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Chapter 5: From Kim Jong Il to Kim Jong Un

After the First Nuclear Test, “Diplomats Must Repatriate All But One Child”

I finished my duties as diplomat in England, and disembarked in P'yŏngyang with my family in January 2008. I returned with a magnificent gift. In 2007 my oldest child was miraculously completely cured. This was thanks to the genuine child treatment of the medical staff and the development of modern medicine. My eldest child from 2004 spent three years receiving regular outpatient treatment in London's Great Ormond Street Hospital.¹

When I heard from the attending physician, “Since your son is completely cured there's no need to come to the hospital now” I felt delivered by heaven. While apart from the doctor my wife and I somehow wanted to meet him again to pay our respects. “As a doctor, ‘Let's meet again,’ is my most hated greeting,” he laughed. “That you want to visit me again means that your son has relapsed, and that's terrible.” My wife and I bowed our heads several times to express our thanks.

Early in 2007, the year before we returned home, an order dropped like a thunderbolt on the Foreign Ministry for diplomats living abroad with two or more children. It ordered only one child to be kept and the rest be repatriated. I was pressed to keep my eldest and send the second one back home.

It was a measure that came down after the implementation of the first nuclear test (October 2006) when the international environment got more difficult. This measure was picked up by foreign news organizations and became known all over the world so that foreign diplomats stationed in P'yŏngyang even requested public confirmation from the Foreign Ministry. In February 2007 Cha Sŏngnam the North Korean Ambassador to England was presenting his credentials to the queen when English ambassador to North Korea John Everard, who was also present, turned to me and asked, “Which of your two children are you going to send?” When I said, “I'm scheduled to be reassigned to the Foreign Ministry this year anyway, so I'll take them with me then,” he fretted, “Consul T'ae, is that okay?”

¹ [translator's note] A hospital famous for pediatric medicine.

Almost all the diplomats living abroad swallowed their tears and carried out the order flown in from P'yŏngyang, but I held out until the end. I was the only one in North Korea's London embassy not follow the directive. Rank 1 Embassy Secretary Ri Kwangnim sent his young elementary school child back to North Korea, and kept his middle school eldest in London.

It was when I finished my overseas duties. While I had appealed, "Since my whole family is going to be repatriated with me soon anyway, please let them stay with me a couple more months," privately I felt the actions of the authorities were just too cruel. I think my love for my little ones is no different from that of any father raising his children. I was prepared to face abuse in life summary after I returned, but in the end I didn't send my children back to P'yŏngyang.

As soon as I got back I was summoned to life summary (self criticism). But anyway, when I went to life summary, far from being criticized I heard this consolation.

"I can understand your state of mind. What can you do? Revolution is such a difficult thing, and sometimes one has to be ready to sacrifice. So is our revolution that much harder than the revolution of India with its billion or so residents and a different language and race?"

It was the reaction after my self-criticism, "I just felt sorry for my kids and wanted to be with them. I've committed the grave sin of not carrying out Party policy. I have reflected deeply on it. I ask for forgiveness." I was even more ashamed. Central Party cadres when they return to their families have the same point of view, so they seemed to have given me their understanding. I was thankful.

I Begin to Write "Stories" in the Party Meeting Records

A bit later I was appointed Europe Bureau Chief and Pumundang Secretary. In the Foreign Ministry the Bureau Chief is responsible for administration and the Bureau Chief is commonly the one responsible for Party organization. If the bureau has fewer than thirty persons the bureau chief becomes the [Party] cell secretary, and if it has more than thirty persons it becomes a [Party] pumundang and the bureau chief is jointly pumundang secretary. The Europe Bureau that I belonged to had more than thirty Party members and three cells had been organized. The organization was that each cell had a cell secretary, and the pumundang secretary supervised the cell secretaries.

Actually it was beyond my capacity to be jointly Europe Bureau Chief and Pumundang Secretary. The pumundang secretary's workday begins with dusting the portraits of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il. One also has to sweep the Kim father and son artworks hanging in the hallways. I didn't have to personally sweep, but it was my responsibility as pumundang secretary to lead and supervise the Bureau

employees. In North Korea such sweeping is called a “devotion² task” and in all organizations the workday begins with this task.

The work I hated the most was understanding of colleagues’ ideological status and reporting it to the Party Committee of the Foreign Ministry. At 2:00 PM every day I would go up to the Party Committee on the 4th Floor and have to report incidents that had come up in the bureau that day and irregularities that arose in the life of bureau personnel. Even private matters like conjugal quarrels or sexual indulgences were subject to report. In order to report like this from around 11:00AM every day I would walk around the office and have to enquire from each person whether anything had happened since the day before. This sort of surveillance was triplicated, quadruplicated through the Party, the State Security Department (Powibu), Ministry of People’s Security (Poanbu), and so forth.

What was hardest and I hated most as pumundang secretary was the task every Saturday of updating the Life Summary Ledger and the Party Meeting forms.

Life summary was held every Saturday from 9:00 to 9:30 am. It proceeded by means of self-criticism and mutual criticism. My task was to record these in Party Meeting Minutes and deliver them to the Party Committee. Writing things down wasn’t difficult, but it was hard on my brain to compose things.

From some time ago Party members did self-criticism but not mutual criticism. After warning them to do mutual criticism before every meeting began the meeting would begin, but almost no Party members participated in mutual criticism. On the outside nobody expressed anything, but who likes reddening faces and raised voices? Yet the Party Committee considered Party member’s participation in mutual criticism very important. They diagnosed it as a symptom weakening Party functioning.

The Party Committee demanded strenuous efforts by the cell and pumundang secretaries, and used to audit the meeting minutes frequently. Since the comrades didn’t participate in mutual criticism in the end I had no choice but to make up many mutual criticisms in my head and record them in the Party meeting minutes. In a word I seem to have written fiction. In this way the energy of the Workers’ Party was dissipating.

‘Collective Funds’ More Vital Than Salary, ‘Solidarity’ through Marriage and Sport

As pumundang secretary I managed the Europe Bureau’s “collective funds.” As North Korea’s socialist welfare system and financial health collapsed what was paradoxically activated were collective funds. These were funds members prepared

² [translator’s note] The Korean term *chöngsöng* means earnestness, but also includes devotion in the religious sense.

and collectively used, and consisted of only foreign currency. The final manager of the collective funds is the bureau head. To use even a penny was possible only with the permission of the bureau head.

People repatriated from abroad deposited \$100 in the bureau as collective money. In the case of the Europe Bureau an average of 7-10 persons came from abroad each year, and a similar number were dispatched to foreign embassies. If you took even a business trip you had to deposit \$20. Only places without a North Korean embassy were an exception. Prepared in this way each year we saved a couple thousand or more dollars.

Because with one's salary received in North Korean currency you couldn't even buy 1 kg of rice, the collective funds are used very effectively. Its uses are quite various. If somebody is admitted to the hospital North Korean custom is to give a couple of boxes of liquor to the doctor. If central party cadres show up we have to give them cigarettes. Because the great majority of them didn't live as well as lower level officials in the Foreign Ministry central party cadres who came to the Foreign Ministry look for things beginning with cigarettes.

Liquor and tobacco generally are bought at foreign exchange shops. Since this is beyond what salaries can bear we had to use collective funds. In addition foreign currency was required to buy the necessary liquor, meat, vegetables, and so forth for all sorts of condolence and congratulatory ceremonies. With this and that there were many occasions to spend money.

An office like the Europe Bureau with much interaction with the outside has lots of collective funds so it is less burdensome for office members. But offices belonging to the same Foreign Ministry that didn't have interaction with the outside had no money and often were embarrassed. Each subsection in the Europe Bureau also had collective money. One could say that there were severe gaps between rich and poor within the Foreign Ministry.

One difficult thing as pumundang secretary is having to constantly drink liquor. In North Korea if you want to be a Party worker you need to take good care of congratulations and condolences in the office or bureau to which you belong. If Party workers want to go among the people it is required that you participate in all family ceremonies that arise in the office to which you belong.

The Foreign Ministry Europe Bureau for which I had responsibility had about fifty members. There was a marriage or funeral almost every month. Marriages were comparatively easy. It was enough if you drank a little and congratulated them. The situation with funerals was different. If a member of the Europe Bureau is was eldest son of the deceased [mat sangje] the bureau takes charge of putting on the funeral. The bureau first organizes a funeral committee and sends a couple of members to make a coffin and reserve Obong crematorium. This is just the

beginning. The funeral committee has to supervise all funeral ceremonies until the funeral is completed.

In South Korea funerals celebrated at the house have almost disappeared, but in North Korea after holding a three-day ceremony at the house of the eldest son or of the deceased the body is then sent out [to the crematorium]. I as the pumundang secretary had to go out from the first day to receive condolences and on that day keep watch until midnight when the body is placed in the coffin. So we would spend the whole night playing cards and drinking.

For me this was a tiresome task, but there was no alternative. I had to superintend funerals on the order of twice a month. Within the Foreign Ministry because only the Europe Bureau was still in pretty good financial shape, every time we put on a member's marriage or funeral the Europe Bureau's improved feeling of oneness and solidarity was of positive importance. Among the reasons the Europe Bureau won first place in volleyball and table tennis in the Foreign Ministry athletic exercises two years in a row is thanks to the members' group solidarity. Here I felt confident, and think this is a result I achieved for the first time as Foreign Ministry Europe Bureau head and pumundang.

The Foreign Ministry convened athletic games four times a year. Kim Jong Il's birthday on February 16th is Star of Hope Day³, Kim Il Sung's birthday on April 15th is Sun Day, the birthday of Kim Jong Il's birth mother Kim Chŏngsuk is December 24th. During athletic events the bureau head and bureau vice head must absolutely participate in the volleyball and table tennis. That is because the two sports are considered the foundation of the athletic events. Thus if a cadre can't play volleyball or table tennis he participates with the qualification of "one point being lost." From the time that I became Europe Bureau Chief I was enthusiastic about volleyball and table tennis.

The Europe Bureau took first place in volleyball and table tennis competitions in 2011 and 2012. However, after I came out to England they say that from 2013 on they weren't able to attain first place. Even now after I've come to South Korea I play table tennis with my colleagues in the National Security Strategy Study Center. Once a week we regularly set aside an hour for play. I once had a vain fantasy. If I was not able to successfully flee into exile and had returned to North Korea I might have restored the Europe Bureau once again to first place.

³ [translator's note] Kwangmyŏngsŏng, or Star of Hope, is the name of the satellites North Korea has launched since the 1990s. Kim Il Sung, of course, is the Sun of the Revolution.

First Secretary with Actual Power Must Wait All Day for Kim Jong Il's Phone Call

It's suffering that all North Korean offices undergo. It is conflict between the Party committee and the administrative organization. You can also call it competition for power or struggle for authority. It is impossible to understand North Korean society without understanding the role of the Party committee. There is a question that I always hear since I've come to South Korea.

"How can an inhumane system like North Korea's last for seventy years? Is there a secret key?"

"What is the driving force that allowed the young Kim Jong Un to so easily purge his mother's uncle Jang Song Thaek who had been a core power for decades? Where on earth is North Korea's power center?"

In the system of North Korea the Party is always the center of power. Leading persons in the Central Party's Organization and Guidance Department could be punished as in the Simhwajo Incident⁴, but North Korea's power cannot be moved either to the right or left.

Many North Korea specialists in South Korea judge that in the late 1990s when North Korea had the Arduous March⁵ and Kim Jong Il put forth "military first administration" the center of power shifted from the Party to the military. After Kim Jong Un took over their analysis is that the power shifted back to the Party. A portion of them judge who is number 2 and who is number 3 based only on the order of authority. These are nothing but empty boasts coming from not understanding the role of the Central Party.

