

North Korean Leadership Transition and Inter-Korean Relations

Ming Lee

*Associate Professor
Department of Diplomacy
National Chengchi University*

I. Introduction

The death of North Korean President Kim Il Sung in July, 1994 has had a profound impact on North Korean domestic politics and left many wondering what direction North Korea will take next. It was Kim Il Sung who established the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) in 1948 and ruled the most isolated country in the world for forty-seven years. He was an idolized "God" in North Korea, although he was extremely controversial among others for waging a relentless 3-year war against the South. He successfully took advantage of Korean nationalism in solidifying his power base, mobilized North Koreans to lift the country out of economic hardship, sabotaged the Republic of Korea (ROK) in the international arena, and resisted challenges from Washington and its allies. The North Korean "great leader" was also adroit in tactically managing equidistant relations between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the former Soviet Union so as to solicit moral as well as material support from both communist giants.

Since the late 1980s, however, North Korea has encountered severe problems from both domestic and international fronts. The year 1989 marked significant breakthroughs in many prolonged world-power stalemates, but unexpected blows to the North Koreans. Sino-Soviet diplomatic normalization and the subsequent US-USSR Summit in Malta, during which the leaders of both superpowers declared the end of the Cold War, heavily affected North Korean gravity in the East-West power balance. This new situation meant that Pyongyang had less room to maneuver and less chance of benefitting as it had in past decades. Moreover, the decline of communism, the democratization of Eastern Europe, and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 further isolated North Korea in its adherence to socialism. Thanks to adverse economic circumstances in the former Soviet Union and the PRC, obtaining economic aid became more difficult. Thus, Pyongyang's economy witnessed a steep decline as it entered

the 1990s.

Another challenge came from South Korea. After two decades of economic take-off, the ROK had earned a reputation as one of the “Four Tigers” of Asia and outweighed North Korea not only on the economic front but also in competition for international support. Although they still retained formal ties with Pyongyang, the former Soviet Union and the PRC decided to shift their focus to Seoul. As a result, Pyongyang felt “betrayed” by its allies and more insecure in the international community. It could hardly be imagined that strained North-South Korean relations, given these developments, would be smoothly moderated into a more stable orbit.

It was under these critical circumstances that Kim Il Sung died. Therefore, this article will first focus on the impact of Kim’s death on future North Korean politics, Kim Jong Il’s succession, and the possible policies which might be used to solve North Korea’s economic plight. Following that will be an exploration of current North Korean policy toward the South. By way of this study, the author intends to scrutinize the linkage between North Korean domestic needs and its goal of accomplishing national reunification.

II. North Korean Leadership Transition

As the supreme leader of North Korea, Kim Il Sung influenced not only the daily life of the people but also their spiritual identity by imposing his idea of *Juche*. *Juche*, according to North Korean theoreticians, states that “all problems relating to the revolution and construction of one’s nation should be solved independently by the country concerned, in accordance with its actual conditions.” *Juche* implies “the creative application of the general truths of Marxism-Leninism in keeping with the historic conditions and national characteristics of one’s own country in the spirit of self-reliance” (Li, 1972: 1; An: 58; Kim, 1975: 70). Thus, Kim Il Sung was “able to creatively apply the general theories of Marxism-Leninism to the concrete realities of Korea.” During his reign there were intensive indoctrination efforts which were intended to incorporate the principle of *Juche* in relations with man, nation, and world.

The idea of *Juche* further developed as *Kim Il Sung Juei*, meaning “Kimilsungism,” early in 1962. Kimilsungism, which was depicted as orthodox thought in North Korea, paralleled “Mao Zedong Thought” in China, and was evidence of divergent aspects comprising the multipolar centers of the international communist movement (Kim, 1986: 3). *Juche* can be understood roughly as self-reliance and independence, utilizing such terms as *chajusong* (self-reliance), *minnjok tongnip* (national or ethnic independence), and *charip kyongje* (independent economy), all of which are in direct opposition to *sadaejjuui* (serving and relying on foreign power). It is therefore no surprise that the latter was strongly opposed by North Koreans

(Cumings, 1993: 214). Thus, *Juche*, with its central ideas of self-reliance and sacrifice, was the focus of North Korean political indoctrination. Kim Il Sung's role was multifaceted in that he was not merely the commander-in-chief of the army and president of the polity, but also a leader of national construction. His historical place in North Korea can hardly be disputed.

