

An Assessment of the Persistence of the Kim Jong-un Regime: With an Emphasis on a Comparison to the Kim Jong-il Regime¹⁾

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Online Series CO 12-20

The North Korean political system, which is centered on one Supreme Leader, is a typical example of an authoritarian regime. Hereditary succession is the regime in and of itself. The right to make policy decisions is solely concentrated on the Leader, and political power is distributed according to hierarchy and position within the complex government network, which are interconnected like spokes to the hub of a wheel.²⁾ Thus, only the hub, or the Supreme Leader, can grant others the power to obtain information and implement policy decisions. In addition, horizontal exchanges or cooperation amongst the elite and the bureaucratic organizations are extremely limited and under close supervision. This is utilized as a means to suppress any fomentation of subvert activity from its very roots. Ultimately, laws and institutions are merely instruments for supporting the governing structure, while the Leader and the powerful elite are immune to the

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- 1) This paper is an augmented version of the author's presentation during a symposium on North Korean policy hosted by the Sejong Research Center at the Korean Press Center on March 12, 2012. The author wishes to express profound gratitude to Professor Kim Dong Sung of Joong Ang University, research fellow Baek Seung Joo of the Korean Institute for Defense Analysis, research fellow Sohn Gwang Joo of the Gyeonggi Research Institute and research fellow Park Hyeong Jung of the Korea Institute for National Unification for their insightful contributions to the discussions.
 - 2) If the extravagant parties that were prevalent during the reign of Kim Jong-il were the highest expression of the governing network management, then the so-called "fax politics," or "rule through approval," was a form of governance that emphasized the right to enact policy decisions in the single-leader system. No action could be implemented without the approval of the Supreme Leader, and consequently, the autocrat's right to enact laws was limitless. However, predictable administration and economic management have become impossible, and the absolute decision maker has become increasingly exhausted. Therefore, in this aspect, it can be speculated that Kim Jong-il's stroke and sudden death were connected to the peculiar characteristics of the North Korean regime.

rule of law.

Within the single-leader system, the death of the autocrat results in a severe crisis that determines the very fate of the regime. It is, therefore, natural that the fall of the head of state will bring about heated controversy concerning the stability of the regime itself. The succession of power from father to son is not only possible within a single-leader system, but is also the only means that can guarantee the continuity and stability of the regime. When Kim Jong-il passed away in 2011, his young son, Kim Jong-un, was presented as the First Secretary of the Workers' Party of Korea and the Chairman of the Central Military Commission at the Fourth Assembly of Party Representatives on April 11, 2012. Two days later at the Supreme People's Council, he made his official debut as the First Chairman of the National Defense Commission of the Korean People's Army, an organization that has been established as the predominant organ of power under North Korea's Military-first Policy. Undoubtedly, the question of whether the young Kim Jong-un is capable of filling the power vacuum that had been generated by the death of Kim Jong-il and establishing his position as the succeeding Supreme Leader will have a profound impact on the potential changes and continued existence of the North Korean regime.

In 1994, the death of Kim Il Sung had also sparked predictions of North Korea's demise, as the incident had coincided with the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc, the reformation of China, the unification of Germany and other world events. But contrary to the predictions and despite an endless sequence crises - such as the cessation of aid provisions from the former Soviet Union, international isolation in response to its development of nuclear weapons, widespread famines and a failed economy - the Kim Jong-il regime was able to muddle through the difficulties. As a result, anti-market and anti-reform policies were preserved and a single-leader system that minimized the institutional mechanisms to question the political accountability of the Leader continued to flourish, while the succession of power continued onto the third generation.³⁾ Due to the proven resilience of the Kim Jong-il regime, opinions concerning the future of the Kim Jong-un regime are, for the most part, relatively cautious, unlike the general mood that pervaded after the death of Kim Il Sung.

However, attempting to understand the longevity of the Kim Jong-il regime solely from the historical anomaly of the North Korean regime will lead to errors. There are numerous examples of states that have successfully maintained authoritarian dictatorships by opposing the powerful waves of democratization and currents of post-socialist regime change, such as Belarus, Ukraine, Russia, among other successor states to the former Soviet Union.⁴⁾ They have either successfully maintained

3) For the relationship between the reform paths of post-socialist states and the level of institutionalization of the political responsibilities of the policy decision maker within an authoritarian regime, refer to: Malesky, Edmund, Regina Abrami, Yu Zheng, "Institutions and Inequality in Single-Party Regimes: A Comparative Analysis of Vietnam and China," *Comparative Politics*, Vol.43, No.4(July2011), pp. 409-427.

4) For a discussion on the effects of information dissemination as the cause of international waves of democratization, refer to: Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991)

the dictatorships or reverted to authoritarian regimes after briefly experimenting with reform policies.

Due to regime persistence, various forms of authoritarian regimes have appeared. Case studies and data regarding this phenomenon have been accumulated, and efficient frameworks for analysis have also been presented. Based on this body of work, this paper will analyze the reasons the Kim Jong-il regime endured, assess the longevity of the Kim Jong-un regime from a linear and comparative perspective, and present the possibilities of change within the North Korean regime. This paper will compare the regime persistence of two time frames: (1) the “early period of the Kim Jong-il regime,” which stretches from the unification of Germany (1990) and the disintegration of the Soviet Union (1991) to the death of Kim Il Sung (1994) and Kim Jong-il’s promotion to the General Secretary of the Workers’ Party of Korea and establishment of the Military-first Policy (1998), and (2) the “transitional period of the succession of the Kim Jong-un regime,” which starts from the first appearance of Kim Jong-il’s illness (2008) and his subsequent death (2011) to the succession of power onto the third generation.

The paper is organized as thus. First, the framework of the theoretical analysis for comparison will be presented. Then, the persistence of foreign and domestic influences in both the Kim Jong-il and Kim Jong-un regimes will be compared and assessed. Finally, there will be an overview of the possibilities for change in the North Korean regime.

