

THE KIM IL SUNG CONSTITUTION AND THE CHANGE OF KIM JONG IL SYSTEM IN NORTH KOREA

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With the official launch of the regime of Kim Jong Il by his reelection to the Chairmanship of the National Defense Commission in September 1998, North Korea revised its constitution. Baptized the Kim Il Sung Constitution, North Korea's new constitution institutionalized 'Govern by the Will of the Deceased.' Regarding the readjustment of the power structure, the character of the revised constitution can be described in five respects: readjustment of the Standing Meeting of the Supreme People's Assembly (SPA) into the Standing Committee of the SPA, the abolition of state President, the position and authority of the National Defence Commission (NDC), the abolition of the Central Peoples Committee, and the readjustment of the administration council to a cabinet. The essential points of these readjustments are the following: (1) centralization of power and dispersion of responsibility and (2) institutionalization of the crisis management system by the military. These can all be seen both as a display of how confident Kim Jong-il is in himself and as an indicator of erosion of the monolithic power that has long guaranteed the stability of the North Korean political and social system.

I. Introduction

Now that Kim Jong Il has filled the position as the supreme head of the North Korean leadership, which had been vacant since the death of Kim Il Sung (1994), with the title of Chairman of the National Defense Commission (NDC) (1998), observers of North Korea are paying special attention to the policy direction of the new regime. How should we understand the contradictory images of North Korea; for example, as a strong military power with an economic crisis, and/or a country capable of launching a satellite but with a serious food crisis? Is North Korea really strong enough to maintain its status as a significant military power? Is its endeavor to become a technological and military power in the region able to endure the present economic difficulties? Or is the resource mobilization distorting resource distribution and critically deteriorating the situation? These questions still need to be answered even after Kim Jong Il's election to the General Secretary of the Korean Workers' Party (KWP) in October 1997, and even after the official launch of the regime by his reelection to the Chairmanship of the NDC in September 1998.

Although Kim Jong Il has executed a sophisticated political maneuver by readjusting the power structure through revising the Constitution and being reelected to the Chairmanship of the NDC, the measure can be seen as a desperate step by the North Korean leadership in response to the economic crisis and the unstable phenomenon of hungry people wandering about in search of food. In fact, in the "arduous marching spirit", the only option left to the leadership would have been to separate Kim Jong Il's control over the party and the military from the economic responsibility of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly (SPA) and the cabinet. The recent mode of power succession causes one to be more cautious in predicting changes in North Korea.

Under the trend of mid- to long-term change in the North Korean system characterized by economic depression and weakened social

control, the leadership has tried to maintain the system by means of brinkmanship negotiation tactics, placing priority on improving relations with the United States, showing a friendly attitude towards inter-Korean economic exchange and cooperation on the civilian level, and fostering a limited but sustained regional opening.

Under this mid- to long-term trend and other international experience, it is highly likely that the North Korean leadership will sustain its current system and continue to seek changes by means of Kim Jong Il's systemic guidance. Evidence for such a prediction can be found in the transitive character of the revised constitution in terms of the political and power structure, and in its evolving economic character. It could be noted that North Korea has fully embarked upon a crisis management system.

North Korea has completed the consolidation of the Kim Jong Il regime and at the same time is pursuing reform and an open-door policy in a limited and selective way in order to overcome the economic crisis. It is well known that the Chinese policy of reform and opening originated from Deng Xiaoping's pragmatist orientation as well as from the change in consciousness towards economic development among the pro-reformist power elites.¹ In this respect, it is interesting to observe whether North Korea can successfully implement reform and open-door policies while maintaining its monolithic system.²

After 1980, when Kim Il Sung was maintaining full power over the North Korean system by means of purging his political opponents, policy conflicts among political factions were unimaginable due to the formation of the Kim Il Sung-Kim Jong Il power succession. The power elite revealed policy differences over the speed and scope of the reform and open-door policy in accordance with the policy changes in China

1 Joseph Fewsmith, *Dilemmas of Reform in China: Political Conflict and Economic Debate* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1994).

2 Yinhay Ahn, *Unitary System and Policy Competition in North Korea* (Seoul: Korea Institute for National Unification, 1996).

and the Soviet Union. This resulted in a frequent change in cabinet members.