To ensure a continuous progress of North Korean socialist construction, Kim Il Sung started cultivating Kim Jong Il as heir apparent in the early 1970s. In June 1971, when speaking at the Sixth Congress of the League of Socialist Working Youth of Korea, Kim Il Sung demanded the involvement of the younger generation in carrying out the North Korean socialist revolution. This message may have provided a hint that Kim Il Sung expected an opportunity for the younger Kim's participation in the years to come. Kim Jong Il was nominated as the heir apparent of the Great Leader in the Six Plenum of the Fifth Congress of the Korean Workers' Party (KWP) in December 1972. When the Seventh Plenum was in session in September 1973, the junior Kim was named the Secretary of the KWP and was in charge of party organization and propaganda affairs. He was also asked to preside as the leader of the special team of the Three (ideological, technical and cultural) Revolutions. His task was to mobilize the mass and make them alert, renovate technical development, accelerate productivity, and knit a web of social and political control. Kim Jong Il's gradual entrance into the daily politics of North Korea during this period was a crucial step towards his final assumption of the elder Kim's position.

The 1980s were marked by Kim Jong Il's fast promotion to the central decision-making structure. He presided as a member of the KWP Central Committee, the Central Standing Committee, the Party Secretariat, and the Central Military Commission at the Sixth KWP National Congress in October 1980. In the First Plenum of the Ninth Supreme People's Congress in May 1990, he was elected as the first vice-president of the National Military Commission, replacing Kim Il Sung as the Highest Commander of the People's Army, while Kim Il Sung retained the post of the Great Admiral. At this point, Kim Jong Il's de facto succession was all but accomplished, with little room for other challengers. In May 1991, after the shock of East European democratization, Kim Jong Il delivered a speech to the Central Committee entitled "On the Victory of Our Style of Socialism Centered on the People," which detailed the continuous efforts to resist peaceful evolution "plots" from capitalist countries and appealed for consolidation with South Korea in pursuing the "final victory of the Korean style of socialism." His speech testified that he had already succeeded his father and taken his privilege of interpreting Party policies.

By nominating Kim Jong Il and promoting him to various high positions in the KWP National Congresses, the North Korean authorities had manufactured the rationale that it was the Korean people, rather than his father, who chose Kim Jong Il as their leader. Of course, such a transfer of

power can be seen not only as corrupt by any interpretation of Marxism-Leninism, but nepotistic by most liberal-democratic criteria. It is curious that few sources from North Korea raised doubts about this method of transferring power. The reason, according to Leslie Holmes, is that the DPRK is in a very fragile position and under constant threat of attack from the South. Only when leadership succession is as smooth as possible can the DPRK protect itself from exploitation by its enemies (Holmes, 1993: 95-96).

Being a fairly closed society, North Korean authorities have not publicized much about Kim Jong Il thus far. He remains a rather mysterious figure who can be seen from various reporting angles and, most of the time, speculations. His biography has been thoroughly worked over by mythmakers, both friend and foe. He has been labelled a "mentally unstable" man who rarely appears in public. His image to the rest of the world ranges from a tyrant who sponsors terrorism, having once ordered a South Korean airliner to be blown out of the sky, to a follower of Hollywood movies (*Newsweek*, 1994: 11). These reports may not always be fair or accurate since most of them are released from South Korea and the West, since some of those information are mingled with prejudices. It is however a fact that the younger Kim does not have the same authority among the intelligentsia or older generation as his father did. Nonetheless, it has been confirmed that Kim Jong Il has been by and large successful in inheriting the elder Kim's mantle as a leader.