The fundamental mission of the Korean Worker's Party Organization and Guidance Department is to establish the Suryŏng's monolithic system of leadership, and of the Propaganda and Agitation Department to establish the Suryŏng's monolithic ideology. The Organization and Guidance Department is the highest organ of power having the authority to grasp and control all of society with authority over appointment, surveillance, and punishment of the highest level of cadres. The Party organizational abilities of the Organization and Guidance Department and the Propaganda and Agitation Department form the two axes that have moved North

⁴ [translator's note] The Simhwajo incident was a large-scale purge of Party members that took place in 1997 as Kim Jong Il was consolidating his power after the death of his father. Some 25,000 people were punished in this purge.

⁵ [translator's note] Arduous March is the North Korea name for the famine from 1994 to 1998.

Korean society from the first days of the formation of the North Korean system until today.

Power rankings have no meaning in North Korea. Even though you can say Prime Minister Pak Pongju's authority ranking is third or fourth he can neither appoint nor remove cabinet members. North Korean authority is determined by who holds the right to assign personnel, hand out rewards, or punish people in the relevant organizations and their sub-organizations. The Central Party's Organization Department Undersecretary responsible for central organizations is who holds these rights for cabinet members. In the end what moves North Korea is the Central Party's Organization and Guidance Department, and the Organization and Guidance Department by controlling each organizations' party committee controls the entire body of organizations. For example, the National Defense Commission cannot lead the Organization and Guidance Department, but the Organization and Guidance Department keeps an eye on and controls the work of the National Defense Commission through the People's Army General Political Bureau.

In order to help you understand North Korean society let me introduce some examples of power struggles between Foreign Ministry Party Secretary and administrative workers. In the Foreign Ministry, too, the center of authority lies in the Party committee. The Party Secretary of the Party committee exercises all authority.

However, in the mid 1970's the 'first undersecretary, first vice head' system was introduced in organizations in which it was necessary for Kim Jong Il to exercise direct control, and so provided the occasion to make changes in the internal organization of the Foreign Ministry. Kim Jong Il's power became inscribed in the administrative worker who was department head. Kim Jong Il introduced the first undersecretary (ilbusang) system to the Foreign Ministry and the State Security Ministry, and so in the People's Armed Forces Department even though there was a general staff officer (ch'ong ch'ammojang) the director of operations (chakchŏn kukchang) came to carry out the vice minister functions.

Below the minister (sang 相) is undersecretary (pusang 副相), and below the department head (pujang 部长) is department vice-head (pubujang 副部长). The authority rank of these is lower than minister (sang) or department head (pujang), but the first undersecretary and first vice-head have the responsibility to directly carry out Kim Jong Il's directives. North Korea's authority is determined by how often one talks with Kim Jong Il and how much power he gives. Unlike many Foreign Ministers (oemu sang) the Foreign Ministry Undersecretary (oemu pusang) keeps his office from the start of work in the morning until eleven PM quitting time while he participates in state ceremonies or foreign activity and all kinds of meetings until the office empties out.

Kim Jong Il had an impatient temperament so if he had a query about a report or something he wanted to point out he would impresstely telephone the First Undersecretary. The First Undersecretary would have to go through the details of the report. Since he was always waiting for something he didn't have days of rest. Even if he went to the rest room a secretary watches the phone connected to Kim Jong Il in his place. In this way if one was First Undersecretary for ten years or so one virtually became an invalid.

Kang Sökchu, Almost Sacked for Replacing the Party Secretary

Toward the end of the 1970s the Foreign Ministry First Undersecretary was Yi Chongmok. After Yi Chongmok died Kim Ch'ungil took over from the beginning of the 1980s, and after Kim Ch'ungil rose up to the third floor secretariat Kang Sökchu, who had been Central Party's International Department Bureau Head for Europe, came down as First Undersecretary. In the early 1990s as North Korea-US talks came about the internal power structure of the Foreign Ministry began to be reorganized centering on Kang Sökchu.

The first thing that Kang Sökchu touched was cadre assignment power. Since originally according to regulations cadre assignment was the properly the Party secretary's prerogative an administrative worker couldn't interfere with it. The power struggle between the Party secretary and the administrative worker had begun. Kang Sökchu who attended Kim Jong Il's secret party reported, "If we want to carry out the Party's foreign policy well we have to send abroad workers of ability, yet the capability of today's ambassadors is insufficient, thus creating many difficulties." Kim Jong Il whose intentions were obvious had given the right of cadre assignment to Kang Sökchu.

From this time forward in the Foreign Ministry power began to be concentrated in Kang Sökchu who wasn't Party Secretary. Naturally the voice of the administrative cadres also got bigger. It would have been absurd in any other organization but in the Foreign Ministry the Party committee observed Kang Sökchu's attitude rather than the other way around. When Kang Sökchu met with Kim Jong Il it was a situation in which if Kang gave an order to the Party Secretary, the secretary might grouse but he would hop right to it.

Kang Sökchu, in order to maximize his power, interfered in the carrying out of the process of scheduled Saturday life. In North Korea Saturday is a day entirely for the Party Secretary. The Party Secretary from Saturday morning also leads the Foreign Ministry itinerary of life summary, notification of policy directives, and study guidance. The hour for notification of Kim Jong Il's directives carried out from 10:00AM is an especially important activity. During this hour all [Party] members gather in the lecture hall and must listen to the Party Secretaries words.

However from a certain moment, just as the Party Secretary was notifying people of Kim Jong Il's directives, Kang Sökchu's slips of paper began to fly in. Their contents were that the cooperation of some bureau head, some section head, is needed and they should come to his office right away. In North Korea the "utterances" of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il are like the Bible. It was as if someone had broken into a reverent Bible reading and run off with one or two believers. The Foreign Ministry members worried, "doing that is really going to hurt Kang Sökchu."

They weren't wrong and problems broke out. This problem was brought to the attention of the Organization and Guidance Department and they investigated Kang Sökchu. It was a situation in which Kang Sökchu would be fired if he responded wrongly. Kang Sökchu who had extraordinarily strong nerves responded with the following:

"All of my projects have the aim of assisting the great General Kim Jong Il's activities toward the outside world. If Comrade Kim Jong Il telephones me asking me about a problem and I don't know the answer what am I supposed to do? I summon a well informed person-in-charge of that problem, ask him, and then must send a report to Comrade Kim Jong Il. I can't waste a second in reporting to His Generalness. Are you telling me I should make the General wait until the Party secretary has finished the task of notification of policy directives?"

The inspection team that had come out to throttle Kang Sökchu was instead driven into a corner and withdrew quietly. After that the Foreign Ministry was Kang Sökchu's world until 2008. There was no reason for the Central Party whose authority had been snatched away to keep quiet about it. Yi Chegang, secretary responsible for general affairs in the Central Party's Organization and Guidance Department, regarded Kang Sökchu with particular distaste. Toward the end of 2008 Yi Chegang dispatched his confidant An T'aegwang, Party secretary responsible for Peony Hill District in P'yöngyang City, to the Foreign Ministry telling him to retake the Party committee's power. In fact, Yi Chegang was right. In the North Korean system the administration cannot be above the Party. From this time on an invisible fight began between Kang Sökchu and Party Secretary An T'aegwang.

An T'aegwang also wanted to suppress Kang Sökchu by piggybacking on Yi Chegang who had the trust of Kim Jong Il. An T'aegwang decided all cases according to the point of view of Party policy, and was an orthodox Party worker rarely seen even in North Korea.

After Kim Jong Il recovered from being felled by a stroke Kang Sökchu couldn't frequently meet Kim Jong Il like he used to. That's because Kim Jong Il reduced his secret [drinking] parties to long intervals because of health problems. From this time on as An T'aekwang's counterattack got started Kang Sökchu's overlordship collapsed.

An T'aegwang summoned the pumundang secretaries of all bureaus and the cell secretaries and dug out from them the Foreign Minister, Department head and so forth cadre's nasty facts. Over twenty years since Kang Sökchu looked orthodox there was naturally irregularity. An T'aegwang, organizing every kind of critical assembly put pressure on the administrative workers, and catching Department Head Kim Ch'anggyu and a few bureau heads on irregularities, drove them from the Foreign Ministry. Within the Foreign Ministry a movement arose to adapt to An T'aegwang's nastiness, and I, too, could not go against his temper.

An T'aegwang pestered us to report on the misdeeds of Europe Bureau Head Kim Ch'un'guk, the bureau to which I belonged. It is normally not difficult to report minutely about superiors in the department in which one had lived together like a family. Making an inspection of each bureau's "Policy Performance Ledger" he quietly cut down Kang Sökchu saying, "You must live believing only the words of General Kim Jong Il." In order to prove his authority he summoned the undersecretary and then had him wait for an hour or so. When one undersecretary who got angry got away, An T'aegwang criticized him saying, "Your attitude toward the Party is incorrect."

Finally Kang Sökchu at the Party Delegates Conference in September 2010 was appointed cabinet vice premier, and retired from the Foreign Ministry. From the outside it looked like he had been promoted, but actually he had been banished from the front lines of foreign relations. An T'aegwang's tyranny that pushed Kang Sökchu out gradually deepened. The entire Foreign Ministry groveled before An T'aegwang. First Vice Head Kim Kyegwan who replaced Kang Sökchu was also someone who didn't get along with An. The administrative cadres of the Foreign Ministry had to kowtow to the Party committee. It came to the point that aged undersecretaries and bureau chiefs bowed their heads to greet young thirty-something party committee staff.

However this situation couldn't last long. In the Foreign Ministry are many children of Central Party Committee cadres. Through them An T'aegwang's tyranny got reported, the the Organization and Guidance Department transferred An T'aegwang as Party Secretary to the Shenyang North Korean Representative Office. Hǒ Tam's son, Hǒ Ch'öl, came as the subsequent Party secretary. Hǒ Ch'öl, who is even related to Kim Il Sung's family, is very seasoned, just like his father. He maintained polite decorum with aged administrative workers, and exercised his power invisibly while putting First Undersecretary Kim Kyegwan in front.

North Korea's present Foreign Minister is Ri Yongho who was selected at the Workers Party Seventh Party Congress in 2016. The health of First Undersecretary Kim Kyegwan is not good. Presently Ri Yongho and Hǒ Ch'öl don't clash, and are running the Foreign Ministry maintaining equilibrium.

Kim Jong Il's Approvals Suddenly Don't Come, Find out It's a Stroke

It's something I remember from the end of August 2008. Kim Jong Il's approvals suddenly stop coming down. At first everybody thought it was because Kim Jong Il was making an unpublicized trip to China. This is because there are previous examples of this. The Foreign Ministry has two methods of reporting documents to Kim Jong Il.

One is the weekly summary sent up every Wednesday that is an abridged form of weekly report. This is a strategic and in depth document that it's fine to not get immediate approval. The report every day, although the daily report is about the problems raised each day, is a document requiring Kim Jong Il's urgent agreement.

The weekly report and daily report are sent to Kim Jong Il's Third Floor Secretariat by computer. Kim Jong Il reads the document and signs, or writes the date and it becomes a "personally ratified document" [ch'inp'il pijun]. To indicate that he just looked at it the document will come down with the expressions "document shown to him" or "directive of the Central Committee." The highest level documents are those on which is written "personally ratified document" and Kim Jong Il has noted concrete instructions on the document's first page.

Nobody is able to confirm whether Kim Jong Il directly reads the documents, just looks at the title, or doesn't even read the title. Documents reported daily from the Foreign Ministry alone are thousands of pages. Other cabinet departments upload a similar amount. Since Kim Jong Il is not a god it would be physically impossible for him to look at all of these. It seems that responsible persons in the Secretariat first try to read the majority of documents and only report important ones to Kim Jong Il.

Occasionally Kim Jong Il would telephone Kang Sökchu to ask about the contents of documents and there were times he sent down directives. I would guess that important items would have to get reported to Kim Jong Il. However, there were cases when it was ambiguous whether they truly reflected Kim Jong Il's intentions, or not. Even though something suddenly happened to Kim Jong Il the North Korean system was such that he would peacefully return without informing the Third Floor Secretariat.

