022.	6,000	6,200	6,300

\* Source: Daily NK

**[Table 5-9] Exchange Rates in Key Markets**

(Unit: won/1 dollar)

Period	Pyeongyang	Sinuiju	Hyesan
March 20, 2022.	6,450	6,520	6,610
May 30, 2022.	7,300	7,350	7,260
July 26, 2022	8,150	8,200	8,000
September 18, 2022.	8,200	8,250	8,000
November 27, 2022.	8,400	8,400	8,200

\* Sources: Daily NK

are about 414 general markets<sup>10</sup> in operation to deal with almost all types of manufactured products, foods, etc., except for the banned items, and are open every day.

In operating these markets, North Korea charges its merchants with the fee for market use (*jangsae*). To do business in the market by renting a stall, a merchant must pay the market use fee (*jangsae*). The amount of fee to be paid by a merchant varies depending on the item

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<sup>10</sup> Hong Min, Changes in the Size and Distribution of Official Markets, Monthly Debate, Institution of Reunification (Nov. 23, 2022), 2022 North Korean Official Markets Survey: Changes in Size, Distribution, Popularity, and Locations presentation materials

and the region.<sup>11</sup>

To prevent the spread of markets from going out of control, North Korea introduced a market suppression policy from 2005 to 2009 during the Kim Jong Il regime. However, the markets of North Korea are still spreading, and the regime of Kim Jong Un is looking the other way, while trying to keep it under institutional control by introducing several policies.

## 2) Kim Jong Il Era

The spread of markets in North Korea during the 1990s was “marketization from the bottom” and resulted in the gap between the economic system of North Korea and its reality. During the Kim Jong Il era, when the government chose to follow the *songun* economic policy, North Korea absorbed the spontaneous marketplaces developing outside the state’s grasp into the planned economy system, through the “New Economic Management Improvement Measures” in 2002 (or the July 1 Measures) and the follow-up measure to keep the market open as standing marketplaces (Mar. 2003). As a result, the July 1 Measures endowed a certain level of autonomous right to compete to each unit of economic activities, such as state-owned businesses or collective farms. As for the standing marketplace measures, the existing farmers markets were converted to general markets, which were open every day. In

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<sup>11</sup> The fees to use the market stall (*jangsae*) vary depending on the items sold. In the order of produce, fish, garments, and manufactured goods, the amount varies from 500 won (min.) to 5,000 won (max.) Also, the *jangsae* varies depending on where the market is located. The markets in cities charge more compared to those in rural communities. (Hong Min et al., Market Information Across North Korea, Seoul: Korea Institute for National Unification, 2016 and interviews with North Korean defectors.)



addition, there were socialist exchanges and imported goods markets for businesses, where they could buy and sell raw materials and items needed for production.

However, after the partial officialization of market functions by opening the markets full-time, the border between planned economy and unofficial economy started to blur. People started to expand their businesses (grasshopper businesses, selling goods in the alleyways or residential areas, or doing door-to-door sales) and private economic activities. Especially various types of service businesses (Karaoke, PC game cafes, hospitality businesses, transportation, eateries, repair services, and delivery services using bicycles and motorcycles, etc.) and small businesses grew. Factories and businesses even changed their existing businesses and production activities to pay the state business profit contributions or invited a “*donju*” to invest in them and collected a part of their earnings to pay the state business profit contributions. While it was not intended by the government, the introduction of full-time markets resulted in a system where the official economy and the unofficial economy co-existed. This alarmed the North Korean government, which took control of the markets in a stepwise manner in 2005. The policy of suppressing markets began in earnest when Kim Jong Il said, “Markets are the habitat of anti-socialism and the dwelling of capitalism.” This was followed by the currency reform and closing of general markets on November 30, 2009.<sup>12</sup>

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**12** The currency reform was implemented to exchange the old currency with the new one at a ratio of 100 to 1, with a limit of 100,000 to 150,000 won (North Korean won) per household, over the period from Nov. 30 to Dec. 5, 2009. This currency reform of North Korea caused a hyperinflation, ending up in a failure with a severely negative impact on the economic life of North Koreans.

However, the currency reform of North Korea, which was intended to increase the financial income, keep the market under control and revive the centralized planned economy, fell apart in two months. The livelihood of North Korean depended heavily on the economic activities in markets, while the domain of planned economy was depending on markets as well. In addition, even the fiscal revenue of the state was mostly generated from markets. Accordingly the “marketization from the bottom” in North Korea which began in the late 1980s ended up with a persistent co-existence of planned economy and market, in a mixture of legality and illegality.

### 3) Kim Jong Un Era

The failure of the currency reform showed that North Korean economy came too far to return to the planned economy of the past and markets became now a part of its economic structure. Kim Jong Un’s regime took its lesson from the currency reform fiasco and chose the path of invigorating North Korean economy by actively utilizing markets and strengthening the endurance of the regime. Especially, by utilizing the monetary assets held by “*donjus*” and ordinary North Korean, Kim Jong Un has been focusing on achieving a tangible result for his regime.

Ther reason why the “marketization from the bottom” could make such a quantitative and qualitative impact on North Korea as it did was, in part, the development of the private financial market, where “*donjus*” played a central role. *Donjus*, or money lenders, were mainly participating in money exchange or money lending business with a

high interest rate during the growth phase of the market economy in the 1990s to the early 2000s. But they leveraged on the lack of an institutional commercial finance system to provide loans or fundings to earn interest incomes, becoming a North Korean version of financial capitalists. According to North Korean defectors, the private financing by *donjus* in the mid to late 2000s expanded to the domains of money deposits, transfer, remittance, transaction payment clearance, mortgage loans, investing in state projects or new businesses, money lending between *donjus*, and other financial activities that are normally performed by commercial financial institutions.

The *donjus*, or money lenders of North Korea operated not only in consumer financing but also in the investment operations in real economy to accumulate their financial assets. In the early days, they invested mainly in intercity bus networks, taxi business, logistics, transportation, wholesale, retail, and state-owned shops. Recently, their investment activities are expanding to the domains of official economy, such as construction, mining, and manufacturing. *Donjus* borrow the name of official state-owned businesses, agencies, or factories and even hire their own waged workers, only to pay a part of their income to



A Taedonggang Taxi in front of Pyongyang Station (2018)



Beori Bus (an intercity bus, 2012, Pyongyang)

©Christophe95

the agencies or state-owned businesses in question to conduct their investment operations.

Since the inauguration of Kim Jong Un's regime, North Korea legalized the use of the personal excess funds by *donjus* and utilized the market as a policy tool. The details are as follows.

First, the official economic domains such as state-owned businesses or state-owned shops receive investments from *donjus* to perform market-oriented business activities directly and generate gains from which the national business profits contributions are paid to the state in an increasing number of cases. Sometimes, the state tries to keep the influence of *donjus* from growing out of control. But the cases where the official economy is operated in cooperation with *donjus* are gradually increasing. However, the recent policy of restoring the state-owned retail network resulted in somewhat strengthened control over private economic activities of civilians.

Second, due to the more autonomous operation of factories and businesses, the state has developed business indicators and has taken measures to ensure that the products from them can be sold in the market by considering stimulating domestic consumer markets as an official policy. Kim Jong Un emphasized the need to manufacture domestic products to replace imported goods in his visits to factories for garments, shoes, and foods, and urged the production and sales of the products in consideration of the preference of consumers. Also, they are continuing the efforts to absorb the consumption by civilians into the state domain, by establishing online web shops or large retail shops.

Third, they have introduced a measure called the "New Economy Management Measure" where the operations of collective farms

are also connected with the markets to promote the distribution of products. North Korea introduced so-called “Our Style of Economic Management” as an economy management improvement measure to support a part of the activities of state-owned businesses, state agencies, and collective farms in their activities in connection with the market. “Our Style of Economic Management” is a method where the “authority of management is granted to the field” and “the workers and farmers are motivated to work.” It is a measure designed to give autonomy and material incentives to the actors of economy.<sup>13</sup>

“Our Style of Economic Management” is manifested as the introduction of the farmland management system (*pojon tamdangje*) under the group (*punjo*) management system (introduced in 2013) for agriculture and, for the state-owned businesses, the implementation of the ‘socialist business management system’ (May 30, 2014).<sup>14</sup>

The “farmland management system (*pojon tamdangje*) under the group (*punjo*) management system” is a system where the group or *punjo* which is the smallest work unit within a collective farm is reduced from 10 to 15 people to 4 to 6 people and each of these workers are assigned to a farmland patch of 1,000 pyeong. Then the excess harvest of this land after deducting the cost for farming materials and the designated share for the state is distributed to the farmers in kind.

“Socialist business management system” is a system where factories

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<sup>13</sup> “Our style of economic management”, *Chosun Shinbo*, June 28, 2012

<sup>14</sup> North Korea included ‘socialist business management system’ in its 2019 amendment of constitution.

and businesses are allowed to establish “their own business plans” in addition to the state’s business plan, so that they have a certain level of autonomy in terms of the production volume, quality of the products, prices, wage, and the number of workers, etc. And the excess products can be sold in the market. This system is run as the “farm management program” in collective farms.

North Korea decided to increase the state-level investment in agriculture to solve its chronic food shortage problem during the 4th Plenary Session of the 8th WPK Central Committee in December 2021, while emphasizing the changes in the rural areas by giving “farm rental exemptions.” However, during the 6th Plenary Session of the 8th WPK Central Committee in December 2022, no noticeable results were yielded except for the construction of ‘some residential units’ while the production of grain somewhat decreased, as well.

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## 2 Economic Opening Policy

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### 1) Four Special Economic Zones

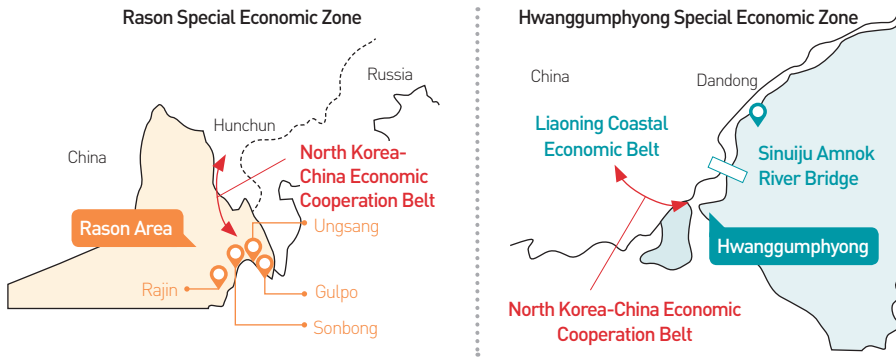
With the collapse of socialist economies in the 1990s, the correlations between industries pushed North Korea to seek opening of its economy. This was because crude oil, cokes, and other basic materials which were provided by the USSR at a “friendly price” had to be purchased from normal trade in the world market. North Korea designated Rajin and Sonbong, the northern-most port towns of North Hamgyong Province, for the first time in its history, as Special

Economic Zone in December 1991 and enacted laws related to the direct investment by foreigners. This was followed by the “Framework Law for Special Administration of Sinuiju,” “Gaeseong Industrial Complex Law,” “Geumgangsan Tourism Area Law,” to establish Rajin-Sonbong, Sinuiju, Gaesong, and Geumgangsan Mountain as the Four Special Economic Zones in 2002.

But the plan for ‘Sinuiju Special Administrative District’ was abandoned when Yang Bin, a Chinese businessman who was appointed as the first administrator of China, was arrested for tax fraud. The Gaeseong Industrial Complex and Geumgangsan Tourism Area were established and operated as special districts where South Korean capital would invest in and develop by itself. The tourism business in Geumgangsan was terminated when a South Korean tourist was killed in August 2008. Gaeseong Industrial Complex was totally shut down in February 2016 due to the continued nuclear tests and long-range missile launches by North Korea.

## 2) Economic Cooperation with China

After the sinking of the Cheonan frigate in 2010, the May 24 Measure of South Korea shrunk the economic cooperation between the South and the North. North Korea, in response, further opened up its economy to China and changed its international trade policy to earn more foreign currency. In 2010, the City of Rason was promoted to a Special City, while Hwanggumpyong and Wihwado were designated as new Special Economic Zones in 2011, and a special policy was implemented to develop Rason, Hwanggumpyong, and Wihwado



**[Figure 5-2]** Rason and Hwanggumphyong Special Economic Zones

jointly with China. In 2011, Jang Song Thaek and the Minister of Commerce of the China participated in the joint groundbreaking ceremony and announced a blueprint for the joint development called “Summary of the Master Plans to Jointly Develop the Rason Economic Trade Zone and Hwanggumphyong Economic Zone between China and North Korea.” Also, they agreed to connect and expand their infrastructures such as bridges, roads, and railways in the border areas, including the three Northa-Eastern prefectures of China.

However, with the purge of Jang Song Thaek in December 2013 and the sanctions by the global community due to the continued nuclear tests of the North, the development of the two Special Economic Zones stalled. As for the Hwanggumphyong/Wihwado Special Economic Zone, no development has been conducted for several years after the building of the management committee, which was built as a formality.

As for the Rason Special Economic Zone, only a handful of small projects agreed upon between North Korea and China made progress.





Amnok River Bridge (May 2020)



Railway between Jipian – Manpo (July 2017)

The progress was limited to the renovation of the 1st Wharf of Rajin Port, construction of a warehouse, expansion of the road between the customs house in Wonjong-ri of North Korea and the port of Rajin (2 lanes -> 4 lanes), and a part of the cooperation program between Jilin prefecture and the City of Rason for high-efficiency agriculture pilot program. The capital investment by China into Rason Special Economic Zone was mainly focused on service business such as restaurants, karaokes, hospitality businesses, and logistics businesses, while the infrastructure and manufacturing sector did not receive a decent amount of investment. China was more concentrated on expanding the road between Wonjong-ri and Rajin and the construction of the 2nd Tuman River Bridge, which were needed to transport its goods to the south using the port of Rajin, rather than developing Rajin Special Economic Zone. According to an announcement by North Korea, the total foreign investments made into Rason Special Economic Zone by May 2013 was a mere 410 million Euros, (about 480 million dollars).

While China was reluctant to proceed with the joint development of the Special Economic Zones between China and North Korea, they have been making progress with the construction and renovation of the

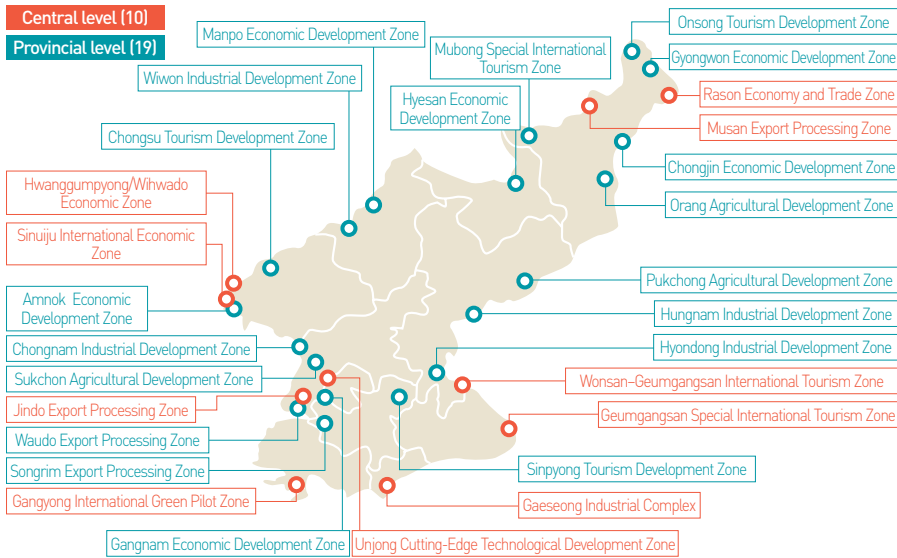
bridges and roads to connect trade posts due to their own needs. While the rest of the world has been strengthening sanctions against North Korea, China constructed the New Yalu River Bridge (not open) opened the New Tumen River Bridge (2016), and built the bridge and railway between Jipian, China and Manpo, North Korea (2019) and a new bridge between Domun, China and Namyang, North Korea. Regardless of the strengthening of the sanctions, China has been continuing small-scale infrastructure projects in the border for its own needs. As a result, the bridges at the trade posts were used for Chinese tourists to visit North Korea for the one-day/half-day tourism by driving until North Korea banned foreign tourists from entering the country due to COVID-19. These tourist programs are no longer in operation now.

### 3) New Economic Development Zones

In addition to the existing Central Special Economic Zones of Rason, Hwanggumpyong/Wihwado, Geumgangsan, and Gaeseong, Kim Jong Un's regime has sought to build more provincial-level Economic Development Zone. On May 29th, 2013, North Korea enacted the "Economic Development Zone Law"<sup>15</sup> and announced its plan to develop ten central-level Economic Development Zones and 19 provincial-level Economic Development Zones, totaling 29 Economic Development Zones as of 2021.

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**15** The "Economic Development Zone Law" of North Korea was introduced as the framework act for the Economic Development Zones that were to be developed across the country. Compared to the existing Special Economic Zone Law, the new law can be considered meaningful as it reflects two-decades of experience in the matter.



**[Figure 5-3]** Special Economic Zones and Economic Development Zones

But none of the Economic Development Zone projects of Kim Jong Un saw actual development. This was because North Korea conducted four nuclear tests and a barrage of missile test launches after they announced the Economic Development Zone projects in 2013. With the tightening sanctions against North Korea and delays in market reforms, shutting down the Gaeseong Complex, insufficiency of electric power and poor infrastructure, and outdated logistics system, etc., were making it very difficult to develop a special economic zone.

Therefore, if North Korea presents a comprehensive plan to engage in opening and reforming its country and actively implements denuclearization, the plan of Kim Jong Un's regime to develop its economy can be put into motion in earnest.



# VI

## Society

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**Section 1.** Characteristics and Changes in North Korean Society

**Section 2.** Everyday Life of North Koreans

**Section 3.** Human Rights

## Section 1

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# Characteristics and Changes in North Korean Society

One of the most effective ways of understanding the characteristics and changes in a society is “comparison.” The characteristics of a society can be understood by comparing them with a different society in the same or similar era. The changes of a society can be better understood via the comparison between its present and past. In the modern world, there are two contrasting types of societies. One is capitalist societies, and the other is socialist societies. While North Korea shares some of the common characteristics of socialist society, it differs in some ways from other socialist states like the China, Vietnam, Cuba, and Laos.

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### 1 Characteristics of North Korean Society

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First, in a capitalist society, there are multiple political parties and groups that compete over the distribution of power. However,

in a socialist society, one political party, which is the socialist party, claims to be the representative of the will and interest of its people and monopolizes the power. As is the case with other socialist states, the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) acts as the sole ruling political party in North Korea society.

However, what makes North Korea stand out among other socialist states is that it still has a one-man dictatorship, where the *suryong* rules the party and the state. During the early days of North Korean society, there were different groups within the WPK, which shared power among each other. During the Korean War and the 1950s and 1960s, they went through a fierce power struggle, which resulted in Kim Il Sung's monopoly of political power.

Such "one-man dictatorship" is not a unique North Korean phenomenon. Like Hoxa of Albania, Ceaușescu of Romania, and Zhivkov of Bulgaria, there are examples of long-lasting one-man dictatorship in the Eastern Europe communist bloc in the past. In Cuba too, Fidel and Raul Castro brothers stayed in power for decades. However, in no other cases was there a three-generation power succession, like North Korea where the power passed on from Kim Il Sung to Kim Jong Il and to Kim Jong Un.

In North Korea, the word "*suryong*" is used as that unique political status, and the status of *suryong* in the party, state, and military changed over the eras of Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Il, and Kim Jong Un. Currently, the official title of Kim Jong Un within the party is the General Secretary of the WPK, while serving as the President of State Affairs Commission (SAC) and the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) at the same time.

Second, in a capitalist society, individuals' private ownership of key means of production such as land, buildings, machines, transportation vehicles, forests, minerals, and other raw materials is permitted. And with this ownership structure, they seek the development of production capabilities. On the other hand, in a socialist society, key production means are owned by the state or cooperatives.

In addition, while a capitalist society would see key resources necessary for production and living distributed through a "market mechanism," they are mostly distributed through a "planning mechanism" governed by the state in socialist society.

While a capitalist society, which is run based on private ownership and market mechanism, sees active and autonomous decision-making by the actors of the economy, things are different in a socialist state, which is centered around the state/cooperative ownership and planning mechanism, as the instructions from the central planning bureaus, order indicators, and prices determined by the state are the basis of decision-making by the actors of the economy.

Such characteristics of a socialist economy resulted in inefficiency and shortage of everything in its economy. For this reason, most of socialist states expanded the roles of their market mechanism and allowed more autonomous decision-making by its economic actors since the 1960s. Especially, China and Vietnam allowed private enterprises since the 1980s, reforming even the socialist system of ownership.

This was not the case with North Korea. From the 1960s, when the socialist economic structure settled down until the mid-1990s, there were not any noticeable reform in its economy, while the state

maintained a typical centralized planned economy. The socio-economic structure of North Korea started to change in earnest since the end of the Cold War in early and mid-1990s, when they lost the socialist market and suffered from a series of natural disasters, accompanied by the accumulated inefficiency of the centralized planned economy and low motivation of the farmers and workers, which resulted in a severe economic crisis.

Third, if the capitalist society, which is focused on private ownership and market mechanism, is characterized with “individualism,” where the freedom and interests of individuals are valued, a socialist society, which is centered around the state and cooperative ownership and planning mechanism, the “collectivism,” in which the interests of an individual has to yield before the interests of the many, have a much stronger influence.<sup>1</sup>

The North Korean government started to eradicate private ownership in agriculture, commerce, and industries to weaken the foundation of individualism. And in 1959, they started the “*Chollima* Workteam Movement” which seeks to realize the collectivist modification of ideology and growth of economy at the same time. In the 1960s, they focused on collectivist education and enrichment centered around schools. And, in the 1970s, the WPK, unions (General Federation of Trade Unions, Union of Agricultural Workers of Korea, and Socialist Working Youth League, and Korean Democratic Women’s

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**1** The North Korean constitution has a clause regarding collectivism, which runs as follows; “The rights and duties of the people of the DPRK are based on the principle of “One for All, All for One.” [Socialist Constitution of the DPRK, Article 63]



Union)<sup>2</sup> served as the basis for the enrichment of organized lives and enrichment of political ideologies, accompanied by various public campaigns, to turn North Koreans into collectivist individuals.

One of the slogans that the North Korean government came up with in the 1960s was “One for All, All for One.” This is a symbolic catchphrase of the socialist collectivism of North Korea. Well-known cultural symbols of this ideology that are used by the North Korean government to brag about their social solidarity and cohesion include mass games and art performances. A few examples include “*The Invincible Workers’ Party of Korea*,” a performance that became famous when the Secretary of State Madelyn Albright watched it during her visit to North Korea in October 2000, “Arirang,” a performance which was staged for the first time in 2002 and continued until 2013, and “The Glorious Fatherland,” which was staged in celebration of the 70th anniversary of the North Korean regime in 2018.

