

## **The Future of North Korean Women in COVID-19 Pandemic: Risk or Opportunity**

- ☐ Date: August 24 (Tue) – 25 (Wed), 2021
- ☐ Venue: Online (Zoom webinar)
- ☐ Host : Center for Korean Women & Politics



사단 한국여성정치연구소  
법인 Center for Korean Women & Politics

# Program Details for Online Conference

\* Simultaneous interpretation provided in Korean and English.

Aug. 4(Tue)

13:00-13:10 (KST)	<b>Opening address:</b> Eun-Ju Kim (Executive Director of CKWP) <b>Congratulatory address:</b> Chounsook Jung (Chairperson of the National Assembly Gender Equality and Family Committee) Sunuk Kim (Chairperson of POSCO TJ Park Foundation)
13:10-14:10 (KST)	<b>Session I Changes in the political status of North Korean women</b> Host: Soo-Am Kim (Korea Institute for National Unification) Presentation (20'): Dae-Jin Jung (Ajou University) Discussion(40'): Hye-suk Kang (Seoul National University), Soo-hyun Kwon (Korea Women's Political Solidarity)
14:30-15:30 (KST)	<b>Session II Changes in the economic role of North Korean women</b> Host: Hee-young Lee (Daegu University) Presentation(20'): Bronwen Dalton (University of Technology Sydney, Australia) Discussion(40'): Eun-Ju Choi (Sejong Institute), Eun-lee Joung (Korea Institute for National Unification)
16:00-17:00 (KST)	<b>Session III The culture of North Korean women appearing in "gonghwaguk lipsticks"</b> Host: Park Hee-Jin (Dongguk University) Presentation(20'): Young-Sun Jeon (Konkuk University) Discussion(40'): Tomoomi Mori (Setsunan University, Japan), Ji-Sun Yee (Korea Institute for National Unification)

Aug. 25 (Wed)

13:30-14:30 (KST)	<b>[Dialogue] Film "The Jangmadang Generation," screening (20') and dialogue (40')</b> Host: Geum-sang Kwon (Seoul Center for Health and Family) Discussion: Film director Sokeel Park (Liberty in North Korea), Si-wu Jung (Yonsei University), Ji-Eun Kim (Radio Free Asia), Yuna Jeong (Broadcaster)
15:00-16:00 (KST)	<b>[Report on human rights in North Korea] The sounds of jangmadang</b> Host: Eun-Hee Cho (Soongsil University) Presentation(20'): Kwang-Baek Lee (Unification Media Group) Discussion(40'): Eun Mee Jeong (Korea Institute for National Unification), Andrew Yeo (Catholic Univ. of America)
16:30-17:30 (KST)	<b>[General discussion] North Korean Women at the crossroads in the COVID-19 pandemic</b> Host: Suh Ho (former Vice Minister of Unification) Discussion: In-Ae Hyun (Ewha Womans University), Jeong-ah Cho (Korea Institute for National Unification), Ilgi Kim(Institute for National Security Strategy), Justin V. Hastings (University of Sydney, Australia)

This booklet contains the presentations and discussions of Sessions I , II , and III on the 1st day, and the discussion papers of the 2nd day [Comprehensive Discussion].

## Changes in the Political Status of North Korean Women

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### I. Introduction

In North Korea, why is there no "following and learning from" campaign for Ko Yong-hui, while there were such efforts for Kang Pan-sok and Kim Jong-suk? Kang Pan-sok, the mother of Kim Il-sung, and Kim Jong-suk, the mother of Kim Jong-il, have been idolized, but Kim Jong-un's mother Ko Yong-hui has not.

This is a departure from the past, when North Korea idolized the mothers of the supreme leaders and defined and propagated women's political and social roles. In previous regimes, the image of the ideal woman was defined by summoning up the figures of the past—the mothers of the supreme leaders. In Kim Jong-un's regime, however, the supreme leader's immediate female family members or closest female aides such as Kim Yo-jong and Hyon Song-wol are directly engaged in politics, creating a new type of female image and consequently heightening their political status. This study intends to examine this phenomenon, especially from the perspective of research into hereditary politics such as those seen in North Korea.

In addition, this study focuses on the role of said hereditary politics in discussing changes in the political status of North Korean women, and attempts to review how their political status has changed in North Korea's unique dynastic socialist political form. In particular, it examines the correlation between the process of following and learning from the mothers of the supreme leaders and the process of leadership change in women's unions, and looks into whether the political status and roles of North Korean women, implied by the absence of Ko Yong-hui's idolization, are related to the political status and roles of current female leaders from the supreme leader's immediate family, such as Kim Yo-jong.

It is known that in North Korea, women have established their political and social status by participating in public services and serving as public officials, or by being engaged in the activities of women's unions—political organizations and channels for women's mobilization. North Korea's policy on women began as the socialist state formed following its independence from Japan, and has been refined through legal and institutional reforms to ensure women's equality and opportunities to participate fully in politics, the economy, and society. However, it is true that the existence of these policies did not guarantee their actual implementation, and North Korea's ideal policy on women co-existed with traditional gender discrimination and inequality against women.

In order to improve the political and social status of women, the country focused on dismantling the feudal family system and liberating women for the construction of socialism, but previous studies have criticized such efforts as having deteriorated to mere mechanisms to mobilize women's labor. North Korea attempted to promote the liberation of women from their families by ensuring women's

economic activities and advancement into society through land reform that aimed to treat men and women equally and by shifting the burden of housework and child rearing onto society through reform of the social system. In reality, however, women are still forced to perform their traditional role. Existing studies point out that women in North Korea suffer from the double bind of being subject to forceful social mobilization while also being pressured to follow the traditional female image.

These studies reveal that, due to the nature of the North Korean regime, the status of women is treated as a matter of loyalty directly related to the prosperity of their motherland, and it is emphasized that national happiness directly leads to women's happiness, and in order to establish a strong and prosperous nation, women should assume any role assigned to them.

In particular, the patriarchal socialist mode of control, the "socialist large family," emphasized as a way to consolidate the autocratic rule of Kim Il-sung and justify three generations of hereditary succession, is evaluated to have been sublimated and developed into a logic that stresses both the traditional and modern roles of women and dedication to the motherland.

With this emphasis on patriarchal socialism, women are facing a triple challenge as they are once again subject to the yoke of the feudal family and are forced to assume the roles and positions as workers for the construction of a socialist state as well as the people responsible for ideological education.<sup>1)</sup> The political status of women in North Korea exists in a unique socio-cultural context that cannot be generalized by the number of female members of the Supreme People's Assembly or a quantitative equality index.

In this context, this study aims to theoretically summarize the unusual political form of the North Korean hereditary regime and analyze the political status of women from various angles by looking into the changes in leadership of women's unions and the changing process and modern significance of emulating the mothers of the supreme leaders.

## II. The Theoretical System of North Korean Hereditary Politics

### 1. The North Korean system and hereditary politics

Based on eight regime determinants, Andrew Heywood classifies regimes into five categories: a) Western polyarchy, b) post-communist regimes, c) East Asian regimes, d) Islamic regimes, and e) military regimes.<sup>2)</sup>

On the other hand, Hague and Harrop divide systems of governance into three categories: a) democratic regimes, b) pseudo-democratic/semi-democratic regimes, and c) authoritarian regimes.<sup>3)</sup>

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\* Care should be taken to refer to this paper since this is a draft for presentation and details, such as statistical data, citations and paraphrases, and footnotes will be revised in the future.

1) Kim Chung-yeol, "A study on the political status of North Korean women in the Kim Jong-un's regime," *Journal of Northeast Asian Studies* Vol 67 (2013), pp. 276-277.

2) Andrew Heywood, *Political Theory: An Introduction* (New York: MacMillan, 1999), p.29.

The expression “North Korean system” conveys an idea that encompasses three dimensions—the state, the administration, and institutions—and seems not to exactly match or be included in one of the abovementioned types. It is judged that the standards defined by Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, who studied the characteristics of totalitarianism, apply to the North Korean system.<sup>4)</sup>

Brzezinski defines a totalitarian system as showing the following six characteristics: a) the existence of a sophisticated official ideology, b) the rule of a single mass party led by a single dictator, c) a psychological and physical terrorist system by the secret police, d) a total monopoly over mass media, such as radio broadcasts, newspapers, and movies, e) the efficient and complete control of the armed forces, f) centralized control and a directive economic system.<sup>5)</sup>

In addition to this, the North Korea system has realized three generations of hereditary politics. In order to justify their political behavior to secure absolute power, North Korea's hereditary regime for three generations has established theoretical frameworks such as the unique *juche* ideology, succession theory, and leadership theory, in the disguise of the public interest, and used undisputed power in the process of completing them.

Despite the difficulties of power succession in the communist system, Kim Il-sung, ahead of the 6<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) in October 1980, reaffirmed his will to power succession as he stressed that “There is no way other than a hereditary system in order to carry on the communist revolution for generations, and succession corresponds to the revolution and the interests of the North Korean people.”<sup>6)</sup>

On September 28, 2010, Kim Jong-il strengthened the “succession system centered on the party's Central Military Commission”<sup>7)</sup> at the 3<sup>rd</sup> WPK Congress and a meeting attended by all members of the military commission. The Covenant of the Party, which was amended 30 years after the 6<sup>th</sup> party congress in 1980, “institutionalized the WPK as Kim Il-sung's private party and highlighted the strengthened autocratic leadership system, thereby maintaining the autocratic rule of the supreme leader”<sup>8)</sup> and laying the foundation for the succession of control to Kim Jong-un.

Kim Jong-un was appointed as the first secretary of the party at the 4<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Workers' Party of Korea on April 11, 2012, and as the first

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3) Rod Hague and Martin Harrop, *Comparative Government and Politics: An Introduction*, 8<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Palgrave MacMilan, 2010), p.9.

4) Kwon Oh-kook, *Evaluation of and Perspective for Stability under the North Korean Regime*, (Cheonan: Police Science Institute, 2019), p.17.

5) Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (Cambridge: Havard University Press, 1965).

6) Yoo Seok-yeol, Doh Heong-yeol, “North Korean studies—Kim Il-sung Dynasty's attempt for hereditary succession, social issues ahead of the 6<sup>th</sup> Congress of WPK, 30 years of North Korea's provocations,” *Journal of North Korean Studies* Vol. 106, (Institute of North Korean Studies, 1980), p.61.

7) Lee Gee Dong, “Disputing issues and subjects of power structure after WPK Conference held in North Korea,” *Korea and World Politics* Vol. 26-4 (2010), pp.216-217.

8) Lee Gee Dong, “The revision of rules and power structures of the WPK,” *The Journal of Defense Analysis Issue* Vol. 54-1 (2011), pp.80-81.

chairman of the Central Military Commission at the 5<sup>th</sup> meeting of the 12<sup>th</sup> Supreme People's Assembly on April 13 of the same year. Accordingly, he “emerged as the highest policy maker of the Party, the administration and the military, completing the succession of power and establishing the ‘autocratic leadership system.’”<sup>9)</sup>

On March 9, 2014, Kim convened the 13<sup>th</sup> Supreme People's Assembly and “had his closest aides elected delegates of the assembly,”<sup>10)</sup> thereby laying the foundation for his consolidation of absolute power. At the first plenary session of the 13<sup>th</sup> Supreme People's Assembly on April 9 of the same year, he was reappointed as the first chairman of the National Central Military Commission, heralding the full-fledged beginning of Kim Jong-un's dictatorship.

At the 7<sup>th</sup> Congress of the WPK, which was held on May 6, 2016 for the first time in 36 years since the 6<sup>th</sup> congress in 1980, “the Party was called ‘Kim Jong-un's party’ and Kim was appointed as the Supreme Leader, the highest position of the Party, strengthening the autocratic leadership system and completing the succession of three generations.”<sup>11)</sup>

At the 4<sup>th</sup> session of the 13<sup>th</sup> Supreme People's Assembly held on June 29 of that year, the National Central Military Commission was abolished 44 years after its establishment and the State Affairs Commission was newly formed, and Kim was inducted from the first chairman of the former into the Chairman of the latter, institutionally establishing his leadership. It is known that at the 8<sup>th</sup> WPK Congress in January 2021, he gave himself the title of General Secretary, created the First Secretary of the Party Central Committee, and defined the title as the deputy of the General Secretary. It is currently unknown who has been appointed to this First Secretary position, and there is much debate over whether the appointee is a simple administrative deputy or Kim Jong-un's successor. However, it is noteworthy that Kim has shown confidence in governing to the extent that he specified his deputy in the Party rules as he has been in power for over 10 years.

The North Korean system and hereditary politics seem to be at a highly advanced level of stability, resulting from the unique characteristics of the North Korean system based on *juche* ideology, Supreme Leader theory, succession theory, and permanent revolution theory.

The *juche* ideology created by Kim Il-sung is the only guideline and guiding ideology in North Korea. Kim Il-sung emphasized that *juche* is the ideology that “the masters of revolution and construction are the masses of people, and the driving force for the revolution and construction also lies with the masses.” In addition, it is an autonomous ideological perception and the basis of Supreme Leader theory, highlighting human-centeredness based on the argument that humans are “social beings with independence, creativity, and consciousness, who are the

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9) Kim Seong-bae, “The choices of WPN's First Secretary Kim Jong-un and South Korea's policy on North Korea,” *Smart Q&A*, No.2012-07 (East Asia Institute, 2012), p.1.

10) Kim Gab-sik, “Evaluation of the 1<sup>st</sup> session of the 13<sup>th</sup> Supreme People's Assembly,” *Unification Strategy Forum Report* Vol. 55 (The Institute for Far Eastern Studies Kyungnam University, 2014), p.35.

11) Lee Ho-ryeong, “The implication of the 7<sup>th</sup> Congress of North Korean Workers' Party and the future outlook for external and internal policies,” *The Journal of Defense Analysis Issue* 1622 (KIDA, 2016), pp.2-3.

masters of the world and of their own destiny and that humans decide everything.” However, the ideology provides the logic that in order to carve out their own destiny, people have to be united as one organization under the leadership of the Party and the Supreme Leader.<sup>12)</sup>

Supreme Leader theory is a cardinal proposition of *juche* ideology and can be summarized into the logic that “At the center of everything, there are the masses of the people, and at the center of them, there is the Supreme Leader.”<sup>13)</sup> In other words, the theory argues that the masses have a desire to shape their own destiny but do not know how to do so, so they will be the subject of history only after they are organized under the leadership of the Supreme Leader. This is at last concluded to the “principle of the trinity—the Supreme Leader, the Party, and the people—that the masses of the people must be united with the leadership of the Party and the Supreme Leader.” In the end, since the revolutionary struggle or communist movement is achieved by class struggle, victory cannot be won without a wise leader, which implies that the popular masses need the political leadership of the Supreme Leader. The conclusion of Supreme Leader theory can be seen as an institutional device to ensure the absolute authority of the Supreme Leader by achieving a divine autocratic leadership system in which a sole divine man takes on an “absolute position and decisive role” in the masses.<sup>14)</sup>

Based on *juche* ideology, “permanent revolution theory” forms the basis of succession theory, in which North Korea recognizes succession as a problem of inheriting and completing the revolutionary accomplishments of the Supreme Leader. In other words, it signifies “the act of ceaselessly continuing the revolutionary struggle without any delay or interruption until the masses fully realize independence.” The theory is based on Kim Il-sung's speech in March 1975 that stated, “The working class should overthrow the exploitative system of imperialism and capitalism, establish a socialist system, and then continue their revolution.”<sup>15)</sup>

Succession theory is not a traditional and authoritative theory, but a logic that has emerged to rationalize, justify, and give legitimacy to father-son succession. It is also not a separate theory, and it stipulates the procedure for designating a person who will stably succeed to the position and role of the Supreme Leader in the process of building a succession system based on *juche* ideology, Supreme Leader theory, succession theory, and permanent revolution theory.<sup>16)</sup>

The important matter is that the above is an institutional device that aims to ensure not only the transfer of control, but also the succession of revolutionary accomplishments and the granting of legitimacy to the successor through “ruling with dying instruction.” As such, these various theories used in North Korea share the commonality that they are theories which ensure the logic, justification, legitimacy, and permanence of the Kim dynasty's autocratic leadership system. These

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12) Jung Eung-ki, “Fundamental principles of the socialist constitution of North Korea—*juche* idea,” *The Journal of Legal Studies* Vol. 51-4 (2010), p.228-229.

13) Lee Kyo-Duk, “The successor theory of North Korea,” *KINU Studies Series* Issue 03-13 (KINU, 2003), pp.4-5.

14) Ibid., p.8.

15) Ibid., p.18.

16) Ibid., pp.2-3.



theories did not exist previously but are modified to suit the circumstances and conditions with the goal of ensuring that a certain successor takes power from the Supreme Leader and continues the revolutionary achievements of the Party. The North Korean political system is characteristic in the wide acceptance of various theories and arguments as a means to accomplish political succession.<sup>17)</sup>

## 2. Hereditary politics and the political status of women

In a dictatorship such as the one in North Korea, hereditary succession is a way to reduce the risks and avoid dilemmas that appear in the process of power succession. The dilemma is that the dictator has to take a risk, whether he chooses to appoint a successor or not.

There are two kinds of risks. On the one hand, if a dictator raises a strong successor, the heir could usurp power or act as a factor to cause internal discord. On the other hand, if a successor is not allowed to build his own power base, or no successor is clearly decided, due to the abovementioned risk, the power struggles are more likely to be unrestrained after the death of the current ruler. Either way, the problem of succession creates a dilemma.

