POLITICAL CHANGES IN NORTH KOREA: WHAT IS IT, WHAT HAS HAPPENED AND WHAT TO EXPECT?

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Nowadays, almost nobody maintains serious doubts about North Korea's changes in the economy and society during the 1990s. The question is, what are their impacts on North Korea's politics during the 1990s and the future, and vice versa. In order to answer, chapter II suggests analytical propositions for analyzing political changes in North Korea. They could be investigated; firstly, as changes in three-way relations among the top leadership, middle level officials, and the masses; secondly, as progress from forced unity to differentiation in mutual relations among politics, economy, and society; and thirdly, as being initiated by the top leadership, and/or social protest, or without subject (i.e. through simple systemic decay). Chapter III confirms that North Korea's changes through systemic decay in the 1990s increased the apolitical autonomy of the economy and society, and changed power relations among the center, middle officials, and the masses, and that the leadership attempted to come to terms with them through various ways, including the July measures in 2002. Chapter IV focuses on the necessities of political reforms of de-Stalinization and of establishing reciprocal relations between the regime and society as

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preconditions for further progress and the success of economic reform and opening. It also investigates a range of possibilities for realizing the necessary political reforms, depending on the one hand, the dynamics of changing internal power relations, and on the other, North Korea's and its Leader's fortune during and after the nuclear crisis.

Introduction

Till the mid 1990s, the main currents of North Korea studies maintained that North Korea could not be changed and stood before imminent collapse. According to these theories, as long as Kim Jong Il ruled, reform and opening would be impossible, because they would jeopardize his personal dictatorship. Information inflow from the opening would be the most serious threat to his dictatorship.

Kim Jong Il's reshuffling of state system and policy from late 1997 was accidentally followed by the initiation of the engagement policy by the Kim Dae Jung government from the start of 1998. With Kim Dae Jung's new North Korea policy, which has been based on North Korea's continued existence and changeability of internal and external behaviors, it turned out that the majority of North Korea studies silently came to agreement with the new perspective on North Korea.

However, with the inauguration of the Bush administration in 2001, the old theories returned with new accents. According to the new old theories of unchangeableness of North Korea, its 'evilness' in internal politics with its grave infringement of human rights and in and outward behavior of developing weapons of mass destruction could not be changed without a regime change in North Korea.

Nowadays, almost nobody maintains serious doubts about North Korea's changes in the economy and society during the 1990s. Besides

back and forth border crossings with China since the early 1990s and receiving considerable foreign humanitarian assistance since the mid 1990s, quite a few North Koreans have been exposed to relatively massive exchange and cooperation with the South after the first summit in 2000. Recently, North Korea put the outsider's capability of imagination to shame with its hasty installation of the Shineuju special economic zone, followed by more prudent openings of Gaesung and Mt. Geumgang in 2001, and its economic shock therapy of the July measures in 2002.

The question is, what were their impacts on North Korea's politics during the 1990s and what impacts will they have in the future, and vice versa. In order to answer, chapter II suggests analytical propositions for analyzing political changes in North Korea. They could be investigated; firstly, as changes in three way relations among the top leadership, middle level officials, and the masses; secondly, as progress from forced unity to differentiation in mutual relations among politics, economy, and society; and thirdly, as being initiated by the top leadership, and / or social protest, or without subject (i.e. through simple systemic decay). Chapter III confirms that North Korea's changes through systemic decay in the 1990s increased the apolitical autonomy of the economy and society, and changed power relations among the center, middle officials, and the masses, and that the leadership attempted to come to terms with them through various ways, including the July measures in 2002. Chapter IV focuses on the necessities of political reforms of de-Stalinization and of establishing reciprocal relations between the regime and society as preconditions for further progresses and the success of economic reform and opening. It also investigates a range of possibilities of realizing the necessary political reforms, depending on the one hand, the dynamics of changing internal power relations, and on the other, North Korea's fortune during and after the nuclear crisis. Perhaps then we can return to the first question of North Korea's continued existence or collapse, and of changeability or

unchangeableness in the divergent circumstances of 'tailored containment' or 'bold initiatives.'

What is Meant by 'Political Change'?

Traditionally, three kinds of questions have been raised regarding North Korean politics and its changes: the first subject of these questions has been Kim Jong Il's personal rule, the question of its stability, of the existence of opposing factions among the top elites, and of the possibilities of a coup d'etat against him; the second has been the three-way relations among the party, government, and the military: the changing balance of power among them in the 1990s, the enhanced role of the military under the policy of 'military first' from 1995, and the strengthened position of the administration after the revision of the constitution in 1998; the third has been the political popularity of Kim Jong Il among the people: their decreasing loyalty to him, and the question of existence and possible formation of dissident movements, etc.

However, the problem could be put into different perspectives. First, every change in North Korea can be characterized as political change because it inevitably modifies the degree of penetration and control over politics, economy, and society by the power of the center. Second, political change could be understood as the alteration of relations, and of balance of power among the three major socio-political groups of top leadership, middle officialdom, and the masses. Third, political changes could be affected by three different momentums - that of conscious choice by the top leadership, or of decay, or of societal conquest.