Kim Jong Il was felled by a stroke in August 2008 but only a small number of persons in the Third Floor Secretariat knew. When Kim Jong Il's approvals stopped coming down not only the Foreign Ministry other offices in the Central Administration, too, fell into confusion. Many telephone queries came as to whether the documents uploaded by the Foreign Ministry had been approved as they were. We couldn't work without receiving approvals, but since we didn't have them we couldn't touch anything from the beginning. The Foreign Ministry went forward with the task related to re-uploading documents revising "we would like to . . ." to "we are doing organization business by doing . . ."

Kim Jong Il didn't even participate in the ceremony on September 9th for the establishment of the DPRK. North Korean society started to get agitated. Strange stories circulated. It was around October when Kim Jong Il took the stage again. He appeared wearing dark glasses at the soccer game between Kim Il Sung Consolidated University and P'yŏngyang Railway University. He seemed to be wearing dark glasses to cover his clouded eyes. Looking at pictures at the time Kim Jong Il's movement seemed very labored.

Along with Kim Jong Il's Return the Ryongch'ŏn Bombing Incident Rises Again

Kim Jong Il seemed to feel keenly that his health was not where he wanted it to be, and that he didn't have very much longer to live. About this time incidents enough to harm his health came up one after another.

One was the incident when the Chief-of-Staff Sŏ Namsik responsible for Kim Jong Il's train Number 8 and Number 9 and Railway Ministry cadres were all at once arrested and a portion of them executed. In North Korea public announcement [of executions] is vary rare. Although the entirety of the incident was not clearly explained, a rumor circulated that Sŏ Namsik and so forth had tried to assassinate Kim Jong Il through the Ryongch'ŏn Station bombing,⁶ and also that a South Korean spy organization sent up during the Korean War had been uncovered. It was four years after the Ryongch'ŏn Station blast and sixty years since the Korean War broke out so these were all past times. Such things were clearly unsatisfactory.

The after effects of this incident reached even into the Europe Bureau of the Foreign Ministry. On an afternoon in October of the same year the Party committee suddenly summonsed Sŏ Ch'ŏl who had worked in the Europe Bureau. After studying abroad in Beijing University's English Department from 1979 he had worked as an English teacher in the International Relations University. When I entered the same university in the following year he was the professor responsible for our class's English instruction. Since I had studied English with him, I considered him an honored teacher.

After that his English proficiency was recognized by Ri Suyong, and in 1992 he came to work as counsel responsible for UN agencies in Geneva. After he returned home he held posts as Foreign Ministry Europe Bureau Office Head responsible for England and North Korea representative to the P'yŏngyang Office of Switzerland's Development Cooperation Ministry.

⁶ [translator's note] A large train explosion occurred in Ryongch'ŏn station near North Korea's border with China on April 22, 2004 just hours after Kim Jong Il's train had passed through returning from China. The loss of life was considerable. Official explanations pointed to explosive material on the train cars, though rumors of a Kim Jong Il assassination attempt have also circulated.

Sŏ Ch'ŏl who had been called up to the Party committee did not come down again, but was loaded into a black automobile and disappeared somewhere. A few hours passed and the Party committee called for me. It turned out Sŏ Ch'ŏl's family had been banished to the countryside, so about ten persons were to accompany me to his house and wrap up his things. I picked the huskiest members of the bureau.

Sŏ Ch'ŏl's residence was next to P'yŏngyang Medical University Hospital. Already State Security Forces stood in the hallways preventing entry and exit. The entire family was sitting on chairs weeping. Sŏ Ch'ŏl's mother who was still alive and with them, said, "I saw that I shouldn't live much longer." While we packed their baggage we found out he is the nephew of Railways Ministry Chief-of-Staff Sŏ Namsik who had been shot not long ago.

Sŏ Ch'ŏl's father during the Korean War had been Investigation Department Head of State Security Service, and his younger brother of Peony Hill District Security Service. Even for North Korea they could be called a rare "red to the core family." It was unbelievable that such a family could be caught up in an assassination of Kim Jong Il.

Sŏ Ch'ŏl's family was expelled to South P'yŏngan Province, Sangwŏn County before midnight. Until that time we randomly wrapped up their baggage. While I was doing this Sŏ Ch'ŏl's wife quietly came up to me and said, "We've got quite a bit of foreign currency in our house, so what's the best way to handle it?" It seemed that Sŏ Ch'ŏl had here and there amassed money during the almost six years that he had lived foreign relations in Switzerland.

Until this morning Sŏ Ch'ŏl had been a colleague who had worked with me. I exchanged the money into North Korean currency on the black market. The area to which Sŏ Ch'ŏl had been banished was a remote place where American dollars wouldn't be necessary. It would be 200 li⁷ to come out to the train station there.

It was a time when the exchange rate for North Korean currency was more than 4000 wŏn to the dollar. I exchanged several thousand dollars, wrapped them in a scarf turning it into a bundle. I hid it in the baggage while the State Security Officers weren't paying attention. Although we would be punished if the State Security Officers saw us, we were all of one mind, and accomplished it without a hitch. Sŏ Ch'ŏl's family accompanied by five members of the Europe Bureau left for Sangwŏn County that night.

While we saw Sŏ Ch'ŏl's weeping family leave P'yŏngyang, since they nevertheless went down carrying a lot of money, we thought they would be supported for a number of years. However, less than a year later in November 2009 North Korea effected a currency conversion. While seeing the money that had circulated until

⁷ [translator's note] About 67 miles.

yesterday turned in an instant into worthless scraps of paper, I thought of Sŏ Ch'öl's family who would spend time suffering in Oji in Sangwŏn County.

I still have a question. The Ryongch'ŏn blast, could it really have been the assassination attempt that Kim Jong Il thought it was? Or was it a fake strategy of the State Security Department to pacify Kim Jong Il who was always stricken by paranoid fear of assassination?

The Last Years of Kim Jong Il, Barely Able to Applaud

After Kim Jong Il recovered from his stroke Ri Suyong being also abruptly summonsed to P'yŏngyang was an extraordinary thing. I don't know precisely when he returned from Switzerland. It seems late 2008 or early 2009.

Ri Suyong had advocated reviving the North Korean economy by increasing the number of special economic zones. He had been urgently summonsed back to P'yŏngyang to organize a Joint Venture Committee and he was appointed committee chair. What had Kim Jong Il's intention been? It could even have been that he keenly felt he didn't have much longer to live, and it was Kim Jong Il's last twitch trying to do something to revive the economy.

Word went around that Ri Suyong was quite close to Chang Sŏngt'aek. This is because Chang Sŏngt'aek's Party administrative department that had a stranglehold on the North Korean economy was responsible for the Joint Venture Committee. After Ri Suyong became chairman of the Joint Venture Committee North Korea set to work preparing a new economic plan called Expanding Special Economic Zones [kyŏngje t'ŭkku]. Especially coming into 2012 just after Kim Jong Il died they began to explore a concrete plan centering on Ri Suyong. Its contents were that thirteen special economic zones be newly set up.

The core of special economic zones was introducing into North Korea's interior capitalist economic methods like those of the Kaesŏng Industrial Zone.⁸ He might now be fired if he didn't get positive support from Kim Jong Un. It was publicly announced toward the end of 2013 that North Korea had newly established 13 special economic zones in the countryside, but in April the next year Ri Suyong was appointed Foreign Minister it ended up coming to nothing. At this time the Joint Venture Committee lost power and tread the path of dissolution.

⁸ [translator's note] The Kaesŏng Industrial Zone is an area in North Korea just north of the demilitarized zone (DMZ) that separates North and South Korea that was opened in 2002 and closed "temporarily" in 2016. South Korean businesses that located in the zone used South Korea machinery, management, and electricity, but North Korean labor that was paid for in dollars.

To pull all of these stages together, it can be said that Kim Jong Un seems to have inherited the last attempt of Kim Jong Il to revive the economy, but then it was torn down in the end. When Kim Jong Un first took power his will for renewal and renovation was obvious. Kim Jong Un also wanted to try renewal and renovation on others, but for some reason seems to have given it up.

I saw Kim Jong Il in Kŭngŏri once in October 2009. It was when Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao visited North Korea. Kim Jong Il and Wen Jiabao together watched the colorful North Korean song-drama (kagŭk) of China's classic novel "Dream of the Red Chamber." Kim Jong Il with a great deal of effort could just barely walk. It looked like his left side was paralyzed to the extent that he could barely clap. However, even at that point nobody thought Kim Jong Il would die that quickly.

Suffering from a Stroke, Jong Chul and Jong Un First Introduced to Those Around Kim Jong Il

For a long time even in North Korea it was thought that Kim Jong Il had no other sons than Kim Jong Nam. In fact it is said that even within Kim Il Sung's household the existence of Kim Jong Un was not known.

However from the time of his 2009 New Years Day address a strange feeling began to permeate the air. When Kim Il Sung had been alive Kim Jong Il delivered the New Years Speech directly in person. From 1995 after Kim Il Sung had died a joint New Year editorial was published in the three newspapers *Rodong Sinmun*, *Chosŏn Inmin'gun*, *Ch'ŏngnyŏn Chŏnwi*⁹ and these were Kim Jong Il's actual New Year's Address. In the 'Joint Editorials' were put together with assessment of last year new-year policy directions in the areas of politics, economy, North-South relations, foreign relations, and so forth. The 2009 new-year joint editorial used a new expression, "Today we stand on an important historical economic line in carrying out the Party's revolutionary task." Nobody at the time had any idea what this expression meant.

North Korea officials normally study the joint editorial until the middle of January. From the end of January they go into preparation for Kim Jong Il's birthday "Bright Star Season". Preparations for "Bright Star Season" in the Foreign Ministry involved volleyball and ping pong tournaments between bureaus and artistic performances. However, different from any other year, each organization made progress on popularizing the song "Footsteps" [palgŏrŭm]. It was right after this song had been shown on North Korea's Central Broadcasting TV. The Foreign Ministry organized a chorus of members with good voices to sing this song. At four in the afternoon they gathered in the lecture hall and sang "Footsteps." Part of the song goes like this.

⁹ [translator's note] *Workers' Daily*, *Chosŏn People's Army*, *Youth Vanguard* respectively.

Ch'ökch'ökch'ök ch'ökch'ök footsteps
Footsteps of our General Kim
Making fly February spirit
Forward ch'ökch'ökch'ök
Footsteps, stomping out vigorous footsteps
All the people of the country following ch'ökch'ökch'ök

“February spirit” obviously meant the spirit of Kim Jong Il who was born on February 16th. “General Kim” spreading this spirit also clearly became his successor. But even those of us singing the song had no idea who General Kim or Comrade General was.

“Footsteps” was manufactured by CNC technology and was spread by means of files. CNC is a technology that appeared meshed with the composition of the successor Kim Jong Un, ending up practically as a slogan, though it was something that was by no means completely new in advanced countries. In North Korea they propagandize, “This factory is CNC-ized.” CNC means a manufacturing machine controlled by numbers built into a computer microprocessor,¹⁰ and at the same time as Kim Jong Un appeared the expression “CNC-ize” came to be inserted in all kinds of phrases. Like if they even built a small food factory they would say the production workload has been CNC-ized to maximize productivity.

The Successor Kim Jong Un Rises under the Name of “Comrade General”

On April 15, 2009 on Kim Il Sung’s birthday they held a “Canon Salute Evening Assembly” (fireworks display). Its scale was unprecedented. Its style was extremely colorful and new. Everybody endlessly praised them. It seemed enough to have cost several million dollars. From within the Party it was propagated as “the canon salute evening directly ordered by Comrade General himself.” It was considered a salute for the appearance of “Comrade General.”

I, too, was curious as to who “General Kim” is. It was certain it would be one of Kim Jong Il’s sons, but nobody could work out a story for this problem. I who had long worked in the Europe Bureau of the Foreign Ministry knew that Kim Jong Il’s children were studying in Switzerland. But I didn’t know how many children he had, and I had never heard their name even once.

Until that time the only son of Kim Jong Il I had seen was Kim Jong Nam. Kim Jong Nam who had finished overseas study in Switzerland and returned to North Korea in early 1990 in the evening used to ride in a high-class Mercedes Benz car to the Koryö Hotel. I even remember the license number of 216-8888. Kim Jong Nam stopped his care at the front door where parking was prohibited and strode into the hotel. Of course the hotel cadres came out to greet him and cater to him.