One of the ways to manage such a dilemma is the hereditary transfer of power. The first reason for this is that hereditary succession ensures safety for the current ruler in the process of power transfer. Compared to other cases, appointing a son as a successor reduces the possibility of the successor rebelling against the current ruler in order to expedite the power transfer or to protect himself.

The second reason is that hereditary power transfer is the best option to ensure the distribution of power among the existing elite and the continuity of those with vested interests. If one of the elites around the current ruler is selected as a successor, the distribution of power among the existing elites will change. If a power struggle occurs among them in the process, one force may collapse, or the entire political system itself may be in crisis. On the other hand, hereditary succession makes power transfer possible without causing changes in the status and privileges of the existing elite. Hereditary succession is a better option than a regime collapse or a series of purges by a victor.

According to Brownlee,<sup>18)</sup> among 258 cases of dictatorship in power for more than three years in the period from World War II to 2006, 23 cases involved attempts of hereditary power succession, and nine of them were successful. The successful cases are as follows:

- 1956 Nicaragua, Anastasio Somoza García (1936-1956)

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17) Jeong Jong-kwan, "Analysis of Kim Jung Un regime's 'reign of terror' and its counter-strategy," *Journal of North-East Asian Studies* Vol. 83 (2017), p.177.

18) Jason Brownlee, "Hereditary Succession in Modern Autocracies," *World Politics* Vol. 59 (July 2007), pp.595-828.

- ▶ Luis Somoza Debayle (1956-1967)
  
- 1961 Dominican Republic, Rafael Trujillo (1930-1961)
  - ▶ Rafael “Ramfis” Trujillo Martinez (1961)
  
- 1971 Haiti, François Duvalier (1957-1971)
  - ▶ Jean-Claude Duvalier (1971-1986)
  
- 1975 Taiwan, Chiang Kai-shek (1949-1975)
  - ▶ Chiang Ching-kuo (1975-1988)
  
- 1994 North Korea, Kim Il-sung (1948-1994)
  - ▶ Kim Jong-il (1994~2011)
  
- 2000 Syria, Hafez al-Assad (1971-2000)
  - ▶ Bashar al-Assad (2000-)
  
- 2003 Azerbaijan, Heida Aliyev (1993-2003)
  - ▶ Ilham Aliyev (2003-)
  
- 2004 Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew (1956-2004)
  - ▶ Lee Hsien Loong (2004-)
  
- 2005 Togo, Gnassingbé Eyadéma (1967~2005)
  - ▶ Faure Gnassingbé (2005-)

Attempts of hereditary power transfer have a higher probability of success in the following cases. First, the ruler founded the ruling party, or, as in North Korea, the authority of the dictator overwhelms that of the party at the time of power succession. Second, there is already a precedent for hereditary power succession. In such cases, it is not easy for the ruling elite to choose another option.

The elites consent to accept the successor chosen by the ruler, and generally show active support for the decision. However, if the incumbent ruler took power

through the existing party's election mechanism, the ruler's attempt to pass on power to their descendant is more likely to fail.

Looking at the empirical examples mentioned above, hereditary succession was also backed by the surrounding elites when the successor was relatively young, inexperienced, and had no independent institutional foundation. For example, Duvalier, who hereditarily took control over Haiti in 1971, was 19 years old, Martinez of the Dominican Republic was 32 (1961), Aliyev of Azerbaijan was 42 (2003), and Gnassingbé of Togo was 39 (2005). Such young and inexperienced leaders were supported by the surrounding elite because the existence of a hereditary successor tacitly guaranteed the safety of high-ranking officials.

According to this logic of hereditary succession, the most important task of the successor will be to protect the vested interests and safety of the current upper-class elites by preventing a power struggle in the process of power transfer. In other words, the hereditary power transfer is a project jointly implemented by the current ruler and the surrounding elites to ensure the continuity of the existing system by overcoming the limitations of the current dictator's natural life span and controlling the uncertainty stemming from power transfer.<sup>19)</sup>

This study focuses on how women's political roles and status have been formed and changed in this joint project in North Korea. This study attempts to contemplate whether the ruler's close family members, such as Kim Yo-jong, are playing the role of a successor to alleviate the dilemma of the hereditary regime in a situation where no idolization of Kim Jong-un's mother is witnessed, unlike in the previous regimes that idolized the mothers of the supreme leaders engaged in hereditary succession, such as Kang Pan-sok and Kim Jong-suk, by teaching the public to learn by emulating them.

### III. Changes in North Korean Women's Unions and Their Political Status

#### 1. History and overview of women's unions

During the establishment of the regime, North Korea quickly enacted gender equality and formed women's unions. The primary goal of the early women's unions was to break down the existing feudalism. Kim Il-sung said, "The prolonged feudal and Japanese colonial rule has hampered social development, remnants of feudalism and capitalism remain deeply rooted, and everything is destroyed and chaotic. With our country in this situation, it is very difficult to successfully carry out a nation-founding project." He also said, "Those who have money contribute to the project with money, those who have power with power, and those who have knowledge with knowledge. All people should be united as one person to stand up

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19) For the abovementioned, see Park Hyeong-jung, "Dilemma in power succession and hereditary power transfer," KINU Online Series 09-37. Also see <https://repo.kinu.or.kr/bitstream/2015.oak/1476/1/0001447301.pdf> (date of searching: July 10, 2021)

for the state regardless of their age and gender. Right here, the masses of women should contribute a lion's share." In a situation where remnants of the feudal system remained, the liquidation of the feudal remnants was prioritized in order to establish a new order of the North Korean regime.

Their second goal focused on women's participation in national projects. In the collection of his writings, Kim Il-sung reveals the significance of women's unions as: "Organizing women, who make up half of all members of our nation, is of great importance in expanding and strengthening the revolutionary capability and promoting the construction of a new and prosperous country." In addition, Rule 1 of the North Korea Democratic Women's Union stipulates that "We will unite with democratic women and concentrate our entire capacity to establish a democratic regime in North Korea based on the 20 platforms announced by General Kim Il-sung." It also stresses that "It is said that women, who constitute half of our country's population, are playing a role like a wheel of a two-wheel cart in the founding of the country. In order for the cart to go well, both wheels of the cart should roll properly. Like this, in order to successfully implement our work to establish our nation, women have to play a major role together with men." As such, the women's union was organized with the aim of mobilizing the capabilities of women who had been confined within the home to play an organizational role in establishing the North Korean regime.<sup>20)</sup>

During the Korean War, the women's union underwent huge organizational changes. At their joint central committee meeting held on January 19-20, 1951, the North Korea Democratic Women's Union and South Korea Democratic Women's Union (chairperson: Ryu Yeong-jun) were integrated into the Korea Democratic Women's Union (KDWU, chairperson: Pak Chong-ae) according to a decision made at the 3<sup>rd</sup> regular meeting of the Central Committee of the WPK.<sup>21)</sup>

During the war, the KDWU actively participated in various activities, including the Storming Party Movement for frontline support, the state-led collection of agricultural in-kind tax, relief activities, and the Innovative Production Movement. After the destruction of the war, post-war restoration and industrialization were regarded as the most important national tasks, and in the process of restoration and the establishment of a socialist regime, North Korea took measures to mobilize the female labor force outside of the home.

On July 19, 1958, North Korea announced Cabinet Decision No. 84 "On the Measure for Incorporating More Women into Each Sector of the People's Economy." The decision was aimed to introduce the female labor force into each sector of the national economy, increasing the ratio of women in the total labor force to an average of 60% or more in the education and health sectors and to 30% or more in other sectors by 1961. It stipulates that the male labor force in business sectors in which women can work should be gradually replaced with women, and that

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20) See Lee Ga-young, "A study on transition of the role of women's alliance in North Korea," *The Journal of Asiatic Studies* Vol 60-3 (2017), pp.108-109.; Kim Il-seong, "The current international and domestic situation and women's tasks," *A Collection of Kim Il-sung's Writings* Vol. 1 (Pyongyang: Workers' Party of Korea Publishing House, 1979).

21) Sejong Institute North Korea Research Center, *Subsidiary Organizations of the Korean Workers' Party* (Paju: Hanul Academy, 2004), p.206.

additional labor force in such sectors should also be supplemented with women. To this end, it also specifies the expansion of convenience facilities such as daycare centers, kindergartens, and communal laundries, and the gradual increase in the ratio of women in various educational and training institutions.<sup>22)</sup>

The KDWU played an important role in the post-war restoration and reconstruction process, and Pak Chong-ae held the position of the first chairperson of the KDWU for two decades. However, a change occurred in the 1960s, when the establishment of Kim Il-sung's autocratic dictatorship was accelerating. Pak Chong-ae passed her position over to vice-chairperson Kim Ok-sun in September 1965. Pak's whereabouts have been unknown since the purge of Kim Il-sung's aides that took place in the late 1960s. The full-fledged cult of Kim Il-sung was pursued during the establishment of the North Korean regime, which resulted in purges of all of the other political parties and even close associates and transformed the KDWU into a working group for Supreme Leader Kim Il-sung, not that of the Party.

A North Korean political dictionary also describes the KDWU as “a voluntary public political organization of North Korean women founded under the leadership of General Kim Il-sung, the Great Supreme Leader of the revolution,” and highlights that the union was a public organization under the leadership of the Supreme Leader that aimed to make sure union members and women were strongly armed with the great revolutionary ideology of the Dear Supreme Leader and vigorously mobilize the organization for the struggle to implement the party line and policy suggested by Kim.”<sup>23)</sup>

## 2. The rise and fall of Kim Song-ae and changes in the KDWU's status

At the 4<sup>th</sup> Congress of the KDWU held in October 1971, Kim Song-ae was elected as the 3<sup>rd</sup> chairperson. She was promoted from the head of the Sunan-gun Women's Union to the secretary of the Central Guard in 1957. She married Kim Il-sung in 1963 after the death of Kim Jong-suk. After being appointed vice-chairperson of the KDWU Central Committee in September 1965 and member of the WPK Central Committee in November 1970, she became the chairperson of the KDWU Central Committee in October 1971. Kim Song-ae, Kim Jong-il's stepmother, who served as the chairperson of the KDWU for 27 years, exercised great influence until the early 1970s and directly led the union by dispatching representatives of the union across the country to inspect and dismiss union members.<sup>24)</sup>

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22) Cheong Gyeong-mo, Choi Dal-gon, ed., *Collection of North Korean Acts and Regulations* Vol. 4 (Seoul: Continent Research Institute, 1990), p.298; Recited from Lee Ga-young, “Study on transition of the role of women's alliance in North Korea,” *The Journal of Asiatic Studies* Vol 60-3 (2017), p.111.

23) Lee Ga-young, “A study on transition of the role of women's alliance in North Korea,” *The Journal of Asiatic Studies* Vol 60-3 (2017), pp.112.

24) For related matters mentioned below, see Lee Ga-young, “A study on transition of the role of women's alliance in North Korea,” *The Journal of Asiatic Studies* Vol 60-3 (2017), pp.116-118.

Meanwhile, Kim Jong-il began to be recognized as successor by presiding over the 15<sup>th</sup> plenary session of the 4<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the Party in May 1967. Emerging in earnest in the 1970s, Kim strengthened the community life of the Party and working organizations.

For example, he overhauled the life review session system of the party, saying, “The Party’s new life review session is a very superior system that nurtures party members into true communist revolutionaries, improves the fighting strength of the Party, and enables party members to successfully carry out the revolutionary tasks facing the Party.” This operates as one of the main mechanisms for maintaining the North Korean regime.

Kim Jong-il thought unfavorably of and had intense discord with his stepmother Kim Song-ae since the woman, who had run errands for his biological mother Kim Jong-suk and done household chores, married Kim Il-sung and exercised her influence. Having been politically active as a member of the Party Central Committee, Kim Jong-il placed checks on her and her children, including Kim Pyong-il.

After his succession was sufficiently ensured, Kim Jong-il attempted to eliminate Kim Song-ae's influence by containing that of the KDWU. As part of these efforts, it was made sure that one person was allowed to join only one labor organization, in order to prevent dual membership and to strengthen the community life of the Party and labor organization. This came after a decision was made to establish Kim Jong-il’s succession in earnest at the 6<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in October 1980.

According to the 1965 rules, all women aged between 18 and 55 were mandated to join the KDWU, so they had to be engaged in the union’s activities although they were working, unless they are members of the WPK or the Youth League. Therefore, the KDWU had a lot of members, and its organizational authority was very strong. However, in the rules amended at the 5<sup>th</sup> KDWU Congress in June 1983, the qualification for women's membership were limited to “women aged 30 or over who are not a member of other organizations.” At that time, many of the union’s existing members were registered with other organizations, so the size of the KDWU significantly declined.<sup>25)</sup> The number of the KDWU members, which peaked at 2.6 million in 1977, decreased to 2.5 million in 1984 and 1.2 million after the mid-1980s. Accordingly, its authority was also reduced, and its business was restricted to family and child-related activities. In addition, under the Kim Jong-il regime after the 5<sup>th</sup> Congress in 1983, no follow-up congresses of the KDWU were held, and the union’s tasks were discussed and decided at the plenary meeting of the Party Central Committee.

Since the 1980s, when Kim Jong-il officially appeared as a successor, full-fledged efforts were made to recommend emulating his biological mother Kim Jong-suk, instead of Kim Song-ae, highlighting Kim Jong-suk's role in relation to the KDWU. Idolization of Kim Jong-suk also seems to have been aimed at

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25) Lee On-juk, Lee In-jeong, *The Kim Il-sung Socialist Youth League and the Korea Democratic Women’s Union* (Seoul: Seoul National University Publishing and Culture Center, 2010), p.157.

removing the influence of Kim Jong-il's stepmother Kim Song-ae.

On November 18, 1981, Kim Jong-il criticized not only the KDWU but also other labor organizations for failing to fulfill their proper roles in a conversation with Ho Jong-suk, secretary of the Party Central Committee and project manager of a labor organization: "Labor organizations are failing to properly play their role as a safety zone that connects the Party and the people. They are not doing well in educating their members, as well as in their role as an organizational mobilizer to encourage them to implement the Party policy. Labor organizations are also not doing well in the campaign for doing good for our nation and people. They have done little in recent years."

After the second meeting of the 5<sup>th</sup> KDWU Congress in December 1983, vice-chairperson and secretary-general Kang Kwan-son was in charge of the women's union, and Kim Song-ae's remarks were omitted. In 1985, her children and relatives were accused as being in collusion with her. Kim Song-ae, who did not take part in any official activities, gave her formal and symbolic post of chairperson of the KDWU to Chon Yon-ok in March 1998. Chon is known as a former vice-chairperson of the Committee for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, who had never been "stained" with the KDWU."

The KDWU, which had grown and contracted in line with the rise and fall of Kim Song-ae under the Kim Jong-il regime, unexpectedly replaced the chairperson of the Central Committee with Chon Yon-ok in 1998 and held the second National Mothers' Congress for the first time in about 30 years. In the same year, Kim Jong-il said, "The KDWU is one of the most important social and political organizations, and women are also important components of society. Denying the existence of the union or ignoring the role of women in society is a wrong way of thinking, and it is really important to strengthen the women's union and raise its status."<sup>26)</sup>

After Park Sun-hui took office as chairperson in 2000, the KDWU was completely transformed into an organization that was loyal to Kim Jong-il, for example, by taking the initiative in the campaign of following and learning from Kim Jong-suk. It also took the lead in implementing the WPK's policy, such as campaigns for promoting the national economy and education, having more babies, and raising and sending many children to the military. Kim Jong-il did not appear at the March 8 International Women's Day event organized by the KDWU after his election as a successor until in 2008 when he attended the celebration performance for the first time in over four decades.

It is interpreted that he did so because, in order to increase the population that plummeted after the Arduous March, North Korea needed to raise the female fertility rate, and the role of women was the most important in order to make women, who make up more than half of the population, devote themselves to the national economy and military-first politics, and raise their children with socialist ideology and morality.

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26) "Under the leadership that helps revitalize the tasks of the KDWU," *Women of Joseon* Vol. 2000-2; Recited from Lee Ga-young, "A study on transition of the role of women's alliance in North Korea," *The Journal of Asiatic Studies* Vol 60-3 (2017), p.111.

During the economic crisis, the KDWU expanded its scope of activities after Kim Song-ae's retirement, though limitedly. The North Korean regime encouraged women to participate in social activities, but the economic crisis forced more businesses and factories to stop operations, and women to return to their homes. Therefore, the KDWU at this time played a role of systematically mobilizing women to support work at industrial fields and military bases, provide supplies, and raise livestock to secure food rather than let them directly participate as labor force. Such structure and behavior of the KDWU were also confirmed by North Korean defectors' testimonies.<sup>27)</sup>

### 3. Changes in the KDWU and hereditary politics in the Kim Jong-un regime

In August 2008, Kim Jong-il collapsed from a cerebrovascular disease, and in January 2009, he gave an instruction determining Kim Jong-un as his heir. In September 2010, Kim Jong-un was given the title of General of the People's Army, and with the death of Kim Jong-il in December 2011, took power from his father for the third generation.<sup>28)</sup>

In the early days of Kim Jong-un's reign, *Women of Joseon*, the official journal of the KDWU, suggested five types of female heroes: a female hard worker, a female revolutionary, a female professional, a good wife and wise mother, and a female military supporter and aid giver.<sup>29)</sup>

The journal argues that women should model themselves after Kang Ban-sok, Kim Jong-suk, and those engaged in anti-Japanese struggle, stresses the importance of being a good mother and a wise wife, and emphasizes women's duty to have many children, raise them as soldiers, be good at rearing children and well educated, support their husbands, and be virtuous daughters-in-law. It also emphasizes support for military and provision of aid—providing supplies to the military of the people and services to war veterans and honorary soldiers—to carry on the ideology of the military-first era and praises women who have worked hard and made remarkable achievements in each field as heroines and encourages women to imitate and learn from them.