The Continuity and Change of Authoritarian Regimes

This paper will utilize Levitsky and Way’s model of authoritarian regimes in order to evaluate the persistence of North Korea’s regime.⁵⁾ Although their model is generally based on “elected authoritarianism” or “competitive authoritarianism,” which appeared during the “Fourth Wave” after the fall of the Soviet Union, it is still applicable as a predictive model for closed regimes, like North Korea, due to its systematic analytical methods. This model analyzes the persistence of authoritarian regimes based on two factors: (1) endurance in the face of international pressure (external persistence) and (2) endurance in the face of unstable domestic factors (internal persistence). External persistence will be further divided into subcategories characterized by (1) relations with groups of democratic states and the international community, and (2) vulnerability to leverages from groups of democratic states and the international community (and the counterbalancing effects of the so-called “black knight” forces from China and Russia). Internal persistence will be evaluated based on factors concerning the organization of the authoritarian government as well as the scope and cohesion of its coercive capabilities through the Party or state mechanisms.

The strength of the external persistence of a state with an authoritarian regime will be determined by (1) the level of economic, diplomatic, human, technological, social, and informational linkage to

5) An explanation on the presented model within this paper is based on the following: Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War* (Cambridge : CambridgeUniversityPress, 2010), pp. 37-83.

Western democratic states, and (2) the ability to evade leverage for regime change from the international community and the degree of its vulnerability to sanctions.

The effects of leverage increase when (1) the size of the target regime's economy and the state is smaller, (2) the policy goals that the Western states exert are in alignment, and (3) an anti-hegemonic authoritarian superpower is not present in the region or refrains from active intervention if present. On the other hand, if the degree of linkage is broader and stronger, then the persistence of the authoritarian state will be weaker. Thus, when the linkage to the international community is stronger, then (1) the exposure of international reactions to anti-democratic oppression and acts of violation will increase, and (2) constituencies that are supportive of democratic and capitalistic values will spontaneously arise and grow more influential, and (3) ultimately, the balance of power will be readjusted to create a political environment conducive to reformist factions, thereby inciting a forceful implementation of reform and democratic processes. Conversely, when the linkage between the authoritarian state and the international community is weak or the state's level of reaction toward the pressure exerted by the international community is high, then the external persistence of the regime is strong.

Internal persistence is determined by the degree of organizational control that is exerted by the ruling dictator. In most authoritarian regimes, the nucleus of the organization is (1) large in scope, and (2) the ruling party and state mechanism (especially the military and other forms of oppressive organizations) have strong levels of cohesion. However, challenges emerge from not only the bottom up, but also from within. Whereas previous theories on democratization had mostly focused on the causes of the formation and mobilization of opposing forces, explanatory models that were created after the third wave of democratization pay special attention to the coercive capabilities of the governing organizations. In other words, the models reflect the empirical fact that an authoritarian regime with a high level of persistence is capable of surviving despite the existence of strong civil societies and opposing forces.⁶⁾

Accordingly, the level of organizational control of the ruling party is determined by two factors: (1) the size of the party and its degree of influence within civil society, and (2) the level of cohesion, which can be measured through the amount of cooperation from partisans procured by the reigning dictator. A large-scale popular party supports the regime's ability to mobilize the public and control it, while also preemptively seizing the opportunity to mobilize forces from the insurgents. A party with a high level of organizational cohesion institutionalizes mediating mechanisms for competition and other sources of conflict in order to minimize the possibility of treason by members of the ruling elite.⁷⁾ In addition, such parties stabilize the process of electing leaders and managing successors.

6) Refer to the following paper detailing the Kim Jong-il regime as a powerful tool for suppression: Daniel Byman and Jennifer Lind, "Pyongyang's Survival Strategy: Tools of Authoritarian Control in North Korea," *International Security*, Vol.35, No.1 (Summer2010), pp. 44-74.

7) On the integrative function of the elite in the ruling party of the authoritarian regime, refer to: Jason Brownlee, *Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007),

If the party contributes to the regulation and integration of the elite, then the coercive capabilities of the state will be better suited towards social control and the suppression of opposing forces. The scope of the state's coercive capabilities is determined by the range of control exerted by the coercive mechanism. The cohesion of the organization is expressed through its level of compliance toward the orders given (such as orders for violent suppression) by the ruling group. If the scale of the state's coercive mechanism is large and its level of social influence is deep, then the mere presence of this mechanism can preemptively suppress the formation of opposing forces. During crisis situations, however, the regime will depend on the cohesion of the military and security mechanisms for protection. The decisive factor will be the question of whether the military or the police will obey the orders of the autocrat and actually open fire on the insurgents. If the mechanisms for oppression are small or have low levels of cohesion during domestic disturbances or a rebellion, then the authoritarian government often becomes easily incapacitated. When the level of cohesion weakens, even the military will defy orders for suppression and respond passively, while in other cases, such as the fall of Gaddafi of Libya, the military may even join the rebelling forces to accelerate the process of disintegration of the state's dictatorship.

The expansion of scale and the strengthening of cohesion within the regime depend on its financial capabilities. In crisis situations, the dictator, which uses the distribution of privileges and rent as a medium of power, and the patrimonial army, which is connected through patronage networks, will act as public organizations. Furthermore, the patrimonial army will most likely follow the dictator's instructions for violent suppression in comparison to the institutional army.⁸⁾ But when the patrimonial army is managed through only material incentives, such as economic privileges and distribution of political power, then in the case of exhausted funds or the leader's weakened capability to govern, it can become a risk factor and threaten the regime. The more important element in maintaining cohesion are non-material factors that include ideology and blood identity as well as a powerful sense of connection stemming from deep-rooted historical experiences, such as wars or revolution. Instances, in which an autocracy is faced with financial bankruptcy but survives by maintaining powerful organizational cohesion, are regularly observed. Such resilience stems from non-material factors like unity.

Figure 1 lays out Levitsky and Way's regime change model based on the persistence of an authoritarian regime. If the linkage between the authoritarian state and the West becomes higher, then regardless of the strength of the internal persistence, regime fluctuation will increase as well as the possibility of the establishment of democratic institutions (Path 1). For example, Eastern Europe and other socialist states - that have either reformed or toppled authoritarian regimes and successfully established democratic institutions during the third and fourth wave of democratization - have all

pp.35-43; and Barbara Geddes, "What Do We Know about Democratization after Twenty Years?" *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol.2 (June1999), pp. 115-144.

