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Prospects for Peace and Cooperation through Dialogue: Analysis on KINU Unification Survey 2019

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The Korea Institute for National Unification (KINU) conducts a survey on unification and North Korea every year. The findings of the KINU Unification Survey, conducted in April 2019, show that even after the breakdown of the North-U.S. talks in Hanoi, South Korean people have not given up their hopes for inter-Korean cooperation. It suggests that despite the stalled dialogue phase, South Korea has an evident demand for continued dialogue with the North and expectations for the need to make progress in inter-Korean relations through the tour to Mt. Geumgang, the resumption of the Kaesong Industrial Complex, and humanitarian aid. Although expectations were low on the possibility of North Korea actually giving up its nuclear weapons program, hostility toward the North has been weakened. Its image as a cooperative partner has also been strengthened. The number of respondents who saw a possibility for dialogue with the Kim Jong Un regime rose. There were increased responses indicating that inter-Korean dialogue is required even though Kim Jong Un cannot be trusted.

KINU Unification Survey 2019

Korea Institute for National Unification (KINU) conducted an annual poll “KINU Unification Survey” in April of this year. It is true that the survey conveys people’s disappointment on unification after the breakdown of Hanoi summit talks in February given last year’s rapid change and progress in inter-Korean relations. However, in spite of the stalled denuclearization and inter-Korean cooperation, the public opinion that the current stalemate should be resolved through dialogue and cooperation has rather been strengthened compared to last year.

Enmity toward North Korea has been weakened, and its image as a partner for cooperation has been strengthened. Also, the percentage of respondents who said that dialogue with the Kim Jong Un regime would be possible has increased significantly compared to previous surveys. Those who said that dialogue is necessary even though they cannot trust Kim Jong Un have also increased.

Although expectations were still low on whether North Korea would actually give up its nuclear program, there was no major change from last year. On the other hand, the opinion that economic exchanges and cooperation should be pursued continuously was higher than last year. Likewise, public support for humanitarian aid to the North has risen, and 62.6 percent of total respondents were in favor of resuming Mt. Geumgang tour. In particular, it is noteworthy that public opinion on the resumption of the Kaesong Industrial Complex (KIC) has grown very sharply this year compared to 2018.

Some answers reflected impatience or disappointment over the lack of progress in inter-Korean cooperation, with the number of respondents agreeing on the necessity of unification falling by 5 percentage point compared to last year. Overall, the result of the KINU Unification Survey 2019 on Unification clearly shows people’s desire for dialogue and peace with North Korea.

Survey Overview

The annual poll by the Korea Institute for National Unification started in

1992, which makes it the oldest active poll in South Korea on unification and North Korean issues. It measures perception and attitude toward unification and North Korea as well as unification and North Korea policy, and includes various contents such as values, ideology, political attitude, personal psychological orientation, and neighboring countries' perception as explanatory variables.