¹⁰ [translator’s note] CNC means “computer numerical control”.

I also tended to go frequently to the Koryŏ Hotel. That's because most of the European representative delegations lodged there. Several times I came across and saw in the distance Kim Jong Nam walking here and there in the hotel. At first I didn't even know that he was Kim Jong Nam. I thought maybe he was a worker in the Third Floor Secretariat but he looked a little bit strange. Once from the side I was looking him over carefully when a senior colleague from my same department stared straight at me and just said, "Let's go," and at the same time he tipped me off, "The General's Child."

It's because of the forged passport incident that Kim Jong Nam lost favor with Kim Jong Il. The day before Swedish Prime Minister Persson arrived in P'yŏngyang (May 1, 2001) Kim Jong Nam was detected trying to enter Japan with a forged passport. Naturally this got widely reported in the Western press. The Foreign Ministry was reporting to Kim Jong Il in almost real time the world press reports on Swedish Prime Minister Persson's P'yŏngyang visit. Persson was the first Western head of state to visit North Korea. Kim Jong Nam's secret entry into Japan poured cold water on the atmosphere of the banquet. Within the Foreign Ministry a strict order came down to absolutely not disclose news of Kim Jong Nam's secret entry into Japan.

It appears obvious that Kim Jong Nam was decisively pushed out of the succession picture due to this incident. Moreover, even in North Korea many people already knew the fact that Kim Jong Nam's birth mother was Sŏng Hyerim. In North Korea Sŏng Hyerim was an extremely famous actress. She was even the eldest daughter-in-law of Yi Kiyŏng, the writer who had crossed north.¹¹ In 1974 and 1975 when I had been studying at a P'yŏngyang foreign language academy I had a friend in the same level called Yi Ch'adol. He was the grandson of Yi Kiyŏng.

Yi Ch'adol's father, Yi Chonghyŏk, was at that time North Korean representative to UNESCO in France. Right now he is vice-chairman of Chosŏn Asia-Pacific Peace Committee and Director of the South Korea Problems Study Center. Yi Ch'adol attended school from Yi Kiyŏng's house, and Yi Oktol of that family is Kim Chongnam's half sister.¹² Each time I went over to hang out or to study she would cut up fruit and treat me very kindly. However not seeing her after a certain time I asked Yi Ch'adol about it, and he said she had gone into the South Korea Revolutionaries Training Center. Yi Oktol's face was outstanding, so I honestly believed what he said.

In 1997 I had been working in Denmark when the news had been reported that Yi Hanyŏng had been assassinated, and it was only at that time I came to know the fact

¹¹ [translator's note] Yi Kiyŏng was a well-known proletarian novelist of the 1930s who went north from Seoul to his native P'yŏngyang after 1945. His most famous novel was *T'oji* [Land].

¹² [translator's note] i.e. her mother is Sŏng Hyerim, but her father was Yi Kiyŏng's son.

that Sŏng Hyerim was Kim Jong Il's girl.¹³ I cannot possibly express what a shock that time was. I became aware that even Yi Oktor's situation was not longlasting. She could no longer return to North Korea, so she followed her diplomat husband as he got moved to Finland, Italy, Austria, and Switzerland.

When I put all these clues together I, too, thought Kim Jong Nam would not be successor. What remained was either Kim Jong Chol or Kim Jong Un but it was hard to judge which one it would be. Those associates introduced to the two brothers by Kim Jong Il knew that Kim Jong Chol was the older of the two. For that reason many people thought Kim Jong Chol would be designated successor.

The succession operation for Kim Jong Il's heir was carried out secretly like this. But from the time after the "General Kim" song of praise "Footsteps" came out it was rushing ahead a full gallop. From about the second half of 2009 from the party committee and so forth the expressions 'Comrade General,' 'Our Party is facing a period of historical transition,' and so forth began to emerge. Anxiety about the true form of 'General Kim' or 'Comrade General' gradually mounted. And then the name Kim Jong Un stealthily appeared. Posters on which were written the lyrics of "Footsteps," the song praising Kim Jong Un, were put up all over Korea with the phrase, "Young Comrade General Kim Jong Un who continues the Paektu bloodline, the Man'gyŏngdae bloodline, the glory of our nation blessed with a general's uniform, a field marshal's uniform."

After Making His Entrance Kim Jung Un Attempts to Solidify Succession through a Currency Conversion

In November 2009 a completely unexpected incident burst out in North Korea. It was a currency conversion. It happened three or four months after Kim Jong Un's name was made public to the North Korean people. North Korea up until 2012, the 100th anniversary of Kim Il Sung's birth, had pushed forward on three tasks in order to construct a Strong and Prosperous Great Country (kangsŏng taeguk). They were a revised constitution, nuclear arms, and economic construction.

Among these the revised constitution was completed in April 2009, and nuclear armament had taken a big step forward with the success of the second nuclear test in May 2009. But they couldn't reach the expectation of achieving epochal results in economic construction. And so what they carried out was a currency conversion.

¹³ [translator's note] Yi Hanyŏng, original name Yi Illam, was the son of Sŏng Hyerim's older sister. He went to university in Moscow and eventually defected to South Korea in 1982. This fact was concealed and he had plastic surgery to change his appearance. In 1996 he published in South Korea a tell-all book, *Taedong River Royal Family*, and was shot near his residence by unknown assailants in 1997. His killers were never found, but it is assumed they were North Korean agents.

Even though North Korea residents get money they don't put it in the bank. That's because they can't freely withdraw it. Residents store at home the money they earn at the marketplaces (changmadang). The authorities have to constantly print money to pay the wages of what adds up to millions of soldiers, civil servants, and workers in state-run enterprises. It's a structure in which inflation gets frightfully aggravated.

As an example, my monthly wage as a bureau head in the Foreign Ministry was 2,900 wŏn, but the price of a kilogram of rice trade in the market was more than 3,000 wŏn. I couldn't even buy a kilogram of rice in the market with my monthly wage. Nevertheless life was possible because of the state rations. To those belonging to the Foreign Ministry, etc. central state organs they supplied a kilogram of rice at the existing state price of 40 wŏn per kilogram. So nobody from the Foreign Ministry was a fool and took his salary just as it was. Rice supply day became essentially wage day as well. In the case of the Foreign Ministry each bureau's female employees take all the bureau member's wages, and on rice distribution day subtract the prices of the distributed rice, and also set aside the remainder.

In the money conversion what Kim Jong Il aimed at was to block hyperinflation, and pull out the money residents had stored up in their houses. He also wanted to block the expansion of capitalism through markets. The concrete action of the money conversion was to convert 100 wŏn of the old money for 1 wŏn of the new money. But the problem was that there was a limit on the amount that could be converted. Caught on the limitation, old money that couldn't be converted into new money ended up becoming toilet paper.

According to my recollection on the day the money conversion was announced, they converted for each household only 100,000 wŏn of the old money into the new money. A few days after that it got adjusted to 100,000 wŏn with a separate additional 50,000 wŏn for each family member. Even so it was absurdly inadequate. The damage was especially extreme for market people. Because the privileged stratum or the money lords (big merchants) already traded with or had amassed their wealth in dollars, Euro, or yuan, etc. they were less damaged.

Due to Residents' Resistance the Money Conversion Failed, Party Economic Secretary Executed

Sweeping resistance grew up. Shops closed their doors and goods disappeared from markets. Kim Man'gil, Secretary responsible for P'yŏngyang, apologized in front of the people and appealed for all commercial activity to start up again, but it was of no use. Kim Jong Il was greatly surprised by people's opposition. He had not expected to see people who had groveled to the leaders' beat be able to engage in mass resistance.

Once you allow people the pleasure of earning money there's no going back. If you try to snatch away that pleasure they'll resist determinedly. What is more it's not a

simple pleasure, but a question upon which survival depends. When the authorities proposed to take away their right to live, the North Korean people who had one way or another been enduring political control risked their lives to resist. Kim Jong Il didn't understand this logic.

At the time of the money conversion there was passive resistance even in the Foreign Ministry. The former value of paper money that had been on the order of 3000 wŏn to the dollar became 100 to the dollar for a while at first as the money conversion was being implemented. In the markets the rice that had traded at mark of 3000 wŏn a kilogram fell to the margin of 50 wŏn. The problem was that the price at which the central organs distributed rice to civil servants in the central organizations was unchanged at 40 wŏn.

Before the conversion you could buy rice at your place of work for 40 wŏn and turn around and sell it in the market for 3000 wŏn. In actuality the members of the Foreign Ministry whose living standard was better than that of ordinary people used to sell their distributed rice in markets, or exchange it for better quality regular rice at a fixed ratio. But after the money conversion with distributed rice at 40 wŏn and market rice at 50 wŏn nobody wanted to buy distributed rice. Most of the rice distributed to central organizations was rice that had been stored for a number of years at military warehouses. The poor quality rice that was covered with mold was called "spoiled rice." Naturally the members of the Foreign Ministry did not want to receive distributions of "spoiled rice."

It became difficult for the Financial Accounting Bureau that had given out the distributions. The Party committee summoned me, the Pumdang Secretary, and warned, "If the Europe Bureau members don't accept their distribution it will be considered a frontal challenge to General Kim Jong Il's policy of money conversion, and you could be punished for sectarian activity". In North Korea if your behavior is mistaken in this kind of transition period you could get your head cut off. All of the members of the Europe Bureau debated and in the end decided to accept the spoiled rice.

However, due to the strenuous opposition of the people the money conversion reverted to a pitiful failure a month after it was carried out. It was an unprecedented thing for the curtain to fall like this on Party policy in North Korea that is a totally controlled society. In order to clam the people's dissatisfaction Kim Jong Il shifted all the blame onto Party Economic Secretary Pak Nam'gi and executed him.

Kim Jong Un was behind the money conversion, I think. The money conversion would simply be a failed operation to solidify the picture of his succession. After this uproar North Korea could no longer force the people on economic questions. Kim Jong Un seems to have received a lesson that no matter how submissive the North Korean people are, if you mess with their right to live your administration even can be shaken.

Establishment of North Korean Embassy in Belgium Flew Out the Window Due to the Shelling of Yŏnp'yŏng Island

On September 27, 2010 Kim Jong Un received the title of General in the Korean Peoples' Army, and the following day he was elected at the Party Delegates' Conference a Party Central Committee member and Vice-chair of the Party Central Committee. Kim Jong Un had been publicly confirmed as successor.

The first time North Korean residents see Kim Jong Un's face is September 28th. The reaction of the majority was, "It's like seeing the figure of Suryŏng Kim Il Sung." In contrast to the lively figure of Kim Jong Un the figure of Kim Jong Il sitting on the chairman's platform lacked vigor to the extent that he could barely even clap.

Right around the time that Kim Jong Un's succession was confirmed the incidents of blowing up and sinking of the Ch'ŏnam (March 2010) and the shelling of Yŏnp'yŏng Island happened (November 2010).¹⁴ These were the most shocking incidents in North-South relations in the past ten years. Since I've come to South Korea many have asked me if it is true that North Korea blew up the Ch'ŏnam. As one who has only worked at the Foreign Ministry I have no way of knowing the truth, but I remember that these stories circulated within North Korea.

"Chosŏn's naval strength is incomparably weaker than that of South Korea, but seeing the breakup of the Ch'ŏnam they know they have to pay attention to our navy."

In this manner North Koreans have come to have self-confidence.

