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Public Opinion on Unification and North Korean Policy of the Moon Jae-in Administration

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Korea Institute for National Unification conducted a face-to-face survey from June 12 to July 12, 2017, a month after the 19th presidential election. The total number of respondents participated in this survey was 1,002 and the confidence interval was $\pm 3.1\%$ at the 95% confidence level. The survey questions encompassed a wide range of issues on unification and North Korea. The characteristics of public preference for North Korean policy surveyed are summarized as follows.

(1) In the survey, respondents showed no meaningful difference in what kind of North Korean policy proposed by each presidential candidate they would prefer. This suggests that the North Korean issue in the 19th presidential election was not a critical factor in the voters' decision-making process.

(2) The number of people in favor of sanctions·pressure-oriented hard line North Korean policy was relatively higher than those in support of economic cooperation and humanitarian assistance-centered policy.

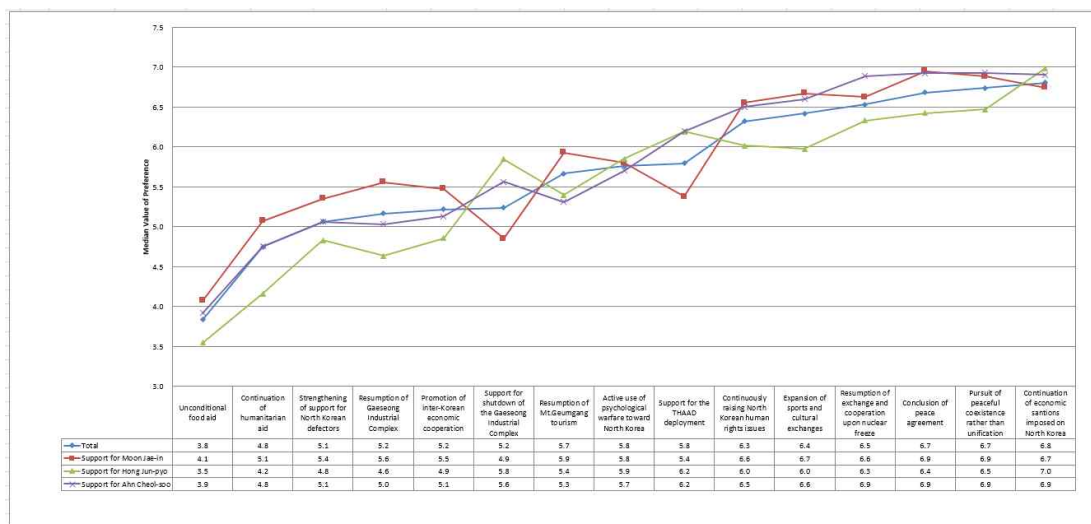
(3) When comparing the North Korean policy of the Kim Dae-jung·Roh Moo-hyun administrations with that of the Lee

Myung-bak·Park Geun-hye governments, the number of respondents in favor of the former far outnumbered the latter. This is an indicator that South Koreans basically have a high expectation for President Moon Jae-in’s policy on North Korea, who has declared to inherit the sunshine·engagement North Korean policy pursued under the Kim and Roh governments.

(4) The overwhelming majority showed a positive attitude toward two of President Moon Jae-in’s main election pledges for North Korean policy; Inter-Korean Basic Agreement and the Convention on National Unification.

In summary, although South Korean citizens are generally positive about the policy direction that the incumbent government has taken toward North Korea, they appear to carry around doubts in mind whether inter-Korean relations can be transformed into cooperative relationship if there were no progress in resolving the North Korean nuclear issues. The results of this survey will be elaborated in more detail in the following.

Elevated Interest for Security and Relative Skepticism for Economic Cooperation



<Figure 1>
Comparison of Public Preference for North Korean Policy Categorized by Each Candidate

A graph above illustrates the attitudes toward 15 North Korean policies of the respondents. Each line indicates supporters of three major presidential candidates and the general samples.¹⁾ These 15 North Korean policies were measured on an 11-point scale (0 = totally disagree, 5 = moderate, 10 = very agree). Figure 1 shows the average point of people's preference for each North Korean policy. The higher the points, the higher the level of people's preference for that specific policy. A score higher than the 5 median value on the scale of 11 could be interpreted that there are more support than an objection to the policy, and vice versa.