Political Change as Differentiation of Politics, Economy, and Society

The power of the socialist party-state should not be characterized simply as political power, but as general and totalitarian power

because it unites powers over politics, economy, and society and attempts to penetrate and control all aspects of life.[1] Then, everything and every change is political because all these are related to power. Also, the changes could not but mean a transition from the totalitarian trinity forced by the central power to the differentiation into relatively independent spheres of politics, economy, and society.[2] This process has been called the transition from totalitarianism to post-totalitarianism in the spheres of politics and society, and as reform in the economy.

Transition to Post-totalitarianism in the Spheres of Politics and Society

About the mid 1950s, communist totalitarianism evolved into post-totalitarianism. According to Linz and Stepan, post-totalitarianism can encompass a continuum varying from "early post-totalitarianism," "frozen post-totalitarianism," and "mature post-totalitarianism."[3] Early post-totalitarianism is very close to the totalitarian ideal type, but differs from in at least one key dimension, which is normally some constraints on the leader. Among East European states, Bulgaria lingered at this phase till 1989. There can be frozen post-totalitarianism, in which, despite the persistent tolerance of some civil society critics of the regime, almost all the other control mechanisms of the party-state stay in place for a long period and do not evolve (e.g. Czechoslovakia, from 1977 to 1989, the Soviet Union from Brezhnev to Chernenko, East Germany under the rule of Honecker). Or, there can be mature post-

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1 Leszek Nowak, "The Totalitarian Approach and the History of Socialism," Janina Frentzel-Zagorska, *From a One-Party State to Democracy: Transition in Eastern Europe* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1993), pp. 50-51.

2 See Fei-Ling Wang, *Institutions and Institutional Change in China: Premodernity and Modernization* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1998).

3 Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 42.

totalitarianism, in which there has been a significant change in all the dimensions of the post-totalitarian regime, except that politically, the leading role of the official party is still sacrosanct. Considerable degrees of political, economic, and societal pluralism have been tolerated, and the dissidents have organized "second culture," which could be different from the state ideology and official culture, and "parallel society," which have been allowed significant autonomy from the state (e.g., Hungary from 1982 to 1988, and Poland in the 1980s).

Reforms in the Economic Sphere

In socialism, the central power penetrated the economic sphere and monopolized the ownership of productive property, the rights for economic management, and of setting economic policy. The economic reforms have been the process of dissolving the monopoly of the center, and of gradually enhancing the autonomy of the economy.

Economic reforms have been advanced in four stages: the Stalinist centralized directive economy¡ semi-reformed decentralized directive economy¡ socialist commodity economy¡ socialist market economy.[4] The first stage has been characterized by extreme centralization of economic power at the center. In the semi-reformed system, the administrative power of the center has been maintained but devolved to the firms and localities, and the plan directives from the center have been reduced and rationalized. At the third stage (i.e. at the socialist commodity economy, plan directives are gradually abolished), the market mechanism is officially acknowledged as an essential part of socialist economy. It is a market economy constituted by state firms and cooperative organizations, and by nascent market institutions, norms, and culture. At the fourth stage of the reforms, the market mechanism

4 See Park Hyeong Jung, *North Korea's Economic Management System* (Seoul: Haenam, 2002)(Korean).

plays a dominant role, and the state productive property is gradually privatized.

The semi-reformed system comprised the Soviet economy after the Kosigin reform in 1965 to the year 1987, and the North Korean economy since 1984 and 1985. The Hungarian New Economic Mechanism from the 1960s, the Chinese economy between 1985-1992, and the Soviet economy between 1987-1991 can be regarded as socialist commodity economy. The Chinese economy after 1992 can be characterized as socialist market economy.

Three-way Power Contest Among the Top Leadership, the Middle Officialdom, and the Masses

Socialist society is made of three major social groups: the top leadership, the middle officialdom, and the masses. Although, ideologically, harmony of interests among them should unite them around the central leadership, such a facade could only be maintained through asymmetrical power relations in favor of the center, and through monopolized instruments for articulation of the social reality.

Based on the virtually absolute power concentration at the center, this constantly attempted to subordinate and control the lower units of the society. To avoid total submission, the officialdom and the masses persistently seek to modify and attenuate unconstrained power of the center. In particular, the middle officialdom, as the manager of the state power on the spot, attempted to expand power and resources on their arbitrary disposal, and to strengthen their grip on the masses in their jurisdiction. The masses, on their side, are also acquainted with the various methods to shun the public and/or private pressure and directives of the state and the middle officialdom.[5]

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5 See Park Hyeong Jung, *Politics and Power in North Korea* (Seoul: Baeksan, 2002) (Korean); Mark Lupher, *Power Restructuring in China and Russia* (Westview Press, 1996).

Each group did not even constitute a united entity without internal cleavages. There have been factions in the top leadership, horizontal and hierarchal divisions among the officialdom and the masses, and especially, the imperative of restructuring power and interest relations during the process of changes made the contest among them and within each group more intensive. Time and again, a part of a group builds an alliance with the parts of other groups to advance a common interest. Time and again, the top leadership and the masses find in the middle officialdom, regarded as corrupt on both sides, their common enemy, and try to build a populist alliance to attack them and make them subservient not only / either to the center but / or to the masses.

Three Kinds of Momentums for Changes

Changes in socialist society have been generated by three analytically separate momentums: firstly, by conscious policy choice by the regime elites; secondly, by social protest and conquest, and thirdly, by decay without conscious initiation.[6] Political change may not occur only by one momentum, but by a combination of momentums, though with different relative weights.