On November 23, 2010, the day of the shelling of Yŏnp'yŏng Island my memories remain fresh. On that day the delegation led by the Chair of the European Union, Belgium's Foreign Ministry Asia-Pacific Bureau Head arrived in P'yŏngyang. North Korean and the European Union had been moving forward on annual foreign ministry bureau-head level political talks. In the evening at the invitation of Vice Minister Kung Sŏgung we had a welcoming banquet at P'yŏngyang's Kobong Mountain entertainment center that belongs to the Foreign Ministry. Around that time the whole world was seething over the shelling of Yŏnp'yŏng Island, but within the Foreign Ministry the only ones who knew this fact were Bureau 5 (America

¹⁴ [translator's note] The Ch'ŏnam was a South Korean naval vessel that was hit by a presumed North Korean torpedo and went down killing 46 sailors on March 25, 2010. Yŏnp'yŏng Island is a small South Korean island in the Yellow Sea just south of North Korea's Hwanghae Province. North and South Korean forces exchanged artillery fire there on November 23, 2010. Four South Korean civilians on the island were killed and 19 injured.

Bureau) who were overseeing CNN. That day's banquet proceeded in a very harmonious atmosphere.

The next day at 10:00 AM public talks were convened in the People's Cultural Palace. When the North Korean delegate head Kim Ch'un'guk first exchanged welcome greetings the delegate from the European Union's side stood up with a tense expression on his face. He said the following and then walked out with the delegation.

"Yesterday North Korea shelled South Korea's territory of Yŏnp'yŏng Island. As an expression of opposition to North Korea's attack the European Union has decided to terminate political talks with North Korea. Therefore, this delegation will leave P'yŏngyang by the quickest means possible. This is a directive from our head office. We are sorry."

North Korea had placed big expectations on these talks. The reason was that the head of the delegation was Belgium's Foreign Ministry Asia-Pacific Bureau Head, and there was the question of an impressively pending proposal to establish a North Korean embassy in Belgium. Even just at the banquet the night before the Belgian side had hinted, "Depending on the results of the public talks there could be progress on the question of establishing a North Korean embassy in Brussels." Although I had gone to the conference center with high expectations it was too bad the talks broke down.

A few days later a rumor was floating up regarding the shelling of Yŏnp'yŏng Island. The story goes that after the North Korea army artillery battery on Doghead in Kangnyŏng County of Hwanghae Province shelled Yŏnp'yŏng Island, they had foreknowledge of the South Korean counterattack, and clearing the area were undamaged.

The Germany Embassy in North Korea Issues a Critical Declaration

The whole world criticized North Korea over the Yŏnp'yŏng Island shelling. The European Union also published a declaration of opposition. The German Embassy in P'yŏngyang translated the declaration into our language and posted on a signboard in front of the embassy. The German Embassy is in the foreign delegate village in P'yŏngyang City's Taedong River District. The State Security Department posted sentries and controlled access so that ordinary people couldn't enter the foreign delegation village.

The Foreign Ministry was sent word about the issuance of a declaration of opposition from the General Foreign Delegation Task Bureau that is responsible for work related to embassies, and they demanded a response. This was the first time in history that a permanent embassy had publicly posted a piece of propaganda directly criticizing North Korea. If we accepted this one or two other embassies also

might be able to post propaganda that criticizes North Korea on the bulletin board in front of their embassy. The Foreign Ministry was caught in an emergency. We reported that we would like to immediately take measures to Kim Jong Il, and designated the person responsible.

Representing the Foreign Ministry I, who had been put in charge of this duty summonsed immediately the German ambassador. The German ambassador was on an overseas trip, and a temporary chargé d'affaires entered. I demanded that they take down at once the European Union's opposition statement. He defended himself like this.

The German Embassy posting of the European Union's declaration of opposition on the embassy bulletin board is a legitimate activity informing the North Korean people of our government's policy position. If the Foreign Ministry wants control to the extent of a foreign embassy's exhibition materials, it is clear interference in our internal affairs. The North Korean embassy in Berlin posts notices criticizing Germany's ally the United States, but the German government has never once interfered. We decline to remove our declaration.

All conversations taking place in the Foreign Ministry interview room are wiretapped. If the interview doesn't go well the State Security Department even reports the interview contents directly to Kim Jong Il. More than one or two have been criticized for mistakenly conducting interviews. A North Korean Foreign Service official must absolutely not be pushed around by the other party. I immediately counterattacked.

"The purpose of a permanent embassy is to develop a friendly relationship with the country in which it is located. I regard the embassy's directly criticizing the country in which it is located to be intended to break the relationship between the two countries. Even though the Chosŏn Embassy in Berlin has issued contents criticizing the United States we have never once criticized Germany itself. The instigator of this shelling of Yŏnp'yŏng Island is South Korea. Because the South Korean military did artillery practice in our direction first, we merely shot back in response. We're the injured party. For what reason has Germany made the injured party the instigator of everything? How you done this because you don't know the truth of the incident? Or if not, is it that you know but do this to take the side of South Korea and the United States? This really is questionable.

Right now the status of the Korean Peninsula has run into an explosive situation due to the Yŏnp'yŏng shelling. In this state of affairs Germany, which has to work toward the peace and security of the Korean Peninsula, cannot just take the word of one side, and we cannot accept propaganda materials criticizing us being posted on the embassy bulletin board. If you don't take action I don't know what our enraged people will do to the bulletin board. If despite our warning you don't take any action I don't know what might happen in the future. Germany will bear the responsibility."

The temporary chargé d'affaires faced turned red at my threat. "I will report to my country and we will take action," he said. Inside I quietly worried. If the German embassy resists until the end, North Korea had to take physical action. In that case a problem would arise in the North Korean embassy in Berlin. Fortunately, the German Embassy took the statement of opposition down the next day, and I received congratulations from my superiors at the Foreign Ministry.

Participate in the London Special Olympics In Order to Improve Relations with England

From early 2011 the London embassy in P'yŏngyang had been persistently trying to get North Korea included in the Paralympics (handicapped Olympics) that would be held the next year in London right after the summer Olympics. They said, "If North Korea participates in the London Paralympics it would be a great help in improving North Korea's human rights image, and North Korean-English relations would also be more developed." And then they said all sorts of nice sounding words like, "If they decide on North Korean participation, then straightaway from this year aid to North Korea might increase."

It was a time when you couldn't even dream of North Korean handicapped persons going abroad as a delegation, not to mention entering into the Paralympics. Until this time the North Korean Workers Party publicized that handicapped people's physical education is wrong based on Kim Il Sung's teaching that "handicapped person's competition is gambling to satisfy rich people's interest in abnormality."

Until the 1970s North Korea said a priori that families with handicapped persons could not live in apartments along P'yŏngyang's central city streets. There were also cases in which handicapped person's families were recommended to the countryside.

Unless their parents are anti-Japanese revolutionary fighters or high rank cadres handicapped persons also cannot attend university. It is known that at the level of the son of Kim Il Sung's partisan comrades, the couple Ryu Kyŏngsu and Hwang Sunhoe, or the Independence Army Fighter Ryang Sebong's grandson they went to Kim Il Sung Consolidated University. When I was little I once saw an excellent chess player who was a disabled student at the University of the Arts at a performance in P'yŏngyang Grand Theater, and he, too, was the son of a cadre family.

In the early 1980s I lived for a number of years in an apartment in P'yŏngyang City, Peony Hill District, Sŏngbuk Precinct, and nearby were two handicapped children. One limped slightly on his left leg. His father was a Security Officer, but even so for fear that he might be recommended for the countryside he sent the child when it was young to his aunt's house in Hamhŭng. Even his family register was moved to Hamhŭng while he lived there, and he only came back up to P'yŏngyang when he was an adult. The other child was a patient of congenital infantile paralysis. Even

though going outside was virtually impossible because they lived beside a first line road he had to move with his family to another place. A 'first line road' [il sŏn toro] means a road that Kim Il Sung or Kim Jong Il travel on frequently. Handicapped persons or people with bad sŏngbun¹⁵ cannot live along first line roads.

These days this policy has been greatly relaxed and they don't send the families of the handicapped to countryside anymore. And so, thinking that North Korea's policy on physical education and activity for handicapped persons must change, and using my individual experience when I was young as well, I accepted enthusiastically the English embassy's proposal requesting North Korea send a handicapped athletic team to participate. In North Korean style I persistently said let's try this once.

The English side sent a letter requesting participation to the North Korean Handicapped Association and requested that the documents be made swiftly. To send a delegation the Handicapped Association must formulate a proposal that receives Kim Jong Il's final approval after passing through the agreement of the Athletics Ministry Olympic Committee, the Foreign Ministry International Organization Bureau, and the Party Central Committee's Scientific Education Department. However, the Handicapped Association hesitated to formulate a proposal. The reason was that dangerous responsibility weighed heavily on them because it would have to be a proposal that requests a fundamental change in handicapped policy.

The Foreign Ministry's International Organization Bureau had this opinion.

"Western countries have raised Chosŏn's handicapped question as part of a human rights offensive against the north. If Chosŏn participates in the London Paralympics the problem that we haven't gone to the Olympics up until now might draw more attention. Also, handicapped persons with no experience dealing with the outside might make mistakes the first time they go abroad. If things go wrong, there's a big danger Chosŏn's domestic reality will become known. Rather we think it is better to not send them."

The Party Central Committee's Science and Education Department also came to the conclusion that to send a delegation of handicapped persons to the Paralympics is contrary to Party policy. Only the Physical Education Ministry Olympic Committee reasoned to the Science and Education Department cadres, "Handicapped person's athletic competition is not gambling for the amusement of the wealthy, but rather if we don't go to the Paralympics it will tarnish our republic's image," but they didn't buy that argument.

It wasn't a problem that could be solved by normal means. Prods kept arriving from the English Embassy. At my wit's end I decided to completely change the starting

¹⁵ [translator's note] Sŏngbun is one's social classification based on occupation or the political and class background of one's family.

point of this problem. I formulated a plan from a different angle that it's not a question of participation in the Paralympics, but a question of developing North Korean-English political relations. The document's title didn't say, "Policy Opinion Report Regarding the Question of Our Delegation's Participation in the London Paralympics," but I revised it to "Policy Opinion Report Regarding the Problem of the North Korean English Embassy's Recommendation."

"The English Government is making every effort to make the 2012 London Olympics successful. They place great significance on Chosŏn participating in the Paralympics, and have made continuous requests for participation of our republic's delegation. England, while maintaining a policy of participating in criticism, has been opposed to a military solution to Chosŏn's nuclear question. If we accede to their request this time they will be in our debt, and afterwards this will become support for the development of relations with England."

Having formulated the documents this way that changed them into a case about the problem of bilateral relations with England there was no need to seek the agreement of the International Organizations Bureau or the Party Central Committee's Science and Education Department. Looking at a draft of the documents Foreign Ministry cadres were aware that I had used "tactics" to dispatch a Paralympics athletic team. But the cadres also acknowledged the necessity for cadres to also participate in the North Korean delegation, so there was nobody who opposed it.

We reported it to Kim Jong Il and on that day the signing was finished. There was no reason to oppose it. A problem that could be solved as simply as this didn't even get introduced for decades because of worries that perhaps somebody would have found fault and heads would have rolled.

A Quickly Formed One-Person Team Participates, Warm Reception in the End

The question of participation in the London handicapped Olympics was settled, but a difficulty was that there were no athletes who could participate. Apart from the Foreign Ministry, the Handicapped Association, and high level Party cadres, there were no organizations that knew of the participation of North Korea's athletic team. At first I tried to find a child from among the members of the Foreign Ministry. I thought it would work out if we sent Rim Chusŏng, second son of Rim Yŏngch'ŏl who had worked as counsel in Beijing, to swimming lessons. Rim Yŏngch'ŏl is my best friend.¹⁶ Youthful overseas study, International Relations University, Beijing Foreign Languages University we all did together.

¹⁶ [translator's note] The text uses the North Korean expression "calf companion" (friend since childhood with an explanation in parentheses consisting of a Sino-Korean term meaning "old friend with whom I used to ride bamboo horses")

Rim Chusǒng who had been in Beijing with his father practiced every day in a neighborhood swimming pool. Rim Chusǒng, North Korea's first Paralympic athlete is a handicapped person missing his left arm and leg. Here, too, there is a tearful story. When Rim Chusǒng was six years old Rim Yǒngch'ǒl was dispatched to the consulate in China's city of Shenyang. Following the regulation that one cannot go abroad with two children, he left with only his eldest son. He entrusted Rim Chusǒng to his mother-in-law. Rim Chusǒng who had been playing at an apartment construction site next to their residence was hit by a crane and his arm and leg were cut off.