In addition, while collectivist mass movements are no longer observed since the economic reform and opening in other socialist societies, North Korea never stopped such attempts to turn its residents into collectivists and resolve its economic hardship through mass campaigns since the *Chollima* Workteam Movement. Some of the well-known examples include the “Three Revolutionary Red Flags Movement” in the mid-1970s, “The Second Great *Chollima* March” in the late 1990s, and “Manlima Speed Creation Movement” that started in 2016.

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**2** The North Korean government renamed the Socialist Working Youth League into Kim Il Sung Socialist Youth League, only to be renamed again to Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism Youth League in 2016 and Socialist Patriotic Youth League in 2021. Korean Democratic Women’s Union was also renamed as Korean Socialist Women’s Union in 2016.

## 2 Changes in North Korean Society

While the dire economic crisis in the early and mid-1990s did not make a dent on the *suryong* system, which was the political property of North Korean society, it did make a noticeable change in the ideological topology of the country which was dominated by state/cooperative ownership, planned economy, and collectivist ideologies.

First, market mechanism has been establishing its place as a supplement for planning mechanism. Markets did exist in North Korea even in the past. While the planned production and distribution system was established by the end of 1950s, it was not possible to plan and distribute everything its people needed. It was not an easy task to identify the varying demands of all residents, and even if they did, their production capacity was not enough to serve them all.

For this reason, the North Korean government allowed a certain type of market to exist, which was the “farmers’ market.” In the farmers’ market, farmers could sell some of the product or farm products they harvested in a collective farm or personal gardening patches to other residents directly. But grains and manufactured goods could not be sold. The state allowed farmers’ markets due to its benefits, which was that the farmers could purchase consumer goods that they still needed with the income from the market activities at farmers’ markets, while the workers who lived in city could acquire secondary food stuff that the government could not provide.

However, with the end of the food rations from the government in the 1990s and the shelves of state-owned stores running empty,

people had to rush to not only farmers' market but also black markets, which were not controlled by the government to purchase the grains and essential items they could not get elsewhere. In the end, the North Korean government accepted market mechanism as a supplement for planning mechanism, by expanding and repurposing farmers' markets into general markets in March 2003.

In a general market, not only farmers but also other residents of North Korea could do business. Even grains and some manufactured goods, which were banned items in farmers' markets, could be sold legally. Merchants had to pay the market management offices a certain amount of market use fee and declare their monthly income, from which a certain rate of "state contributions" had to be paid after the declaration. The U.S.-Korea Institute of Johns-Hopkins of the U.S. claimed that it confirmed 482 official marketplaces with satellite images in February 2018, while the Korea Institute for National Unification used the satellite images of Google Earth to claim that there are 414 official markets<sup>3</sup> in operation within North Korea as of November 2022.

Second, with the progress in marketization, there have been noticeable changes in the ownership structure within North Korean society, which is the "de facto privatization." This is the opposite of the "legal privatization." Even though the private ownership of key means

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**3** The Increase of Official Marketplaces Detected in Satellite Images, at Least 482 Places, *Yonhap News*, Feb. 4, 2018; Hong Min, *The Changes in the Sizes and Distribution of Official Market Places*, Korea Institute for National Unification Monthly Discussion (Nov. 23, 2022) *The Result of a Survey of the Official Marketplaces of North Korea: Size, Distribution, Trend, and Changes in Locations*, Presentation material.

**[Table 6-1]** Changes in North Korean Socio-economic Structure

Ownership of the means of production	State/cooperative ownership	➡	De-factor privatization in progress
Distribution of resources	Planning mechanism	➡	Increased role of market mechanism
Decision-making	Non-autonomous decision-making	➡	Dispersion of decision-making authorities

of production is not allowed by the law or the system, individuals who actively participate in market activities may utilize the production means of the state or cooperatives for personal purposes, using currency as the medium.

This “de facto privatization” is making progress largely thanks to “*donjus*.” “*Donju*” is a new word used to describe the individuals who became wealthy with personal financial assets in the process of marketization of North Korean society. *Donjus* tend to lend money, materials, or fertilizers to factories, state-owned businesses, or collective farms, and take a portion of the gains. They can conduct private businesses by borrowing the names of such organizations or going as far as to run an unofficial private enterprise.<sup>4</sup>

However, unlike other socialist states, North Korea has not recognized “legal privatization” or private employment. But the government of North Korea amended the “Democratic People’s Republic of Korea Business Law” in November 2014 to add a new clause laying down, “Businesses may borrow its operational fund from a bank or mobilize the excess monetary fund of the residents as

<sup>4</sup> Injoo Yoon, *A Study on the Privatization in North Korea: Focusing on the Current Status and Implications*, Journal of North Korean Studies, Vol. 18, No.1, 2014, pp.58-76

specified.” (Article 38) to legalize the investment by *donjus* in state-owned businesses.

As such, with the increasing influence of *donjus*, the possibility of having a new social class, namely “capitalists” in addition to the two social classes of workers and farmers in North Korean society, is gaining attention. Given the precedents of China and Vietnam, where the governments legalized private enterprises as they opened up the economy and reformed the society, some watch with keen eyes whether North Korea’s legalization of *donjus*’ investment in state-owned businesses would result in the legalization of private enterprises and increase of private employment as opening and reform gain traction in the North Korean society.

Third, individualism is spreading. Since the late 1980s, when the North Korean economy started to deteriorate, North Koreans started to pay more attention to their side hustles rather than their official duties as a part of the collective organizations. North Koreans opened their eyes to individualism, which was different from their usual collectivism, in the process of selling the products of side hustle at farmers’ markets or black markets.

In the 1990s, the growth of individualism and spread of “anti-socialist” phenomena (abuse of state properties, moral deterioration, and corruption) due to individualism were such that even Kim Jong Il pointed out that “some individuals were making too much profits and indulged in selfishness”<sup>5</sup> in 1990, which became an irreversible trend in North Korea.

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<sup>5</sup> Kim Jong Il, *Concerning our dedication to light industrial revolution* (June 2, 1990), Kim Jong Il Collection Vol. 10, WPK Press, 1997, p. 147

Especially during the early and mid-1990s, North Koreans had to travel further to get food and essential items while their rate of showing up at work decreased. The group life and the enrichment of political ideology, which were the basis of the collectivist system, weakened. On the other hand, the functions and roles of the market, which were the basis of individualism, only grew to result in rapid development of individualism.

According to a study, the “old generation” of North Korea, who spent their prime days during the merciless economic hardship shared the will to pursue the basic human desire, obsession with survival, anxiety, a sentiment of cynicism that no one can be trusted and you have to survive on your own, and confusion about the changed value system that “the life of an individual is the individual’s own responsibility.” The immediately following “youth generation” who spent their childhood during the economic hardship are not playing the central role due to their insufficient financial capabilities. But they show different cultural characteristics<sup>6</sup> from the older generation as they share information using digital devices including smart phones, while being more sensitive to foreign culture without hiding their desire for personal consumption.

During the economic transition of China, individualism among the youth increased due to the increase in the number of private enterprises, free distribution of information, and increased contact

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6 Seonggyeong Kim, *The Mixed Identity of the “in-between” Generation of North Korea*, Gyeongnam University East Asia Institute, *Are the Youth of North Korea a “New Generation?”: The Multi-Faceted Identity of the Youth Generation and the Kim Jong Un Regime*, Gyeongnam University East Asia Institute, 2015, pp. 169-193

with the outside world, in the form of travel to foreign countries or contact with foreigners.<sup>7</sup> There is a chance that, in North Korea, too, the personal desire for consumption, individualism, and demands for various cultures would only grow. In this regard, the North Korean government is strengthening the political ideology education of the younger generation, as well as their youth generation organization that is centered around the Socialist Patriotic Youth League. For example, the WPK amended its Platform during the 7th Party Congress in May 2016 to newly include the definitions of the “strengthening of youth movement” as the “priority of the party and the state and a strategic demand for the revolution.” During the Presidium meeting of the Supreme People’s Assembly (SPA) held in December 2020, North Korea adopted the “Law on the Prohibition of Reactionist Ideas and Cultures,” in order to impose severer penalties against the introduction and distribution of the anti-socialist/non-socialist ideas and cultures. This was followed by the “Youth Education Guarantee Law” enacted by the SPA in September 2021, as they focus on the ideological education of the youth.

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<sup>7</sup> Eric Fish, *Chinese Youth in China’s Economic Transition: Changing Behaviors and Values*, North Korea’s Jangmadang Generation: Who Are They, and Will They Be the Driving Force of a Change?, Gyeongnam University East Asia Institute Academic Conference Presentation Text (June 23, 2015), pp. 87-90

## Section 2

# Everyday Life of North Koreans

The behaviors and ideas of an individual who lives in a society are never free from the influence of the socio-political structure and its dominant ideology. To understand the lives of North Koreans, the first thing you must do is to understand the characteristics and changes of the politics, economy, and ideologies of the North Korean society.

As we have discussed in Section 1, the economic structure of the North Korean society is changing from the centralized planned economy, to a clearer co-existence of planned economy and markets, accompanied by the “de facto privatization.” As a result, the ideological environment of North Korean society, which was dominated by collectivism in the past, recently has shown a rapidly growing individualistic trend, so that collectivism and individualism co-exist in the same society.

Such a change is affecting the lives of the residents of North Korea, too. In this section, we will examine the everyday lives of North



Koreans terms of organization, clothing/food/housing, leisure and holidays, and health and welfare.

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## 1 Life in Organizations

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Compared to the everyday lives of other societies, what makes North Korea stand out is that life as a member of organization is embedded in every stage of the lifecycle. Through life in an organization, North Koreans are indoctrinated with the ideas and orientation of the government, which controls its citizens and mobilizes their labor. The participation rate in organization activities is not as high as in the past, due to the economic hardship, progress in marketization, and spreading individualism. However, the North Korean government is still emphasizing the importance of organizations as the means to maintain collectivism, stabilize the regime, and mobilize the economy.

Children in North Korea start their life as a part of an organization in the daycare center if their parents are working. Once they go to regular schools, it is mandatory that they sign up for official organizations. This official organizational membership begins in the 2nd year in primary school (7 years old) when they join the “Children’s Union.” The entrance ceremonies are held three times a year, namely on the birthday of Kim Jong Il (Feb. 16), birthday of Kim Il Sung (Apr. 15), the foundation anniversary day of the Children’s Union (Jun. 6). The signs of the Children’s Union membership are the red neckties and the crest of the Children’s Union.

The union membership continues until the child reaches 13. From 14, they are to sign up for the Socialist Patriotic Youth League (hereinafter the “Youth League.”) The process of joining the Youth League is similar to that of the Children’s Union, only more sophisticated and demanding. When you join the Youth League, you have to get the recommendation by your classroom teacher, which was the case when you joined the Children’s Union as well. Then, the applicant has to go through the review by the “primary group” which basically means your school, only to be further reviewed by the Youth League Committee of the city (or municipality/county).

Once you graduate from high school (secondary school) and reach the age of 18, you are eligible for joining the Workers’ Party of Korea (WPK). While the Children’s Union and Youth League membership is mandatory, a membership of the WPK requires that you have to qualify in a series of joining processes. According to the party’s platform as amended during the 8th Party Congress in January 2021, party members can form a party cell, which has about five to 30 members depending on the job or the region. Under “special circumstances,” it is allowed to form a party cell with only three to four members or more than 30 members. Party members perform their activities under the guidance provided by the cell secretary. A party cell is the grassroot organization of the WPK and is the smallest unit of the organization of the party and implementation of its policies. An applicant for party membership must submit a party membership application form and letters of reference from two party members to the applicable party cell. The general convention of the party cell will discuss the membership application, which goes through the approval

process by the Municipal/County Party Committee. To become an official member of the party, the applicant has to spend two years as a member candidate. After this two-year period, the general convention of the party cell will review and decide on formal admission.

A worker who is with a job and 31 or older is required to become a member of the General Federation of Trade Unions of Korea, while the farmers who work in a collective farm must be a member of the Union of Agricultural Workers of Korea. Women who are full-time homemakers are also obliged to join the Socialist Women's Union of Korea.

North Koreans who are members of such organizations must participate in a activity review session (saenghwal chonghwa) for each week, month, and quarter. A review session is joined by 10 to 15 members. The WPK conducts these activity reviews at the cell level, while occupational unions conduct these gatherings at the grassroots level or in smaller groups.

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## **2** Clothing, Food and Housing

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The supply of essential goods was not sufficient to meet all demands even before the economic meltdown. But it was still possible to get or purchase the essential household items such as clothing from state-owned stores. The food rations were handed out by the government, and the housing was also provided by the government.

However, in the 2000s after the serious economic downturn, the

life of North Koreans changed drastically. They now tend to find the essential supplies from the marketplaces on their own, rather than relying on the state for their clothing, food and housing.

First, while it is still possible to get or purchase the clothing and other essential items from state-owned stores, the quantity is never sufficient, and the quality is poor. Therefore, most North Koreans rely on markets. According to the annual survey of North Korean defectors by the Institute for Peace and Unification Studies of Seoul National University, about 90% of the defectors who escaped North Korea between 2011 and 2020 testified that they purchased their garments from markets most of the time when they were still living in North Korea. Also, over the past few years, the share of department stores and foreign currency shops increased dramatically. With these changes, it is now possible to see that the distribution channels for clothing are diversifying, while more North Koreans can afford more expensive clothing (Table 6-2).<sup>8</sup>

Second, the group of North Koreans who relied on the government rations for their food supply most heavily were the workers living in urban areas. This is because farmers get their food directly distributed to them from collective farms without going through the state. After the economic meltdown of North Korea, the government limited rationing to the government or party workers, teachers, and soldiers. They changed the food rationing system so that factories or state-

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<sup>8</sup> The Institute of Peace and Unification Studies, Seoul National University, *Changes in the North Korean Society 2012-2020*, The Institute of Peace and Unification Studies, Seoul National University, 2022, p. 45.

**[Table 6-2] Garment Purchase Points By Years**

(Unit: %)

Point of Purchase \ Year	Year of Defection		
	2011-2014 (Answered by 542)	2015-2017 (Answered by 348)	2018-2020 (Answered by 226)
Marketplace	93.0	91.4	87.6
State-owned shops (Including Direct Sales Shops)	0.6	0.6	2.2
Department stores (Including Foreign Currency Shops)	1.1	1.7	8.9
Government-issued	0.2	0.0	0.9
Other (Including Direct Purchase from Overseas)	5.2	6.3	0.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

\* Source: The Institute of Peace and Unification Studies, Seoul National University, *Changes in the North Korean Society 2012-2020*, The Institute of Peace and Unification Studies, Seoul National University, 2022, p. 47, <Table 2-7>.

owned businesses purchase food from the state for the workers in the manufacturing or service sectors.

However, North Korea suffered a food shortage of 1.147 million tons in 2015 and 1.486 million tons in 2018, according to the official announcement of the government, which showed the dire food situation of North Korea.<sup>9</sup> Even General Secretary Kim Jong Un said during the Plenary Session of the WPK Central Committee in June 2021 that “the food situation of the people is becoming more serious” and defined agriculture as “the priority of the party and the state with grave importance that is to be achieved as a combat mission.”

As a result, more North Koreans are growing their own food or purchasing the amount of food in shortage from the market. Urban

<sup>9</sup> Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, *Voluntary National Review on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for the Sustainable Development*, June 2021, p.58, Annex II.

workers work in the small gardening patches near the city areas to produce their own food and sell the excess in the marketplaces.<sup>10</sup> While farming in small gardening patches is illegal in North Korea, it became an essential source of food supply for the people together with the food that farmers sell in marketplaces.

Third, the usual mode of residence in North Korea was paying rent for the houses assigned by the government. However, since the economic meltdown, accompanied by the marketization and the state's failure in providing housing enough to meet the demands, the housing pattern of North Koreans has changed significantly. Now, transaction of houses among individuals, which has been prohibited by the law in North Korea, is happening in reality.

For example, those who need capital to run their own business or those who failed in their business ventures, or those who are in desperate need of food sell their state-owned houses in an illegal transaction. On the other hand, if they are willing to pay a little more money, they can purchase a better house with a better living condition through an illegal transaction. Such illegal sales of houses take place through the officials of the department which has the authority to issue "house use permits (move-in permit)" and professional realtors.<sup>11</sup> State organizations build houses in cooperation with *donjus* or private

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**10** Euni Jeong, *A Study on the Food Purchase Mechanism of North Korean Urban Workers: Focusing on the Case of Farming on Small Gardening Patches in Musan, North Hamgyong Province*, East Asia Economic Studies, Vol. 26, No. 1, 2014, pp. 265-280.

**11** Euni Jeong, *An Analysis on the Development of the Property Market in North Korea: Focusing on the Illegal Sales of House Use Permits*, East Asia Economic Studies, Vol. 27, No. 1, 2015, pp. 304-308.

[Table 6-3] Housing Arrangement Method By Years

(Unit: %)

Point of Purchase	Year	Year of escaping North Korea		
		2011-2014 (Answered by 547)	2015-2017 (Answered by 351)	2018-2020 (Answered by 227)
Assigned by the state		21.6	20.2	15.9
Personally purchased		55.4	50.7	65.6
Built by the owner		7.1	12.3	4.8
Inherited		13.7	14.5	11.0
Assigned by a relative or friend		2.2	2.3	1.8
Others		0.0	0.0	0.9
Total		100.0	100.0	100.0

\* Source: The Institute of Peace and Unification Studies, Seoul National University, *Changes in the North Korean Society 2012-2020*, The Institute of Peace and Unification Studies, Seoul National University, 2022, p. 50, <Table 2-9>

construction businesses and sell those houses to those who seek a new house, for example, for their children who just got married and need to move out of their parents' home.<sup>12</sup>

According to the defectors from North Korea, such house sales have gained traction since the mid-2000s.<sup>13</sup>

This period coincides with the time when marketplaces started to boom with the opening of general markets. Among the North Korean defectors between 2018 and 2020, 65.6% answered they personally purchased their residences, while the rate of those who answered they received one from the state decreased to 15.9% (Table 6-3),

<sup>12</sup> Jeonga Cho, Eunyeong Choi, *A Tale of Two Cities, Pyongyang and Hyesan: The Living Space for North Koreans*, Korea Institute for National Unification, 2017, pp. 40-45, 112-116.

<sup>13</sup> The Institute of Peace and Unification, *Changes in the North Korean Society in 2016: Marketization, Informationization, and Social Differentiation*, The Institution of Peace and Unification, Seoul National university pp.55-56

which indicates that acquiring a residence is gradually becoming the responsibility of an individual, rather than the state.

In addition, the data from the 2008 North Korean Census showed that the majority of households in North Korea was composed of four members, while the majority of residents used single-building multi-unit residents (apartments) (Table 6-4). However, according to the *Democratic People's Republic of Korea: Socio-Economic, Demographic and Health Survey 2014*, which was jointly published by the United Nations Population Fund and the Central Bureau of Statistics of the DPRK, 32.8% were detached houses, 41.7% town houses, and 25.0% were apartments, indicating that the share of apartment increased while the share of detached house and town houses decreased. This means that more and more North Koreans are now living in apartments.

**[Table 6-4] Types of Residences and Number of Household Members (2008)**

The Number of People in a Household	Detached house	Tenement house	Apartment	Others	Total
1	32,283	47,675	18,350	858	99,166
2	252,325	325,257	166,246	7,457	751,285
3	383,514	532,520	248,767	10,466	1,175,267
4	672,731	944,701	471,396	18,161	2,106,989
5	416,459	493,876	234,994	10,410	1,155,739
6	177,791	187,153	87,328	4,164	456,436
7	40,851	37,973	21,460	1,005	101,289
8 or more	12,461	15,280	13,168	391	41,300
Total	1,988,415	2,584,435	1,261,709	52,912	5,887,471

\* Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, *The DPRK 2008 National Census Report*, Central Bureau of Statistics, 2009, <Table 46>



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### 3 Leisure and Holidays

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North Koreans must participate in not only in their production activities but also in non-production activities. Since the economic meltdown, North Koreans are now occupied by their private businesses after their regular working hours. Therefore, it is difficult for them to have a leisure time in their daily lives. On top of this, the poor power supply of the country makes it even more difficult to enjoy a leisure time.

Some of the common leisure of North Koreans include watching movies, performances, or TVs. Watching movies and performances has been traditional ways of spending time for North Koreans. Group watching by factories, collective farms, or workplaces is common. Due to the poor power supply, more North Koreans watch their TVs using solar panels or batteries. Especially, with the influx of foreign movies or TV shows, it appears that watching them saved on portable media rather than over the national network is becoming more popular.

Since the beginning of the Kim Jong Un era, more emphasis is put on sports as leisure activities. The North Korean government sought to promote sports as regular leisure activities among its people. Since the 1990s and the economic meltdown, promoting sports have also suffered. In accordance with the ‘songun policy’ of Chairman Kim Jong Il of the National Defense Committee, the North Korean government promoted sports activities for the public centered around the “defense sports.” However, those who had difficulties with making ends meet did not have extra energy for sports activities, and the government, too,

was not in a position to provide support for such activities.<sup>14</sup>

However, the situation has been gradually changing since the inauguration of President Kim Jong Un. As the government invested more in sports, the promotion of sports among the people is gaining more traction.

The North Korean government is trying to build/remodel sports facilities to encourage sports activities among its people. In November 2012, they opened the “People’s Outdoor Ice Rink” in Pyeongyang, along with a large-scale roller-skate rinks. This was followed by the roller-skate rinks in Nampo, Wonsan, and other cities in the country, making roller-skate and in-line skate popular. In May 2013, North Korea opened “Rungra People’s Sports Park” which was equipped with soccer fields, basketball courts, volleyball courts, and roller-skate rinks. A large-scale water amusement park called “Munsu Waterpark,” and “Mirim Horse-Riding Club” was also opened.

Symbolic, large-scale sports facilities such as the “Pyongyang Gymnasium” and the “May 1 Stadium” of Rungrado island were remodeled, along with the completion of the remodeling of “Pyongyang Youth Street Sports Village,” which was the cradle of Olympic medalists like the Taereung Village of South Korea and the major winter sports facility, “Paektusan Sports Village.” In 2017, they completed “Pyongyang City Sports Village” which was equipped with a general sports center, soccer fields, basketball courts, volleyball courts, and accommodation facilities near the Botong River in Pyeongyang.

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<sup>14</sup> Ju Hyun, Ji Ho Ahn, *A Study on the Changes in the Sports Policies of North Korea*, “Korea Journal of Sports History”, Vol. 20, No. 3, 2015, pp. 153-155.

One particular type of sports that draws attention in relation to the promotion of physical activities among the people is skiing. Even though the majority of North Koreans cannot afford skiing, the facility to make it a popular sport is expanding. For example, the large-scale “Masikryong Ski Resort”, opened in December 2013. Later, the “Ganggye Ski Resort” opened in Jagang Island on January 2018, which was smaller in size and targeted for the youth. Since 2018, the National Sports Competition for adolescents added skiing to its list of events.

