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**Leadership Change in  
North Korean Politics**

**The Succession to Kim Il Sung**

Kong Dan Oh

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# Leadership Change in North Korean Politics

## The Succession to Kim Il Sung

Kong Dan Oh

October 1988

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*40 Years*  
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## PREFACE

This study explores the issue of father-to-son leadership succession in North Korea. Because North Korea is under autocratic rule, information about its current leader Kim Il Sung and his policies is particularly important for our understanding of the country as a whole. Kim Il Sung is now 76 years old, and it will not be long before the future directions of North Korea will be determined by the personality and policies of his son Kim Jong Il, his designated successor.

Because North Korea is a tightly closed society, it is very difficult to obtain any direct information about the workings of the government or the policies of its leaders. This study is therefore based extensively on official North Korean publications and other secondary sources. However, the insights gained from these publications enable us to evaluate the prospects for succession and to describe the personal styles of the major players.

Earlier RAND studies concerning North Korea are reported in the following publications:

Norman D. Levin, *Management and Decisionmaking in The North Korean Economy*, N-1805/1-NA, February 1982.

Bruce W. Don, *Estimates of Total Nonmilitary Consumption for North Korea*, N-1811-NA, February 1982.

Kyong-Mann Jeon, *Differences in Estimates of North Korea's GNP*, P-6739, March 1982.

Harry Gelman and Norman D. Levin, *The Future of Soviet-North Korean Relations*, R-3159-AF, October 1984.

Richard L. Sneider, *The Political and Social Capabilities of North and South Korea for the Long-Term Military Competition*, R-3271-NA, January 1985.

Charles Wolf, Jr., Donald P. Henry, K.C. Yeh, James H. Hayes, John F. Schank, Richard L. Sneider, *The Changing Balance: South and North Korean Capabilities for Long-Term Military Competition*, R-3305/1-NA, December 1985.

The research, which was conducted between July 1987 and August 1988, was supported by The RAND Corporation, using its own funds. The findings should be of particular interest to those in government who are responsible for designing a foreign policy to deal with North Korea now and in the future.

## SUMMARY

This report examines the prospects of the political leadership of North Korea passing from Supreme Leader Kim Il Sung to his son Kim Jong Il. The North Korean regime has carefully arranged the succession in order to preserve the Kim Il Sung system and his *chuch'e* [self-reliance] ideology. But hereditary succession is such an unusual and inappropriate way to transmit leadership in a socialist country that there are questions as to whether this arrangement will achieve its objective and whether North Korea's power structure and social integrity will remain intact after the demise of Kim Il Sung. To address these questions, this report analyzes:

- The chronological development of the rise of Kim Jong Il.
- The building of a personality cult around Kim Jong Il.
- The background of and rationale for choosing the method of hereditary succession.
- The development of Kim Jong Il's leadership strategy.
- Supporters and opponents of Kim Jong Il.
- Potential policy directions in the post-Kim Il Sung era.

Collecting information on the inner workings of North Korean political decisionmaking is a frustrating process. Great attention had to be paid to changes in nuance, tone, and style in the North Korean source material to glean information about Kim Jong Il's personality, political philosophy, and leadership strategy. The major findings of this study, drawn from various sources, especially *Rodong Shinmun* [Daily Worker], the propaganda organ of the Korean Workers' Party (KWP), are not all new. However, they do provide insights into the prospects for future leadership change. (See)

The major finding is that hereditary succession in a socialist system has proven an immensely difficult task, even for a monolithic regime like that in North Korea. A chronological account of the rise of Kim Jong Il verifies this difficulty and suggests that the younger Kim will encounter continuing problems in establishing his legitimacy. Precisely because of these difficulties, the North Korean media have repeatedly tried to convince the population—and quite likely the political elite as a whole—to accept the father-to-son succession. *Rodong Shinmun* has served as the major channel of propaganda communication, particularly in fostering a personality cult around Kim Jong Il. Apparently, this calculated effort to influence public attitudes has had some effect,

leading the North Korean populace to accept at least to some degree the political directions favored by Kim Il Sung. In today's North Korea, Kim Jong Il appears to be accepted as a co-leader with his father.

The study reaches the following conclusions:

- A hereditary succession is in its final phase of preparation.
- The image-building and personality cult of Kim Jong Il have virtually reached the level of those of Kim Il Sung.
- Kim Il Sung appears to be firmly persuaded of his choice of successor in spite of domestic and foreign criticism.
- A succession struggle may occur after Kim Il Sung's death; as long as the senior Kim patronizes Kim Jong Il, however, no serious near-term succession conflict is anticipated.
- Kim Jong Il's leadership ability has yet to be proved, and the proof is not likely to come until after Kim Il Sung's demise.
- Kim Jong Il's personality and leadership continually waver between irrationality and rationality, pragmatism and dogmatism, and recklessness and sensitivity. It therefore seems likely that in domestic affairs, Kim Jong Il will cautiously, if clumsily, pursue more pragmatic economic policies; and in foreign affairs, he will selectively open North Korea to trade and influence from Japan and other countries outside the communist bloc. *He is also likely to intersperse the flood of irrational communications directed at South Korea with tentative friendly gestures and rational probes aimed at establishing more extensive, if still highly restricted, relations with the south.*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In preparing this report, my first debt is to my RAND colleagues. Jonathan Pollack read the manuscript several times and gave me invaluable advice on both style and content. Brian Jenkins's early review of the manuscript contributed greatly to improving the final report. Harry Gelman reviewed the manuscript near the final stage of writing and provided much careful and constructive criticism. Norman Levin's suggestions were also very helpful in refining my understanding of North Korean society and strengthening the report.

Outside RAND, Robert Carlin of the Foreign Broadcast Information Service contributed his valuable knowledge and insight about North Korea, which enabled me to more effectively analyze the succession issues.

I have benefited from the opportunity to interact with a large number of Korean colleagues. I am particularly indebted to Han-ho Song and the research staff of the Unification Board during the Chun Doo Hwan Administration. They enhanced my understanding of North Korean economic and social issues in recent years and provided me with many valuable source materials. The comments of Suk Ryu Yu of the Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security and Kang Suk Rhee of the National Defense College were very helpful in clarifying issues related to the North Korean power structure and other aspects of North Korean society.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The Sixth Congress of the Korean Workers' Party (KWP) of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), commonly known as North Korea, was held in October 1980. It was a watershed event in many ways. First, the congress formally signaled Kim Jong Il's status as the eventual successor to his father, Kim Il Sung, who had exercised total political control over the DPRK for three and a half decades. Even though observers of North Korean politics had long anticipated that Kim Il Sung would reserve the position of heir apparent for his son, official confirmation of Kim Jong Il's status was an extraordinary step for a socialist country.

Second, some circumstantial evidence indicated that Kim Il Sung was increasingly aware of domestic problems in North Korea, particularly economic stagnation and the lack of preparation for leadership transition with the approach of his own inevitable demise. In April 1977, Kim Il Sung delivered a strong message to a reporter from the Japanese newspaper *Yomiuri Shimbun* that the Second Seven-Year Economic Plan (1978-1982) would eliminate North Korean economic bottlenecks and would double the country's industrial output.<sup>1</sup> At the Eighteenth Plenary Session of the Central Committee of the KWP in June 1979, Kim Il Sung seemed to be greatly concerned about improvements in the economic infrastructure as the foundation for economic construction.<sup>2</sup> His recognition of these economic problems suggested that an alteration of North Korea's economic policies would be unavoidable.

Finally, there were the beginnings of a generational change in the North Korean power structure, related to the emergence of Kim Jong Il as the presumptive political heir to his father. At the Sixth Congress, members of the younger generation were made full and candidate members of the Central Committee of the KWP, not only replacing deceased or demoted members, but also strengthening Kim Jong Il's power base. The number of full members increased from 117 at the Fifth Congress to 145 at the Sixth Congress, while the number of candidate members jumped from 55 to 103. The newly added 63 full and 82 candidate members were mostly young and appeared to be supporters of the junior Kim.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Yomiuri Shimbun*, April 28, 1977.

<sup>2</sup>*Naewoe Tongshin* [Domestic and Foreign News], Nos. 126 and 128.

<sup>3</sup>*Pukhan Kaeryo* [An outline of North Korea], Seoul: P'yonghwa Tongil Yon'guwon, 1986, p. 87.

These three developments—the official confirmation of Kim Jong Il's status as the successor to his father, Kim Il Sung's tacit but unmistakable acknowledgment of his advancing age and of the economic problems of the regime, and generational changes in the power structure—all suggest that the succession issue had become of supreme importance by 1980.

To evaluate the prospects for political change following the death of Kim Il Sung, it is necessary to understand the politics of leadership succession. North Korea is a most unusual nation. It is governed under extreme secrecy, with power concentrated to a remarkable degree in the hands of Kim Il Sung and his closest followers, and the government displays fanatic xenophobia, particularly toward the United States. Even in comparison with other communist countries, there is very little evidence in North Korea of regular channels for decision-making and policy formulation. Unlike China or the Soviet Union, about which foreign analysts have a much wider array of data, there are very strict limits on information about policymaking in North Korea, especially information that reveals the inner workings of the leadership process. Analysis of North Korean politics is less a matter of assessing policy issues and debates than of searching for clues and symbolic actions that shed light on personal relations and political struggles at the highest levels of the system. And to mislead the unwary observer, North Korean propaganda has tried to present an image of total unanimity among the leadership and the people on the course charted by Kim Il Sung. As a result, it is extremely difficult to specify the various forces and trends in the North Korean political system.

The present study is based extensively on articles from *Rodong Shinmun* [Daily Worker], the propaganda organ of the KWP. There are three reasons for this. First, given the limited access of outside observers to the workings of the North Korean system, the North Korean (government) press becomes a vital source of information. Second, even though the editorial content of *Rodong Shinmun* appears uniform and rigid in style and ideology, subtle changes in nuance, tone, and description hint at changes and potential sources of conflict in the North Korean system. Third, it appears that *Rodong Shinmun* has not previously been subjected to systematic scrutiny on the leadership succession question and thus can be considered a fresh vein of ore for the researcher, albeit not the highest-grade ore.

It is important to understand the role of North Korea's media in the context of the country's political system as a whole. The essence of North Korean politics appears to be the control and manipulation of political symbols and labels, rather than more "conventional" political

behavior (e.g., debates over development strategy, competition for leadership positions, or struggles over the allocation of resources). Given the extremely personalized and highly concentrated power at the top of its system, North Korea does not appear to have developed any of the conventional channels and processes for interest articulation and aggregation. In the future, it may prove impossible to maintain the present system. For the past four decades, however, Kim Il Sung has sought to preserve and enhance the current system as much as possible, for this alone will enable—or at least improve the prospects for—an orderly succession for his son.

Alexander George's classic study of propaganda analysis<sup>4</sup> provides much useful guidance concerning the hints and clues in North Korea's media. As George argues, "Propaganda analysis has two general purposes: (a) the summary, or selective description, of what is being said by the propagandists and (b) the interpretation of the intentions, strategy, and calculations behind propaganda communications." Of the two types of propaganda analysis—description and inference—George argues that inferences are "potentially more valuable and also more difficult for the propaganda analysts to make." But despite this difficulty, it is important to "infer components of purposive behavior which are not usually accessible to direct observation and to account for individual action in situations of choice." George studied inferences made from Nazi propaganda during World War II, but three of his assumptions are applicable to the North Korean case as well:

1. Mass communications (directed to both domestic and foreign audiences) are used as an instrument of policy, in a highly purposeful and deliberative fashion, to implement goals of domestic and foreign policy.
2. The selection of goals and strategies for mass-communication channels is closely coordinated with the policy calculations, estimates, expectations, and intentions of leaders.
3. All channels of mass communication and their contents are subject to centralized control through the propaganda ministry and other coordinating bodies.<sup>5</sup>

These insights provide a context for understanding Kim Jong Il's rise to power and the prospects for his future rule. The present study is an analysis of politics and personality at a distance, filtered through the peculiar content and form of one of the world's most controlled

<sup>4</sup>Alexander L. George, *Propaganda Analysis: A Study of Inferences Made from Nazi Propaganda in World War II*, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishers, 1976.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 20.

media systems. Yet the very mode of presentation can reveal much about the workings of the leadership process, if not a great deal of detail about policy choices per se.

## II. THE RISE OF KIM JONG IL

### CHRONOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT

Upon the formal proclamation of the Armistice Agreement at the end of the Korean War in July 1953, North Korean leader Kim Il Sung, who had been in power since his installation by the Russians in 1946, signaled an impending purge of his opponents. Kim wanted to act swiftly and adroitly to get rid of Pak Hon-yong, his strongest rival, and to rebuild his reputation, which had been damaged by North Korea's failure to win the war. It was an appropriate time for Kim to fulfill these goals, particularly since Pak Hon-yong was already under arrest.<sup>1</sup> Kim managed to eliminate the Pak group by August 1953 and reemerged even more powerful than he had been before the war. He has maintained absolute power ever since, establishing himself as one of the most dominant political leaders in the contemporary world. During his four decades in power, he has not only transformed himself into a demigod, but he has also turned North Korea into one of the world's most tightly sealed societies.

Kim Il Sung has proven to be a man of extraordinary charisma, with the ambition to create a sacred image of himself as a national leader. As a demigod surrounded by an extreme personality cult and the sound of endless adulation from the masses, Kim has been highly desirous of perpetuating his leadership even after his death. As early as the beginning of the 1970s, he argued that socialist revolutions must be carried on by younger generations. At the same time, he asserted that the younger generation leaders must possess an innate leadership quality which could not be produced like manufactured goods. This argument provides some basis for his subsequent pursuit of a hereditary succession from father to son. However, two relevant background issues must be understood with regard to Kim Il Sung's extraordinary decision: the de-Stalinization process initiated by Khrushchev, and China's tumultuous succession politics before the death of Mao Zedong.

In 1956, at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Khrushchev launched a formal denunciation of Stalin, challenging the supremacy and infallibility of Stalin as a leader. The de-Stalinization campaign was undoubtedly a rude shock to Kim Il Sung. A second trauma occurred in the 1960s, when Mao signaled his

<sup>1</sup>Robert A. Scalapino and Chong-Sik Lee, *Communism in Korea, The Movement Part 2*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972, pp. 436-452.

wish to groom a political heir after his demise, thus putting the nation in a state of heightened anxiety and uncertainty. In September 1971, Mao's handpicked successor, Marshal Lin Biao, revolted against him and allegedly was killed in a plane crash while seeking to defect to the Soviet Union. These incidents convinced Kim Il Sung that he should carefully prepare a smooth political transition. Thus, he created an entirely different solution for North Korea's leadership succession. At the start of the 1970s, he began to preach the importance of a revolutionary succession by the younger generation to pursue North Korea's goal of building a true socialist state. A well-thought-out plan was formulated, with Kim's intention being to perpetuate revolution and the supremacy of his personal political philosophy (called Kimilsungism). Kim's choice for a successor was his own son, and the junior Kim began to appear on the political stage.

Observers of North Korean politics agree that the Seventh Plenum of the Fifth Congress of the KWP, held in September 1973, provided the first formal acknowledgment of Kim Jong Il as the designated successor of his father. At this unpublicized meeting, the junior Kim was placed in a position of power as the secretary in charge of organization and propaganda-agitation of the KWP. Given the importance of mass organization and propaganda-agitation in North Korea, this position would prove crucial in enhancing the image of the young Kim, who was then only 31 years old and largely unknown to the North Korean populace.

Kim Jong Il's personal background, including some very basic facts such as his birthdate and birthplace, have yet to be independently confirmed. He was reportedly born in Samarkand in the Soviet Union on February 16, 1942. Upon the liberation of Korea in 1945, his parents, Kim Il Sung and Kim Chong-suk, returned to North Korea with him and his younger brother. The younger brother, Yu Ra (apparently a Russian name), drowned in a pond at Kim Il Sung's residence at the age of five. Kim Jong Il entered Namsan People's Elementary School in Pyongyang in 1948. During the Korean War period, from 1950 to 1952, he stayed in Manchuria for reasons of personal safety. He returned to North Korea in 1952 and resumed his education at Mangyongdae Revolutionary Institute, a special educational institution for the privileged class. Upon completion of his high school education at Namsan High School in 1958, he was sent to East Germany for a year to study at an Air Force school. When he returned, he entered Kim Il Sung University as a sophomore in the college of politics and economy.

He graduated from the university in 1963 and began his political career.<sup>2</sup>

Kim Jong Il's first public position was that of a member of the Organization and Guidance Bureau of the KWP, to which he was appointed in 1964, when Kim Il Sung's younger brother Kim Yong-ju was the director of the bureau. Reportedly, Kim Jong Il's assignment was to act as a bodyguard for Kim Il Sung. Five years later, in 1969, he was promoted to deputy director of the bureau. In the following year, he was named the director of the Culture and Arts Department of the KWP. In 1971, he became the director of the Propaganda and Agitation Department. In later years, people often referred to this period as his "student period for learning politics."<sup>3</sup>

Kim Jong Il's personal and career development reflects the importance accorded the first son of the Supreme Leader. From his earliest years in the party, he was given important duties. Kim Il Sung may have considered the possibility of designating his son as future leader even at a very early stage in the young man's political career. But Kim Jong Il did not possess any particular attributes to be a legitimate successor other than his relationship to his father. Precisely because of this lack of special talents, the next decade was used to build Kim Jong Il's image as a legitimate leader through a state-sponsored image-building campaign.

In fact, preparation for the elevation of Kim Jong Il's status seems to have started as early as 1971. There are no written documents from North Korea to support this conclusion, but South Korean sources point to the Sixth Meeting of the League of Socialist Working Youth (LSWY) of the DPRK as the first signal of Kim Il Sung's plans for his son. Kim Il Sung is believed to have made a statement at the LSWY meeting in June 1971 to the effect that the older generation must let the post-liberation generation carry the torch of the revolution. This statement implied that the successor must be a member of the junior Kim's generation, rather than someone only a few years younger than Kim Il Sung.<sup>4</sup>

Until that time, Kim Il Sung's younger brother, Kim Yong-ju, who had served as the head of the Organization and Guidance Department of the KWP since the early 1960s, had been considered the senior Kim's most likely successor. During the Fifth Congress, in 1970, Kim

<sup>2</sup>*Vantage Point*, Seoul: Naewoe Press, June 1984; Jae Kyu Park, *North Korea Under Kim Jong Il: The Problems and Prospects*, Research Report No. 7, The Institute for Far Eastern Studies, Kyungnam University, Seoul, 1985, pp. 67-68.