In the case of "post-totalitarianism by choice," regime elites (often for their own sense of personal safety) may collectively decide to constrain the completely arbitrary powers of the maximum leader, reduce the role of terrorism (if that had been prominent), and begin to tolerate some non-official organizations to emerge in what had been virtually a completely flattened civil society. The representative case is the initiation of de-Stalinization by Khrushchev after the death of Stalin.

In "post-totalitarianism by decay" (or post-totalitarianism by reluc-

6 Linz and Stepan, *op.cit.*, pp. 193-194.

tant acquiescence), commitment to ideology may simply become hollow, mobilization may degenerate into bureaucratic ritual, and pockets of resistance or relative autonomy may emerge, more due to regime incapacity or reluctant acquiescence to foreign pressure than to any choice. The typical case is Czechoslovakia between 1969-1989.

Force outside the regime can also generate a situation of "post-totalitarianism by societal conquest," in which civil society groups struggle for, and win, areas of relative autonomy. Typical cases are Hungary and Poland; because of violent revolt in 1956, the Hungarian communist party must keep fear prevalent amongst the society, and had to introduce a set of policies on behalf of society, called Kadarism. In Poland, the revolts in 1956, and the struggle of the Solidarity between 1980-1981 exerted great influence on the policies of the Polish communist party.

North Korean Changes in the 1990s

Faced with drastic economic deterioration and with dwindling resources needed for control of lower units in the 1990s, the top leadership had to give tacit permission to the increase of apolitical autonomy of the lower units and the masses in the apolitical area of their lives. After the revision of the constitution in 1998, North Korea's authorities had officially accepted the past changes in the power relations among the three groups, and chose a policy orientation of decentralization and introducing market mechanisms.[7]

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7 See Park Hyeong Jung, *Ability, Direction, Speed, and Dynamics of North Korea's Change* (Seoul: KINU, 2001)(Korean).

Changes by Decay in the 1990s

Contents and Characters of the Changes

The best depiction of North Korea's changes in the 1990s are the changes by reluctant acquiescence or by decay, but in general, the term "post-totalitarianism by decay" means diminishing desire and capacity for domination at the top leadership. However, in the case of North Korea, totalitarian desire for domination at the center remains intact, and only its capacity has been drastically reduced by economic hardship. The decay of capacity for domination has not been originated by active challenge from the society, but by economic hardship and hunger, which also inflicted great damage to societal forces and individuals. They were allowed spaces for autonomy, mostly limited in the apolitical areas of their everyday lives.

The most important aspect of the decay of totalitarian domination is that, because of the economic hardship in the 1990s, the center has suffered significant loss of resources and instruments for penetration and control of lower units. With diminishing economic surpluses concentrated at the center, this could not supply adequate resources to maintain a normal management level of the firms and organizations along the hierarchical plan command system. As a consequence, the center could not penetrate and control the daily activities of the firms and individuals as it was before. Besides, informal economy has expanded extensively and has provided, though illegal, jobs and income opportunities outside the state sector. As the public distribution turned nominal, and the prices at the farmer's market continually increased, it became imperative for almost all individuals to find extra income sources outside the state sector through illegal commercial activities or corruption and embezzlement.

With this development, the relations of submission and discipline between the center and the middle officialdom and between the offi-

cials and the masses have experienced meaningful alterations. First, concurrently with the weakening of bureaucratic coherence and discipline of administrative and economic institutions, the party apparatus has fallen into disarray because its role as the infrastructure for political surveillance and direction on the spot has been dependent upon normal operation of state bureaucracy. Second, with the decline of the state's capacity, the relations of exchanging submission and discipline for guarantees of privilege and economic welfare between the state and the middle officialdom have been broken, and a significant part of the former socialist middle class (i.e. the middle officialdom) has also gone to ruin. Third, the weakening of organizational and ideological discipline went side-by-side with the drastic increase of abuse of public competences by the middle officialdom as attempts to secure livelihood. Officials of all hierarchical ladders attempted to change their politico-administrative power into economic wealth through bribery, private expropriation, abuse of state property, and involvement in illegal commercial activities. In the same manner, the decline of the state's capacity and the weakening public discipline of the middle officialdom have contributed to loosening the grip on the masses' subordination to the middle officialdom in its administrative domains.

Counter Measures to the Weakening Structure of Domination

Notwithstanding the declining capabilities and partial paralyses, the center attempted to maintain traditional totalitarian structure and method of domination. In view of the results thus far achieved, the fundamental framework of totalitarianism-cum-sultanism (i.e. extreme personal dictatorship)[8] has not been gravely shaken.

In order to cope with weakening capacities of production, politico-social discipline, and political-administrative control, the center resort-

8 Linz and Stepan, *op.cit.*, pp. 349-356.

ed to various planned and impromptu measures. First of all, the center reinforced security and semi-security organizations during the 1990s, and introduced politics of 'military first' from 1995. Besides continuously maintaining concentration camps for political offenders, North Korean authorities also opted for terrorist rule, especially from the mid 1990s, such as public execution by firing squad. After the introduction of 'military first' politics, the traditional role of the party has been partially transferred to the military, which has been given the communist party's role of being the ideological and political model for the whole society, and centered on 'endless loyalty' to Kim Jong Il, and 'perfect discipline.' It has also been mobilized massively within industrial and agricultural production and partially to public order and internal security.