In the meantime, traveling, which is a popular leisure activity in South Korea, is not widespread in the North. A trip permit is required, and the transportation infrastructure is still in poor condition. There are two types of trip permits, a business trip permit and a travel permit. A business trip permit is issued when a person needs to travel for an official business, while a travel permit can be issued for personal trips, such as a trip to visit relatives for a family occasion, like a wedding or a funeral. However, since the economic meltdown, more travel permits are being issued in exchange for a kickback, for the purpose of conducting private businesses. It appears that more residents are traveling with a travel permit, to stay in big cities and gather the latest information to accumulate wealth.

The legal holidays can also be a good opportunity for the people to enjoy their leisure time and take a break from the busy everyday life. The national holidays of North Korea can be divided into socialist holidays, international holidays, and traditional holidays.

The key holidays celebrated by the North Korean government include April 15, the birthday of Kim Il Sung; February 16, the birthday of Kim Jong Il; February 8, the foundation day of the Korean People’s

**[Table 6-5] Public Holidays of North Korea**

Name *(Name Used by the North Korean Government)	Date (as of 2023)
New Year's Day	January 1
Lunar New Year's Day (Seollal)	January 22
Korean People's Army Foundation Day(Military Foundation Day)	February 8
Birthday of Kim Jong Il (Day of the Shining Star)	February 16
International Women's Day	March 8
Pure Brightness Festival(Folk Holiday)	April 5
Birthday of Kim Il Sung(Day of the Sun)	April 15
Korean People's Revolutionary Army Foundation Day	April 25
May Day (International Worker's Day)	May 1
Foundation day of the Korean Children's Union	June 6
Armistice Day (Victory Day of the Fatherland Liberation War)	July 27
Liberation Day	August 15
Commencement day of the Kim Jong Il's <i>songun</i> Policy(Day of <i>Songun</i> )	August 25
Foundation day of the regime	September 9
Chuseok (Korean Thanksgiving Day)	September 29
Foundation Day of the Workers' Party (Party Foundation Day)	October 10
Mother's Day	November 16
Socialist Constitution Adoption Day (Socialist Constitution Day)	December 27

Army; August 15, the Liberation Day; September 9, the foundation day of the regime; October 10, the anniversary of the WPK; and, December 27, the anniversary of the enactment of the constitution. The North Korean government designated April 15 and February 16 as the most important and joyful holiday for the Korean people. They also celebrate May 1, the International Labor Day and March 8, the World's Women's Day.

The North Korean government also celebrates traditional Korean holidays such as the Lunar New Year's Day (Seollal) or Chuseok. In

the past, the North Korean government recognized only the western New Year's Day, calling the traditional holidays the remains of feudal suppression. However, since 1972, they have allowed the people to visit the graves of their kins and partially revived traditional holidays. In 1988, Chuseok was designated as a holiday again, followed by the recognition of the Lunar New Year's Day and Hansik. In 2003, Kim Jong Il celebrated Lunar New Year's Day instead of the western New Year's Day, taking a day off for the New Year's Full Moon Day (Jeongwol Daeborum). He also ordered Danoh and Chuseok to be called Surinal and Hangawi (after the traditional names of these holidays.) However, the traditional holidays are not institutionalized. They are up to the designations by the government. Therefore, to make a traditional holiday a no-work day, it is necessary for the Cabinet of North Korea to designate the traditional holidays of the year an off day through an official announcement.

One of the flagship programs for the folk holiday is the “ethnic sports”(minjok cheyuk) based on traditional games. The ethnic sports that are recommended by the government to the people Ssireum (Korean wrestling), Geune (swing), Neoltuigi (a modified version of



How North Koreans celebrate the Luna New Year's Day (Seollal)

see-saw), Taekwondo, and tug-a-war. There are group and individual competitions for different events during a “Ethnic Sports Competition.”

## 4 Healthcare and Welfare

The healthcare system of North Korea can be characterized by free universal healthcare and preventive medicine. The current constitution of North Korea pronounces the right of the people to have access to free medical care. As a result, North Korea enacted its People’s Healthcare Law, pledging free-of-charge access to medicines, diagnoses, lab tests, treatments, surgery, doctor’s visits, admission, and meals. All services and recuperations are also free of charge. The same law emphasizes the disease prevention activities by the state and specifies the doctor’s jurisdiction system for preventive medical programs (Article 28), to establish its own preventive medical system.

Unfortunately, after the economic meltdown and marketization, there is a significant gap between these systems and the reality. According to defectors, while the state is still providing some part of treatment, admission, surgery, and medicines, individuals still have to pay for a considerable part of it. And, when you have surgery or are admitted to a hospital, it is the general custom to offer a small amount of money or give a meal treat to the healthcare professionals as a token of appreciation.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Korea Institute for National Unification, *White Paper on Human Rights North Korea 2022*, Korea Institute for National Unification, 2022, pp. 271-275.

However, the vaccination program for children, which is a part of the preventive medicine program, is working relatively well. According to the UNICEF, the vaccination rate of North Korean children was as low as 35% in 1997, in the midst of the economic crisis. However, with the continued support from international organizations such as the WHO and GAVI, the rate exceeded 90% since 2006.<sup>16</sup> In 2021, the UNICEF reported that the child vaccination rate of North Korea in 2020 was between 97 and 99%.<sup>17</sup> However, according to the statistics published by the WHO and the UNICEF, the vaccination rate of North Korean children dropped significantly in 2021. This is believed to be the result of the disruption of the medical support programs of international organizations due to the lock down of the border during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>18</sup>

They do have a social security system, which is the backbone of social welfare. The “Social Welfare Law” of North Korea obliges the state to pay social security pensions and subsidies to the eligible persons such as those who cannot work due to illness or disabilities, elderly without supporting household members, children, people with disabilities, and otherwise designated by the state. In accordance with the “socialist Labor Law,” the government must pay retirement pension to retiring workers after working a minimum number of years, after they turn 60, for men, and 55, for women.

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<sup>16</sup> Chief of UNICEF Pyeongyang, “North Korea’s Child Vaccination Rate above 90%,” *No-Cut News*, 2010.1.20.

<sup>17</sup> UNICEF, *The State of the World’s Children 2021*, 2021, p. 200.

<sup>18</sup> WHO, WHO Immunization Data portal, <http://immunization.who.int>.

**[Table 6-6]** Changes in Total Birth Rate and Life Expectancy

Classification	1993	2008	2014
Total Fertility Rate	2.2	2.0	1.9
Life Expectancy*	73.2	69.3	72.1

\* Source: DPRK CBS and UN Population Fund, DPRK: Socio-Economic, Demographic and Health Survey 2014, CBS, 2015, p. 100; DPRK CBS, DPRK: Population Projection (2014-2050), CBS, 2016, pp. 33-35.

However, according to defectors, such social welfare programs are not of much help to the livelihood of the people due to the dire fiscal state of the government. As for the workmen's compensation, while it is required by the rule to pay social security pensions or subsidies, they are in many cases not paid or only in a small amount that is not enough to support livelihood. The retirement pension, too, was paid in a modest amount which was not a lot but could support livelihood until the economic meltdown in the 1990s. However, since the economic meltdown, only a small amount is being paid, which is not helpful enough to keep the retiree afloat.<sup>19</sup>

Especially, if you focus on the changes in the population structure of the North Korean society, the welfare for the elderly is expected to be a priority issue in North Korea. According to the 2008 Census, 9.0% of the total population is 65 or older, which is more than the "aging society" threshold of 7.0%. The joint sampling survey by the UN Population Fund and the Central Statistics Bureau of North Korea showed that the aged population accounted for 10.2%, which was up

<sup>19</sup> Korea Institute for National Unification, *White Paper on Human Rights North Korea 2022*, Korea Institute for National Unification, 2022, pp. 331-337.



by 1.2% from the level in 2008.<sup>20</sup> With the decline in the total fertility rate and extended life expectancy, the aging of North Korean society (Table 6-6) is an irreversible trend. The Central Statistics Bureau, too, forecasts that the country will become an aged society between 2030 and 2035, where 14% or more of the total population is 65 or older, based on the lower fertility rate, while the percentage of the aged population is expected to reach 19.2% between 2045 and 2050.<sup>21</sup>

In addition, since the economic meltdown, the sense of responsibility for the family to care for the elderly and the mutual aid within local communities weakened, while it is difficult for the elderly to participate in the new market economy. As a result, the elderly in North Korea is having difficulty in making ends meet in their retirement life. Therefore, if the current population trend and economic trend persist, the elderly in North Korea are likely to become poorer over time.

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**20** Jiyong Choi, *An Evaluation of the Recent Population Structure of North Korea*, Modern North Korean Studies, Vol. 20, No.1, 2017, pp.25-26

**21** Hong et al., *Changing Trends in the Population of North Korea, Factors, and Forecast*, Korea Institute for National Unification, 2020, pp. 258-259.

## Section 3

# Human Rights

After experiencing inhuman war crimes in World War II and large-scale violations of human rights, humankind began to see the human rights issue not only as a domestic issue but also as an international one. As a result, human rights are now seen as a universal task.

The General Assembly of the UN adopted the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” in December 1948 to designate the universal respect and observance of human rights and fundamental freedom as the duty for all member states. This was followed by efforts to enact the international human rights laws to legally guarantee the rights specified in the Declaration. As a result, the “International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights” and the “International Covenant of Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights” were adopted in 1966. The North Korean government joined the two international covenants in 1981 and became a member of the United Nations in 1991.

In the eyes of the international community, the level of human

rights of North Koreans is believed to be extremely. The real situations of human rights in North Korea were revealed in detail to the world through the report submitted by the UN's Commission of Inquiry set up in March 2013 to the UN General Assembly in February 2014 (hereinafter the UN North Korean Human Rights Report.)

※ **The foundation and activities of the Commission of Inquiry**

The UN Human Rights Council decided the formation of the Commission of Inquiry (COI) on March 21, 2013. The three main goals of the COI were, respectively (1) to investigate and document the cases of human right violations by North Korea; (2) gathering and documenting the testimony of the victims and violators of human rights; (3) identifying the responsible parties. The COI conducted more than 240 unofficial interviews within the victims of human rights violation by North Korea and other witnesses over the first year since its foundation and hearings held in Seoul, Tokyo, London, and Washington D.C., and the resultant North Korea Human Right Report was submitted to the General Assembly of the United Nations on February 7, 2014. The COI submitted the detailed findings of the investigation to the North Korean government and based on the conclusion that the leadership of North Korea, including Kim Jong Un, who was the 1st Secretary of WPK at that time, were the perpetrators of significant and widespread human right violations, sent the findings of the investigation and a letter urging improvement of human rights directly to the 1st Secretary Kim Jong Un on January 20, 2014. With the activities of the COI, the world was now better informed of the current status of human rights of North Koreans, which opened the door to more detailed and specific human rights improvement activities compared to those in the past.

## **1** **Serious Violations of Civil and Political Rights**

According to the UN North Korea Human Rights Report, the civil and political rights of North Koreans are being violated in many areas. Civil and political rights include the freedom of thought, speech, and religion, the rights for equality, freedom of travel and movement, and right for life.

## 1) Violation of Freedom of Thought, Speech and Religion

The North Korean government operates a system of ideological education to install personal cult and absolute obedience to the supreme leader since childhood, effectively blocking any thought that is outside of the regime's propaganda. Almost all aspects of social activities of North Koreans are controlled by the WPK. The state monitors its residents through social organizations under the WPK, making it mandatory for the people to join these organizations, and control their daily lives. Any anti-state activities or anti-government speech by the people of North Korea is strictly forbidden and heavily punished.

Access to TV, radio, and the internet are severely restricted. As a result, people's rights to access independent sources of information is not guaranteed. The only information provider allowed in North Korea is state controlled media. Any use of mass media must be in compliance with the instructions given by the WPK. All telephone conversations are monitored. Telephone calls to the outside world is severely restricted for the general public, and only domestic phone calls are allowed. Recently, the North Korean government established an organization dedicated to detecting and punishing any access to outside information. Especially, they are issuing more severe punishment toward the access to South Korean visual media.

In the meantime, they consider the proliferation of Christianity as a serious threat, seeing it as the foundation for the organization and interactions of social and political nature outside of the government's control. Except for a handful of churches that have been established

and controlled by the North Korean government out of necessity, ordinary residents are prohibited from having or practicing a religion. Christians are severely punished when identified. This is a violation of the freedom of religion and, at the same time, discrimination against a certain religion.

## 2) Discrimination

Even though the government of North Korea claims that its people enjoy equal rights, there is a class system in North Korea which is called the *songbun* system. The *songbun* system classifies its people into different classes based on the social class and background, as well as political views and religion. The discrimination by *songbun* is accompanied by the widespread gender discrimination in North Korea. Even though the state has made some to reduce discrimination, the people with a disability are also subject to discrimination.

In the past, the *songbun* system was an important factor that determined an individual's area of residence, type of residence, job, education (especially college education), the amount of food they received, and even choosing their spouses, covering almost all aspects of life. The traditional discrimination by the *songbun* evolved in a very sophisticated manner due to the spread of market economy within North Korea. With the collapse of the basic public services, which are now available only when you pay for them, people without money and or a prestigious *songbun*, who account for the majority of North Koreans, are further marginalized and subject to worse discrimination.

In the meantime, discrimination against women is rampant in every

corner of the society. Gender discrimination in North Korea takes the form of forcing only women to pay kickbacks or fining specifically women only. Across North Korea, sexual violence or gender-based violence is rampant, and the women who suffered such crimes find it very difficult to receive protection, support services, or legal remedies from the government. As for the political domain, only 5% of the high-level party officers are women, and 10% among government bureaucrats.

Such discrimination against women come hand in hand with a plethora of human rights violations to result in further disadvantages for women. The violation of the human rights for food and travel exposes women to the threat of human trafficking, trapping them in the snare of prostitution. The utmost suppression of the freedom of speech and association also contribute to the inequality suffered by women compared to men. Due to these restrictions, the women in North Korea have been deprived of their right to associate and claim their rights through an organized movement. Lastly, the North Korean government restricted the people with disabilities from living in Nampo, Gaeseong, Chongjin, and other areas which are visited by foreigners and still fail to secure the rights of mobility for the people with disabilities in their residences as well as public spaces.

Every society has a certain degree of discrimination. However, North Korea has introduced discriminations as official policy, severely affecting the freedom of individuals. Discrimination is an important tool for the elites to maintain their control over the people and to protect themselves from the potential threats.

### 3) Violation of the Freedom of Travel and Movement

North Koreans have to live where the state dictates them to live and work, which violates the freedom of their choice. One of the key factors they use when they determine where an individual must live and work is one's *songbun*. Those who are loyal to the party can live and work in a better environment, while those who are found suspicious politically are relocated to a marginalized area along with their families. The special position of Pyongyang is clear evidence of such a discriminatory policy, as only the selected few who have proven their loyalty to the party can be allowed to live in the capital.

In addition, North Korean cannot travel out of their place of residence or to another region within North Korea without the official permit issued by the government. The purpose of this policy is to maintain different living standards of North Koreans, limit the flow of information, and maximize control by the party. As a result of this policy, the social and familial bonds are being sacrificed. In addition, North Korea practically banned its people from taking overseas trips, violating the right of the people to leave the country.

The North Korean government abuses and even tortures its people when they are caught trying to defect or sent back to North Korea after escaping. Also, these victims are detained without a trial and for a very long period of time. In some cases, they are exposed to sexual violence while their bodies are searched. North Koreans who are found to have contacted South Korean citizens or a Christian are sent to a gulag or a prison or even executed without a trial.

#### 4) Violation of the Right to Life

North Koreans' right to live is continuously violated. Shot in the process of escaping the North, beaten to death in detention facilities, and executed for crimes of theft, drug trafficking or production and distribution of porn are only a few examples. The North Korean government gathers its people and forces them to watch these executions. Such public executions are intended to instill the fear of the regime among the people.

The police and security officers of North Korea are involved in organized violence and punishment which are violations of human rights. They arbitrarily arrest and detain those who are suspected as political dissidents. Also, these suspects in detention are deliberately starved or put in an inhuman environment to force a confession or make them frame another person.

The North Koreans who are involved in a serious political offense are detained in the "political prison camps" (control facility) without any trial or other legal processes. They are locked up in solitary rooms, and their families are not even told whether they are still alive. In the past, even the entire family members (three generations, including grandparents) of such political prisoners were sent to a gulag as well. While this is still happening, the frequency is decreasing compared to the past. The North Korean government denies the existence of their gulags, but their existence can still be confirmed by the testimonies of former security guards, inmates, or the residents who lived near such gulags, as well as satellite images.

Serious human rights violations are also happening in regular



prisons (correction facilities) and a variety of short-term forced labor detention centers. Most inmates in these facilities are victims who were imprisoned arbitrarily without a trial or tried ignoring the fair legal processes in international law. The inmates of regular prisons are starved deliberately and mobilized in illegal forced labor in an organized manner. Arbitrary abuses such as torture or sexual violence by the guards or other inmates are widespread without accountability. In some cases, basic personal hygienic supplies or feminine products are not supplied.

## 5) Abduction of Foreigners

Under the name of a state policy, North Korea has abducted and refused to return them, causing a widespread mass disappearances. Between the 1960s and 1980s, many citizens of South Korea, Japan, and other countries were abducted by North Korea. North Korea used its soldiers and intelligence officers to kidnap the victims. Most of these victims were taken to provide labor or other skills to the North Korean government. Some of these victims were used in espionage and terrorist attacks, either directly or indirectly.

These abductees were stripped of their right of travel within North Korea and the right to be respected as a human being, as well as the right to be free from torture or other cruel, inhuman, and humiliating treatment. The victims are under tight surveillance and control, and they are being discriminated in education and employment. The North Korean government has not provided any information or whereabouts of the abductees.

## 2 Violations of the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

The economic, social, and cultural rights of North Koreans are not respected properly. Economic, social, and cultural rights include rights to food, health, education, and social security.

### 1) Violation of Food Rights

North Korean government uses food as a means to control its people. North Koreans are discriminated against based on the *songbun* in terms of their access to food and distribution. Some areas such as Pyongyang, enjoy more benefits compared to other areas. There are even cases where the distributed food ration is too small; or the frequency, rationed amount, or the mixing ratio between grains are different depending on the region, occupation, or the state-owned business they work for.

The North Korean government was already aware of the worsening food supply before they sought food aids from international organizations for the first time in 1995. Since the end of the 1980s, the ration system failed to provide the people with a sufficient amount of food. However, the North Korean government covered up the information, and the people could not find an alternative for the central rationing system that collapsed. With the aid from the international community being delayed, many lives perished. The North Korean government still restricted its people from traveling inside and outside its border or purchase food from non-official markets, even after they failed to provide them with enough food.

The North Korean government still committed inhuman acts even during the peak of the famine, obstructing the relief efforts of the international community. Most of the time, they prioritized the military-purpose expenditures for the development of weapons and the nuclear program, abandoning their duty to mobilize the maximum available resources to feed its own people. Furthermore, North Korea even failed in providing its enlisted men with foods.

In the highly centralized decision-making process of North Korea, the decisions on the production and distribution of foods, allocation of the government funds, and the decisions regarding the use of the humanitarian reliefs or aids from the international community, were made by a handful of elite bureaucrats. The people of North Korea, who were affected by these decisions, could not hold the bureaucrats responsible. North Korea has the structural problems including the laws and regulations that violate the food right of its people. Hence the food supply condition of North Korea can only become worse.

## 2) Violation of Right for Health, Education, and Social Security

The in access to healthcare, widespread illegal medical practices, and insufficient preventive medicine threaten the health right of North Koreans. The indirect costs involved with surgery are paid by the patient. Due to the insufficiency of the medicines within the official healthcare system, *jangmadang* is becoming an alternative route for medicine purchase. There are also discriminations based on the *songbun* and class of the people, such as special medical facilities exclusively available to party officials and their families only or separate department within a hospital dedicated only for party officials.

Also, the right to education is not guaranteed due to the insufficiency in educational facilities and equipment, discrimination in the opportunity for education, and the limited options available for learners. Recently, the free education system is not working properly, and the financial burdens for school improvement and purchase of teaching materials as well as the operational cost of the school and the wage of teachers are passed over to the parents. Also, social security rights are being violated, as the support and protection systems for retirees, the elderly, people whose livelihood is at risk due to diseases or disabilities, or the workers who suffered from work-related injuries or diseases are in a poor condition.

The poor food, healthcare, and educational situations in the country negatively affect the human rights of the marginalized class in the society, especially women, children, and people with disabilities.<sup>22</sup> The UN estimated that since the closure of the border to stop the spread of COVID-19 in January 2020 and the strengthened internal control, the human right situation in North Koreans further deteriorated.<sup>23</sup>

### 3 International Efforts to Improve North Korean Human Rights

The international community, especially the United Nations, has been urging North Korea to take human right improvement measures

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<sup>22</sup> Korea Institute for National Unification, *White Paper on Human Rights North Korea 2022*, Korea Institute for National Unification, 2022, pp. 348-449.

<sup>23</sup> "UN Secretary-General : North Korea's Suppression of Human Rights Worsens with COVID-19 Control Measures," *Yonhap News*, Aug. 31, 2022

in addition to their expression of regret over its dire human right situation. The UN Commission on Human Rights adopted three “Resolution on the Situation of Human Rights in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea” from 2003 to 2005. In June 2006, the UN Commission on Human Rights was reformed to the UNHRC, which continued the adoption of this resolution every March since 2008.

**[Table 6-7] ROK Government Stance on UN Resolutions Concerning North Korean Human Rights**

Classification	UN Human Rights Council, UNHRC		UN General Assembly	
	Mode of adoption	Stance of the ROK	Mode of adoption	Stance of the ROK
Year				
2003	Vote	Absence	-	-
2004	Vote	Abstention	-	-
2005	Vote	Abstention	Vote	Abstention
2006	-	-	Vote	Aye
2007	-	-	Vote	Abstention
2008	Vote	Aye	Vote	Co-sponsor and aye
2009	Vote	Co-sponsor and aye	Vote	Co-sponsor and aye
2010	Vote	Co-sponsor and aye	Vote	Co-sponsor and aye
2011	Vote	Co-sponsor and aye	Vote	Co-sponsor and aye
2012	No vote	Co-sponsor	No vote	Co-sponsor
2013	No vote	Co-sponsor	No vote	Co-sponsor
2014	Vote	Co-sponsor and aye	Vote	Co-sponsor and aye
2015	Vote	Co-sponsor and aye	Vote	Co-sponsor and aye
2016	No vote	Co-sponsor	No vote	Co-sponsor
2017	No vote	Co-sponsor	No vote	Co-sponsor
2018	No vote	Co-sponsor	No vote	Co-sponsor
2019	No vote	Absence of joint proposal	No vote	Absence of joint proposal
2020	No vote	Absence of joint proposal	No vote	Absence of joint proposal
2021	No vote	Absence of joint proposal	No vote	Absence of joint proposal
2022	No vote	Absence of joint proposal	No vote	Co-sponsor

Also, the General Assembly of the United Nations continued adopting this resolution, 18 times in a row, from 2005 to 2022. South Korean government participated in this effort as a co-sponsor for 12 years, except for the period from 2019 to 2021, between the 63rd General Assembly in 2008 to the 77th General Assembly held in 2022. In the meantime, according to the recommendation in the UN North Korean Human Rights Report in 2014, the UN Human Right Office in Seoul was opened in June 2015.