III. North Korea's Current Political Status

The death of Kim Il Sung continues to be an unprecedented blow to North Koreans. Firstly, they may feel especially insecure about the DPRK's future in comparison with South Korea's vigorous posture. It goes without saying that North Koreans feel very ambivalent regarding socialist construction. For a long period, they have been afflicted with material shortages and limited political freedom. Despite this, Kim Il Sung maintained control of the regime through his charisma. Now that he is gone, that factor is no longer present. In other words, the lack of confidence and the sense of insecurity may contribute to the uncertainty of this already impoverished country.

Secondly, there still exists the possibility that the younger Kim will not be capable of maintaining control. It was reported that he is currently troubled by a kidney disease. In addition, rising challengers within his family signal a possible power struggle to come. For instance, Kim Jong Il has been wary of his stepmother Kim Sung Ae and his stepbrother Kim Pyong Il, keeping them out of decision-making circles. The fact that Kim Pyong Il has been dispatched abroad as North Korean Ambassador to European countries indicates that Kim Jong Il has been at least partially

successful in this regard. Jong Il's long feud with Kim Sung Ae has deprived her of any influence on post-Kim Il Sung politics. Her rank as the 104th person in the North Korean Committee for Kim Il Sung's funeral was taken as a sign of her defeat in power struggle. Although the possibility of other significant challengers may be remote, unanimous support for Jong Il should not be taken for granted either. To safeguard his position, he may have to woo the military, but managing the power balance among different groups of people in this particularly adverse environment might be his most difficult task.

Thirdly, Kim Il Sung left Jong Il with a devastated economy, and there is no sign that the plight will be alleviated in the future. There are three key economic problems: shortage of food, lack of energy, and an unfocused economic policy. North Korean food productivity has been declining in the last several years, with total grain production at 4.81 million tons in 1990, 4.43 million tons in 1991, 4.27 million tons in 1992, and 3.83 million tons in 1993, all of these below the minimum requirement of 5.50 million tons. Pyongyang's refusal to participate in the Hiroshima Asian Games may partly be attributed to the shortage of food. According to the soldiers who defected to the South, North Korea has launched a "two-meals-a-day" movement to save food. The lack of energy sources has heavily obstructed production in every respect. Russia and the PRC have lost the inclination to provide fuel at "friendship prices," and North Korea does not have the abundant hard currency to purchase energy, creating a vicious circle which is deteriorating its economy. In the Kim Il Sung era, North Koreans were taught through endless brainwashing that they were living in a "worker's paradise." Now that they are competing with the outstanding South Korean economy, however, the propaganda may no longer be fruitful. Although Pyongyang adopted a Joint Venture Law aimed at attracting foreign investment early in 1984, the Law did not bring about a satisfactory outcome due to poor infrastructure and low expectation of profits. Moreover, Pyongyang's fear of being conquered by capitalist values and multiparty systems has swayed its economic policy back and forth. Without a consistent policy, the economy is in certain danger. What Kim Il Sung endowed to his elder son was barely more than an unwelcome burden.

Fourthly, Kim Jong Il's lack of diplomatic experience, accompanied by the downgrading of North Korea's international status, may be a liability that is detrimental to North Korean external relations. Unlike his father, Kim Jong Il does not enjoy high prestige among various developing and nonaligned countries, while Kim Il Sung usually solicited considerable support. On the other hand, Kim Jong Il confronts a fast-changing international environment in which North Korean allies have either collapsed or made vast policy revisions.

All of the above problems are additionally vexing in that North Korea has entered a critical time at the precise moment that Kim is on the

crossroads. His tactics in coping with these issues will not only decisively affect the North Korean regime's future, but also future relations between North and South Korea.

IV. Continuities and Discontinuities: Kim Jong Il's Policy Choices

Almost half a year after Kim Il Sung's death, Kim Jong Il has taken neither of the two key posts left by his father: Secretary-General of the KWP and President of the nation. This situation has provided room for gossip that the junior Kim is incapable of assuming control. It is conceivable that Kim, despite years of maneuvering and his nominal command over the army, is still consolidating his power base. The armed forces are particularly crucial in communist countries because of their role in defending against potential enemies, both domestic and abroad. Steadfast support from the military is often the linchpin in assuring a smooth leadership transition; this has been true in the Chinese case, as when Hua Guofeng became the Chairman of the CCP's Central Military Committee to strengthen his control over the armed forces after Mao's death. Kim Jong Il may not be an exception. However, the military often resists drastic changes to current policy in order to maintain their benefits. Kim Jong Il may be encountering a bottleneck between compromising with the military and launching a more pragmatic policy.