Increased Apolitical Autonomy of the Economy and the Society

As the state sector could not provide firms and individuals with resources, they could not continue to be dependent on the state's provision and tutelage, and exist merely as the state's functional entity. In proportion to the declining capacities of the center and of the state sector of the economy, they had to start seeking livelihood outside the state sector. The second market expanded its spheres of influence, and the individuals found more spaces for independent activities, albeit in apolitical areas, such as seeking livelihood on their own.

Though there have been no official 'reform' projects in the 1990s, significant changes have been brought about in the economy. Apparently and officially, the planned economy has been untouched, and there have been increased economic activities by firms, local governments, and individuals outside the planning and the state sector. As a result, North Korea's economy became a dual economy of the state sector and the second economy.

Concomitantly, apolitical autonomy of individuals and 'the society'

has been increased. Because of the weakening of the structures of domination and the grip of the center, even without bringing up enlightened demand, they could be freed partly from totalitarian control by the center, while struggling to find ways to survive without the state's provision. The catastrophe of hunger has not only broken down the infrastructure of totalitarian control, but also the framework for individuals' livelihood and for the moral and humanitarian discipline of the society. However, because the system of brutal violence and surveillance for political submission has remained relatively intact, the individuals and the society could develop autonomy only in the apolitical spheres and activities.

The Center's Attempts to Manage and Direct Changes by Choice Since 1998

Kim Il Sung's death on July 8th, 1994 was followed by a 'march of suffering' between 1995-1997. During the period, Kim Jong Il attempted a defensive policy to avoid deterioration of the situation with the catchwords 'military first.'

After taking the post of general secretary of the party in October 1997, Kim Jong Il set out to reconstruct and restructure the party-state, which has been broken down, to 'the new environments and conditions.' His major strategic orientation appeared to be the followings: first, to keep political stability through personal cult, 'military first' politics, internal security system, and terrorist measures; second, to endeavor for maintenance and normalization of the state governing system with the revised 1998 constitution - accordingly, the status of the government, which is the country's main executive organ of economic policy, has been enhanced, and leading administrative posts have been filled with younger technocrats; third, to build an environment for economic recovery and the country's security by improving relations with South Korea, the US, and Japan; and fourth, to pay more

attention to economy while increasing on-the-spot guidance by Kim Jong Il.

Where the policy choice for reconstruction and restructuring has been most prominent was in the economy. The July measures in 2002 could be seen as attempts to reconstruct and restructure the economy on 'the new environments and conditions,' acknowledging the irreversible changes that occurred in the 1990s such as the weakened capacity of control and penetration, de facto dual economy of the state sector and the second economy, and decentralized relations between the state and firms, and between the central government and the localities.[9]

North Korea's economic policy orientation after July 2002 could be summarized in five major points: first, to enhance the competitiveness of the state sector against the illegal second economy by increasing prices and wages in the state sector; second, to trim down fiscal expenditure by abrogating rationing and drastic reduction of subsidies, and to increase fiscal revenue by issuing public bonds for people's lives; third, to establish new relations between the planning center and the firms, and between the central government and the localities, thereby guaranteeing increase of production and revenue. In other words, the state allowed the increase of managerial autonomy and responsibility of the firms and localities, for which it could not provide with adequate supply and capital so that production could be increased and the state could collect more revenue from increased production; fourth, to make the production outside the plan of the firms legal, to permit the 'socialist exchange market for goods between the state firms,' and to acknowledge the 'combined market,' as the farmers' market is now officially called as one method for the 'socialist system of goods distribution'; and fifth, to strengthen opening and cooperation while estab-

9 See Park Hyeong Jung, "North Korea's Economic Policy in the Era of 'Military First,'" *International Journal of Korean Unification*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 2003.

lishing special economic zones.

The meaning of such policy orientation could be summarized as follows: the ultimate purpose is the same as in the past such as to reproduce existing power relations through political stability and production increase. However, the new orientation showed us North Korea's determination to acknowledge the reality and to actively adapt to the new reality, overcoming defensive management of the status quo as in the past. It is geared to legalize and promote the changes that occurred in the 1990s, such as alteration in the relationship between the center, middle officialdom and the masses, and between the central power and the economy, and between the center and the society. First, North Korea's dual economy transformed from the state sector-cum-illegal second economy to the state sector-cum-legal second economy. In the future, the coverage of the newly legalized second economy would be expanded when we keep in mind that North Korean authorities have accepted the word 'reform' as official vocabulary from June this year. Second, the relaxation of 'organized dependence' of individuals, firms, and localities to the center has been officially institutionalized. In other words, the July measures have officially approved the loss of 'perfect' penetration and control by the center. Accordingly, the production and exchange outside the plan, which have been punished as criminal activities in the past, became legal activities. Nowadays individuals and firms can even defend their rights to produce and exchange outside the plan against intervention from the state.

The social and economic effects of the July measures are not expected to be negligent, though it is debatable whether they have improved the economic situation. And the policy orientation would not be given up because it is not merely a possible policy for economic recovery, but reflected the changed power relationship between the state on the one hand, and individuals and firms on the other. Because the firms and individuals would inevitably increase autonomy from the weakened center, the policy orientation can only be continued in the future.