<sup>3</sup>Jae Kyu Park, *North Korea Under Kim Jong Il: The Problems and Prospects*, p. 69.

<sup>4</sup>*Pukhan Ch'ongram 1945-1982* [A Survey of North Korea 1945-1982], Seoul: Pukhan Yon'guso, 1983, p. 77.

Yong-ju rose to the sixth most powerful position in the KWP. However, at the Eighth Plenum of the Fifth Congress of the KWP, held in February 1974, he was demoted to one of the vice-premierships of the Administration Council, which was considered to be a sinecure before retirement. He had lost all power by 1975, and today he holds no official title. He has become a nobody.

His dramatic fall graphically illustrates the carefully but forcefully executed generational change within the North Korean power structure in the 1970s. Certainly the main purpose for this change would appear to have been to install Kim Jong Il's supporters in the party machine. During the 1970s, many active cadres in their mid-forties and fifties were replaced by much younger people in their thirties and early forties. Undoubtedly, the "lost generation" people in their mid-forties and fifties were not happy at being passed over. Indeed, it is likely that latent generational tensions have built ever since Kim Il Sung revealed his intention to make his son's generation the main actors on the North Korean leadership stage.

Following the LSWY meeting, the Central Committee of the KWP held a closed session on December 22, 1972, immediately after the Sixth Plenum of the Fifth Congress. According to one report on the session, Kim Il and Ch'oe Yong-gon, two old and faithful comrades of Kim Il Sung from his partisan days, proposed that Kim Jong Il be groomed as the successor. Kim Il, the number-two ranking member of the KWP, purportedly elaborated the rationale for this decision:

The Soviet Union experienced a leadership conflict following the death of Stalin, for it did not prepare a leader like Stalin. In China, the Cultural Revolution must be understood as an outcome of a power struggle when the country did not decide on Mao's successor. As a result of the Cultural Revolution, Lin Biao was chosen to be Mao's successor. However, the Lin Biao Incident of 1971 invited more confusion than before. . . . Kim Jong Il is well-armed with Kim Il Sung ideology. He is young, energetic, and has already contributed a lot for the party with his wisdom and artistic talent. He is a man of integrity, who would not damage the name of the Great Leader.<sup>5</sup>

Although neither the authenticity of this statement nor the content of the secret session can be documented from available North Korean sources, it is clear that the decision of the Seventh Plenum in the following year (1973) to place the junior Kim in charge of organization and propaganda-agitation could not have been made without prior consultation and debate. By this logic, it is reasonable to assume that the closed session on December 22, 1972, cleared the way for Kim Jong Il.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 168.





Kim Il Sung (right) and Kim Jong Il (left) on an "on-the-spot"  
guidance tour at an automobile factory, September 2, 1973  
(SOURCE: *Chosun-ui Yonggwang* [The Glory of Chosun], Pyongyang, 1974)

There is also an indirect indication from an official North Korean source that by 1972 the senior Kim was paving the way for a hereditary succession. The 1970 edition of the *Dictionary of Political Terminologies*, published by the Academy of Social Sciences of North Korea, had strongly denounced hereditary succession:

Hereditary succession is a reactionary custom of exploitative societies whereby certain positions or riches may be legally inherited. Originally a product of slave societies, it was later adopted by feudal lords as a means to perpetuate dictatorial rule.<sup>6</sup>

However, in the 1972 edition of the same dictionary, this statement was deleted.

The appointment of Kim Jong Il to head the Propaganda and Agitation Department was not, by any means, an official confirmation of his status as the future leader of North Korea. Rather, it was the beginning of a long process of overcoming both visible and invisible obstacles to making the junior Kim a crown prince in a supposedly classless society. North Korea's two communist neighbors, the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Soviet Union, both subtly expressed discomfort about a North Korean hereditary succession, of which more later. Nonetheless, Kim Jong Il began to be referred to as the "Party Center" [*Tang Chung-ang*] or "Dear Leader" (his father is called the Supreme Leader or Great Leader). Only in the 1980s was the veil of mystery surrounding the identity of the Party Center drawn aside.<sup>7</sup>

According to one report, at the Eighth Plenum, in February 1974, Kim Jong Il was made a member of the Political Committee (later renamed the Politburo) of the Central Committee of the KWP. A *Chosoren*<sup>8</sup> publication reports the plenum's decision to grant the junior Kim membership:

The person who first recommended to the party Kim Jong Il's membership in the Political Committee was a silver-haired old comrade, who fought together with the Supreme Leader from the days of anti-Japanese resistance. He stood up and emphasized that the leadership must be strengthened with new members in order both to

<sup>6</sup>*Dictionary of Political Terminologies*, Pyongyang: The Academy of Social Sciences, 1970, p. 144; Kwon-sang Park, "North Korea Under Kim Chong-Il," *Journal of Northeast Asian Studies*, June 1982, p. 61.

<sup>7</sup>Rin-Sup Shinn, "North Korea in 1981: First Year for De Facto Successor Kim Jong Il," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 22, No. 1, January 1982, p. 100.

<sup>8</sup>The shortened form of *Chosen Soren*, the General Federation of Pro-North Korean Residents in Japan.

lessen the burden on Kim Il Sung and to continue the socialist revolution for constructing a true socialist state.<sup>9</sup>

Following this statement, the old comrade proposed Kim Jong Il's name as a new member of the committee. According to this Chosoren source, Kim Il Sung was reportedly reluctant at first but finally accepted his old comrade's recommendation. The silver-haired comrade who recommended the junior Kim was Kim Il.<sup>10</sup>

It appears that the Eighth Plenum of the Fifth Congress, in February 1974, was the start of an active effort at image building for the Party Center, because the North Korean news media began to use this code name side by side with Kim Il Sung's official titles. Particularly in the latter half of 1974, *Rodong Shinmun* increasingly cited the Party Center as the brains behind numerous guidelines being used for socialist construction. Two typical reports in the newspaper in September 1974 exemplified North Korean media efforts to build a leader image for Kim Jong Il. An editorial on September 9 asserted that "the glorious fatherland was perpetually prosperous following the banner of *chuch'e* [self-reliance] under the leadership of the Supreme Leader and the Party Center."<sup>11</sup> On September 18, *Rodong Shinmun* highly praised the Party Center, who set the guidelines for *sokto-jon* ["speed battles"] to achieve quantitatively and qualitatively satisfactory results on various tasks in the shortest possible time.<sup>12</sup>

From 1974 to 1976, Kim Jong Il's name never appeared in print, but the media quoted the Party Center as the source of endless wisdom and guidelines. North Korean authorities who endorsed the junior Kim put their maximum effort into building a leadership image of him for the future. However, the process of creating a new leader may have proved more difficult than they had anticipated. Beginning in September 1976, references to the Party Center became less frequent, suggesting that some obstacles to hereditary succession had been encountered.

For example, a September 18, 1976, *Rodong Shinmun* article on the issue of loyalty toward the leadership simply mentioned that people must show unconditional loyalty "to the Great Leader and the glorious party."<sup>13</sup> During the previous two-year period, the Party Center was constantly cited side by side with the Great Leader, so the substitution

<sup>9</sup>Tak Jin, Kim Jong Il, and Pak Hong Je, *Kim Jong Il Chidoja, Che 2-pu* [Leader Kim Jong Il, Part II], Tongbangsa, 1984, p. 6.

<sup>10</sup>It is not clear whether this Chosoren report of the junior Kim's elevation to membership of the Political Committee was based on fact. Neither North nor South Korean documents record Kim Jong Il's promotion at that time.

<sup>11</sup>*Rodong Shinmun*, September 9, 1974, p. 3, Editorial.

<sup>12</sup>*Rodong Shinmun*, September 18, 1974, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup>*Rodong Shinmun*, September 18, 1976, p. 3.

of party for Party Center may suggest that the future of the junior Kim had been challenged.

The frequency of references to the Party Center decreased noticeably after September 1976, and by the beginning of 1977, the use of the code name had been virtually discontinued in *Rodong Shinmun*. The only exception occurred in February 1977, when reference to the Party Center was once again resumed, presumably to coincide with Kim Jong Il's birthday on February 16.<sup>14</sup> The decline of the Party Center was also reflected in an editorial on December 1, 1978, which emphasized solidarity around the Party Central Committee (not the Party Center) to carry the torch of the "three revolutions." The idea of three revolutions—ideological, technological, and cultural—was originally propounded by Kim Il Sung in February 1973 as a means of eradicating revisionist elements and more rapidly achieving the goals of a socialist economy. In addition, however, three-revolution small team units were formed to expedite the revolutions. These groups consisted of twenty to fifty younger party members who served as vehicles to facilitate Kim Jong Il's control over the KWP and the younger generation. Although the three-revolution-team (TRT) movement was the brainchild of Kim Jong Il, the editorial's emphasis on solidarity around the Party Central Committee conspicuously avoided the use of his code name.<sup>15</sup> With very few exceptions, this tendency continued well into 1979. While *Rodong Shinmun* seldom cited Kim Jong Il's code name, there were no other clues anywhere in the newspaper to explain his submergence from public view. However, there were several indirect reports in newspapers published in Japan that shed possible light on his position at the time.

On February 2, 1978, *Toitsu Nippo* [Unification Daily], a pro-South Korean newspaper published by Korean residents in Japan, carried an eye-catching article about Kim Jong Il. According to the article, lieutenants and supporters of Lee Yong-mu, director of the General Political Bureau of the People's Armed Forces of the DPRK, had attempted to crash their vehicle into the car in which Kim Jong Il was riding. Lee's lieutenants reportedly wanted to remove Kim Jong Il because of his alleged responsibility for the Panmunjom tree-cutting incident of August 18, 1976.<sup>16</sup> In this incident, two American officers who were trimming trees in the buffer zone near Panmunjom were ax-murdered

<sup>14</sup>Morgan E. Clippinger, "Kim Chong-il in the North Korean Mass Media: A Study of Semi-Esoteric Communication," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 21, No. 3, March 1981, pp. 292-293.

<sup>15</sup>*Rodong Shinmun*, December 1, 1978, p. 1, Editorial.

<sup>16</sup>*Toitsu Nippo* [Unification Daily], February 2, 1978.

by North Korean soldiers. The incident was considered a manifestation of North Korean belligerence and irrationality.

Although there is no independent confirmation of this report, three developments following the Panmunjom tree-cutting incident suggest an uncertain domestic mood toward Kim Jong Il's status. The first was the complete disappearance of Lee Yong-mu and many other high-ranking military leaders. The second was an agitation rally for the People's Armed Forces on November 30, 1977, in which Kim Il Sung delivered ten specific instructions for the military personnel to obey.<sup>17</sup> The third development was the promotion of O Kuk-yol to the position of Chief of the General Staff of the Korean People's Army. O Kuk-yol was a classmate of Kim Jong Il at Mangyongdae Revolutionary Institute. It can be argued that the three developments were step-by-step measures for the removal of military opponents of Kim Jong Il and the installation of his supporters as military leaders. The measures also appeared to be designed to remove any potential challenges to Kim Jong Il's promotion within the armed forces.

It is very important to note that between August 1976 and September 1979, Kim Jong Il did not appear in the media or in public. This was the same period during which Kim Il Sung and his supporters tried very hard to remove many potential and real threats toward the junior Kim. The agitation rally in 1977 (which was reportedly ordered by Kim Il Sung himself) and the promotion of O Kuk-yol to the most powerful position within the armed forces in September 1979 seem to have been part of a sustained effort to establish Kim Jong Il as the legitimate heir.

At the same time, one must not dismiss the possibility of a connection between North Korean domestic politics and international developments surrounding the Korean Peninsula at the time. It was during this period that the Carter Administration announced its intention to withdraw the remaining American ground forces from the Korean Peninsula. In addition, the notorious Koreagate incident that stirred the Washington policymaking community added fuel to the fire. In a word, the relationship between South Korea and the United States was at a low ebb. It is tantalizing to speculate that Kim Il Sung tried to appear more normal and approachable to the Americans at the time. In this context, Kim Jong Il's silence may have been his father's idea, to convince the world that North Korea was not an abnormal polity.

Whatever the causes of Kim Jong Il's diminished status in the late 1970s, he reappeared by the time of the Sixth Congress in October 1980. The congress proved a watershed in North Korean succession

<sup>17</sup>Noewoe T'ongshin, November 1978, p. 32.

politics: It saw the junior Kim positioned as virtually the second man in the North Korean power structure. Kim Jong Il was given important positions in the Party Secretariat, the Politburo, and the Military Commission. More precisely, he was listed second in the ten-member Secretariat, fourth in the five-member Presidium of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the KWP, and third in the ten-member Military Commission. Kim Il and Defense Minister O Chin-u, the second and third men in the Presidium, were already quite old, and Kim Il's health was not considered good at the time, so he was clearly not a contender for the top spot. In addition, O Chin-u, the second-ranking man in the Military Commission, was not named to membership in the Secretariat. In short, Kim Jong Il was the only person other than Kim Il Sung to be appointed to all three important party organizations.<sup>18</sup> On October 12, 1980, Kim Jong Il was seen standing next to his father to receive foreign guests on the occasion of the Sixth Congress. On the same day, he was listed second, following Kim Il Sung, in the 27-man ad hoc committee for drafting work reports for the congress, a committee that consisted of the most powerful political figures in North Korea.<sup>19</sup>

The Sixth Congress was an official declaration of Kim Jong Il's consolidated status and an unambiguous revelation of the senior Kim's design to perpetuate Kim Il Sung ideology through his son. Kim Jong Il's name was not yet engraved in the party constitution, but no one doubted that he was the crown prince chosen by his father. Perhaps the single most important task of the Sixth Congress was the placement of the junior Kim at the top echelon of the North Korean power structure, next to his father. On October 12, 1980, during the course of the Congress, Hwang Chang-yop, chairman of the Supreme People's Assembly, legitimized the father-to-son succession of power:

The leadership of the party and the chieftain should be handed over and completed without interruption: the question of succession is a fundamental and vital one that determines the fate of revolution and it was resolved for the first time in history by the chieftain.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup>*Pyongyang Times*, October 15, 1980. Also, Kim Ch'ang-sun, "Kwonryok Sesup-kwa puja ch'ejje hwakrip" [Hereditary Succession and the Establishment of Father-Son System], *Pukhan* [North Korea], November 1980, p. 77.

<sup>19</sup>Suk Ryul Yu, "Pidong'maeng oegyo hwaktae-wa yong'hyar'ryok haeng'sa" [The Expansion of Non-alignment and the Influence of North Korea], *Pukhan*, November 1980, p. 110.

<sup>20</sup>*Rodong Shinmun*, October 12, 1980. The translation of the original version is from Suk Ryul Yu, "The Rise of Kim Jong Il and the Heir-Succession Problem (II)," *Vantage Point*, December 10-12, 1987, p. 2.



Kim Jong Il at the Sixth Congress in October 1980  
(SOURCE: *Chosun-ui Yonggwang*)

As if to further legitimize his new status, Kim Jong Il in the same month appeared for the first time with Kim Il Sung and O Chin-u at Myohyang Mountain for "on-the-spot guidance." The identity of the mysterious Party Center was also confirmed for the first time at the Sixth Congress, when Kim Jong Il surfaced as the de facto second in command. The code name had been followed by North Korea watchers since 1974 and had been generally assumed to be Kim Jong Il. In February 1977, the Japanese media had revealed that "Party Center" was a code name for Kim Jong Il, citing a confidential Chosoren document.<sup>21</sup> The public revelation in 1980 of the identity of the Party Center implied Kim Il Sung's strong commitment to his son as the future leader.

However, after the congress, there was no visible difference in the handling of Kim Jong Il's name in the North Korean media. His name did not appear at all during the next seven months. He was still referred to as the Party Center, and it may be assumed that both father and son consciously toned down his visibility to avoid potential resistance to his rise to power, at least until the excitement of the Sixth Congress had faded.

Finally, in May 1981, *Rodong Shinmun* began to increase Kim Jong Il's public exposure, referring to him by name simultaneously with the Party Center. On October 21, 1981, Kim Jong Il's name was for the first time printed in boldface type equivalent to his father's. The occasion was the Seventh Meeting of the LSWY of the DPRK, at which Kim Jong Il appeared as the de facto leader of the North Korean Youth.<sup>22</sup> Precisely ten years earlier, at the Sixth Meeting of the LSWY, Kim Il Sung had stated his desire to perpetuate the socialist revolution by bequeathing power to younger generations. The joint appearance of Kim Jong Il as co-leader with his father at the Seventh meeting was nothing less than a fulfillment of the senior Kim's earlier vision, with his son serving as the instrument of generational leadership transition.

By 1982, Kim Jong Il's presence in North Korean society and politics had become an undeniable fact. Not only did his name appear in the media as frequently as his father's, but he also began to conduct "working guidance" (i.e., lectures, similar to his father's "on-the-spot guidance"). On February 16, 1982, Kim Jong Il's 40th birthday, he was accompanied by several top-ranking North Korean leaders for working guidance at the Moranbong Stadium in Pyongyang. The accompanying group consisted of O Chin-u, Kim Chung-rin, Kim Yong-nam, Yong

<sup>21</sup>Clippinger, "Kim Chong-il in the North Korean Mass Media," p. 293.

<sup>22</sup>*Rodong Shinmun*, October 21, 1981, p. 1.