The main context of what the KDWU emphasizes under the Kim Jong-un regime remains unchanged from previous regimes, and content related to Kim Jong-un's official consort Yi Sol-chu, his birth mother, and his younger sister Kim Yo-jong hardly appears in the *Women of Joseon*.

It seems that the fundamental context of the KDWU is maintained partly

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27) Park Hyun-sun, *The Family and Society of Modern North Korea* (Seoul: Hanul Publishing House, 2003), p.274-275.

28) For related matters mentioned below, see Lee Ga-young, "A study on transition of the role of women's alliance in North Korea," *The Journal of Asiatic Studies* Vol 60-3 (2017), pp.123-125.

29) Nam Sung-wook, Bae Jin, Chae Su-lan, Lee Ga-young, "A study on heroine discourse under the Kim Jong Un regime: Focusing on articles of *Women of Joseon*," *Journal of Peace and Unification* Vol 7-1 (Spring 2017). p. 56.



because Kim Jong-un's birth mother cannot be emphasized. After he came to power, Kim Jong-il removed the influence of his stepmother Kim Song-ae, and at the same time, described Kim Jong-suk as a heroine and actively encouraged women to learn by following her. However, Kim Jong-un seems to be constrained by the fact that his birth mother Ko Yong-hui was Korean-Japanese, which would be a fatal weakness in maintaining the regime.

While Kim Il-sung emphasized his mother Kang Ban-sok, and Kim Jong-il also portrayed his mother Kim Jong-suk as a heroine, Kim Jong-un cannot use the name of his birth mother, and this is interpreted as being intended to maintain the legitimacy of the third-generation hereditary succession by emphasizing the dynasty's lineage initiated from Baekdu Mountain. Therefore, even in the Kim Jong-un regime, the mantra of following and learning from historical figures Kang Ban-sok and Kim Jong-suk continue to appear mythologically.

Comparing *Rodong Sinmun* articles mentioning Kang Ban-sok, Kim Jong-suk, and Ko Yong-hui, those mentioning Kang Ban-sok and Kim Jong-suk excessively outnumber those mentioning Ko Yong-hui. Given that even these few mentions of Ko Yong-hui are determined to be referring to a journalist at the newspaper or other persons with the same name, Ko has hardly been covered.

Table 1. Articles related to the idolization of women in the *Rodong Sinmun* before and after Kim Jong-un took power since the 2000s

Name Period	Kang Pan-sok	Kim Jong-suk	Ko Yong-hui	Note
2000-2011	4 cases	3,780 cases	199 cases	No significance in that Ko Yong-hui mentioned here is a journalist at the <i>Rodong Sinmun</i>
2011-2021	3 cases	1,135 cases	5 cases	No significance in that Ko Yong-hui mentioned here are unrelated persons with the same name

The position at the culmination of hereditary politics has been occupied by male supreme leaders, from Kim Il-sung to Kim Jong-il, and Kim Jong-un, while the role of women is still emphasized by calling on and idolizing the mothers of the previous supreme leaders.

Peculiarly, however, even in the Kim Jong-Il era since the 2000s, Kim Jong-Il's younger sister, Kim Kyong-hui, has been covered by 206 articles from 2000 to 2011 and 175 articles from 2011 to 2021,<sup>30)</sup> indicating that her status as younger sister of the Supreme Leader active in real politics plays a part in addition to the idolization of heroines of the previous generations.

30) The number was counted for articles that cover Kim Kyong-hui, the sister of Kim Jong-un, and thousands of news reports containing those with the same name do not matter here.

This trend can also be examined in connection with the status of Kim Yo-jong, who is currently playing a role in the real politics of North Korea. Since Kim Jong-un took power, she has been mentioned in 111 *Rodong Sinmun* articles, and even appeared in the headline of one article in 2020 and two articles in 2021. Although it is not frequent, she is appearing in more news articles, and her role is visible in the headlines, all of which seem to be relevant to her status in the real power landscape.

To repeat the theoretical discussion of hereditary power transfer once again, the most important role of a successor is to protect the vested interests and safety of the current upper-class elites by preventing a power struggle in the process of power transfer, and hereditary power transfer is a project jointly implemented by the current ruler and the surrounding elites to ensure the continuity of the existing system. From this point of view, if a hereditary successor is not designated, it is highly likely that the familial ties of the supreme leader will be mentioned in the absence of a powerful candidate for the position. In that sense, Kim Kyong-hui and Kim Yo-jong partly drew attention under the Kim Jong-il and Jong-un regimes, respectively.

It is judged that both Kim Jong-il and Kim Jong-un took (takes) advantage of the political status of their younger sister to some extent until their son was (is) appointed as a successor in a situation in which their male siblings were virtually eliminated politically or exerted no great influence.

It is noteworthy that before 2010, when Kim Jong-un officially appeared as a successor, Kim Kyong-hui, Kim Jong-il's younger sister, was mentioned in a considerable number of news articles, though she was not at the top of her power. On the other hand, since Kim Jong-un took power, she has become less frequently mentioned, while Kim Yo-jong has been visible, appeared more in news articles and even made headlines recently.

In particular, it is highly likely that the political role of Kim Yo-jong will draw attention for a considerable period of time, considering the situation in which the move to emulate Kim Jong-il has yet to emerge and Kim Jong-un's son has not yet been designated as a successor. In addition, her political role, unlike that of Kim Kyong-hui, is expected to be significant as she is active in foreign affairs, such as issuing personal discourses towards South Korea and the United States, and thus seems to be a research subject that needs to be continuously pursued in the future. However, it is well known that a cautious approach is necessary since there are no explicit circumstances and grounds to determine that she was appointed as a successor, or that the situation has developed to the extent that she has the position and power to replace Kim Jong-un.

#### IV. Conclusion

If Kim Jong-un is in power for a longer time, his approach, different from his predecessors, will appear more clearly regarding the role of the KDWU and his policy on women. From the perspective of hereditary power succession theory, it is

highly likely that in a situation in which any of Kim Jong-un's sons has not been designated as a successor, Kim Yo-jong will take the role of a close female family member who performs a significant political role.

On the surface and formally, the political status of women in North Korea seems to have steadily risen and been guaranteed. According to the Voluntary National Review for the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the Democratic Republic of Korea, submitted by North Korea to the United Nations in June, the country claims to have achieved gender equality a long time ago and accomplished most of the global SDGs. The Gender Equal Rights Act issued on July 30, 1946 explains that in North Korea, women who have suffered the restrictions of feudalism for hundreds of years and the fate of slavery under imperialism now enjoy equal freedom and rights as men, and participate in state activities and social life.

According to Article 77 of the Socialist Constitution, "women have the same social status and rights as men," women and children are protected through paid maternity and postpartum leave, and "mothers with children enjoy reduced working hours" and other social benefits. North Korea has adopted several laws such as the Women's Rights Guarantee Act and the Labor Protection Act to strengthen women's social status and rights in all social and economic areas. It also explains that women have equal rights as men to vote and to run for elected office. In the Voluntary National Review, North Korea reveals that women accounted for 20.2% of those elected to the 13<sup>th</sup> Supreme People's Assembly in 2015, 17.6% in the 14<sup>th</sup> Supreme People's Assembly in 2019, and more than 25% of local People's Assemblies.

Numerically, it can be said that the level of women's political participation and status is gradually heightening. However, there are still many shortcomings in women's actual political participation and the guarantee of women's rights. In particular, due to its nature, hereditary politics limits the mothers of the previous supreme leaders to being idolized and emulated, and close female family members to acting as assistants to the supreme leader. From the viewpoint of hereditary power transfer theory, it is highly likely that such status will be guaranteed only until the time when the son of the supreme leader is appointed as a successor. Therefore, it is difficult to conclude that the political status of women is guaranteed and developing in North Korea in the practical sense. In the future, there is a need for continuous observation and study of the status and role of women in the top political elite leadership in North Korea, and further preparation and research are essential to explore mutual contacts and potential for development in the role of women in the political integration of the Korean Peninsula.

## Discussion Paper on “Changes in the Political Status of North Korean Women”

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This study examines the “changes in the political status of North Korean women” in the North Korean system that has a “unique” character of a hereditary regime. While claiming to advocate a democratic republic, North Korea adheres to an unprecedented and unique system that has ensured hereditary succession for three generations. What influence the dynamics and process of the hereditary power transfer have given to and gained from North Korean women’s political status, in which mechanism such phenomenon has taken place, and what specific changes have been brought can be the key tasks to be identified in this discussion.

The author clearly states the purpose of the study in the introduction. That is to investigate how women’s political role and status were formed and have changed in the politics of the hereditary power transfer, “a project jointly implemented by the current ruler and the surrounding elites to ensure the continuity of the existing system by overcoming the limitations of the current dictator’s natural life span and controlling the uncertainty stemming from power transfer.”

The author's attempt to analyze the unique hereditary regime in connection with the political status of North Korean women is interesting as well as significant. What matters here is the logical link between the mechanism of the hereditary regime and women’s political status. In this regard, the study is expected to improve if the following issues are more explored.

The first issue is related to the concept of a hereditary regime.

It is hoped that the concept of hereditary regime (politics) will be refined more elaborately in this study since it is a unique characteristic of the North Korean system and a key variable in this study.

Hereditary succession has “steps” as a process, or “cycles” in some aspects. For example, there are differences for each process of hereditary politics, such as the process of selecting a successor, the process of the successor proving their qualifications, and the process of the successor forming independent authority after the transfer of power. Moreover, the hereditary succession of Kim Jong-il should be examined more closely in that it was prepared in an unprecedented long term. The political status of Kim Jong-il as a successor and the influence of hereditary succession on the North Korean politics were not identical before and after the major points of time, for example, the year of 1967, 1974, 1980, and 1994, which divided each stage of succession. From this point of view, the influence of the

character of the hereditary regime on North Korean women's political status also needs to be studied more specifically and clearly at each stage and in each period. In other words, if the concept of hereditary politics as an independent variable is established more clearly and the argument for measuring the changes in the political status of North Korean women is presented more convincingly, the overall analytical power of this study must be enhanced.

In the same context, there is room to improve the explanation of the relationship between the concept of hereditary politics (regime) and other concepts of North Korean politics. This study explains that the *juche* ideology, leadership theory, succession theory, and permanent revolution theory are unique characteristics that the North Korean hereditary regime is based on. Though the study states that various theories are widely accepted as a means to complete the hereditary regime, this seems to require a more detailed explanation. Whether this study adopts a general approach of totalitarianism, or the approach of specificity based on the four characteristics of the North Korean regime, such theories were not designed for the hereditary regime itself, and the status of those theories is also not distinguished clearly. It is difficult to conclude that the *juche* ideology is a means to establish a hereditary regime just because such concepts were used as a tool in North Korea's hereditary politics. If the relationship between other political ideologies and concepts in North Korea already mentioned in this study is described more clearly as part of a detailed work to apply the concept of hereditary politics to North Korea, it is believed that the overall thesis statement of this study will be revealed more clearly.

The second is about "research questions" related to women's political status in North Korea.

This study specifically reveals its research purposes by questioning as follows:

1) In previous regimes, the image of the ideal woman was defined by summoning up the figures of the past—the mothers of the supreme leaders. In Kim Jong-un's regime, however, the supreme leader's immediate female family members or closest female aides such as Kim Yo-jong and Hyon Song-wol are directly engaged in politics, creating a new type of female image and consequently heightening their political status. What significance this phenomenon has?

2) How has women's political status changed in North Korea's unique dynastic socialist political form?

3) In particular, what correlation the process of following and learning from the mothers of the supreme leaders has with the process of leadership change in women's unions?

4) Are the political status and roles of North Korean women, implied by the absence of Ko Yong-hui's idolization, related to the political status and roles of current female leaders from the supreme leader's immediate family, such as Kim Yo-jong?

These questions can be summarized more briefly: 1) “political phenomenon in which a new image of women is created through present figures rather than those of the past; 2) changes in women's political status in the “dynastic state”; 3) the correlation between the campaign for following and learning from Kang Pan-sok and Kim Jong-suk and the leadership of the KDWU; and 4) the correlation between the absence of idolization of Ko Yong-hui and the political status of the supreme leader’s immediate female family members, such as Kim Yo-jong.

Each of the abovementioned issues seem sufficient to be a subject of research. In this respect, it seems difficult to include all of the issues in a single study. It is also difficult to say that in this study, the research results for each question are organically connected. Although these questions sound similar, each of them must be identified through a separate argument, and a separate analysis is required to put them together. In order to analyze North Korean women's political status more sufficiently and persuasively, it is necessary to examine the questions mentioned above in a more systematic and comprehensive way.

One way to do this is to clarify the “standard” or “scale” that this study uses to evaluate the changes in the political status of North Korean women. That can be 1) new image and type of women in North Korea; 2) types and changes of leadership in the KDWU; 3) types and changes of each woman's political achievements; 4) types and changes of women as subjects to be followed and learned from. If each of these changes is interpreted under the conditions of specificity and generalization, it may be possible to comprehensively evaluate the political status of North Korean women.

The third is related to the interpretation of the influence of major variables, such as organizations, figures, and power politics.

This study chooses the KDWU and its leadership as important grounds for identifying the changes in North Korea's political status. It evaluates the status of the KDWU through the political rise and fall of its chairpersons such as Park Chong-ae and Kim Song-ae, and through this, examines the changes in women’s political status in North Korea. However, it is questionable how convincing it is to link a specific organization and its leadership with the status of women as a whole. Although acknowledging that the political struggle between Kim Song-ae and Kim Jong-il emphasized in this study was an important occasion in North Korea's power politics, the former cannot be identified with the KDWU itself, and furthermore, cannot serve as a direct basis for evaluating the political status of North Korean women. The improvement of ordinary women’s political rights and interests is closely related with the presence or absence of administrative ministries and policy achievements, but they are not identical. This is also true in that a female president, the establishment of a ministry for women, or the upgraded status of women do not guarantee the enhancement of women's rights and interests in that country. Surely, this study will be more persuasive if more rigorous proofs for each phenomenon are added, whether it emphasizes the political symbolic significance of a certain figure or the mechanism of the KDWU’s political functions and roles as an organization, or logically sets up the relationship between the figure and the organization.

The fourth is about structural variables necessary for analyzing the changes in North Korean women's political status.

Regarding the changes in North Korean women's political status, structural variables such as changes in the country's economic and industrial environment should be taken into account as importantly as the variables of power politics. This study's description of the 1970s and 1980s mainly focuses on the competition for power between Kim Song-ae and Kim Jong-il. However, as is well known, the burden and instability of the North Korean economy following the internal reform flow of the socialist camp in the late 1970s had a negative impact on the normal operation of the North Korean industry. With the operation rate of factories decreasing, North Korean women were excluded from industrial production jobs and experienced a social shift from factories and workplaces to homes. Their shift from formal to informal labor definitely put them in an unfavorable position in terms of food and product rations. The stagnation of the North Korean economy and natural disasters that continued into the 1990s resulted in the Arduous March, symbolized by mass starvation. In the military-first politics, women were forced to make dedication and service as rearguard and assume the double burden. In this regard, it may be insufficient for this study to explain the changes in women's status from the late 1970s to the late 1990s only with the political dynamics and power competition of the hereditary regime. Therefore, it is judged that this study will be more convincing if, in addition to the existing explanation, changes in women's political status according to the structural issues of North Korea's economic and industrial environment are explored further.

The fifth concerns the patriarchal characteristics of the hereditary regime.

This should be addressed given North Korea's patriarchal political practices and related discourses, such as the North Korean nationalist ideology that has continuously emerged since the late 1980s, the internal and external crises and military-first politics of North Korea throughout the 1990s, the declaration of completion of nuclear armament in the 2010s, and the emergence of "Our State First" discourse. It is difficult to say that women's political intervention or active participation in the recent North Korean politics has increased in the central political arena. While the logic of military and security was regarded as the country's absolute top priority with the deepening crisis of the regime, the actual political realm of women was reduced.

Of course, as the author points out, it is difficult to deny that the political status of North Korean women is enhancing, at least formally. The female representatives of the 8th Party Congress totaled 501, which accounted for as much as 10 percent of the total representatives, a series of welfare policies have been institutionalized through the enactment of related laws, Mother's Day was established and the National Mother's Congress was held, and more symbolic significance was granted to the Workers' Party of Korea as a mothers' party, all of which reflect the North Korean authorities' perception of the political importance of women. However, it is not easy to say that these phenomena are directly related to the improvement of the political status of North Korean women because, as the author points out,

such political phenomena are based on the male-centered political dynamics of North Korea emphasized under the principle of the socialist large family. An emphasis is being put on women, but women still remain as symbols, and this proves that women themselves are not functioning as independent subjects in the political realm.

Therefore, in order to have a more accurate interpretation of the changes in the political status of ordinary North Korean women, it is hoped to add a more in-depth analysis of the patriarchal nature of institutional changes. In addition, it needs to emphasize motherhood as a prerequisite for making a hereditary regime possible. In short, it is expected that additional analysis of such patriarchal attributes will strengthen the logical link between the hereditary regime and the changes in women's political status in North Korea.