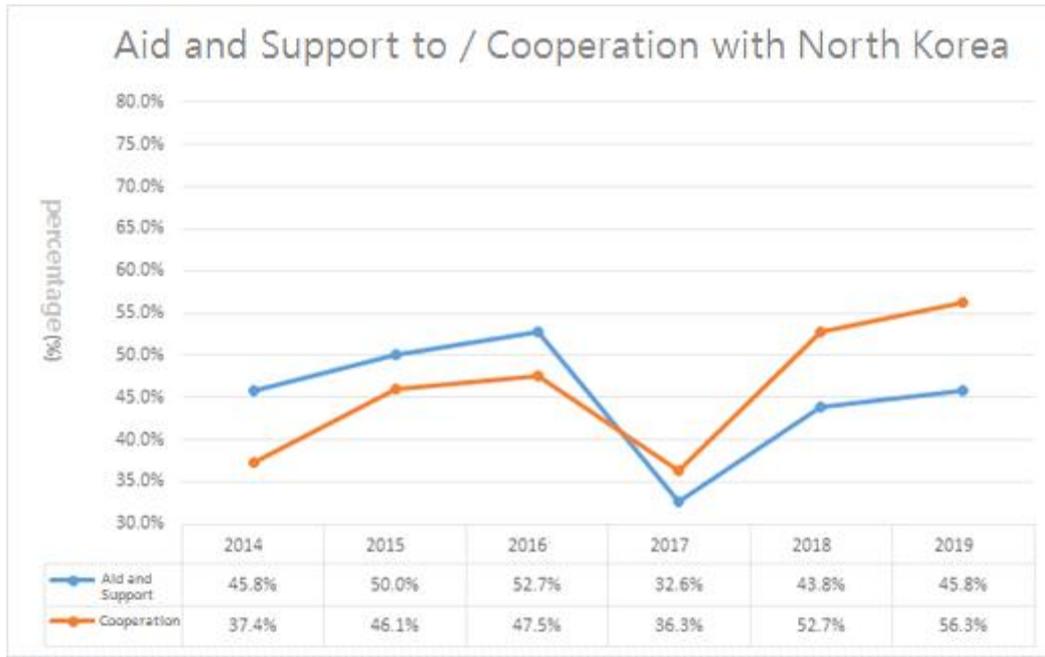
The 2019 survey began on April 5 and ran until April 25 and included men and women aged 19 and older residing across the country. The samples were collected randomly after proportionally allocating gender, age, and region. A face-to-face interview method was used by an investigator who personally visited and investigated the subjects. A total of 1,003 people responded to the survey. On the assumption of random sampling, the sampling error at the 95% confidence level was $\pm 3.1\%$.

Changes in North Korea's Image

The KINU Unification Survey 2019 measures four items on the image of the North.¹⁾ The survey asks whether the respondents agree to view North Korea as a target to (1) give aid and support to, (2) cooperate with, (3) be cautious about, and (4) be hostile to, and measures the answers on an 11-point scale. From zero to four points are negative, five is the medium, and six to ten points are positive.

The graph below shows a change in the percentage of respondents who consider that North Korea should receive aid and support. In other words, the ratio is the total number of respondents who gave more than six points. The 2017 survey was conducted in March 2017, when U.S. President Trump responded harshly to North Korea's nuclear threats, even raising alarms of an imminent war. The below graph illustrates that the percentages of people who view North Korea as a country to give aid and support to or to cooperate with were the lowest at 32.6 percent and 36.3 percent respectively, in 2017. But this negative view of North Korea marked a turning point in 2018. The 2018 survey began in early April, when inter-Korean

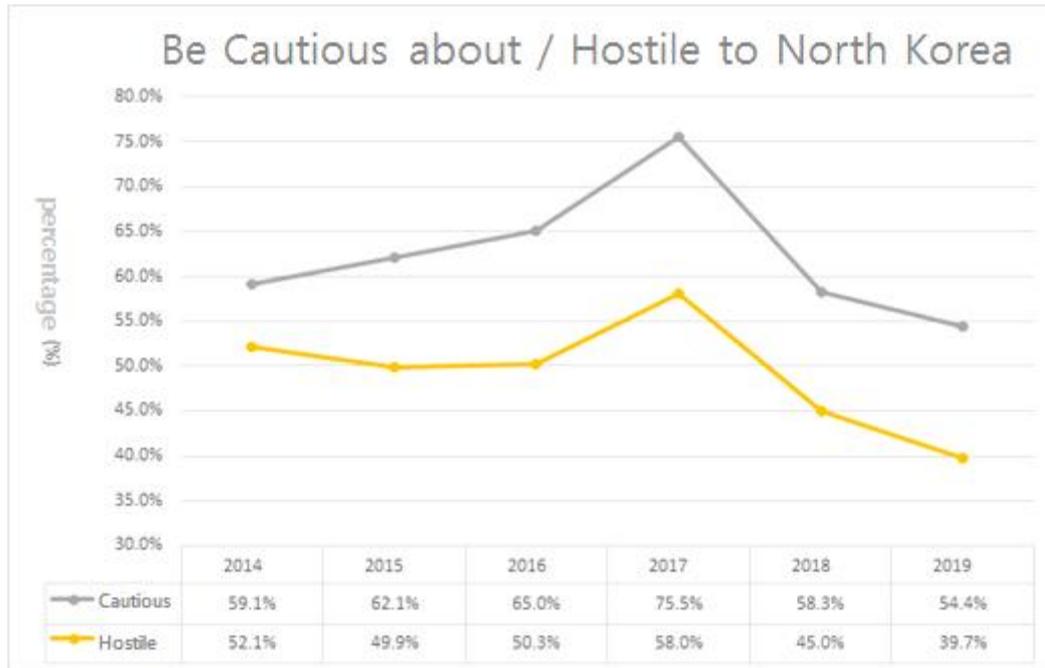
1) 0= disagree strongly; 10=agree strongly.