Hyong-muk, Ho Dam, and other veteran cadres.<sup>23</sup> On April 2, two months after Kim Jong Il's grandiose working guidance, his picture was prominently displayed in *Rodong Shinmun*, showing him standing next to his father at a guidance tour.<sup>24</sup> Pictures of Kim Jong Il either alone or beside his father had occasionally appeared in North Korean publications in the past. However, appearing next to his father at *on-the-spot guidance tours* had a different implication. Through the past several decades, on-the-spot guidance had been one of the most stylish and unique manifestations of Kim Il Sung's leadership. At various guidance tours, he had voiced concern about people's welfare, economic conditions, and harmony between leaders and workers. Thus, Kim Jong Il's photo with his father was a symbolic gesture that the senior Kim intended to hand over the conducting baton to his son. It is interesting to note, however, that until 1988, the media still made a distinction in phrasing between Kim Il Sung's on-the-spot guidance and Kim Jong Il's working guidance.

Domestic acceptance of a hereditary succession seemed to have entered a stable phase by the end of 1982, and North Korea began to pay attention to foreign reactions toward Kim Jong Il's rise to power. In effect, it appears that domestic legitimacy had been largely achieved. Now North Korea had a different task: It had to conduct a media campaign abroad to promote its new leader. The response from the PRC and the Soviet Union, in particular, had to be tested. By 1983, some indications of North Korean efforts to test these waters had begun to appear. First, in June 1983, the Western press reported on a ten-day visit by Kim Jong Il to the PRC, an unofficial visit which became known to the North Korean public at a later date. It was a symbolic and important event that signified China's "unofficial" endorsement of the younger Kim. However, *Rodong Shinmun* did not cover this event, presumably because the Chinese were not yet ready to formally endorse the succession arrangement. Only in October 1983 did formal, yet indirect, information on Kim Jong Il's visit to the PRC begin to appear in *Rodong Shinmun*. A report on a film review and banquet meeting hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs mentioned that a documentary film entitled "Dear Leader Kim Jong Il's Visit to China" was shown to an exclusive party of cadres on October 28.<sup>25</sup>

The same documentary film also began to be used widely outside of North Korea to impress the world with the image of Kim Jong Il as an international figure. The film was shown in October and early

<sup>23</sup>*Rodong Shinmun*, October 17, 1981, p. 1.

<sup>24</sup>*Rodong Shinmun*, April 2, 1982, pp. 1-3.

<sup>25</sup>*Rodong Shinmun*, October 28, 1983, p. 2.



Kim Jong Il showing the newly built *Chuch'e* Tower  
in Pyongyang to Kim Il Sung, April 1, 1982  
(SOURCE: *Chosun-ui Yonggwang*)

November in major cities throughout Japan. The majority of film viewers were Chosoren members, but *Rodong Shinmun* claimed that more than twenty foreign diplomats had enjoyed the film, including diplomats from the United States, China, Indonesia, Finland, West Germany, France, Great Britain, and Australia. On November 15, 1983, *Rodong Shinmun* reported that Kim Jong Il's visit was a "historic event in the history of North Korea-Chinese friendship."<sup>26</sup> The same report noted that Kim's visit to China was favorably evaluated not only as a historic event for North Korean-Chinese relations, but also as an example of how Kim Jong Il's admirable personality resembled that of his father.

Kim's visit to China was also an important turning point in terms of legitimizing his leadership: The statement of his domestic legitimacy was made on Chinese territory, and he was formally introduced to the Chinese. Undoubtedly, the impact of the trip would influence his potential opponents, who presumed a father-to-son succession would be anathema to Chinese leaders. This impact would not only frustrate the opponents, but would also enhance the junior Kim's image as a legitimate leader. Another effect of the China trip appeared to be its influence on the Soviet Union. The Soviets came forward to publicly recognize Kim Jong Il's status less than three months after the public announcement of his trip to the PRC. In January 1984, for the first time, the Soviet leadership sent a formal New Year's greeting to Kim Jong Il separately from the one to Kim Il Sung.<sup>27</sup> And again, in February 1984, Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs Kapitsa for the first time attended the ceremony for Kim Jong Il's birthday given by the North Korean Ambassador to the USSR.<sup>28</sup> Finally, Kapitsa reportedly told Japanese journalists in Moscow that the Soviet Union would not oppose Kim Jong Il as the future successor to Kim Il Sung.<sup>29</sup> Chinese and Soviet recognition of Kim Jong Il thus set the tone throughout 1983 and 1984. North Korea had undertaken active pursuit of the Kim Jong Il succession and had received a measure of support and recognized legitimacy from both Beijing and Moscow.

<sup>26</sup>*Rodong Shinmun*, November 15, 1983, p. 2.

<sup>27</sup>The New Year's greeting was sent by V. T. Grishin, member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party (CPSU) and First Secretary of the Moscow City Party Committee, and Konstantin Viktorovich Rusakov, Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU. Reported by the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), Pyongyang, January 18, 1984, in *Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS)*, Asia and Pacific, January 20, 1984, p. D17.

<sup>28</sup>Suk Ryul Yu, *Kim Jong Il kwonryok sunggye-e taehan Soryon-ui t'aedo* [The Attitude of the Soviet Union Toward the Political Succession of Kim Jong Il], Research Report #65, The Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security, Seoul, 1985, pp. 3-4.

<sup>29</sup>*Yomiuri Shimbun* (Evening edition), December 7, 1984.



**Kim Jong Il welcoming Hu Yaobang, then General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, visiting North Korea, May 4-8, 1984**  
(SOURCE: *Chosun-ui Yonggwang*)

Since 1984, the role of Kim Jong Il has been greatly enhanced in almost all spheres of North Korean politics, economics, and society. The most noticeable developments have been the great increases in publications about Kim Jong Il and official activities conducted by him. His speeches and treatises and the biographies written about him have been internationally circulated. In the North Korean media, his working guidance tour reports have surpassed those of his father in both frequency and variety of content. In 1984, Kim Jong Il performed fifty-five official activities, including guidance tours, five times more than his total of eleven in 1983 (see table below). In addition, Kim Il Sung made an extended tour of the Soviet Union and East European countries between May 16 and July 1, 1984, indicating his willingness to entrust the nation to his son. Given the fact that no decision can be made without Kim Il Sung's consent, his six-week absence attested to the junior Kim's consolidated status. Reports suggested strongly that he, rather than his aging father, was now in charge of day-to-day administration. In short, prior to 1984, Kim Jong Il was depicted primarily as a theoretician or interpreter of *chuch'e* ideology and Kim Il Sung thought. Since 1984, he has become the instructor, architect, and planner for practical matters such as agricultural production and the development of light industry.<sup>30</sup>

Kim Jong Il's authority was also extended to international affairs. In August 1984, *Rodong Shinmun* carried an article by him denouncing

**KIM JONG IL'S OFFICIAL ACTIVITIES, AS REPORTED  
IN *RODONG SHINMUN*: MAY 1981-NOVEMBER 1985**

| Year | Administrative<br>Guidance | Other Official<br>Appearances | Total |
|------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|-------|
| 1981 | 4                          | 4                             | 8     |
| 1982 | 2                          | 7                             | 9     |
| 1983 | 3                          | 8                             | 11    |
| 1984 | 10                         | 45                            | 55    |
| 1985 | 3                          | 25                            | 28    |

SOURCES: *Rodong Shinmun*; *Pukhan Ch'ongram 1983-1985*, p. 38; *Pukhan Kaeyo*.

NOTE: *Pukhan Ch'ongram* explains that the main reason for the reduced activities in 1985 was Kim Jong Il's increased involvement in day-to-day management rather than official appearances.

<sup>30</sup>*Rodong Shinmun*, July 12, 1984, p. 3.

Western imperialism.<sup>31</sup> The article signaled Kim Jong Il's increasing role in North Korean foreign policy, including issues of North Korean policy toward the United States. He had never previously publicly expressed any ideas or attitudes on North Korean foreign policy; Kim Il Sung had always been the sole authority on such issues. Certainly, Kim Jong Il echoed his father's usual criticism and denunciation of the United States, with no noticeable shift in content or emphasis. However, the simple fact that he was now regarded as an authority on foreign policy issues was an important development. He had reached the stage of equal jurisdiction with his father, and a co-leadership had been created.

Retrospectively, the November 1983 bombing incident in Rangoon in which seventeen South Korean government officials were killed was another possible indication of Kim Jong Il's enhanced responsibility in the foreign policy area. A South Korean couple (actress Ch'oe Un-hui and director Shin Sang-ok), who were kidnapped to North Korea in 1978 from Hong Kong and escaped in March 1986 through Vienna, recently claimed that Kim Jong Il was the architect of the Rangoon incident.<sup>32</sup> While the kidnapped couple were in Pyongyang, the junior Kim apparently told them about the incident. If this story is true, it means that he was in charge of a project with important foreign policy implications. Moreover, Kim Jong Il seemed to have achieved sufficient authority and power that even after the failure of his attempt to kill the South Korean president and the revelation of North Korean involvement, his reputation survived. International criticism clearly did not hurt his status, for his power and influence remained intact. In a sense, he even strengthened his rhetoric by denouncing the U.S. and South Korean response as a scheme to downgrade the North Korean polity. The Rangoon bombing may have created latent criticism of his handling of such events, but on the surface it did not affect his power base.

More evidence of Kim Jong Il's enhanced role in the foreign policy sector appeared in the last quarter of 1984. Even though he was still most often mentioned in domestic-affairs articles, the frequency with which his name appeared in foreign-affairs articles visibly increased. Also, at this time, the long-used code name Party Center virtually disappeared from the North Korean media.

Several new developments since 1984 suggest a further intensification of the image-building campaign for Kim Jong Il. In 1985, the name of the *Kim Il Sung Thought Institute* was changed to the *Kim Il*

<sup>31</sup>*Rodong Shinmun*, August 28, 1984, p. 6.

<sup>32</sup>*FBIS, East Asia*, February 16, 1988, p. 18.

*Sung and Kim Jong Il Thought Institute*.<sup>33</sup> In the same year, the North Korean authorities held a special sports event on Mt. Paektu, the North Koreans' most sacred mountain, to demonstrate the loyalty of North Korean youth to their young leader.

The intensified image-building campaign not only enhanced Kim Jong Il's influence, but also revealed his claim to political authority. In September 1986, he delivered the usual guidelines in front of the workers at an automobile plant:

At a general automobile plant, Comrade Kim Jong Il, the member of the Standing Committee of the Politburo and Secretary of the Central Committee of the KWP, instructed us in the following guidelines: "Loyalty to our party and the Supreme Leader can be demonstrated only by strict observation of the teachings of the Supreme Leader and Party guidelines as well as absolute obedience toward the authorities of the Supreme Leader and the *Party Center*."<sup>34</sup>

What stands out in this statement is Kim Jong Il's expectation that the North Korean citizenry would obey his authority as well as his father's. In the past, Kim Jong Il had insisted that the North Korean people be loyal to Kim Il Sung, but now he also demanded absolute obedience toward himself. This demand could not have been stated publicly unless he felt secure enough to expect that it would be obeyed. It was a minor revelation, but certainly a significant one.

In a *Rodong Shinmun* editorial on March 30, 1987, a significant disclosure appeared concerning Kim Jong Il's official title in the North Korean government: He was referred to as *suwi* [top rank]. Kim's power base is in the KWP, not in the government administration, and the editorial declared, "the battle ability and authority of our party is directly connected with the extraordinary leadership of our leader, who is *on the top of the Party*."<sup>35</sup> The *Dictionary of Political Terminologies*, published in North Korea, defines the *suryong* [supreme leader] as "the highest authority and leader of the KWP whose authority cannot be harmed by anything else and the most trusted leader among the people." The same dictionary defines *suwi* as "the first position in rank and gradation."<sup>36</sup> Given the dual authority structure in recent years, granting Kim Jong Il the title of *suwi* may have been a North Korean scheme to preserve Kim Il Sung's unchallengeable authority while creating a new leadership image for his son.

<sup>33</sup>*Pukhan Ch'ongram 1983-1985*.

<sup>34</sup>*Rodong Shinmun*, September 9, 1986, p. 1 (italics added).

<sup>35</sup>*Rodong Shinmun*, March 30, 1987, Editorial.

<sup>36</sup>Yu Wan-sik, "Pukhan e taehayo" [On North Korea], Internal Report of the National Unification Board of the Republic of Korea, The National Unification Board, Seoul, 1987, p. 2.

The personality cult of Kim Jong Il has almost reached the level of that of Kim Il Sung, as reflected in the rhetoric of the media. In the past, Kim Il Sung was depicted as the "sun" and the "star" to lead the Korean people. Kim Jong Il became a "guiding star" as early as 1973. In 1977, he was depicted as the "future sun" and the "blessed sunshine." He has not yet been called the "sun," but "future sun" and "blessed sunshine" indicate that he is the future leader, following his father. In recent years, the father and the son have been given the titles of the "sun" and the "moon." Descriptions of Kim Jong Il's leadership ability and brilliance have included such terms as "respectful," "great," "extraordinary," "excellent," "beloved," "dear," and "the best."<sup>37</sup> The symbolism of the personality cult reached new heights on February 16, 1988, Kim Jong Il's 46th birthday. According to the North Korean media, a Japanese botanist dedicated the results of more than 20 years of horticultural effort to Kim Jong Il by naming a flower belonging to the begonia family in his honor.<sup>38</sup> Yet again, Kim was following his father, for whom a "Kimilsung flower"—a rare species of orchid with dark purplish pink buds—had been brought from Indonesia in 1975.

#### IMAGE BUILDING: THE KIM JONG IL CULT

Much of Kim Jong Il's rise to power seems to have occurred without him performing outstanding deeds or obtaining extensive experience. It is therefore useful to review how the government media have built a leadership image and created a personality cult for him.

The image building occurred in three stages: The first stage lasted from 1973 (the Seventh Plenum of the Fifth Congress) to the Sixth Congress in October 1980. The second stage continued from 1980 to 1984. The third stage has lasted since the last quarter of 1984 up to the present.

During the first stage, *Rodong Shinmun* used only the code name Party Center to refer to Kim Jong Il. Morgan E. Clippinger offers three hypotheses to explain why a code name was used for such a long period of time: The first hypothesis is that Kim Il Sung did not want foreign countries to be aware of his regime's decision to choose Kim Jong Il as his successor, because adverse foreign reactions to a hereditary succession in a socialist state could jeopardize the regime's security. The second hypothesis is that the use of a code name was a conscious and careful effort to avoid North Korean domestic criticism of

<sup>37</sup>*Pukhan Ch'ongram 1963-1985*, p. 39; *Rodong Shinmun*, 1973-1981.

<sup>38</sup>*Vantage Point*, February 1988, pp. 24-25.



Kim Jong Il by giving him a mysterious identification. The third hypothesis is based on Kim Il Sung's desire for undivided authority and admiration. The appearance of Kim Jong Il's name in the media could have created a competing line of authority, pushing Kim Il Sung into a semi-retired status.<sup>39</sup>

The second stage of the campaign marked the formal recognition of Kim Jong Il as the designated successor to his father. This period was characterized by the mixed use of the code name and his real name. The code name was used in describing his guidance activities and instructions for economic, administrative, and cultural affairs, whereas his real name appeared mostly in connection with international developments and foreign visitors to North Korea. The frequent appearance of Kim Jong Il's name in relation to external rather than domestic events strongly implied that North Korean authorities were still very nervous about potential domestic resistance to his ascension to power. By giving him media support in foreign-related articles, particularly in complimentary articles written by foreigners, the authorities were hoping to legitimize Kim Jong Il's status.<sup>40</sup>

In this period also, the media acknowledged Kim Jong Il's co-leadership with his father by printing his name in boldface type in *Rodong Shinmun*. This small but important change, which occurred first in October 1981, may have indicated that Kim Il Sung had to "sell" his son's prospective role to other old cadres. The unprecedented personality cult of Kim Il Sung, which did not allow anyone other than himself to be in the media limelight, now allowed the junior Kim equal public adulation. This new status signified Kim Il Sung's readiness to transfer power to his son.

The third stage has been a period for intensifying the Kim Jong Il cult as well as extending his rule and influence over North Korean society and politics. Kim Jong Il's working guidance tour reports, for example, increased remarkably in *Rodong Shinmun*, whereas Kim Il Sung's appearances in the media began to decrease. This tendency had already begun in 1983, but 1984 marked a turning point in terms of frequency and variety of content for Kim Jong Il's guidance tours. In the past, his *silmu chido* [practical administrative guidance, the same as on-the-spot guidance] had been confined primarily to ideological matters such as how to elevate revolutionary zeal among workers or the best way to express loyalty to the Great Leader, particularly among workers and students. In contrast, in 1984, he visited a wide range of facilities, from food factories to shipbuilding yards, giving workers

<sup>39</sup>Clippinger, "Kim Chong-il in the North Korean Mass Media," pp. 307-308.

<sup>40</sup>Jae Kyu Park, *North Korea Under Kim Jong Il: The Problems and Prospects*, p. 84.

more concrete *pangch'im* [guidelines] for carrying out production tasks more effectively.<sup>41</sup> Descriptions of these guidance tours in *Rodong Shinmun* contained expressions like "benevolent," "wise," "energetic," and "revolutionary," the same words used to describe Kim Il Sung's guidance tours in the past.

### WHY KIM JONG IL? THE IDEOLOGICAL RATIONALE

Why did Kim Il Sung decide to undertake a long image-building campaign to support his son, rather than let someone with more seniority and experience be chosen by the party to take the reins when he releases them? That would certainly have been the more natural course for succession in a communist country.

The principal rationale behind the idea of hereditary succession derives from the desire to perpetuate the ongoing revolution from generation to generation. *Chuch'e*, the basis of revolutionary ideology in North Korea, has not yet been realized, thus necessitating continued efforts toward self-reliance by the younger generation. Kim Jong Il leads this younger generation, whose primary task is to continue the revolution. A second, so-called "leadership theory," is presented as a supporting theory of succession. According to this theory, leaders are not merely made, but rather are born of "leadership lineage." Until the revolution is complete, the people must be led by the party, which must be led by a bona fide leader.<sup>42</sup> In November 1982, Kim Jong Il defined the basics of leadership theory:

The Korean Workers' Party is an undefeatable revolutionary party armed firmly with the unique thought of the supreme leader. . . . The supreme leader of our party is the very person who executes the organizational will of the party and whose thought leads the party. . . . The leader is the highest authority of the party and his leadership is the party leadership.<sup>43</sup>

Since Kim Jong Il belongs to the younger generation, his youth has become an asset in his effort to become Kim Il Sung's successor. But why should Kim Jong Il among so many young North Korean cadres be the one to lead the young generation? To answer this question, the

<sup>41</sup>*Rodong Shinmun*, April 2, 12, 21, 1984, and May 3, 22, 1984.