Rim Yǒngch'ǒl's mother-in-law didn't know what to do so she gave the news of the accident to me first. My wife and I urgently rushed to Kim Hyǒngjik Military Medical School Hospital where Rim Chusǒng had been admitted. I can still see vividly before my eyes the figure of little Rim Chusǒng lying sedated in bed with his arm and leg cut off. My wife and I cried together by the side of the bed. It was all the more sad, I thought, because if he had gone abroad with his parents, he would never have suffered this terrible accident. Rim Yǒngch'ǒl and his wife arrived in P'yǒngyang by train the next day. I couldn't possibly calculate how deep was the pain and agony of Rim Yǒngch'ǒl, his wife, and his mother-in-law.

The London Paralympics were held from the end of August until early September in 2012. Rim Chusǒng was the only North Korea athlete participating. Accompanying personnel were twelve people. Most of them were company cadres who had financially supported the Handicapped Association.

The English government's welcome of the North Korean athletic team was tremendous. The English Under-Secretary of State convened a meeting in the Foreign Office for just the North Korean athletic team. This was the first time this had happened in the history of North Korean-English foreign relations. England previously had not granted a meeting with someone of that rank even when the [North Korean] Foreign Ministry Undersecretary visited. This sign vividly shows how hungry England was for North Korean participation.

On the day of the swimming competition Rim Chusǒng was coming up with difficulty the very last among the athletes. He had hastily prepared and he couldn't suddenly swim well. At this point the hall announcer's voice rang out through the stadium.

"Ladies and gentlemen, North Korea is participating for the first time in the Paralympics. The athlete currently approaching the finish line is North Korea's sole Paralympic participant. He is representing all of North Korea's handicapped people. Let us all stand up and help him make it to the finish line.

(chungma kou) again meaning a friend one grew up and played with during childhood.

Everybody stood up clapping and cheering to help him out. There were many overseas South Koreans there and they all got up from their seats and urged him on until the end. North Korea's participation in the Paralympics was a great success. However, on the day that the North Korean delegation left England a shameful thing happened.

Overseas South Koreans and reporters had come out to the airport to see the North Korean delegation off. The North Korean delegation and the accompanying company cadres had bought large amounts of goods and the sight of shipping them by air caught the South Koreans' and reporters' attention. The next day this fact was widely reported in overseas Korean newspapers. The North Korean Foreign Ministry cadres had laboriously dispatched the delegation, and were so angry that the company cadres followed and looked after only their own preparation.

Even so the occasion of participation in the Paralympics this time led to big changes in North Korea's policy on handicapped persons. North Korean handicapped persons have begun to achieve international exchange. Since then I've held great pride and attachment to North Korea's handicapped advancement abroad, and if there is anything I can do for handicapped persons I step in to help.

Kim Jong Il Dies, Announced Two Days Later by Order of Kim Jong Un

After Kim Jong Un was confirmed as successor in September 2009 it didn't take long for him to grasp all power in North Korea into his hands. This was different from Kim Jong Il who had to play the role of nominal second-in-command beneath his father Kim Il Sung even though he was wielding real power. Kim Jong Il's death approached that abruptly.

It was eleven AM on Monday, December 19, 2011. A noon a directive came down from the Party committee that all personnel should gather in the lecture hall as there would be an important broadcast at 12:00 o'clock. On that day after attending the Europe Bureau morning meeting at 9:00 AM I was practicing ping pong together with colleague athletes in the the North Korean Handicapped Association gym. This is because we were having trials in preparation for the Foreign Ministry athletic function commemorating the birthday of Kim Chŏngsuk¹⁷ (December 24th).

Hearing the news that there would be an important broadcast I hurried back to the Foreign Ministry. In North Korea important announcements, important broadcasts have various meanings, but this was the first time since the death of Kim Il Sung that all personnel were told to gather in the lecture hall to watch. Everybody gathered tensely in the hall, but inwardly thought 'surely not.' At precisely 12:00 o'clock Chosŏn Central Broadcasting announcer Yi Ch'unhŭi appeared. She was wearing

¹⁷ [translator's note] First wife of Kim Il Sung and mother of Kim Jong Il.

black Hanbok. An instant sigh of 'ah' spread through the lecture hall. The only time before that Yi Ch'unhŭi had worn mourning clothes was when Kim Il Sung died.

Kim Jong Il had died at 8:00 AM on December 17th. The announcement came after 51 hours, two days, had passed. The explanation, according to North Korean press, was that they originally wanted to make the announcement on the same day. But because that was Saturday Kim Jong Un had the announcement delayed so that residents could relax over the weekend. Perhaps there is no country in the world but North Korea that can keep top secret for two days the death of the country's leader. Since all of the country's administrative tasks are accomplished by computer, if a few people in the Third Floor Secretariat hush things up the North Korean system will roll along as is for a while. Even if Kim Jung Un should pass away, a similar thing could happen.

When the important broadcast ended the Party secretary went up to the rostrum. He said, "You can all return to work," and disappeared behind the stage. Everybody arose from their seats and scattered to their offices. Not a single person sobbed or wailed. This is different from when Kim Il Sung died. Then there were many people listening to the broadcast daubing their eyes.

We went back to our offices, but there was nobody to bring out the lunch boxes. When Kim Il Sung died there were many people who suffered bitter criticism for mistaken conduct. They ferreted out people who after the condolence ceremony went to the sauna, moved house, or played cards, and banished them to the countryside. Thinking how people underwent such things everybody knew how they had to act. However, there was no location to offer condolences. Today Kim Jong Il's bronze statue has been set up, but at that time only Kim Il Sung's statue was on Mansudae Hill.

Ministerial staff asked me, pumundang secretary, where they have to go to pay their respects. Enquiring with the Party committee we were told to wait until there are instructions. About 3:00 PM instructions came down from the Party committee. They fixed up a space (incense altar) in the Foreign Ministry's foreigner's interview room where condolences could be paid until the evening.

In North Korea you have to be good at this. Nobody wanted to get caught so all displayed excessive loyalty. The ministerial staff who hadn't shed a single tear watching the report of Kim Jong Il's death began making white paper flowers as if somehow possessed. Everyone pitched in to make a garland. It was an activity that made leaving at quitting time unacceptable. The flower garland was completed about eleven in the evening. Only then did the staff pick up the garland and got to the condolence hall. And one by one each went into mourning and emerged saying they were going to hold watch at the condolence hall.

A time period was fixed for each bureau. They returned by rotation and went down one hour each keep watch next to Kim Jong Il's portrait. It was similar in other

places. Beginning with Kim Il Sung square here and there in P'yŏngyang they hung out portraits of Kim Jong Il where condolence ceremonies were held. The next day at each person's Party organization it was compulsory to report how many hours had been kept. If you didn't do this, you didn't know whether you might get some sort of disadvantage.

Kim Jong Il's body was displayed at the Kŭmsusan Sun Palace, and a state funeral was carried out. Kim Jong Un's younger sister Kim Yŏjŏng was first made public in the North Korean press at this time. By contrast Kim Jong Chol was not, of course, on the funeral program and his name was not mentioned by the press. The condolence ritual was carried out without a hitch in a very organized fashion as if it had been scripted beforehand. I judged that Jang Song Thaek had acted as the commander organizing the condolence ceremony. Kim Jong Un would have been upset at the sudden death of his father, and in situation at that time the only person who could come out and lead the North Korean system calmly and without interruption was Jang Song Thaek.

Early in Kim Jong Un's Tenure "Make a Kaesŏng Industrial Complex in 14 Places", Displays Renovation Tendencies

After Kim Jong Il died North Korea quickly entered into the Kim Jong Un system. It changed at first from the guard regulations for the Number One Event. Number One Event is what they call events that the highest leaders attend. Formerly all they did was present the list of names participating in the Party committee meeting to the Guard Command (Howi Saryŏngbu), and on the day of the meeting Security Service and Guard Officers wearing civilian clothes confirmed people's identity. But as Kim Jong Il took power guards in military uniforms confirmed identity papers. On both sides of the entrance to Kim Il Sung Square machine guns had been emplaced, and on either side was a line of fully armed soldiers.

Participating crowds had no choice but to enter Kim Il Sung Square between the machine guns. I have experienced it several times, but every time I pass in front of machine guns I feel a shudder at the back of my neck. If an accidental stray shot should occur I could only helplessly die. To the participants who entered the event location to cheer "Long Live Kim Jong Un" having machine guns aimed at them was no different than declaring martial law. It seemed to be nothing more than an attempt to strike fear in order to repress residents.

Things closely resembling martial law actually took place. From the day before Number One Event civil servants in the ministries in the vicinity of Kim Il Sung Square were sent home. The empty buildings of the Cabinet, the Foreign Ministry, the Trade Ministry, the Agriculture Ministry, and the Education Committee were filled up with fully armed soldiers. Soldiers able to suppress riots were deployed in advance. After-the-fact talk has naturally come out, but up until this time there were only a few who predicted Kim Jong Un style politics of fear.

On April 11, 2012 Kim Jong Un becomes Workers Party First Secretary. On April 13th as he ascended to First Chairman of the National Defense Commission he inherited all of the responsibilities of Kim Jong Il. For the first time in world history a three generational inheritance of power in a republican government became formalized. On this day they shot off Bright Star Number 3, but it failed because of technical problems. On July 18th the Supreme Peoples' Assembly decided to bestow on Kim Jong Il, Commander-in-Chief of the Chosŏn Peoples' Army, the title of Wŏnsu, two ranks higher than his existing rank of General.

Actually, North Korea's elite harbored great expectations with the advent of Kim Jong Il. Kim Jong Un had passed through middle school in Switzerland. At a time of acute sensitivity, anyway, he had come into contact with Western cultural products. It was an expectation that Kim Jong Un might accept the forward-looking reform and renovation that in order to preserve the system Kim Jong Il couldn't bear to carry out. The consensus of North Korea's elite was that North Korea could also take the road like China that achieved rapid development through reform and renovation after the death of Mao Zedong.

With an opened mind worthy of the overseas faction might not Kim Jong Il be able to modernize North Korea? This expectation at first seemed to come true. In North Korea there is a "Policy Transmission Hour" that is held every Saturday morning. It's an hour in which is delivered what Kim Jong Un has said over the past week. If you look at what Kim Jong Un said around that time it was on a level that one might think North Korea would go impressively in reform and renovation.

"Chosŏn's current economic system is difficult. Let's all try studying other countries' economic systems. Let's get the economic theories that are good and study all of them. Let's give it a try."

Kim Jong Un unhesitatingly expressed even thought that completely contradicted Kim Jong Il.

"Chosŏn has to received foreign capital if it wants to develop economically, but right now in the situation that the United States is increasing sanctions there aren't many methods. These days the simple way of earning foreign exchange is mining. We've got to greatly increase the number of miners to make mining develop."

Kim Jong Un even cited the example of the Kaesŏng Industrial Complex and emphasized the necessity for reform and renovation.

"Many people worry that the Kaesŏng Industrial Complex might over the long run threaten Chosŏn's system. But what we get is greater. First of all, we earn money that is absolutely necessary for us. Second, it makes easier a natural control and management of the Kaesŏng city people. Control of residents has become ever so difficult in other areas because of markets. The fifty thousand citizens of Kaesŏng all

gather together to go to work and come home from one place so what management is necessary? Overall, it's much more profitable for us. We've got to expand this kind of special economic zone into the interior. Make 14 more places like Kaesŏng Industrial Complex."

Kim Jong Un also sent down the order, "Education is important. Construct a high middle school in every city district and country to strengthen nurturing of talent."