In the early 1990s, amid the reunification of Germany and the collapse of the Soviet Union and the East European socialist countries, North Korea became more isolated and the father-to-son power succession system became consolidated. The economic difficulties, on the other hand, worsened. Such a situation encouraged the North Korean power elite to compete for recognition from the Kim family, and such loyalty produced policy competition among ministries and departments.³ In this respect we may examine how the regime tried to dampen and utilize policy competition between the military and the ministries related to the economy through the 1998 revision of the constitution.

When we take into consideration the reality of policy competition among bureaucrats for the purpose of showing loyalty to Kim Jong Il, the North Korean power structure can be seen as having been readjusted to reinforce the military for maintaining the system and overcoming economic difficulties by means of recruiting economic specialists as cabinet members. Pyongyang's efforts to maintain the Kim Jong Il regime by means of confined changes for a self-reliant economy could be perceived as an indicator of the prospect for change in the North Korean system.

In this respect, this paper aims to forecast changes in the North Korean system by analyzing the Kim Il Sung Constitution and the durability of the Kim Jong Il's regime.

II. Formation of the Power Succession and Rule based on "the Governance by the Will of the Deceased."

Kim Il Sung, who witnessed the de-Stalinization movement in the

3 Yinhay Ahn, "North Korea's External Policies and Policy Competition," *Korea Review of International Studies* (Seoul: Korea University, 1998) Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 63-84.

Soviet Union by Khrushchev and the challenge of Mao Zedong's absolute power by Lin Biao in China, prepared to take political power after Mao's death. Kim Il Sung purged his revolutionary comrades, including the partisan factions, and paved the way for monolithic leadership. In 1972, he secured the position of the supreme head of North Korea by revising the DPRK socialist constitution. The Soviet and Chinese experiences convinced Kim Il Sung to give his position to the person most trustworthy, namely, his son.

In his preparation for the power succession, Kim Il Sung appointed Kim Jong Il as the Secretary of the Korean Worker's Party (KWP) and allowed him to dominate the decision-making organ, and then supported his son ideologically by inserting the theory of succession into the *juche* ideology.

In relation to the succession problem, Kim Il Sung emphasized at the 6th Conference of Socialist Labor Youth League held on June 24, 1971 in Pyongyang that "the youth should continue the revolutionary task through succeeding generations" and to accomplish the revolutionary task, a new generation should lead the way.⁴ Immediately after Kim Il Sung expressed his intention, Kim Jong Il was nominated as the successor with the recommendations of Choi Yong-gun, Kim Il and others at an unofficial meeting held after the end of the 6th plenary session of the 5th Central Party Committee. From 1975 onwards, Kim Jong Il began to be called "the center" of the party.

Despite the opposition against Kim Jong Il's sudden rise to power among the elders in the party, Kim Il Sung entrusted him as head of the three revolutionary movements, which embodied the *chongsanri* way to help his son consolidate his power. The importance of the three revolutions in the fields of ideology, technology and culture had already been displayed at the 5th Congress held in December 1971, and

4 Kim Il Sung, "The youth should continue the task of revolution by succeeding generations," *Collected Works of Kim Il Sung* (Pyongyang: Korea Workers' Party Publisher, 1984) Vol. 26, p. 204.

the Second Congress of the League of Farmers and Workers held in February 1972.⁵ The revised constitution of 1972 also alluded to the three great revolutions.⁶ Kim Il Sung proposed the three revolutions at a meeting of the Politburo in February 1973, and Kim Jong Il reasserted the movement to consolidate the succession power base.⁷ The “Three Revolutions Team” that took up the main task of consolidating Kim Jong Il’s succession demanded unconditional loyalty to the heir whose principles were embodied in the guidance of Kim Il Sung which were enunciated in widely publicized books written by Kim Jong Il. They wielded the formidable power to control, coordinate and supervise not only the party and administrative organs but the investigative bodies as well.