<sup>42</sup>*The People's Korea*, July 25, 1987, p. 4.

<sup>43</sup>*Kulloja*, November 1982, pp. 14-21.

theory of "revolutionary family" becomes important for both the Kim family cult and the legitimization of a father-to-son succession.<sup>44</sup>

In the North Korean media, the Kim Il Sung lineage has been described as one of dedicated and illustrious revolutionaries and strong-willed nationalists who fought against foreign intruders. Kim Il Sung's great-grandfather was allegedly the frontline commander who destroyed the American warship *General Sherman* with a single shot, and his grandparents are said to have supported their children's anti-Japanese resistance. Kim Il Sung's father has been described as a patriotic revolutionary who struggled against Japanese imperialism, and his mother is praised as a woman pioneer who helped liberate the Korean people from imperialist bondage. Kim Il Sung's deceased first wife (the mother of Kim Jong Il) has been depicted as a comrade-partner who assisted the Great Leader during the anti-Japanese movement period. In a word, Kim Jong Il is considered not a random but rather a legitimate choice if one accepts the embellished stories about the honorable revolutionary blood flowing through the family veins.<sup>45</sup>

There is yet another, more personal consideration in Kim Il Sung's choice of his son. As noted earlier, it is generally believed that Kim Il Sung was very nervous about the de-Stalinization and de-Maoization that took place in the aftermath of the deaths of Stalin and Mao. Kim Il Sung has had an almost fanatic personality cult built around him as the great leader-father of the North Koreans, and he does not want his image to be destroyed after his death. Rather, he is eager to eternalize the leader-father image through generations. It is therefore prudent to choose his son, whose filial piety should protect the elder Kim's image even after his death.

To summarize, the North Korean media claim legitimacy for Kim Jong Il as his father's successor for five reasons: First, the socialist revolution must be carried out from generation to generation until the *chuch'e* ideology and Kim Il Sung thought are firmly rooted. Second, the successor to the Great Leader must come from the post-liberation generation. Third, the successor must be a man of leadership quality, similar to the Great Leader in his thought, character, and benevolence. Fourth, the successor must be loyal to the Great Leader and willing to preserve Kim Il Sung thought. Fifth, the successor must be a true revolutionary, who will serve as a vanguard for the *chuch'e* ideology.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>44</sup>Chong-Sik Lee, "Evolution of the Korean Workers' Party and the Rise of Kim Chong-il," in Robert A. Scalapino and Jun-Yop Kim (eds.), *North Korea Today*, The Center for Korean Studies, Berkeley, 1983, pp. 65-80.

<sup>45</sup>*Pukhan Ch'ongram 1945-1982*, pp. 75-77.

<sup>46</sup>Jae Kyu Park, *North Korea under Kim Jong Il: The Problems and Prospects*, pp. 61-62.

### III. KIM JONG IL: THE MAN

To understand the prospects for the leadership succession of Kim Jong Il, it is necessary to understand something of the person, as distinguished from the image that has been arduously built for him. What kind of person is Kim Jong Il in terms of personality and ability? And what kinds of policies and strategies does he appear to support?

#### PERSONALITY AND MANAGERIAL ABILITY

Only limited information is available on Kim Jong Il's personality, traits, and lifestyle. Numerous North Korean and Chosoren sources praise him as a man of unlimited capability and brilliance, but these are intended simply to promote him as the legitimate successor to Kim Il Sung. None of these sources directly reveal his personality. However, a two-volume diary written by the kidnapped Korean film stars Ch'oe Un-hi and Shin Sang-ok, in which Kim Jong Il is closely observed, has recently been published. This diary sheds new light on the junior Kim by vividly describing his favorite things, habits, and lifestyle.

According to Ch'oe and Shin, Kim Jong Il displays a strong willingness to experiment with whatever he envisions as worthwhile. To be more precise, boldness and swift execution of his ideas must be considered his most salient personality traits. Some would call this impulsiveness. The exact degree of his influence on the inner workings of North Korean political decisionmaking is not known, and it is impossible to determine the kinds of political decisions over which he wields power. However, it seems highly likely that he oversaw two notorious incidents: (1) the kidnapping of Ch'oe Un-hi and Shin Sang-ok from Hong Kong to Pyongyang in 1978, and (2) the bombing of a Korean Air flight in 1987. The Rangoon incident also seems to follow his pattern, but it is excluded here because of lack of solid evidence.

Ch'oe Un-hi describes Kim Jong Il as both her kidnapper and her supporter while she was detained in North Korea from January 11, 1978, until her escape on March 13, 1986. Kim Jong Il ordered the *chip-haeng* [literally "execution," but here meaning "abduction"] to bring Ch'oe to make propaganda movies and also to promote the film

industry in North Korea.<sup>1</sup> Ch'oe's colleague and former husband, Shin Sang-ok, was abducted several months later for the same reasons. The most striking aspect of this abduction case is Kim Jong Il's belief that kidnapping foreign nationals for his cause was an appropriate and necessary act. The connotation of the word *chip-haeng* is "resolute and prompt action with no adjustment or hesitancy." In the *Great Korean Dictionary*, *chip-haeng* is defined as the realization of a legal decision or punishment by law.<sup>2</sup> By describing his action with the word *chip-haeng*, Kim Jong Il delivered an image of a person who actualizes plans into daring action. The probable impact of this actualization may never have been thought out. Even if Kim Jong Il did consider the impact, he evidently ignored it.

During the five years following the abduction of Ch'oe and Shin, Kim Jong Il did not use them as film experts, focusing instead on careful indoctrination and training prior to giving them a chance to work in North Korea. Beginning in October 1983, the two worked together for the film industry with the full support of Kim Jong Il. During this period, they managed to tape a discussion between him and themselves, as well as to observe his almost extravagant use of the national budget to make propaganda films for a country that suffers from severe economic problems.

The second incident that illustrated Kim's daring or impulsiveness was the bombing of KAL 858 on November 29, 1987. According to a female North Korean agent, her orders originated with an instruction signed by Kim Jong Il:

The party has decided to bomb a Korean Air plane with the aim of blocking the South Korean side's maneuvers to fabricate the two Koreas and also to host the 1988 Olympics on its own. . . . This project must be accomplished without fail and must be kept in absolute secrecy.<sup>3</sup>

The same perspective can be applied to this case as to the 1978 abduction. First, Kim Jong Il ordered the execution of a plan that would harm innocent civilians. Second, he again seemed to ignore the potential impact of the action, especially the impact of a potential failure. The naiveté and recklessness of the plan are reminiscent of a third-rate espionage movie, causing one to doubt the maturity of the planner.

<sup>1</sup>*Ch'oe Un-hi and Shin Sang-ok: Choguk-un cho-hanul cho-molli* [Ch'oe Un-hi and Shin Sang-ok: My Fatherland Is Far Away Beyond the Sky], Pacific Artist Corporation, Vol. II, 1988, p. 99 (translated by the author).

<sup>2</sup>*Kuk-o tae-sajon* [Great Korean Dictionary], Yi Hui-sung (ed.), Minjung Publication, Ltd., 1982 Edition, p. 3529.

<sup>3</sup>FBIS, East Asia, January 19, 1988, p. 17.

These two extraordinary cases suggest the hypothesis that Kim Jong Il's "bold and forceful" execution style reflects his personality. If this inference is true, it raises very worrisome questions about his eagerness to take risks and his inability to assess consequences.

Ch'oe also notes in her diary that she often received unanticipated calls from Kim Jong Il, sometimes even in the early morning, which may be indicative of an unpredictable or even impulsive style.<sup>4</sup> That is, he may like to actualize his ideas as quickly as possible. A possible analogy can be found in the numerous "speed battles" that he sponsors, through which he tries to reach economic targets quickly. Despite the fact that North Korea is in need of some fundamental economic reforms, the junior Kim tries to solve the existing problems by increasing the speed to complete tasks and by motivating the masses to work harder. Although there are certain merits in this management style, it must be recognized that radical steps to mobilize people to engage in economic construction can cause social disorder. In July 1987, Kim Jong Il taught the laborers at the Ch'ongjin Steel Refinery Plant, "not to hesitate and [to] push vigorously until the completion of goals."<sup>5</sup> To decide and execute ideas in one bold step and to forcefully pursue them until the fulfillment of intended goals describes Kim Jong Il's approach to the economy as well as his performance in the two cases of state-sponsored terrorism.

On the other hand, an impressive example of Kim Jong Il's awareness of the failings of the North Korean system is also encountered in the diary. In his first formal interview with Ch'oe and Shin on October 18, 1983, at his office, Kim Jong Il explained that North Korean artists and filmmakers were smart enough to waste state property by lazily pursuing their work, precisely because they all knew their rice bowl was an iron bowl (i.e., guaranteed employment) as long as they created acceptable works for the state. In his own statement about this problem, he lamented the weaknesses of socialism:

Everything is paid by the government in the state-sponsored budget system. . . . In taking pictures of several movie scenes, actors and actresses are using the whole roll of film. . . . For only one cut, they may waste a hundred meters of film. This is our reality. [laughter] Well, we, the state pay everything. They are rewarded by the state. Therefore, if their works meet the basic standard of our ideology or art, or are useful for textbook purposes, the Bureau of Art and Culture will say it is alright in an administrative sense. So our budget is in the red. . . . But, the government still pays for the red-budget work.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Ch'oe Un-hi and Shin sang-ok, Vol. I, pp. 282-284.

<sup>5</sup>Rodong Shinmun, July 7, 1987, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup>Ch'oe Un-hi and Shin Sang-ok, Vol. II, p. 112.

In the same interview, he also acknowledged the dilemma of opening North Korean society. He emphasized that this opening could occur only after the completion of education of the younger generation to be strong in their national sentiment and pride. However, he also admitted major difficulties and problems because North Korea's technology and level of development were falling behind those of the other socialist countries. Interestingly, although he acknowledged the advancement of Chinese, Russian, and American films, he made no mention of South Korean films. He also quoted the remarks of Hu Yaobang, then the Chinese Communist Party Secretary General, who apparently noted the similar dilemma that China faced after it began economic modernization. Hu said, "When the opening started, the youth learned first not the needed technology but how to grow hair and mustaches. They did not consolidate their values, only blindly followed Western things."<sup>7</sup>

Thus, Kim Jong Il demonstrated some understanding of national problems and an awareness of the dilemmas that North Korea faces. This discovery of his ability to understand national problems is a pleasant surprise. The combination of rational awareness and the irrational attitude revealed by his recklessness and irresponsibility suggests that the future directions of North Korean politics and the North Korean economy are still up in the air, with few solid clues about their ultimate direction.

### POLICIES AND STRATEGIES

Kim Jong Il faces two challenges to consolidation of his position as the new leader. The first challenge is to overcome the appearance of inferiority to his father, who has ruled the country during the past four decades with enormous power and authority. The junior Kim has to present himself as a leader with qualifications comparable to his father's. The second challenge is to find a way to accommodate *chuch'e* ideology to effective strategies that can deal with domestic and international pressures and with serious economic difficulties. Kim Jong Il cannot abandon the *chuch'e* ideology, precisely because as Kim Il Sung's successor his designated revolutionary task is to carry the torch of this ideology from generation to generation until it is solidly rooted in North Korea. However, he must sooner or later prove that he is an able leader who can solve North Korea's mounting economic problems. His dilemma is clear-cut: Without either abandoning

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 107.

*chuch'e* ideology or changing its meaning greatly, from its original "self-reliance" concept to a more open and receptive definition such as "independent yet interdependent," the prospects for improving North Korea's economic performance—let alone closing the burgeoning gap between the economic power of the North and the South—will prove impossible.<sup>8</sup>

Evidence of Kim Jong Il's independent strategies as a national leader must be sought after 1984, when he appeared to have consolidated his status in the KWP apparatus. Before 1984, he conducted many administrative guidance tours and participated in other national occasions at which he presented advice and ideas, but his speeches on these occasions were generally confined to repetition of the Kim Il Sung line. Only since 1984 has Kim Jong Il begun to raise his own voice and take the independent posture of a leader during guidance tours and other public meetings. Examination of the two most crucial political activities of Kim Jong Il—administrative guidance and the management of the TRT movement—contribute greatly to understanding his leadership strategy and style.

#### Administrative Guidance

During the past several decades, Kim Il Sung and his followers have repeatedly emphasized at plants, factories, collective farms, and mines that the Supreme Leader personifies wise leadership. Kim Jong Il began his formal guidance tours in May 1981. From the beginning, however, his teaching was called *silmu chido* [practical administrative guidance or working guidance], as distinguished from his father's *hyonji chido* [on-the-spot guidance].

The junior Kim's frequent accompaniment by powerful figures of the North Korean government and the party on his guidance tours displays a conspicuous grandiosity. On his first official administrative guidance tour, to the Myohyang Mountain construction site in May 1981, he was accompanied by Kim Il Sung, Defense Minister O Chin-u, and Party Secretaries Ho Dam and Kim Chung-rin. Since then, his usual retinue has included O Chin-u, former Chief of the General Staff of the Korean People's Army O Kuk-yol, Ho Dam, Party Secretary Hwang Chang-yop, former Premier Kang Song-san, and Vice Premier Yon Hyong-muk. Occasionally, Vice President Im Ch'un-ch'u (now deceased), the principal advocate of inheriting the revolutionary traditions and a staunch supporter of Kim Jong Il, joined the group. The

<sup>8</sup>A similar idea was expressed in Inkuk Kang, "Tojon patnun sesup ch'eje chong'ongsong-kwa kwonwi chojak" [The Legitimacy of Hereditary Succession and Authority Creation on Trial], *Pukhan*, July 1985, pp. 74-75.



prime reasons for this grand style were to display Kim Jong Il's power over these prominent, high-ranking cadres and to give the public an impression that he was the unchallengeable successor to Kim Il Sung.

Three themes have been emphasized repeatedly in Kim Jong Il's guidance during the past six years: (1) reforming people's political consciousness to be reborn socialists, (2) technological development, and (3) increasing production. In a word, ideological education and economic achievement are the two main targets in Kim Jong Il's various guidelines. In emphasizing the importance of educating people with the *chuch'e* ideology and Kim Il Sung thought, he demands absolute loyalty to the Great Leader and 100 percent adherence to these thoughts. The younger generation receives special attention in his guidance, for they are the future revolutionaries who will transform North Korea from a socialist to a communist state. Kim Jong Il's guidance on practical matters such as technological improvement and increasing production seems to be neither innovative nor pragmatic, because he considers ideological redressing to be the best remedy for economic problems. For example, at a chemical fertilizer plant in October 1986, he stated: "If people are energized with ideology, they will feel fighting spirit and revolutionary zeal, which in turn will make them achieve a revolution and a miracle."<sup>9</sup> The statement implies that the most crucial factor in achieving goals is neither technology nor better facilities, but ideological education and revolutionary zeal.

The junior Kim's guidelines, particularly on economic matters, do not differ substantially from those advocated by his father. The banality of an emphasis on human reform, ideological indoctrination, and nonmaterial incentives to produce more and to work harder is found in almost all of the public statements made by Kim Jong Il. However, one should not dismiss two developments since 1984 in his economic guidance. The first development is the multiplicity of his visits to various places, ranging from construction project sites to consumer goods factories. In 1984, during the month of April alone, he visited a food factory, a road construction site, a shipbuilding dock, and a recently built theater. At each place, he made more concrete suggestions for quality improvement, speedy accomplishment of economic targets, and effective use of raw materials.<sup>10</sup>

The second development is the subtle departure from Kim Il Sung's guidance in terms of rhetoric and emphasis. In the years before 1984, Kim Jong Il's administrative guidance, by and large, resembled that of Kim Il Sung, echoing past guidelines on ideology, hard work, and

<sup>9</sup>Rodong Shinmun, October 28, 1986, p. 4.

<sup>10</sup>Rodong Shinmun, April 1-30, 1984.

pursuit of leadership goals. Since 1984, however, Kim Jong Il has begun to use more distinctive expressions depicting his own management style. Detailed instructions on how to improve service and store management at various marketplaces and stores in Pyongyang on May 2, 1984, were one such noticeable departure. The differences in guidance between Kim Jong Il and Kim Il Sung suggest that the son has taken a step as an administrative leader, while Kim Il Sung remains a more distant inspector and evaluator.<sup>11</sup> On the day following the statement on store management, the editors of *Rodong Shinmun* emphasized the importance of proper financing and supply of seeds and fertilizer for farmers as an ideal means to accomplish agricultural production goals, citing the junior Kim's writing.<sup>12</sup> Once again, attention to details for improving the agricultural sector distinguished Kim Jong Il's guidance from that of his father, who has tended to make blanket statements (e.g., farmers must take care of harvested grains, otherwise the crops will rot quickly).

In addition to these two developments, Kim Jong Il seems to have his own favorite set of expressions to describe work attitude. Both the senior and the junior Kim have certainly shown their concern for worker discipline and speedy goal achievement, but Kim Jong Il's new phrases encompass a simple demand to work hard. According to him, workers must push forward "aggressively" and "forcefully" until they complete given tasks. People can fulfill revolutionary goals only "with dynamic force and bravery without timid hesitation." Further, setting up "grand plans" and "aspiring to high goals" are necessary for accomplishing targets. In Kim Jong Il's rhetoric to sweating workers, there is no patience with timidity, hesitation, and lukewarm attitudes. The only valuable concepts are "marching forward" and "forcefully going ahead" toward economic goals.<sup>13</sup> By imposing these values upon people, he presents the image of a vigorous and youthful leader who will lead the country in the future. Equally important, Kim Jong Il's leadership endeavors suggest a potential source of trouble ahead if he attempts to achieve goals too hastily or irrationally.