Thanks to such interest and efforts from the international community, North Korea has shown some responses, focusing on the human rights of women, children, people with disabilities, and other marginalized populations. The North Korean government joined international human rights conventions such as the “Convention of the Right of the Children” in 1990 and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 2001. In the April 2009 amendment of the constitution, a new clause saying “... shall respect human rights and protect them” was added (Article 8) for the first time. Also, they ratified other human rights conventions such as the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography (2014), and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2016). In 2017, North Korea allowed the visits and reviews by the Children’s Right Commission and the Committee on the Elimination of the Discriminations against Women, along with a visit by the UN Special Rapporteur for the human rights of the persons with disabilities. In January 2019, North Korea also submitted a progress report on the Convention on the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities. In addition,

North Korea participated in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR,) where the entirety of UN member states reviews the overall condition of human rights in every four years. As of 2022, they have responded to three reviews, namely in 2009, 2014, and 2019. However, North Korea adheres to the claim of “Our Style of Human Rights” where the interest of the group comes before the rights of individuals and strongly rejects the recommendations from the outside world as meddling with domestic affairs.



## Culture and Arts

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**Section 1.** Culture and Arts

**Section 2.** Media and Publications



## Section 1

# Culture and Arts

### 1 Culture and Arts Policies

The culture and art policies of North Korea are typically referred to as the “literature and art policies.” This means the policies and administrative plans of the North Korean government regarding literature, art, and culture. North Korea has been actively using its culture and art policies to maintain its hereditary power system. For the succession of power within Kim’s family, Kim Jong Il came up with the “Theory of the Creation of the Image of *Suryong*” (*sulyeonghyeongsang changjoilon*) to ensure that the sole ideological system can control all North Koreans. Culture and art have been playing an important role for the propaganda of the North Korean regime. The culture and art in North Korea seek highly political goals, unlike the culture and art in a free democracy.

North Korea considers the “socialist national culture” which

advances the ideas of the party, people, and social class, along with traditional cultures, in line with the reality of socialism, as the essence of culture. Such a belief system persists in the era of Kim Jong Un as well, with more stringent elimination policies against non-socialist/anti-socialist cultures. This is based on a view that the influx of culture from outside is cultural infiltration. They see Hallyu and other cultures of free democracies as a matter of the survival of socialism and try to prevent agitation within its society. As such, North Korea adopted its “Law on the Exclusion of Reactionist Ideologies and Cultures” in December 2020, which imposed severe punishment against the influx of the ideologies and cultures from outside.

### 1) Juche-Songun Art Theory

Immediately after the Liberation, North Korea adopted socialist realism and KAPF<sup>1</sup> to unfold an art policy based on “national forms and socialist contents.” Such an art policy was updated with the instruction by Kim Il Sung, saying “all creations of art must be focused on the anti-Japanese revolutionary literature,” in the mid-1960s. The key point of this anti-Japanese art theory is to inherit the plays and songs the Chinese used in the 1930s as a means for an anti-Japanese revolution. The ideology of one-man dictatorship is reflected in art policies, as they sought to idolize Kim Il Sung using literature and art.

The culture and art policy of North Korea saw some changes in the 1980s. At the heart of these changes was the “Follow Hidden

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<sup>1</sup> Korea Artista Proleta Federacio, formed in 1925.

Heroes” movement. It was Kim Jong Il who led this movement. The main difference from the movements of the past was that the main characters were changed from the heroes of anti-Japanese revolution to the “ordinary folks” such as a technicians, lower-level party members, nurses, homemakers, or farmers. However, when Kim Jong Il switched the emphasis to revolution and ideology again, the culture and art policies started to emphasize visualization of the *suryong* once again. This could have been an attempt to protect its regime in the aftermath of the collapse of the socialist bloc.

The 1990s was the time when Kim Jong Il completed the development of the *juche* culture and art theory. Kim Jong Il published “*The Theory of Dancing Art*” (1990), “*The Theory of Music Art*” (1991), and “*The Theory of Juche Literature*” (1992). With these, the *juche* culture and art theory has become the official view of the party on the culture and art. Some examples of practical guidelines based on the *juche* culture and art theory include the “Theory of Seeds” and the “Theory of Mass Art.” North Korea argues that “the seed is the essence of creation, and the seed is the basis of the valuation of the artwork. An artist must ensure proper establishment of the seed to deliver his or her own ideology and aesthetic intention precisely, while ensuring the philosophical depth of the artistic creation.”

In addition, they emphasized that “in artistic activities, one must stay away from the tendency to rely on specialized workers. It is imperative to remove mysticism around creation, and literature and art must progress by the hands of the mass.” One more characteristic of the *juche* theory is that they tend to strengthen nationalistic tendencies while embracing different schools of culture. This can

be a manifestation of the will of the North Korean government to consolidate North Korean society during the economic meltdown in the 1990s.

In the 2000s, North Korea added the “Songun Revolutionary Literature” in addition to the *juche* culture and art theory of Kim Jong Il. The Songun Revolutionary Literature was defined as “a progress of the *juche* realism literature and a new type of literature originating from *juche* realism” and characterized Songun Revolutionary Literature as “the manifestation of the spirit of anti-imperial revolution, manifestation of patriotism, powerful engagement and moral lessons.”<sup>2</sup>

In December 2002, Korean Central Broadcasting Station used the term “*Songun* Revolutionary Music” for the first time, making “*songun*” the descriptive term of the literature and art of the Kim Jong Il era. Later, it was further organized into “*Songun* Visual Art” and “*Songun* Cinema.” The essence of these concepts is to achieve solidarity among North Koreans and ensure the security of the regime through the practice of revolutionary spirits by the military and the protection of the *suryong* with their lives. Starting from the mid-2000s, “pragmatism” and “emphasis on the national culture” were added to the culture and art policies. “Pragmatism” was for culture and art to serve the reform and opening for pragmatic gains. This could be called a significant change in the culture and art area that appeared after July 1 Measures in 2002, The “emphasis on the national culture” was used as a tool to block the capitalist culture flowing into the society due to the reform

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<sup>2</sup> The Essence and Characteristics of *songun* Literature: A new Stage of *juche* Realism Literature, *Chosun Munhak*, Jan. 2005

and opening. The “*Songun* Literature and Art,” both in their themes and contents, adhered to the existing themes of the praising the *suyong*, preservation the regime, and “revolution and construction,” while probing different directions.

## 2) Powerful and Civilized Socialist State

The culture and art policy of the Kim Jong Un era can be summarized into the notion of “socialist civilization,” and “powerful socialist civilization.” The notion of socialist civilization was introduced for the first time in 2012 and later further elaborated in the “*Theory of the Subjects of the Construction of a Powerful Socialist Civilization*” (2017). By a powerful socialist civilization, they mean, first, a country where all of the people have a high level of cultural knowledge, healthy body, and high morality; second, a country where all of the people live under the most civilized conditions and environment as they enjoy socialist cultural lives; third, a country that is full of sound and ethical conducts in everyday life.<sup>3</sup> Kim Jong Un demanded that “the innovative style of creation introduced by the Moranbong Band shall be followed as a model,” He emphasized the use of a new form, making it more science-based, and a higher level of modernization<sup>4</sup>, which indicated that being science-based is also another direction of the culture and art policies of the Kim Jong Un era.

Through the general review of operations during the 7th Party

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<sup>3</sup> Myong Gwang Soon, *The Theory of juche on the Construction of a Powerful Socialist Civilization*, Pyongyang, Social Science Publishing, 2017, p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> *Rodong Sinmun*, May 17, 2014.

Congress, Kim Jong Un also underlined that literature and art must visualize the achievements and grandeur of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il. In addition to Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il, “the greatness of Kim Jong Un,” “Our Style of Socialism,” “*Manrima* Spirit” were pronounced too, while focusing on the “devotion by the youth,” ‘self-prosperity,’ and “economic stimulation.” Based on these notions, the culture and art policies of Kim Jong Un are expanding over to tourist facilities.

### 3) The Ideology of Our State First and National Symbols

The term “Our State First Ideology” was used for the first time in 2017 and has been in use for propaganda and enrichment programs ever since. In 2019, the term was officially used during the new year’s speech. As a result, North Korea has been emphasizing the “National Symbol” enrichment programs based on the notion of “Our State First.” and encouraging their artists to create cultural and artistic creations based on these symbols.

In addition to the symbols of the country which were already mentioned in the constitution, such as the national anthem, national flag, national crest, name of the country, and its capital, the national dog (Pungsan Dogs), national tree (pine tree), national language (Pyeongyang Culture Language), national bird (goshawk), national liquor (Pyeongyangju, Pyeongyang Soju, Goryeaju), and national flower (magnolia) were newly designated as the symbols of the country during the Kim Jong Un era. Since the declaration of Our State First, the national flag has been designated as the most important symbol of the country, and the song inspired by the flag, titled “Our National

Flag” is being promoted vigorously.

It appears that these enrichment programs surrounding the national symbols are intended to create the image of a “normal state” and use it as the basis to encourage national pride and patriotism, seeking internal solidarity to achieve self-prosperity.

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## 2 Reality of Culture and Arts

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### 1) The Kim Il Sung - Kim Jong Il Era

#### Literature

Before 1967, the literature of North Korea focused on the critical succession of the proletariat literature and creation of the works of socialist realism. However, starting from 1967, the direction of creation was switched as the *juche* literature took the main stage. The new direction was to interpret the past focusing on the resistance movement of Kim Il Sung against the Japanese in the 1930s and view the present based on this past. Poems such as “*The Marching Course of Our Party*,” and novels such as “*Lots of Sun Flowers*.”

In the early 1970s, a novel about the history of Kim Il Sung’s revolution, titled “*Undying History*”, was published. Also, the plays that were alleged to have been staged during the anti-Japanese revolutionary movements by Kim Il Sung, such as the “*Sea of Blood*” and “*The Flower Girl*” were republished as novels.

In the 1980s, the dominant theme was to find the “hidden heroes” among ordinary people. “*A Thought on Hidden Heroes*” is one of the

stories based on such a new idea of heroes. Like “*Ode to the Youth*,” some other works combined the theme of loyalty with the romance between young individuals. As such, the 1980s were a time of relative diversity in North Korean literature.

The North Korean literature in the 1990s emphasized the loyalty to the party and visualization of the achievement of Kim Jong Il. There was a declaration of the creation of the book visualizing the achievements of Kim Jong Il, titled the “*Immortal Leadership*” in February 1990, which was followed by the “*Morning Sun*” (1989) and the “*Rifle*” (2003), which was recognized as one of the most successful works of *songun* Literature. An epic, “*Fatherland, Be Proud of Thy Young*” (2000) and “*Hwangjini*” (2002) were published too.

### **Movies and TV Shows**

The North Korean movies of up to 1967 were mainly about the reproduction of a new type of human being for constructing a socialist society and the heroes of the *chollima* era. However, with the year 1967 as the turning point, they switched to anti-Japanese literature and arts. During this time, the three revolutionary movies reportedly created by Kim Il Sung during the anti-Japanese revolutionary era of the 1930s, namely “*Sea of Blood*,” “*The Flower Girl*,” and “*The Fate of a Self-Defence Corps Man*” were produced. As such, during the 1970s, “*Suryong Visualization Movies*” were the thing. However, espionage movies such as “*Azalea of Scouts*” (1970) and family melodrama TV shows with a theme of loyalty to the regime, such as “*The Problem with My Family*” were widely popular.

In the 1980s, North Korea continued making *suryong* visualization



movies, while making the movies about “hidden heroes.” *Suryong* movies included “*Star of Korea*” ((1980 - 1987) and “*Sun of the Nation*” (1987 - 1991), while some of the famous hidden hero movies included “*A Broad Bellflower*” (1987). Another characteristic of the North Korean cinema in the 1980s is creations inspired by Korean history. Classic action movies like “*Rimkkeokjeong*” (1987) or movies inspired by folk lores and legends like “*Chunhyangjeon*” were produced.

After the collapse of the socialist block in the 1990s, the cinemas of North Korea emphasized independence and the corruption in capitalist societies. A good example was an art movie series “*Nation and Destiny*” series that started in 1992. While the movie was originally planned as a ten-part series, it was extended to 100 parts in 2002. Also, the spread of *songun* movies resulted in the production of movies depicting model soldiers, like “*He Was a Colonel*.”

In the 2000s, too, the majority of the movies produced were military-themed. After July 1 economic management improvement measures in 2002, movies with different tastes were produced. These movies included “*Manager Couple*” (2001), which was about the need to reduce unnecessary meetings while valuing pragmatic methods “*The schoolgirl’s diary*” (2006), which was about the concerns of the next generations of North Korea. “*The schoolgirl’s diary*” was the first-ever North Korean movie that was screened in the west through the movie distribution network in Europe. The movie, which was produced in a turbulent time of North Korea, after the death of Kim Il Sung and during the Arduous March, distanced itself from the revolutionary optimism which was consistently observed in the North Korean movies of the past, and showed the anxiety and frustration of the younger

generation and the psychological descriptions that were cynical about the life of the older generations, which were symbolized by the father. As a result, the movie was received with phenomenal popularity in North Korea.

The TV shows of North Korea usually have a storyline that features the achievements of the leader's family and the mental growth of the characters who joined the leaders in their struggle. A good example of these shows was "*Sophomores*" (2002). Economic stimulation is another major subject. One of the famous examples of these shows was "*The Class Continues*" (2006). Some other TV shows featured conflicts between spouses or different generations. "*Don't Wake up Mom*" (three-part) touched on the conflict between a husband and his wife, who also had a job, and "*Family*" (nine-part) which was themed around a broken marriage and divorce, were quite different from the TV shows in the past.

From time to time, North Korea has been hosting film festivals in Pyongyang, mainly inviting non-aligned countries since 1987. The official name of this film festival is "Pyongyang Peace Film Festival of the Non-Aligned and Other Developing Countries," or just "Pyongyang Film Festival." The highest honor of this festival was given to the "Gold Torch Prize." The festival included the "competition category" (full-length art movies, short-film, and animation movies) and the "non-competition category," along with a movie market. Since 2006, the official name of the festival changed to Pyongyang International Film Festival.

## Plays and Musicals

Until the 1960s, North Korean plays were about the independence from the remnants of colonial Japan, succession of the national culture, and reception of the Soviet art. In the 1960s, the themes of creation were centered around the *Chollima* Movement, which resulted in the shows like “*The Red Agitator*.” The trend changed in the 1970s. Based on the direction by Kim Jong Il, the “*Seonghwangdang* Style” of revolutionary theater (“*Seonghwangdang*” (1978)) was developed<sup>5</sup> to become an archetype later. In the 1980s, too, there were shows that were produced in this style, such as “*Hyulbunmangukhoe*” (1984) and “*A Letter from the Daughter*” (1987). These shows continued until the 1990s and are now called as the Five Revolutionary Plays in North Korea.

Since the demise of Kim Il Sung in 1994 and the coming of *songun* in the discourse of art and culture, *songun* became the principle of creation. A well-known show that corresponded well with the *songun* discourse included “*Comrade*” (1999). By the end of the 2000s, most of the plays were themed around economic stimulation. One of the well-known shows of that time was a comedy, “*Echo*” (2010). During this period, the repertoire of the 1950s and 1960s were also remade. An example of these reproductions was “*A Sentry under a Neon Lamp*” by the National Theater.

The mainstay of the musicals during the Kim Il Sung era were

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**5** The Seonghwangdang style of directing the theater is characterized by the “flow-style multi-dimensional stage art” and “bangchang.” The “flow-style stage art” means the entire stage moves without fading out the light to switch the scene. “Bangchang” means that there is a choir outside of the stage to sing.

opera-style traditional Korean music such as “*Chunhyangjeon*” and “*Simcheongjeon*.” However, since the 1960s, “modern, national-themed music dramas rooted in the lives of the people and secular lives based on traditional folk” gained ground. Some of the well-known examples of these productions include “*A New Song from the Village across the River*” (1960) which depicted the reality in socialism and “*The Eight Nymphs of Geumgangsán*” (1969). In the 1970s, Sea of Blood style music dramas started to appear under the directions by Kim Jong Il. A revolutionary music drama titled “*The Flower Girl*” (1972) and other similar works such as “*Chunhyangjeon*” (1989) were produced in this format inspired by traditional classics of Korea, called “the national music dramas.” When Kim Jong Il ordered to produce “high-quality revolutionary music dramas” based on industrious heroes, the whole theaters of music dramas in North Korea focused on the production of revolutionary music dramas.

### Music

Until the 1960s, the music in North Korea emphasized combat functionality, enrichment roles, national forms, and socialist content. But from the 1960s and onward, they stressed the modernization of the national music to suit the era of *chollima* and revolutionary music creation. Movie soundtracks started to appear around this time as well. Some of the well-known works included “*Kim Il Sung is our Commander-in-Chief*,” and “*Song of Chollima Advance*.”

In the 1970s came a wind of change to more folk-oriented, revolutionary, socialistic, and communistic music art. What differentiated at that time was the increased number of songs about the declaration

of loyalty to the *suryong* and more overseas music performances, led by Mansudae Artists Band. Especially, 1971 was a turning point, when the revolutionary music drama, “*Sea of Blood*” was announced. *Sea of Blood* style revolutionary music dramas used modified traditional musical instruments as the backbone and mixed western instruments, and the melody of these songs were heavily dominated by the traditional melodies from old Korean songs too.

The 1980s saw the proliferation of *juche* ideology in all areas. The national music was restored in line with the traditional music culture. Due to Kim Jong Il’s order to develop electronic music in a North Korean style, “Pochonbo Electronic Ensemble” (1985), which was performed with the combination of electronic musical instruments and traditional music, and the first-ever light music band of North Korea, “Wangjaesan Arts Band” (1983) debuted.

The key themes of the North Korean music in the 1990s were personality cult, ideological enrichment, prioritization of the military, and economic growth. Another characteristic of the music in the 1990s was the increase in songs about everyday life. Quick tempos and the elements of western pop music defined these songs, such as “*Whistle*” and “*Nice to Meet You*.”

When Kim Jong Il pronounced *songun* music politics, politics by songs, and music politics in the 2000s, the share of ordinary songs decreased while the music themed on *songun* ideology and *chollima* movement were produced. These new songs included “*A Long Journey of Songun*” (2003). While the previous versions of “*Arirang*” were melancholic, the “*Strength and Prosperity Arirang*” composed by the order of Kim Jong Il was based on full of the yearning for prosperity

and optimism, and they claimed this new version was an emotional inspiration for Koreans. More bands were created as well, with the “Unhasu Orchestra” in the late 2000s and “Samjiyon Orchestra,” both debuting in 2009.

### **Dance, Acrobatics, Mass Games and Art Performances**

As for dancing as an art form, the Choi Seung Hee Dance Institute functioned as the cradle of dancing art after the war. But starting from the 1960s, musical dance pieces were created, such as the “Kii Dance” which was featured in the revolutionary musical, *“Sea of Blood.”* Also, they focused on the creation and identification of traditional dances, such as “Jenggang Dance” and “Sword Dance.” As a part of the *juche* art and culture campaign since the early 1970s, they also conducted studies to record dancing moves, which resulted in the publication of the *“Method of Documenting a Dance”* in 1987.

In the 1990s, *“General Mobilization Song”* and other “revolutionary dance” pieces were created, along with “dance fragments” and major dance productions such as “dance ensembles” and “dance dramas.” A “dance ensemble” was a production where separated sequences of dances were joined under a single idea. A well-known example is the *“Serve the General in Solidarity”* (1995). According to the instruction by Kim Jong Il that “mass dances should be a part of people’s everyday life,” a number of mass dance pieces were produced. And the promotion of dances as sports progressed, in forms of “gymnastic dances,” “water dances,” and “ice dances.”

The acrobatic shows, or circus, of North Korea began with the debut performance of the Pyongyang Circus founded in June 1952.

The Pyongyang Circus staged its performances frequently not only in its home theater, which is the Pyongyang Circus Theater, but also small-sized mobile tents in other regions, along with several overseas performances. Some of their productions included “*On the Ice*” and “*Animal Circus*.” In the 1980s, they started water circus and ice circus performances for the first time in Asia, and due to the high-difficulty moves of their shows, their skill level was highly recognized in the World Circus Competition.

North Koreans claim that the “*Flower Gymnastics*” created by Kim Il Sung in 1930 as the origin of their mass games. However, these performances appeared in earnest with the “*Gymnastics of the Boys*” of May 1946. This was followed by the introduction of the concept of “mass sports” in the late 1950s, with which the “group mass games,” mainly for students, started to develop. Starting from the 1960s, mass games began to spread among the population. In Pyeongyang, they started to produce “large-scale mass games” joined by tens of thousands of players. In the 1970s, the “Mass Game Production Group” was founded to upgrade mass games in terms of quality as well as quantity. Some of the best works from this period included “*Korea of Juche*” (1978), with a total of 750,000 participants. In 1982, a stadium that was fitted for such mass games, that is, the Kim Il Sung Stadium (renamed Moranbong Stadium in 1982) was opened to expand the scale of mass games even further. Also, the North started to perform the same show numerous times.

During the Kim Jong Il era, mass games were staged in a burlesque performance art format mobilizing tens of thousands of people to perform on the occasion of national holidays or a state VIP reception.

While smaller-scale shows were created during the Arduous March, “*The Invincible Workers’ Party of Korea*” was performed featuring more than 100,000 participants, which marked the beginning of a changing trend. Ultra-scale mass games and art performances were staged, and their nature also changed from what was entirely a sport event into a form of art. One of the most famous works of this line was “*Arirang*,” during the Kim Jong Il era. *Arirang* was performed by more



A performance of Arirang

than 100,000 participants, and it was recognized and recorded in the Guinness Book as the largest mass game and art performance in the world. This piece included not only music and dances but also mass games, card sections, gymnastics, and circus elements.

### Fine Art

Immediately after independence, painters who moved to the North actively joined the debate on the contents and formats of socialist fine art. However, when the communists labeled tradition as a class element, the debate finally ended in 1967. The “noble’s art” (*muninhwa*) was to be irradiated, as it was the art of the feudal ruling class, and the “folk art” was recognized as the art of the people and therefore to be preserved. As a result, they decided to develop traditional Korean painting, focusing on the colored works, into more modern forms and have them contain socialist themes in a national form, thus creating revolutionary art. Accordingly, the “fight for a socialist revolution” and the “construction of a socialist state” became the most important themes.