relations were on a rapid rise in the wake of the PyeongChang Winter Olympics and ended before the April 27 Panmunjeom Summit. Reflecting this sudden turn of events, the number of respondents who saw North Korea as a country to give aid and support to and to cooperate with increased to 43.8 percent and 52.7 percent respectively in the 2018 survey.

The 2019 survey shows that the number of respondents rose once again to 45.8 percent as a target ‘to give aid and support to’ and 56.3 percent as a target ‘to cooperate with.’ In particular, it should be noted that the 56.3 percent for a target ‘to cooperate with’ in 2019 is the highest since the survey on North Korea’s image started in 2014. There was a time when people’s perception on North Korea as a country to cooperate with increased during the previous Park Geun-hye government due to the ‘theory of unification as a bonanza,’ however it falls short of the 56.3% in 2019. It needs to be taken into account that the 2019 survey was conducted about a month after the second North Korea-U.S. summit in Hanoi ended without a clear conclusion. In other words, more than half of South Koreans think of the North as a target of cooperation, even when the two Koreas are not very friendly toward

each other.

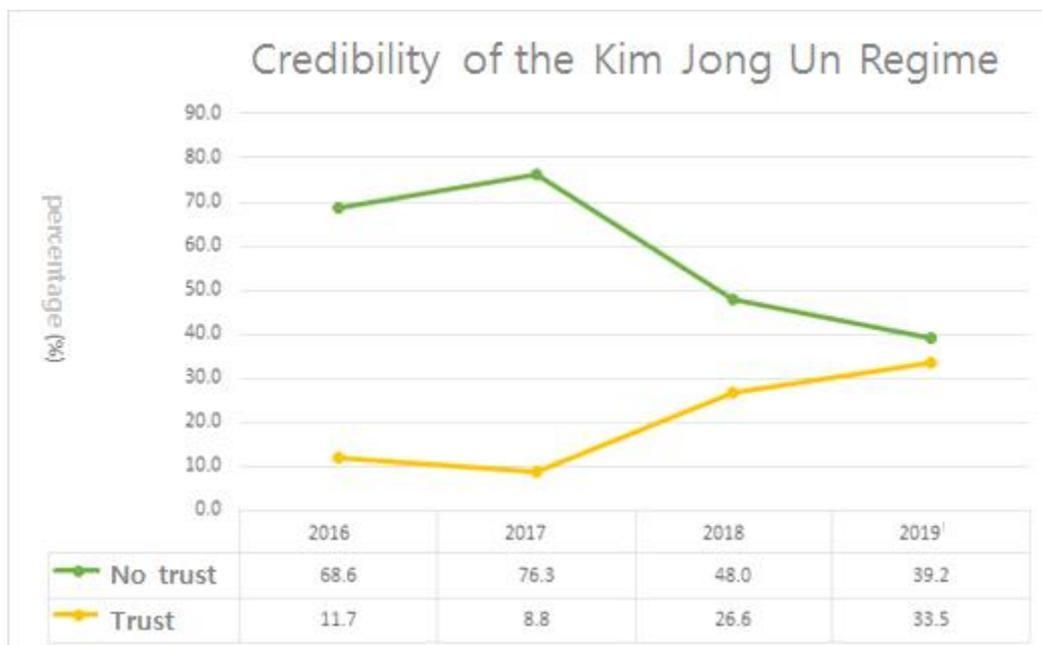


Meanwhile, the negative image of North Korea turned out to be on the decline. The graph shows the change in the proportion of people who answered North Korea as a country to be cautious about or be hostile to. Compared with 2018, the ratio of North Korea's image as a country to be cautious about declined from 58.3 percent to 54.4 percent. The hostile image also declined by 5.3 point from 45.0 percent to 39.7 percent. In particular, for hostile image, it is important that the ratio is the lowest since 2014.