At various guidance tours, Kim Jong Il's guidelines have displayed an interesting combination of irrationality and rationality. His irrational and somewhat reckless guidelines include (1) the importance of political consciousness as the basis for socialist reconstruction, (2) the limitless power of ideology to transform people loyal to the leader, and

<sup>11</sup>*Rodong Shinmun*, May 2, 1984, p. 1.

<sup>12</sup>*Rodong Shinmun*, May 3, 1984, Editorial.

<sup>13</sup>*Rodong Shinmun*, January 9, 1987, p. 1.

(3) miraculous achievement without appropriate investment in facilities and technology.

Overemphasis on the importance of ideology and political consciousness as the basis of achievement will not likely prove to be a solution to North Korea's economic difficulties. People simply cannot work hard for long periods of time with poor nutrition and poor facilities. A North Korean family who sailed out of a North Korean port and eventually reached South Korea claimed at a press meeting that mothers often have to go hungry so that they can give some of their food to their children.<sup>14</sup> In addition, it was reported on May 1, 1987, that North Korea's May Day celebration in Pyongyang "turned into a riot when some people began to chant slogans demanding fair food rationing and reduced forced labor."<sup>15</sup>

The increasing frequency of Kim Jong Il's administrative guidance (from four tours in 1981 to ten in 1984) has served to enhance his visibility as leader.<sup>16</sup> He also appears to have succeeded in presenting himself as an experienced administrator through these guidance tours. However, Kim Jong Il's most important claim to power and status comes from his management of the TRT movement, through which he executes enormous authority as planner and organizer. The TRT movement has been the main channel for his control over the party and warrants separate discussion.

### The TRT Movement

The TRT teams are groups of from twenty to fifty party cadres, government economic organization staff members, students, technicians, and scientists, all relatively young, who are dispatched to factories, plants, mines, and collective farms to expedite the "three revolutions"—ideological, technological, and cultural. The total number of team members is not known, but it is estimated to be about 46,000.<sup>17</sup> The principal responsibility of the TRT members was set forth by Kim Il Sung in his speech "On the Forceful Pursuit of the Three Revolutions in the Industrial Sector" on February 10, 1973, where TRT members were depicted as vanguards for accomplishing the three revolutions by lending their leadership and expertise to workers and farmers. According to the senior Kim, they must serve as models for the masses in their political consciousness and ideological readiness

<sup>14</sup>*Vantage Point*, April 1987, p. 14.

<sup>15</sup>*North Korea News*, August 31, 1987, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup>*Pukhan Kaeryo*, p. 70.

<sup>17</sup>*Pukhan Yong'o Haewi* [The Definition of North Korean Terms], The National Unification Board, Seoul, 1982, pp. 150-151; *North Korea News*, February 22, 1988, p. 4.

in order to ignite people's enthusiasm to revolutionize every segment of society, thus assuring North Korea's technological and economic development.<sup>18</sup>

Since the dispatch of the first TRT members to light industrial factories in the autumn of 1972 by Kim Il Sung himself, the TRT movement has been credited with destroying diehard bourgeois mentality, conservatism, individualism, and bureaucratism. The teams' contribution to the three revolutions was highly praised in *Rodong Shinmun* on July 20, 1982:

Thanks to the activities by the TRT members, there has been functional improvement both in party organizations and government economic organizations. There has been a fundamental change in workers' thought and working style, which created a new environment to successfully complete party policies among party members and workers.<sup>19</sup>

This statement suggests that the dual purposes of the TRT—to transform people's thought and to stimulate the economy—have been partially achieved. However, one must not overlook another important aspect of the movement, which may have been even more significant: The TRT units are special function groups to “facilitate the gradual takeover of the party machine by Kim Jong Il and the younger generation.”<sup>20</sup> Thus TRT members are not only the vanguards for revolutionizing society, but also a force for the emergence of Kim Jong Il as a new leader. They are, in other words, smoothing the road for his control over the party. The TRT movement was created by Kim Il Sung, but it has been directed by the junior Kim, who has used it to consolidate his power and establish his leadership among younger generations.

Kim Jong Il would have had far more difficulty taking control over the KWP if he had not utilized the TRT members as special squads loyal to him and the party. The structural characteristics of the TRT, which supposedly reports directly to the Politburo of the Central Committee, have enabled Kim Jong Il to attain personal influence and power over the KWP. According to *Rodong Shinmun*, the TRT members have been under the direct supervision of the Party Center, with primary responsibility to guard the party.<sup>21</sup> From 1973 up to the present, Kim Jong Il has tried to prove his leadership ability by using the youthful TRT members to break through North Korea's economic difficulties and to elevate people's political consciousness.

<sup>18</sup>*Rodong Shinmun*, October 3, 1986, p. 2.

<sup>19</sup>*Rodong Shinmun*, July 20, 1982.

<sup>20</sup>Kwon-sang Park, “North Korea Under Kim Chong-Il,” p. 64.

<sup>21</sup>*Rodong Shinmun*, February 19, 1980.

Various sources in the South Korean and Japanese media have reported that TRT youth who sought to impose Kim Jong Il's guidelines met strong resistance from North Korean workers and underprivileged non-party members. Given the fact that the TRT units can wield authority over local party membership and can collect information for Kim Jong Il,<sup>22</sup> it is not surprising that senior cadres and the members of other party organizations increasingly dislike this special group. Nonetheless, the TRT teams have developed a unique mechanism for transmitting instructions from Kim Jong Il to millions of citizens on the bottom rungs of society's ladder, serving as the channel of his rule over the KWP and the society.

Kim Jong Il seems to have gained three important advantages by using the TRT system. First, he has established a network for acquiring information. The TRT can penetrate every segment of society under the justification of loyalty to the Party Center and the Great Leader.<sup>23</sup> This information network is an essential factor in the junior Kim's power consolidation. Second, Kim Jong Il must have obtained some managerial experience while dealing with the TRT youth. Given his limited experience as an administrator and his lack of an official position in the government structure, management of the TRT certainly gave him opportunities to practice leadership. Third, the junior Kim introduced his image as a leader by becoming the administrator for the TRT movement. As early as 1971, Kim Il emphasized that the torch of revolutions must be carried on by younger generations. Kim Jong Il's influence may elicit strong support for his future leadership from the young party cadres and students who belong to the TRT units.

One negative message that the TRT movement transmits to people is that Kim and his TRT members are violating the norm of impartiality, a supposedly important norm in an egalitarian socialist state. At guidance tours and other public appearances, Kim Jong Il advocates the eradication of class distinctions. Yet the TRT units are the ministry of this distinction, because they are not even under the regular jurisdiction of the party organizations. As long as the TRT squads behave as special leaders for the three revolutions, the call for an egalitarian society is empty rhetoric.

Kim Jong Il's leadership of the TRT movement also exhibits an ambivalence in his approach to technological revolution, one of the three revolutions. He reportedly demands that technological revolution

<sup>22</sup>*Rodong Shinmun*, July 20, 1982.

<sup>23</sup>Suk Ryul Yu, "Political Succession in North Korea," *Korea and World Affairs*, Vol. 6, No. 4, Winter 1982, pp. 577-579.

be achieved in the shortest time as the basis for socialist reconstruction. By emphasizing technological revolution, he presents an image of a pragmatic leader rather than a *chuch'e* advocate. Kang Suk Rhee, however, asserts that it is greatly misleading to perceive Kim Jong Il as a pragmatist simply because of his advocacy of technological revolution.<sup>24</sup> Even as the junior Kim emphasizes the technological revolution, he also asserts the importance of political thought reform and mass-line as means for technological revolution.

Kim Jong Il's continuing emphasis on the spirit of mass-line and revolutionary zeal clearly suggests that his advocacy of technological revolution may be largely lip service. On the surface, he presents himself as an advocate of pragmatic reform. His speeches call for vigorous, reform-minded leadership, a different kind of leadership than that offered by his father. However, his favorite method of thought reform suggests that the TRT movement may be little more than a repetition of the irrational approach of the PRC's Great Leap Forward or the later Red Guard Movement, in which appropriate material incentives, practical measures for economic development, and sound political and educational approaches were absent or neglected. The junior Kim rose as the "beloved leader" for young party cadres of the TRT movement. He became the center of the movement and his leadership seemed to be strongly cemented among the youth. However, it is still very doubtful that the TRT movement has had a substantial positive impact on the North Korean economy. Except for several cases of successful "speed battles," there is little evidence of success in dealing with North Korea's practical problems. To a certain extent, one can even presume that Kim Jong Il's advocacy of technological revolution and the support of the TRT movement may well turn out to be a self-built trap that could destroy his legitimacy, precisely because the economic stakes are so high. If Kim Jong Il's ability to carry out economic tasks proves to be inadequate, his hard-earned legitimacy will be called into question.

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<sup>24</sup>Kang Suk Rhee, "North Korea's Pragmatism—A Turning Point?" *Asian Survey*, Vol. 27, No. 8, August 1987, p. 900.

## IV. THE SUCCESSION TO KIM IL SUNG

### PROBLEMS OF HEREDITARY SUCCESSION

#### Signs of Resistance to Kim Jong Il

The persistent image-building of Kim Jong Il seems to have largely achieved the original goal of securing his status in the North Korean power structure. At least on the surface, Kim Jong Il stands firmly in the media limelight and receives adulation as the nation's co-leader, side by side with Kim Il Sung.

Yet doubts persist that the father-to-son succession will proceed smoothly. An annual "loyalty festival period," extending from Kim Jong Il's birthday on February 16 to Kim Il Sung's birthday on April 15, has been observed since 1976, when the junior Kim's birthday was declared a public holiday. During this period, all of the North Korean people are supposed to engage in demonstrations of their total loyalty and dedication to the two leaders. Even in a monolithic and totalitarian society, such incessant emphasis on preservation of absolute power and authority suggests recurring doubts about the loyalty and obedience of the populace.

For example, on February 17, 1987, the day after Kim Jong Il's 45th birthday, the North Korean Children's League held a national rally at the Pyongyang Gymnasium. The most eye-catching objects at the rally were two huge banners hanging horizontally over the participants. One inscription read, "We sincerely wish for the longevity of the Great Leader Comrade Kim Il Sung." The second banner, above the first, said, "Let's follow and learn from our Dear Leader Comrade Kim Jong Il!"<sup>1</sup> The simple fact of hanging banners at a rally is nothing unusual. However, one must assess the implications of these banners as political symbols. First, the banner for Kim Jong Il signifies a formal declaration of co-leadership with his father. In the past, finding a banner other than the one dedicated to Kim Il Sung was a rarity, as the North Koreans were expected to show complete loyalty only to the Great Leader. Second, the banner for Kim Jong Il implied that his support comes from the North Korean youth. This has been the most emphasized aspect of his future leadership.

Ironically, Kim Jong Il's presumed identification with younger generations suggests that he has encountered considerable resistance from other age groups in North Korean society. Some indication of the

<sup>1</sup>*Rodong Shinmun*, February 17, 1987, p. 3.

forces arrayed against him is found in his frequently quoted lecture "On Some Problems of Education in the *Chuch'e* Idea," which was given to the senior officials of the Central Committee of the KWP on July 15 1986.<sup>2</sup> (The lecture was not published in *Rodong Shinmun* until a year later.) Even before this lecture, Kim Jong Il had strongly denounced "resistant elements existing in the society against the present political system" in a lecture broadcast through the Korean Central Broadcasting Station (KCBS) on May 18, 1986.<sup>3</sup>

Some parts of the July 1986 lecture highlighted problems among the senior cadres in relation to their *chuch'e* ideology and Kim Il Sung thought. Kim Jong Il criticized many incorrect ideas allegedly held by them, emphasizing the importance of the *chuch'e* idea and correct leadership to build a communist society. In his lecture, the emphasis was on *chuch'e* as the monolithic ideology of the KWP, and cadres' neglect of absolute and unconditional adherence to this principle:

Some of our officials, however, still do not understand clearly that the *chuch'e* idea is the monolithic ideology of our party. That is why they regard our party's *chuch'e* idea as something contrary to Marxism-Leninism or misunderstand that class education or the education in the revolutionary tradition is one thing, and that education in the *chuch'e* idea is another.

An analysis of the shortcomings revealed recently in party life shows that our officials still lack the correct understanding of the subject of the revolution. In particular, they are not firm in regarding the leader as the center of a socio-political organism. Because they lack the firm revolutionary determination to share life and death, wealth and woe, with the party with the leader at its center, they fail in their adherence to the principles of absoluteness and unconditionality in the implementation of the great leader's instructions and the party policies, and waver, affected by defeatism and acting from expediency in their work when they are faced with difficulties.<sup>4</sup>

This statement suggests that entrenched senior cadres constitute the core group resisting Kim Jong Il. This group distinguishes the *chuch'e* idea from Marxism-Leninism, which is an indirect implication that some policies chosen by the leader are not genuinely in line with the tenets of Marxism-Leninism. One of these policies is assuredly the hereditary succession. Thus, Kim Jong Il points out that *chuch'e* is "the monolithic ideology of the party," which "inherits all the

<sup>2</sup>*The People's Korea*, July 25, 1987, pp. 2-5.

<sup>3</sup>Suk Ryul Yu, *Kim Jong Il-e taehan chohang seryok*, [Resisting Force Against Kim Jong Il], Research Report #47, The Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security, Seoul, 1986, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup>*The People's Korea*, July 25, 1987, pp. 3-5.



revolutionary principles of Marxism-Leninism." By emphasizing the *chajusong* [autonomy or independence] inherent in the *chuch'e* idea, he is able to rationalize the leader's choice of the father-to-son succession and also to shield North Korea from foreign criticism, especially from the PRC and the Soviet Union.

There have been other indications that strongly hint at domestic resistance to Kim Jong Il's governance, especially since May 1986. Throughout May 1986, *Rodong Shinmun* often quoted Kim Jong Il to the effect that an urgent task of the society as a whole was to strengthen the party and the revolutionary movement through intensive education on party policies and guidelines. At the same time, the principal task of all revolutionaries was defined as the absolute implementation of the guidelines of *hyokmyong-ui h'yangdoja* [the guide for the revolution], who is none other than Kim Jong Il.<sup>5</sup> Kim Il Sung also emphasized the importance of party unity and consolidation: "With the Party Center [Kim Jong Il] as the core, the unity and solidarity of the party must be guarded like our eyeball. . . . All the phenomena that damage party unity should be destroyed."<sup>6</sup> Finally, in various party publications and media reports, there has been an increasing demand for unconditional loyalty to the Great Leader and the monolithic party ideology. The junior Kim states that the most necessary requirement for socialist construction is absolute loyalty to the leader. According to Kim Jong Il's pronouncements, even propaganda and agitation will not work effectively if people are not totally loyal to the leader.<sup>7</sup>

Constant calls for loyalty, correct understanding of the *chuch'e* idea, and absolute adherence to the party ideology and party unity under the leadership of the Great Leader and Dear Leader are indirect but suggestive indications of resistance within the party against Kim Jong Il. They are also an inevitable outcome of the manufactured charisma and legitimacy that surround his ascension to top leadership. The senior officials of the party may have struggled to silently swallow the un-Marxist-Leninist option of hereditary succession until they experienced Kim Jong Il's governance as the co-leader. By 1985, however, there were signs that their patience may have been exhausted. At that time, both Kims began to express their growing anxiety about the wrongdoings of senior cadres.

Personnel changes in the North Korean military, made on April 13, 1985, are suggestive of this tendency.<sup>8</sup> On that day, O Chin-u and

<sup>5</sup>*Rodong Shinmun*, May 19, 23, 1986, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup>*Kim Il Sung Kanguiroh* [The Lecture of Kim Il Sung], Pyongyang, June 1, 1986.

<sup>7</sup>*Rodong Shinmun*, February 19, 1987, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup>*Pukhan Ch'ongram 1983-1985*, p. 39.

O Kuk-yol were promoted, respectively, from general to marshal and from lieutenant general to general. Both were known to be among the most faithful supporters of the junior Kim. In addition to these two, seven other lieutenant generals were also on the list for promotion to general. According to a South Korean source, only two years before, between January and April 1983, more than 500 North Korean Air Force and Navy officers had been purged. The primary reason for the massive purge was said to be their dissatisfaction with and criticism of Kim Jong Il.<sup>9</sup> In this context, the 1985 promotions can be seen as an effort to replace "resisting" elements and give Kim Jong Il's supporters even more power and position.

As of 1987, resistance elements seemed to have been at least submerged. On the surface, Kim Jong Il has been behaving like a legitimate leader with full power given to him to rule the society. Kim Il Sung stands in the background with a leisurely attitude toward day-to-day national administration. At occasional on-the-spot guidance tours, the senior Kim appears in elegant attire, with panama hat and sunglasses. He looks like a man in semi-retirement rather than a hard-working leader. By contrast, the junior Kim presents the image of a concerned and diligent leader, who is often described by the media as a leader with wholehearted dedication to his people. As long as the media depict him this way and dissatisfied voices are silenced, it will be very difficult to discover any sign of resisting elements in North Korean society. Nonetheless, the regime's persistent efforts to educate the people to be absolutely loyal to their leader tacitly demonstrate that Kim Jong Il is neither another Kim Il Sung nor a leader enjoying absolute acceptance of his power.

### Supporters and Opponents

Many North Korea watchers have looked for signs of power conflicts since the rise of Kim Jong Il.<sup>10</sup> Of course, no such conflicts can be

<sup>9</sup>*Naewoe T'ongshin*, No. 354, October 21, 1983.