## The Patriarchal Hereditary System and the Absence of Women's Political Identity

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Despite the differences in times as well as differences in the political and economic systems, perception and thinking of women are so similar that it is sometimes questionable what the changes in times and the differences in the political and economic systems mean. Of course, although there is a degree of difference, it is easier to identify similarities in the perception and thinking system of women than differences between democratic and non-democratic countries. This shows that the patriarchal system and sexism that justify the subordination of women are deeply and widely rooted, and in this point, North Korea is no exception.

### Double, or triple obligations imposed on women

At the beginning of the establishment of its regime, North Korea emphasized the equality of women and men by likening women to “a wheel of a two-wheel cart” based on socialist and communist ideology. As the presentation paper mentions, however, it is difficult to say that women's participation in society (participation in the project of founding a nation) has more meaning than rhetoric for “mobilizing a female workforce in society.”

North Korea has expanded women's participation in economic activities mostly to areas considered to be women's labor (such as education and healthcare), which shows the absence of understanding of the gendered labor division system. “The male labor force in business sectors in which women can work should be gradually replaced with women,” and this can be said to reinforce the tendency of making such labor as women's by replacing the male labor force with a low-wage female labor force rather than strengthening women's labor rights.

To encourage women's participation in economic activities, North Korea has established more convenience facilities such as daycare centers, kindergartens, and communal laundries, and at the same time, put pressure on women to perform feudal and traditional roles of women at home by emphasizing the importance of being “a good mother and a wise wife” and “forcing them to have many children, raise them as soldiers, be good at rearing children and well educated, support their husbands, and be virtuous daughters-in-law.” As such, North Korea is forcibly imposing double, or triple burdens, only on women. Although North Korea promised

to destroy the feudal order, the status of women in the North Korean political system and social order is not different from that of women in the feudal order in that the country's "blood"-based power succession system itself is a feudal order.

Above all, only Kang Pan-sok (Kim Il-sung's mother) and Kim Jong-suk (Kim Jong-il's mother) are consistently called and admired as mothers of the men of supreme power, which implies that in North Korean society, women are respected and honored only as a "mother" after they get married and give a birth to a child. In particular, if it is true that Kim Jong-un's mother, Ko Yong-hui, cannot take the same position as Kang Pan-sok and Kim Jong-suk because she is a Korean-Japanese, I believe that this demonstrates that in the North Korea's hereditary rule, there is a strong obsession with "pure" bloodline, and at the same time, the base of its hereditary rule is weak to that extent. In other words, Kim Jong-un cannot conduct a campaign of following and learning from his mother, as done by the former supreme leaders, because she does not belong to the "pure" bloodline, and the fact is perceived as a fatal weakness in maintaining the regime, and this implies that if the purity of the bloodline is not guaranteed, legitimacy of the hereditary rule disappears.

#### Elimination and absence of women's political identity

The Korea Democratic Women's Union (KDWU) changed its name to the Socialist Women's Union of Korea at the 6th Congress held in November 2016. In this regard, Korea University professor Nam Sung-wook interpreted that "The word 'democratic' in the name of the Korea Democratic Women's Union is a political expression, implying its passive and inactive nature of only receiving and executing orders from the North Korean authorities. However, the term 'socialist' in the name of the Socialist Women's Union of Korea seems to contain the meaning that women should play an active and subjective role in economic activities." (Yonhap News, November 19, 2016) If the term "socialist" signifies a kind of subjectivity, it means nothing more than the subjectivity as a mother, the subjectivity demonstrated when they bear children and raise them into a socialist worker. Kim Jong-il undermined the status and influence of the KDWU led by Kim Song-ae in the process of seizing power, the members of the KDWU were full-time housewives, and the Women of Joseon, the official journal of the KDWU, only emphasized following and learning from the mothers of the supreme leaders rather than presented a new female image. In this respect, I think it is difficult to say that the KDWU did more than support the male-centered hereditary system in North Korea and that changes in or activities of the KDWU are difficult to serve as an indicator of changes in North Korean women. Rather, it can be said that the current position and role of the KDWU in the North Korean political structure shows a degradation of North Korean women's political status and role.

Although Kim Jong-un's younger sister Yo-jong's activities are becoming visible to some extent during the Kim Jong-un era, the sisters of the supreme leaders (Kim Jong-il's sister Kim Kyong-hei and Kim Jong-un's sister Kim Yo-jong) have weak power in that they have acquired and maintained their political status

and power because they are related by blood to the supreme leaders, and there is no other ground for justifying their political status and power. In addition, given that the power succession in North Korea is based on paternal lineage, the women can have power only when they faithfully perform the role of an aide without threatening the supreme authority, which makes their status always instable even though they share the bloodline with the supreme leaders.

It is said that women account for 20.2 percent of the Supreme People's Assembly and 25 percent of the local People's Assembly. However, the North Korean political system does not allow autonomy and independence and is based on strong patriarchal power, so it seems difficult to say that a relatively high proportion of women in such political organizations have more meaning than a symbolic representation. In addition, if North Korea's hereditary system is a project jointly implemented by the current ruler and his surrounding elites who want to secure the current system, women who have gained power are also conspirators, the same as the male elites who want to maintain and defend the current system.

The way North Korean women are treated is based on sexist ideology, and the sexist ideology is working as an important tool to justify North Korea's hereditary power system. In other words, on one side, hostile sexism is being reinforced by viewing women trying to seize power as hostile and intimidating and punishing (excluding or purging) them, while on the other side, benevolent sexism is being strengthened by praising women who support men.

Both hostile and benevolent sexism are problematic in that women and men are not perceived as equal. The bigger problem is that men are not the only ones that have such perception of sexism and many women also internalize it. In this regard, it is necessary to carefully examine what kind of sexism North Korean women internalize and to what extent they internalize it. And it is also needed to contemplate about how to eliminate such sexism in inter-Korean relations. Just as emancipation of labor does not lead to the liberation of women, inter-Korean exchanges and unification do not automatically guarantee gender equality.

Although South and North Korea are heterogeneous in many areas such as politics, economy, and culture, it is difficult to say that there is a huge difference in sexist ideology. In order to ensure that the improvement of inter-Korean relations will be able to enhance gender equality, it is necessary for North and South Korean women to not just meet and understand each other, but also get rid of sexism and agree on a common goal of realizing gender equality.

To this end, it needs to analyze and evaluate the North Korean system and society more closely from a gender perspective. Studies need to be conducted in the multifaceted aspects, going beyond just understanding the changes in the status and position of a few elite women, by examining how those women exercise power, whether such exercise of power can contribute to eliminate gender discrimination and inequality within the North Korean system, how North Korea's patriarchal and male-centered system reinforces gender discrimination and inequality in North Korean society, and how North Korean women respond or resist it. When the gendered problems in the North and South Korean systems are accurately identified, detailed action plans can also be presented from the gender perspective.

# Changes in the Economic and Social Role of Women in North Korean

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## Content

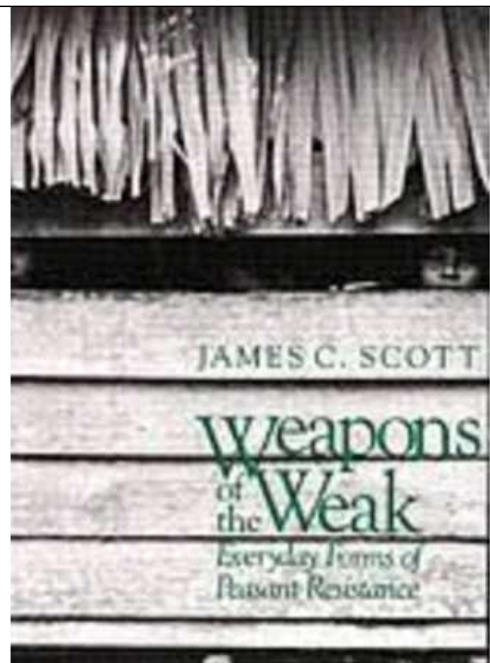
- Research Questions
- Everyday processes that sustain or undermine autocratic resilience
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- The jamadang generation: The Rise of the Donju, Hyper-femininity & Conspicuous consumption
- A radically changed information environment
- Women in 2021: Sanctions, floods, Covid-19 & food insecurity 또 다른 고난의 행군?
- Current crackdown
- Women and future legitimacy of the regime?

## Method

- 41 in-depth interviews with female refugees resettled in South Korea, China & Australia. (field work Sept 2014, May 2015, Jan & Dec 2016)
- Snowball sampling, and to diversify -fieldwork sites,incl NGOs and Protestant churches
- 3 fieldtrips to North Korea (Dalton visited schools, theatres, hairdressers, restaurants, a department store and other public spaces in Pyongyang, Hyesan and Gaeseong).
- Analysis of primary and secondary sources. Eg Korean-language research, analysis of official documents and media.

## Everyday life that sustain or undermine autocratic resilience.

- The wielding of power is not one way nor based on a distinction between society and politics or a private and public sphere – in particular, in North Korea where the private sphere is public and everything is political.
- Without examining people's daily lives, we miss important clues re popular tactics, everyday resistance, and authoritarian resilience at ground level.



## Research Questions

1. character of marketplaces and what role do women play within the m?
2. social and political impact of their activity?
3. role and status of women in the context of work, family, marriage, reproductive health and the social construction of female embodiment and sexuality?
4. How has the most recent natural disasters, sanctions, border closures due to the pandemic that has induced economic crisis affected women?
5. How will the spread of capitalist relations and changes in the social position of women affect social relations – BUT ALSO the legitimacy of the regime?

## In summary: economic and social change

- **Widespread marketisation**
- **Increasing exposure to foreign pop culture**
- **Leading to social, economic but not political change**
- **Relative deprivation – women's bearing the triple burden and those from a burgeoning moneyed elite**
- **These changes**
  - reaching far beyond Pyongyang to affect many, if not most, women in the country.
  - transforming role and lifestyle of North Korea's Women across the country and even how North Korean femininity is conceived.
- While this new-found economic agency carries the seeds of societal transformation in a traditionally patriarchal system, women have borne a disproportionate burden in securing not only their families' survival, but also arguably that of the North Korean economy.



## Women-led capitalist capitalism

- Between 75 - 80% of market traders are women. (Yi 2006 p.37; Landolt and Kim 2008)
- 2016 approx. 400 markets with 1.8 million people visiting daily (Kim 2016, Strategic & International Studies 2018).
- Each official market has up to 20,000 sales stalls
- Only females over 20 are permitted to sell products
- Women earn more than 70% of household income
- Women have emerged as critical economic actors taking advantage of economic opportunities to secure their families' livelihood security and advancement (Jung, Dalton & Willis 2018).






The '**triple burden**' of paid work, unpaid domestic work and care work exerts enormous physical and emotional stress on **women**

*After marriage, women are slaves. Women have to obey their husbands and feed their families. While women are eating barley, they provide their husbands with white rice. Women wear their husbands' old clothes, while they provide the husband with new clothes. (Ri, 39)*

#### Women experience significant time poverty

- responsibility to be the breadwinner
- child care/demands of running the household
- “loyalty” work (eg saenghwalchonghwa) often their own participation control and surveillance (eg role in inminban – a key node in the system of state surveillance)



## Violence in and outside the home

- Domestic violence
- The predatory state:
  - bribery - officials operate parasitically in the profit creation system of market by collecting 'rents' from market vendors (Haggard & Noland, 2013, p.51)
  - sexual violence by govt officials, prison guards, interrogators, police, prosecutors, and soldiers, husbands

## Sex trafficking to China

- But women also use official corruptibility and migration strategically
  - 'even a ghost', if bribed, 'listens to you'
  - "[I]n communism, you'd threaten a dog into compliance, while in capitalism, obedience is obtained through bribes."
  - "If you want to live better up there, you'd better be a woman selling stuff in markets or marry a man who lives on bribes or taxes from these women at markets, or works for the regime's trading firms"

## Destabilising patriarchy: The family and social relations



Living the "non socialist" life style...

- Relaxed gender roles in the household and changed family relations
- Market participation affords women a level of public visibility and unregulated social interaction
- This has granted North Korean women greater status and economic independence, with many assuming a more influential role in domestic decision-making.



## Gender roles

- Status as breadwinner may have translated into higher levels of household decision-making power and the narrowly conceived domesticised ideals of women as wife and mother have become contested.
- This is reflected
  - slang eg men there are like...“lights that are switched off all day.” “guard dogs”
  - The value daughters. According to one refugee: “After our economic situation deteriorated, there were more families wanting to have only one child. There was even a saying: “If you only have one son, you will end up an orphan in your later life.” . . . A son is more burdensome for parents because they need to prepare a house for their son. Facing a famine, sons need more food than daughters do.”
  - Human Relations- Love marriage, increase in divorce, dating



- In an increasingly materialistic and consumerist society, social status now tied to success in the market.
- In this context, the role of women has shifted from reproducers of workers to reproducers of class and social status.
- Those in their 20s and 30s have experienced a market economy and foreign media. They know about the prosperity of the South. Impacted impact on the social construction of femininity in ways that depart from earlier state prescribed and policed ideals.
- Marketisation is transforming interests, expectations and values of the entire society revitalization of the market and expansion of consumption activities as evidenced in changing modes of consumption
  - Fashion
  - Cosmetic surgery
  - "5 shining pieces"
  - Pop culture
  - Hagwon and Private tutoring





## A radically changed information environment

Before, info was planned, produced & monopolized by the state. But control has weakened. Info circulated via mobile phone & in the markets is crucial for survival.

Influence of 한류 approx 70 -80% of young people have watched SK movies/dramas. "Mister Trot" very popular among women

- Consumption of foreign media is not a passive activity but 'another production'. The penetration of imported media/popular cultures into media consumption may stimulate new aspirations for a different material future.
- A doubled edged sword- The more citizens use electronic devices permitted and controlled by the govt, the more access the government will have readily available about what citizens discuss amongst themselves.



## Effects of economic crisis & govt crackdown on women



Photo by Dr Kyungja Jung (2013)



## Women & Leadership

- Which is more important ? Blood or gender?

## 2021: 또 다른 고난의 행군?

No officially reported cases of COVID-19 (유령 병) but adjacent Liaoning and Jilin have had sporadic COVID-19 outbreaks. Facing a wait for vaccines -supposed to receive 2mill AZs but delayed

### An economy in crisis

- Exports dropped by 32.6% in 2017 and 83.1% in 2018. GDP shrank by 3.5% in 2017 and 4.1% in 2018. Trade with China has collapsed by 81% in 2020.
- Facing a shortfall of 1.3+ mill tons of grains, 10 mill or 40 % of its population face malnutrition
- Trade controls have contributed to a surge in food prices

In April 2021, Kim warned that the country faced its "worst-ever situation" and to be ready for another "Arduous March" (KCNA 2021).



Aspects of crackdown target women making gendered burdens more acute

Increased fees for market traders

- heightened border control measures - supply chain disruptions
- The leadership is calling on women to follow the example of the Kim Il Sung era's "Chollima spirit."
- Ordered an end to the largely urban practice of hiring nannies to look after children.

Kim Jong Un's new emphasis on the issue of child rearing. the hiring of nannies as "individualism in the selfish pursuit of one's own comfort." the society must wage a "sharp struggle to eradicate [keeping] nannies" and that offenders will face punishment "without question."

## Muddle through or collapse?

All revolutionary changes are unthinkable until they happen — and then they are understood to be inevitable.

Theodore Roszak

Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More

Alexei Yurchak



고맙습니다



# Changes in Socioeconomic Roles of North Korean Women

Choi Eun-ju, Sejong Institute

### ■ Topics and Methodology

- A study on the socioeconomic roles of North Korean women
  - Analyzing the interactions between social structures and agents
- A study on the daily lives of North Korean women at a micro level
  - Assuming women as active agents not limited to passive actors in a macrostructure
  - Considering the characteristics of women in general social members
  - A study on the reality faced by women and change patterns through daily life analysis
- Interviews and field surveys of North Korean female refugees, studies of primary and secondary literature
  - Given that it is difficult to conduct participant observation in North Korea studies, using various alternative methods to identify aspects of North Korean women's daily lives
  - Identifying the gap between the North Korean government's policies and the reality

### ■ The gap between the legal system and reality

- Although the principle of gender equality has been legislated, women's rights in reality is hardly guaranteed.
  - Since the establishment of the regime, North Korea has encouraged women to participate in society by advocating gender equality, women's liberation, and family revolution.
  - In reality, however, women play triple roles in the family and social structure of housework, bread winning, and compulsory labor.
- The gap between the system and the reality results from social awareness and the socioeconomic structure.
  - The traditional role of women emphasized due to the slow change in social perception compared to the legislation
  - After the economic hardship of the 1990s, women were forced to be



engaged in more economic activities to maintain the family economy and fulfill more obligations for childcare to supplement the weakened infant care system.

- In particular, economic activities in the market have been expanded mostly by women since the economic difficulties in the 1990s, dividing the economy into the formal economy led by men and the informal economy led by women.