According to scholars, the elements who support Kim Jong Il include some militant and hawkish groups whose conservatism will influence North Korean politics. Also, the constitutional amendment of April 1992 that separated the role of the President from the role of the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces may bring a collective leadership system to the North Korean regime, making Kim Jong Il the military and party leader even as he assigns a person he trusts to be the head of government (Suh, 1993: 61-80). In a nutshell, Kim Jong Il's foremost objective in the future will be to solicit support from the armed forces so as to assure the control and stability of the regime.

Of pressing importance to Kim Jong Il is the economic arena and the establishment of international connections. North Korean tradition overtly emphasizes self-reliance, and its xenophobic attitude towards the Western world will have to be somewhat revised. The economy is currently afflicted with a high inflation rate, a shortage of foreign reserves, and diminishing growth. To be specific, the North Korean economy has contracted sharply in the 1990s, dropping 3.7 percent in 1990, 5.2 percent in 1991, 7.6 percent in 1992, and 4.3 percent in 1993. In order to save his vulnerable economy from total bankruptcy, Kim Jong Il may have to resort to "reform and open door" policies, although they are not a panacea to all centralized economies. Economic interest thus might replace ideological commitment as the centerpiece of Kim Jong Il's policy considerations. Pyongyang has announced its failure

in the Third Seven-Year Plan (1987-1993) and promised to concentrate on agriculture, light and consumption industries, and foreign trade. Last year, North Korea proclaimed the Law on International Trade, the Law on Free Trade Areas, and a Banking Law, all of which are evidence of Pyongyang's wishes to arouse foreign investment. It is believed that Kim Jong Il is in fact in charge of daily economic affairs and has been engaging in a plan of economic reconstruction. The question is, how far and to which direction will this reform policy go? Many suggest that the PRC's experiences since 1979 would be a reasonable model to imitate. Kim Jong Il's call for building "Our Style of Socialism Centered on the People" brings to mind Deng Xiaoping's slogan of "Socialism with Chinese characteristics."

In addition, North Korea is likely to gradually abandon its belligerent attitude against the South. In the past, both Koreas denied the other's political legitimacy through propaganda campaigns, attempted subversion of the opposite government, and sabotaged the other's activities in international arena. The interactions between two Koreas have witnessed dramatic changes recently, many of them stemming from shifts in the international environment. South Korea revised its unification policy under President Park Chung Hee, who announced that he did not intend to close its door to countries with different political systems. The ROK's unification policy reached high tide after Roh Tae Woo assumed the presidency; his July 7 Declaration in 1988 manifested South Korea's intent to treat the North on a more equal basis. In addition to these developments, the post-Cold War international environment has soothed North-South tensions. Most South Koreans were encouraged by German unification, and as they witnessed the West Germans' huge load in helping the destitute East Germans, they became less opposed to a quick unification for fear that anything else would bring disaster upon themselves. Under the Kim Young Sam administration, South Korea has endorsed a natural and incremental track leading to national unification. Furthermore, North and South Korea gained joint entrance into the United Nations (UN) in September 1991, a clear sign that both nations are not as concerned with international recognition conflicts as in the past. Scholars label the years 1991-92 as a "new detente" between the two Koreas, a period distinct from a similar time in 1971-72. In the "new detente," both Koreas recognize that co-existence is a necessary condition for maintaining peace and stability in the post-Cold War era. Also, according to Young Whan Kihl, the two Koreas have recognized that non-violent reunification is not likely without first establishing the framework for peaceful co-existence and promoting cooperation and exchanges between the two sides (Kihl, 1994: 135). Against this backdrop, two historical documents were signed at the end of 1991: the "Agreement on Reconciliation, Nonaggression, Exchanges, and Cooperation Between the South and North Korea" (also known as the Basic Agreement), and the "Joint Declaration of the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula," with both being put

into force in February 1992. Under these circumstances, Kim Jong Il has few reasons to abruptly break the “new detente,” for this would put his position in jeopardy.