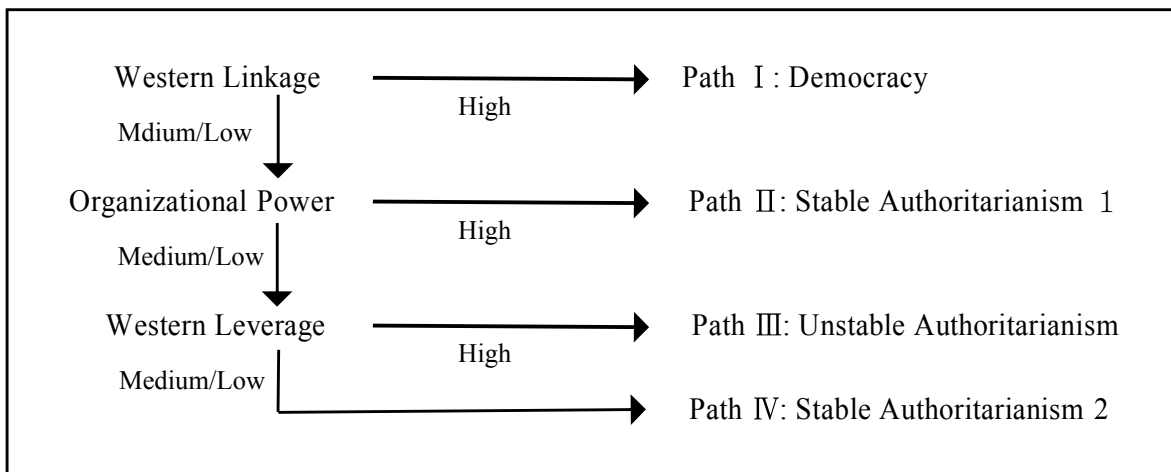
8) On a comparison of the levels of obedience between a patrimonial military and an institutionalized military during crisis situations under authoritarian rule, refer to: Eva Bellin, "Reconsidering the Authoritarianism in the Middle East," *Comparative Politics*, Vol.44, No.2 (January 2012), pp. 127-149.

displayed high levels of linkage with the West.

For closed authoritarian regimes with low levels of linkage, the matter of survival is determined by the autocrat’s extent of control over the government (or internal persistence). If internal persistence is strong, then the regime will not be greatly influenced by the West and the international community’s attempt to exert leverage, and consequently, the existing regime will display a tendency to maintain stability (Path 2). The survival of the Kim Jong-il regime is a primary example of Path 2, which will be further discussed later in the paper.

When the levels of both international linkage and internal persistence are low, the stability of the regime will be influenced by its reaction to the leverage exerted by the West. If the effects of leverage are powerful (or in other words, the reaction is weak), then the balance of power between the supporting and opposing factions within the regime will fluctuate due to external influences, and instability will increase. In this case, even if reform is enacted under the influence of the international community, the attempt will most likely fail or the succeeding regime itself will become authoritarian (Path 3). Frequent regime changes and increased political instability can be anticipated. On the other hand, when the influence of the leverage is weak, it is more likely that the political order created under the previous authoritarian regime will endure, even if the level of internal persistency within the regime is low (Path 4).

Figure 1. Persistence and Fluctuation within an Authoritarian Regime



Source: Quoted from Levitsky, Steven and Lucan A. Wa, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War*, p. 72.

Table 1. Examples of Failure in Model Predictions

	Linkage	Organizational Power	Leverage	Prediction by Model	Actual Result
Albania	High	Low	High	Democracy	Unstable Authoritarianism
Belarus	Low	Low	Medium	Stable Authoritarianism	Unstable Authoritarianism
Benin	Low	Low	High	Unstable Authoritarianism	Democracy
Ghana	Low	Medium	High	Unstable Authoritarianism	Democracy
Mali	Low	Low	High	Unstable Authoritarianism	Democracy
Peru	Medium	Low	High	Unstable Authoritarianism	Democracy
Ukraine	Low	Low	High	Unstable Authoritarianism	Democracy

Source: Excerpt from Levitsky, Steven and Lucan A. Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War*, pp. 341-342.

In the cases of Path 2 and Path 4, the stability of the authoritarian regimes can be predicted, and in particular, a Type 1 regime that has followed Path 2 is better stabilized than its Type 2 counterpart. The level of linkage is influenced by factors, such as geographical proximity, history and other relatively long-term elements, are irreversible, but the degree of leverage is politically flexible in the short-term, under the influence of the fluctuations of international dynamics. In other words, Type 2 stable authoritarian regimes also contain a greater possibility of instability in the relative short-term, since they are more affected by the variable nature of the leverages' influence.

By verifying the possible predictions through analyzing 35 cases of fluctuations in authoritarian regimes after the Cold War, most cases with the exception of seven (refer to Table 1) have shown that the expected results matched the actual outcome. Even taking into consideration the fact that the cases where predictions have failed were limited to examples where the evaluations of persistence were borderline cases and therefore difficult to assess, the predictive capabilities of the model was relatively high. As with all structural frameworks of analysis, this model had some problems in underestimating the role of actors (or agents). As in the case of Peru, the quality of the leadership among the ruling class and insurgent forces can exert a considerable amount of influence. In the case of North Korea where "human" governance and the single-leader system are deeply established, application of this model would require a thorough evaluation of the role of agents.

When the model is applied to North Korea, Type 1 stable autocracy is defined as the firm establishment of the "authoritarian regime of a hereditary single leader," and Path 3, which is the unstable authoritarian regime, is reinterpreted as the possibility of instability within the single-leader regime or the implementation of this system within the autocracy. Furthermore, the influence of China needs to be assessed from various perspectives. China's desire for stability or preservation of

the status quo on the Korean peninsula cannot be seen as “inevitably” conceding to the establishment of an autocracy with Kim Jong-un as the Supreme Leader. China can incite change in particular manners for the purpose of “stable regime management.”