#### ■ Characteristics of recent changes in North Korean women's socioeconomic status

- Women's role as a main agent of economic activity emphasized in the formal economy
  - After Kim Jong-un took power, women's role in the formal sector stressed by encouraging professional women to enter into society and take senior official in the official sector, such as encouraging women to advance into society and facilitate the appointment of women as senior officials
  - As the operation of companies and factories is normalized mainly in the light industry and commercial sectors, women have been more likely to engage in activities in the formal economy.
  - The traditional patriarchy as well as existing hierarchical relations weakened with women's increased market activities
- Effect of inequality in socioeconomic structure on women
  - Even among women, socioeconomic roles differ according to region, class, education level, and social status.
- Activeness of changes and future prospects
  - Considering the interaction between actors and structures (institutions), it is necessary to pay attention to whether strengthened roles of women as active actors can bring changes to institutions.

## Changes in the Economic and Social Role of Women in North Korean

Joung Eun-lee, Korea Institute for National Unification

### General Reviews

1. This study is considered to be a very meaningful analysis in that it discovers the active elements of women in the recent dynamic changes in the North Korean economy and society and explores how their power will affect the regime in the future.
2. In particular, the attempt of this study to rethink the status of women in North Korea's economic society by examining it in various daily activities is a very important element in studies of North Korea, yet has been easily overlooked. Therefore, it is novel and meaningful that it highlights women as a research subject along with these daily routines.
3. Above all, in a situation where materials on North Korea are limited, the author made utmost efforts to improve the accuracy of this paper and reflect the reality of North Korea by personally visiting North Korea three times to conduct field surveys not only in Pyongyang but also in local cities of Hyesan and Kaesong, and using experiences and information obtained at various places such as schools, theaters, beauty salons, restaurants, department stores, and public places.

### Issues

It is necessary to examine a time-series study of how women have contributed to North Korea's marketization that began in the 1990s, and at the same time, actively expand and analyze the economic domain limited to the *jangmadang* market. It is because this could cast light on whether recent changes and development of women a) contribute to the development of the North Korean regime in a better direction; b) are acting as a factor to cause instability in the regime; c) or are likely to exert more power to overthrow the most closed, persuasive, and oppressive regime in the future, as the author claims.

→To examine these questions, this panelist raises the need to pay attention to the role of the rich class, or *donju*. Dating back in history, the first *donju* refers to Korean-Japanese who went to North Korea through the North Korean Repatriation Project in the late 1950s. They belonged to the politically “hostile class,” but were in the top class economically. Most of them received goods or foreign currency remittances from family members or relatives living in Japan, and the value of these goods was very high in North Korea. As an extreme example, a Seiko watch was equivalent to 80 years of wages for a worker. Accordingly, it can be said that in the mid-1960s, when the socialist planned economy was in its prime time, Korean Japanese in North Korea were the main agents that gave birth to black markets in North Korea. In particular, most

products traded were luxury items preferred by women, such as clothes and home appliances, and conditions were prepared for Korean Japanese women who did not have to go to work to become the key players of the black markets. As a result, excluding *wangseobang*, Chinese residing in North Korea who emerged as main players in markets with China's reform and opening in the 1980s, 80% of the *donju* class in North Korea are women. Traders have joined the *donju* class since the 1990s, lenders since the 2000s, and bureaucrats since 2010, but women manage money at home, and accordingly, they are actual *donju*.

Currently, *donju* refers to an economic entity with **operating capital** of more than 100,000 dollars, and it is known that **there are about 5,000 donjus nationwide**. Above all, they are engaged in the private financial business, but their business is not limited to mere usury and is linked with not only local economies but also third countries through remittance networks, facilitating the inflow and circulation of overseas cash in North Korea. Recently, they are investing in producing facilities of plants in each area as well as in real estate and logistics and transportation businesses. In particular, the status of *donjus* has risen to the level where the government has **absorbed their money into commercial banks**.

Therefore, in North Korea, *donjus*—that is women—have contributed to the expansion and institutionalization of the informal sector. It was illegal in the 1990s to be engaged in businesses, such as distribution, real estate, and production as well as those in *jangmadang* markets, but now part of them have been absorbed into the official sector. Second, they contributed to the legalization of black-market prices. In North Korea, products are actually traded at market prices. Third, the investment structure has been changing with the focus shifting from commercial to industrial sectors. In the mid-2000s, a lot of *donju*'s capital was invested in the trade, but now it is being invested in domestic production aimed at domestic consumers.

Most notably, since women are *donjus*, they have a lot of interest in health, sanitation, and education in areas where they live, and as a result, make investments in these sectors. As such, *donjus* are seeking growth and development while interacting with and complementing the local economy.

→ Therefore, given these historical changes and developments of *donju* and women, North Korean women are not passive beings dependent on low-wage labor but leaders who are evolving, developing, and changing the North Korean system in a more dynamic way. This is because in North Korea, *donju* is a practical entity that pursues high added value.

## Questions

1. In which year did the 41 North Korean women escape from the country during the field survey held in September 2014, May 2015, and January and December 2016? That is, about which year are they talking in the text?
2. Which part of this study includes the founding and analysis of the surveys on the three visits to North Korea (Pyongyang, Hyesan, and Kaesong)?

3. What is the relationship among North Korean women, the *jangmadang* generation, and the top one-percent rich *donju*?
4. Aren't mobile phones included in the six home appliances? (How about the recent trends?)
5. Are the *jangmadang* generation, fashion, consumption culture and conspicuous consumption, private tutoring at private institutes, the rapidly changing information environment, the influence of the Korean Wave, and the triple hardships (natural disasters, the pandemic, and sanctions) remarkable changes that only appeared in women's lives? Aren't these elements seen in men's changed lives as well?

## North Korean Women's Culture Seen from *Lipsticks of the Republic*: Beauty and Cosmetics of the Kim Jong-un Era

Jeon Young-sun (research professor at Konkuk University)

### I. Introduction

Beauty and cosmetics is the area which best shows the characteristics of North Korean women's culture under the Kim Jong-un regime. Since Kim took power, an increased number of cosmetics-related news articles have been reported in the *Rodong Sinmun*, including reports on Kim's visits to cosmetics factories in Pyongyang and Sinuiju.

North Korea's cosmetics and beauty culture had not been the concern of previous Supreme Leaders. Cosmetic products were not diverse, and makeup was not actively recommended. For women, makeup was just a form of basic social etiquette.

However, many things have changed under the Kim Jong-un regime. Beauty and cosmetics have been one of Kim's main interests. He has visited cosmetics factories several times in person, with his visits reported by the *Rodong Sinmun*. Competition has been encouraged among cosmetics companies. The facilities of the Pyongyang factory, inferior to that of the Sinuiju factory, were completely renovated. "The Sinuiju Cosmetics Factory was built to ensure that more quality cosmetics could be provided to women, and an order was soon followed to renovate the Pyongyang Cosmetics Factory,"<sup>31)</sup> said the *Rodong Sinmun*. Kim Jong-un's "field guidance" tours to cosmetics factories have been reported several more times since then.

Why does the Kim Jong-un regime show interest in cosmetics and even beauty? Politically, the people's interest in beauty is being propagated as a right that citizens of a civilized socialist country are supposed to enjoy. By doing so, the regime aims to strengthen the status of Kim as a leader who cares for the people. Economically, the regime is paying attention to cosmetics and beauty as products that offer self-reliance and self-strengthening. It is fostering cosmetics and beauty as an export industry by improving product quality through competition and developing various products to revitalize the domestic market. During a relatively short period of time, product design and quality have been enhanced due to scientific and technological advances. Under the Kim Jong-un regime, intense competition is taking place in the fields of beauty and cosmetics.

Amid such fierce competition, the people's desire for beauty is growing little by little to the extent that it cannot be controlled under the purview of socialist aesthetics. A wave of change is spreading from cosmetics to the overall beauty industry. Cosmetics and beauty are symbolic fields that demonstrate political, economic, and socio-cultural change occurring in North Korea.

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31) "In the days when he created a frenzy of socialist competition," *Rodong Sinmun*, September 15, 2014: "The Great General has constructed the Sinuiju Cosmetics Factory magnificently in order to provide more quality cosmetics to our people, especially to women, followed by the reconstruction of the Pyongyang Cosmetics Factory made possible with his gracious love."

## II. The Perception and Culture of Makeup

### 1. Makeup as a flower of society

In North Korea, makeup is regarded as a form of courtesy and morality that women are required to perform. As such, it should not contradict social ethics and standards. The standard is “socialist aesthetics,” pursuing beauty while upholding socialist ideology. A woman’s makeup is not the act of an individual aimed at cultivating beauty. It should be a basic act for the society and the community. In North Korea, desirable makeup is that which conforms to socialist aesthetics.

Even in makeup, social order and universal standards are more important than individual characteristics. Makeup should not be fancy; it should be in line with national values and the socialist moral code. In North Korea, women are likened to flowers. Women are the flower of the family, the flower of society, and the flower of the nation. It is the virtue of women to fulfill their duties and roles as flowers.<sup>32)</sup> In the country, color makeup is normally avoided, and it is popular to apply basic cosmetic products such as toner and lotion. In particular, wearing heavy lipstick is perceived as a “non-socialist act.”

Natural and light makeup is preferred over heavy, color makeup due to social perception. Adult women have always applied makeup, as it is considered to be a social norm. In North Korea, color makeup tends to be avoided, and it is common to apply only basic makeup such as toner and lotion.

Bridal makeup is special. The general etiquette for makeup is described in Gil Su-mi's *Makeup and Our Life: Anyone Can Become Beautiful* published in 2017.<sup>33)</sup>

First, makeup should be put on in soft colors. Our people have historically preferred simple, elegant, and subtle colors over glamorous and luxurious ones.

Second, makeup should also fit the national characteristics of our people. If you apply excessively old-fashioned makeup that is not suitable for the needs of the times or, on the other hand, adopt unusual makeup methods rather than our own in the pursuit of modern beauty, both will conclude with the destruction of beauty.

Third, makeup should be applied to ensure the skin looks healthy and beautiful. Makeup should be done according to time and place. Wearing too much makeup or no makeup at all, unsuitably for the occasion, is also against the etiquette. Makeup should be appropriate for one’s occupation and age. If you put on makeup according to your occupation and age, you will not only become more beautiful, but your personality will also be enhanced.

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32) Nam Sung-wook, “A study on *juche* esthetics and make-up of North Korean women: Focusing on makeup behavior and social identity,” *The Journal of Peace Studies* Vol. 18-3, The Korean Association of Peace Studies, 2017, p80.

33) Gil Su-mi, *Makeup and Our Life: Anyone Can Become Beautiful*, Korea Publications Export & Import Corporation, 2017.

Makeup should be appropriate for the season. Humans' skin and physiological conditions vary depending on the seasons.

Fourth, makeup should match the shape of your face and the color of the clothes you wear. Each person has a different face shape, preferences, and hobbies, and the colors and shape of the clothes they are wearing are also different. So, you should not match your face to others' makeup style just because it looks beautiful. You need to match the makeup style to your face if you want to look beautiful.

Even in makeup, national characteristics and social significance are emphasized. Makeup should also suit the season and the wearer's skin.

The socialist lifestyle requires makeup to reflect a sound and elegant culture.

Makeup should be suitable for the lifestyle of socialist society, national characteristics, and the aesthetic sense of the times.

Abnormal makeup, not fitting our style, ruins the healthy atmosphere of society.<sup>34)</sup>

Makeup shouldn't be "extraordinary." Makeup should be as beautiful as a flower and never be fancy. "Abnormal makeup, not fitting our style, ruins the healthy atmosphere of society," Gil says. Wearing heavy makeup is considered to be against the socialist lifestyle and morally ignorant. In North Korea, cosmetic products also have their own significance in that they improve the health of workers and enhance their lives culturally and hygienically.

## 2. The national narrative and cosmetics: "A Gift of Love"

Before Kim Jong-un took power, cosmetics were a gift of love. In the Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il regimes, cosmetics symbolized the grace of the communist party. They were a gift of love, of special consideration, that the party presented on major national holidays such as Women's Day (March 8).

Female poet Ryeom Hyeong-mi sang the joy of receiving cosmetics:

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34) Gil Su-mi, *Makeup and Our Life: Anyone Can Become Beautiful*, Korea Publications Export & Import Corporation, 2017, p8.

Husbands who love their wives most  
 Have never dreamed of it  
 To simple women whose ears turn red  
 Even with an unexpected flower,  
 What a great wave of happiness it was  
 On March 8 International Women's Day last year

Great General Kim Jong-il of the military-first era  
 Put off all his work and all his visits to the battlefield  
 To be the father of female workers,  
 To watch the commemorative performances together,  
 And even to give us Bomhyanggi (spring fragrance) cosmetics.<sup>35)</sup>

Lauded General Kim Jong-il, who, despite the difficulties of the military-first era, put off all of his work and his visits to the battlefield to become the father of female workers, watch the commemorative performances together, and even give them Bomhyanggi cosmetics. Ahead of International Women's Day, Kim thought of female workers and decided to present them with cosmetics. A special train loaded with cosmetics symbolizing the General's love ran all night, and the General himself met the train at the station at 3 o'clock in the morning.

“(Long Poem) One Hundred Days, One Hundred Nights,” written by Kim Yun-gol and Park Jong-chol and published in the *Rodong Sinmun* on March 25, 2012, also sang of the joy of receiving Bomhyanggi cosmetics as a gift of love on Women's Day.



- ▣ Ryeom Hyeong-mi, “The Song of Women in the Military-first Era,” *Joseon Literature*, Issue No. 8, 2009; Kim Yun-gol, Park Jong-chol, “(Long Poem) One Hundred Days and One Hundred Nights,” *Rodong Sinmun*, March 25, 2012.

35) Ryeom Hyeong-mi, “The Song of Women in the Military-first Era,” *Joseon Literature* Issue No. 8, 2009.



Bomhyanggi cosmetics, a symbol of the Supreme Leader's love gifted to his people, are produced at the Sinuiju factory, which has been visited by three generations of Supreme Leaders. One of the roles that North Korean literature assumes is to create narratives. It must create touching narratives for the country to aspire towards. Cosmetics also have their own narrative, which ardently captures how precious the cosmetics are. Each cosmetic product contains the love of the General, of the Supreme Leader. It may be insignificant, and the quality may be lacking. However, the touching narrative shows that even such trivial cosmetic products contain the warm heart of the Supreme Leader who works hard day and night for the people.

Where did Bomhyanggi cosmetics, the cosmetic products that contain the love of the Supreme Leader, originate? The novel “Bomhyanggi” introduces how Bomhyanggi cosmetics were developed and what meaning they have. The novel, written by Park Hye-ran, was included in the 12<sup>th</sup> issue of *Joseon Literature*. Using the Sinuiju Cosmetics Factory as its setting, the novel tells the story of scientists working hard to produce cosmetics. In the novel, scientists who have searched for clean water, which is the raw material for cosmetics, finally discover spring water from Seokdu Mountain in southern Sinuiju. Having been searching for sterile water in nature, the scientists recall Kim Jong-il, who in his living years insisted on using the spring water of Seokdu Mountain as an ingredient for cosmetics. Following the will of Kim Jong-il, they are successful in their search for the spring water.



▶ Novel “Bomhyanggi,” *Joseon Literature* Issue No. 12, 2009; Art film “Bomhyanggi”

The novel “Bomhyanggi” was adapted into an art film with the same title. The film “Bomhyanggi” was produced by North Korean Film Studio in 2005. Ri Hak-hyon and Kim Guk-song wrote the script, Chon Gwang-il directed, and Hwang Ryong-chol filmed the movie. It was sponsored by the Sinuiju Cosmetics Factory.

This film depicts the following episode. While inspecting a military unit on the front line, the General notices a tube of toothpaste and says, “This toothpaste has separated, even though it hasn’t passed its expiration date. This is a problem of quality. There is a limit to raising the quality just by using filtered drinking water. To produce good cosmetics, we must use good water.” He continued that “It is necessary to find and use sterile water from nature.” Yong-jun searches for the water day and night, with belief in the General’s remarks on sterile spring water. In order to put the General’s words into practice, spring water should be completely perfect. Finally, Yong-jun finds spring water under the Brother Rock of Seokwha Mountain. In the morning when everyone is asleep after working all night to dig a spring under the rock, the water springs up, and exhausted Yong-jun collapses while everyone shouts with joy. Looking at Yong-jun lying in the hospital room, everyone

anxiously waits for the analysis results of the spring water. However, they learn the unexpected news that bacteria have been detected in the sample. Just in time, they receive a call from the party, and the General, showing interest in sterile water, sends new equipment and scientists. The research chief at the State Academy of Science says that according to the General, bacteria detected repeatedly in the analysis of the water samples may result from a temperature problem during the collection process and orders the scientists to use a refrigerator to collect and analyze samples.

The story of Bomhyanggi cosmetics also appears in a children's poem. "Bomhyanggi" is a children's poem written by Kang Eun-gyeong and published in *Children's Literature* Issue No. 8 in 2018.

Does my mom wash her face with the spring water  
From the old saying, that makes you beautiful?  
After putting on Bomhyanggi cosmetics,  
She has become the most beautiful flower in the world

My mom's face that becomes more beautiful every day  
Did the spring from the old saying do its magic?  
No, no, it's the boundless love of the Supreme Leader  
That makes my mom's face really beautiful

The love that the Supreme Leader was eager to find  
Even on hot summer days and winter days,  
Now comes to the faces of moms and sisters,  
Bringing spring fragrance to every home<sup>36)</sup>

The novel, the art film, and the children's poem with the same title all tell the same story. A single story repeated in various forms makes people remember a single narrative of the cosmetic products and finally creates a shared memory. A collective common memory is produced even for simple cosmetic products. Thus, cosmetics have been imprinted as a gift from the Supreme Leader.