Such efforts by Kim Il Sung were set in stone in the early 1970s, and by going through a preparatory stage in the 1980s, Kim Jong Il finally became the official heir to Kim Il Sung at the 6th Party Congress. He was appointed as Secretary of the Party Secretariat, fourth-ranking member of the Politburo, member of the Politburo Standing Committee, member of the Party Central Committee, and third-ranking member of the Party Military Committee. Kim Jong Il thus consolidated his position as number two in the power hierarchy. By the end of the 1980s, he began to prepare for his actual rein by placing those who supported him into the main positions of the party, government and military.

In the 1980s, when North Korea began to fall into economic difficulties, technocrats related to the economy came to the forefront of government positions. Maybe it was a response to the economic crisis, but this recruitment was based primarily on the standard of ideological loyalty. These elites were selected first among groups of Kim Jong Il’s

5 *The History of Korean Workers’ Party* (Pyongyang: Korea Workers’ Party Publisher, 1984), p. 487.

6 Article 11 of the socialist constitution stipulates on ideological revolution, Article 25 on technological revolution and Article 36 on cultural revolution. *Kunroja*, January 1973, pp. 29-42.

7 *The History of Korean Workers’ Party*, 1984, p. 489.

policy lines, then in accordance to their specialty. Kim Jong Il placed importance in all three fields—the party, economy and military. Loyalty to the revolution implied loyalty to the party, and loyalty to the *suryong* (leader) meant loyalty to the heir.

Power succession proceeded in the form of revision of the constitution in 1992, in which the right of military command possessed by the state President was taken away. Kim Jong Il was then elected Chairman of the NDC, thus becoming the one to wield power over the military. Over twenty years of preparation for power succession had made Kim Jong Il's position firm even though his father's position was left vacant for four years. In October 1997, Kim Jong Il took the position of Party Secretary and officially declared that Kim Il Sung's policies would continue to be implemented.⁸

Kim Jong Il, who lacks the charisma of his father, maintained the transitive system based on "Governance by the Will" of his deceased father for over four years in order to evade the responsibility for the economic crisis and diplomatic problems, and the burden of having to succeed the position of state president. However, the state presidency could no longer be left vacant. Kim Jong Il, therefore, opted for the official launch of his rule by declaring the Kim Il Sung Constitution, abolishing the position of state president, and taking the position of Chairman of the NDC.

III. Completion of the Kim Jong Il Regime and Kim Il Sung Constitution

Kim Jong Il's regime was finally consolidated at the first session of the 10th Supreme People's Assembly (SPA) of the DPRK (September 9,

8 North Korea emphasized that in the future, there will not be any policy differences, not even the 0.001 mm difference compared with the past. *Pyongyang Broadcasting Service*, October 4, 1997.

1998). The SPA dealt with amendments and supplements of the socialist constitution of the DPRK, election of the Chairman of the NDC and the election for the state leadership organs of the DPRK in order to reinforce the Kim Jong Il regime and institutional changes for launching his official rule. It was, however, the posthumous power of the deceased Kim Il Sung that held sway of the SPA, and Kim Il Sung was also the very person who was made the prominent figure of the event in a politically symbolic sense.⁹ The DPRK socialist constitution was called the Law of Kim Il Sung, and the position of the state presidency was abolished. It cannot be denied that having completed its power consolidation by means of amending the Constitution, the Kim Jong Il regime has become weaker than that of the preceding monolithic structure of Kim Il Sung. Although this does not necessarily imply the instability of the regime, the regime itself will not have a smooth path ahead. It could be characterized as a system of crisis management to overcome the present difficulties in the short term by relying on the projected will of his deceased father.

Institutionalization of "Governance by the Will of the Deceased"

Kim Il Sung is to rule North Korea as the "eternal president" by means of the constitution that is professed to embody his thought and achievements. The institutionalization of Kim Il Sung's teachings is significant to Kim Jong Il's regime in two respects. First, the constitution plays a symbolic and ideological role in justifying its legitimacy because Kim Jong Il lacks his father's charisma. Second, by setting Kim Il Sung's teachings into a constitutional framework, Kim Jong Il can also secure his authority not only from the people but also from the

9 Rather than Kim Jong Il's speech, the recorded tape of Kim Il Sung's policy speech ("Let us bring the advantages of socialism in our country into full play," delivered by the President Kim Il Sung at the first session of the 9th SPA of the DPRK on May 24, 1990) was played before the SPA.

power elite. President-for-eternity Kim Il Sung provides support to the command of the Korean Workers' Party (KWP) as the Great Suryong, and Kim Jong Il, the General Secretary of the KWP, governs North Korea backed by the halo of his dead father. These are positive aspects, but there are negative ones as well.