Necessity and Possibility of Political Reforms for De-totalitarianization

Internal and External Necessities

Even with the socio-economic changes in the 1990s, totalitarianism-cum-sultanism (=extreme personal dictatorship), North Korea's basic political framework, has not been gravely shaken. Typical elements of Stalinism have been prevailing till now in North Korea, such as the personal cult of the top leader, patrimonial personal dictatorship instead of one party dictatorship, extensive surveillance and a spy network both for the regime elites and for the masses, arbitrary arrest and expulsion, terrorist measures such as public accusation and execution, and concentration camps not only for political offenders, but also for minor criminal offences from hardship, etc.

With its new attempts to recognize and adapt to the 'new environments and conditions' from 1998, North Korea confronts both internal and external necessities of extrication from totalitarianism-cum-sultanism especially from 2000/2001. If North Korean elites cannot somehow manage the necessary political transition to a certain kind of "post-totalitarianism," their projects for reform and opening, despite how seriously they might be intended, would not be successful, and/or they would fall into mutually paralyzing contradictions. As the old Marxist maxim teaches us, alterations in economic substructure would force the politico-ideological superstructure to adjust, making it compatible with the former.

With the changes by systemic decay in the 1990s and by policy choice from 2000/2001, the North Korean economic policies stand on the border between the centralized directive economy and the socialist commodity economy especially after July 2002. In the centralized directive economy, the center conveys plan directives to the firms, and is involved in their daily management. In the socialist commodity econo-

my, the central plan directives are (gradually or on the whole) abrogated, and the state firms are managed on commercial principles. At this juncture, the plan and market find not only economical, but also politico-ideological frameworks of coexistence, thereby sprouting and developing market institutions and norms, such as market prices, commercial financial organizations, differentiation of property rights, and contractual and commercial laws and minds, etc. Simultaneously with these changes, the compatibility between the internal economy and the world market will increase so that exchanges with outside world can drastically expand.

As already mentioned, North Korea's existing political system has allowed for adaptation of the economic management system through the July measures, etc., to the changes caused by systemic decay in the 1990s. The adaptation will continue, and the alterations caused by it will intensify in the future because the center lacks resources for penetration and control in the scale of the past. Instead of totally impeding the inclinations of the firms, local governments, and the individuals for expansion of autonomy, the center would try somehow to take advantage of the inevitable changes. As for North Korea's economy in the future, the question is not whether North Korea would evolve into a more mature socialist commodity economy, but the question is how to manage the evolution and how to make it successful. A good management of the evolution may introduce a period of economic growth concomitant with 'political stability' and 'liberalization' as was in China, but a bad management would cause continuation of a vicious cycle of poverty with political turbulences.

The problem is that the present political system in North Korea (i.e. totalitarianism-cum-sultanism) cannot be compatible with a more mature socialist commodity economy: as for the internal relations, a closed economy of central direction could have lived together with totalitarianism-cum-sultanism for a longer period in some countries, as was in North Korea and Romania. But socialist commodity economy,

with its extensive decentralization and numerous autonomous economic units and expanding foreign trade and exchange, it would not share the same house with a political system such as totalitarianism-cum-sultanism, as is now in North Korea.

As for the external relations, for successful entry into the world market to be possible, North Korea must receive assistance and admission from the US, South Korea, Japan, and from international organizations. The entry must fail, if North Korea is to remain a "rouge state" with its security problems with neighboring countries and infringements in human rights. Only after it has solved the twin problems, more or less successfully, can North Korea evolve into a mature and prosperous socialist commodity economy with extensive foreign trade and exchange.

Two Stages of Political Reforms for Transition to "Post-totalitarianism"

In light of experiences from the former socialist countries including the Soviet Union, the transition to "post-totalitarianism" in North Korea may pass through analytically in two stages: the first is de-Stalinization reforms, which would terminate personal cult and terrorist domination over society. In the second stage, one-sided domination of the party-state over the society would evolve into more or less reciprocal and consensual relations between them.

Political Reforms for De-Stalinization

North Korea's present political situation is comparable to Stalinism, which in other socialist countries was brought to an end in the mainstream till the mid 1950s, with the exception of Romania, and which maintained it till the end of communism in 1989. Thus, the priority tasks for political reform are similar to those which were implemented

after the death of Stalin in 1953 and the secret speech of Khrushchev in 1956 in the Soviet Union.

As was for the Soviet Union in the mid 1950s, a package of measures for North Korea's de-Stalinization in the mid 2000s, or thereafter, would be composed of the following elements:[10] first, no successor of Kim Jong Il would ever be allowed to gather as much power as he had. Second, the upper echelons of the elite are to be exempt from arbitrary arrest and surveillance, and should enjoy a certain level of stability of status. The power of the secret police must be limited. Third, the prisoners in the concentration camps should be released, and arbitrary investigation, arrest and expulsion of anyone at anytime without any due procedures should be limited. Fourth, de-politicalization of the daily lives of the people should be advanced. The spaces for private life and apolitical fields, such as hobbies and friendship, should be provided and enjoyed. Fifth, the arbitrary directive and intervention by the top leader and the communist party should be reduced in the areas of expertise, such as natural sciences. Sixth, the operation of the communist party should be normalized. The general meeting of the party should be held regularly, and the composition of the organs and the operation of the central committee should be normalized according to the party rules. Seventh, the strategy of massive, unceasing capital accumulation should be checked. There should be some shift in emphasis from capital investment and military expenditure to the production of consumer goods and agriculture.