### 3. The people wearing makeup

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36) Kang Eun-gyeong, "Bomhyanggi," *Children's Literature* Issue No. 8, 2018, p22.

In North Korea, makeup is considered to be a field of beauty that helps people hide shortcomings in their appearance and make their faces beautiful and clean in a cultural and hygienic sense. Makeup can be divided into general makeup and ceremonial makeup.

General makeup focuses on balancing and harmonizing the facial features by weakening or hiding flaws using pictorial techniques while actively highlighting the face's personality and beauty. Ceremonial makeup aims to maximize beauty by grooming each part of the head, neck, hands and face beautifully and splendidly and by adorning the appearance according to the shape and color of ceremonial garments. A woman's makeup is exceptionally glamorous at her wedding. Recently, more brides get their wedding makeup done by professionals. The bridal dress and makeup are provided as a set, and a growing number of brides ask professionals for makeup. It is said that bridal makeup costs vary widely.

Except for special cases like ceremonial makeup, general makeup is not fancy. This is because North Koreans believe that makeup or body care is directly associated with one's mental state. Heavy makeup has been connected with capitalist extravagance. North Korean women have been taught that way for a long time, shaping their preference for mild and subtle makeup.



- ▣ Gil Su-mi, *Makeup and Our Life: Anyone Can Become Beautiful*, Korea Publications Export & Import Corporation, 2017; Commemorative artifacts left behind at the cosmetics factory by the Supreme Leader who guided the production of cosmetics tailored to the tastes and characteristics of women (*Rodong Sinmun*, March 8, 2020)

It is said that North Korean women begin using makeup in senior middle school, which is equivalent to high school in South Korea. Senior middle school is the last course of preparation for professional life. Most learn to apply makeup for their careers or begin wearing makeup when entering society.

North Korea's makeup culture seems to have changed from before the Kim Jong-un regime. Makeup, which was regarded as a working woman's duty, has become a field of color art that adorns people's faces beautifully and culturally. It is changing in the direction of revealing women's beauty and expressing their individuality. There is also a book that specifically introduces how to apply makeup according to one's face type, age, and skin type, and cosmetics that emphasize

functionality are also being launched competitively.

The changes in North Korean makeup culture can also be identified in North Korean literary and artistic works. Ryu Gyeong-cheol's children's poem "My Stylish Older Sister," included in the first issue of *Children's Literature* in 2018, features an older sister putting on makeup.

Eunhasu (Milky Way) cosmetics must be really good  
For a while, my older sister sits in front of the mirror,  
Applying cream and rouge fabulously  
And drawing lovely half-moon-shaped brows

I also want to look good in my school uniform  
She just stands in front of the mirror and sprays perfume  
My older sister really is a stylish girl  
Her clothing style and face are more beautiful than actresses

On her shiny, gorgeous, wavy hair  
My older sister also applies fixing agent<sup>37)</sup> while laughing, *hohoho*  
If she appears on the street with a flower-like appearance  
The whole street gets bright and filled with the scent of spring

I like it too, *hehehe*, so does my grandma, *hohoho*  
My older sister, known as an innovator of the Manlima Movement,  
Has become a stylish fairy, prettier than a flower  
Thanks to the high-end cosmetics full of the Supreme Leader's love<sup>38)</sup>

Ryu's "My Stylish Older Sister" is written from the perspective of a younger brother who watches his older sister sit in front of a mirror and apply Eunhasu cosmetics. In the eyes of the younger brother, his sister in makeup is like a stylish fairy. "On her shiny, gorgeous, wavy hair, my older sister also applies fixing agent." This poem ends by revealing the secret to her stylish looks: "Thanks to the high-end cosmetics full of the Supreme Leader's love." She is able to put on cosmetics because of the Supreme Leader.

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37) Hair spray

38) Ryu Gyeong-cheol, "My Stylish Older Sister," *Children's Literature* Issue No. 8, 2018

The second issue of *Children's Literature* in 2018 contains Kim Seong-hui's poem titled "Mom's Face Getting Beautiful." This poem depicts a mom whose face becomes beautiful with Eunhasu cosmetics.

Even this morning,  
My mom sits in front of the mirror,  
Putting on makeup.  
Look at her face

After applying spring water-like  
Eunhasu toner  
She puts on foundation.  
It looks milky

...

Her face is so pretty  
That I look at it again  
And feel the love of the Supreme Leader  
Deep in my heart

The Supreme Leader sent  
Eunhasu cosmetics  
To make all moms  
Get beautiful

The whole country  
As bright as a spring day  
Was included  
In those quality cosmetics<sup>39)</sup>

It was Eunhasu cosmetics sent by the Supreme Leader that made mom's face

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39) Kim Seong-hui, "Mom's Face Getting Beautiful," *Children's Literature* Issue No. 2, 2018.

beautiful. In the past, Bomhyanggi was the subject of literary works, but this has changed to Eunhasu. Is it simply the author's choice? No, it can't be. Under the Kim Jong-un regime, Eunhasu is mentioned more frequently than Bomhyanggi. Eunhasu, which was used as the subject of the above children's poem, is a cosmetic brand manufactured at the Pyongyang Cosmetics Factory.

Along with Bomhyanggi and Eunhasu, several other brands have been developed. In the past, it was thought that the Sinuiju Cosmetics Factory equals Bomhyanggi and the Pyongyang Cosmetics Factory equals Eunhasu, but the formula has changed. Even in a single factory, products of different brands are produced. Emerging brands compete by focusing on functionality. This is the landscape in the age of diversified brands.

Women's cosmetics were highly demanded and popular in the commercial networks of the capital celebrating March 8 International Women's Day. The cosmetics stands at Pyongyang No. 1 Department Store were also bustling with many customers. A variety of cosmetics from brands such as Bomhyanggi, Seonnyeo (fairy), Mirae (future), and Eunhasu are displayed on the stands on the first, second, and third floors. All cosmetics are domestic products produced at Sinuiju, Pyongyang, and other cosmetics factories.

According to salesperson Ryu Eun-gyeong at the cosmetics counter on the first floor, the newly developed Seonnyeo cosmetics are very popular this year, along with Bomhyanggi products. Guaranteeing beauty, youth, and health, Seonnyeo cosmetics are functional cosmetics with high efficacy made possible with newly introduced advanced technology and contain hyaluronic acid, the best natural moisturizing agent, and ingredients from Kaesong Goryo ginseng. Users have reported that Seonnyeo foundation, toner, and lotion are not only effective for whitening, moisturizing, glossy skin, and nutrition supply, but also remove age spots, freckles, and acne, prevent wrinkles and aging, and block ultraviolet rays.

A male college student has chosen Seonnyeo cosmetics as a gift for his middle school teacher, though he had given Bomhyanggi cosmetics to her for every previous Women's Day. "I want to give her new functional cosmetics this year, hoping that she will make greater achievements in education for future generations with more energy and vitality."<sup>40)</sup>

It is also new for men to buy cosmetics. Of course, cosmetics left no room for choice when they were provided as a gift by the state. However, as a product, people should select cosmetics according to their function and characteristics. From the people's point of view, the more goods available, the wider the range of choice.

Since 2012, when Kim Jong-un took control, North Korea has set a goal of national development as a socialist civilized country. A "socialist civilized country" is not only a nation the North Korean regime aims for but also a society in which the people "enjoy" the benefits of the nation. In the socialist civilized state, the people are required to prepare conditions and environments in which they can enjoy

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40) "Bomhyanggi and Seonnyeo cosmetics are popular as a gift in the commercial networks of Pyongyang celebrating March 8 Women's Day," *Rodong Sinmun*, March 17, 2017

materialistic cultural life. New cosmetic products are also launched to meet the heightened needs of the people in the materialistic culture.

Upholding the teaching doctrines of the Dear Supreme Leader who personally visited the Pyongyang Cosmetics Factory in February two years ago, the workers and engineers of the factory have made many achievements by constantly conducting technology development projects to launch new products that can serve as a model and standard for cosmetics in North Korea.<sup>41)</sup>

The lineup of Eunhasu cosmetics has expanded significantly in recent years. ... Since receiving field guidance from Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un in 2015, the number of product types has rapidly increased to about 50 and the number of items to about 160.

Since the renovation and modernization in October of last year, this factory has been transformed into the hub of the domestic cosmetics industry, equipped with modern analysis and measurement, experimental, and production facilities. The factory is currently producing 59 types of products and a total of 169 general, functional, and therapeutic cosmetic products. The factory has set a high goal of expanding the lineup to include 112 types of products and some 250 items, and by extension, launching all products under development as part of the five-year national economic development strategy. The range of the products is extensively wide to encompass products for improving wrinkles on the neck and other parts, as well as various cosmetic tools.<sup>42)</sup>

Companies have faced a new environment of competition. Cosmetics makers are subject to competition as well. The communist party also intentionally induces competition among companies. Against this backdrop, the Pyongyang Cosmetics Factory has emerged as a strong competitor in the cosmetics market, which was almost monopolized by the Sinuiju Cosmetics Factory. The Pyongyang factory has received field guidance from Kim Jong-un several times. It is also promoting the Eunhasu brand through literature and art. Why did Kim visit the Pyongyang Cosmetics Factory?

### III. The North Korean Cosmetic Industry

#### 1. The cosmetic industrial era

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41) “Fiery enthusiasm to drive the development of the cosmetics industry,” *Rodong Sinmun*, March 17, 2016.

42) “More cultural life with Milky Way – Pyongyang Cosmetics Factory that has realized scientific production,” *The Chosun Sinbo*, June 15, 2018.

When the market grows, an industry emerges. When a product sells extremely well in the market, the product is produced in large quantities in the factory. If it is continuously produced in large quantities, it will lead to the emergence of an industry. In the Kim Jong-un regime, two industries that had never existed before have emerged: service and consumer goods. North Korea seeks to stimulate the domestic economy based on the service industry. If one pays a little more, one can go to a better place and enjoy better facilities. One can enjoy and rest at a nice place, have a good phone, take a taxi, eat spaghetti at an Italian restaurant, and have *jajangmyeon* delivered using a smartphone app, as long as one has money. Services that had before been provided by the party free of charge have now been industrialized.

The emphasis is put on the consumer goods industry as well as the services industry. The party aims to localize consumer goods under the pretext of revitalizing the people's economy, promoting the domestic market through quality improvement, and further increasing exports. The area first chosen was tobacco. In the past, cigarettes from China and other foreign countries dominated the North Korean market. Now, North Korean cigarettes have taken over the market. The focus is now shifting to textiles and household goods. In the consumer goods industry, cosmetics were an attractive choice.

North Korea's economic environment is not very favorable. International sanctions against North Korea are still in place. In this situation, North Korea should be able to compete with others using its own technologies and resources. Along with dietary supplements, textiles, food and beverage, and daily necessities, cosmetics are relatively competitive. Cosmetics are relatively easy to manufacture, requiring no advanced technology. Competitiveness can also be enhanced by simply lowering prices. If the gap in features is narrow, compared to mobile phones or automobiles, many cosmetics consumers prefer "not the best but affordable" products.

#### Modernization and localization!

Right here is the powerfully pulsating iron will of the Dear Supreme Leader to keep our pride and create and develop everything in our own way, based on our strength, technologies, and resources.<sup>43)</sup>

In terms of self-reliance that North Korea emphasizes, there is no item better than cosmetics. Slogans such as "self-reliance," "localization," and "our own strength" arrive to the conclusion that "we must revive the economy with what we have." Patriotism may appeal to customers in the domestic market. In that way, a foundation can be laid, and products can be exported.

Based on the enthusiasm for revolution and struggle of all employees of this factory, who have engraved the Dear Supreme Leader's heavenly faith and expectations into their bones, the day is approaching for our people to burst

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43) "Modernization and industrialization," *Rodong Sinmun*, December 13, 2015.



into laughter of happiness as we can choose our cosmetics with the trademark of Eunhasu over products from other countries.<sup>44)</sup>

In line with Kim Jong-un's teachings of "localization of resources and raw materials" and "modernization and informatization," which are the economic strategies under Kim's regime, the North Korean cosmetics industry seeks to localize raw materials using stem cells and natural materials, while promoting modernization and the automated production process.

The Sinuiju Cosmetics Factory has localized whitening, moisturizing, and anti-aging agents using biotechnological methods and a natural substance extraction method using supercritical fluid extraction technology. ... Even now, fierce competition is taking place among countries that are said to take the lead in the cosmetic production field. It can also be regarded as a technological competition that essentially aims to maximize the effectiveness of different ingredients in cosmetic products by ideally combining them. In addition, the factory has not only set up the manufacturing testing laboratory with brilliant talents with expertise in different major fields of study, such as biology, organic and inorganic chemistry, botany, microbiology, and biochemistry, but also paid due attention to constantly replenishing and updating analysis facilities desperately required to raise the quality of Bomhyanggi cosmetics to a world-class level.<sup>45)</sup>



▣ Bomhyanggi Cosmetics brochure touting quality certification

Achievements in cosmetics development are also publicized on a large scale. A news report said, "According to a comparative analysis of the anti-aging function of Bomhyanggi products with those from a cosmetic brand from a country which is said to take the lead in the global cosmetics industry, domestic products are better in quality."<sup>46)</sup>

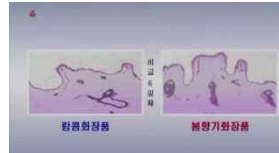
Is this true? The "cosmetic brand from a country, which is said to take the lead in the global cosmetics industry," reported by *Rodong Sinmun*, is France's Lancôme.

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44) "Fiery enthusiasm to drive the development of the cosmetics industry," *Rodong Sinmun*, March 15, 2017.

45) "Our capability appearing in Bomhyanggi," *Rodong Sinmun*, February 16, 2016.

46) Ibid.



- ▶ Video comparing the anti-aging function of Bomhyanggi and Lancôme products

## 2. Types of cosmetics

"Cosmetics" refers to products used for makeup, and is a collective term that includes creams, powders, and perfumes. Advertisements explain that cosmetics are used to “make skin smooth and keep it clean, look beautiful, or change its appearance.”



- ▶ Advertisement for 4<sup>th</sup>-generation functional cosmetics of the Geumgangsang brand; Advertisement for Bomhyanggi Cosmetics

How are cosmetics classified in North Korea? Introducing the Pyongyang Cosmetics Factory on March 17, 2016, *Rodong Sinmun* divides the products produced at the factory according to their efficacy and type. “The cosmetics classification system, which divides cosmetics into general cosmetics, functional cosmetics, and therapeutic cosmetics according to efficacy, is more specifically subdivided according to the parts the product is used for, purpose of use, degree of functionality, and therapeutic effect. In addition, products can also be classified into about ten type

categories including emulsion, liquid, gel, and oil.”

Based on this, North Korean cosmetics are classified as follows:

First, products are classified depending on method of application into creams (makeup cream, nourishing cream, shaving cream, etc.), perfumes (general perfume, hair perfume, sanitary perfume, spray perfume, etc.), toner and face lotion (general toner for makeup, shaving lotion), powder (makeup powder, hair powder, stage makeup powder, sweat absorbing powder, etc.), lipsticks, hair oil and other hair products, and makeup soaps.

Second, they are divided according to the composition and characteristics of the finished product into water- and alcohol-based cosmetics (perfumes, toner, face lotion, etc.), oil-based cosmetics (creams, hair oils, lipsticks, soaps, etc.), cosmetics using carbonate or starch (fragrance, dental products, lipsticks) , and special cosmetics (sanitary cosmetics, special makeup cosmetics, stage makeup cosmetics, medicinal cosmetics, etc.).

Third, there are special cosmetic products, such as cosmetics for stage makeup, medicine, and hygiene. They are not mass-produced in cosmetic factories, but in accordance with their purposes. Cosmetics for stage makeup are manufactured for actors on stage. Medicinal cosmetics are specially formulated to treat specific parts of the body according to a doctor's diagnosis. Sanitary cosmetics are made to protect skin, hair and teeth from the external environment, the atmosphere, and the action of microorganisms, and to keep them beautiful and healthy. Such cosmetics include toothpaste, skin protection cream, sun protection cream, and medicinal cream.



- ▶ Bomhyanggi Cosmetics instructions explaining the types and effects of cosmetics

### 3. Basic cosmetics

#### Toner and cream

A basic North Korean cosmetic item is toner. Toner types include astringent toner and moisturizing toner. Their main ingredients are hyaluronic acid and fragrance. Toner functions to provide sufficient moisture to the skin, while the active ingredients of traditional Goryeo medicinal herbs penetrate into the deep layers of the skin to make the skin soft and elastic, delay aging, and prevent wrinkles. It is recommended to apply an appropriate amount evenly on the face and neck area and lightly tap to absorb.



- ▶ Toner and lotion set of the Bomhyanggi brand and Bomhyanggi cream indicating the ingredients and efficacy of the product

Cream acts as the base of everyday makeup and forms a nutrient barrier that does not interfere with skin respiration to protect the skin from cold, heat, moisture, harmful gases, dust, and ultraviolet rays, thereby maintaining skin elasticity and preventing aging. It is recommended to apply an appropriate amount of cream evenly after using toner.

## Hair essence and whitening essence

Hair essence is used to protect the scalp and hair. In its product instructions, hair essence is introduced as follows:

Hair essence protects the scalp and hair, prevents dandruff and hair loss, and offers gloss to the hair. After washing your hair or on a daily basis, apply an appropriate amount to the scalp and hair evenly before combing your hair. Be careful not to get it into your eyes.