In summing up the changes in North Korea's image, positive and hopeful images of the North have increased, while negative and confrontational images have decreased. Most of all, it is noteworthy that the cooperative image has hit its highest level since 2014, and at the same time that the hostile image has recorded its lowest level since the survey began. Given that the survey was conducted after the failed agreement of Hanoi summit, the changes show that South Koreans have yet to give up their expectations for cooperation with North Korea.

Dialogue and Compromise with North Korea

The distribution of answers to the question “Do you think the current Kim Jong Un regime is a possible partner for dialogue and compromise?” with five-point scale answers²⁾ was compiled in the graph below. The proportion of people who saw the possibility of a compromise with the Kim Jong Un regime was extremely low at 8.8 percent in early 2017, when inter-Korean relations were at their worst, but rose sharply to 26.6 percent in 2018. The 2019 survey also shows that the figure has risen to 33.5 percent. Despite the failed agreement of the Hanoi summit, the Kim Jong Un regime’s increased credibility is a very surprising result.



There may be a counterargument that the figure of 33.5 percent here is not high on the absolute term. The Institute for Peace and Unification Studies (IPUS) at Seoul National University measures a similar question on a four-point scale³⁾: “Do you think a compromise can be reached or discussions of unification can be conducted with the North Korean regime?” In 2017, 28.1 percent said that they trust

2) 1=strongly disagree; 2=somewhat disagree; 3=neutral; 4=somewhat agree; 5=strongly agree.

3) 1=very confident; 2=somewhat confident; 3=not so confident; 4=not confident at all.

North Korea. In the 2018 survey, the trust level surged to 54.7 percent.⁴⁾ In comparison, the figures in the KINU Unification Survey 2019 may appear to have been relatively low.

But the crucial difference here is whether to use the name “Kim Jong Un.” Seoul National University (SNU) used the term “Kim Jong Il regime” both in 2007 and 2008 instead of the term “the North Korean regime.” The survey found that the percentage of trust was very low at 8.8 percent in 2007 and 6.7 percent in 2008. In 2009, when the expression “Kim Jong Il regime” was replaced by “the North Korean regime,” the rate of trust⁵⁾ soared to 40.9 percent. In other words, in a survey using the name of North Korea’s top leader, South Koreans have a strong tendency of distrust.