Kim Jong Il has not achieved any visibly substantial results during his four-year rule after the death of his father. If the signing of the US-DPRK Geneva Agreement (October 1994) and the launch of a satellite (August 1998) are two achievements to be attributed to Kim Jong Il, then the deepening economic difficulties and the unending food crisis are the two destabilizing factors to the Kim regime.¹⁰ Under the circumstances in which Kim Jong Il is unable to present a new policy alternative in overcoming the crises, governance by the teachings and legitimacy of Kim Il Sung can be the sole shelter and the last resort available to the younger Kim in managing the crises. North Korea in this respect could not complete the three-year modernization period that began in 1994, nor has the leadership presented a new economic plan.

Considering the positive and negative aspects of governance by the teachings and projected presence of his deceased father, Kim Jong Il's regime is expected to sustain its governing system for the time being despite the deepening economic crisis. As the DPRK socialist constitution stipulates that North Korean society is a "large family," governance by the will of the dead, coupled with the traditional governing principles of loyalty and filial piety, will remain as the central political discourse of the Kim Jong Il regime.

Readjustment of the power structure

The readjustment of the North Korean power structure revealed in the revised constitution in five respects: conversion of the standing

10 Kim Yon-chul, *Crisis of the North Korean Ration System and Prospects for Market Reform* (Seoul: Samsung Economic Research Institute, 1997).

meeting of the SPA into the Presidium of the SPA; the abolition of the state President; the position and authority of the NDC; the abolition of the Central People's Committee; and transformation of the administrative council to a cabinet.

(1) Centralization of power and dispersion of responsibility

If the birth of the concept "eternal president" was inevitable with the abolition of the state presidency, then there arises a problem as to where the state power should be entrusted in accordance with the Constitution. Here Kim Jong Il should duly be the person to be entrusted with the state power and naturally the person who should have full and direct command over the military. The position should also be appropriate to his personality. In this context, North Korea entrusted the NDC which possesses the responsibility for "supreme military guidance" with the role of "overall military management" (Constitution Article 100 amended), and also gave the role of "guiding the general affairs of the military" to the Chairman of the NDC (Constitution Article 102 amended). In a state that has been highly militarized and is under crisis management such as North Korea, the "overall military management" and the "general military affairs" are the priority of state management. Therefore, the fact that Kim Jong Il has been reelected as Chairman of the NDC in addition to his position as General Secretary of the KWP whose role is to guide the DPRK (Constitution Article 11) implies that he has officially secured absolute power. Due to Kim's "peculiar" personality being translated into his over-all ruling style, the responsibility to represent the state in ceremonial functions, officially to compose and write letters of trust or to issue summons would be to a certain extent too burdensome for Kim Jong Il. Thus the function of state representation was entrusted to the SPA Presidium Chairman (Constitution Article 111 amended).

The separation of the "state representative" and the "final decision

maker of state management" can be explained not only in terms of Kim's ruling personality. The DPRK Constitution transformed the Administration Council into a cabinet, and entrusted it with the function of "overall management of state affairs." In addition the Constitution made it the "administrative organ of supreme sovereignty" and recognized the Prime Minister of the cabinet as the government representative (Constitution Articles 117, 120 amended).¹¹ The fact that the revised Constitution separates the position of the state representative and entrusts the cabinet with the management of state affairs implies that North Korea has dispersed the responsibility of the power elite. Under the circumstances of prolonged economic crisis and the emerging importance of diplomacy in state maintenance, the entrusting of economic and diplomatic authorities to the power elite, especially to bureaucrats, could be interpreted as the measure for dispersing functional responsibility. Kim Jong Il himself argued that Kim Il Sung advised him not to take direct charge of economic matters.