Another task Kim Jong Il must accomplish is to mend fragile relations with Western countries, in particular the United States and Japan, not only for the sake of economic purposes, but also for national preservation. In the Cold War era, driven partly by historical animosity, partly at the back of the PRC and former Soviet Union, North Korea depicted the United States as the most vicious enemy of the socialist camp and Japan (and South Korea) as US lackeys, all of whom had to be toppled. But due to the collapse of the former Soviet Union, the United States and her UN allies have become very efficient in conducting international peace-keeping; for instance, the Iraqi invasion against Kuwait in August 1990 met with effective intervention and firm punishment. North Korea may have learned from this that any unlawful military action will meet resistance. North Korea also perceives that nations adjacent to the Korean peninsula have an interest in preserving the status quo. The United States and Japan have shown patience toward North Korea on nuclear proliferation issues in exchange for Pyongyang’s concessions. Therefore, Washington and Tokyo may become wellsprings of economic aid instead of sources of trouble so long as quarrels over North Korean nuclear development program reach a consensus. Pyongyang leaders, as a scholar frankly puts it, “are now doing all they can to win assurances from the United States that their system will be able to survive.” Also, “North Korea is now more concerned about saving itself than unification” (Rhee, 1994: 32). This is not to suggest, however, that a framework of “cross-recognition” will be in hand. Instead, the path to reconciliation with North Korea will likely be more time-and-energy-consuming. It is safe to argue that to maintain a stable and cautious association with both Japan and the United States will likely be the backbone of Pyongyang’s diplomacy in the future.

V. Inter-Korean Relations in Perspective

After examining the epoch-making Basic and Denuclearization Agreements, it has been disappointing to note that very few of them have come into effect. It was originally agreed that a North-South Liaison Offices would be established at Panmunjom within three months after the coming into force of the Basic Agreement (Article 7). In addition, a South-North Political Committee was to be set up for South-North high-level talks within one month (Article 8), and a South-North Joint Military Commission was to be established within three months of the coming into force of this agreement (Article 12). As of this writing, none of these have been developed. Genuine peace will not be achieved as long as one side is always “chasing” after the other. A “Cold Peace” in the Korean peninsula may result if this deadlock continues. Even after the end of the Cold War, South Korea has

had bitter experiences in attempting reconciliation with the North. North Korea flatly rejected inspections of its undeclared nuclear facilities by claiming they were military installations, creating nervousness in the international community about security. North Korea also threatened to withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in March 1994 and was only persuaded to stay after a series of negotiations.

A summit between the North and South Korean leaders was scheduled for July 25-27, 1994, providing hope for optimists who thought that the respective leaders would produce some comprehensive solutions to issues relating to unification, including the reunion of separated families and nuclear nonproliferation (*News Review*, 1994: 4). Hence the summit's subsequent shelving because of Kim Il Sung's unexpected death disappointed many South Koreans. Others, however, considered it a fortunate turn of events, for they believed it was wrong to talk with the North at a time in which Kim Il Sung was still regarded as a war criminal and the North Korean regime a monolithic and totalitarian society. Still others had worried that excessive concessions would be offered to Pyongyang when the South hastily requested the summit. Therefore, public opinion about the timing in negotiations with the North was in fact quite divided (Kim, 1994: 12-21). Given these circumstances, South Koreans are in general more confident that time is on their side and that it is more difficult to have Pyongyang honestly put agreements into practice than simply make deals.

The ROK government has long regarded unification as a task that cannot be accomplished overnight but a challenge that has to be tackled step by step. Also, South Koreans take it for granted that unification should not be achieved by use of force but by peaceful means such as economic, social and cultural intercourse. In 1988, Roh Tae Woo's "July 7 Declaration" urged the two Koreas to overcome their antagonism and build cooperation within the framework of a "single national community." According to this idea, North Korea was welcome to enter the international community and make a contribution (National Unification Board, 1988: 89-111). Although Pyongyang turned a cold shoulder to the overture, accusing Roh of "plotting national separatism," North Korea eventually changed its policy and decided to participate in the UN with the South.