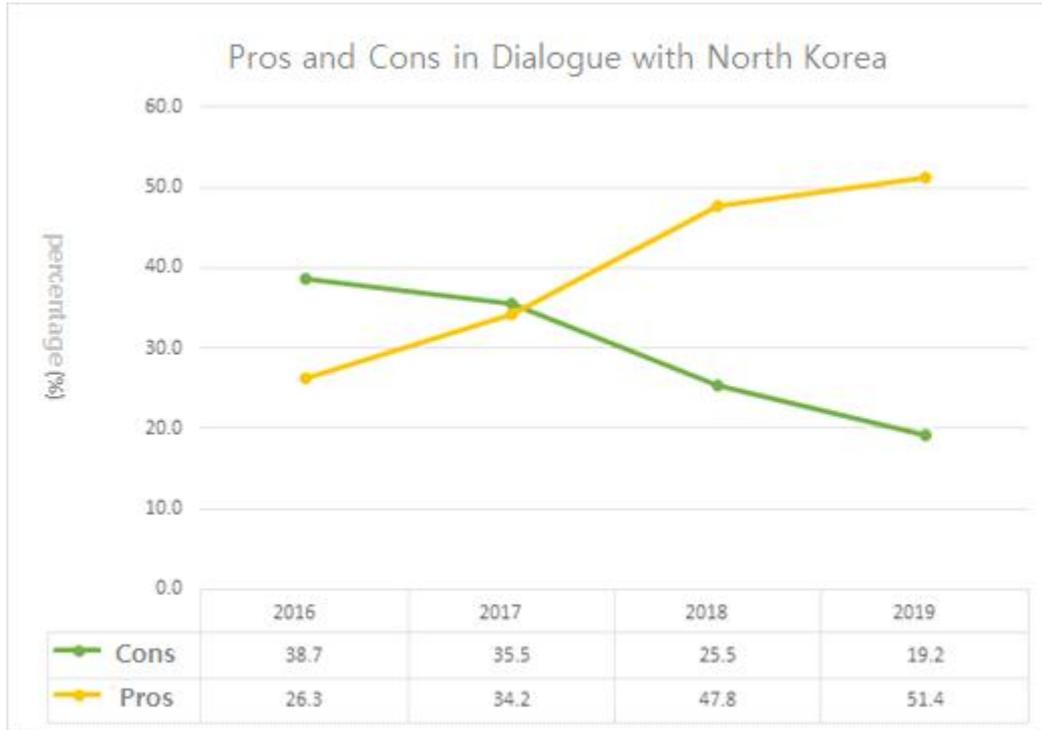
Therefore, it may be assumed that KINU survey’s credibility rate for North Korea, which directly uses the name “Kim Jong Un regime,” tends to be relatively low due to differences in expression and measurement methods compared to SNU’s survey. Given this, 33.5 percent is by no means a low level of trust. While the forward-looking development of inter-Korean relations may be the biggest reason for such a rise in confidence, it is possible that the public opinion was influenced by Kim Jong Un’s continued exposure to various media outlets in 2018.

Meanwhile, the KINU Unification Survey 2019 asked about the credibility of the Kim Jong Un regime and then asked again in a follow-up question: “Do you think we should pursue dialogue and compromise with the Kim Jong Un regime regardless of the above question (Kim Jong Un’s credibility)?” The answer to this question was summarized in the graph below.

If the previous question asked about the attitude toward the Kim Jong Un regime, the follow-up question is about whether they are for or against South Korea’s policy of trying to achieve compromise and engage in dialogue with the North Korean regime. Even if they do not trust the Kim Jong Un regime, these two questions are distinct because there are people who think that dialogue with the North is meaningful in itself.

4) The Seoul National University survey is conducted every July and August.

5) very confident+ somewhat confident



The survey found that, with the rising credibility of the Kim Jong Un regime, the support rate for dialogue and compromise policies also increased from last year's 47.8 percent to 51.4 percent. It should be noted that since 2016, a preference for dialogue and compromise has been on the rise. In other statistics described earlier, perceptions towards North Korea appeared the most negative in 2017. Both the image of North Korea and the credibility of the Kim Jong Un regime showed a pattern of negative decline between 2016 and 2017 before rebounding in 2018. Although, the perception towards dialogue and compromise was the lowest in 2016, the perception elevated in 2017, when even rumors of a war crisis emerged. What can be assumed here is that South Koreans do not necessarily want to cut off dialogue with North Korea even in times of deteriorating inter-Korean relations. If inter-Korean relations enter a stage of cooperation, South Koreans would prefer to develop cooperation and achieve peace and prosperity through dialogue and compromise. However, even at a time when relations are deteriorating due to North Korea's nuclear issue or missile launches, the preference for dialogue and compromise has increased. In other words, this can be seen as one proof that South

Koreans prefer to solve the problems of inter-Korean relations through dialogue and compromise rather than through conflict and pressure.

There is another notable change. Among the respondents who said that they did not trust the Kim Jong Un regime in 2018, 48.9% opposed dialogue with the Kim regime. In other words, they did not trust the Kim regime and also believed that there was no need to talk with the regime. This accounted for 235 people out of 1,002 respondents. In 2019, however, the anti-talk ratio among those who do not trust the Kim Jong Un regime falls to 40.7 percent. This represents 160 out of 1,003 respondents. On the other hand, 31.6 percent is in favor of dialogue, although they do not trust the regime. In the 2019 survey, about a third of those who do not trust the Kim Jong Un regime think that it would still be better to try to talk with the North.