The Fluctuation of North Korea’s External Persistence

The External Persistence during the Establishment of the Kim Jong-il Regime

Kim Jong-il had inherited a closed authoritarian regime from Kim Il Sung, one that was isolated from the Western world. The conflict between the U.S. and the Soviet Union during the Cold War had resulted in North Korea’s severed “linkage” to the West and South Korea in terms of politics, economy, society and culture despite its geographic proximity. As a consequence, the influence of the ROK-U.S. alliance was focused on military deterrence and political containment rather than regime change within the North. The containment policies have resulted in North Korea closing its borders and effectively establishing a dictatorship without interference from the outside world. Even the indirect influence of the West and South Korea had been nullified by the existence of anti-hegemonic states, the Soviet Union and China, and their indispensable military and economic aid. Thus, North Korea’s relations to the international community prior to Kim Jong-il’s claim to power had been maintained solely on nominal terms through solidarity with two communist superpowers. Although North Korea was quite dependent on the Soviet Union, its actual influence in the North was rather limited due to the existence of a socialist rival, China, and their geopolitical proximity.

North Korea’s state system had been supplanted from the former Soviet Union.⁹⁾ Despite its principle of self-sufficiency, North Korea’s economy would have collapsed at a much earlier period without the protection of a mutually beneficial system of planned trade. In fact, not only North Korea but also most states within the Communist Bloc were able to maintain their socialist regimes and planned economies under the condition that the vast Soviet empire was willing to pay the steep political and economic costs of sustaining the international socialistic bloc. Ultimately, the Eastern Bloc collapsed in a domino effect (from the unification Germany to the disintegration of the Soviet Union and subsequent regime changes in Eastern Europe) as soon as the former Soviet Union had refused to provide funds and military intervention in order to focus on reforms within its own border. In other words, there was a severe reverse-leverage effect when the Soviet Union ceased to supply aid to its satellite states.

With their strong links to Western Europe in regards to economic, historical, and cultural matters, the Central and Eastern Europe states were generally able to develop into democratic regimes after a period of transitional confusion. The West effectively utilized EU membership and its benefits as leverage. However, in regions with low levels of linkage to the West, the survival of the authoritarian

9) On the transposition process of the Soviet system of state and party system onto North Korea, refer to Andrei Lankov, *From Stalin to Kim Il Sung: The Foundation of North Korea, 1945-1960* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002).

regime is determined by the state's internal persistence. In North Korea, China, Kazakhstan and other Central and East Asian states where coercive mechanisms had evolved into institutions with abnormal levels of influence, the preexisting authoritarian regime was preserved with slight adjustments or new autonomous structures replaced the old.

The Kim Jong-il regime limited potential American and Western intervention within the boundaries of the denuclearization games by using the development of nuclear weapons to its advantage, which had the effect of neutralizing external pressures and also decreasing the effects of reverse-leverage that had resulted from the disintegration of the Soviet Union by procuring aid through the use of nuclear negotiations as bait. Also, North Korea was able to invest most of its efforts in blocking the flow of the so-called non-socialist elements within its borders, while minimizing the influence of the outside world by limiting human, technological, and cultural interactions with Russia, China, and other former socialist states.¹⁰⁾

Ultimately, Kim Jong-il inherited a closed authoritarian regime where the linkage to the West was very low. By utilizing North Korea's geopolitical position and engaging in nuclear games, he had blocked the domino effect from the collapse of the Communist Bloc and the effects of reverse-leverage. In addition, leverage from South Korea and international community, which focused on sanctions and conditional aid, were not very effective due to the weak linkage. Thus, North Korea had an extremely high degree of external persistence during the establishment of the Kim Jong-il regime.

The External Persistence of the Kim Jong-un Regime and South Korea's Leverage against North Korea

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, North Korea's planned economy had, in effect, come to an end. Although the topic will be further discussed in the chapter concerning North Korea's internal persistence, it will be noted here that the Kim Jong-il regime had minimized reforms and liberalization, which were necessary measures to revive North Korea's economy, for the sake of protecting the interests of the ruling class, and tenaciously held onto the tactic of muddling through difficulties. In order to survive, North Korea had also depended on economic aid and assistance from abroad, which were relatively easy to control in regards to entry and exit points. As North Korea's economy lost its autonomous production capabilities, procuring aid from abroad became a vital issue that could determine the fate of the regime. As a result, under the Kim Jong-il regime, North Korea had deteriorated from its status as a planned economic state to an aid-dependent state.¹¹⁾

10) Victor Cha warns that a frenzy of fundamental neo-Juche revivalism might occur, based on the observation that the level internationalization among the second generation of North Korean elites has fallen as a result of ultra-nationalism and isolationist policies that were implemented after the death of Kim Il Sung. Refer to: Victor D. Cha, "The End of History: 'Neojuche Revivalism' and Korean Unification," *Orbis*, Vol.55, No.2 (Spring 2011), pp. 290-297.

11) On a discussion concerning the structure of the parallel economy of North Korea after the collapse of the

Table 2. Yearly Trade Volume between North and South Korea

(Unit: 1 million US dollars)

1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
186	194	287	252	308	222	334	425	403
2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
641	724	697	1,055	1,350	1,797	1,820	1,679	1,912

Source: Institute for Unification Education, “Understanding Issues of Unification 2011” (Seoul: Ministry of Unification, June 2011), p.134.

On the other hand, the U.S. and South Korea’s attempts to exploit North Korea’s survival strategies and economic vulnerabilities to procure leverage have continued. By observing the economic interactions between the Western world and North Korea under the Kim Jong-il regime, the relatively constant and gradual expansion of exchanges with South Korea is more noticeable than that with the U.S., which has tended to provide either humanitarian aid or politicized aid as a result of nuclear strategies.¹²⁾

Table 3. North Korea’s Trade, 2008-2009

(Unit: 1 million US dollars)

North Korea’s Exports			North Korea’s Imports		
Year	2008	2009	Year	2008	2009
Total Export	3,052.3	2,235.0	Total Import	5,196.6	3,488.2
Export to China	754.0	793.0	Import from China	888.0	744.8
Export to South Korea	932.3	934.3	Import from South Korea	2,033.2	1,887.7

Source: Excerpted from Dick K. Nanto and Mark E. Manyin, “China-North Korea Relations,” *CRS Report for Congress R41043* (Last updated on December 28, 2010), p. 16.

Soviet Union and the necessity of international aid in order to maintain this structure, refer to Benjamin Habib, “North Korea’s Parallel Economies: Systemic Disaggregation Following the Soviet Collapse,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 44, Issue 2 (June 2011), pp. 149-159.