The two characteristics that appeared in the process of his taking full control of power, namely dispersing responsibility to others and readjusting the power structure, are functional indicators of Kim Jong Il's leadership. When we take into account the current crisis of North Korea and the prospect that there are no signs of improvement at the moment, the readjustment of the power structure in the revised Constitution makes us presume that neither Kim Jong Il evaluates himself as having the capacity for state management, nor can he bring any tangible achievement in the near future. When the economic crisis develops into the instability of the regime itself, the power dispersion corollary to the dispersion of responsibility will highly likely lead to an actual erosion of Kim Jong Il's power. Nobody will know who—between the state representative and the state manager—will be entrusted with the historical role of leading the state in the midst of this systemic confu-

11 The cabinet was also entrusted with a part of the functions and authority of the Central People's Committee.

sion. Dispersion of power and responsibility can therefore be an indicator of the erosion of monolithic power that has been a guarantee of the stability of the North Korean political and social system.

(2) Institutionalization of the crisis management system by the military

The North Korean system was long seen to be undergoing a situation of crisis management through the delay in the launching of Kim Jong Il's official position in the midst of economic difficulties and diplomatic isolation following the death of Kim Il Sung. The strengthening of military power is a common phenomenon in most dictatorial states facing crisis such as North Korea. Kim Jong Il, who took the position of Chairman of the NDC on April 9, 1993, was reelected to the same position in order to complete the power succession through an institutional process.

If the Chairman of the NDC himself were the head of state, then it could be regarded as a military state. Two points are worthy of note here. First, it is usually the party that ranks as the highest state organ in a communist state. It is still the case in existing communist states. Secondly, it is the politico-military rather than political, social and economic factors that play the role of social integration. Although North Korea has long adopted the policy of militarization of all social areas, recently it is revealing its military tendencies in its international relations and the management of the state as well. In addition to the reinforced power and role of the NDC and the position of the Chairman as newly stated in the constitution, it is particularly interesting to note that no military-economic specialist such as Yon Hyong-muk and Chon Pyong-ho are members of the NDC.¹² The NDC has become an institution that even handles economic issues.

12 There are ten members including the Chairman of the NDC. For information regarding Yon Hyong-muk and Chon Pyong-ho, refer to *Directory of North Korean Officials* (Joong-ang Ilbo, 1990).

Economic-oriented cabinet and changes in economic institutions

Another noteworthy change in the revised Constitution is its articles related to the economy. The characteristic feature of the change is that Pyongyang has finally recognized in constitutional terms the economic changes it has been undergoing over the past several years. First of all, North Korea expanded the scope of private ownership (Article 24), inserted the freedom to travel and transfer residence (Article 75), and encouraged the establishment and operation of businesses in Special Economic Zones (SEZs) (Article 37). In addition, the revised Constitution extended the operation of independent enterprise and adopted the concept of cost, price and profitability (Article 33), expanded the subject of foreign trade and eliminated the right of state supervision (Article 36). Although most of the revised and newly inserted articles of the constitution reflect the changes North Korea is undergoing, it is particularly interesting to note the deletion of "state supervision" from the area related to trade. Reinforcement of autonomy and division of state organs related to foreign trade is expected in the future.

In order to increase its efficiency the number of cabinet vice-ministers was reduced from 9 to 2 and related departments from 37 to 31. There was a great reduction in the number of economic organs from 32 to 23. The abolition of the Foreign Economic Committee is also noteworthy. The main way in which these organs in the cabinet have been strengthened is that they were filled with new technocrats. New faces and technocrats related to economic fields are rising to positions of power in order to overcome the present economic difficulties. Among the 31 technocrats, 24 were newly appointed to posts, thus signifying the launch of a generational change in the state apparatus. Premier Hong Song-nam, Vice Premier Cho Ch'ang-tok (former Minister of Extractive Industries), Vice Premier Kwak Pom-ki (former Minister of Metal and Machine-building Industries) are all economic specialists. From their appointment, North Korea's policy of favoring

economic specialists to overcome the present economic difficulties can be observed.

As one of the efforts to complete the consolidation of the monolithic guidance system of Kim Jong Il and to overcome the impending economic crisis, North Korea is separating domestic affairs from international ones in the governing structure. Without becoming the head of state, Kim Jong Il took the dual position of General Secretary of the KWP and Chairman of the NDC. Economic issues were entrusted to the cabinet and those of foreign relations mandated to the Presidium of the SPA. This signifies that Kim Jong Il will govern North Korea by means of controlling power over the party and the military while having the cabinet and the SPA Presidium hold direct responsibility. By being reelected to the position of Chairman of the NDC, Kim reinforced the military and appointed economic specialists to have them cope with the economic problems.