Overall, the general observation on the preference for 15 North Korean policies surveyed in this research found a relatively high level of public preference for items related to security and hard line policy toward North Korea. On the contrary, the level of preference for policy related to economic cooperation and humanitarian assistance to North Korea was relatively lower than that of security policies.

High Level of Support for Moon Jae-in Government's Sunshine Policy

A fairly positive evaluation was shown on the Moon Jae-in government's North Korean policy that was inherited from Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun's administrations. On a question of comparison about North Korean policies between the Kim Dae-jung·Roh Moo-hyun administrations and Lee Myung-bak·Park Geun-hye administrations, 63.7% of respondents replied that they preferred the former (very prefer: 24.2%, slightly prefer: 39.5%).

In addition, there were many positive responses to the conclusion of Inter-Korean Basic Agreement and the Convention on National Unification, two of major election pledges of the Moon Jae-in government. Moreover, on a question of the conclusion of Inter-Korean Basic Agreement, 74.2% of respondents answered

1) In the survey, 48 percent of respondents said they voted for Moon Jae-in with 22.2% for Hong Joon-pyo and 16.6% for Ahn Cheol-soo. That percentage is not much different from the actual voter-turnouts in the 19th presidential election with 41.1% for Moon, 24% for Hong and 21.4% for Ahn.

positively (very agree: 12.9%, somewhat agree: 61.3%) and similarly 74.4% showed their support for the Convention on National Unification approval (very agree: 12.5%, somewhat agree: 61.9%).

To conclude the above results, it is hard to say that the relative skepticism toward exchange and cooperation-centered North Korean policy has originated from the mistrust about the Moon Jae-in government's North Korean policy. Rather, it would be more plausible to interpret as follows; the level of preference for exchange and cooperation-oriented policy was lower than the hard line security policy owing to the anxiety of security issues along with the realistic judgment that the North Korean nuclear issue will not be likely to be resolved through a dialogue. ©KINU 2017

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<Reference>

Abbreviated Expression	Contents of Questionnaires
Unconditional food aid	"We should provide unconditional food aid to North Korea."
Continuation of humanitarian aid	"Humanitarian aid to North Korea should continue."
Strengthening of support for North Korean defectors	"We need to strengthen support for North Korean defectors."
Resumption of Gaeseong Industrial Complex	"Gaeseong Industrial Complex should be resumed."
Promotion of inter-Korean economic cooperation	"Inter-Korean economic cooperation should be pursued regardless of political situation."
Support for shutdown of the Gaeseong Industrial Complex	"Closing the Gaeseong Industrial Complex is the right decision."
Resumption of Mt.Geumgang tourism	"Mt. Geumgang tourism should be resumed."

Active use of psychological warfare toward North Korea	"We should make a full use of flyers, balloons, radio broadcasts, and loudspeaker broadcasts as a means of psychological warfare toward the North."
Support for the THAAD deployment	"Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) - missile defense system should be deployed."
Continuously raising North Korean human rights issues	"Even if inter-Korean exchanges are resumed, we should continue to raise North Korea's human rights issue."
Expansion of sports and cultural exchanges	"We need to expand sports, culture, and human exchanges with North Korea."
Resumption of exchange and cooperation upon nuclear freeze	"If North Korea stops developing (starts freezing) its nuclear weapons, South Korea should resume humanitarian assistance along with social, cultural and economic exchanges."
Conclusion of peace agreement	"We should conclude a peace treaty on the peninsula to put an end to the phase of cease fire continued after the Korean War."
Pursuit of peaceful coexistence rather than unification	"North Korean policy should aim for peaceful coexistence between the South and the North rather than achieving unification."
Continuation of economic sanctions imposed on North Korea	"We should strictly implement sanctions against North Korea in cooperation with the international community."