<sup>10</sup>Important articles in English dealing with Kim Jong Il are (in chronological order): Chong-Sik Lee, "Evolution of the Korean Worker's Party and the Rise of Kim Chong-Il," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 22, No. 5, May 1982, pp. 434-448; Kwon-sang Park, "North Korea Under Kim Chong-il," *Journal of Northeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2, June 1982, pp. 57, 58; Suk Ryul Yu, "Political Succession in North Korea," *Korea and World Affairs*, Vol. 6, No. 4, Winter 1982, pp. 565-594; Hak-joon Kim, "The Rise of Kim Chong-il: Implications for North Korea's Internal and External Policies in the 1980's," *Journal of Northeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 2, June 1983, pp. 81-92; Jae Kyu Park, "North Korea under Kim Jong Il," pp. 56-102; Suk Ryul Yu, "Kim Jong Il-ui taedu-wa chonggwon sunggye" [The Rise of Kim Jong Il and Political Succession], *The Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 2, July 1987, pp. 61-115; Kang Suk Rhee, "North Korea's Pragmatism a Turning Point?" *Asian Survey*, Vol. 27, No. 8, August 1987, pp. 885-902;

confirmed from North Korean sources. The North Korean media effectively filter out material that might suggest any negative image, including reports of conflict within the leadership. However, even acknowledging the limits imposed on discussions of sensitive political topics, subtle changes can be observed in relation to the power structure under the co-leadership of the Kims.

Suk Ryul Yu has suggested that the power base of the junior Kim comprises four elements: the KWP, the military, the graduates of the Mangyongdae Revolutionary Institute, and the TRT members, who may be the strongest element.<sup>11</sup> This means that other, older generations can be categorized as the first group of potential opponents to him.

Calls to restructure the composition of power appeared in the North Korean media as early as 1980, during the Sixth Congress, when Kim Jong Il made his official political debut as a member of the Party Secretariat, the Politburo, and the Military Commission. Further confirmation of these changes appeared in 1983 at the Eighth Plenum of the Sixth Central Committee of the KWP. Through the three-day meeting from November 29 to December 1, the members of the committee spent most of their time on two topics: economic development and the reorganization of the party machine. The latter had been discussed since June 1983 as an important issue, strongly suggesting the need to shuffle personnel within the party to enhance the power base of the junior Kim.<sup>12</sup> As a result of the meeting, Ho Dam, the first candidate member of the Politburo, was promoted to regular member of the Politburo. At the same time, Party Secretary An Sung-Hak and Vice Premiers Hong Song-ryong and Kim Pok-sin became candidate members of the Politburo. Given the fact that Ho Dam is the husband of Kim Il Sung's cousin and a faithful supporter of the junior Kim, there was no doubt that his promotion was intended to add to Kim Jong Il's power base. The three candidate members of the Politburo are all well-known economic bureaucrats whose promotion implies special attention to economic policies. Their promotion may thus reflect Kim Jong Il's concern for the maintenance of his status, precisely because failure in economic policy would jeopardize his position in the party.

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Kong Dan Oh-Hassig, "Kim Jong Il as a New Leader: His Management Style," unpublished conference paper presented to the Third Annual Conference of the Council on U.S.-Korean Security Studies in Seoul, Korea, November 30-December 2, 1987, pp. 1-13.

<sup>11</sup>Suk Ryul Yu, "Kim Jong Il-ui taedu-wa chonggwon sunggye" [The Rise of Kim Jong Il and Political Succession], pp. 81-85.

<sup>12</sup>*Rodong Shinmun*, November 30-December 5, 1983.

Since the Sixth Congress of the KWP in 1980, several reorganizations of party and government personnel have been carried out. By June 1985, numerous new faces had surfaced, and supporters of Kim Jong Il had been promoted to higher and more influential positions. A list of these people illustrates that a careful effort was given to strengthening the "Kim Jong Il system." People like Vice President Im Ch'un-ch'u, Foreign Minister Kim Yong-nam, Party Secretariat member Ho Dam, First Vice Premier Yon Hyong-muk, and Candidate Member of the Politburo Kim Chung-rin were promoted to their present status under the special patronage of the junior Kim. These appointments were primarily in the area of political and diplomatic affairs. In the military sector, O Chin-u became the Minister of the People's Armed Forces (equivalent to Secretary of Defense in the United States), the most prominent position in the North Korean military. Following him, O Kuk-yol, Chief of the General Staff of the Korean People's Army, Paek Hak-rim, Public Security Minister, Kim Tu-nam, Head of the Military Department of the KWP, and Kim Kang-hwan, Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the Korean People's Army, became the core of the Kim Jong Il system in the military sector. Premier Kang Song-san and Vice Premiers Hong Song-ryong, Kim Pok-sin, and An Sung-hak formed the power base for the junior Kim in the government apparatus.<sup>13</sup>

By October 1987, however, some of these individuals had lost their positions or had been demoted. Kang Song-san came down from the premiership, even though he was posted to Secretary of the Party Central Committee, probably a more influential position, in which he works more closely with Kim Jong Il. Kim Chung-rin, the Party Secretary in charge of anti-South Korean operations since the late 1960s, lost his membership in the Party Secretariat, presumably as a demotion following the Rangoon bombing incident of October 1983. Only in June 1987 did he resume a double post as President of the North Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) and Chairman of the Public Information Commission of the Administration Council.<sup>14</sup>

The constant reshuffling of membership within Kim Jong Il's supporting camp suggests two things: (1) the unsettled atmosphere surrounding the junior Kim's succession, and (2) persistent efforts to achieve economic goals through personnel changes. Since October 1980, eleven people have risen to vice-premiership and then been replaced. The average longevity has been less than a year; An Sung-hak lasted only 70 days, from November 19, 1985, to February 4, 1986.

<sup>13</sup>*Pukhan Ch'ongram* 1983-1985, p. 39.

<sup>14</sup>*North Korea News*, June 15, 1987, pp. 4-5.

First Vice Premier Ch'oe Yong-rim, who lost his post in October 1985, has not appeared at any public meeting since then. An interesting coincidence of An and Ch'oe's demotion is that both were in charge of economic affairs. An Sung-hak was appointed as Vice Premier and Chairman of the Chemical and Light Industry Committee, and Ch'oe Yong-rim was supposedly responsible for the Second Seven-Year Plan, which was a failure.<sup>15</sup>

The priority given to economic policy, one result of which has been to consolidate the power base of the junior Kim, is also evident in the personnel arrangements of the party machine. Pak Nam-gi was appointed Party Secretary in charge of economic affairs at the Tenth Plenum of the Sixth Central Committee in December 1984, because he had been considered one of Kim Jong Il's supporters. Many other new faces were also added to the membership of the Central Committee, whose main mission was presumably the successful implementation of the economic plans that Kim Jong Il wanted to fulfill as a crucial factor in consolidating his power.<sup>16</sup>

It has proven more difficult to determine who is opposed to Kim Jong Il than to identify his supporters, primarily because any efforts to resist his consolidation of power are under constant and systematic surveillance. According to an annual report by Amnesty International, 1,096 people were sent into detention in North Korea between January and April 1983 because of their resistance to the Kim Il Sung-Kim Jong Il system.<sup>17</sup>

*Rodong Shinmun* and other official publications also offer hints of resistance. Kim Jong Il's own rhetoric and various photographs in these sources in particular enable us to hypothesize opposition groups.

As noted above, the first potential resistance group is likely to be the older generations, particularly those in their fifties and sixties. These generations probably anticipated that they might succeed the Kim Il Sung generation to power, and the hereditary succession not only dashed their expectations but also subordinated them to a much younger leadership, which creates problems in a society where seniority receives special honor. Even under socialism, Confucian precepts undoubtedly persist in North Korea. The parent concept strongly prevails, as indicated, for example, by the famous expression "Great Leader, Father Kim Il Sung." The junior Kim cannot be certain that his leadership will be accepted naturally by these older generations.

<sup>15</sup>*Pukhan Ch'ongram 1963-1965*, pp. 33-37.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 41.

Two unusual aspects of Kim Jong Il's personal style revealed in *Rodong Shinmun* deserve mention in this context. One is the extraordinarily casual, informal clothing that he now prefers to formal suits or the Maoist uniform which had been the official wardrobe for Kim Il Sung and the junior Kim for a long time. In an official photo of Kim Il Sung's departure for Moscow on October 22, 1986, Kim Jong Il appeared in his usual jumpsuit jacket and casual pants.<sup>18</sup> Induk Kang, a long-time North Korea observer and two-time Pyongyang visitor, who has met with Kim Il Sung, suggests that this informality and "rudeness" has not been accepted positively by older generations. The intermediate generation between Kim Il Sung and the junior Kim particularly rejects this informality as an indication of the junior Kim's disrespect toward senior comrades.<sup>19</sup>

Another aspect of Kim Jong Il's style is his usage of plain-style Korean in his instructions for solving technology and production problems. In a *Rodong Shinmun* report on socialist construction carried out in the Kimch'aek Steel Refinery, Kim Jong Il's address was quoted as follows:

We must concentrate on solving issues like technology problems and production increases which are the basics for maintaining a self-reliant *chuch'e* economy for the masses. For this purpose we must accomplish people's economy, relying on our own raw material, fuel, and energy.<sup>20</sup>

Kim Jong Il used *handa* [must do], an informal plain-style ending, instead of *hamnida*, a formal, polite-style ending which has been regularly used during the past several decades by Kim Il Sung. On the following day, the junior Kim once again was quoted in a *Rodong Shinmun* report on the world situation, this time using plain-style Korean in denouncing the role of the United States in Latin America. The junior Kim used *hago itta* [someone is doing] in place of *hago issumnida* in the denunciation:

The American imperialists are intervening militarily against the Latin American people who are fighting for freedom and independence. They are strengthening their military threat and conspiracy to destroy progressive liberal Latin American countries.<sup>21</sup>

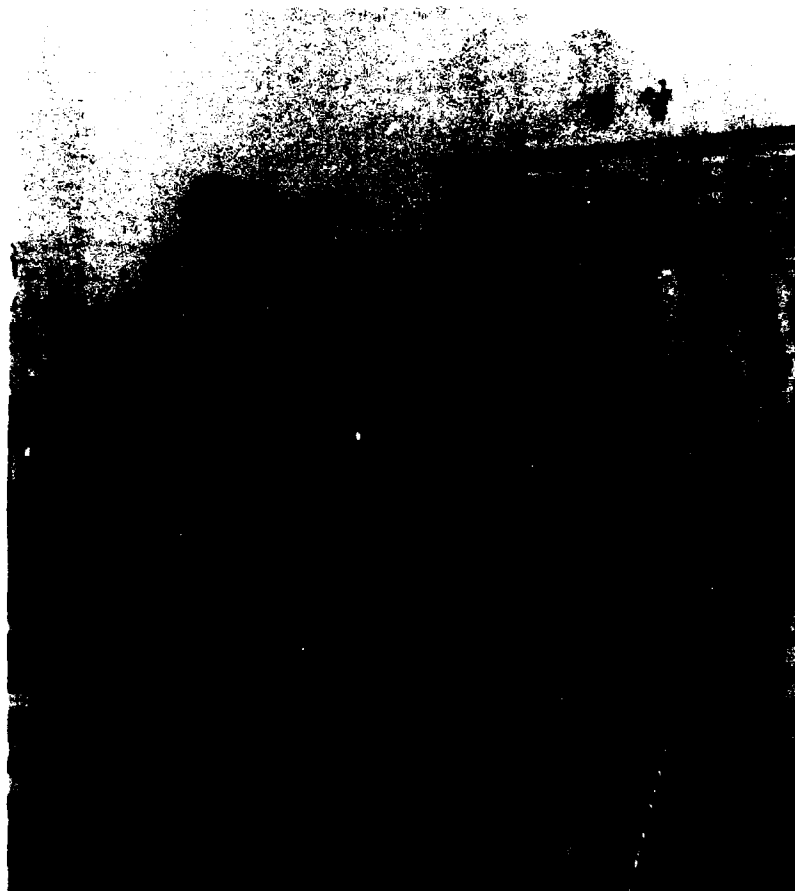
One of the most distinctive aspects of the Korean language is a strict gradation of style determined by the relative positions of speaker

<sup>18</sup>*Rodong Shinmun*, October 23, 1986, p. 1.

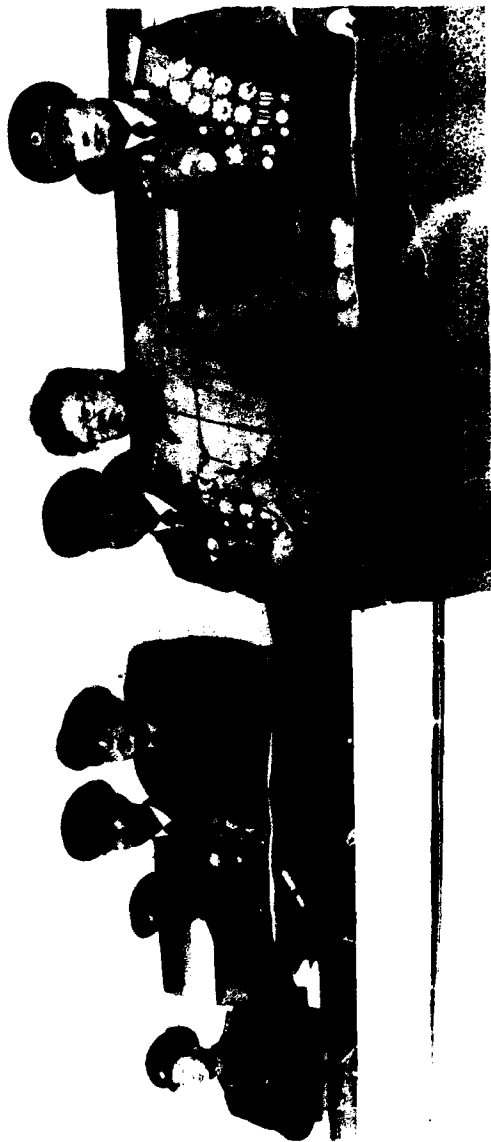
<sup>19</sup>Author's interview with Induk Kang, Seoul, October 23, 1987.

<sup>20</sup>*Rodong Shinmun*, November 23, 1986, p. 1.

<sup>21</sup>*Rodong Shinmun*, November 24, 1986, p. 6.



Kim Jong Il at Pyongyang airport seeing Kim Il Sung off  
to the Soviet Union, October 22, 1986  
(SOURCE: *Rodong Shinmun*, October 23, 1986)



Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il inspecting the Korean People's Army (KPA)  
on its 55th anniversary, April 27, 1987  
(SOURCE: *Rodong Shinmun*, April 28, 1987)



and listener. When one talks with someone who is his senior in both age and status, one should use the formal polite style; occasionally, the informal polite style may be used, depending on the degree of intimacy. The plain style used by the junior Kim, e.g., *handa* and *hago itta*, is to be used only between peer-friends, siblings, and children under their mid-teens. Kim Jong Il's conscious attempt at casual usage or his inadvertant usage of plain style in his public speeches therefore violates two rules: (1) the Kim Il Sung tradition, which sticks to formal polite style, and (2) the public expectation that the leader should speak in the formal polite style with dignity and formality. It is reasonable to assume that the insolence manifested in Kim Jong Il's rhetoric must have offended senior administrators and managers, who expect to be addressed with *hamnida* and *hago issumnida*.

The second group of opponents are within Kim Il Sung's own family. This group is presumably spearheaded by his stepmother Kim Song-ae, a Central Committee member of the KWP and the Chairman of the Korean Democratic Women's League. Kim Song-ae formerly appeared in various public meetings as the first lady of North Korea, entertaining visiting foreign guests and accompanying wives, but since December 4, 1983, she has been submerged under Kim Jong Il's influence and has not appeared in any published formal photograph with Kim Il Sung.<sup>22</sup> Another indication of Kim Jong Il's rise and the concomitant fall of Kim Song-ae can be found in the gradation of party members of the Central Committee of the KWP. In the Fifth Congress of the KWP in 1970, she was ranked 67th in the Central Committee. But in the Sixth Congress of 1980, when Kim Jong Il rose to the second most powerful position in the KWP, her rank dropped sharply, to 105th.<sup>23</sup>

Kim Song-ae has five children from her marriage to Kim Il Sung. Among the five children, Kim Pyung-il (36 years old) has been favored by Kim Il Sung, a fact that has allegedly annoyed Kim Jong Il. It has been reported that Kim Jong Il delivered a special instruction to high-ranking cadres in charge of internal security to carefully watch this *kyothaji muri* [side branch of the flock].<sup>24</sup> This step was undoubtedly undertaken to prevent Kim Song-ae and Kim Jong Il's five step-siblings from forming a power base against the junior Kim. Given the fact that stepmother and stepchild do not appear to like each other, Kim Song-ae, as spouse of the Great Leader, certainly represents a potential opposition force.

<sup>22</sup>*Rodong Shinmun*, December 4, 1983, p. 1.

<sup>23</sup>Suk Ryul Yu, "Kim Jong Il-ui taedu-wa chonggwon sunggye," p. 98.

<sup>24</sup>*Naeuoe Tongsin*, February 4, 1983.

The third group of potential opponents is centered in the North Korean military, particularly among field commanders in their fifties. These commanders have resisted the junior Kim, who has not had field experience in the Korean People's Army, in contrast to Kim Il Sung's active career as a military commander.<sup>26</sup> Kim Jong Il apparently has been keenly aware of this situation, because he has imposed many changes in the army in order to establish a power base within the military. As already noted, the most noticeable military development since his rise to power at the Sixth Congress was the promotion of many young officers to higher rank. The most important promotion was that of O Kuk-yol, Kim Jong Il's Mangyongdae Institute classmate, to be the Chief of the General Staff of the Korean People's Army in September 1979.<sup>26</sup> In addition, large-scale personnel changes within the military took place at the Sixth Congress. The primary objective was to shift the power from older-generation division commanders to younger-generation officers. The minimum age limits for company, battalion, and regiment commander were set aside, allowing the appointment of numerous officers between the ages of 32 and 40.<sup>27</sup> Presumably, as the younger-generation leader, Kim Jong Il can command his junior military leaders when he inherits his father's role as commander-in-chief.