Outpost Dabaksol



A Sleepless Night on the Jangja River

The 1970s was the era of the “grand zenith of *juche* art.” A number of works were produced on the theme of the *suryong*, socialist revolutionary conflict, and construction of a new motherland, such as “*Evening Glow Over Kangson*” (1973), and “*Suryong, Where Are You Going Tonight?*” (1978).

In the 1990s, the “noble’s art” such as the traditional paintings of the four noble objects (*sagunja*) was restored in line with the doctrine of “Korean People First.” After 2000, when the *songun* politics of Kim Jong Il was in full blossom, *songun* art works were produced in line with the political trend. Themes of these works included protecting the *suryong* with your life, solidarity between the military and civilians, revolutionary optimism, Rifle Ideology. Some of the noteworthy pieces included “*The Magnificent Eight Views of songun*” (2004).

North Korea took their propaganda paintings very seriously. Since the 1970s and up until today, the projects to produce propaganda paintings are have been considered as key projects to indoctrinate the people ideologically and a flurry of artworks themed on the policies of the party are being created.

## Sports

North Korea formed its “North Korean Sports Alliance” in 1945 and encouraged most of its people to join a sports organization. With the debut of the *juche* ideology, the government emphasized national sports. Starting from the mid-1950s, traditional games were used to promote nationalism and patriotism to strengthen the *juche* ideology. In addition, North Korea did paid attention to elite sports and joined a number of international sports organizations.<sup>6</sup>

Since the mid-1960s, when Kim Il Sung secured his monolithic dictatorship, North Korea started to join defense sports with the sports of the mass to justify the dictatorial regime. Mass sports were joined with the *chollima* movement to ensure the economic realization of the *juche* ideology and led to the theme of productivity enhancement. Since 1967, the defense sports were promoted farther, which resulted in the introduction of more military-training-like sports events such as shooting, regimented marching, and more. In the 1970s and 1980s, sports were used as propaganda tools to asset the superiority of the regime.

In the 1990s, the economic hardship resulted in the weakening of the foundation of sports programs. Therefore, it could be said that they did not make much progress during that time. In the meantime, the joining of the traditional games and physical training was valued,

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<sup>6</sup> 1956: International Shooting Association, International Amateur’s Basketball Association, International Volleyball Association; 1957: International Table Tennis Association, International Amateur’s Boxing Association; International Ice Sports Association; 1958: International Gymnastic Association, FIFA, International Amateur’s Wrestling Association; 1959: International Weight Lifting Association



A North Korean cheering squad at a sport competition



New Year's Sports Day of North Korea

to serve the doctrine of “Korean People First.” In the name of national pride, it was said that these programs were intended to strengthen the ideology of collectivism. The North Korean government still took winning in international competitions seriously and focused on promoting its female soccer in the late 1980s. As a result, North Korea started to excel in female soccer in the 1990s. As for table tennis, North Korea formed a joint national team with South Korea to compete in the 41st World Table Tennis Championship and won (1991).

### Cultural Heritage

To emphasize its legitimacy since independence, North Korea conducted excavations of historical sites such as the ancient tombs of Goguryeo era in Anak, for the sake of ‘succeeding and developing the cultural heritages of the people.’ In the 1950s, they proceeded with the restoration of Anak Palace of Goguryeo and the construction of Mt. Daesung Museum. By emphasizing that North Korea was the heir of Goguryeo, the North Korea government tried to promote its legitimacy among the people of North Korea.

Starting from the 1960s, North Korea tried to use cultural heritages for a political agenda to deify Kim Il Sung. According to a resolution



A roof tile excavated from the No. 1 Palace Site of the Southern Palace, Anhak-gung



A mural of a vassal and the owners of the tomb, the West Chamber, No. 3 Anak Tomb

passed during the 15th Plenary Session of the 4th WPK Central Committee, the government dedicated itself to the development of the old residents of Kim Il Sung's families, revolutionary sites, and fields of combat into historical heritages. In the 1970s, all forms of culture and arts were used as propaganda tools to advance the *juche* ideology of Kim Il Sung. It was during this period when they launched a large-scale excavation of the Tomb of King Domgyeong.

In the 1990s, the government enacted the "Law on the Protection of Cultural Artifacts" (1994) to introduce a law related to cultural heritages officially. During this period, a number of projects to excavate and restore cultural and historical sites were launched. To prove that the historical legitimacy of Korea lied with Pyeongyang, the government focused its efforts on the excavation projects centered around its capital. As a result, Gwangbupsa (1990, Pyeongyang), which was a temple of Goguryeo, the Tomb of King Dongmyeong (1993, Pyeongyang), the Tomb of Dangun (1994, Pyeongyang) were restored. North Korea joined the Convention on the Protection of the World Cultural Heritage in July 1998 and, during the 28th meeting

of the UNESCO's World Cultural Heritage Committee, the tomb site of Goguryeo became a world cultural heritage (July 2004). This was believed to seek solidarity among its people using patriotism after the collapse of the socialist bloc.

### **Architecture**

During the post-war reconstruction in the 1950s and thereafter, North Korea introduced the neo-classical style of Russia which was based on socialistic realism. The architecture involved the formation of two powerful axes on either side of the main entrance of a building, boasting the aesthetics of the massive structure and symmetry. Also, the buildings were built with higher ceilings and exposed pillars to emphasize verticality. A good example of this trend was the Pyeongyang Station building (1954).

Starting from the late 1950s, buildings designed with traditional form and socialist ideas were raised in every corner of Pyeongyang, such as the Grand Theater of Pyongyang completed in 1960. The building was characterized by the "traditional Chosun-era style" roofing. One of the well-known buildings of the 1960s include the "Memorial Tower of Follen Soldiers" built to honor the fallen soldiers of the Korean War, the "Tower of Friendship" to honor the Chinese army joining the Korean war, and the "*Chollima* Statute" which was intended to encourage the construction of a socialist state.

If the 1960s was characterized by the attempt to harmonize socialist styles and traditional elements, the 1970s was the era of "our style." Once the monolithic dictatorship by the party was established, North Korea built large memorial monuments, historical sites of the

revolution, and the fields of major revolutionary battles across the country and used them as a the tool for ideological education. For example, the “Mansudae Monument” was built in celebration of the 60th birthday of Kim Il Sung in 1972.<sup>7</sup> The 1980s saw the largest number of memorial buildings built in Pyeongyang under Kim Jong Il’s leadership. Kim Jong Il wanted to overcome the limit of being an heir in a hereditary regime in his legitimacy and show off his ability as the successor of the power, by means of further strengthening the symbolic significance of Pyeongyang. The *Juche* Ideology Tower<sup>8</sup>, the Arch of Triumph<sup>9</sup>, and the Grand People’s Study Hall<sup>10</sup> were all built during this period.

The 1990s saw the construction of the key architectural achievement of North Korea, such as the “Three Revolutions

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- 7** At the compound of the monument at Mansudae, a statue of Kim Il Sung is located at the center, accompanied by the Statue of Anti-Japanese Revolution on the left and the Statue of the Construction of Socialist Revolution on the right.
  - 8** The *Juche* Ideology Tower was built on the east bank of the Taedong River in celebration of the 70th birthday of Kim Il Sung in April 1982. Standing 170m tall, the tower is composed of a beacon, main body, and a statue of three figures. The beacon alone is known to be 20m high and weigh 46 tons. On the front and back sides of the main body of the tower, which is 150m in height, the text, *juche*, is engraved, in characters that are 4.2m wide. On the front side of the main body of the tower had a statue of three figures, standing 30m tall. These figures represent workers, farmers, and intellectuals, holding a hammer, a sickle, and a writing brush, respectively, reproducing the crest of the party.
  - 9** The Arch of Triumph was built around the same time at the root of Mt. Moranbong. The structure stands 60m tall, 50.1m wide, and 36.2m deep. The Arch in North Korea is higher than Arc de Triomphe in Paris by 11m, wider by 5m. On the pillars on both sides of the southern side of the arch are engraved two numbers, 1925 and 1945, in gold. It is said that these two numbers are the year when Kim Il Sung left his home at Mangyongdae to liberate his colonized motherland and the year when he returned victorious. The Rainbow Arch, which is the central section of the Arch of Triumph, is decorated with 70 Azelea flowers, which symbolized the 70th birthday of Kim Il Sung.
  - 10** Grand People’s Study Hall was completed in 1982 and is the largest library in North Korea. It is a 10-story building that stands 63m tall, with a gross floor space of more than 100,000m<sup>2</sup>.

Exhibition,” the “Party Founding Museum of WPK” (1990), etc. However, North Korea suffered significantly from its economic meltdown, which forced it to suspend the construction of Ryugyong Hotel scheduled to be completed by 1989. The construction of the hotel resumed in the 2000s, when the construction of the residences for 100,000 households started as well, in line with the goal of building a strong and prosperous country. Some of the well-known buildings that are more relevant to ordinary North Koreans include East Pyongyang Grand Theatre and Yanggakdo Stadium.

### Cities

With the end of the war at hand, North Korea started the reconstruction of Pyongyang, which was devastated during the Korean War. North Korea involved those who were educated in the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc in the process of rebuilding Pyongyang as an ideal socialist city. Kim Jong Hee, who studied at Moscow Architectural Academy, proposed the “Pyongyang Master Plan” based on the socialist urban development ideas. The plan was to create a number of cores to establish spatial equality and develop a copious number of green areas to eliminate the gap between the cities and rural areas, while the city itself was designed with a grid of micro-districts. The construction of this ideal socialist city continued until the end of the 1960s.

In the 1970s and 1980s, when North Korea turned to Kim Il Sung’s *juche* ideology, the ideology behind urban planning also switched to *juche* ideology. During the economic downturn, it was not possible to develop all cities at the same time. They chose to delay the development

of other cities and focused on Pyongyang. They pronounced the strategy of “*juche*-styled urbanization” where the development of a city was to be carried out using the city’s own capabilities, and the urban development strategies for the regime’s propaganda strengthened. As a result, Pyongyang in the 1980s became a strategic space where the revolutionary *suryong* perspective and the superiority of the regime were promoted. During this time, only Pyongyang saw a boost in the construction of the symbolic plaza in the heart of the center where they could hold mass gatherings, military parades, and other celebration events. Spreading out from this center space were public memorial buildings, main roads, and high-rise residential buildings.

Urban planning in North Korea is characterized by the emphasis put on the main streets of the city rather than districts. The arrangement allows the political and ideological values of the heart of the to be spread along the main streets far and wide. During the Arduous March in the 1990s, the special treatment of Pyongyang continued, resulting in the enactment of the “Law on the Management of the Capital City Pyongyang” in 1998. The purpose of this law was to sacrifice the development of other cities to encourage the participation of the general public in the management of Pyongyang and investing more in the

development of the capital. In 2002, Kim Jong Il suggested “the construction of a 21-century-type capital,” and the privileges of Pyongyang persisted thereafter.

What followed the construction of the main roads of Pyongyang



Mansudae Street



were apartments. The apartments of North Korea are concentrated in Pyongyang and by themselves a grand view, to be used as a symbol of the superiority of the socialist regime to serve their propaganda needs. The intention behind the construction and improvement of Pyongyang during the Kim Jong Il era, first of all, can be found in the external dimension. By decorating Pyongyang, it wanted to boast the dignity of the state and its authority as a powerful, independent country.

The key point of urban planning in North Korea is the Pyongyang Urban Plan, and the core axis of this Urban Plan is the line that connects the Kim Il Sung Plaza and the Juche Ideology Tower (1982). This indicates that the city was built as a symbolic space to instill the ideas of *juche* in the daily lives of the residents of the city. Another main axis of the urban plan of Pyongyang was the line connecting Mansudae Hill and the the Monument to Party Founding (1990). On Mansudae Hill stands a statue of Kim Il Sung, which was later joined by the statute of Kim Jong Il to emphasize Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism.

## 2) Kim Jong Un Era

### Literature

During the Kim Jong Un era, the remnants of *songun* literature almost disappeared, and the trend returned to the existing *juche* literature and *juche* realistic literature.

Immediately after the death of Kim Jong Il, the commemoration literature to honor the late dictator dominated the scene. Starting from 2013, however, other works were created to justify the succession of power by Kim Jong Un, such as “*The Oath of Fire*,” or collections of

the anecdotes of Kim Il Sung, like “*A World of Anecdotes of the Liber Solis*,” or “*A New History of the Growth of Cinema*” which described the achievements of Kim Jong Il.

After the development of nuclear weapons and missile programs, poems to praise the achievements of Kim Jong Un, books on the visualization of the people who are suitable for the *Mallima* Era, or other works which themed on the young people who devote themselves to the fight and sacrifice flourished. Recently, there were a number of works published with the theme of “the ideology of prioritizing science and technology” in accordance with the directions of the government. In celebration of the 70th anniversary of the regime, a ballad, “*The Song of My Heart*,” was released.<sup>11</sup> The works themed on Kim Jong Un’s people first ideology like “*The Savory Taste of Sesame Candy*” and “*The Eternal Sons and Daughters of the Sun*” by Chae Dong Gyu were published and used as tools for ideological indoctrination of the people. In 2020, the 4.15 Literary Creatin Group published a novel “*Revival*,” which was a part of the collection “*The Immortal Journey*” which was intended for the idolization of Kim Jong Un. This is the first-ever publication of a collection which was themed on Kim Jong Un. The first theme of the collection was selected as the “educational revolution of the new century” to promote the policies of the Kim Jong Un era where the “construction of a country with strong talents” is emphasized as the foundation of the prosperity of the country.

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<sup>11</sup> *Rodong Sinmun*, September 17, 2018

## Movies and TV Shows

Some of the projects in the Kim Jong Un era include “Rice Flower” which is themed on economic stimulation (2015) and “The Story of Our Home” (2015) which emphasized active self-sacrifice of the youth. The animation series, “*Gojumong*” was an 18-episode show that aired over the television network.

In the Kim Jong Un era, North Korea is actively seeking joint production with foreign partners for movies. One of the most popular movies among the ordinary viewers was “*Comrade Kim Goes Flying*” which was the first-ever joint movie production project between North Korea, the UK, and Belgium. The movie produced by Korea 4.25 Art Movie Production in 2012 won the Best Directing Prize in the Pyongyang International Film Festival of 2012. While there were no new movies since 2016, “*One Day, One Night*” finally premiered in 2022, which shows that the movies, which were the flagship genre of the North Korean culture and arts, is suffering a severe slump during the Kim Jong Un era.

TV shows include “*Herbalists at War*” (2018) which was a story about the herbalist of Chosun to protect Gaeseong ginseng against the



North Korean TV show, “*A Father Awaits*”



North Korean TV Show, “*My Little Playground*”

greed of Japan. This series is much faster paced compared to other shows in the past.

### Theater and Musicals

During Kim Jong Un era, plays that were popular among the people of North Korea were comedies including light comedies. The trend of these shows can be divided into the reproduction of other shows in the past and those themed on building the economy. The reproduced shows include the “*Dholes*” (2015) which was themed on anti-American propaganda and “*Admiral Ri Sun Sin*” themed on patriotism (2016). The reproduction of the shows first introduced during the era of Kim Il Sung is believed to reflect the policies to establish the legitimacy of the Kim Jong Un regime, which suffers from dynastic power succession. There are attempts to remind the people of Kim Jong Il, who directed revolutionary plays and to connect him with Kim Jong Un through the cultural policy of memories. The works themed on building the economy has been announced since the beginning of the Kim Jong Un’s regime. “*Scent*” (2015),<sup>12</sup> a story about young people who endeavor to increase the number of fish they catch could be said to have been created in order to promote Kim Jong Un’s visit to the Fishery Office and his direction to enhance the quality of life of the people.

The well-known new projects in musicals during the Kim Jong Un era include “*The Victory of the Revolution is in Sight*” (2016) and “*North*

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<sup>12</sup> A light comedy aired on Feb. 17, 2015, on Korean Central Television. However, Chosun Central Almanac does not mention this show.

*Korean Frontline*” (2017). However, overall, they focused on re-staging old revolutionary musicals of the 1970s, such as “*The Destiny of A self-reliant Soldier*” and “*Sea of Blood*.”

Since the 2020, the government made a strong political drive for the protection of “our style of culture” and “our style of systems” as a part of the “preservation of the socialist stronghold. In line with that, the government introduced the “Law on the Exclusion of Reactionary Ideologies and Cultures” on December 4, 2020, which was accompanied by the announcement of the platform to punish the introduction of foreign ideologies and cultures more severely. The instruction of severe punishment against anti-socialism and non-socialism is especially focused on the enrichment of the youth.<sup>13</sup> Musical “*Eternal Victor*” and play “*Selfless Service*” reflects North Korean society in this regard.

## Music

The most representative band of the Kim Jong Un’s era is the Moranbong Band. Moranbong Band performed “*Arirang*” with a lively rhythm during the pilot performance in July 2012 and gained attention by performing the theme song of the movie “*Rocky*” which was unprecedented. This was followed by Kim Jong Un’s order that “All artists must follow the spirit of protecting the *suryong* with their lives” (2013) and “learn the creative methods and styles of Moranbong

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**13** While evaluating the 10th congress of the Youth League held on April 29th, 2021, they demanded “uncompromising fight with the reactionary ideological elements.” [Editorial] Hold up the historical letter of the respected Comrade Kim Jong Un and create a new heyday for the youth movement of North Korea,” *Rodong Sinmun*, May 3, 2021.

Band actively to create a fundamental innovation.” (2014). This made Moranbong Band the most prestigious band of all, until it saw its roles shrunk significantly after being renamed as Moranbong Electronic Ensemble in 2018. Chongbong Band is composed of a female vocal and mostly male band members. Since its foundation in July 2015, it has been a rival of Moranbong Band. In 2018, they performed in Gangreung Art Center and Seoul National Theater, along with the Samjiyon Orchestra. The Samjiyon Orchestra, which was formed by the members who were selected among the Korean People’s Army Merited State Chorus, Chongbong Band, Moranbong Band, and Mansudae Art Troupe, performed in Seoul and Gangreung. In 2018, an exclusive performance hall for an orchestra, Samjiyon Theater, opened in Pyeongyang.

The Band of the State Affairs Commission debuted in 2020. It is a large-scale ensemble composed of an orchestra, a choir, and singers. Kim Ok Ju, who has been named as the “people’s actor” in 2021, is a member of this ensemble, and they have been participating in key events such as the 8th Party Congress.

“*Ode to the Fatherland*” (2013) and “*Our National Flag*” (2019) are sung proactively as a part of patriotic enrichment, after they were created as a part of the national symbol project based on the Our State First ideology. “*Ode to the Fatherland*” mentions the symbols of the state, such as the goshawk, which is the national bird, magnolia, which is the national flower, and the national flag, in its lyrics. “*Our National Flag*” has been played during flag raising ceremonies and other important events as a symbolic song of the country. Instead of the “*Anthem of General Kim Il Sung*” and “*Anthem of General Kim*



Moranbong Band in a performance



Band of the State Affairs Commission in a performance

*Jong Il*”, which were sung many times during the opening and closing of national events or the Ceremony of the Nation, “*Aegukka*” is being used proactively.

North Korea also holds a memorial concert in memory of famous composers of North Korea, along with international exchange music performances. Recently, Pyongyang’s Exchange Group for the People with Disabilities performed in the UK (2017), which was followed by the 1st Pyongyang International Vocal Competition in 2018. In 2019, a large-scale artistic envoy made a performance at the National Music Center of Beijing. The participating artists’ groups included the Merited State Chorus, Samjiyon Orchestra, Moranbong Band, etc., which were some of the best music bands of North Korea. The performance of the North Korean art group in China was the first since 2008, which took place in celebration of the imminent 60th anniversary of the diplomatic ties of the two countries. With the North’s nuclear test and the sanctions against it imposed by the rest of the world, the cultural exchanges between North Korea and China also stopped. Moranbong Band was scheduled to perform in December 2015, but the show was called off immediately before the event. Therefore, the performance

in China in 2019 was the highest-level cultural performance held in the Kim Jong Un era. And it could be called a symbolic performance to celebrate the restoration of the relationship with China through cultural diplomacy.

### **Dancing, Acrobatics, Mass Games, and Art Performances**

Now, modern dances like the “Wheel Dance,” “Tariff Dance,” and “Shadow Dance” became the key repertoire instead of the revolutionary dances that were the centerpiece of such performances until the Kim Jong Il era. The dance performances of the Kim Jong Un era tend to be a combined performance of music and dance. Some of the well-known examples include “*Eternal Glorious Victory of July 27*,” a large-scale performance featuring more than 10,000 participants, called “*Great Party, Glorious Chosun*,” etc. These are the combinations of dance, music, and plays, based on the unique rhythms and dance moves of North Korea. The dance performance, “*My Golden Country*” and the music and dance poem “*A Story Told by Arirang*”, among other repertoires, were staged. And most of these shows were themed on the socialist regime’s propaganda.

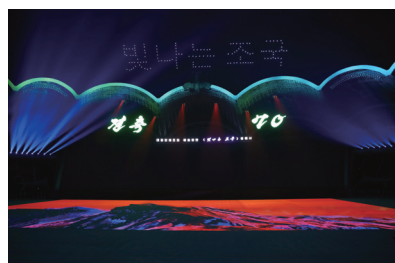
Pyeongyang Circus was renamed as the National Circus and performed “*Chunhyangjeon*” (2012). The performance was characterized by extraordinary moves of the performers, such as tight ropes and tight rope on the water. In 2018, they staged the shows that reflected the *mallima* spirit. At the 1st International Festival of National Performances, they were awarded the gold medal for “*Iron Bar and Swing*,” and at the World Festival of National Arts, they won the top award for “*Steel Wire Walking*.”



The performances thrown on national holidays or memorial days during the Kim Jong Un era became larger-scaled and more magnificent. However, the number of new original works decreased significantly. Most of these performances were re-runs of the works of the past or newly edited ones. The number of brand-new creations decreased significantly.

In 2018, which was the 70th anniversary of the foundation of the regime and five years after they stopped performing “*Arirang*” in 2013, North Korea staged “*The Glorious Fatherland*” instead of “*Arirang*” of the Kim Jong Il era, in accordance with the slogan of the Kim Jong Un era, “Our State First.” Drones and other latest technologies were used, along with a media-art method to project the Cheonji lake at the summit of Mt. Paektu on the floor of the stage. This performance was staged in celebration of the inter-Korean Summit in September 2018, skipping the propaganda part for the regime. The show was staged once again after being retitled as “*The Country of the People*” in 2019. When President Xi Jinping of China visited North Korea on June 20, it was once again staged under yet another name, “*The Invincible Socialism*.” In 2020, which saw the 75th anniversary of the foundation of the WPK, “*The Great Guide*” was staged. This time, the performance started with a national flag raising ceremony, instead of a performance of *Arirang*, a folksong, which was the case for previous performances.”