The Kim Young Sam Administration launched another bold campaign recently by suggesting wider economic ties with the North. Seoul banned most direct business ties with the North in late 1992 during a tense period caused by a bitter row over Pyongyang's suspected nuclear arms program. Encouraged by successful US-North Korean talks over nuclear affairs in Geneva late last October, Kim Young Sam announced in November 1994 a lifting of Seoul's ban on trade with and investment in the North. This decision was again hailed by the South as a significant overture to the North that might induce a friendly feedback from Pyongyang. Also, many of South Korea's mightiest conglomerates have indicated interest in doing

business in the North, for the latter provides the world's lowest-paid workers and a shared common language. In December 1994, the Seoul government allowed six South Korean companies, including Ssangyong, Daewoo and Hyundai, to seek business opportunities in the North as part of its plan to ease tension on the Korean peninsula. A delegation composed by Ssangyong Group leaders made their trip to Pyongyang in December, under the North Korean excuse that it wanted private-level business contacts with the South. Referring to Kim Young Sam as a "traitor," however, Pyongyang's official news agency KCNA strongly rejected Seoul's proposal for talks (*International Herald Tribune*, November 11, 1994; *Japan Times*, December 17, 1994). Despite the cold reception, more South Korean businessmen are likely to follow Seoul's lead and discuss business ventures in the North.

Considering the wide gap that exists between the two Koreas' economic structures and individual living standards, scholars predict that if unification begins in the year 2001 and is achieved in the subsequent four years, it will cost between 8.2 to 8.6 percent of the South's gross regional product (GRP) in order to bring the per capita income of the North to a level equivalent to about half of that of the South. Therefore, Sakong Il suggests that both Koreas could jointly plan to use their "peace dividends" for their own needs. He thinks that the brunt of the unification burden of unification will fall on South Korea and that it is urgent for Seoul to reorient its priorities toward economics so as to provide a solid foundation for unification (Sakong, 1993: 178-179). Inter-Korean economic ties should be fostered in the future, but South Korea will have to carefully consider its economic security. In the meantime, an overt strategy to wield South Korean economic leverages will invite suspicion and repulsion from the North.

As for military security, South Korea has three major concerns: military attack by the North, nuclear blackmail from Pyongyang, and the sudden collapse of Kim Jong Il's regime. The chance of relentless military attack from the North Korea may be remote, given Pyongyang's current predicament. Also, North Korea will gain nothing but a possible "rollback" from the South. Secondly, the nuclear accord just reached by the United States and North Korea could ironically be detrimental to South Korean security. In return for Pyongyang's promise to freeze and eventually dismantle its nuclear weapons program, it was reported that the US has agreed to arrange for several nations, led by South Korea and Japan, to build two new light-water reactors (cost approximately US\$4 billion) for the North. Moreover, some of North Korea's nuclear sites will not be allowed to be inspected for the next five years. The accord was challenged by U.S. Republicans for "giving away too much," sentiments which are echoed by South Korea, who worry that too many concessions might encourage nuclear blackmail (*New York Times*, December 3, 1994). In addition, Seoul has reportedly agreed to supply North Korea with a modified version of a reactor built by Combustion Engineering of the U.S., but Pyongyang is uncom-