Political Reforms for Establishing Post-Totalitarian Inclusion Regime

Though the second stage of political reforms exists in the continuation of the first stage, there is a qualitative discontinuation. At this

10 See George Schopflin, *Politics in Eastern Europe 1945-1992* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992; Gyorgy Korand and Ivan Szelenyi, Die Intelligenz auf dem Weg zur Klannsenmacht (Frankfurt a. m.: Suhrkamp, 1978).

stage, the relations between regime and society or between rulers and ruled would be transformed from one-sided domination, still as in the first stage, to more or less a reciprocal and consensual one. In other words, the regime becomes inclusive of societal inputs. The second de-Stalinization has been, in fact, the last genuine, living attempt to redefine the communist agenda in a broadly consensual direction.[11] A great part of communist countries, such as transformation, has been realized between the 1950s-1960s. In China, it started with the reform attempts initiated after 1978.

A series of characteristic changes in the political institutions at this stage could be summarized as follows: first, in general, the status of the representative organ such as the people's assembly, should be enhanced, and that of the repressive organ such as the secret police, should be lowered. The supreme people's assembly and parliamentary procedures became more important, so that with encouragement of constructive criticism and effectiveness of the government could be increased. Second, attitudes of the communist party to society should be changed from one-sided direction and coercion to political management attempting to persuade the society and to arbitrate interests. Attempts should be made to give elections at least the semblance of authenticity by encouraging a choice between candidates, though not, of course, between policies. Third, the press should be encouraged to express some of the differentiation that is recognized as being in existence and to uncover abuses of power (i.e. flaws in the workings of the system). Fourth, there should also be attempts to separate the party from the state. The party's role notionally is to formulate strategy and oversee the execution of policy, though without being involved in day-to-day implementation. Fifth, a series of organizations such as the labor union and other social organizations should be encouraged to play the

11 See Schopflin, *op.cit.*; Ken Jowitt, *New World Disorder. The Leninist Extinction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); An Chen, *Restructuring Political Power in China: Alliances and Opposition, 1978-1998* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999).

role, which they are expected to play officially. Sixth, while the official ideology retained an ideological monopoly, some areas of life could be free of political criteria and determined by other rationalities. In concrete terms, this meant that, for example, natural sciences should be free to develop according to universal norms. Seventh, though the intellectuals could not, of course, enjoy complete freedom to criticize, it should become possible within certain limits to discuss the functioning of the system, albeit not its essentials. This ought to have ensured that the system would function more effectively and that new ideas, always subject to the leading role, could be debated.

Possibilities and Prospects for Political Reform and/or Change

As has been written, with the result of alterations in the 1990s and of policy choice in the beginning of the 2000s, changes in the economy precede those in politics. Changes in politics (i.e. the adjustment of political arrangements to the changed and changing economic relations) are needed to make further economic changes possible and successful, if not for moral imperatives of human rights.

Even if necessities for changes in politics have been brought up, their realization is another matter, or they could be realized in different circumstances in different ways and degrees. To be realized, there must be subjects for implementation and environments for initiation. Here, the possibilities are analyzed according to the theory of three momentums for change, as has been written before. But in the case of North Korea, another source of momentum must be taken into consideration - the momentum of possible outside intervention such as a preemptive surgical strike or other mild forms of foreign intervention, as has been discussed by hardliners in the debate on dealing with North Korea's nuclear weapons development.

Change by Choice

- Change by Kim Jong Il's policy choice

North Korea's capabilities for adjustment, which have been shown in internal changes and in the expansion of exchange with the outside world since 1998, allude to the possibility that, even with the continuation of Kim Jong Il's power, political reforms for de-totalitarianization could be implemented.

The possibility would increase if Kim Jong Il resolves the nuclear problems, and normalizes diplomatic relations with the US and Japan. In this case, he could put himself among the ranks of major international leaders, and based upon his international status, his internal power could be bolstered. While international assistance to North Korea would be strengthened, Kim Jong Il could push internal reforms and external opening, and boast visible improvements in the economic situation.

In this case, even if Kim Jong Il retreated one step further from the frontline politics, he would prevail through checks and balances between different bureaucratic lineups such as the party, the government, the supreme assembly, the military, and the secret police. In general, the government would concentrate itself on economic construction. The people's assembly would criticize certain aspects of policy formulation and implementation, and attempt to insert people's wishes and interests in the policies of the government. Kim Jong Il would attempt to enhance legitimacy of his rule and expand his personal power bases in two ways: he may impute certain extreme elements in the former leadership of the responsibility for criminal repression and policy failure in the past, as he recently explained in the case of kidnapping Japanese citizens; he may also criticize the middle and lower level of party-state organizations for their corruption and decay, and reestablish them by replacement of personnel. The political police

would still play an important role, but its activities would become more cautious. The military would retreat from production and internal security, but could continue to have its power felt through the defense industry and force of arms. If Kim Jong Il is not personally referred to, 'constructive criticism' would be possible, and apolitical autonomy in the spheres of economy and society would increase rapidly. In any case, it would become imperative to allow a certain level of 'liberalization.'