Behind all these efforts to eliminate Kim Jong Il's opponents, Kim Il Sung himself seems to have paid close attention to the military, which is the weakest career field for his son. Increasingly, the senior and junior Kims appear together at military parades and other formal occasions to display the legitimacy of the junior Kim as the military's future leader. A grandiose formal picture taken for the two Kims' official visit to the Ninth Division of the People's Armed Forces of the DPRK on April 25, 1984, silently hinted that the son would be the next commander. Defense Minister O Chin-u and O Kuk-yol escorted the co-leaders, symbolizing the junior Kim's leadership over the military.<sup>28</sup>

A systematic monitoring of potential opponents within the military seems to have achieved a basic housecleaning of resistance to Kim Jong Il. However, there have been reports by three sources outside of North Korea that suggest the existence of a conflict between him and one group of military officers. According to these reports, the officers

<sup>26</sup>Albrecht Lein, a West German scholar who visited Pyongyang in May 1980, reported his impression that field commanders in their fifties did not support Kim Jong Il. (*Dong-a Ilbo*, February 14, 1983.)

<sup>26</sup>*Pukhan Kaeryo*, p. 392.

<sup>27</sup>Suk Ryul Yu, "Kim Jong Il-ui taedu-wa," p. 89.

<sup>28</sup>*Rodong Shinmun*, April 26, 1984, p. 1.

attempted unsuccessfully to remove him, and when physically confronted they escaped to China.<sup>29</sup> However, deeper analysis based on speculative accounts is not warranted at this point. It is more reasonable to look for clues provided by efforts to consolidate the junior Kim's relationship with the military.

Two clues demonstrating his control over the military deserve examination. The first is the reorganization of the Administration Council *Chongmuwon* [the equivalent of a cabinet] in April 1982 at the Seventh Plenum of the Sixth Central Committee, in which the Ministry of People's Armed Forces and the Ministry of Public Security began to come under the jurisdiction of the KWP, rather than under the Administration Council.<sup>30</sup> These ministries are the two most important organizations in terms of control over the military, so it is fairly clear why Kim Jong Il is almost always accompanied by O Chin-u on his administrative guidance tours. By subordinating the two ministries under the control of the KWP, the leadership of which is in the hands of the two Kims, Kim Jong Il intended to put the military under his influence. The second indication (previously noted) is the 1985 promotion to full general of nine lieutenant generals who are considered advocates of the succession of Kim Jong Il to his father. Both Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il still pay special attention to the military in order to upgrade and consolidate the latter's influence in the army.

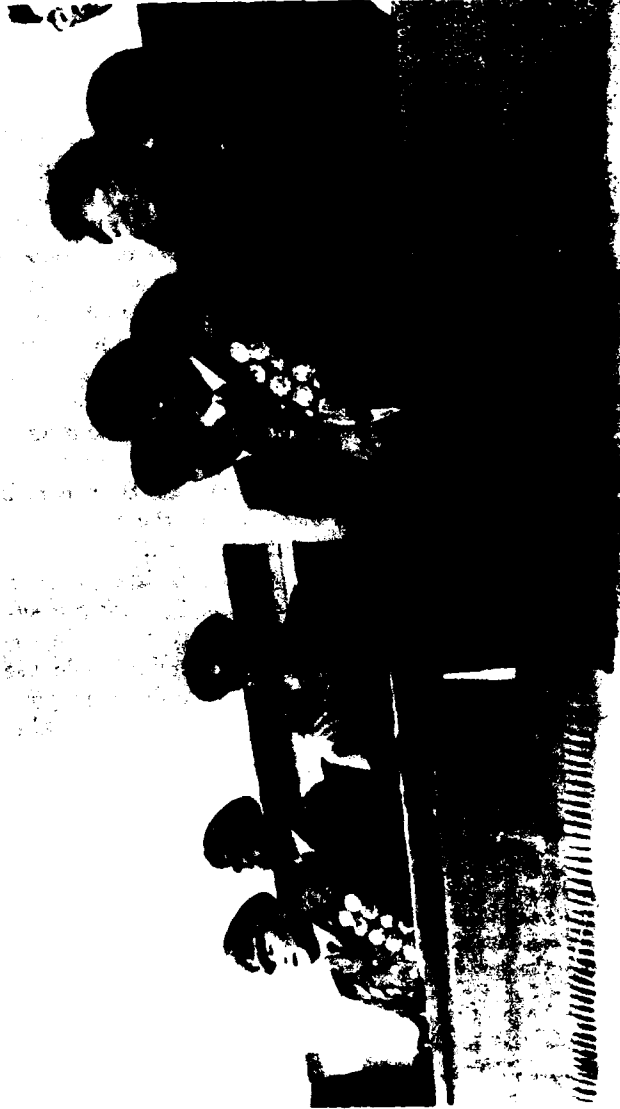
Finally, the fourth potential resistance group consists of over-exploited workers who have been forced into exhausting labor projects led by the TRT members. The workers themselves are outside the leadership, but ambitious opponents within the leadership could use the discontent of this dissatisfied group to attack Kim Jong Il's position. A recent article from Naewoe press (in Seoul) reported the May Day 1987 riot in Pyongyang as follows:

A large civil disturbance and shooting incident which caused 10 deaths and 30 casualties occurred on May 1 in Pyongyang, a Japanese source who wanted to remain anonymous revealed recently. . . . He said he was told by a North Korean official that a May Day celebration in the evening turned into a riot when some people began to chant slogans *demanding fair food rationing and reduced forced labor*. The rioting was subdued only after the police intervened and began shooting into the crowds.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> *Pukhan Ch'ongram 1963-1985*, p. 41.

<sup>30</sup> Kwon Won, "Pukhan-ui chongch'i hwan'gyong-kwa kwonryuk sesup ihu kwaje" [The Political Environment of North Korea and the Tasks After the Hereditary Succession], *Pukhan*, September 1984, p. 87.

<sup>31</sup> *North Korea News*, August 31, 1987, pp. 1-2 (italics added).



Kim Il Sung (seated) and Kim Jong Il inspecting the KPA on its 52nd anniversary, April 25, 1984; between the two Kims is General O Kuk-yol, then Chief of the General Staff of the KPA (SOURCE: *Rodong Shinmun*, April 26, 1984)

Outside observers of North Korea have been told many times about chronic shortages of food, clothing, and other daily necessities. In recent years, the proud TRT youth have urged workers to engage in prolonged labor and construction projects to complete tasks as fast as possible. Special "shock brigades" have been organized to complete construction projects, increasingly driving the workers to the point of exhaustion. The May Day incident, which has not been independently verified, illustrates the North Korean people's complaints and dissatisfaction. Ultimately, Kim Jong Il has to prove his capability to handle these social problems if he wants to ensure his longevity in power.

An extraordinary and mysterious incident occurred in November 1986, which invites analysis in relation to potential opponents of the two-Kim system. On November 17, the South Korean Defense Ministry announced that Kim Il Sung had been assassinated in a shooting incident. News of Kim's death had been heard over North Korean loudspeaker broadcasts at the demilitarized zone which are aimed at South Korean border guards and village residents. On the basis of these broadcasts, the South Korean government declared a state of emergency, even though news of Kim's "death" did not appear in other North Korean media such as Radio Pyongyang or the Korean Central News Agency. When contacted, the North Korean ambassador to Beijing denied that there was any truth to the report, as did a spokesperson for Chosoren in Tokyo.<sup>32</sup>

That the report of Kim's death was an exaggeration was confirmed by Kim's appearance at the Pyongyang airport to greet Mongolian President Jambyn Batmonh on the following day, November 18. At the airport, Kim was reported to look normal and in good health.

The South Korean authorities say that atmospheric conditions prevented border guards from making any tape recordings of the announcements. The following statements were written down by people at the border:<sup>33</sup>

16 November, 13:35 (0435 GMT): In a solemn voice, a male announcer lists Kim Il Sung's achievements from the 1940s to the 1980s.

16 November, 19:52 (1052 GMT): The President was praised as follows: "Great Leader Kim Il Sung has flown away like water in the river. He is now a fallen leaf. General Kim, the great man, we miss you. We call out once more: The great leader of the nation."

<sup>32</sup> *Asahi Shimbun*, November 18, 1986, p. 1.

<sup>33</sup> *FBIS, Asia and Pacific*, November 24, 1986, pp. E4-E5.

16 November, 22:45 (1345 GMT): A North Korean flag is seen flying at half mast in Kijung-dong, the North Korean propaganda village north of Panmunjom. The flag is photographed.

17 November, 01:32 (1632 GMT): "General Kim Il Sung has died." Music is played, followed by a poem praising Kim.

17 November, 07:00 (2200 GMT): "Rodong Shinmun reported in its November 16 issue that great leader General Kim Il Sung has died."

17 November, 13:25 (0425 GMT): "Comrade Kim Jong Il, who has succeeded to the fame and reputation of great Comrade Kim Il Sung."

17 November, 18:40 (0940 GMT): Kim Jong Il was praised and called "President."

17 November, 19:45 (1045 GMT): "According to the central broadcasting station [in Pyongyang], Comrade Kim Il Sung has died and Comrade Kim Jong Il has taken over."

18 November, 06:00 (2100 GMT): "Defense Minister O Chin-u has taken over all power . . . the Korean people are actively supporting him."

18 November, 08:00 (2300 GMT): "A mutiny broke out in a North Korean regiment in the central sector. As a result, 29 died . . ."

18 November, 08:45 (2345 GMT): "Do not be deceived by the death of Kim Il Sung, the leader . . ."

Three interpretations of this strange incident come to mind. The first interpretation is that there was indeed an attempted coup in North Korea, with O Chin-u involved not as a conspirator, but as one of the targets of the coup. The coup was unsuccessful, but coup participants who had gained control of the loudspeakers near the DMZ were not aware of this because of faulty communication lines, and they broadcast the death announcements according to their original plan.

The second interpretation is more complicated. Perhaps there was a coup attempt, or at least a strong challenge from within the North Korean power structure, against the Kims' authority. The challenge failed, but Kim Il Sung astutely decided to use the attempt to smoke out his opposition. He had the death announcements broadcast at the DMZ, far from the capital so the populace would not be alarmed and so the opponents could get rumors of his death, but no clear confirmation.

The third interpretation is that this was a North Korean exercise in psychological warfare. The broadcasts were aimed at the South

Koreans for the primary purpose of examining their reaction toward a leadership change in the North.<sup>34</sup>

It seems useless to speculate much further on the meaning of Kim's death announcement. The second interpretation, that it showed Kim Il Sung's concern about domestic opposition, seems at least as plausible as the other two interpretations.

### Summary

Regardless of the authenticity of speculations about the junior Kim's legitimacy and popularity, it is clear that the North Korean regime is not totally monolithic. Covert, but divided, opinions almost certainly exist. Moreover, Kim Jong Il's opposition forces appear to be broad and diverse in their affiliation and disposition. Young and old, cadres and noncadres, pragmatists and ideologues, these opponents also seem to share one common theme: The junior Kim is the leader's son, not the leader's successor. To counter his critics and these opposition forces, the junior Kim must immediately begin to demonstrate leadership ability by achieving success in reaching North Korea's economic goals.

## PROSPECTS FOR HEREDITARY SUCCESSION

### The Post-Kim Il Sung Era

The necessary groundwork for a hereditary succession seemed to be complete as of the end of 1987, although this does not necessarily mean that all resisting elements and criticisms have been eradicated. The division of reign and rule between father and son implies that the Great Leader himself is ready to hand over the position of strongman to his son. However, when and how a formal political succession will be executed still remains a question. Most observers agree that the current power structure and national policies of North Korea will remain largely intact for the duration of Kim Il Sung's life. Major changes, however, may occur in the aftermath of his demise. Therefore, it is important to consider possible leadership conflict in the post-Kim Il Sung era.

The timing of Kim Il Sung's demise will be a crucial factor in determining the characteristics of the post-Kim Il Sung era, because his longevity can dictate different scenarios with regard to political succes-

<sup>34</sup>FBIS, Asia and Pacific, November 21, 1986, p. E1.

sion. If his demise occurs unexpectedly, say before 1990,<sup>35</sup> two outcomes are possible. The first scenario envisions the formation of a small ruling group spearheaded by Kim Jong Il. Members of the oligarchy leadership will be well-known Kim Jong Il supporters, such as O Chin-u and Kim Yong-nam.<sup>36</sup> It is difficult to predict whether the oligarchy will be able to weather a rough transition period after Kim Il Sung's death, but it is certain that Kim Jong Il and other members will try to eliminate all of their opponents as quickly as possible. The second scenario is somewhat similar to the first. In it, Kim Jong Il takes a tough line to consolidate his regime, independent of a collective leadership. He might order a nationwide purge of opposing groups, which could be harsher than Kim Il Sung's purge in the 1950s. Both scenarios suggest that the unanticipated early demise of Kim Il Sung would put Kim Jong Il into a struggle against opponents. The prime reason for predicting that Kim would need to take aggressive action is that at present, he still needs his father's strong support. His power consolidation is not complete, even though the necessary groundwork has been firmly laid. If Kim Jong Il loses the succession struggle, he may well be thrown out of power by a new group of powerholders in the aftermath of his father's death.

If Kim Il Sung survives past his 80th birthday, with his health intact or degenerating only gradually, the prospects for a smooth succession appear much better. Under Kim Il Sung's authority and protection, the junior Kim will most likely gain leadership experience. In addition, he will have had time to consolidate his power. By the time he takes over from his father, the North Korean masses and elites may have received enough education and influence that Kim Jong Il will be accepted as their national leader. He may also benefit during his father's reign by the gradual elimination of opposing groups, as well as by the enhancement of his power base.

Thus, Kim Il Sung's longevity will dictate the direction of the succession process. His timely demise after the completion of all the necessary preparations for the hereditary succession would at least make it possible for Kim Jong Il to receive the throne without much conflict. The durability of the junior Kim's regime would then depend totally on policy directions of his own choosing. To a certain extent, even the strongest and most hostile opposing groups would remain silent unless Kim Jong Il's policies appeared to be irrational and futile

<sup>35</sup>Kim Il Sung, now 76 years of age, is reported by both Eastern and Western bloc sources to be in robust health and is expected to live beyond the age of 80.

<sup>36</sup>Suk Ryul Yu, "Kim Jong Il-ui taedu-wa," p. 112. Yu cited O Chin-u, O Kuk-yol, and Im Ch'un-ch'u as the oligarchy. Im Ch'un-ch'u died in April 1988, and O Kuk-yol was demoted from 16th to 32nd in the KWP as of April 28, 1988.



for the North Korean economy and national dignity. In this context, we will examine Kim Jong Il's policy options after his father's demise.

### New Policy Directions after the Succession

**Domestic Affairs.** Suk Ryul Yu speculates that Kim Jong Il may endeavor to carry out a three-stage consolidation task after he inherits power. The task will be to obtain supporters and eliminate opponents within both the party and the military, to control with power, and to secure his legitimacy as the new leader.<sup>37</sup> One cannot be certain which stage is more important or which should precede the others. Kim Jong Il will demonstrate both continuity and discontinuity in his leadership approach. He will show continuity in terms of strict adherence to the *chuch'e* ideology and Kim Il Sung thought as the North Korean national ethos or ideology. But he may impose discontinuity or change in economic and foreign policies.

Kim Jong Il's ability to handle North Korea's economic problems will be important in determining the legitimacy of his regime. The recent revelation of the existence of North Korean "farmers' markets," a form of open-price market, proves that the state-run economy has a serious problem in supplying quality consumer goods for its people. In the farmers' markets, people are reportedly willing to pay prices five to ten times higher than the official prices, because "the quality of these home-grown, home-made products far exceeds that of products sold in the state-run stores; and due to North Korea's extremely anemic consumer-goods industry, most of these products aren't readily available."<sup>38</sup>

Kim Jong Il himself seems to have given special attention to this shortage of quality consumer products. During the past several years, he has repeatedly emphasized the need to develop light industries to improve living standards for the masses. Solving the shortages in food, consumer goods, and housing could prove critical to his foremost effort to establish a positive image of his leadership. A statement of administrative guidance to the Ryongsong Foodstuff Factory on September 7, 1987, exemplified his awareness of these problems. He noted that "production should be increased on a massive scale to satisfy the ever-growing demand of the people for foodstuffs." He also stressed that "the equipment should be put in full operation and the serial produc-

<sup>37</sup>Suk Ryul Yu, "Kim Jong Il-ui taedu-wa," p. 113.

<sup>38</sup>*Vantage Point*, October 1987, p. 13.

tion of foodstuffs ensured."<sup>39</sup> At the same time, he also may be well aware that North Korea lacks the capital that is necessary to power the wheels of economic growth. As of October 23, 1987, North Korea's interest on its debt of \$779 million appeared to be impossible to pay, so Western banks decided to freeze North Korea's assets abroad.<sup>40</sup>

Generation of hard currency earnings will be critical to reducing this debt. Expanding tourist facilities may be a small part of the solution, and Kim Jong Il has already concerned himself with such measures. According to the Korean Central Broadcasting Station (KCBS), North Korea's first golf club was opened in April 1987. The name of the club, "Pyongyang Golf Club," was given by Dear Leader Kim Jong Il, and the golf course site was also chosen by him. It is clear that the golf club was not built for the North Korean populace, but for pro-North Korean Japanese as a means to lure them to Korea.<sup>41</sup>

Kim Jong Il might take an economic line similar to that taken by the PRC, but in terms of flexibility and readiness to open its society, North Korea will be much more sluggish and reluctant than the PRC because of the constraints of *chuch'e* theory. However, increasing signs of change have already filtered through to the outside world, hinting that the dogmatic rigidity of the *chuch'e* idea may have begun to lose its mandate. Since 1984, when North Korea unveiled a joint venture law and announced its willingness to engage in economic exchanges with capitalist countries, signs of internal demand for economic reforms have been visible. For example, during 1985 and 1986, many North Korean ministerial-level officials visited the PRC, where they were reportedly briefed by their Chinese counterparts about China's ongoing economic reforms.<sup>42</sup> In November 1987, North Korean Premier Li Kun-mo made a visit to Beijing, accompanied by economic bureaucrats, including the External Economic Affairs Minister, the Deputy Foreign Trade Minister, and the Transport Commission Chairman. According to a Radio Beijing report, the talks between Li and Deng "concentrated on China's economic development for the past nine years."<sup>43</sup> The ideological purity of the *chuch'e* economy, in which even the slightest hint of dependence on foreign powers is considered to be an error, will likely persist for a while, but conflicts between reform-minded pragmatists and dogmatic ideologues will certainly grow stronger. Kim Jong Il will be under constant pressure to harmonize

<sup>39</sup>*The People's Korea*, September 19, 1987, p. 1.