fortable with the arrangement, which would involve opening its doors to hundreds of South Korean technicians and engineers (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, December 29, 1994: 14). Thirdly, German unification has taught South Koreans that arbitrarily integrating divided states will cause unbearable disasters. South Korea would rather have a stable counterpart gradually leading to economic reform and political democratization. Seoul has considered erecting a permanent peace treaty with North Korea to replace the armistice agreement sealed in 1953. According to this idea, the peace treaty will be signed by two Koreas with the framework guaranteed by the Four Powers (the US, the PRC, Japan and Russia) — the Korean version of the “Two Plus Four” format. The South Korean Foreign Ministry has recently confirmed that South Korean ambassadors to the Four Powers met in November 1994 to discuss the details of a new treaty (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, December 29, 1994: 15). The future of Korean unification requires coordination of the Four Powers, although the latter are not equally involved in the Korean affairs. The United States has never changed its thinking that the security of the Korean peninsula is vital to Washington’s interests in the Pacific, and the 37,000 U.S. troops in the Peninsula indicates its firm commitment. The PRC has an interest in inviting South Korea to be a partner of its Four Modernization program. The roaring trade volume between the PRC and South Korea in recent years helped contribute to an exchange of diplomatic recognition — an unhappy occurrence from Pyongyang’s viewpoint. Even if not based upon a “friendship of bloodshed” during the Korean War or the appeal of “socialist solidarity,” Beijing will nonetheless maintain close relations with Pyongyang based on strategic considerations. Beijing’s support, in either moral or material terms, will be crucial to the survival of Kim Jong Il’s regime. China’s role in opposing the immediate sanctions against North Korea on the nuclear issue is a good example.

Japan’s relations with North Korea is far less stable due to historical reasons as well as contemporary disputes. Controversies over Japan’s reparations for “exploiting” Korea prior to 1945, including Tokyo’s cool attitude in compensating “comfort women” recruited by the Japanese military during World War II, and Japan’s close association with U.S. foreign policy in the Pacific, have stalemated relations. However, Japan is likely to upgrade ties with North Korea out of mutual interest, including participation in its economic reconstruction and diplomatic normalization if Pyongyang shows sincerity in solving the nuclear issue. Although troubled by its economic problems, Russia has not given up its concern over Korean peninsula, where is strategically important to Russian Maritime Provinces. Russia has also expressed interest in remaining a part of North-South negotiations. Georgi Kunadze, Moscow’s ambassador to Seoul, said in an interview that Russia opposes PRC Premier Li Peng’s suggestion of a “Two Plus Two” format (i.e., two Koreas plus China and the U.S.) in solving Korean issues,

objecting to any peace process that does not recognize Russia's role. In 1993, Russia also joined the West's efforts to freeze North Korean nuclear development when President Boris Yeltsin signed an executive order to halt its nuclear cooperation projects with Pyongyang (*International Herald Tribune*, November 5-6, 1994). Under these circumstances, the Four Powers have common interests in encouraging economic cooperation and political consultations; they abhor any drastic change that may arouse danger in this area.

VI. Conclusion

Kim Il Sung's death not only marks the end of the dictator's life but precludes a new era in which Kim Jong Il takes his father's power as a supreme leader. At this critical juncture, it is as difficult as ever to cover Pyongyang's political situation due to lack of reliable information. *Rodong Sinmum* (Labor Daily), the KWP's official newspaper, carries numerous articles and commentaries which uphold Kim Il Sung's *Juche* and praise Kim Jong Il's eligibility as a successor. In an article, the younger Kim showed no signs of relaxing a commitment to hard-line communism when he said that the KWP is "constantly carrying forward the brilliant tradition of benevolent politics established by the Great Leader" (Eberstadt, 1994: 13-30). However, this author does not believe that North Korea is merely continuing Kim Il Sung's policies without Kim Il Sung, for the younger Kim has a different career background and style of leadership and also faces changing domestic and international environments. Kim Jong Il must preserve some policies while exploring new thinking in the transitional era; the former will be used to solicit support from the old guard and the latter to solve serious problems.

The foremost challenges for Kim are economic plight and North Korea's isolated international status. It is generally agreed that North Korea has to change, but how and how far? Given the fact that all nations are increasingly interdependent upon one another, balancing economic prosperity — the linchpin of political stability — and totalitarian rule is an specially thorny question. North Korea has three options: reform, "muddling through" with improvisations and without reconsidering basic strategy or fundamental policies, or collapse (Li, 1993: 31). As mentioned above, both Koreas benefit nothing from North Korean collapse, in particular in the short run. A reform that brings about a pluralistic economic and political atmosphere would not be welcome by the North. Therefore, Pyongyang's choice may be to "muddle through" imminent problems without adopting reform in the long run. One of the key differences between the two sides is the ideology of unification. South Korea long ago revised its goal of national renunciation in order to push the North to political democratization and economic liberalization while accelerating its own develop-