- ▶ Toner and hair essence included in a set of seven Bomhyanggi cosmetics

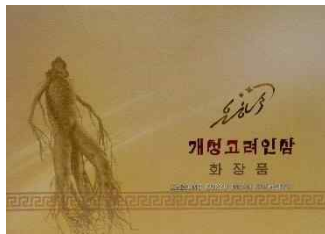
Whitening essence is a kind of toner that provides nutrients to the skin. “It promotes blood circulation in the skin and helps to improve metabolism. By replenishing moisture and nutrients to the skin and inhibiting the formation of melanin, whitening essence helps keep the skin clear and bright while preventing wrinkles.” After applying toner, gently massage your face with an appropriate

amount of essence for absorption.

#### 4. Raw materials of cosmetic products

##### Kaesong Goryo Ginseng

One of the most widely used raw materials in North Korean cosmetics is Kaesong Goryo ginseng. The ingredient is highlighted in the products of many brands, probably because a lot of cosmetics promote functionality. Products featuring Kaesong Goryo ginseng are available at major North Korean cosmetic companies such as Eunhasu, Geumgangsan (Geumgang Mountain), and Mirae, as well as Bomhyanggi from the Sinuiju Cosmetics Factory.



- ▶ Bomhyanggi toner made with Kaesong Goryo ginseng, Eunhasu Kaesong Goryo ginseng cosmetics, Geumgangsan Kaesong Goryo ginseng sheet mask pack

##### Apple

As cosmetics products diversify, products using apples have also been released. In Kim Il-wang's poem "The Story of a Rocky Village Flourishing with Apples," apple perfume, apple conditioner, and apple shampoo are mentioned.

Once upon a time, as three strange stones emerged,  
The area was named Samseok (three stones)  
In Dodeok, a village well-known for many rocks even in Samseok,  
Yet producing more apples than rocks  
A daughter-in-law lives.

...

Apple perfume, apple conditioner, and apple shampoo

Look as if they were on a cosmetics stand of a department store

Which department store did you buy them from?

I didn't, these nice products

Were manufactured by my daughter-in-law's fruit processing factory<sup>47)</sup>

The narrator boasts that apple perfume, apple conditioner, and apple shampoo were produced at the daughter-in-law's fruit processing plant. It sounds a bit awkward that cosmetics were made in a fruit processing plant. This shows that even a fruit factory makes efforts to diversify its products.

## Gelatin

Gelatin is widely used as a cosmetic ingredient as well. In an article titled "Gelatin and its usage" released on December 3, 2017, *Rodong Sinmun* introduced gelatin as follows:

Gelatin is a protein obtained by in various ways treating collagen, which is a major component of animal hides, bones, and tendons.

Gelatin is used as a carrier for functional foods and cosmetics in the food, cosmetics, and medical industries, and is also widely used as a pharmaceutical ingredient. Gelatin products are produced in the form of fine powders and thin films and contain amino acids and various types of trace elements essential for the human body. ... Gelatin is being actively applied in the cosmetics industry as an additive to high-end cosmetics including toner and lotion. In recent years, a research group at Han Deok Su Pyongyang Light Industry University has carried out scientific research projects and yielded results that can produce more gelatin products.<sup>48)</sup>

From an economic perspective, North Korea is concentrating its capabilities on modernizing cosmetic factories and localizing raw materials to produce and supply quality cosmetics both internally and externally.

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47) Kim Il-wang, "The story of a rocky village flourishing with apples," *Joseon Literature*, Issue No. 11, 2011, pp41-42.

48) "Gelatin and its usage," *Rodong Sinmun*, December 3, 2017.

## Rose, green tea, and aloe

One of Geumgangsans's cosmetic products is its rose cosmetics set. The products included are made with roses, a recently popular ingredient. In Ryugyeong Rose Garden located on the Mirae Scientist Street, customers can take a bath with rose water, have a sauna, and get their hair cut. As the name suggests, roses are used in everything. Customers can enjoy a rose-water bath as well as rose flower tea and rose ice cream at the soft drink shop. Roses are also used as a raw material for cosmetics. Cosmetics using green tea are produced by Mirae Cosmetics.



▣ Geumgangsans rose cosmetics set, Geumgangsans Joint Venture's aloe sheet mask pack, Mirae Cosmetics three green tea item set

## IV. Conclusion

The North Korean beauty industry demonstrates the changes of the Kim Jong-un era. North Korea is concentrating all of its efforts on creating a socialist civilized country and promoting the economy. It is developing products to revive the service industry and the domestic market, with the goal of achieving economic recovery.

The cosmetics sector is drawing the attention of the party since it can boost both the domestic and export markets. North Korea can sharpen its competitive edge by developing materials and improving product quality. In this situation, the North Korean beauty industry is developing in a different way from before.

It has become common for North Korean women to wear makeup, with makeup now being considered an undisputed right of a citizen of a civilized socialist country. New cosmetics are continuously launched for makeup users. Exports of cosmetics are also increasing due to quality improvements, development of new raw materials, international certification of quality control, and proprietary products. Policy support is also provided actively to ensure that cosmetics produced with North Korea's own technologies and raw materials can compete with those from other countries.

All of these are changes have been observed after the Kim Jong-un regime was launched with the aim of building a socialist civilized country. This goal will be continuously pursued under the Kim Jong-un regime. However, as of 2019, the

external environment has changed drastically. The country has slowed down in implementing the policy of internationalization and globalization since the Hanoi "no-deal" with the U.S. In 2020, when North Korea declared its intentions to squarely confront and overcome difficulties, the situation developed into the worst crisis in history.

Externally, international sanctions are still in place. The border closures caused by the pandemic completely blocked foreign trade channels. The food situation is also dire. In 2020, there were droughts in the spring, floods in the summer, and typhoons in the fall. The desperate slogan of "Protect our socialist front" was emphasized. Kim Jong-un even said that he was prepared for an "Arduous March." Internal controls are also being strengthened. *Rodong Sinmun* is filled with articles looking back on the times of the Cheonlima Movement. The aftermath of the economic crisis is slowly affecting the people's lives. Whether to give up the Manlima Movement and go back to the period of the Cheollima Movement will ultimately depend on the state of the economy.



## Discussion Paper Regarding Professor Jeon Young-sun's "North Korean Women's Culture Seen from *Lipstics of the Republic*"

Tomoomi Mori<sup>49)</sup>

Associate Professor at Setsunan University

The presentation paper is an analysis of North Korean society through the makeup culture and cosmetics of the country. Professor Jeon Young-sun, the presenter, empirically analyzes the status of makeup culture in North Korean society based on the development and manufacturing of cosmetics and efforts to export domestic cosmetics under the Kim Jong-un regime.

The presenter explains North Korea's social aesthetics as well as the makeup etiquette and methods with reference to *Makeup and Our Lives: Anyone Can Be Beautiful*, an important primary material on North Korea's makeup culture. In my experience of visiting North Korea several times, North Korean women actually formed a makeup culture which accords with these etiquette and methods.

The presenter also summarizes the North Korean authorities' attempts to promote cosmetic products through literary and artistic works. Although such form of promotion is often used by the North Korean regime, the presenter's summary is very useful in that I have not learned many detailed cases.

Specific comments and questions on the presentation paper are as follows.

### Comments:

1) According to the presentation paper, not many studies have been conducted on North Korea's makeup culture. Under this circumstance, it can be said that this paper is taking the lead in analyzing North Korea's makeup culture.

2) As mentioned in the presentation paper, North Korea exports cosmetics. According to some news reports, it exports cosmetics not only to Russia and China but also to Iran, Cyprus and Australia.<sup>50)</sup>

3) North Korean cosmetic factories are striving to improve product quality by

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49) Tomoomi Mori / Associate Professor, Setsunan University, Japan [tomoomi.mori@setsunan.ac.jp](mailto:tomoomi.mori@setsunan.ac.jp)

50) Minwoo Park, "Move over Chanel: North Korea's 'raccoon eye makers' get state push," August 8, 2019, *Reuters* <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-cosmetics-idUSKCN1UY01H>  
"Reasons why North Korean cosmetics draw attention," August 30, 2019, Nippon TV <https://www.news24.jp/articles/2019/08/30/10491064.html>

Fan Lingzhi, "North Korean factory aims to compete with Chanel and Shiseido on quality and safety," September 17, 2018, *Global Times* <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1119909.shtml>

conducting a comparative study of ingredients not only with Lancôme products mentioned in the presentation paper, but also with Chanel and Shiseido cosmetics.<sup>51)</sup>

### Questions:

1) A considerably large number of studies that analyze the social meaning of makeup, especially sociological studies, have already been carried out. Among them, I am deeply interested in the status of makeup culture in socialist countries. Can it be said that North Korea's makeup culture (or North Korea's socialist aesthetics) is unique and distinct from that of other socialist countries?

(I believe that the makeup culture of the former Soviet Union or pre-reform/opening China is suitable for the comparison with the current North Korean makeup culture .)<sup>52)</sup>

2) North Korea's formal makeup etiquette and methods seem to assume women put on a makeup, and there seem to be no cosmetic products for men. However, there are cosmetics for men in other countries, and men use basic cosmetics and take care of their skin. This is also regarded as a matter of course in social life to some extent.

Are there men's cosmetics in North Korea, and if there are not or there are very few, what socialist aesthetics is the phenomenon based on?

3) Cosmetics are largely divided into skin care products and color cosmetics. The presentation paper mostly examines basic cosmetics and rarely mentions color cosmetics. I want to know the reason.

4) This question is partially related to the question above. Basic cosmetics are aimed to care for the skin, while color cosmetics users seek to express themselves.<sup>53)</sup> Wearing a makeup using color cosmetics can also be seen as an act of “freedom of expression.” Manufacturing more color cosmetics and diversifying such products could stimulate the people's desire for “freedom of expression” This must be undesirable to the North Korean authorities under the current circumstances, and also contradicts the socialist aesthetics of the country. I analyze that this makes North Korea focus on manufacturing basic cosmetics rather than develop color cosmetics. I would like to know what the presenter thinks of this analysis.

5) I want to know the prices of North Korean cosmetics mentioned in the

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51) Fan Lingzhi, “North Korean factory aims to compete with Chanel and Shiseido on quality and safety,” September 17, 2018, *Global Times* <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1119909.shtml>

52) Yekaterina Sinelschikova, “Eight strange things in Moscow told by celebrities,” May 2, 2020, *Russia Beyond* <https://jp.rbth.com/arts/83646-y%C5%ABmeijin-ga-tsudzutta-mosukuwa-no-kimy%C5%8D-na-koto>

53) Stella Ko, “Beauty is freedom: The North Korean millennials wearing makeup to rebel against the state,” March 3, 2020, CNN <https://edition.cnn.com/style/article/north-korea-womens-beauty-freedom/index.html>

presentation paper (Bomhyanggi, Eunhasu, etc.). Some news articles indicate that there seem to be great price differences between brands.<sup>54)</sup> Also, are North Korean cosmetics for the domestic market priced differently from those for exports?

6) In order to develop basic cosmetics and improve product quality, it is important to link with medical personnel, especially dermatologists, and conduct clinical trials. How are cosmetics factories cooperated with the medical care industry in North Korea?

7) Although mentioned in the article of *Global Times*,<sup>55)</sup> it is uncertain whether the improvement in the quality of North Korean cosmetics will directly lead to an increase in their exports to foreign countries. I agree with this opinion in that the competitiveness of North Korean products is related to the country's internationally unfavorable national image. I think that North Korea's exports of cosmetics will be able to grow only when the national image is upgraded along with the quality of cosmetics. This is partly a matter of public diplomacy. A good example is the synergy created by Korean cosmetics and Korean cultural content (K-pop or drama). I'd like to know the presenter's opinion on this.

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54) Fan Lingzhi, "North Korean factory aims to compete with Chanel and Shiseido on quality and safety," September 17, 2018, *Global Times* <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1119909.shtml>  
Cao Siqu, "North Korean cosmetics firm gains attention from Kim's factory visit," July 3, 2018 (last update), *Global Times* <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1109205.shtml>  
Jung Da-min, "North Korean cosmetics popular in China: report," August 9, 2018 (last update), *The Korea Times* [https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2018/08/103\\_253552.html](https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2018/08/103_253552.html)

55) Cao Siqu, "North Korean cosmetics firm gains attention from Kim's factory visit," July 3, 2018 (last update), *Global Times* <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1109205.shtml>

**Discussion Paper**  
**on “North Korean Women’s Culture Seen from *Lipsticks of the Republic*”**

Yee Jisun

How is North Korea changing? Which sectors are changing? What is the driving force for the changes? Scholars who study North Korea must be interested in the changes in North Korea. I believe that this study was conducted in a novel way in that it examines the direction of North Korea through beauty and cosmetics in a situation where sanctions against North Korea have not been lifted. It has provided an opportunity to explore changes in the North Korean industry and economy, factors of cultural and social changes, and the possibility of changes in external relations through beauty and cosmetics as part of women's culture.

As mentioned by the presenter, cosmetics, or the beauty industry, reflects the people's desire for beauty that cannot be controlled by the Kim Jong-un regime's national building goal of establishing a socialist civilized country, self-reliance-first principle based on localization, the production and competition of a variety of products, and socialist aesthetics. I also read the paper while attempting to find answers to “Why have beauty and cosmetics become Kim Jong-un’s main interests?” as if solving a puzzle. I would like to enumerate the thoughts I had while reading the paper rather than raise issues for the discussion.

North Korea's view of makeup as etiquette and morality and the standard of makeup as a socialist aesthetics focuses on “makeup” and “makeup techniques.” Etiquette and morality can be regarded as a universal value system for behavior and attitude. In other words, women's makeup, categorized as “etiquette and morality,” is related to the capitalist idea of emphasizing the “face” and at the same time aesthetically displaying the female body and replacing body care with a value-added industry.

To begin with, I would like to ask three questions regarding etiquette.

The first is about makeup considered etiquette. Seeing makeup as etiquette seems to be the viewpoint commonly shared around the world. Recently, some view this as gender discrimination. They believe that makeup is a matter of personal preference and choice, and that makeup worn under social pressure is itself oppression and control. In the case of North Korea, however, the state and society are encouraging women to put on a makeup as etiquette. This seems to be related to the situation in which more women have relatively high economic power compared to men as they have become engaged more in the economy through marketization. State and society’s encouragement for makeup may be interpreted that the state acknowledges the desire for expression of women, who have rapidly emerged as consuming subjects, and responds to such desire by promoting the cosmetic industry. However, recent situations that femininity through “etiquette” is emphasized could be a plan by the North Korean authorities to maintain the country’s patriarchal society. I'd like to know the opinions of the presenter on this.

Second, makeup is in general a way for women to express their beauty. Aren't the makeup techniques controlled by socialist aesthetics aimed to create a standardized beauty? In addition to this, who is the best model for makeup that fits the “ethnic characteristics” of North Koreans? Artists appearing in North Korea's television shows are wearing a special stage makeup. Who would be the best model applying a makeup that matches their ethnic characteristics?

Third, the tendency to control makeup with socialist aesthetics may be a precaution against the influx of external culture. In particular, the younger generation seem to be greatly influenced by video content such as Korean dramas. If it is not possible to completely prevent the influx of fresh and novel external culture, the North Korean authorities may have determined to control cosmetics based on a socialist aesthetics to allow the youth to satisfy their demand for external culture to some degree while leading the demand for self-expression to drive the cosmetics industry. I would like to hear from the presenter about it.

Next, I would like to ask two questions about how to interpret makeup from the perspective of morality.

First, women's makeup is defined as etiquette, but in some cases, wearing a makeup itself becomes a problem. This is a taboo for "abnormal makeup" or "extraordinary" makeup. I wonder what kind of makeup is "abnormal makeup" that ruins the healthy atmosphere of society. If North Koreans believe that "heavy makeup has been connected with capitalist extravagance," how heavy will it be like?

Second, why do women put an abnormal and extraordinary makeup that is perceived as morally corrupted? The abnormal and extraordinary makeup must be a capitalist makeup imported from outside. But there may be another reason. I would like to hear more detailed reasons why women's heavy makeup is judged and regulated as "rebellious."

Lastly, this may conflict with the previous question. Whereas socialist aesthetics is sought to create standard beauty, the production of diverse cosmetics can be related to the fulfillment of the desire to express one's identity through differentiated consumption. This can be identified in makeup techniques of the millennials and Generation Z in North Korea and the cosmetics consumption by the older generations with economic power. I would like to learn which ones among such diverse cosmetic brands are preferred by generation and which brand reveals differences in purchasing power by class.

Speaking of North Korea's millennials and Generation Z, I think the core of the new generation's culture is the pursuit of a new style. North Korean women in their teens and twenties tend to find their own fashion and style despite the crackdown and control by inspectors and People's Units. In a way, this aspect seems to indicate that the culture of a new generation conflicts with and reacts to the state-centered, controlling and dominant culture. In this sense, I would like to hear more about makeup and cosmetics consumption of new-generation women of North Korea, especially teenage girls.

Many industries are being derived from cosmetics and cosmetics in North Korea. I know that North Korean women get their bridal makeup done by professionals, and that there are skin care salons and makeup shops in Pyongyang. The most well-known North Korean brands in China are cosmetics and Taedonggang Beer, which North Korea are promoting as major export items. North Korea's beauty industry definitely has competitiveness, and it will be a new sensation in a new era that the people enjoy in their daily lives, differently from the past.