<sup>40</sup>*North Korea News*, November 2, 1987, p. 5.

<sup>41</sup>*North Korea News*, May 4, 1987, p. 6.

<sup>42</sup>*Vantage Point*, January 1988, p. 16.

<sup>43</sup>*North Korea News*, November 23, 1987, p. 18.

ideology and pragmatism, increasingly separating the *chuch'e* policy from economic reforms.

It is difficult to judge how strong the pressure for reform is in North Korea. At the same time, it is even more difficult to measure the influence of the *chuch'e* ideology. If Kim Jong Il believes his power as the new Supreme Leader is secure, and if he ever recognizes that creating "red experts" is not possible in North Korea, he may not pursue any reform movement or opening of the society. Instead, a more controlled North Korean polity and centralized economy will maintain the current system, under which economic technocrats will merely serve as subordinates of the *chuch'e* regime.

Kim Jong Il clearly recognizes that North Korean technology and locally manufactured goods are inferior to foreign technology and goods. In their diary, Ch'oe and Shin describe foreign guest houses in North Korea filled with foreign manufactured goods such as Japanese electronic appliances, Western liquor, and imported interior decorations. Kim Jong Il himself is very fond of Western liquor and automobiles. And he maximizes the weaknesses of a socialist system—the state-controlled budget and the state monopoly of resources—to distribute available quality goods among his followers and potential supporters. On the surface, this kind of manipulation and state monopoly appear to be effective as long as the distributor and recipients share common goals of maintaining power conducive to their interest. But sooner or later, alienated masses and less powerful members of the power structure will actively criticize the system, demanding a share of the pie.

The succession from Kim Il Sung to Kim Jong Il itself functions as a major determinant of the economic open-door policy, precisely because the junior Kim is lacking in political contributions to the nation. Unlike his father, whose political credentials are superb, Kim Jong Il was chosen because of a biological relationship. Therefore, his performance in economic areas will be a major factor in determining his legitimacy as a national leader. Ironically, however, his role as an economic guide is constrained by his adherence to his father's *chuch'e* self-reliance doctrine. Kim Il Sung delivered a New Year's message on January 1, 1988, in which he stressed the importance of *chuch'e* in carrying out the three revolutions. This message differed greatly from that of 1987 in its emphasis on the need to stick to the *chuch'e* theory. Kim did not mention at all that there was a need for foreign technology and capital.<sup>44</sup> What is Kim Jong Il's stance at this juncture?

<sup>44</sup>North Korea News, January 11, 1988, p. 1.

Before answering this question, we must examine Kim Il Sung's message.

There are at least two possible interpretations to the 1988 message. The first is that the senior Kim deliberately stressed *chuch'e* theory in order to encourage the populace to reject dangerous capitalist cultural influences. This interpretation is based upon two possibilities: (1) that capitalist influence has had a real impact since the 1984 joint venture law, and/or (2) that there is a potential impact in the future. There have been very few joint ventures, yet the regime has been keenly concerned with maintaining *chuch'e* intact. In addition, Kim Il Sung might have felt that he must be the advocate for *chuch'e*, while his son takes responsibility for promoting an open-door policy. Simply speaking, the father may have voluntarily become the linchpin to maintain the status quo of power during the transition from the older to the younger generation.

The other interpretation is that Kim Il Sung is genuinely concerned about any tendency to dilute *chuch'e* theory. He has closely watched the Soviet movement of *glasnost* and *perestroika* as well as continuing Chinese economic reforms. For him, *chuch'e* is the only way to avoid these influences and keep North Korean society free from its neighbors' malaise.

The most plausible of these possible interpretations is that Kim Il Sung is ensuring the continued strength of the *chuch'e* idea while letting Kim Jong Il promote economic reform. The Thirteenth Plenary Session of the sixth-term Central Committee of the KWP, held from March 7 to 11, 1988, supports this interpretation. The primary item on the agenda was a discussion of the development of science and technology. Party Secretary Ch'oe Tae-bok emphasized the importance of electronics and biotechnology to achieve the "modernization of the people's economy."<sup>45</sup> The contrast between Kim Il Sung's message and this statement implies that one of them is misleading unless the technology can be developed indigenously, without foreign inputs. It is not very likely that North Korea will suddenly be able to create world-class scientists to promote science and technology. Therefore, the Thirteenth Plenary Session seems to be serious about exchanges with capitalist countries. Henceforth, the future option is for an incremental opening of the society, like that undertaken by the PRC in the early stages of its open-door policy.

Kim Jong Il's economic system will be different from his father's with regard to economic options. No matter what the circumstances are, he will gradually accept new innovations to reshape North Korea's

<sup>45</sup>North Korea News, March 21, 1988, pp. 1-2.

economy. He will have to pay more attention to the international economic system and use the overseas market to profit from North Korea's economic strengths, i.e., inexpensive labor, natural resources, and potential managerial resources. North Korea must recognize that no country can strictly adhere to an internally oriented development strategy and have a strong economy. Kim Jong Il and the younger technocrats of the regime face the difficult task of substantially remodeling the economy. The system must become more flexible and open, at the risk of Kim's political career, if he is to resolve the nation's economic issues and improve living conditions for the North Korean people. In his 1988 New Year's message Kim Il Sung himself admitted that North Korea has shortages of food, clothing, and housing.<sup>46</sup>

If Kim Jong Il is able to open North Korea's doors and discard the idea of unifying the peninsula by force, the expansion and growth of the nation's economy could be very rapid, given the availability of cheap and disciplined labor and North Korea's experience with rapid industrialization in the 1950s and early 1960s. At the same time, he will gain popular support as the legitimate successor to his father, whose most visible accomplishment was providing food and clothing during the several years after the Korean War. Effective provision of foodstuffs and better living conditions may be the best counterbalance for the junior Kim's lack of political authority. Kim Jong Il is sharply aware of the power of material incentives to appease cadres and the privileged people of North Korea. Ch'oe vividly describes a special gift-giving scene from the Dear Leader to the staff of a film production company on New Year's eve. Some of the gift recipients openly cried and some of them danced, expressing deep gratitude to the Dear Leader.<sup>47</sup> Kim Jong Il must recognize that the whole populace constitutes potential supporters, people who have been alienated from this blessed circle in the past. A more viable economic reform will not only bring equality among the North Korean people, but will also create appropriate conditions for Kim's political legitimacy.

**Foreign Relations.** The succession of Kim Jong Il has two important implications for the foreign relations of North Korea. First, it could foreshadow a transition from Kim Il Sung's "one-Korea" policy to a "two-Korea" policy. In recent years, Kim Il Sung has been aware of the stalemate in the unification talks between the two Koreas, but he has been unable to retreat from his trademark policy. Therefore, Kim Jong Il could be the new leader who provides Kim Il Sung with an

<sup>46</sup>*North Korea News*, January 11, 1988, p. 2.

<sup>47</sup>*Ch'oe Un-hi and Shin Sang-ok*, Vol. II, pp. 328-329.

escape from the dilemma.<sup>48</sup> If the younger Kim's legitimacy totally rests on following his father, he may not be able to change, but even under that circumstance, there may be gradual alteration toward a more workable scheme for unification.

On January 10, 1984, North Korea declared its intention to hold tripartite talks for tension reduction between the two Koreas and the United States.<sup>49</sup> The most important aspect of these talks was that North Korea "had reversed its three-year-old policy of categorically refusing to negotiate with the Chun Doo Hwan government."<sup>50</sup> In other words, North Korea was willing to grant that the South Korean government was its legitimate partner in discussions on tension reduction. This year was the very beginning of Kim Jong Il's active role as co-leader with Kim Il Sung. The coincidence of the timing suggests that a so-called "revisionist" approach to unification, which has never been sanctioned by Kim Il Sung, made an official debut under Kim Jong Il's leadership. Kim Jong Il will likely continue advocating a one-Korea policy, raising the issue of withdrawal of the U.S. armed forces from South Korea. However, his one-Korea policy must be treated as a revised version of Kim Il Sung's, precisely because the younger Kim's policy accepts the United States as one party to the talks. In the past, North Korea has insisted that Korean unification is a bilateral issue between the two Koreas and that the United States could not play any role in the unification discussion. By emphasizing the necessity of tripartite talks, Kim Il Sung in fact withdrew his rigid one-Korea policy in lieu of a more flexible approach to unification.

A departure from the one-Korea policy toward tripartite talks prior to the possible introduction of a two-Korea policy deserves particular attention, because it poses three important questions with regard to North Korean foreign policy. The first question is whether the proposal for tripartite talks was a genuine endeavor to engage in a dialogue with the United States and South Korea to achieve the ultimate goal of unification or merely a political gesture to appease the South Korean and U.S. governments following the Rangoon bombing incident. The second question is whether a two-Korea policy, if it is endorsed, would be a recognition of the reality that both Koreas must coexist peacefully

<sup>48</sup>*Nampuk taehwa hwanryon chuyo ilchi 1981.1, 1987.4* [Important Diary of South-North Dialogue January 1981-April 1987], National Unification Board, Seoul, 1987, p. 19.

<sup>49</sup>Yi Ki-taek, "Nam-Pukhan kwangye-eso pon Pukhan-ui kwonryok sunggye" [The Political Succession of North Korea in Relation to the North-South Relationship], *Pukhan*, September 1984, pp. 94-96.

<sup>50</sup>Byung Chul Koh, "Continuity and Change in North Korea's Unification Policy," *Korea Observer*, Spring 1988, p. 96.

or an interim goal to gain time for infiltrating South Korean society to prepare for a revolution. The third question is whether a two-Korea policy would include cross-recognition, with China, the Soviet Union, the United States, and the two Koreas establishing formal diplomatic ties with one another.

While it is very difficult to find answers to these questions, at least two conclusions can be drawn concerning Kim Jong Il's foreign policy directions. First, a full-scale offensive toward South Korea seems to have been discarded in favor of limited, low-intensity conflict.<sup>51</sup> Urban terrorism and insurgency activities by North Korean agents and sympathizers in South Korea are examples of this limited warfare. Meanwhile, North Korea will try to encourage the total withdrawal of U.S. forces from South Korea by displaying a new image of peace-oriented leadership under Kim Jong Il. Second, Kim Jong Il will follow economic imperatives for a while until North Korea breaks through its economic bottlenecks, maintaining a more active posture of bilateral dialogue and exchanges of technology with the United States and Japan.

Kim Jong Il's conduct of foreign relations with the PRC and the Soviet Union remains an interesting question. However, it is quite logical to presume that he will encourage a much more dynamic relationship with those countries. The PRC will be treated with the usual cordiality by the junior Kim, but the Soviet Union will play a dominant role in North Korea's future foreign relations. This assumption is based on consideration of the mutual strategic military and economic needs of the Soviet Union and North Korea. The Soviets would like to have North Korea as a Northeast Asian version of Vietnam, while North Korea wants to keep a good relationship with the Soviets in order to sustain military superiority over South Korea. So far, the Soviet Union has been the major supplier of technology and weaponry for North Korea.<sup>52</sup> Bilateral economic and military exchanges between Moscow and Pyongyang have multiplied since 1984, signifying a turning point in their relationship.

What Kim Jong Il can get from this stronger relationship is both tangible and symbolic support. By approaching Moscow with clearly visible warmth, Pyongyang can show its strength to South Korea, Japan, and the United States. At the same time, Pyongyang hopes to make the PRC more concerned about North Korean demands for assistance in its economic development. As many North Korea specialists

<sup>51</sup>A similar opinion was also discussed in Yi Ki-taek, "The Political Succession of North Korea in Relation to the North-South Relationship," pp. 96-97.

<sup>52</sup>Suk Ryul Yu, *Kim Jong Il kwonryok sunggye-e*, pp. 6-7.

conclude, Pyongyang is not exactly in a position of leverage between Beijing and Moscow. It is more or less in a dilemma to select the best friend from which to obtain aid and technology. In this sense, Kim Jong Il's choice is a rational one, for Moscow is still a better choice than Beijing in terms of helping the North Korean economy.

Recently, the relationship between the Soviets and North Korea has been a cordial one, particularly in economic areas. Bilateral exchanges have increased during the past several years. In 1987 alone, the Soviets sent forty-five delegations to North Korea, while North Korea sent sixty-two missions to Moscow. Fifteen of the visits to the Soviet Union were economic and scientific missions. Of the forty-five Soviet visits to Pyongyang, eighteen were economic-related. Diplomacy with the PRC was less frequent in 1987. The PRC sent twenty-nine missions to North Korea, of which only four were economic-related. North Korea dispatched forty-two delegations, twelve of which were for economic and scientific exchanges.<sup>53</sup> Undoubtedly, North Korea's closer relationship with Moscow is intended to obtain military and economic aid from the Soviets. Kim Jong Il will most likely maintain that relationship in search of such assistance.

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<sup>53</sup> *Vantage Point*, December 1987, pp. 17-22.



## V. CONCLUSIONS

The carefully arranged maneuvers for a hereditary succession in North Korea appear to have fulfilled all the necessary requirements for the installation of Kim Jong Il as the successor to his father, Kim Il Sung, with only the formal ceremony yet to be performed. Kim Jong Il is in charge of running the country, while the senior Kim presides as the infallible founding father of the regime. The junior Kim's domestic and foreign policy directions have yet to be defined with much clarity, however, and it is important to take this into account when considering his future career.

Two points stand out in relation to Kim Jong Il's future as the successor to his father. The first is that he has yet to demonstrate that he has his own ideas. As an interpreter and actualizer of his father's *chuch'e* theory, can he achieve sufficient legitimacy to rule after his father's demise? If the country is doing well and the people are content, this may well be enough. But the country is not making much progress with its economy, and there seems to be some discontent among the people. The new ruler will have to provide more than the status quo. The people will want something that works better than the present economic system, or at least something that is different.

The second point concerns time and timing. Kim Jong Il is faced with a tricky situation: Can he afford to advocate policies that are different from his father's (for example, a revision of the *chuch'e* ideology) while his father is still alive? Such a development seems quite unlikely. Yet if he does not establish a strong, independent position now, how much time will he have to do this after his father's death? Probably very little, unless the people are quite content and willing to support him, or unless all his potential enemies have truly been eliminated.

In addition to these two major points, there are several others that are relevant to Kim Jong Il's future. He can see that *chuch'e* and firm political control have kept his father in power, so he may be tempted to follow these same policies to keep himself in power after his father's death. However, this may not work for him under conditions that are different from those faced by his father. Moreover, he does not have the imposing physical presence of his father, so his actions may need to speak for him—and he seems to be short on striking actions. These two factors could work against him. On the other hand, he probably has fewer enemies now than his father did at the start of his own

career, thanks to many years of political housecleaning. This may give Kim Jong Il some breathing space. And finally, it is likely that Kim Jong Il can see the relationship between people's satisfaction with the government and their perception that the economy is healthy, and this realization should push him in a pragmatic direction. Taking into account these points, one might make the following predictions about Kim Jong Il's future policies.

On the domestic front, Kim Jong Il has two options. He can strictly adhere to *chuch'e* theory and Kim Il Sung Thought, that is, continue his father's style of leadership. Or he can adopt a cautious "open-door" economic policy along the lines of the new Chinese and Soviet models, thus edging away from his father's leadership style. Kim Jong Il is more likely to choose the second road, in order to achieve three goals: (1) recruitment of domestic supporters looking for a more realistic economic policy, (2) consolidation of power through economic success, and (3) enhanced legitimacy resulting from a successful resolution of North Korea's economic problems and a demonstration of his own initiative. His present lack of political legitimacy could be made up for by a demonstration of willing and able leadership on economic reform. He will continue to pay special attention to economic problems, as he has done since he took charge of the day-to-day management of North Korea.

In foreign relations, Kim Jong Il will devote most of his attention to South Korea, particularly to the internal disunity of South Korean society. He will try to maximize conditions in South Korea that are favorable to North Korea, e.g., student opposition to the government and the division of power among the four parties in the National Assembly. However, his father's "one-Korea, one-government" policy will probably be changed into a more realistic concept of "one community-two governments."

In military affairs, given the current tendency in both the PRC and the Soviet Union to pay greater attention to economic reform than to military buildup, Kim Jong Il will also give priority to the economy over the military. Large-scale aggression toward South Korea seems to be a plan of the past, because neither the PRC nor the Soviet Union seems likely to provide military support for an invasion. A strategy of low-intensity conflict, e.g., insurgency and terrorism, will be the preferred North Korean offensive strategy for achieving influence over South Korea, but even this strategy will likely take a back seat to more rational and practical approaches.

Kim Jong Il will attempt to establish closer ties with the Soviet Union in order to get more economic and military aid. The increase in bilateral exchanges in economic, cultural, and military spheres in

recent years between the two countries will be continued, because North Korea and the Soviet Union offer attractive things for each other. Moscow would like to secure warm-water port facilities along the eastern shore of North Korea, while Pyongyang wants better technology and new weapons.

Kim Jong Il will be tempted to deal with Japan in a much more positive manner to gain Japanese technology and business management skills. This assumption is based on Kim's great fondness for Japanese products.

Political succession is often not easy to accomplish. The PRC and the Soviet Union experienced succession traumas after the deaths of Mao and Stalin. While Singapore seems to be preparing a hereditary succession and Taiwan has successfully carried one out, South Korea and the Philippines went through difficult times in bringing about successful democratization to establish new governments. The turmoil in Burma following the resignation of Ne Win is the most recent reminder of how difficult it can be to smoothly hand over the reins to a chosen successor. Succession outcomes are hard to predict and difficult to arrange. For all the effort that has gone into preparing Kim Jong Il to succeed his father, the outcome must still be in doubt.