ment. Ironically enough, North Korea still deems unification a zerosum game. As North Korean scholar Li Sam Ro puts it, "Any attempt to unify the systems in whatever form is not acceptable to either side, because it envisages one side conquering the other." Li also suggests unification on the basis of Pyongyang's concept of "one nation, one state; two systems, two governments." Kim Jong Il may utilize the same approach in the future, making consensus between the two sides extremely difficult.

Whether North Korea has resolutely given up using force in achieving unification is unclear. For the time being, Kim is possibly preoccupied by economic renovation programs, power struggles, his health, etc. Only after successfully consolidating his control over policy priorities will he become more assertive in negotiating with the South. Within the foreseeable future, Pyongyang will probably do its best to escape direct contact with South Korea. The North will instead take advantage of the involvement of the Four Powers, as it did with the United States in last October, to maximize its interest. North-South relations, against this backdrop, can hardly be improved very soon.

References

- "Accord Gives Away Too Much." *The New York Times*, December 3, 1994.
- An, Tai Sung, *North Korea: A Political Handbook*. Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc.
- China Times* (Taipei), November 8, 1994.
- Cumings, Bruce. 1993. "The Corporate State in North Korea." Hagen Koo, ed., *State and Society in Contemporary Korea*. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.)
- Eberstadt, Nicholas. 1994. "North Korea: Reform, Muddling Through, or Collapse?" Thomas H. Henriksen and Kyongsoo Lho, eds., *One Korea: Challenges and Prospects for Reunification*. (Stanford, Calif: Hoover Institution Press.)
- Holmes, Leslie. 1993. *The End of Communist Power: Anti-Corruption Campaigns and Legitimation Crisis*. (Cambridge, U.K.: Polity Press.)
- Kihl, Young Whan. 1994. "The Politics of Inter-Korean Relations." *Korea and the World: Beyond the Cold War*. (Bolder, CO: Westview Press.)
- Kim, Ilpyong J. 1975. *Communist Politics in North Korea*. (New York: Praeger Publishers.)
- "Kim Jong Il Reaffirms 'Powerful Socialism'," *International Herald Tribune*, November 5-6, 1994.
- Kim, Nam-shik. 1986. "Causes of Friction Between North Korea and the Soviet Union (I)." *Vantage Point: Developments in North Korea* (Seoul), vol. IX no. 8.

- Kim, Tschol-su. 1994. "Hasty Summit with Kim Jong Il Unnecessary." *Korea Focus*, vol. 2 no. 5.
- Li, Sam Ro. 1993. "The Reunification of Korea and Peace and Security in Asia." Amos A. Jordan, ed., *Korean Unification: Implications for Northeast Asia*. (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies.)
- Li, Yuk-sa., ed. 1972. "*Juche!*" *The Speeches and Writings of Kim Il Sung* (New York: Grossman Publishers.)
- National Unification Board (Korea). 1988. *Pukhan mit Kongsankwon Donghyang* (The Trends of North Korea and Communist Countries), no. 85.
- News Review* (Seoul), July 2, 1994, 4.
- Newsweek*, July 18, 1994, 11.
- "North Korea Rejects A Plan by South for Wider Economic Ties." *International Herald Tribune*, November 11, 1994.
- Rhee, Sang-woo. 1994. "South Korea's Unification Policy in A New International Environment." *Korea Focus*, vol. 2 no. 5.
- Sakong, Il. 1993. *Korea in the World Economy*. Washington, D.C.: Institute for International Economics.
- "Silent Partner." *Far Eastern Economic Review*, December 29, 1994-January 5, 1995.
- "South Korean Businessmen Visit North to Discuss Business Ventures." *The Japan Times*, December 17, 1994.
- Suh, Dae-Suk. 1993. "North Korea—The Present and the Future Source." *Korean Journal Defense Analysis*, vol. 5 issue 1.