In the “*Great Party, Glorious Chosun*” performance staged in celebration of the 70th anniversary



The Glorious Fatherland performance

of the WPK in October 2015, more than 10,000 professional artists participated, along with the key professional artist groups such as the Mansudae Art Troupe, Pochonbo Electronic Ensemble, and Wangjaesan Arts Band. However, since the 7th Party Congress, large-scale performances decreased in numbers. Including the areas of performing art, the entire art sector, such as the movies, music, and theater, is currently in a sluggish condition. However, there were attempts to apply the achievements in science to the performance. “*The Glorious Fatherland*” featured a drone show and a type of media art method, projecting the Cheonji lake at the summit of Mt. Paektu. The events in celebration of national holidays or memorial days were held after sunset to maximize the effect of drones, fireworks, laser shows, and lightings.

### Fine Art

Since the beginning of the Kim Jong Un era, two different types of the statues of Kim Il Sung are being made in North Korea. The statue that accompanies Kim Jong Il is the statute of the old days, while those that stand alone are portrayals of Kim Il Sung's younger image. These statues are made with a smiling face or as a colored statue. Instead of the ‘solemnness’ emphasized by Kim Jong Il in his “theory of the creation of the image of the *suryong*,” it is now designed with a “friendly and lively form.” This is believed to be due to the statement of Kim Jong Un made during the 2nd National Convention of Grassroot Propaganda Workers in 2019 that “instead of mystifying the *suryong*, absolute loyalty can be expected when people are charmed by the human side of the *suryong*. Therefore, the mode of propaganda

and agitation shall change from now on.” In line with Kim Jong Un’s intention to secure legitimacy as the successor of the preceding *suryongs*, artworks depicting Paektusan Mountain, which is a symbol of the bloodline of Paektu, are being produced with enthusiasm.

Changes are also observed in oil paintings. An article by Kim So Young published in 2013 emphasized that “oil paintings shall be developed in line with the characteristics of oil paintings.” Though this comment does not look like anything extraordinary, it may sound quite different in the art sector of North Korea, as what the North Korean art community has been emphasizing is the “our style of oil paintings” based on Korean paintings since the 1960s. The layering of colors and the texture of materials which were refused by “our style of oil paintings” were considered as a taboo by North Korean artists, who tried to reproduce the characteristic of Korean painting in which the ink was absorbed by the paper in their oil paintings. Such taboos on techniques are now being lifted, and this indicates a shift from the “national element” to the “sentiment of the people” and “globalization” in art and literary creations, which represents the trend in the Kim Jong Un era.

Artworks themed on pine trees and other symbols of the country are being produced and displayed in exhibitions with the introduction of the Our State First concept. And there is a widespread movement to strengthen and enrich patriotism among the people.

There have been attempts to connect achievements in science and technology with art. The debut of media art is also noteworthy. The celebratory performance for the 75th anniversary of the WPK held in October 2020 was titled “*The Harmony of Lights 2020*.”

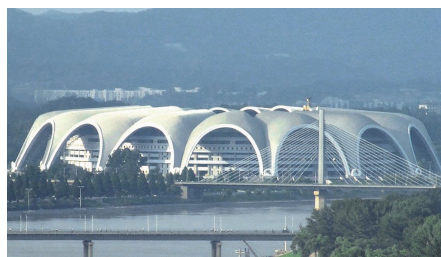
## Sports

The sports policies in the Kim Jong Un era can be summarized as the development in professional sports technologies, introduction of science to sports, cooperating with international sports organizations more actively, and invigorating the sports for the public. For this purpose, the government established the “State Physical Culture and Sports Guidance Commission” (2012) to strengthen the national defense capabilities and working capabilities through sports, while introducing science to sports and training elite athletes to make North Korea a sports power. North Korea participated in the 2012 London Olympic Games with 56 athletes for in 11 events, ranking the 20th in total. They also participated in major international sports competitions, such as the East Asian Cup (2013), Incheon Asian Games (2014), and Brazil Worldcup (2014) to promote the image of its regime to the rest of the world and its sports achievements internally.

They intensively built sports facilities such as the “Temple of Taekwondo” in the Chongchun Street of Pyongyang, Masikryong Ski Course, Rungra People’s Sports Park, Mirim Horse Riding Club, Munsu Water Park, Pyongyang Gymnasium, and Yanggakdo Sports Village. Especially, North Korea has been promoting skiing, calling it



A North Korean child enjoying skiing at Masikryong Ski Course



May Day Stadium, North Korea



Ryom Tae Ok and Kim Ju Sik,  
2017 Winter Asian Games



Paektusan Mountain International  
Figure Skating Festival

“a traditional sports of Korean people, of which the development was denied due to Japan’s policy of irradicating our national culture.” In addition, North Korea is trumpeting its sports policy development by using the images of the North Korean residents who play what they call sand volleyball (beach volleyball) wearing bathing suits in Pyeongyang’s Rungra People’s Amusement Part or enjoying their core-muscle exercises in a gym located in the Tongil Street Fitness Center, etc.

Sports is also being used as a means to improve North Korea’s foreign relations and national competitiveness. North Korea opened Pyongyang International Soccer School, where foreigners can enroll, in the Rungrado district of Pyeongyang. Recently, athletes Ryom Tae Ok and Kim Ju Sik won gold medals for Merano Cup’s figure skating event<sup>14</sup> as figure skating is gaining attention among North Koreans. During the 18th Asian Game held in Jakarta in 2018, North Korea and South Korea formed a single team to win a gold medal in female canoe event and a silver medal in the female basketball events. Park Myung Won won a gold medal in shooting, while Rim Eun Sim won another medal in weightlifting, to name a few of the achievements.

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<sup>14</sup> *Rodong Sinmun*, Feb 12, 2017

## Cultural Heritages

North Korea abolished its Law on the Protection of Cultural Artifacts adopted in April 1994 and newly introduced the Law on the Protection of Cultural Heritages in August 2012. This new law included “non-tangible cultural heritages”<sup>15</sup> which was not included in the Law on the Protection of Cultural Artifacts in the scope of legal protection. With this, North Korea prepared the legal basis for its policies to protect intangible cultural heritages. In this regard, North Korea registered “non-tangible national cultural heritages” such as the folk song “*Arirang*,” national sports “*Ssireum*,” and “*Yeonbaek Nongakmu*” which is a traditional folk dance, “*Pyongyang Cold Noodle*” which is a national food, along with Kimchi and Makgoli, etc.<sup>16</sup>

In 2015, the Law on the Protection of Cultural Heritage was renamed and updated as the Law on the Protection of the National Heritage, to include historical sites and natural heritages<sup>17</sup> such as the legally protected species. It appears that they reshuffled the types of national heritage in accordance with the classifications of non-tangible heritage of UNESCO. In November 2018, the Law on the Protection of National Heritage was revised in part to change one of the classes of

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<sup>15</sup> North Korea defined “non-tangible cultural heritage” as “the mental and cultural wealth that is developed by a people in its process of historical development and passed on to the subsequent generations, while being recognized as a certain social group or individuals as a part of their culture, in the form of traditional customs, lifestyle, knowledge, talents, and other related means and tools, encompassing the heritage that is created and passed down in the realm of mental culture of humans.” *Rodong Sinmun*, Oct 21, 2018.

<sup>16</sup> *Rodong Sinmun*, Jan 19, 2014

<sup>17</sup> North Korea defined a “natural heritage” as to be “a famous mountain, lake, waterfall, valley, cave, beach, island, or other renowned destinations or unique animals, plants, fossils, natural rocks, or fountains.” *Minju Chosun*, May 9, 2015.

non-tangible cultural heritage that had been in use since 2015, which was “traditional art” (2015) into “traditional art and medicine,” while updating “traditional handicrafts”(2015) into “traditional handcraft techniques.”

North Korea amended Article 41 of its socialist constitution in April 2019. From the previous clause that “the State shall, in establishing a socialist national culture, object imperialist cultural infiltration and retrospective tendencies, protect the national cultural heritages, and succeed/develop them in accordance with the reality of socialism,” the phrase “... and retrospective tendencies” was removed, and reflected in the amendment of the law and the system. The policies on the preservation and succession of traditional culture further strengthened.

In this process, the projects to find and register non-tangible cultural heritages picked up pace led by the Office of National Heritage Protection and Guidance, resulting in the registration of 108 items as national non-tangible heritages and 13 items as regional non-tangible heritage until 2018.

The characteristics and direction of the cultural heritage policy during the Kim Jong Un era could be characterized by the expansion of the scope of cultural heritage, updating the categories and classification systems of historical heritage and historical relics, including natural heritage and famous natural scenes in the scope of the national heritage, and actively excavating and identifying national heritage to register them with UNESCO (world heritage, humanity’s intangible cultural heritage, world record heritage) after the updating of the law.

## Architecture

Since the beginning of Kim Jong Un's regime, North Korea has shown keen interest in the architecture and building projects for Pyongyang. Some of the good examples are the modernization projects for Sunan Airport of Pyeongyang and the Wonsan Kalma International Airport.

Under the slogan of "Building a Socialist Civilization" and "People First" they emphasized the construction of amusement facilities and built Pyongyang Mangyongdae Funfair, Rungna People's Pleasure Ground, Mirim Horse Riding Club, Munsu Water Park, and Masikryong Ski Resort. In accordance with Kim Jong Un's order to "develop sports and, as the symbol of sport facilities, rebuild a stadium that is worthy of our civilization" (June 2014), they also focused on building sports facilities, resulting in a number of sports and cultural facilities construction projects.

Due to Kim Jong Un's order to "improve the quality of life of the people," construction projects gained a lot more momentum as well with the construction of the Natural History Museum and Central Zoo (2016), Taedonggang Seafood Restaurant (2018), Rinsan Catfish Factory (2018), Kangwondo Agricultural Nursery (2018), Yangdok Hot Spring Cultural Recreation Center (2019). In addition, large-scale orphanages (*aejukwon*) of large scales were built in Pyeongyang, Nampo, Kanggye, Pyeongsong, Sariwon, Sinuiju, Haeju, and many more cities in North Korea.

## Cities

In celebration of the 100th birthday of Kim Il Sung in 2012, the



Ministry of Capital Construction, which was a part of the Cabinet, was upgraded to the Command of Capital Construction under the National Defense Commission, and Kim Jong Un ordered that “the City of Pyongyang shall become a grandiose, splendid, world-class city as the capital of the sacred revolution and the home of revolutionary *suryong* perspective. (April 27, 2012)

As a result, the modernization of Pyongyang and house building projects were carried out over 2012 and 2013. Some of the key projects include Mansudae Apartment Complex, Mirae Scientists Street, and Ryomyong Street. Ryomyong Street was completed in 2017 and many of the faculty members of Kim Il Sung University live there. Unjong District of Pyongyang has also seen the completion of the residential complex for the satellite scientists. In addition, Kwangbok District, centered around Gwangbok Street has a commercial center with a gross floor area of 12,700m<sup>2</sup>, and, in cooperation with Chinese capital, a large-scale commercial facility project is in progress in the East Pyongyang District. As for the construction projects in Pyongyang during the Kim Jong Un era, the main focus is on the supply of houses. During the 8th Party Congress of the WPK, a five-year plan to



Taedonggang Seafood Restaurant



Mirae Scientists Street

“build 50,000 residential units in Pyeongyang” was announced. Apart from this project, they are currently proceeding with the “attic-style residential units” near the Botong River Area. With these projects, they made major changes in the landscape of Pyeongyang and presented them as a monumental achievement of the socialist civilization that symbolizes the era of Kim Jong Un for their domestic propaganda purposes.

## Section 2

# Media and Publications

North Korea explains the function of the mass media as “educating the people, propagating the policies of the party and the government, mobilizing the people for the construction of a communist society, and encouraging criticism and self-criticism” based on the communist theory of the media. This means that the media is a tool of political socialization in North Korea.

North Korea claims that there is the freedom of speech citing Article 67 of the Socialist Constitution that “all people shall have the freedom of speech, publication, association, and demonstration.” However, the media in North Korea can have its freedom guaranteed only when “it contributes to the encouragement of the people to expedite their efforts to build a socialist society.”<sup>18</sup>

The key mission for the journalists of the North is to campaign for

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**18** “Editorial in Celebration of the 10,000th Issue,” *Rodong Sinmun*, December 1, 2001

and endorse the party policies and revolutionary projects.

North Korea defines the publications “must be a key tool to connect the party with the people and a powerful weapon to organize and mobilize the working public for the realization of the political, economic, and cultural goals given by the party.”<sup>19</sup> The key function of the publications in North Korea is to educate the public and organize/mobilize them in accordance with the policy of the party.

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## 1 Newspapers and Magazines

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### 1) Newspapers

All newspapers of North Korea are published by the authorities. They are the official media circulated by the party, Cabinet, various associations or the cultural/artistic propaganda wings. All newspapers are monitored and supervised by the Office of Newspapers within the Publicity and Information Department of the WPK, while also receiving the administrative instructions from the Office of Newspapers of the Publishing Bureau of the Cabinet. The types of North Korean newspapers include the central newspapers that are intended for the readers across the country, the capital newspapers read by the residents of the capital, and regional newspapers targeted for the working public of specific regions.

The three well-known examples of the central newspapers are

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<sup>19</sup> *Kim Il Sung's Authorship Collection*, Vol. 10, Choson Rodongdang Publisher, 1980, p.296



The official newspaper of the WPK, Rochong Sinmun The Official Newspaper of the Cabinet, Minju Chosun

“Rodong Sinmun,” which is the official newspaper of the WPK, “Minju Chosun,” which is the official newspaper of the Cabinet, “The Youth Sinmun” (*cheongnyeon jeonwi*), which is the official newspaper of the central committee of the Socialist Patriotic Youth League. Capital newspapers include “Pyeongyang Sinmun,” which is the official newspaper of the Pyongyang municipal party committee. There are 12 regional newspapers which are published by each of the provincial WPK committees, as well. Industrial newspapers include the “Cheyuk Sinmun,” “Gyowon Sinmun,” “Cheoldo Sinmun,” There are also the official newspaper of the military, called, “Korean People’s Army,” and a weekly English newspaper for overseas promotion, called “The Pyongyang Times.” Of these, the three central newspapers of Rodong Sinmun, Minju Chosun, and The Youth Sinmun and the

regional newspapers published by the municipal and provincial party committee are daily newspapers.

Newspapers published by government organizations are issued every other day or weekly, and the circulation volume is also low. The types of articles include the editorials which cover the policies and strategies of the party, opinion pieces covering important ideological, social, or political issues, explanatory articles explaining the lessons given by Kim Il Sung or Kim Jong Il and joint editorials, political articles covering political issues, analysis articles analyzing and evaluating political matters, short comments, political environment analysis, short articles, official discussions, moral articles, and leadership articles, totaling to 29 types of articles.<sup>20</sup> Since the beginning of the Kim Jong Un era, key newspapers like Rodong Sinmun went through technical improvements to enhance ideological authenticity and readability. A good example is that the key official newspapers such as Rodong Sinmun, Minju Chosun, and The Youth Sinmun are printed in color for all pages.

### **Rodong Sinmun**

Rodong Sinmun is the official newspaper of the WPK Central Committee and the most prestigious newspaper in North Korea. The history of Rodong Sinmun started when it was first published as “Jeongro” on November 1, 1945. Later, it merged with the official newspaper of the Shinmin Party, “Jeonjin” and renamed as Rodong

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<sup>20</sup> *Gwangmyung Encyclopedia 7: Education, Language, Publication and Media*, Encyclopedia Publishing House, 2011

Sinmun on September 1, 1946. Rodong Sinmun represents the stance of North Korea for key domestic and international issues or specific events, through political articles or opinion pieces. The basic purpose of this newspaper is to explain the policies and strategies of the party and modify the society and its members in a revolutionary way to strengthen the organization of the WPK and establish a system of monolithic ideology.

The sections of Rodong Sinmun include the news about Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Il, and Kim Jong Un, politics, ideology, economy, culture, politics in South Korea, and international politics. It is a morning newspaper, with about six pages for each issue, and nine to ten pages when it covers a special event. The news about Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Il, and Kim Jong Un normally appear on the front page, and the names of the three Kims and the citations of their lessons are printed in larger and bold fonts. Rodong Sinmun goes through meticulous censorship and are distributed only to public organizations or members of the party, while carrying absolute authority.

### **Minju Chosun**

Minju Chosun is the official newspaper of the Standing Committee of the Supreme People's Assembly, which is the legislative branch of the North Korean government, and the Cabinet. Minju Chosun started as "Pyongyang Ilbo," which was the official newspaper of the People's Committee of South Pyongan Province in October 1945 and relaunched as the official newspaper of the Temporary People's Committee of North Korea, Minju Chosun, in June 1946. Later, it became the official newspaper of the People's Committee of North

Korea in February 1947 and fixed at its current position in September 1948. Minju Chosun has roles that are similar to those of Rodong Sinmun. However, since it is the official newspaper of the government (Cabinet), it covers more items related to practical administrative issues. The newspaper is published in a large size, six days a week, and covers the decisions made by the regime, laws, and regulations in detail. As for the editing, like the case of Rodong Sinmun, the front page mainly features the latest news about the political guidance and photos of Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Il, and Kim Jong Un, the content of the celebratory messages or letters from foreign countries to them, poems or essays about personality cult propaganda. Each issue has four pages, except for Tuesdays, Fridays, and special occasions, when six pages are printed. It is the second most prestigious newspaper in North Korea next to Rodong Sinmun.

### **The Youth Sinmun**

The Youth Sinmun (cheongnyeon jeonwi) is the official newspaper of the Socialist Patriotic Youth League. With the foundation of the North Korean Democratic Youth League on January 17, 1946, the newspaper was first published as “Minju Cheongnyeon.” After that, the newspaper changed its name several times to finally settle down with The Youth Sinmun in 1996. The Youth Sinmun is a daily newspaper intended to keep the younger generations ideologically in line as the gaps between generations were widening. The newspaper teaches *juche* ideology to the youth, campaigns for the policies and directives of the WPK, encourages the youth to devote themselves to the realization of such agenda, and educates them to be loyal to the three Kims. Most



of the articles in The Youth Sinmun connect the issues covered by Rodong Sinmun with the youth.

## 2) Magazines

In North Korea, both industrial magazines and academic journals are called magazines. Key magazines include Economic Studies (*gyeongjae yeongju*), Workers (*geunroja*), Chollima, Korean Women (*Chosun nyeosung*), Korean Literature (*Chosun munhak*), Korean Art (*Chosun yesul*), etc.

### **Economic Studies**

Economic Studies (*gyeongjae yeongju*) is a theoretical magazine in economics. The first issue of this magazine was published on April 10, 1956, and has been issued bimonthly by the Science Encyclopedia Publishing House. Since April 1973, it was merged with “Social Science” which was a general theoretical magazine in social science and published by Social Science Publishing House, until it was divided in December 1985 and issued as Economic Studies again. Economic Studies focuses on the economic ideology and theories based on the outcomes of the studies conducted by North Korea in the field of economics and explain such ideologies and theories in a comprehensive manner to promote them. The main readers include domestic economists, economic experts, college professors, economic managers, and college students majoring in political economics and other social sciences.

## **Workers**

*Workers (geunroja)* is an official magazine of the WPK Central Committee covering political theories. The magazine is circulated in 300,000 copies and published by the “Workers Company,” which is an affiliate company of the WPK Publishing House. The title, “Workers” was chosen by Kim Il Sung, reportedly. The first issue was published in October 1946 and was issued monthly, switching between monthly and biweekly, and finally settled down with monthly issuance in 1966. The main readers include the officers of the central and regional party organizations, officers of the administrative branches and unions, and workers of social science, education, and training institutions. The main goal of this magazine is to introduce the policies of the WPK to its officers, suggesting implementation strategies for the policies, campaigning for the policies and directives of the party, establishing the monolithic ideological system of Kim Il Sung, and enriching communism.

## **Chollima**

Chollima is a “popular cultural general magazine” published in North Korea. A “general magazine” is a magazine that edits articles of politics, economics, culture, and many other fields in various formats and methods. The magazine is literally intended for the general public and covers all aspects of their social lives to enrich the working public in culture. Chollima is, in line with its nature as a popular cultural general magazine, carrying articles such as the education of the party policies, revolutionary traditions, and socialistic patriotism, as well as informative pieces on international politics, economic development,

history, geography, science, forestry, healthcare, and lifestyle; literary pieces such as novels or poems; and other articles covering culture and art, traditional customs and culture of Korea, and more. The readers include workers, farmers, intelligentsia, soldiers, teenagers, and the public in general. The first issue was published on January 22, 1959 (published by the National Art Publishing House.) But today, the magazine is issued monthly by Chollima Company, an affiliate of the Literature and Art Publishing House.

### **Korean Women**

Korean Women (*Chosun nyeosung*) is the official magazine of the Central Committee of the Korean Socialist Women's Alliance. The first issue was published on September 6, 1946 (by Chosun Nyeosungsa). Today, it is issued monthly by the Workers' Union Publishing House. As its primary goal, Korean Women aims to arm the women with *juche* ideology and convert them into revolutionaries and the working class, and educate them so that they can contribute to the construction of the socialist state. And the magazine was founded as a guidebook for the enlightenment and development of women. As a popular political magazine, it continuously features articles that actively promote and endorse the policies of the party related to gender issues as well as the progress in women's movement. By introducing model cases of the women deemed desirable in the North Korean society, the magazine also plays the role of leading women to this particular direction.

### **Korean Literature**

Korean Literature (*Chosun munhak*) is the official magazine of

the Central Committee of the Writer's Alliance of Korea. It was first published as Cultural Frontier in 1946 and changed its name to Korean Literature in 1947, to Culture and Art in 1948, and back to Korean Literature in 1953. The magazine promotes *juche*-styles of literature theories, and campaigns form them. In addition to the works by Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il, the magazine carries classic literature pieces, selected poems, novels, critics, and essays. Main readers include experts in the field of literature and art and workers. The magazine is issued monthly.

### Korean Art

Korean Art (*Chosun yesul*) was founded as a general art magazine in 1967 and the official monthly magazine of the Korean Federation of Literature and Art. The readers include experts in art areas, artists, art group members, and general public. The magazine started as the art magazine for theater and dance. But starting with the 4th issue in 1968, it merged with arts, cinema, and music. Its purpose of the magazine is to introduce the achievements in artistic activities, experience, and selected pieces of art to enhance the practical political capabilities and artistic skills of artists, and by doing so to contribute to the development of the culture and art in general.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Korean Cinema (*Chosun yeonghwa*) is a film and arts magazine that was established in 1957. It targets both film professionals and enthusiasts in the general public. After its third issue in 1968, it was integrated into Korean Arts (*Chosun arts*), but in 1984, it was re-established as Korean Cinema. Finally, in 1997, it was merged into Korean Arts once again before being discontinued.