• Advent of stable collective leadership after the death of Kim Jong Il

After Kim Jong Il dies a natural death at a certain point in time, a relatively stable collective leadership could be negotiated and organized.

Though it has been proposed that Kim Jong Il would bestow his power to one of his sons, the possibility is low. In the case of Kim Jong Il, he inherited and maintained power after his father's death because he had adequate time to establish his own power bases over 20 years before being designated the successor. And, since there was no one, Kim Jong Il began his own rule, whose position and power could be comparable to those preceding him designated successors in the past.

Even if someone were to be designated the official successor, he would not inherit power successfully since he could not have built his independent power bases before succession. Also, if the designated successor were to attempt expansion of his independent power bases, he might be recognized as a threat to the present ruler. On the other hand, if the successor cannot ensure his own power bases before the downfall of the present ruler, failure in succession may be possible.

It is less probable that, after Kim Jong Il's downfall, someone would secure individual control of the political lines of the party, the government, the military, and the secret police. Major power factions would attempt to form a collective leadership because, on the one hand, it

would become impossible to have an absolute leader. And on the other, it would be in the interest of individual elites to avoid extreme power concentration on one individual. A new oligarchy would take measures comparable to de-Stalinization to guarantee the personal security of its members and bolster its legitimacy of rule. The collective leadership would not be able to rule the society in a one-sided manner as in the past, and would become more accommodative to both latent and patent demands of the society.

- Changes by Intervention of foreign forces and/or Splits among Ruling Elites

The possibility of open splits and power contests among top elites is low in North Korea because of Kim Jong Il's adroit management of his absolute position in the power structure and internalized ideological maxim of 'absolute' unity around him. For all that, if there emerged open splits among regime elites, it might be caused by foreign instigation, because only with outside assistance can a defecting faction or a coalition of factions expect chances for prevalence.

China would consider intervention in the internal politics of North Korea, and this would pose a grave threat to peace and security in Northeast Asia, stubbornly adhering to developing weapons of mass destruction. The neighboring countries may give a tacit permission to Chinese intervention in North Korean politics. If successful, a newly organized leadership would be dependent on and receptive to Chinese counsel. While reckoning massive foreign assistance, it could push overdue internal reforms, normalize relations with neighboring countries, and expand opening.

Changes by Decay

• Changes by Kim Jong Il's loss of hold over internal development

If talks and negotiations on North Korea's nuclear weapons development face prolonged stalemate and protraction, humanitarian assistance to North Korea, illegal acquisition of hard currency through drug trafficking, arms export, and counterfeit notes circulation would encounter reductions and active interruptions. North Korea's economy would deteriorate, and the center's hold on the society would be weakened. Influenced by foreign instigation, defection and anti-government agitation would increase.

Though, as in the beginning and mid 1990s, political stability could be maintained resorting to terrorist political measures, preservation of North Korea's diplomatic dignity, and prestige and privilege of the upper elites, and maintenance of core instruments for internal rule would encounter grave difficulty. Members of the ruling elites and middle officialdom would do their utmost to secure their living conditions through illegal activities, especially taking advantage of their share of public power. Even the discipline of core agents for system stability would be loosened gradually.

Then, Kim Jong Il or the center would not be able to maintain hold over economic and social changes, because it would lack financial instruments for control. All in all, in the midst of an impending humanitarian catastrophe, centrifugal forces would be strengthened; the discipline of the state organizations would be weakened, the autonomy of the firms and localities would increase, and with expansion of production outside the plan, the market would spread out.

• Confusion after the death of Kim Jong Il

During the complicated process of solving North Korea's nuclear

weapons development, Kim Jong Il might die a natural death, in which case, North Korea's mainstay would be lost. The remaining elites may possibly fail to form a coherent leadership for a longer period, in which case, the confusion of leadership would be prolonged.

The unity among regime elites, forced and maintained by Kim Jong Il, would disintegrate, and the leadership struggle among factions would continue. The military might be able to arrange an order by brute force and play a pivotal role in maintaining internal security and economic construction. However, in the event the military, having been controlled by Kim Jong Il through checks and balances among its several separate lineups, broken into several factions, there would definitely be complicated contests and confusions in the process of shaping a hegemonic coalition of factions from different sectors and groupings. In any case, it needs a relatively longer period to form a new power structure at the upper echelons of the elites.

Any new supreme leader or any collective leadership would be dictatorial, but could only have a weaker hold over regime elites and the society, and retreat from totalitarian rule would be inevitable. However, reorientation of internal and external policy orientation would be implemented amidst grave enmity between factions and with lesser policy coherences and in socio-political chaos.

Change by Societal Conquest

- Changes by failed societal struggle

Despite various severe internal difficulties, North Korean authorities have succeeded in repressing open resistance by the masses.

Any form of open opposition in the future would promote internal reforms. Directly after such an incursion, the political atmosphere might be hardened, but the feeling of crisis among the regime elites could force them into preventive reforms, a part of which would be

self-renovation of the regime elites and the middle officialdom through political purges, and which would make the regime more responsive to societal demands.