Has 'Arirang' Discontinued, Attempts to Carve a Softer Image

There were even examples that we directly experienced in the Foreign Ministry. Kim Jong Un ordered us to hold a stand-up party for our New Year's assembly. This is a passage that runs counter to Kim Il Sung's practice. At a normal North Korean parties the method is for each person to sit in a chair to eat their food. Although Kim Il Sung held a stand-up party in the 1960s at the recommendation of Party International Secretary Pak Yongguk who had toured Europe it ended after one try. The cadres of the time opposed it this way.

"Why should we have to stand strictly at banquets when we have sat up until now? Horses and such eat standing up. Are we horses? We don't want to stand because our legs are tired. Pak Yongguk, the rat, went to Europe once and came back with a strange report."

After that Kim Il Sung didn't have another stand-up banquet. Actually, the reason cadres avoided these stand-up banquets wasn't that they were uncomfortable, but because they didn't fit with the North Korean system. At a stand-up party you freely go up to and choose your conversation partner and have to select a theme that matches the situation. To North Korean cadres who, in cases of activity with outsiders, have to receive permission beforehand about who they can meet and what topics they can talk about, stand-up parties were absolutely 'clothes they cannot wear.'

However, the 2012 New Year assembly was held in stand-up party fashion as ordered by Kim Jong Un. England's and a few other ambassadors came up to Kim Jong Un and gave him a New Year's greeting, but the atmosphere was very uncomfortable. The cadres and workers at foreign embassies clumped here and there each among their own, and then it could be said to be over. The party ended, and in the place where only the cadres remains Kim Jong Un lost his temper, "Who conducts activity with outsiders like this?" While I looked at his figure I got the positive feeling that Kim Jong Un had anyway been trying something new.

Around 2012 when he had just taken power Kim Jong Un was much gentler than he is now. The cadres didn't tremble before Kim Jong Un like they do now. If you compare his image then with his image now definite differences appear. Cadres

could approach Kim Jong Un without difficulty, and Kim Jong Un reciprocated with a friendly attitude.

Even in June 2012 when construction on P'yŏngyang's Ch'angjŏn Street was completed Kim Jong Un showed off a shocking walk. Ch'angjŏn Street, the newest apartment complex, can be said to be "New Town, North Korean Edition," or "P'yŏngyang's Kangnam."¹⁸ Kim Jong Un together with his wife Ri Sŏlju visited families that had newly moved in. He personally poured soju for aged persons and went about cultivating the image of a people's leader.

What caused the greatest reverberations among North Korean residents was his discontinuing of the Arirang Games. Many North Koreans were dissatisfied with the Arirang Mass Games. Why wouldn't they be dissatisfied since students were mobilized and made to practice for six months every year? But this had been a problem that nobody could lay out or talk about. Even though they didn't know who recommended this to Kim Jong Un, in as far as he discontinued mobilization of students it was enough to receive North Korean residents' applause.

In August of the same year his boarding an unarmed wooden fishing boat to inspect the North Korean islands of Mudo and Changjaedo opposite Yŏnp'yŏng Island was to North Koreans a 'moving' production. It had been something unimaginable when Kim Il Sung or Kim Jong Il were alive. Boldly inspecting the front lines without even any bodyguards itself excited North Korean residents. Odds are good that old people even cried seeing the figure of a young, vigorous Kim Jong Un boarding a 27-horsepower wooden boat, braving wind and waves to visit the backcountry.

"Seize Europe's BBC and America's ABC"

After Kim Jong Un took power a certain change began to happen in North Korea's divisions dealing with the outside. Kim Jong Un who had been educated abroad when he was young understood very well the propaganda effectiveness of the press, and emphasized activity with foreign opinion.

Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il both were very concerned with foreign opinion. Kim Il Sung knew how to make use of prominent world press like *The New York Times* through direct interviews. Kim Jong Il never had even a single interview with a foreign press company but sent down guidance that North Korea must seize England's BBC in Europe and ABC in America.

Kim Jong Il's guidance to seize BBC makes sense, because in Europe BBC's influence is beyond that of any other press organization. However, among American press it was CNN that paid more attention than others to North Korean problems. CNN is

¹⁸ [translator's note] Kangnam "South of the Han River" is a district in Seoul with high class apartments and residences.

also the press company that has made the most visits to North Korea. Even so, if Kim Jong Il wanted to change American public opinion to the benefit of North Korea, it wasn't CNN but ABC that he said had to be seized. I don't know the reason.

No matter how important North Korean leaders considered the task of dealing with foreign opinion there were limits. It is hard to expect speech to be effective in a situation in which there is no freedom of speech. It's North Korea's contradiction and tragedy. The Foreign Ministry headed off foreign press's criticism of North Korea, and they always agonized about problems of using public relations methods on these. Using the lips of foreign opinion to quickly deliver North Korea's point of view is also a task the Foreign Ministry faces.

However, the foreign press emphasizes South Korean press more than North Korean press. If incidents happen like the shelling of Yŏnp'yŏng Island or the blowing up of the Ch'ŏnan, South Korean press report it one step ahead of the North Korean press. Moreover the reports of Chosŏn Central Broadcasting or the Workers' Daily are fragmentary and monotonous without even any particular content. The foreign press naturally have to cite the contents of South Korean press or quote them.

Anyone can easily guess the reason North Korean press reports are slow. It's because there are strict controls on reports. If the North Korean press report on incidents like the capsizing of the ferry Sewŏl¹⁹ or the impeachment of President Park Geun-hye²⁰ they have to pass through procedures. The Report Office of the Unification Front Bureau must get permission from the Central Party Propaganda and Agitation Department's South Korea Conditions Report Office, transmit to Kim Jong Un a "Plan to Report on South Korean Conditions" and get his approval.

International news like the 9.11 terror, or the Iraq War are not much different. The Foreign Ministry Report Office must get permission from the Central Party Propaganda and Agitation Department's Foreign Propaganda Office and transmit to Kim Jong Un on Wednesday each week "Next Week's Report Plan," and get his approval. Generally North Korea press issue international news about a week late.

North Korean press faces the contradictory situation of having to speak but lips not being able to move as they want. Considering this Kim Jong Il or Kim Jong Un have an ambivalent attitude on the problem of reporting about the outside world. Some days they tell Foreign Ministry diplomats to actively attract interest in North Korea's

¹⁹ On April 16, 2014 the South Korean ferry Sewŏl capsized and sank off the southwest coast drowning 304 passengers and crew. A large portion of the victims were high school students on an outing.

²⁰ South Korean President Park Geun-hye was impeached by the South Korean National Assembly on December 9, 2016 on charges involving corruption and influence peddling. The impeachment was upheld by South Korea's Constitutional Court, and she was removed from office on March 10, 2017. She was subsequently tried and found guilty of abuse of power and coercion and was imprisoned.

position through interviews and briefings with foreign press. Yet on other days they change their words saying they cannot tolerate even little mistakes, and Foreign Ministry diplomats cannot contact foreign press just as they please.

Nobody Wants to be Foreign Ministry Spokesperson, Publish Opinion Only Through Documents

Foreign Ministry diplomats who have contact with foreign press get criticized for mistakes at weekly or monthly Party Life Summary. Up until this level the criticism is by colleagues and is not that humiliating. However, at quarterly Party Life Summary held every three months 1000 ministry officials gather in the lecture hall, and it is presided over by the Undersecretary of the Party Coordination and Guidance Department responsible for the Foreign Ministry. This criticism by only a couple of people installed on the debate stage is very humiliating for the person involved, and the punishment level can rise. The Party undersecretary is faithful to Kim Jong Il's guidance that, "Life summary must be carried out in a atmosphere of ideological struggle." The atmosphere of quarterly Party Life Summary was always reward and punishment.

When I was Vice Head of the Europe Bureau Ch'oe Hwi, who visited the South during the P'yŏngch'ang Winter Olympics, was Undersecretary of the Party Coordination and Guidance Department responsible for the Foreign Ministry. Foreign Minister Pak Ŭich'un, too, in front of Ch'oe Hwi was like a mouse in front of a cat. If you don't want to make self-criticism at Quarterly Party Life Summary the best thing is to do the world you're ordered to without random contact with foreign press. Who would want an interview with foreign press in this environment of rampant self-preservation?

It was the time point just before the celebration of Kim Il Sung's 100th birthday in April 2012. Even to the extent of opening a satellite-launching site to the foreign press they were attempted to harvest exceptional results. A directive came down to overseas ambassadors telling them to have interviews with foreign press to propagate North Korea's policy. However the great majority of ambassadors avoided interviews with foreign press as before.

That year I participated in a council opened in the Foreign Ministry. It was a meeting related to the task with foreign press. I proposed this way.

"Right now the Foreign Ministry publicizes the republics views on foreign affairs only through announcements and communiqués. Solely through documents. Even if we should publish these through broadcast announcers it wouldn't change anything. In no country in the world do broadcast announcers simply read Foreign Ministry announcements and communiqués. Now our Foreign Ministry should also have a spokesperson came to do direct briefings with the foreign press and take questions. This is a worldwide tendency. Since only published documents come out in

P'yŏngyang it doesn't make sense to tell on-the-spot ambassadors to have interviews with press. You can't guarantee speed, and you don't get timely effectiveness."

Actually I had long since received a request from APTN²¹ asking if they could have an interview and a press conference with a Foreign Ministry spokesperson. It was a reasonable request. The presiding chairman sidestepped my proposal really by ordering the Foreign Ministry Report Bureau to assume the spokesperson role. But all were sitting mute neither refuting nor supporting my opinion. Their discomfort was obvious. The meeting closed without coming to any conclusions. After the meeting Ambassador Song Irho who bore responsibility for negotiations with Japan told me quietly.

"That a Foreign Ministry spokesperson should hold a briefing for domestic and foreign reporters is already an item that General Kim Jong Il decided for us. I guess you know this, too, but the problem is that within the Foreign Ministry there is nobody who would volunteer to be spokesperson. There would be nothing but trouble if you make a mistake, and who wants that?"

He meant that I could talk that way for sure but nothing will get changed. Even after that every time I got the opportunity I recommended setting up a system of transmitting P'yŏngyang's point of view to the whole world through an interview with APTV's P'yŏngyang branch, but in the end I couldn't put it through.

Yi Sŏlju Appears Playing an American Song with Moranbong Band, Is It the Beginning of Opening Up?

I was also under the illusion that Kim Jung Un might give up his line of nuclear development and lead us toward renovation and opening. On the evening of July 6, 2012 a special music performance was put on in P'yŏngyang. By order of Kim Jong Un it was the first performance of Moranbong Band.

Two things surprised me about this. One was that Ri Sŏlju sat next to Kim Jong Un to watch the performance. At this time Ri Sŏlju's name and status has not been made public. The other was that among the foreign songs played by Moranbong Band were many American popular songs. Of course it wasn't explained that they were American. What I mean is that while "Gonna Fly Now", among the theme songs of "Lucky", was being played the top stage screen's supertitles introduced it in the manner of "Light music, 'Right now flying up' (foreign song)." This song appears while Lucking is running by himself and shadow boxing, and on the screen behind the Moranbong Band stage the actual scene from the movie "Lucky" was even spread out as background. Also Frank Sinatra's "My Way" was performed introduced as, "Light Music 'My Path' (foreign song)."

²¹ [translator's note] Associated Press Television Network.

The highlight was a medley of cartoon theme songs introduced as, “World Animation Famous Song Collection.” A collection of theme songs from Disney Cartoons were collected including Mickey Mouse, Uncle Bear Ppu (Winnie-the-Pooh), Snow White and the Seven Dwarves, Cinderella, and Beauty and the Beast. Characters dressed up as Mickey Mouse, Minnie Mouse, Winnie-the-Pooh appeared while on the stage screen the corresponding cartoon passed by like a panorama. Although they wrote “Famous American Cartoon Song Collection” it wasn’t colorless.

Regular North Koreans who have watched TV wouldn’t have known these were American songs and cartoons, but I who had seen many American movies overseas grasped everything easily. It was entirely unprecedented. I heard that they gathered a good number of the themes from South Korea. These days you can find public performances of cartoons on Y-tube.