## 2 Broadcasting

Broadcasting services in North Korea are operated under the guidance from the Korean Central Broadcasting Committee (KCBC) and, as was the case with the newspapers, it reports and campaigns the party's policies and political issues. The broadcasting service system of North Korea is divided into two parts, which are, respectively, the party's role to guide and adjust the broadcasting itself and the role of the Cabinet responsible for the facilities, equipment, and administration of the broadcasting stations. KCBC is the organization which plans and oversees anything that is related to broadcasting and performs the broadcasting function and regulatory function at the same time. There are regional broadcasting committees under KCBC, and under these regional broadcasting committees are the county broadcasting

committees. They have cable TV relay stations under them. The central organizations for the broadcasting committee include the Radio Bureau, TV Bureau, and Culture and Art Bureau.

North Korea has been servicing its Korean Central Television (KCTV) to Asia, Africa, and a part of Europe through ThaiComm 5, which is a communication satellite of Thailand since 1999 and to Americas using the “Intelsat” since 2015. From February 9, 2015, North Korea switched its KCTV satellite broadcasting to digital HD.

### **Radio Broadcasting**

The radio broadcasting stations include Korean Central Broadcasting Station (KCBS) and Pyongyang Cable Broadcasting System for the residents of North Korea, Pyongyang Broadcasting Station (PBS) which is broadcasting to South Korea, and other international broadcasting services which are provided in Russian, English, French, Chinese, Japanese, and Arabic. KCBS started with the broadcasting of the “Welcoming Ceremony of the Mass for the Triumph of the Fatherland” by Kim Il Sung on October 14, 1945. This was followed by the division into the First Central Broadcasting (domestic) and the Second Central Broadcasting (to South Korea and other countries) in 1967. In 1972, the First Central Broadcasting service was renamed as Korean Central Broadcasting Station.

PBS was spun off from KCBS in 1967 and launched as the Second Central Broadcasting. Later in November 1972, the channel was renamed as Pyongyang Broadcasting Station. In most cases, the news is produced by citing articles, editorials, opinion pieces, or essays in official media such as Korean Central News Agency or Rodong

Sinmun. Pyongyang FM Broadcasting Station, which opened in 1989, is serviced to South Korea for propaganda and broadcasts classic music such as Beethoven, Brams, and Vivaldi, along with the revolutionary songs and music of North Korea. North Korea has also unique cable channels, which are called the “Third channel.” All households of North Korea are connected with a cable broadcasting network, and the message from the government is directly broadcast to households through a dedicated speaker.

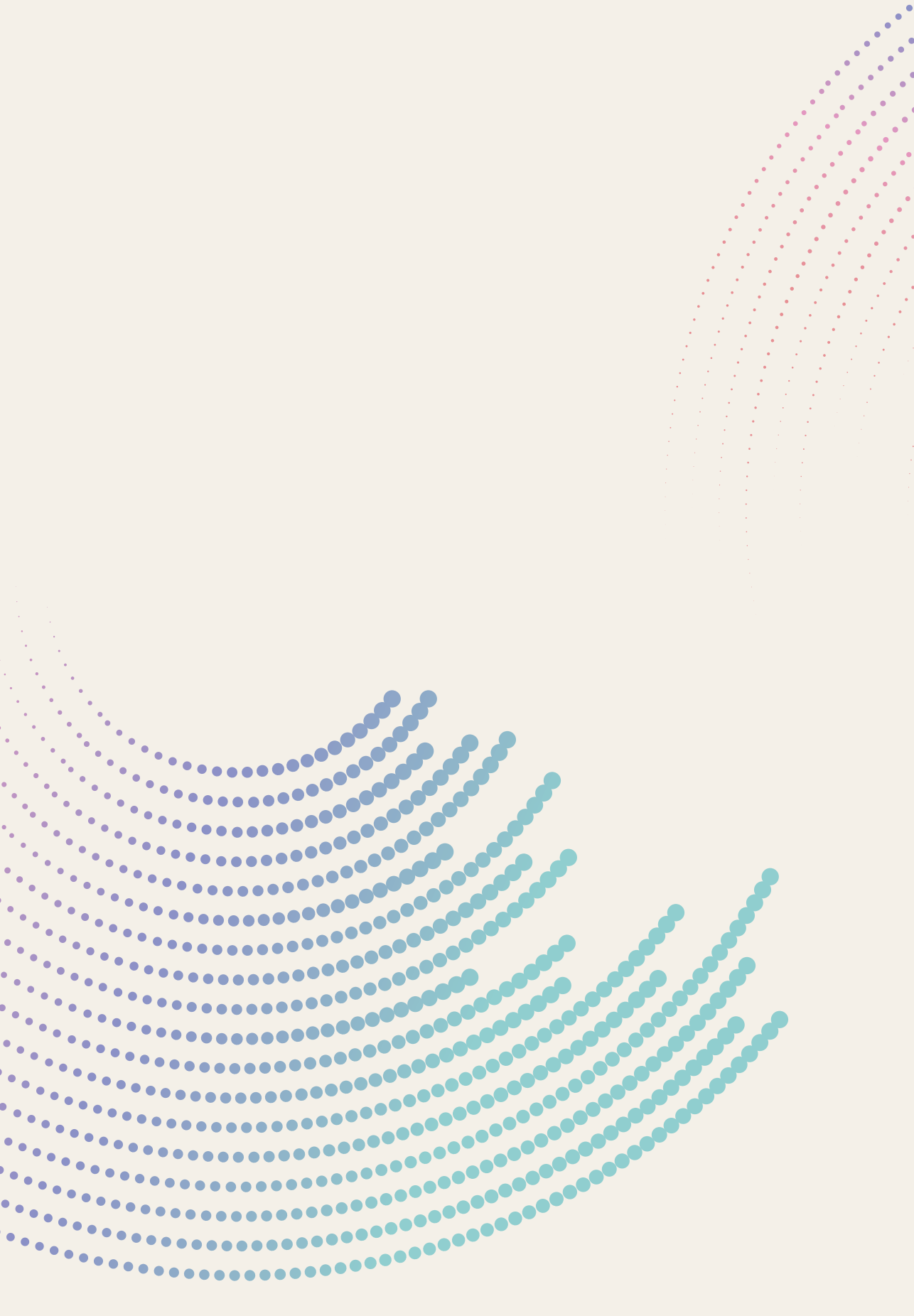
### **TV Broadcasting**

The TV networks of North Korea include Korean Central TV, Mansudae TV, Ryongnamsan TV, and Sports TV. The Korean Central TV, which is the leading TV channel of North Korea, opened as Pyongyang Broadcasting in 1963 and was renamed as Korean Central TV in 1970. In celebration of the 62th birthday of Kim Il Sung in 1974, the network started to air in color, and, in 1999, the network started to air via satellite in celebration of the 54th anniversary of the WPK. The TVs run from 5pm on weekdays (Monday through Saturday) and 9am in the morning on Sundays and holidays. Since August 2013, the starting hours changed to 3pm on weekdays and 9am on Sundays and holidays. However, since the announcement of the outbreak of COVID-19 (May 12, 2022) and starting from May 16, 2022, the TVs started from 9am even during weekdays, which is still the case as of January 2023. Key programs are about idolizing Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Il, and Kim Jong Un. What makes this network stand out is that it records and broadcasts plays and movies. Recently, the airtime of movies and sports increased. And, in 2014, they broadcasted Incheon

Asian Games, namely those events where North Korea excelled. In celebration of the 70th anniversary of the Liberation, the Sports TV opened on August 15, 2015. Since the beginning of the Kim Jong Un era, North Korean TVs are airing more sports games.

North Korea's TVs are mostly about propaganda and agitation. However, recent TV shows are diversifying in their topics, covering romance, everyday life of ordinary North Koreans, and social conflicts. They also paid attention to the quality of the image. In 2015, they stopped their SD broadcasting and started servicing HD broadcasting (4:3 screen ratio). Then, in December 2017, Korean Central TV started its HD full screen broadcasting (16:9 ratio). Also, they are running accounts in Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and other SNS services, totaling more than 30 accounts.







## Education

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**Section 1.** Education Policy and Systems

**Section 2.** Curriculum and Contents

## Section 1

# Education Policy and Systems

### 1 Education Policy

#### 1) Goal of Education

The ideological orientation of the education in North Korea is socialist education based on *juche* ideology. In the earlier days, North Korea used education as a tool to plant Soviet socialism into North Korea, as was the case in other socialist states. The education programs of North Korea have been operated in order to eradicate illiteracy, construct a socialist state, and cultivate the talents to for the regime.

Education during the Kim Il Sung era, in accordance with the “Thesis on Socialist Education” (1977)<sup>1</sup>, aimed at cultivating “new communist

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**1** The “Thesis on Socialist Education” was the basic policy and framework of the education systems in North Korea, announced during the 14th Plenary Session of the 5th WPK Central Committee on September 5, 1977. This announcement was composed of a summary of the speeches, lessons, and orders by Kim Il Sung on educational issues and summarizes the directions and instructions on education in North Korea in general.

human beings.” During the Kim Jong Il era, the 2009 Amendment of the Socialist Constitution changed the goal of education from “cultivating new communist human beings” to “cultivating new *juche* human beings.” They also upgraded the laws related to education, such as the Education Law (1999), Elementary Education Law (2011), and Higher Education Law (2011).

During the first year of Kim Jong Un era, “Regarding the Implementation of universal 12-year compulsory education.”<sup>2</sup> (2012 Law by the Supreme People’s Assembly) was announced. In the following year, the “Decree on the universal 12-year compulsory education” was completed, followed by gradual implementation of the decree and the announcement of the “Full Implementation of the universal 12-year compulsory education” (2017.) In addition, new laws such as the Law on Child Care and Enrichment (2013), Education Law, Elementary Education Law, Higher Education Law were amended and supplemented in 2015. This was followed by the enactment of the “Law on the Implementation of the Decrees on Education” (2016) and “Law on Online Education” (2020). In 2019, the amendment of the Socialist Constitution changed the goals of education from “cultivating healthy and moral revolutionaries” and “new *juche* human beings with knowledge, ethics, and physique” to cultivating “true patriots” and “the workers for the construction of a socialist society with knowledge,

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**2** “Regarding Full-Scale Implementation of universal 12-year compulsory education for the Critical Enhancement of Its Quality” [September 25, 2012]. 1. Implementation of universal 12-year compulsory education 2. Enhancement of education in line with the demands for the development of education for the era of knowledge economy and the level of the world 3. Increasing the state’s investment in educational programs and preparing the necessary conditions and environment.

ethics, and physique.”<sup>3</sup>

The “Socialist Education” specified in the Education Law aims to cultivate the talents who are “equipped with independent ideological awareness and creative capabilities” (Article 1) and “the reliable talents with sound ideological awareness, advanced knowledge in science and technology, and formidable physique” (Article 3). Also, the law emphasized “prioritizing the political ideology education, in-depth science and technology education, along with physical education and art education.” The education policy of the Kim Jong Un era emphasizes ideological education for the future believers of Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism, while strengthening English, Science, Technology, and Informationization of Education. During the 8th Party Congress in 2021, they urged that “intermediate and secondary education must be updated in terms of contents, teaching methods, and academic administration continuously in order to keep up with the latest trend of modern education and educational demands.”

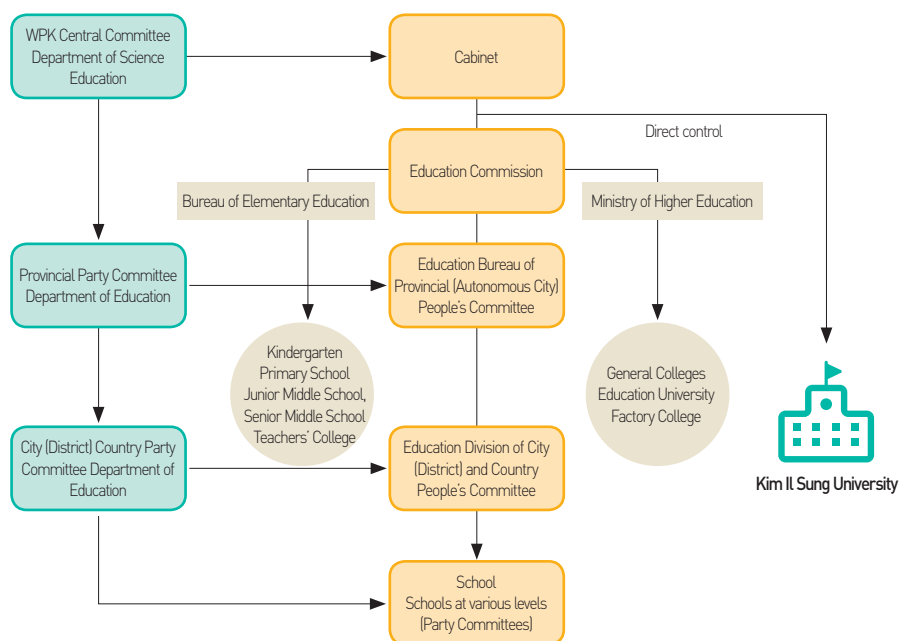
## 2) Educational Administration

All educational and cultural institutions, including schools, are monitored and instructed by the Party and other state organizations. Key educational policies of North Korea are discussed and decided during the Plenary Sessions of the WPK Central Committee. The

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**3** In the revised Socialist Constitution of 2019, Article 43 states: “The State shall rear the rising generations to be true patriots who will struggle for the society and collective, the country and the people, embodying the principles of socialist education, and as revolutionaries of socialist construction equipped with noble moral character.”

Department of Science and Education, which is the educational department of the WPK Central Committee, prepares practical educational policies and implementation instructions, which are passed down to educational administrative bodies. The central educational administrative bodies under the Cabinet, the Education Commission Bureau of Elementary Education and Ministry of Higher Education as well as the local and regional educational administrative bodies are the implementation bodies under supervision and instructions by the Department of Science Education of the WPK Central Committee. The schools of North Korea, too, are under the control and supervision of the party committee of the school, which is a part of the WPK.



[Figure 8-1] Education Administration System in North Korea

As shown in [Figure 8-1], the educational administrative system of North Korea is based on a three-part structure composed of the Party, Cabinet, and School. The party is responsible for directing and supervising the educational policy, while the Cabinet develops and materializes the educational policy based on the instructions given by the party. Schools are to implement the educational policies passed down from the party and the Cabinet.

Under the Education Commission of the Cabinet responsible for the administration, are the Bureau of Elementary Education and the Ministry of Higher Education. The Bureau of Elementary Education governs kindergartens, primary schools, middle schools and teachers' colleges, while the Ministry of Higher Education governs colleges, universities, and factory colleges. The Education Commission passes down the educational instructions to the Education Bureaus under provincial People's Committees. Then, these Education Bureaus propagate them to the Education Divisions in city and country People's Committees, to have them finally handed over to schools.

The school administration systems of North Korea are divided into administrative organizations and political organizations. The administrative organizations are headed by the principal and the vice principal, and the actual administrative weight is pulled by the Administrations Department and the Accounting Department. On the other hand, the political organizations are centered around the vice principle, who is also the secretary of the party cell, and include the School Party Committee, Children's Union Committee, and Youth League Committee. The school education of North Korea has a hierarchical structure centered around the party. Therefore, the

authority of the principal who is responsible for the administrations and accounting of the school is rather limited, compared to the vice principal responsible for the organizational membership activities of faculty members and students as well as their ideological enrichment.

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## 2 Educational Systems

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### 1) History of Educational Systems in North Korea

After the independence of Korea, North Korea introduced a Soviet-style education system. During the earlier days, the government focused on the eradication of illiteracy among all North Koreans. After the Korean War, North Korea focused on reconstruction from the war devastation and building of a socialist state. For this purpose, they established a school system where “they learn as they work.” North Korea introduced the 4-year primary compulsory education (1956), 7-year secondary compulsory education combining the 4 years in primary school and 3 years in middle school (1958). This was followed by the establishment of 2-year vocational schools and vocational senior middle school. Then, they introduced a 5-year middle school by joining combining the existing 3-year middle school with 2-year vocational school, resulting in a 9-year technical education system (1967).

With the official introduction of *juche* as the ruling ideology of North Korea in the 1970s, an emphasis was put on *juche* in education as well. Starting from April 1973, a “10-year education and 1-year pre-school education” program was implemented according to the



**[Table 8-1]** Changes in North Korea’s Mandatory Education Program






Year	Description of the education programs
1956	4-year primary compulsory education
1958	7-year secondary compulsory education (4 years in primary school + 3 years in middle school)
1967	9-year technical compulsory education (4 years in primary school + 5 years in middle school)
1972	universal 11-year compulsory education (1 year in kindergarten, + 4 years in primary school + 6 years in middle school)
2012	universal 12-year compulsory education (1 year in kindergarten + 5 years in primary school + 3 years in junior middle school + 3 years in senior middle school)

decision made during the 4th Plenary Session of the 5th WPK Central Committee of 1972.

After the mid-1980s, North Korea established gifted children education institutions at the municipal and provincial-level called the No.1 middle school, to educate those with gifted talents in science and technology. They designated intermediate-level gifted children education institutions and established gifted-students’ classes in colleges. Later, people’s schools were renamed as primary schools, while higher middle schools were renamed as middle schools (2002). The 40-year-old “universal 11-year compulsory education” program was upgraded to a “universal 12-year compulsory education,” where the primary school education was extended from previous four years to five years. The changes in the school system of North Korea are as shown in [Table 8-1.]

## 2) School Systems of North Korea

The school system of North Korea in the Kim Jong Un era extended the previous four-year primary schools to five years, while the six years of middle schools were divided into three years in junior middle

Age	School years	School types	Education type	
26	4	 Doctoral course (two to four years) University	Higher education	
25	3			
24	2			
23	1			
22	6			
21	5			
20	4			*
19	3			
18	2			
17	1			
16	3	 Senior Middle School	Secondary education	Elementary education (12 years)
15	2			
14	1	 Junior Middle School		
13	3			
12	2			
11	1	 Primary School	Primary education	
10	5			
9	4			
8	3			
7	2			
6	1	 Kindergarten	Pre-School education	
5	Upper Class			
4	Lower Class			

**[Figure 8-2] North Korean School System**

\* Currently only Pyongyang Teachers' College (three years) has a doctoral degree course, while the regional Teachers' College (three years) do not.

schools and three years in senior middle schools.

The school systems of North Korea are as shown in [Figure 8-2.]

### 3) Elementary Education of North Korea

The school education in North Korea is divided into elementary education and higher education. Elementary education is the basic, general education and composed of pre-school education, primary education, and secondary education. According to Article 19 of the Elementary Education Law of North Korea, elementary education can be classified as follows (Table 8-2) based on the content of education and their characteristics.

With the enactment of the law to introduce “universal 12-year compulsory education” in 2012 and its subsequent full-scale implementation in 2017, education in North Korea took a step of evolution. As the background for shake-up of the school system, the North Korean government pointed to the “demands for the development of education in the era of knowledge economy and the enhancement of the quality of education to the world level.”

**[Table 8-2] Classification of Elementary Education**

Class	School class
1	1 year pre-school education at kindergarten
2	5 years primary education in primary school
3	3 Years Lower-level education in junior middle school
4	3 Years Higher-level education in senior middle school
5	Schools for special needs children (vision and hearing disabilities)
6	Academies for specific education programs (Revolutionary Academy, Foreign Language Academy, and Art and Sports Academy)
7	No.1 Middle schools for gifted children

An educational decree in North Korea is a standard for education, like the official curriculum in South Korea. The new textbooks published according to the new educational decree were improved in terms of the quality of paper and illustrations, while including discussions, explorations, and practice activities for each ‘subject.’ With the increase in education budget in the Kim Jong Un era, new school uniforms were also issued, and school buildings and facilities went through an update.

Education during the Kim Jong Un era is characterized by the strengthening of the elementary education and the emphasis on the education of science, technology, and informationization for the goal of building a powerful socialist country. North Korean government pronounced “developing all North Koreans into science and technology talents” in 2013, underscoring that they would strengthen their education of science and technology in line with the demand of the era of knowledge economy. This was followed by the declaration on the goal of “developing all North Korea as science and technology talents” to build a “country with powerful science and technology” during the 7th Party Congress of the WPK in 2016. During the 3rd Plenary Session of the 7th WPK Central Committee in 2018 (April 20), the party pronounced “science and technology education” as a long-term priority program. In 2019, too, North Korea emphasized the importance of science and technology education through its state administration speech (April 13) of the Supreme People’s Assembly and the new year’s speech.

In September 2019, North Korea held the 4th National Teachers’ Convention five years after the last convention in 2014, to call for

the increase in the state-level investment into educational projects, enhancing the competence of teachers, and a culture of valuing teachers in the society. In 2019 and 2020, each locality announced the rankings of their educational program evaluation results under the slogan, “Establish a culture of prioritizing education and talents in our society,” encouraging the entire country to make a “fever of educational competition” among local officials and teachers. In 2020, the government went further to disclose the evaluation results of teachers’ colleges and universities across the country including “securing teachers” and “improving the curriculum” as evaluation factors in order to strengthen the talent pool for teacher.

One of the characteristics of the educational reform during the Kim Jong Un era was that, on top of the general elementary education of the past, a new type of vocational senior middle school at the senior middle school stage was tried. According to the government’s announcement, while a regular middle school will focus on teaching the general intermediate-level knowledge, a “vocational senior middle school” provides, on top of the regular curriculum, “basic vocational education” in accordance with the economic and geographic characteristics of the region.<sup>4</sup> The North Korean government established eleven new “information technology senior middle school” in each of the provinces and ordered each city and counties to operate at least one or more

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<sup>4</sup> “For the successful pilot operation of the new school class, which is the vocational senior middle school, now regular middle schools are to provide knowledge on general topics, while vocational senior middle schools are to provide knowledge on general topics and the basic vocational education in accordance with the economic and geographic characteristics of the region, and the necessary preparations for this pilot program will be executed without failure.” *North Korea Kyoyuk Sinmun*, Oct. 2, 2014, p. 2.

“vocational senior middle school,” to strengthen their technological education. During the 10-year period up to 2022, North Korea had established more than 500 vocational senior middle schools (technical class) in the 10 sectors in the ten industries with metallurgy, power, coal, chemical, agriculture, and fishery. In addition, it was suggested that more than 200 schools be selected as “pilot schools” to strengthen the “material foundation” for the progress of education, namely, to modernize all educational institutions and realize informationization.

Academies of North Korea are special education institutions meant for specific topics. Some of the well-known examples of these academies include the revolutionary academies such as the Mangyongdae Revolutionary School, foreign language academies such as Pyongyang Foreign Language Institute, and art and sports academies such as Kumsong Academy, Pyongyang Music School, Nampo Central

**[Table 8-3] Special Education Institutions**

Purpose	Name of the institution	Description
Training Core Talents	Revolutionary Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Established in 1947</li> <li>• Elementary and secondary educations</li> <li>• Children of revolutionaries, fallen soldiers, or high-ranking officials of the party or the government</li> </ul>
Educating Gifted Talents	No.1 Middle School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Established in 1984</li> <li>• 6-Year secondary educations</li> <li>• Focusing on natural science, math, and physics, etc. (for training future scientists)</li> </ul>
	Foreign Language Institutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Established in 1958</li> <li>• 6-Year secondary educations, focused on eight foreign languages including English, Chinese, Japanese, and Russian</li> <li>• Students selected among the graduates of primary schools who are talented in foreign languages</li> </ul>
Training in Art and Sports Talents	Music Schools, Sports Institutes, and Takwondo Academy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Established in the 1960s</li> <li>• 6-Year secondary educations</li> <li>• Special education for the students with talents in art or sports</li> </ul>

Institute of Physical Education, and Taekwondo Academy. Also, while North Korea emphasizes its equality in education, they have established its “gifted children” education systems apart from the regular education. North Korea calls their “gifted children” education program the “*juche*” education of “our style,” emphasizing that talented students must be identified early on to provide gifted-children education.