This might occur in any of the cases already mentioned. An open confrontation with societal forces, which once having begun can no more be covered, would facilitate the formation of critical social groups in the society. After a longer period with recurrent suppression of societal resistances, the regime could gain periods of time for self-transformations, and the 'civil society' could become powerful enough to compete for ruling power with the regime elites.[12]

• Change by successful societal revolt

As for now, the possibility of regime collapse through open resistance by the masses or replacement of ruling faction by dissident civil leaders is minimal.

However, the likelihood of mass revolt cannot be excluded, if, in specific accidental state of affairs, several elements are piled upon another, such as deterioration of economic situation, foreign intervention and instigation, and divisions among regime elites. For the time being, any mass revolt would be utilized by an elite faction or foreign powers.

Change by Foreign Choice

• Pre-emptive surgical strike and the elimination of Kim Jong Il

In a certain point in time during the process for dealing with North Korea's nuclear weapons development, the US administration may

12 See Leszeck Nowak, *Power and Civil Society. Toward a Dynamic Theory of Real Socialism* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991).

consider elimination of North Korean leadership through pre-emptive surgical strike. It is highly possible that such an attempt may encounter backlash. First, even if weakened, a great part of North Korea still upholds a quasi-religious belief in their 'Dear Leader' Kim Jong Il, and regards the U.S. also in a quasi-religious manner as 'evil.' A sudden elimination of Kim Jong Il by an American military strike under this circumstance would cause intensification of anti-Americanism and xenophobia to the extreme degree. The successor regime would not be able to escape from the effects of the intensified xenophobia, and would encounter a grave difficulty in normalizing relations and finding forms of cooperation with neighboring countries.

• Induced mass defection and regime collapse

Mass defection could be applied as a way to induce regime collapse or instability, only if the Chinese government cooperates. North Korea would have infringed and be expected to encroach on the vital interests of China, for example, with acts of aggression, underground nuclear tests, or exports of fissile materials. In such a situation, inducement of mass defection may be used as one of the instruments for regime collapse besides engineering 'tailored containment,' division among regime elites, instigation of revolt, and so on.

Summary and Policy Implications

With new policy orientation in the early 2000s, North Korea attempted to adapt itself to and take advantage of the changes in the 1990s, such as the weakening of the center's power and resources and increased apolitical autonomy of the lower units. In coping with changed power relations between the center, the mid officialdom, and the masses, North Korea's center attempted to maintain its grip in

different ways in the 'new environments and conditions.'

North Korea's adaptation and change will likely be continued in the future, no matter whether by policy choice of the center or by decay, or by social protest. Simultaneously, gaps and contradictions between the progressing economic and social changes and the status quo-oriented politics would widen. In order to provide conditions and environments for successful economic reform and opening, or for evolution into a socialist commodity economy, North Korea should implement political reforms of de-Stalinization, and transform the structure and operation of the regime to be more responsive to societal wishes and demands.

In the 'new environments and conditions,' two kinds of pressure for political reform have been being amplified: first, changes in internal power relations and in the socio-economic situation have gradually increased the necessities for de-Stalinization; second, human rights infringement has become a problem, which cannot be overlooked in North Korea's relations with the outside world. Unlike the socio-economic changes, which can be progressed without significant political effects, the impact of de-Stalinization cannot be negligent with regards to North Korea's stability.

South Korea's interest demands that North Korea be changed as quickly as possible while maintaining its stability. With such intentions, South Korea's engagement policy promoted exchange and cooperation, and assisted North Korea to improve relations with the outside world. It also contributed to providing North Korean leadership with the environments and conditions for change, as well as acknowledging its leadership as an equal partner, thereby arranging more spaces for policy choice. In this sense, South Korea's engagement policy has not failed to realize a part of its original intentions.

Till now, the South Korean government has been engaging North Korea's leader Kim Jong Il with the assumption that there is the leader and the regime without society in North Korea. It has been a conve-

nient operational proposition, and might not have been totally false for the 1990s, but it may not be so in the future, simply because positive results of the South's policy helped geminate sprouts for new internal dynamics in North Korea. With its intentions of expanding exchange and cooperation as extensively as possible, South Korea's policy has contributed and will contribute not only to the regime to stabilize the system, but also to the socio-economic changes to be promoted. In this way, South Korea's policy has not only intensified the contradictions between politics, on the one hand, and economy and society in North Korea on the other, but also, those implied in its own policy were designed to recognize the regime as an equal partner and, if only for a while, to ignore the existence of the society.

Not only the North Korean regime, but also the South Korean engagement policy should be prepared for the latent civil discontent in North Korea to become more provocative in the future. As for North Korea, its policy orientation in the early 2000s may be interpreted that the regime itself has began to take the pressure from the society more seriously into consideration, having to concede, though apolitical, autonomy for groupings in the society. As for South Korea's new old North Korea policy of peace and prosperity, a new addressee in North Korea has not been implied.

Already, there has been a criticism on the South Korean engagement policy, which has fallen into immoral trade with an immoral regime. With increased attention on human rights infringement and fortunes of defectors, such criticism has been intensified internationally with the advent of the Bush administration since 2001.

Before it's too late, it is time for deliberation to devise a more complex engagement policy that engages not only the regime but also the society, albeit currently latent and at the backstage, waiting for its moment to start a long march and challenge the negligence of the South Korean government.