12) On the concept of politicized aid in contrast to developmental aid, and its problems, refer to: Alberto Alesina and David Dollar, “Who Gives Foreign Aid to Whom and Why?” *NBER Working Paper 6612* (National Bureau of Economic Research, 1998).

Table 4. Statistics on the Kaesong Industrial Complex

Fiscal Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Number of Korean Manufacturers	11	15	65	93	118	121
Estimate of North Korean Laborers	6,000	11,000	23,000	39,000	42,000	47,000
Estimate of South Korean Laborers	N.A.	700	800	1,500	960	About 500
Yearly Production (million US dollars)	15	74	185	250	256	323

Source: Excerpted from Dick K. Nanto and Mark E. Manyin, “The Kaesong North – South Korean Industrial Complex,” *CRS Report for Congress R34093* (last updated on March 17, 2011), p. 1.

Even if one excludes the projects and humanitarian aid, it is a given fact that the volume of economic trade between North and South Korea had exponentially grown during Kim Jong-il’s reign. If so, then will the external expansion in exchange activity cause an increase in South Korea’s leverage (North Korea’s vulnerability) against the Kim Jong-un regime? It is predicted that the effects of an increase in exchanges between the two Koreas will be rather limited and vulnerable to certain conditions.

First, the exchanges between North and South Korea that are focused exclusively on economic factors have limitations in terms of increasing the level of linkage. The linkage effect will become more apparent when interactions expand encompassing human, material and cultural dimensions. A concentrated expansion of linkage in one area can be reciprocated and controlled strategically. In fact, North Korea focused on thwarting the leverage effect of exchange and investment activities (the spread of capitalistic values and democratic ideals) through isolation policies (opening mosquito nets), human surveillance and control, and management and monitoring activities by mobilizing the military and security institutions.¹³⁾ Under such controlled circumstances, it is unlikely that the increase in economic interactions will lead to the expansion of linkage and thereby, provide a base for the establishment of pro-South Korean factions and contribute to the expansion of autonomous reformist forces.

Second, until recently, the presence of China, as the anti-hegemonic state within the region and China’s provisions of aid for the North Korean regime, counterbalanced any potential leverage effect gained by South Korea, the U.S., and the West. China will make efforts to guarantee that the North Korean regime will not disintegrate under pressures for denuclearization from the international community. Moreover, the Kim Jong-un regime will exploit the collateral effects of its own geopolitical position and try to manipulate China’s intentions. The geopolitical position of the

13) Even during the period of the Sunshine policy when human interactions were frequent, North Korea, through selective contact and control, was able to create reverse-expansion effects that caused more conflict and strife within South Korea.

Korean peninsula is a fundamental limitation to the establishment of an international cooperative scheme concerning North Korea. Conflicting national interests make policy agreements among allies very difficult. For example, there have been periodic disagreements between South Korea and the U.S. concerning the timing and methods of sanctions against North Korea, and these differences will most likely appear in the future. The possibility of increasing interactions between North and South Korea is rather low due to the rise of China as the potential anti-hegemonic state within the region and the difficulties in establishing cooperation under international policies. However, if the conditions are sufficiently met, such as the establishment of international cooperation or the change of the strategic environment into a friendlier one, then the leverage effect will most likely appear.

Despite South Korea's limited influence over the North, it still has the potential to exert a certain amount of pressure over the Kim Jong-un regime based on the increase in its recent economic activity. As part of the Kim Jong-un regime's crisis management strategy, North Korea has been transformed from a one-party system based on ideology and organizational cohesion to a typical patrimonial authoritarian regime. Subsequently, the ability to procure material resources for distribution to his followers has become an important factor in determining the survival of the dictator. Compared to the period during the establishment of the Kim Jong-il regime, South Korea's economic leverage has now met with the conditions for exerting a considerable amount influence on North Korea. In this context, the vital factor in determining the extent of South Korea's leverage is ultimately the influence of China.

Table 5. Recent North Korean-Chinese Trade

(Unit: 1 million US dollars)

Year	Export	Import	Total
2010	1,187.9	2,277.8	3,465.7
2011	2,464.2	3,165.0	5,629.2

Source: Excerpted from Jong Hyung Gon and Kim Ji Young, "Analysis of North Korea's external economic figures for 2011 and prospects for 2012," *KIEP Regional Economy Focus*, Vol.6, No.5 (March 2012), p.1.

The China Factor

From the period of Kim Jong-il's rule to the present, North Korea's political dependence on China has progressively deepened. As seen in Table 5, the increase in North Korean-Chinese exchanges has accelerated under the Kim Jong-un regime. China has not been satisfied with mere trade, and is now actively pursuing direct investment activities, such as the procurement and development of long-term rights to mine subterranean resources and the establishment of infrastructure within North Korea, thereby increasing its dependence on China. The linkage between the two states, which is based on historical roots, has now moved beyond economic interaction and developed to include military, political, cultural, and human exchanges. In this backdrop, China has played the role of a sponsor state, exerting an enormous amount of influence in the speedy and stable establishment of the new

North Korean regime by immediately supporting the succession of Kim Jong-un to power after the death of Kim Jong-il. Thus, China's leverage towards North Korea is strengthening. The paper has already analyzed how China's sponsorship supports North Korea's persistence against South Korea and the U.S., and neutralizes the influence of South Korea and the international community.

Then, is the expansion of China's influence entirely beneficial for the Kim Jong-un regime? First, China wishes to maintain the status quo on the Korean peninsula, and if the Kim Jong-un regime defies its wishes, then China can actively intervene. China will not cease to provide assistance to North Korea under the circumstances that the latter is maintaining the status quo by establishing a pro-China regime. Most importantly, China will not idly stand by if South Korea initiates a movement for unification under revolutionary and drastic circumstances, or if North Korea attempts to introduce democratic institutions within its regime. But on the other hand, China will also intervene if the new North Korean regime pursues radical policies and thereby, disrupts the international order in the Northeast Asian region.

Second, if China perceives that the cost of maintaining the Kim Jong-un regime outweighs the cost of establishing another regime that is friendlier to China, then it could exert its influence in order to change or at least adjust the North Korean regime. In other words, China will not strictly adhere to the "single-leader system" of "Kim Jong-un."