As a result, North Korea has been running “bases for training gifted students,” “academies,” and other special-purpose education institutions for training gifted students from the earlier days of its regime. In 1958, they established foreign language academies, which were intermediate level institutions, and, since the 1960s, they established special schools for music, dancing, and sports. Elite education for gifted individuals expanded in the 1980s. Especially, elite education institutions started to appear since the mid-1980s to train talented individuals in the field of information technology. And these programs were expanded to municipal levels starting from the 1990s.

The Kim Jong Un regime is also emphasizing elite education. When the North Korean government announced its “universal 12-year compulsory education,” it also called for the “strengthening of elite education and the enhancement of the competency of the education and science research institutions.” They focused on the projects to train basic science or computer science, while encouraging its students to participate in international competitions for math or physics. Also, they were keen to identify young talents in the fields of art and literature, continuously hosting the “competitions for talented kindergarten children across the country.”

#### 4) Higher Education in North Korea

The history of higher education started with the establishment of Kim Il Sung University in Pyongyang in October 1946. During the three-year reconstruction period after the Korean War (1954 - 1956), colleges in the fields of politics and economics were established. And, during the implementation of the mandatory intermediary education programs, the government focused on the expansion of teachers' colleges and education universities to train intermediate level teachers. In the 1960s and the 1970s, North Korea focused on training technicians, who were needed for the implementation of their economic development plan. For this reason, they established "colleges where you learn as you work"<sup>5</sup> such as factory colleges and evening colleges. Small-sized factory colleges, remote colleges, and vocational schools also increased.

During the early days of the Kim Jong Un era, the government chose to expand their universities. They restructured Sinuiju Agricultural University into Pyongyang University. Hamhung Computer, Light Industry, and Construction University were integrated into Hamhung University of Chemical Industry to establish new universities in each region. They also reshuffled their higher education system by promoting Han Tok Su Pyongyang University of Light Industry, Jang Chol Gu Pyongyang University of Commerce, and

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**5** The higher education of North Korea is divided into full-time studies and part-time studies, where you "learn as you work." The "learn as you work" education systems include the factory colleges that are established within factories, farm colleges, and fishery colleges. Also, there are part-time programs in regular colleges, remote education programs, and broadcasting education programs. The types of colleges include universities, colleges, vocational schools, and factory colleges.



Pyongyang University of Mechanical Engineering. However, since the second half of 2019, the North switched from the existing policy of expanding university programs, returning them to colleges or spinning off colleges under these universities. They held national college review meetings to announce the rankings of central and regional colleges, teacher's colleges and universities, vocational colleges, and factory colleges, while seeking to make their curriculum more practical, comprehensive, modernized, and "integrated."

At the same time, in accordance with their policy to train all North Koreans into science and technology talents, they established research institutions to implement the high-profile, advanced research projects under universities across the country. Also, they have established the "continuous education system" where students can finish all courses from undergraduate to doctoral courses at once. To this end, they established the "Future Science and Technology Institute" under Kim Chaek University of Technology and "Advanced Technology Development Institute" under Kim Il Sung University. Also, North Korea converted academies and special schools to vocational schools and expanded the size of vocational technical institutes, while upgrading the level of their education to train "practice-oriented technical talents."

The higher education of North Korea uses different arrangements based on the nature of the schools or programs. For example, teachers' college and other colleges offer three-year programs, while education universities intended to train the faculty members of colleges and universities offer four-year programs except for Kim Hyong Jik University of Education (five-year). Colleges and universities also

provide programs of varying length, ranging from four years to six years. To go to college in North Korea, one needs to go through certain processes such as passing the preliminary entrance tests getting the recommendations to enter the college or university and passing the main entrance exam. The student candidates eligible for the main entrance exam of each college and university are determined by the Education Commission of the Cabinet of each province. Then, the provincial People's Committee sends the admission notice to the students who passed the exam based on the number of available slots for the region. Of these candidates who were screened through the preliminary exam and got the recommendation for college entrance, those who finally got to a higher educational institution is about 19%<sup>6</sup> to 26.8%.<sup>7</sup> Boys who fail the preliminary screening have to join the military, and girls are assigned to a job. North Korean students are not usually given a second shot for college. But they can still get recommendation and try the exam again when they get a recommendation in the military or at work. Those who enter the college immediately after graduating from an middle school are called to "one-shot student." To be one you must have good grades and good family backgrounds. After the economic meltdown, one more factor now influences entrance, in addition to the grade and background. Your financial situation also matters.

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<sup>6</sup> Press release, Statistics Korea, 2011, <http://kostat.go.kr/assist/synap/preview/skin/miri.html?fn=e14df6300214231055214&rs=/assist/synap/preview>.

<sup>7</sup> UNESCO, Democratic People's Republic of Korea Education and Literacy, 2018.

## Section 2

# Curriculum and Contents

### 1 Curriculum

#### 1) Primary Schools

The curriculum of primary schools, as shown in Table 8-3, includes the childhood of the leader, Korean, mathematics, science, English, information technology, and more, totaling 13 subjects to learn over five years at a primary school. As for the class hours per week, Korean language has the most hours, followed by mathematics, sports, music and dance, drawing and crafts, and science. Compared to the past, the hours for English, mathematics, music and dance, drawing and crafts increased after the change of the school system. According to the “Decree of the universal 12-year compulsory education” (2013), primary schools were now required to teach a news subject, the “Childhood of Dear Marshal Kim Jong Un,” which increased the overall political ideology enrichment hours.



Primary school students



Primary school textbooks

[Table 8-4] Education Curriculum for Primary School

Class	Subject	Class Hours Per Week				
		Grade1	Grade2	Grade3	Grade4	Grade5
1	Childhood of the Great Suryong Grand Marchal Kim Il Sung	1	1	1	1	1
2	Childhood of the Great Leader Kim Jong Il	1	1	1	1	1
3	Childhood of Anti-Japanese Heroine Kim Jong Suk	1				
4	Childhood of Dear Marshal Kim Jong Un	1	1	1	1	1
5	Socialist Morality	1	1	1	1	1
6	Mathematics	4	5	5	5	5
7	Korean	7	7	7	7	7
8	Science	1week	1week	2	2	2
9	Music and Dance	2	2	2	2	2
10	Physical Education (PE)	2	2	2	2	2
11	Drawing and Crafts	2	2	2	2	2
12	English				2	2
13	Information Technology (Computer)			1week	1week	

\* Adapted from "The 1st universal 12-year compulsory education decree (primary schools)"

\* The curriculum of North Korea specifies the class hours and the focused teaching hours per week. In the table above, "1 week" means the focused teaching hour.

Korean language, English, mathematics and physical education (PE) use the same subject names as those of South Korea. But the natural science, home skills, music, and fine art subjects of South Korea are respectively called the science, information technology, music and dance, and drawing and crafts. There is no social studies subject in North Korea. Ethics is called the “Socialist Morality.” As for the importance of subjects, Korean language, math, and other basic subjects and political ideological education are considered more important than others. The information technology (Computer) subject has one focused teaching hour per week.

## 2) Junior Middle School

The secondary education used to be six years. But since 2012, they were divided into junior middle school and senior middle schools, each for three years. The middle school curriculum was designed to develop the talents in science and technology to lead the way to a “powerful knowledge economy.” For this purpose, the curriculum was redesigned to put more emphasis on basic science, computer skills, foreign language education, as well as the development of autonomous learning and creative skills, along with experiments and practices.<sup>8</sup>

Before the update, students were required to



Textbooks for junior middle school

<sup>8</sup> *Kyoyuk Sinmun*, May 8, 2014.

**[Table 8-5] Education Curriculum for Junior Middle School**

Class	Subject	Class Hours Per Week		
		Grade1	Grade2	Grade3
1	Revolutionary Activities of Great <i>Suryong</i> Grand Marchal Kim Il Sung	2	2	
2	Revolutionary Activities of Great Leader Grand Marchal Kim Jong Il		2	2
3	Revolutionary Activities of Anti-Japanese Heroine Kim Jong Suk	1		
4	Revolutionary Activities of Dear Marshal Kim Jong Un	1	1	1
5	Socialist Morality	1	1	1
6	Korean	5	5	5
7	English	4	4	4
8	Korean History	1	1	2
9	Korean Geography	1	1	1
10	Mathematics	6	6	6
11	Natural sciences	5	5	5
12	Information technology	2week	2week	2week
13	Basic technology	1	1	1
14	Physical Education (PE)	2 (1week)	2 (1week)	2 (1week)
15	Music and Dance	1	1	1
16	Art	1	1	1

\* Adapted from "The 1st universal 12-year compulsory education decree [junior middle schools]"

\* In the table above, the hours per week for PE is 2 hours, and 1 week in parentheses means the focused teaching hours.

learn 23 subjects over the six-year period in middle school. However, after the change, the subjects were divided and increased into 16 for the junior middle school and 22 for the senior middle school. The total class hours per week in the junior middle school is 32 hours, and the school programs are composed of regular classes along with extracurricular learning, Children's Union activities, and extracurricular PE. Among the subjects of the middle schools, the political ideology,

math, science, and English are considered important. Most of the basic subjects are all considered important.

The “revolutionary activities of Kim Jong Un” was newly added to the junior middle school curriculum, while some integrated subjects such as the natural science and music and dance were also introduced. The “system and practice” before the update of the curriculum now became a part of the “basic technology” and the computer subject was now integrated with statistics and the basics and application of image files to be renamed as “information technology.” Science at primary school was now changed to natural science, and fine art and handcraft was renamed as fine art. Social studies and ethics area subjects include “socialist morality” and other subjects that are focused on Korea, such as Korean History and Korean Geography.

### 3) Senior Middle School

The total class hours per week in the senior middle school is 34 hours, and the school programs are composed of regular classes along with extracurricular learning, Youth League activities, and extracurricular PE. The senior middle school curriculum includes 22 subjects such as the “revolutionary history” of the leaders, Korean language and literature, mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, and English. The importance of these subjects is in the order of natural science subjects such as math, physics, and chemistry, and English.

The senior middle schools newly have the “revolutionary history of Kim Jong Un,” and spun-off subjects were added, so that the natural science subject of the middle school was now divided into



Textbooks of senior middle school

physics, chemistry, and biology. On the other hand, Korean subject of the junior middle school was replaced with “Korean language and literature” and the Korean history and Korean geography of the junior middle school was replaced with “history” and “geography.” Also, they now learn

the combined subject of “art” which is the combination of music and dance, and art in the middle school. New subjects that were not in the junior middle school curriculum, such as the “current party policies,” “psychology and logic,” “Chinese characters,” “introduction to (agricultural) industry,” “basics of military activities” were also included. The only foreign language they teach at school is English. There are no second foreign language courses. “socialist morality and law,” “history,” “geography,” “psychology and logic” are required courses. There are no optional courses available for selection. Some regions provide optional “introduction to (agricultural) industry” courses.

The senior middle school program of North Korea is characterized with a structure focused on vocational training rather than preparation for college education. Information technology, basic technology, and introduction to (agricultural) industry subjects are mandatory for all students in North Korea. The “basics of military activities” subject is also necessary to prepare the graduates for long military services after their graduation. The educational decree includes, in addition to the curricular programs, one week of field trip, one week of the “Young Red Guards” training, three weeks of tree planting, and nine weeks of co-op training.



**[Table 8-6] Education Curriculum for Senior Middle School**

Class	Subject	Class Hours Per Week		
		Grade1	Grade2	Grade3
1	Revolutionary History of Great Suryong Grand Marshal Kim Il Sung	3	2	
2	Revolutionary History of Great Leader Grand Marshal Kim Jong Il		2	4
3	Revolutionary History of Anti-Japanese Heroine Kim Jong Suk		1/2	
4	Revolutionary History of Dear Marshal Kim Jong Un	1	1	1
5	Party Policies	1week	1week	1week
6	Socialist Morality and Law	1	1	1
7	Psychology and Logic			1week
8	Korean Language and Literature	3	2	3
9	Chinese Characters	1	1	1
10	English	3	3	3
11	History	1	1	2
12	Geography	1	1	1
13	Mathematics	5	5/4	4
14	Physics	5	4	2
15	Chemistry	3	4	2
16	Biology	3	3	3
17	Information Technology	2	1	1
18	Basic Technology	2week	3week	3week
19	Introduction to (Agricultural) Industry			4
20	Basics of Military Activities		1week	1week
21	Physical Education (PE)	1	1	1
22	Art	1	1	1

\* Adapted from "The 1st universal 12-year compulsory education decree [senior middle schools]"

\* It is estimated that the weekly hours of "the revolutionary history of Kim Jong Suk" and "mathematics" in grade 2 are interlinked.

#### 4) University

The curriculum of universities differ among the institutions and majors. Most of the programs are composed of political ideology courses, general subjects, general basic courses, basic major courses, and major courses. All majors are required to take the political ideology courses, foreign language, and PE, which are the general courses. The general basic courses are composed of the major courses and the common courses as specified by the institution. The basic major courses are the preparatory courses for their majors. Major courses are composed of mandatory courses and optional courses.

Recently, North Korea updated its university education program to establish the School of Computer Engineering, Information Engineering Courses, and Department of Information Engineering, focusing on the undergraduate IT courses. To strengthen the education of information technologies, bioscience, nanoscience technologies, various majors and courses were integrated to create a new major and subject, and the curricula are redesigned to reflect these changes. In the case of Pyongyang University of Computer Technology, the previous School of Computer Engineering was renamed as “Intelligent Information Engineering School” to prepare an AI-related education program.

At the same time, the North Korean government is following the policy of “training all North Koreans as science and technology talents” by improving the secondary education programs “in line with the practical demands with a critical improvement with the education system, contents, and methods,” urging the society to enhance the quality of the science and technology education. For this purpose,

they have invigorated the existing “work as you learn” programs and “preliminary technology training” programs. Also, they are modernizing the libraries, natural museums, and science exhibition centers across the country.<sup>9</sup>

In order to allow the workers of factories to take cyber-college courses, they also expanded the “Science and Technology Proliferation Rooms” in “factory colleges,” and, in October 2015, established the “Sci-Tech Complex” to form a science and technology network.

The North Korean government is interested in international exchanges for science and technology and engaged in academic exchanges with some countries, including China and Russia. Especially, Pyongyang University of Science and Technology is a special science university jointly established by the North and South in October 2010, with the request from North Korea, to “seek globalization and independence of the economy by training talents in science, technology, and management.” Pyeongyang University of Science and Technology has majors of electric engineering (computer, communication, and industrial automation), agricultural bio engineering, international finance and business administration. As of March 2018, the university dispatched 40 honor students out of the 1,100 graduates to Europe, South America, and China to study abroad. Pyongyang University of Science and Technology has been holding international academic conferences by inviting famous scholars from the United States, Australia, and Germany biannually since 2011 (except 2017, due to cancelation.)

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<sup>9</sup> *Rodong Sinmun*, October 20, 2014.

### 1) Curriculum

In the curriculum of North Korea, political ideology, science and technology, and PE have been important subjects. With the shake-up of the curriculum during the Kim Jong Un era, English and computer education are being emphasized, but political ideology is still an important part of the curriculum. According to the “universal 12-year compulsory education decree” of North Korea, the goals of the political ideology education is to instill loyalty to the leaders. The mandatory education of North Korea is organized in a way to turn every member of the society into individuals absolutely loyal to the *suryong* (leader) and the party.<sup>10</sup> Not only the regular curricula but every activity inside the school are designed to internalize the collectivist value system emphasized by the party, along with the enrichment of the students’ political ideology, including the loyalty toward the party and the *suryong*. Through its regular curricula, North Korea is teaching students the “childhood,” “revolutionary activities,” and “revolutionary history” of the Three Paektu Generals (Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Il, and Kim Jong Suk) and the greatness of Kim Jong Un.

Since the 2000s, North Korea pronounced pragmatic education.

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**10** The goal of education specified in the “1st universal 12-year compulsory education decree” specifies the purpose of education as to ensure “the principal understanding of the ideological theories of the great being of Paektusan Mountain (Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il), as well as their greatness, the greatness of their leadership, and greatness of their charisma, so that the students may form a revolutionary *suryong* perspective and endless loyalty toward the party and the *suryong*, which shall be valued with their life...”

This policy was extended to the education of foreign languages. Instead of Russian, which they used to teach, they now started to teach English starting from the 3rd year in primary schools starting from 2008. Currently, English is a mandatory subject for all students from the 4th year in primary schools to senior middle schools. And they emphasized that the teaching method, too, must switch from the grammar-centered method to the conversation-centered method.

Computer education was included in the regular curriculum starting from the end of the 1990s. Computer courses were offered in the Mangyongdae Children's Palace in 2001<sup>11</sup> followed by the Pyongyang Children's Palace, the Kumsong Middle school No.1 and Kumsong Middle school No.2, so that a handful of gifted children selected from the schools all across the country could learn computer technology. Education in North Korea in the Kim Jong Un era is focusing on developing talents by strengthening science and technology education, especially information technologies and computer education.

In the Kim Jong Un era, they are paying more attention to building the educational infrastructure for multimedia education, IT education, and remote education in line with the era of informationization and knowledge economy. The activities to develop education support

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**11** An extracurricular educational institution located in the Mangyongdae district of Pyongyang. It is a type of student learning center built for the extracurricular activities of the students of elementary and middle schools. Larger centers among these are called the "Children's Palace." These centers are equipped with a theater of about 2,000 seats, a library, and group activity rooms and classrooms for various activities in science, technology, sports, and art. On top of this, they offer swimming pools, gyms, and an exhibition hall for science and technology-based products. Especially, Mangyongdae Children's Palace is one of the best-known adolescent facilities along with the Pyongyang Children's Palace and function as a special education institution to develop gifted talents in various areas.

software have also increased. They include the “Mystery Scope” and “Sunflowers” which are educational support computer programs for children, “Arithmetic Star” and “Shining Star” which are an education support tool for primary schools, “English Star” which is an English-learning support tool for middle schools, AR-support tool “Mysterious Star,” and real-time video synthesis program, “Proud Star.”

To support such education, North Korea has also been strengthening the re-education of the faculty members through the teachers’ training centers and remote training. They have produced and applied electronic teaching materials at all levels of schools, while encouraging teaching competitions, discussion meetings on teaching methods, teaching materials exhibition (teaching plans, texts, and learning materials), and acquiring related licenses.

## 2) Extracurricular Education

Education outside the curriculum is called “extracurricular activities” in North Korea. They are not included in the regular class hours and administered separately. Primary schools provide, in addition to the regular teaching hours over the five years, 900 hours of extracurricular activities, 432 hours of the Children’s Union activities, and 513 hours of extracurricular PE activities. Middle schools provide, in addition to the regular teaching hours over the three years, 540 hours of extracurricular activities, 432 hours of the Children’s Union activities, and 306 hours of extracurricular PE activities. Senior middle schools provide, in addition to the regular teaching hours over the three years, 465 hours of extracurricular activities, 372 hours of the Youth League activities, and 243 hours of extracurricular PE activities.

## Extracurricular Learning

Once they show up at school, both teachers and students of North Korea start their day by reading an editorial or an opinion piece of Rodong *Sinmun*, called the “newspaper reading activity.” Even immediately before the beginning of each class, they go through an ideological enrichment routine with their home-room teachers, such as the “morning study,” “before-the-class study,” “365 days enrichment.” Once the regular classes are over, all students are to conduct a “self-criticism” of the school day, then followed by extracurricular hours.<sup>12</sup>

During the extracurricular hours, students normally study on their own, run a review of what they have learned while being assisted by the teacher, or preview their next classes, for a couple of hours. Some schools provide supplementary classes during the extracurricular hours, not by the home-room teachers but by a specialized teacher. Homeroom teachers sometimes utilize these hours to teach the students ethics or other enrichment subjects, such as “Do a Good Thing” program. During the extracurricular hours, students study not only their regular subjects but also the “enrichment of greatness” or “learning of the memoirs” as a part of their political ideological enrichment. These classes may be offered not only in their classrooms but also in “outdoor learning places.”

## Circle Activities

North Koreans believe education does not happen only in school

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<sup>12</sup> Kim Jong Il, “In order for the students to understand what they have learned fully, it is necessary to strengthen the guidance for extracurricular activities,” *Kyoyuk Sinmun*, November 14, 2013.

but also in broader social relations. They claim that educational programs must be provided not only as a program of a school but as a program of the entire society. In this regard, they emphasize the circle activities and other extracurricular activities based on not only the school but also the Children's Palaces, Children's hall, libraries, Children's Union camping grounds, and other outdoor enrichment bases.

The circle activity is a small group activity, for two to three hours after school every day, with the assistance from a guidance teacher of each area. The circle activities include school subject activities, music, art, sports, and many more. Multiple-subject circles<sup>13</sup> are intended for high-performances, and there are subject learning circles, literature circles, vocal circles, including school choirs and bands, art circles, as well as all kinds of sports circles including soccer, basketball, volleyball, table tennis, tennis, and other ball games, along with other sports such as Taekwondo, Korean wrestling, swimming and gymnastics.

### **Production and Labor**

Another characteristic of the education in North Korea is that they emphasize the connection between theories and practices. The Socialist Constitution demands that education and production labor must be tied closely, while the Education Law also requires that the education and practices are to be connected to ensure that the students can acquire knowledge and practical abilities at the same time. After

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**13** "Multi-subject circles strengthen the education of basic science, such as math, physics, chemistry, and biology, and foreign languages." *Kyoyuk Sinmun*, July 11, 2013.



the beginning of the Kim Jong Un regime, an order was given to stop extracurricular labor activities for students so that students can focus on learning. But students are still working due to the limitations in reality.

North Korean students are required to participate in various production labor such as planting rice seedlings or pulling out weeds. As they advance to higher school years, their mobilization hours get longer, and they are called to work in more areas, too. Especially, North Korea has been emphasizing “tree planting” as a national project, indicating tree planting activities a part of the educational decree. Junior middle school students are required to participate in tree planting at least four days a week during the spring season. And, in fall, they participate in picking fruits for three days. In senior middle schools, students should participate in tree planting for one week and three weeks of production labor.

The extracurricular activities of North Korea emphasize building experience through communities and considers contribution to the community beyond their families and schools important. They tend to underline collective value systems, community activities, and ideology and enrichment activities rather than personal interests or autonomy.



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