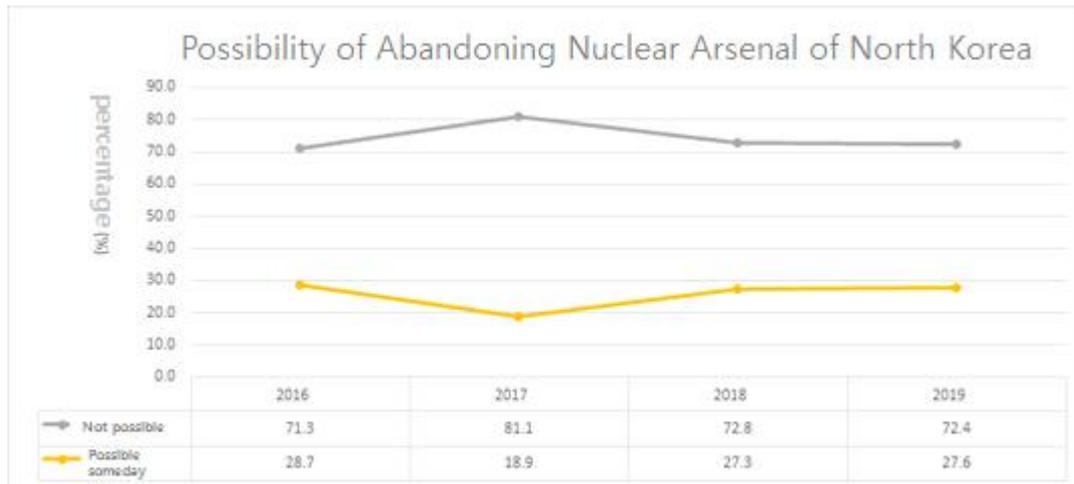
Inter-Korean relations in 2019 are not progressing as fast as they were in 2018. The KINU Unification Survey 2019 shows, however that even under the current circumstances, South Koreans prefer to find a wise solution through dialogue and compromise rather than returning to confrontation and antagonism with North Korea.

Possibility of North Korea Giving Up Its Nuclear Weapons Program and Evaluation of North Korea Policy

So, how do South Koreans feel about the possibility of North Korea giving up its nuclear weapons? When asked, “Do you think North Korea will give up its nuclear weapons program?,” participants responded as shown in the graph below.

Expectations for the North’s abandonment of nuclear arsenal were also the lowest in 2017, when its nuclear threat peaked, with only 18.9 percent of the respondents saying that the North will give up its nuclear weapons at some point in the future.⁶⁾ In 2018, however, this negative image took a turn with a 27.3%

6) The response “give up at some point in the future” combines two items, “North Korea will give up its nuclear weapons soon” with “North Korea will give up its nuclear weapons in the long-run.”



responding that abandoning nuclear weapons is possible. In the 2019 survey, a slightly higher number of people, 27.6%, although not statistically meaningful, believed in the possibility of the North giving up its nuclear arsenal.

Still, 27.6 percent is not high. The majority of the respondents, 72.4 percent, forecast that there is no possibility of North Korea giving up its nuclear weapons program. But given the changing trends of survey responses, even after the breakdown of the Hanoi talks, South Koreans believe that the dialogue phase that began in 2018 has not gone into a crisis phase.

This belief has led to a favorable assessment of the overall North Korea policy of the incumbent government of the Republic of Korea (ROK). The graph below shows changes in preference for major North Korea policies being pursued by the current ROK government, including (1) continuation of economic exchanges,⁷⁾ (2) reopening of the Kaesong Industrial Complex,⁸⁾ (3) resuming the tour to Mt. Geumgang,⁹⁾ and (4) continuing humanitarian aid.¹⁰⁾ Each item was measured on an 11-point scale and compared on a graph by adding the percentage of respondents who gave positive response (more than 6 points).