Third, even though China has not implemented reforms or transformed into a democratic society, it is now successfully maintaining a developing authoritarian regime where the Party and state has implemented economic reforms from the top down. China also tacitly wishes that a regime that is more compatible with China's system would be established in North Korea. This is an important issue that would also lead to lower costs of maintaining the North Korean regime. China may choose to exert its influence in order to instigate an uprising, or in the worst-case scenario, a regime change.

Thus, China will do all it can to cajole the Kim Jong-un regime towards greater strategic national interests for China.¹⁴⁾ Considering North Korea's relatively low level of persistence against China during the establishment of the Kim Jong-il regime, Kim Jong-un may also view China as a potential threat.¹⁵⁾ Kim Jong-il's suspicions and dislike of China is a well-known fact. He was probably well aware of the dangers of North Korea's growing dependence on China. In fact, it is quite possible that Kim Jong-il's repeated attempts to pull the U.S. and South Korea into the intrigues of the Korean peninsula through the development of nuclear weapons was driven by Kim Jong-il's intention to counterbalance the dangers of North Korea's dependence on China. Without any viable alternatives, the Kim Jong-un regime will most likely prolong this strategy; however, North Korea's dependence

14) On the hierarchy of interests for China in the Northeast Asian region, refer to David Shambaugh, "China and the Korean Peninsula: Playing for the Long Term," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (Spring 2003).

15) On the absolute influence that a sponsor state can exert on an extreme form of individual dictatorship such as a sultanate, refer to "Paths out of Sultanistic Regimes: Combining and Voluntarist Perspectives," in H.E. Chehabi and Juan J. Linz (eds.), *Sultanistic Regimes* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

on the nuclear weapons may also intensify.

In comparison to the establishment of the Kim Jong-il regime, it appears that the external persistence of the Kim Jong-un regime has weakened somewhat. But North Korea's level of linkage with the West and South Korea is still quite low, and considering the China factor, it is highly unlikely that the Kim Jong-un regime will follow the Type 1 path towards reform in the Levitsky and Way model. However, in a scenario in which the internal persistence within the Kim Jong-un regime fractures, the external leverage effect might act as the impetus for change within the North Korean regime. This will be discussed further in the paper. But even in such a case, it is more likely that North Korea will follow the Type 3 path under the influence of China. However, if this scenario becomes a reality, it would be difficult for Kim Jong-un to maintain his status as the Supreme Leader. It is possible that North Korea might counteract the influence of South Korea and the U.S., as well as the influence of China by following the Type 4 path, but in such a scenario, the survival of the Kim Jong-un regime will be largely determined by the internal political dynamics. Under such circumstances, the major variables will be the leadership of Kim Jong-un and other potential rivals.

Evaluation of Internal Persistence

The Survival of the Kim Jong-il Regime

The cessation of aid provisions from the Soviet Union and the collapse of its economy halved North Korea's gross national product and subsequently, led to difficulties in procuring funds for regime management. As a consequence, North Korea faced the prospects of total destruction.¹⁶⁾ The fundamental reason the Kim Jong-il regime was able to survive in spite of this serious crisis can be attributed to the organizational persistence of the Party and the coercive mechanisms of the state, especially the military.

Kim Jong-il perceives that the Eastern European model of radical reform, in which the collapse of the regime is inevitable, and the Chinese model, where the framework sustains the dictatorship while economic reforms are implemented from the top down, both threaten the preservation of a system focused solely on the dictator. The final option is to place the costs of non-reform on the public and selectively distribute rare resources onto the coercive mechanisms of the state, as they are crucial for the maintenance of the regime.¹⁷⁾ Thus, if the result of the first option was mass death through

16) Under the influence of structural crisis situations and worldwide events brought on by the collapse of the Eastern Bloc and the unification of Germany, theories that predicted the regime collapse of North Korea after the death of Kim Il Sung gained prominence. On the arguments of the proponents of theory of North Korean collapse, refer to Marcus Noland, *Korea after Kim Jong-il*, "Policy Analyses in International Economics," No.71 (Washington, DC: Institute for International Economics, 2004), pp. 12-19; Robert S. Litwak, *Regime Change: U.S. Strategy through the Prism of 9/11* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007).

17) On an analysis of the impossibility of the *Juche* regime to engage in reforms that would inevitably result in fundamental self-defeating measures, refer to Samuel S. Kim, "The Future of the Post-Kim Il Sung System in North Korea," in Wonmo Dong (ed.), *The Two Koreas and the United States: Issues of Peace, Society,*

starvation, then the political result of the latter option was the Military First Policy.¹⁸⁾

There are several reasons North Korea maintained its high level of internal persistence. First, Kim Jong-il had inherited an enormous military and coercive institution, a large-scale party organization as a mechanism for mobilization, and a civil society weakened by totalitarian control.¹⁹⁾ By distributing the maximum amount of resources to the large-scale coercive institution and mobilizing that institution at the same time, North Korea was able to control the people who were pushed to the brink of survival.²⁰⁾ From the beginning, it was impossible for individuals fragmented by long periods of totalitarian rule to swiftly mobilize organizations in response to crisis situations and foster rebellious behavior and resistant groups in an orderly manner. The only choice left for the desperate public was mass displacement and escape from North Korea.

Second, Oh Jin Woo, Cho Myung Rok and the so-called first generation of revolutionaries had contributed to the establishment of the Kim Jong-il regime by seizing control of the military and Party, and preventing the factionalism of the elite class.²¹⁾ These people were part of a pseudo-blood connected group that had affirmed its camaraderie through shared experiences in armed conflict during Japanese colonization and the Korean War.²²⁾ Their unity was very useful for not only placing Kim Jong-il on the throne, but also maintaining the cohesion of the military and the Party.

Third, the cohesion of an ideological “brotherhood” was a vital element. The fall of the Soviet Union had resulted from a state of anomie among avid followers of Marxism, which was difficult to

and Economic Cooperation (Armonk: East Gate, 2000).