Such restructuring of power can be seen as a desperate measure to encourage competition between the military and economic power elites over loyalty and to give them channels to express their interests so that overall competition will converge into efforts for overcoming the economic crisis.

IV. Managing the Monolithic Guidance System

As can be seen from the new Kim-Il Sung-centered constitution, North Korea is confronted with a burden of managing the monolithic guidance system in a way that maintains the Kim Jong Il regime yet also overcomes the economic crisis. The policy guideline thus shifted from the "march of toil and blood" to the "establishment of a strong and prosperous state." Although North Korea reinforced the military for regime maintenance, North Korea also revealed its practical orientation in economic policy: many economic specialists were appointed

to main government posts related to the economy. Kim Jong Il seems determined to overcome the economic crisis by means of a crisis management system backed by the monolithic guidance system.

Guideline of system maintenance policy: From the march of toil and blood to the construction of a strong and prosperous state

North Korea is encouraging its people to uphold the great achievements of Kim Il Sung in all government projects, professing that it is the will of the late Kim. Kim Jong Il stated that the strong and prosperous state is a state based on the *surjong* and that its construction "is the wish desired by the great leader and the best teaching left to us."¹³

Kim Jong Il declared at his inauguration as Secretary General of the KWP to uphold the "red flag philosophy" of *juche* thought. After declaring "arm all society with Kimilsungism" in displaying his loyalty to his father, he legitimized his status as Kim Il Sung's heir with the "ten principles to establish the monolithic thought." Therefore, he has no choice but to rule by justifying that everything he does is in accordance with the will of the deceased great leader. It is highly likely that the efforts to idolize Kim Il Sung by declaring the "juche calendar year" might develop into the idolization of Kim Jong Il.¹⁴ Therefore, in spite of the official opening of the Kim Jong Il era, there will be no drastic changes in policy line or in ruling style. Without presenting a new policy vision for North Korea, Kim Jong Il is merely emphasizing the realization of the teaching of the deceased. It is anticipated, therefore, that Pyongyang will reinforce its military and ideological aspects in accordance with the theory of "strong and prosperous state" and pursue a policy of military first and economy

13 "Strong and Prosperous State," *Rodong Shinmun*, August 22, 1998.

14 At the meeting of the 52nd anniversary of the founding of KWP, proposals were made to uphold Kim Il Sung as the eternal *surjong*. *Central News Agency* (North Korea), October 9, 1997.

next line.

These endeavors to build *juche* socialism may rather produce dissent from the people because their livelihood is in a critical situation and remains as the most urgent problem.

Reinforcement of the military

Kim Jong Il, who had to confront systemic crises following the collapse of the socialist countries, the death of his father, and food shortages, pursued the policy of favoring the military in order to gain their loyalty to maintain control over the people. Under the policy guideline of unification by military means and the strengthening of North Korea's negotiating capability with foreign countries, Kim Jong Il commanded the leadership to place "priority on the military before labor," even if the economic situation was difficult.¹⁵ Now Kim Jong Il has taken the positions of General Secretary of the SPA and Chairman of the NDC and possesses actual authority. The SPA Presidium and the cabinet are entrusted with nominal power. This implies that while Kim Jong Il exercises all power, the responsibility falls upon the Chairman of the SPA Presidium (Kim Yong-nam) and the Premier (Hong Sung-nam).

Governing behind the scenes is Kim Jong Il's style; he has been doing so since the death of his father. The influence of the military will increase and Kim Jong Il will rule North Korea by relying on the military and staying behind the scenes. This can be defined as the institutionalization of the crisis management system based on the military. Therefore, emphasis on ideology, politics and the military will not cease even in the process of constructing the so-called economically powerful nation for a "strong and prosperous state."

15 *Central News Agency* (North Korea), October 7, 1997.