For several years the North Korean State Symphony Orchestra has been practicing American public performances. The Moranbong Band performs American popular music and it seems clear that Kim Jong Un has ordered that this be broadcast on TV. Since the Moranbong Band has completed preparations to be sent to America it would be a signal that North Korea is opening its doors.

Ri Sölju appeared publicly on North Korea press on July 25th. The TV reported, “Kim Jong Un together with his wife, Comrade Ri Sölju, took part in the completion ceremony of Nūngna People’s Amusement Park.” I had supposed that the woman sitting at Kim Jong Un’s side at the time of the Moranbong Band’s first performance would be his wife, but it was truly unexpected that the title ‘Comrade Ri Sölju’ even came out.

What made North Korean residents even more surprised was the sight of Ri Sölju walking intimately with her arm in Kim Jong Un’s. In North Korea for even a married couple to walk down the street arm in arm is quite unseemly business. And this thing, too, was at a state ceremony where aged cadres all could see. It could even be seen as a highly indiscreet act.

Instant Return of Politics of Terror, Peoples’ Army Chief of Staff Executed

Even in the Foreign Ministry that image was constantly talked about. World publications even had feature articles. Some of the publications reported that this was something Jong Un deliberately performed to show himself to have an open, civilized character.

On this day Ri Sölju came to be the star of an even more dramatic episode. Kim Jong Un had proposed to Chinese Ambassador Liu Hongcai and other foreign dignitaries that they should ride together on the amusement ride “Spinning Horse.” When Kim Jong Un got on first the foreign delegates had no choice but to take their seats, but

the Spinning Horse that had been working fine suddenly stopped working. The cadres who were at one side didn't know what to do and the managing workers jumped this way and that. A short time later the Spinning Horse turned again.

It was an accident that could easily happen, but as soon as Kim Jong Un alighted from the Spinning Horse he abruptly yelled at the managing workers. The managing workers apologized trembling in their boots. Liu Hongcai and the other foreign ambassadors were also dismayed. At this time Ri Sölju came up to Kim Jong Un and quietly stroked him. Kim Jong Un's agitation got calmed down and only as he began to return to the other amusement facilities did a peaceful atmosphere flow. Even after that Ri Sölju accompanied Kim Jong Un to on-the-spot guidance presenting splendid image of a tender husband and wife.

However, North Korean elites' expectations of Kim Jong Un gradually began to crumble. Entering into the second half of 2012 strengthened internal Party discipline and control of cadres. He demanded that each and every action of all cadres and Party members be thoroughly reported in advance to Party organizations. His order was to, "set up a reporting system so the Party will be able to hear even the sound of a needle being dropped in the wilderness."²² In accordance with this everyone in the Foreign Ministry from the bureau head level on up had to report to the Party committee their schedules one day in advance, and the Foreign Ministry Party committee had to report daily to the Central Party Organization and Guidance Department the concrete activities of high level cadres from Undersecretary on up.

It was about this time that the stage of terror politics appeared. It was passed around that People's Army Chief-of-Staff Ri Yŏnggho who had been considered the real power of the Kim Jong Un system was caught by wiretap speaking ill of Kim Jong Un in private and got purged. It was said that Ri Yŏnggho said about Kim Jong Un's reform and renovation walk early in his tenure, "Does the General (Kim Jong Un) think we didn't do reform and renovation because we didn't know that we could live well if we did it?" They said that after he was purged Ri Yŏnggho received the revolutionization treatment, and then was executed.

In North Korea right now if Kim Jong Il commands "shoot" the firing squad carries it out impresstely. If Kim Jong Un puts on a large scale construction project to state commemoration project one or two people are executed each time. Since he kills them even at the beginning of a project everyone is dispirited. Its beginning was from the gigantic remodeling of the Kŭmsusan Memorial Palace toward the end of 2012. They had decided to change the square in front of the palace into flower beds, and so every state organ was assigned an area of the project. The task was to dig the dirt up to a depth of three meters, bake it, and then spread it out again. The baking was to eradicate pests. It was detected that when the State Industrial Arts Guidance

²² What I have translated as "wilderness" is in the original, "Samsu River and Kapsan County," remote and rugged parts of North Hamgyŏng Province.

Department found it difficult to keep up with the time schedule, they dug down only 1.5 meters, and covered it up. One person, the Department head was put before the firing squad at the command of Kim Jong Un.

Jang Song Thaek's Execution Suggests Warning about Internal Enemies

On April 14, 2012 Kim Jong Un convened the Supreme People's Assembly and made clear in the Constitution that North Korea is a country possessing nuclear weapons. The task of making the status of nuclear state statutory in the system was a plan put forth in the Kim Jong Il era. Kim Jong Il had declared 2012, the hundredth birthday of Kim Il Sung, the year for advance to a Strong and Prosperous Great Country, and until that time laid plans to acquire the status of a nuclear power. Kim Jong Il left this world without being able to live until 2012, but tenacity about nukes seems to have survived after his death. Specifying in the Constitution that North Korea is a country possessing nuclear weapons can be said to be the first example of this.

On December 12, 2012 North Korea launched an Ŭnha 3 missile carrying a satellite that was successfully launched into orbit. The satellite launch proceeded according to missile plans, but this can be seen as a signal that Kim Jong Un has turned to Kim Jong Il's line. That the next year Kim Jong Un carried out a third nuclear tests, and claimed that this confirmed the ability for accurate nuclear hit that has been miniaturized, lightened, and diversified also backs this up.

And finally on March 31st Plenum of the Party Central Committee the Pyŏngjin line of nuclear and economic development was formally adopted as Party policy. The nuclear and economic Pyŏngjin Line means that together with economic development military force from now on will be strengthened through an asymmetrical strategy centering on nukes and intercontinental ballistic missiles. Following this decision all of North Korea's revenues will be concentrated on nuclear and missile development.

In this manner opportunity by opportunity North Korea always keeps to its goals. This is because there is almost no power to operate society much less new goals. If 2012 is the hundredth anniversary of Kim Il Sung's birth let us do something unconditionally until that time, in this way they must propagandize and mobilize North Korean residents. If they don't do this social stability will not be maintained.

But when Kim Jong Un declared the Nuclear-Economic Pyŏngjin Line, underneath he said words that weren't written in the report.

"The path of completing nuclear weapons will not be easy. America, China, and other great powers will do anything to block this. A fight with American could even break out. However, I think we should take up the domestic war before war with America. We can only make nuclear weapons if we win the domestic confrontation with ideology and intentions."

At that time, we had wondered, “Confrontation with whom?” If we try to match this up with the situation that transpired afterwards, in the end Kim Jong Un’s words hinted at purges, but at the time we didn’t know what they meant.

It was about this time that Kim Jong Un cast off his attitude of seeming to want reform and renovation and turned tough. Why did it have to be this time when it turned? As an individual I analyze it this way. Kim Il Sung returned to North Korea in 1945. He became North Korea’s leader at the age of 33. His going to war was also during his thirties. Kim Jong Il also wanted to achieve something as a young man.

While Kim Jong Un took power in 2012, he wanted to make 2015 the “Year of the Great Fatherland Unification Emergency,” and this came out in *The Workers Daily* frequently. In both Party internal meetings and in military meetings they decided to finish war preparations by 2015. Kim Jong Un inspected military troops and examined war preparations. However, the reality was dismaying.

Facilities were old and out-of-date, the secretly stored oil was used up and didn’t correspond with accounts, and the troops were starving. The decisive thing was that if the economy didn’t revive they wouldn’t have the money and equipment to maintain a 1.2 million-man military force. Kim Jong Un came to the conclusion that war based on conventional armaments is impossible. And so there was nothing but all-in with the nukes from the time of Kim Jong Il and grandfather Kim Il Sung. He had thought that from the instant he gives up nukes it becomes difficult for him to maintain power.

The core of all-in was money. All revenue must be poured into nuclear and missile development, and Jang Song Thaek was holding the majority of the economic concessions.²³ Kim had to decide whether Jang Song Thaek should hand the concessions over, or keep them in his grasp. I see one reason Kim Jong Un ruthlessly executed Jang Song Thaek was that he couldn’t give up the economic concessions. Of course Kim Jong Un’s deep-rooted hatred for Jang Song Thaek would also have played a decisive role.

The Reason China Couldn’t Persuade North Korea to Give Up Nukes

The Third Floor Secretariat²⁴ seems to have had a certain amount of influence on Kim Jong Un’s turning hardline. Fundamentally, the Third Floor Secretariat is an organization to deify Kim Jong Il and Kim Jong Un, father and son, and maintain hereditary control. If North Korea went into reform and renovation and residents came to know the real face of the Kim father and son the Third Floor Secretariat

²³ [translator’s note] In the sense of control over exploitation and export of major natural resources.

²⁴ [translator’s note] Of the Korean Workers Party.

would fall apart. I don't think Kim Jong Un who inherited the Third Floor Secretariat organization outright would have been able to counter their opposition.

Kim Jong Un completed the task of making explicit and systematizing in domestic law the Constitutional and Party policy of North Korea being a nuclear state through making possession of nukes explicit in the Constitution and choosing the nuclear-economic Advance Together line. In terms of timing it is the beginning of 2013. From this time on, the nuclear debate between North Korea and China began to change its aspect. This is because the logic of North Korea's response had evolved, and this is connected to "making explicit possession of nukes."

Whenever high level talks or exchanges took place between North Korea and China the nuclear problem used to emerge as an item of controversy. China advocated this:

"We're not telling you to eliminate nuclear weapons right away. It's fine for you to keep nukes for a certain period of time. But you have to declare as policy that Chosŏn's long-term goal is denuclearization, and to return to the bargaining table of denuclearization talks. We can increase aid even if you only return to talks for denuclearization. While you keep nuclear weapons for a certain period of time, our view is that you can gradually move toward elimination of nukes if trust gets built between North Korea and America and neighboring countries."

Exchange between North Korea and China is divided between party-to-party exchange and government-to-government exchange. Party-to-party exchange is carried out by International Department of the North Korean Workers Party (朝鲜劳动党国际部) and the External Liaison Department of the Chinese Communist Party (中华共产党对外联络部), while government-to-government exchange is carried out by the North Korean Foreign Ministry (朝鲜外务省) and the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (中华外交部). In cases of talks between Party delegations North Korea retorts like this:

"It is the sacred duty of communists to fight imperialism. In order to fight American imperialism we, too, must have nuclear weapons. When developing nuclear weapons even the Chinese Communist Party said there is no way to stand up to America except with nuclear weapons. And with nuclear weapons you protected socialism. When all the communist parties in the world opposed China's development of nuclear weapons only the Chosŏn Workers Party alone supported the Chinese Communist Party. There are big Parties and little Parties, Parties with long history and Parties with short history, but there cannot be high Parties and low Parties, Parties that give orders and Parties that receive orders. All Parties are equal. The desire to counter America's nuclear weapons with nuclear weapons is the policy of the Chosŏn Workers' Party. To question this policy is interference in our internal affairs and is contrary to the principles of the international communist movement."

If it's a government-to-government exchange North Korea's refutation gets changed.

“Chosŏn has made possession of nukes explicit in its Constitution. Your telling us to give up nuclear weapons is tantamount to demanding that we revise our Constitution. While in the world there can be big and little countries, no country but China interferes in another country's internal affairs and says to rip up and change its Constitution. This is not the era of the Qing Dynasty.²⁵”

North Korea and China are communist countries that emphasize theory and logic. There are many times that logical fights determine talks' victory or defeat. The Chinese Communist Party that has made Marxism-Leninism its leading thought is in the perplexing position of not being able to oppose the North Korean Workers' Party policy of nuclear development on the basis of preexisting ideology and theory. Here lies the reason China right now is not able to forcefully press North Korea to denuclearize.

²⁵ [translator's note] From 1636 to 1894 Korea, while independent in domestic and foreign affairs, was a tributary of the Manchu Qing Dynasty (that ruled China from 1644 to 1912). The Korean court thus deferred to Qing on many issues of protocol and listened carefully to Qing advice on foreign affairs. Koreans took the opportunity of the Sino-Japanese War (1894-5) to sever this relationship. (translator's note)