- 18) On a political-economic analysis on the characteristics of the North Korean great famine, refer to Andrew S. Natsios, *The Great North Korean Famine: Famine, Politics, and Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2001) with Marcus Noland, Sherman Robinson, and Tao Wang, “Famine in North Korea: Causes and Cures,” *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, Vol. 49, No. 4 (July 2001), pp. 741-767.
- 19) Refer to: Marcus Noland, “North Korea: The Tyranny of Deprivation,” in Robert I. Rotberg (ed.), *Worst of the Worst: Dealing with Repressive and Rouge Nations* (World Peace Foundation/ Brookings Institution, 2007).
- 20) Exploiting from the resources of the weak and transferring it to the powerful has been an effective means of maintaining the existence of the dictator. Bruce Bueno De Mesquita and Alastair Smith, *The Dictator's Handbook: Why Bad Behavior Is Almost Always Good Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011), pp.75-99.
- 21) The East German regime collapsed without any resistance towards the collective anti-government action of the civilians, while the Chinese government had proven its persistence through its violent suppression of the Tiananmen Square protestors. East Germany had hesitated, whereas China had mercilessly suppressed political dissent. Mark Thomson has pointed out that the presence of the first generation of Chinese revolutionaries who have reaffirmed their solidarity and collective unity through the hardships of revolution was one of the factors in these different reactions. Mark R. Thomson, “To Shoot or Not to Shoot: Post-totalitarianism in China, and Eastern Europe,” *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (October 2001), pp. 63-83.
- 22) On the discussion that the North Korean Juche philosophy itself is a result of the shared experiences of the so-called harsh guerilla warfare against imperial Japan in Manchuria, and fraternity based on exclusive blood-ties, refer to: Hyun Ok Park, *Two Dreams in One Bed: Empire, Social Life, and the Origins of the North Korean Revolution in Manchuria* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

overcome. But the North Korean regime had established a single-leader system, which was its own unique dogma for dictatorship during the 1970s when the succession of rule to Kim Jong-il was already determined. It merged this principle with the Juche philosophy, a typical example of extreme ethnocentrism, and relentlessly expanded the project of idolization and ideological education. Most significantly, North Korea had invested an enormous amount of effort towards enshrining the 10 tenants of the singular philosophy, the most basic rules of a dictatorship, as the most preeminent law and even ranking them higher than Party regulations.²³⁾ As a consequence, these efforts were able to minimize the ideological vacuum brought about by the collapse of the Socialist Bloc. The efforts have also mandated the cohesion of the military and Party by making the absolute obedience to the Supreme Leader a fixed principle. Table 7 reflects the result of a survey conducted on ex-military personnel who have recently escaped from North Korea. The results show that even towards the end of the Kim Jong-il regime, personal loyalty towards Kim Jong-il, as the individual, was relatively strong.

Table 6. Level of Loyalty towards Kim Jong-il for military posts

(5.00 = very high)

North Korean-Chinese Border	Military Demarcation Zone	Other	Average
3.22/5.00	4.00/5.00	4.05/5.00	4.00/5.00

Source: Lee Kyo Duk et al., “Study on the weakening of discipline of the North Korean military” (Seoul: KINU, 2011), p. 118.

The Kim Jong-il regime had inherited the institutions of governance, including the large-scale Party and the military, and despite the state of bankruptcy, it had been able to maintain a high level of cohesion within these organizations by exploiting the non-material incentives as previously discussed. The Kim Jong-il regime was able to persevere because it had perpetuated its strong internal persistence based on these coercive institutions.

The Factors for the Weakening Internal Persistence of the Kim Jong-Un Regime

The Kim Jong-il regime had inherited the totalitarian system of coercion and a party organization, which have been internalized within North Korean society during Kim Il Sung’s reign. Now in its infancy, the Kim Jong-un regime has inherited the patrimonial political system as the sole dictator, which had been established during the reign of Kim Jong-il. The significance of the differences between the two periods will now be examined.

23) On a brief explanation on the preparatory process of the succession of Kim Jong-il, refer to Kang Dan Oh, *Leadership Change in North Korean Politics: The Succession to Kim Il Sung* (Santa Monica: Rand Corporations, 1988).

First, the Kim Jong-il dictatorship had formalized the official organization and functions of the Party.²⁴⁾ That is, the Party's right, as the highest decision-making body on policy pertaining to its position as the sole authoritarian party of a socialist state, had been destroyed and has been denigrated to the level of personal property and instrument of power to the Kim clan.

A regime focused on a single individual cannot coexist with a party-centric institution of governance. As the individual-centered dictatorship became a functional substitute for the party-centric system of governance, which had become difficult to manage due to bankruptcy, it had become a contributing factor to overcoming the crisis and the survival of the regime. But considering the fact that the stability of the regime can fluctuate according to the level of control exerted by the dictator within the single-leader system, the young Kim Jong-un must carry a heavy burden, as he assumes the role of the Supreme Leader. It would be nearly impossible for Kim Jong-un to replace Kim Jong-il in a short period of time because he lacks the political experience, the procurement of loyal and protective allies, the charismatic exertion of control, and other features that are required for a leader in this system. Therefore, it would be very difficult for Kim Jong-un to firmly maintain the single-leader dictatorship.

In order to compensate for these deficiencies, the regime attempted to restore its functions through the reform of Party regulations in 2010. In the introduction, it has been noted that the Party had regulated the factionalism of the elite in an institutionalized way and thereby, contributed to the maintenance of persistency. But controlling the elite, who have become complacent with patrimonialism and human governance, and rebuilding the Party are tasks that would be exceptionally difficult for Kim Jong-un. Furthermore, it is difficult to imagine that the military organization and the military elite, which have enjoyed material privileges and special rights as the nucleus of power for the maintenance of the regime during the period of the Military First Rule and therefore are "sufficiently politicized," would voluntarily hand over power to the Party.²⁵⁾ It is also unlikely that Kim Jong-un and his support group, who have only recently launched their regime, would overexert themselves to restore the Party to power. Rather, there would be several temporary solutions to extend the life of the regime, resulting in increased political uncertainty.

Second, the so-called "first generation of revolutionaries" - who have established the laws of the Party and military organizations, strengthened organizational cohesion and maintained a powerful sense of solidarity despite the financial collapse - have mostly died or have been disregarded. Unlike the period under Kim Jong-il's rule when the first generation was active, the Kim Jong-un regime will experience difficulties in maintaining the cohesion of the party and military organization when faced

24) On the individual-focused authoritarian rule, cronyism and patrimonialism, and the resulting status of the party and disintegration of cohesion during the reign of Kim Jong-il, refer to Ken E. Gause, "North Korean Civil-Military Trends: Military-first Politics to a Point," *Strategic Studies Institute (SSI) Report* (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College, September 2006).