Disintegration of the economic system and duality of economic policy

North Korea's economy entered a stage of depression in the early 1980s and in the 1990s the authorities had to acknowledge officially the failure of their economic plan (the third Seven-year Plan, 1987-1993).¹⁶ The leadership designated Rajin-Sunbong as a special economic area in December 1991 and began to implement the policy of opening economic areas to overcome the difficulties. The open-door policy, however, was limited and selective due to the precondition of system maintenance. Their efforts were not successful due to the energy shortages generated from economic deterioration and food shortages following natural calamities in 1994.

The crisis in the economic sphere brought about two changes in the North. First is the change in social control and integration. The North Korean leadership has long dominated the people by means of confining the residents to certain areas, but the authorities could no longer control them due to their frequent travels to find food. With the people moving about unrestrained, residents began to exchange information and express grievances among themselves. This resulted in a change of consciousness unfit for the erstwhile-indoctrinated way of thinking.¹⁷ The formerly tight control over the population and social integration in terms of ideology weakened. The second change is related to the economy. As shortages of food and goods intensified, the black market came to be the sole sphere of economic activities that could guarantee people's livelihood. The authorities could only tacitly allow private economic activity.¹⁸ As a consequence, the North Korean economic sys-

16 It is noteworthy that the authorities alluded to the deterioration of the international environment as a cause for their economic failure. *Central News Agency* (North Korea), December 9, 1993.

17 KBSM, *The Food Crisis of North Korea: Witnessed by 1,019 Food Refugees* (Seoul: Korean Buddhist Sharing Movement), June 1998.

tem is in transition from a strictly planned to a weakened planned economy.

Such changes in North Korean social and economic spheres coupled with the deviant behavior of the power elite are beginning to tear apart North Korean society as a whole. Great gaps between the elite and the people, differences in living standards among regions and emerging differences in social consciousness are indicators of the social disintegration.¹⁹

These symptoms have, in fact, compelled the Pyongyang leadership to adopt a dual strategy. On the one hand, they are reinforcing indoctrination and ideological control to tighten up their control over the people. They have set forth slogans such as "arduous marching spirit" and "full march of socialism" to mobilize and control the people, and are emphasizing self-reliance and nationality (nationalism) to justify economic policy.²⁰ A joint editorial essay by *Rodong Shinmun* and *Kunroja* (September 17, 1998) focused on the difference between self-reliant and foreign-dependent economies.²¹ As a result, the supremacy of trade which was emphasized from the end of the 1993 was discarded. The economic crisis that North Korea faces is structural and cannot be overcome soon. With the official launch of the Kim Jong Il regime, therefore, North Korea is trying to control the people by mobilizing

18 Choi Soo-Young, *The North Korean Second Economy* (Seoul: KINU, 1997); Kim Yonchul, *Crisis of the North Korean Ration System and Prospects for Market Reform* (Seoul: Samsung Economic Research Institute, 1997).

19 The fact that there are gaps in the living standard among regions reveal that the areas suffering from the food crisis are concentrated in certain regions.

20 Kim Jong Il (June 1, 1997), "On upholding self-reliance and nationality in revolution and construction," *Party News / Military News Kim Jong Il* (August 4, 1998), "Let's thoroughly realize the great leader Kim Il Sung's teachings for unification of the fatherland"; *Party News / Military News*, "Joint editorial in 1998"; Kim Jong Il (April 18, 1998), "Let's achieve autonomous and peaceful unification of the fatherland by means of grand solidarity of the whole nation," *Party News / Military News*.

21 Joint editorial essay by *Rodong Shinmun* and *Kunroja* (September 17, 1998), "Let's hold on to the self-reliant national economic policy."

them under the banner of building this so-called strong and prosperous state.

The North has merged economy-related organs, downsized the local administrative organizations and revised the articles of the constitution related to the economy. The task of the Kim Jong Il regime is to construct an economically strong state based on self-reliance. North Korea, therefore, has acknowledged that the livelihood of the people has in fact been sacrificed to reinforce the military and has set forth the commitment to raise the living standard by concentrating investment in the economic field.²² The purpose for placing economic specialists in the forefront is to improve agricultural policy, to increase food productivity, and to revitalize the domestic economy by investment in social infrastructure. As stated in the new constitution, private activities of North Korean residents have been expanded to promote productivity.²³ The regime is also highly likely to promote officially its economic opening policy.