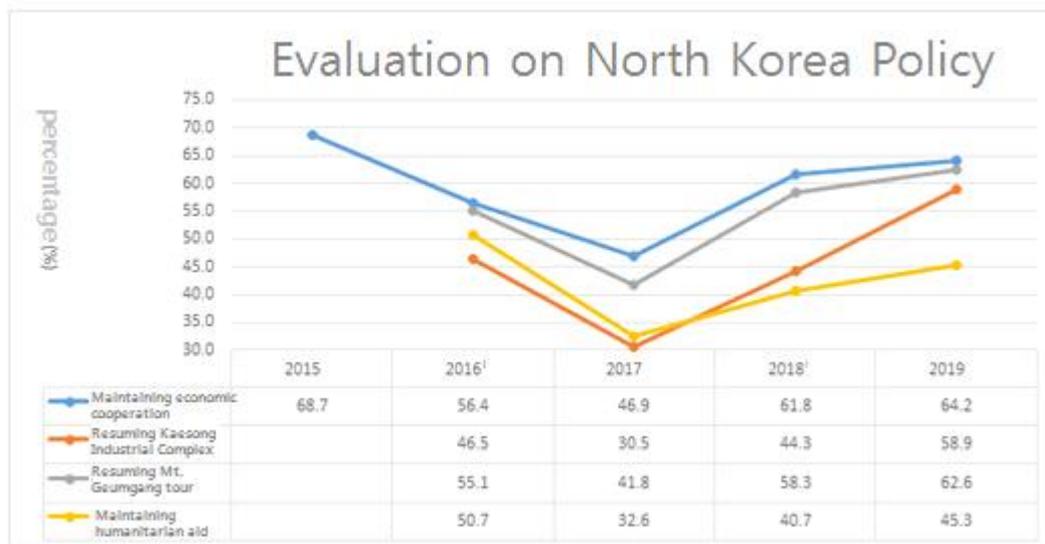
7) "The Two Koreas should continue economic exchanges and cooperation even in a state of political and military confrontation."

8) "The tour to Mt. Geumgang should be resumed."

9) "The Kaesong Industrial Complex should be resumed."

10) "We must continue the humanitarian aid to North Korea."

The most obvious feature is the steady increase since 2017 in preferring to cooperate with and assist North Korea. There have been slight differences in the four policy areas, but continued increases have been confirmed. Preference for economic cooperation with North Korea and the resumption of tours to Mt. Geumgang was particularly high in 2019, with 64.2 percent and 62.6 percent of supporters respectively.



The item that showed the biggest change between 2018 and 2019 was the preference for resuming the Kaesong Industrial Complex (KIC). Those who supported the resumption of the KIC in 2018 stood at 44.3 percent, compared to 2019 when the number rose by 14.6 point to 58.9 percent. Continuing humanitarian aid was also supported by 45.3 percent, nearly half of the respondents.

Expectation of Cooperation and Belief in Dialogue

The author has looked at changes in people's perceptions and attitudes by focusing on the findings of the KINU Unification Survey 2019. The three rounds of inter-Korean summits in 2018 and the two rounds of North Korea-U.S. summit led to an approval rating exceeding 80% for ROK President Moon Jae-in and a high preference for the overall government policies towards North Korea. In 2019,

however, there have been many situational changes. Due to economic difficulties, the approval rating for President Moon is relatively lower. In particular, there is growing skepticism about further cooperation between the two Koreas since the unexpected breakdown of the DRPK-U.S. summit in Hanoi. However, when analyzing the survey results conducted in April, South Koreans appear not to have given up hope for further cooperation between the two Koreas. Despite the stalled dialogue phase, there have been solid calls for continued dialogue with North Korea. In addition, the demands for the need to make progress in inter-Korean relations through the tour to Mt. Geumgang, the resumption of the Kaesong Industrial Complex and humanitarian aid have been made clear. Therefore, it is time to make efforts in setting up policies that can lead to the realization of concrete improvement in inter-Korean relations. ©KINU 2019

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