25) On an analysis on the possibilities of a military coup d'état and potential scenarios, refer to Koh Jae Heung, "A Study on the North Korean Military under the Kim Jong-il Regime" (Seoul: The National Security Strategy Research Center, 2011), pp. 119-145.

with domestic or foreign crises or social schism. The solidarity among the supporters of Kim Jong-il is formed not through a sense of fraternity or devotion to the cause during revolutionary warfare, but is rather based on privileged self-interests. Because the party system itself, which is responsible for mediating competition and conflict among the elite, has been completely nullified, there is the possibility of rapid factionalism if conflict of interests and political strife occur among the nouveau elite.²⁶⁾

Third, another obstacle that the Kim Jong-un regime will encounter is the end of ideology. The sharing of an organized, ideological belief system is as important an asset as the aforementioned sense of solidarity in compensating for its shortcoming and maintaining organizational cohesion. The Kim Jong-un regime can compensate for North Korea's psychology, which was brought on by the failure of its experiment in socialism with its sole Juche philosophy based on absolute faith and loyalty to the Supreme Leader. But structural corruption, which inevitably spreads under the system of patrimonialistic privileges, has shaken the philosophy of the sole leader and its pseudo-religious belief system to the core. The end of ideology has done more than adversely affect the cohesion of the elite class. The chronic failure of North Korea's economy and the isolationism caused by the proliferation of the traditional market economy has not directly resulted in the organized rebellion of civilians, but has rendered the rule of authoritarian ideology by the state and regime virtually impossible.²⁷⁾

Fourth, the spread of patrimonialistic rule has resulted in the institutionalization of corruption, thereby accelerating the feudalization of the elite class and the privatization of public institutions. For example, the reason the patrimonial military is more obedient to the dictator is ultimately because of the privileges that it enjoys. Due to North Korea's perpetually failing economy, the resources necessary to satisfy the patrimonial military are constantly lacking, thereby allowing internal exploitation and corruption within the economy to become widespread. This will very likely lead to increased violations of regulations and the disintegration of organization. Consequently, the starved patrimonial military may become a catalyst for the impending crisis, rather than an instrument for the suppression of that crisis.

The military elite will start to splinter along faction lines in order to procure privileges, and the lower ranking soldiers within the military will most likely abandon their duties, becoming absent without leave. Table 8, Table 9, and Table 10, which describe the results of surveys conducted on North Korean escapees with military experience, show that the disastrous effects of the patrimonial system has already become commonplace and has led to the weakening of the military structure. However, the detrimental influence of patrimonialism is not simply a problem for the military. It had spread to

26) Refer to Jin Ha Kim, "North Korea's Succession Plan: Stability and Future Outlook," *IIRI Working Paper*, No. 8, Korea University Ilmin International Relations Institute (December 2010).

27) On the currents of secularization from the bottom up in North Korea, refer to Stephan Haggard and Marcus Noland, *Witness to Transformation: Refugee Insights into North Korea* (Washington, DC: Peterson Institute for International Economics, 2011).

the administrative branches of the state and the entire Party institution.²⁸⁾ It is clear that the organizational control of the regime will falter because of this phenomenon.

Table 7. The Level of Misappropriation and Diversion of Military Resources for Military Posts

(5.00 = very high)

North Korean-Chinese Border	Military Demarcation Zone	Other	Average
4.11/5.00	3.50/5.00	3.15/5.00	3.30/5.00

Source: Lee Kyo Duk et al., “Study on the weakening of discipline within the North Korean military” (Seoul:KINU,2011), p. 128.

Table 8. Level of Desertion of Duty of Military Posts

(5.00 = very high)

North Korean-Chinese Border	Military Demarcation Zone	Other	Average
2.89/5.00	3.35/5.00	2.44/5.00	2.73/5.00

Source: Lee Kyo Duk et al., “Study on the weakening of discipline within the North Korean military” (Seoul:KINU,2011), p. 157.

Table 9. Amount of Food for Military Posts

(5.00 = very low)

North Korean-Chinese Border	Military Demarcation Zone	Other	Average
4.33/5.00	3.90/5.00	3.30/5.00	3.53/5.00

Source: Lee Kyo Duk et al., “Study on the weakening of discipline within the North Korean military” (Seoul:KINU,2011), p. 187.

The dependence of the Kim Jong-un regime on South Korea, the U.S., and the international community seems to have increased, in comparison to the early period of Kim Jong-il’s reign, due to the increase in aid and exchange activities, but it is expected that other factors, such as North Korea’s

28) On the self-destructive mechanism of the patrimonial regime, refer to Michael Bratton and Nicolas van de Walle, *Democratic Experiments in Africa: Regime Transitions in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

development of nuclear weapons and the rise and intervention of China, will nullify these positive developments. However, North Korea's increasing dependence on China may be a double-edged sword. China will not hesitate to support North Korea in maintaining its regime, under the condition that the new regime implements a pro-China policy. If North Korea tries to muddle through with anti-market and anti-reformist attitudes, then China is expected to exert more influence on North Korean affairs, based on North Korea's weakened responses in comparison to the Kim Jong-il regime. It may be true that, in terms of internal persistence, the coercive mechanisms of the state, including the military, have not considerably diminished compared to that of the Kim Jong-il regime. However, conflict within the military stemming from patrimonialism is expected to increase, and the weakened organizational structure due to the disintegration of the distribution system for military resources will result in factionalism. The state's level of control over North Korean society is also expected to weaken, as a consequence of the disintegration of a distributive economy, the proliferation of market economy ideals, and the exacerbation of the effects of injustice and corruption. In addition, the cohesion and solidarity of the Workers' Party is expected to be relatively weaker due to the effects of the dictatorship based on patrimonialism, which had taken deeper root during the reign of Kim Jong-il.

In conclusion, it is highly unlikely that North Korea will experience a sudden collapse of its regime through rapid change from the bottom up, brought on by China and the external world's policy for stabilization and the maintenance of the status quo. However, it seems more likely that the implementation of a looser form of authoritarian rule will substitute the single-leader system, as a result of the overall decline of North Korea's internal persistence.