The dual characteristics revealed in the economic policy reflect the critical situation the leadership is currently facing. Although the authorities incessantly emphasize nationality (nationalism) and self-reliance to the North Korean people, it has adopted a practical policy in revising the constitution and appointing cabinet members to revitalize the economy. Such duality in economic policy will be prolonged for the foreseeable future until there is some tangible improvement.

22 Kim Jong Il praised the efforts of the people by saying "you have prepared for the future of a strong and prosperous state by reinforcing the military...even under the lag of economic development and in the face of the difficulties of the livelihood of the people."

23 In the Kim Il Sung Constitution, illegally cultivated fields are legalized, the farmers' market is activated, small scale markets opened, and measures will be taken to allow profit-seeking hand manufactures and private business and other private market activities.

V. Conclusion

For several years, the North Korean system has been under the governance of the will of the deceased father, without having an actual head of the state. However, with Kim Jong Il's rise to power in accordance with the proclamation of the Kim Il Sung Constitution, Kim Jong Il has put priority on military policies yet readjusted the cabinet with economic specialists to overcome the economic crisis and maintain the current political system. The change of Kim Jong Il's regime can be observed from the standpoint of such restructuring of the North Korean system.

The North Korean government, which has completed the establishment of the Kim Il Sung-Kim Jong Il supremacy in consonance with the consolidation of Kim Jong Il's regime, is putting all its efforts into overcoming the economic crisis. In the 1990s, however, with the collapse of the East European bloc and natural disasters, the North Korean economy was exacerbated and driven into a situation where the regime had to ask for foreign aid. Despite the frequent changes in the cabinet and partial aid from outside, the economy remains at a devastated stage. Moreover, the change of consciousness of the North Korean people has induced the need for even stronger control.

First, the arduous march of Kim Il Sung's era is not yet over; nevertheless, North Korea has publicized the Kim Il Sung Constitution and institutionalized the governance by the will of the deceased father along with the proclamation of building a strong and prosperous country. The revised constitution upholds Kim Il Sung as the "eternal president" and legitimizes Kim Jong Il's regime. It is also significant in that Kim Jong Il's power has been secured based not only on the people, but also on the power elite. As long as Pyongyang proclaims a strong and prosperous state in response to South Korea's "The second nation-building," there is a high possibility that it will use this motto as a norm in deciding foreign and inter-Korean policies.

Second, North Korea has restructured its power system by revising its constitution. This can be summarized in five respects: readjustment of the Standing Meeting of the SPA into the Standing Committee of the SPA, the abolition of state President, strengthening of the position and authority of the NDC, the abolition of the Central People's Committee, and the readjustment of the administration council to a cabinet. Kim Jong Il has taken most of the real power, but having entrusted the cabinet with the management of state affairs implies that Pyongyang has dispersed the responsibility of the power elite. Under the circumstances of the prolonged economic crisis and the emerging importance of diplomacy in state maintenance, the entrustment of economic and diplomatic authority to the power elite, especially to technocrats, is a measure of dispersing responsibilities. This dispersion of power and responsibility can be seen as a display of how confident Kim Jong Il is in himself. However, in the institutional dimension of authority, it is an indicator of erosion of the monolithic power that has long guaranteed the stability of the North Korean political and social system.

Third, the characteristic feature of the change is that North Korea has finally recognized in constitutional terms the difficulties that it has been undergoing economically for the past several years. According to the amended constitution, the newly formed cabinet is largely composed of economic specialists. This constitution not only recognizes the reality of economic activities occurring in North Korean society, but also strengthens the autonomy and differentiation of the trade-responsible organs for these economic activities.

In order to maintain the Kim Jong Il system as well as to overcome the economic crisis, North Korea has propagated the principle of "governance of the country by the will of the deceased." Following the enunciation of the Kim Il Sung Constitution the seemingly perfected Kim Jong Il structure has to resolve the outstanding crisis whose result will largely influence its contours. The need to alleviate the potential for a further militarization of the North Korean state, which may come

as a result of the inability of the "military-first" policy to effectively manage the economic crisis through the division of responsibility, is all the more reason why North Korea's economic problems must be successfully confronted.