Literary works and video content, media articles, and Kim Jong-un's discourses on makeup and cosmetics signify that the desire for beauty had been already spread widely even before the national discourse was made. Globalization and modernization conveyed by makeup and cosmetics imply contemporary sensibility. In the current situation, North Korea is striving to control the gushing desires with socialist aesthetics since no one knows where the desires arrive. At the same time, the creative individuality and the desire for self-expression are also emerging in North Korea's new generation.

I end this discussion paper with the thought of which lipstick color is sold and preferred most in the republic.

Thank you.

## **The Future of North Korean Women in the Pandemic Era: Risks or Opportunities**

In-Ae Hyun (Ewha Womans University)

Gender equality in North Korea inevitably had limitations under the patriarchal state structure. North Korean women were given gender equality not by themselves, but by the party and the Supreme Leader. As a result, they were not able to realize actual gender equality.

Since 1990, North Korean women have faced difficulties supporting for their family due to the patriarchal structure of the state, and have been engaged in activities in markets. As the patriarchal structure has continued for over 30 years, the dual gender-based economic structure has been deeply rooted as divided into the economy into the national economy for men and the market economy for women.

North Korean women began engaging in market activities after a very difficult and painful process, but this served as an opportunity for women. As women have taken responsibility for the family's livelihood, their status in the family has risen, and as money is concentrated in the hands of women, their social status is also enhancing. As women have economic power, they have begun feeling personal desires and paying for them, and their private desires are gradually growing. Therefore, the future of North Korean women is closely related to the existence and development of markets.

However, in North Korea, the authority to decide the fate of markets rests with the authorities. Recently, the North Korean authorities seem to be using the pandemic as an opportunity to revive the socialist economy. North Korea has defined 2021 as the first year for its five-year socialist economic development plan and is accelerating the restoration of the socialist economic system based on self-reliance. They are trying to turn the difficult situation, in which raw materials cannot be imported from abroad due to border closures, into opportunities for an internal economic recovery. Currently, markets in North Korea are expected to have suffered a significant blow. In a situation where 70 to 80 percent of the products sold in North Korean markets are imported from abroad, and domestic products produced in the country were entirely dependent on China for raw materials, border closures that have lasted for a year and a half would have led products to run out in markets. Merchants in markets would have almost closed down their business. And those who had produced products domestically would have been unable to do so due to the lack of raw materials.

Women must have been more frequently mobilized by the North Korean authorities for the restoration of the socialist state economy and various construction works. If they cannot earn money in markets, they have no choice but to participate themselves in the mobilization of labor. This situation will place women

in a more difficult situation and put pressure on North Koreans' livelihoods. The restoration of the socialist state economy will at last result in weakening women's status.

However, it is unlikely that the intentions of the North Korean authorities will be realized. The policy to return to the socialist economy is likely to end in failure as its monetary reform did. Then, the North Korean leadership will return to the policy of allowing the market in its entirety, and women will be engaged in market activities more actively.

If the North Korean leadership continues to maintain the dual economic structure based on gender division of labor, this will lead women to enjoy more economic independence and higher self-reliance by making them confident in their own power, thereby helping them to raise their female consciousness and develop their capability. In the process, women will at last achieve their own liberation.

After the Kim Jong-un regime was inaugurated, the emergence of Kim Yo-jong and Hyon Song-wol has a symbolic meaning, but has little to do with the practical liberation of women. As the history period shows, the Supreme Leader, the representative of men and the patriarchal state structure, cannot liberate women.

## North Korean Women's Lives in the Pandemic Era

Cho Jeong-ah, Korea Institute for National Unification

- Life and gender politics of North Korean women
- Women have been at the center of economic and social changes in North Korea since the mid-1990s.
  - During the Arduous March, factories closed and distribution was stopped, women began to be engaged in activities for survival, going beyond the boundaries of their homes and workplaces to get around the country, and sometimes even crossing national borders, and by doing so, assumed the responsibility of providing for their family instead of the state and the patriarchs.
  - In the process of marketization since the 2000s, women who have learned how the market economy operates have obtained economic power abilities learned while acting as key players in the market economy outside the male-dominated formal economic structure.
- Changes in women's economic and social roles, as well as the material foundation of family life, are resulting in changes in social relationships and perceptions.
  - In a situation where it is difficult to cover the cost of living of a family with rations or wages from men as householders, women have been engaged in market activities and taken on the actual role of breadwinners in charge of the family's livelihood. Accordingly, the voices of women have been strengthened at home and the perception of marital and family relationships has changed.
  - Although no fundamental changes in male-dominated patriarchal family relationships are witnessed across society, the norm of a wife's "absolute obedience" to her husband is weakening.
  - Some families implicitly acknowledge women's economic role and male family members accept changed gender roles by sharing housework to sustain the livelihood of the family that shares a common destiny (a situation where "women have the final say").
- On the other hand, social recognition of labor is given to the realm of formal labor in which men are in charge, regardless of who generate economic profits, and therefore, this hierarchical gender division of labor, represented by the phrases, "men equal formal labor, women equal informal labor," acts as the structural basis of the gender politics under the Kim Jong-un regime.
  - Women's labor in the informal sector (market economy) is not socially recognized despite its economic significance, and women engaged in such



- labor are still mobilized for “support.”
- Even in the social labor field, unequal gender division of labor still exists, which is a factor that drives North Korean women to choose economic success through market economic activities over professional life and social success in the formal labor sector.
  - Although women's social labor is encouraged at the policy level and women's professional occupations are emphasized, North Korean women perceive that the activities of professional women or female senior officials do not go far beyond a mere “decorative screen.”
  - Married women often choose a strategy to create a “backing” by helping the promotion of their husband to protect their market economic activities rather than achieving their own success in the formal labor field.
- o For North Korean women, marriage is accompanied by triple difficulties of being engaged in both housework and market economic activities, various crackdowns on and controls of market economic activities, and activities in women’s and people’s unions, so many are reluctant to get married or postpone marriage.
- In particular, younger women seek new family relationships, escaping from the subordination of male patriarchs based on their economic power, and at the same time pursuing strategies to circumvent the institutional control of North Korean society by avoiding marriage, delaying registration of a marriage and getting divorced.
  - The women of the new generation in North Korea are developing their self-consciousness as “individuals” with material desires and happiness, expectations of the future, and their own individuality rather than remaining as members of large socialist families.
  - Video clips imported from the outside society also affect the thinking and practice of women related to marriage and family relationships.
- o The North Korean authorities are enacting and enforcing legislation on women's rights and emphasizing women’s role and social activities as a professional workforce while striving to incorporate women into the patriarchal family structure by stressing both the existing ideology of the socialist family and women's motherhood.
- Changes in women's views on marriage are being reflected in the recent North Korean government's policies on women. In his letter released at the 7<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Socialist Women's Union in June 2021, Kim Jong-un mentioned childbirth and the social work of married women and stressed “national welfare by establishing an atmosphere of actively helping women who have many children and treat them favorably.
  - In North Korea, top-down gender politics, gender discourse, and policies are not implemented through coercion by the state but by women who discipline themselves, strike a balance between reality and desires, and through their strategies of securing the survival of themselves and their families and realizing their desires.
- o The driving force that has brought change to the landscape of gender politics after the economic hardship was women who stepped up to the plate for their

families and their livelihoods. Women's acts have the double-side character that such acts are conducted in the top-down gender politics and gender system, and at the same time, performed in a way that challenges or circumvents them.

- In particular, it is worth noting that the gender performance of the new generation of women is acting as a trigger of resistance that causes cracks in the existing gender politics.

□ The COVID-19 pandemic and the life of North Korean women

- o The North Korean authorities have officially announced that there are no confirmed cases of COVID-19 in North Korea, but private organizations are reporting that according to sources inside North Korean society, the country does have confirmed cases.
  - The *Rodong Sinmun* has continued publishing quarantine-related articles from February 2020, and such articles are increasing in 2021.
- o Amidst the pandemic, problems are commonly emerging, such as job insecurity for women, vulnerable women's jobs and income put at risk, domestic violence, and care crisis.
  - The specific aspects may differ, but the gendered effect of the pandemic such as those mentioned above will appear in North Korea regardless of whether or not there are confirmed cases.
- o The border closures and strengthened social control due to the pandemic are expected to have a greater negative effect on the market economic activities, mainly performed by women, than the official economic field.
  - The suspension of smuggling between North Korea and China due to border closures, reduction of domestic market activities, and more unstable inflation are anticipated to undermine women's market economic activities and aggravate economic difficulties.
  - In addition, strengthened social control, such as restrictions on movement and increased organizational activities due to concerns about the spread of the pandemic are predicted to act as factors to reduce women's market economic activities.
- o Schools have been in relatively normal operation so far, although changes have been made at schools, such as extended vacations and partial introduction of remote education. The most important challenge for women will be the decreased household income due to reduced activities in the market economy, rather than the care crisis caused by paralyzed care services such as childcare and public education.
- o A decrease in women's market economic activities will result in their reduced contribution to the household economy, which may also affect women's status in the family.
  - In the case of poor families, in particular, the reduction in women's market economic activities is highly likely to worsen their family's financial difficulties and aggravate domestic violence.

## **North Korean Women at a Crossroads in the Pandemic**

Kim Il-gi, Institute for National Security Strategy

### **1. Current Status of North Korea's COVID-19**

- o Current COVID-19 situation: North Korea, a virus-free country with “zero confirmed case”?
  - The North Korean authorities say there are no COVID-19 confirmed cases; no one wearing masks at the Workers’ Party state agencies meeting.
  - As shown in the presentation paper of UMG/DailyNK CEO Lee Kwang-baek, North Koreans were infected with and died from COVID-19.
- o Pandemic prevention: Full-fledged measures taken to prevent the spread of the virus from the level of national security
  - In December 2019, the virus broke out in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China, and on January 25, 2020, borders were closed very quickly, compared to other countries.
  - In 2020, foreign tourists were banned from entering the country on January 22, borders were closed on January 25, staff at the Kaesong inter-Korean liaison office were withdrawn on January 30, and the quarantine period was extended from 14 days to 30 days on February 23, etc.
  - WHO declared the “Public Health Emergency of International Concern” on January 30, and North Korea swiftly responded by upgrading its alert level from the “hygiene and quarantine” to the “national emergency quarantine.”
- o Introduction of COVID-19 vaccines
  - North Korea plans to provide COVAX to 852,000 people (1,704,000 doses) by May 2021, but the plan has not been implemented.
  - Due to distrust of vaccines made in China, North Korea seeks to introduce Russian vaccines, but no progress has been made.

### **2. The Political and Economic Situation of North Korea in the Pandemic Era**

- o With the prolonged pandemic, North Korea implements a policy of “addressing internal affairs first before external affairs”
  - Turning its strategy to withstanding by ensuring the safety in residents' daily lives instead of properly handling the situation
  - It may have originated from the disappointment about the U.S. Biden

administration's policy toward North Korea, but the problems in the country are so serious that the North Korean authorities cannot turn their attention to external issues.

- o Focusing on stabilization of the system in a crisis due to the pandemic and sanctions against North Korea
- The two axes for stabilization of the system are economic growth and regime stabilization, which is a “strategy to withstand” the sanctions and a “forced choice” after the North Korea-U.S Hanoi Summit.
- o Worsened economic hardship due to sanctions against North Korea and border closures caused by COVID-19 preventive measures
- In 2020, the trade volume between North Korea and China decreased 80.7 percent from 2019 to mere 540 million dollars, and the trade volume between January and April this year plunged as much as 81 percent to 48.15 million dollars from 250 million dollars a year earlier.
- About one million tons of crops are needed due to last year's flood damage, and the situation is severe to the extent that a “generation with food shortage” has emerged from the end of January this year.
- At the 3<sup>rd</sup> plenary meeting of the 8<sup>th</sup> Workers' Party Central Committee held on June 15 to 18, Kim Jong-un signed a “special order” stating support for the stability of the people's livelihood while mentioning the seriousness of the economic hardships and food shortage.
- An expanded meeting of the Political Bureau was held on June 29, and major party officials including the Standing Committee members of the bureau were replaced on the grounds of their “neglect of duty” and “important scandals” (related to the Uiju airfield warehouse for quarantine, war reserve stocks, and military rice)

### **3. North Korean Women's Lives in the Pandemic**

- o Roles of North Korean women: producers, reproducers, and caretakers
- Claiming that according to the Equal Rights Act proclaimed on July 30, 1946, women enjoy the same freedom and rights as men and participate in national activities and social life.
- Insisting on “equal social status and rights” under Article 77 of the Socialist Constitution, and gender equality by laws, including the “Act for Assurance on Women's Rights” and the “Labor Protection Act”
- In 2015, women accounted for 20.2 percent of all members of the 13<sup>th</sup> Supreme People's Assembly, 17.6 percent of the 14<sup>th</sup> members in 2019, and more than 25% of all members of each local People's Assembly.
- However, Park Myong-sun (Director of Light Industry) is the only female member among 19 members and 11 candidates of the Political Bureau.
- As Dr. Dalton mentioned, there is the category of “mother” in North Korea, but the category of “woman” is almost unrecognized, and the concept of

gender is eliminated from the surface of national politics.

- o Expanded role in markets: Breadwinners responsible for the livelihood of the family
  - According to data from the Korea Institute for National Unification, the role of women in markets has expanded, with their income accounting for more than 70 percent of household income
  - Out of 33,572 North Korean defectors arriving in South Korea by 2020, 24,317 are women (72 percent)
  - Influence of patriarchal society: Men work in the formal workplace, while women in the informal workplace
- o In the pandemic era, the vulnerable, especially women, are affected hard
  - As men are mobilized at all times to the large-scale construction for the implementation of the five-year economic development plan, as well as further food production, an increased burden of supporting for the family has been imposed on women.
  - Kim Jong-un's recent emphasis on childcare, orders to prohibit “personal nannies,” and essential measures to mobilize the female labor force
  - Most of those engaged in border trade are women and they have been severely hit by border closures due to the pandemic
  - Markets have also contracted because of difficulties in procurement of supplies, affecting women’s economic activities.
  - Considering that the vulnerable groups in North Korea are usually the elderly, infants, and women, the pandemic shifts the burden of the elderly and infants onto women.

## Discussion Paper

Justin V. Hastings (University of Sydney)

The papers in the conference bring together a variety of viewpoints, and different kinds of evidence, for looking at trends in the status of women in North Korea, both as political actors, and as economic actors, during the Kim Jong-un period, including since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. The papers are too rich for me to do them justice in discussing them, so in this discussion paper I will just use the fascinating findings from the papers as a launching point for discussing the implications of the papers for women, North Korea's economy, and North Korean society.

### *Women in the economy*

The rise of women in the North Korean economy, at least in the informal part of it, is fascinating, inasmuch as it suggests that North Korean society is shifting underneath the feet of the North Korean state, regardless of whether that is official policy or not. Even the term *Jangmadang Generation* to characterize people who have grown up with markets in their lives in North Korea suggests a generation that is shaped by activities that are not only not ordained by the North Korean state, they are only ambiguously legal.

In terms of women's role as buyers in the North Korean economy, their increased buying power may be recognized even by the state. The cosmetics industry would appear to be a good example of how North Korea's economy – and the approach to North Korea's economy -- has changed under Kim Jong-un. The state has deliberately introduced competition in a consumer market (although no doubt the companies in both Sinuiju and Pyongyang are state-owned), and encouraged uptake of what could be described as a non-essential consumer good. That women are the targeted demographic for this consumerism suggests that

North Korea has encouraged what is essentially an import substitution policy in response to international sanctions and, more generally, a lack of foreign currency to buy foreign-made inputs for manufactured goods. The irony of this is that, in some sense, for the locally made consumer goods to get uptake, North Korea has to encourage consumption, and market the goods as somehow being at least equal to, or even better, than foreign consumer goods. The marketing of local cosmetics, with the emphasis on their purity and scientific basis, is a good example of this.

In terms of women's role as *sellers* in the North Korean economy, we have to ask: which economy? In some sense, we can think of men and women operating in two parallel economies, even in the same households – men in the decayed, essentially non-functional command economy, and women in the burgeoning market economy. It is not surprising that men might be viewed as less valuable as a result, since their labor and production are almost worthless to both the state and the family. The stereotypes of the behaviors of men and women in these economies – men as lazy, women as industrious -- mirror the behaviors of participants in the parallel economies. In broad brush strokes, command

economies tend to (without significant coercion) produce socialist work ethics, and market economies tend to (with the relevant incentives) produce more productive work ethics. Women's rise in stature as a result of their breadwinner status within the household mirrors the rise in the relative contribution of the market economy to North Korea's economic survival as a whole.

So women's participation in markets is changing the status of women, but also changing North Korean society as a whole. What does this mean for women's participation in the development of a public sphere that is separate from, or at least has an existence that is not wholly constrained and defined by state? Given the informality of North Korean markets – the lack of state enforcement of contracts and resolution of disputes, their ambiguous legality, their susceptibility to purges and sudden changes in policy – and the lack of information and low levels of trust that characterize many interactions in North Korea, women in markets have to engage in a variety of strategies to survive. They have to build social networks, both with people they trust, and people who, through multiple interactions, they can come to trust: these social networks can provide information and reduce uncertainty on the markets and business opportunities (or other things, as we see below), provide political cover, particularly if they include state officials, and help to resolve disputes, as well as prevent disputes from arising in the first place. These social networks, and the behaviors, can form the building blocks of a nascent public sphere (which is not to say that they actually form a full fledged civil society), and perhaps most interestingly, it is women who are the center of these networks.

Indeed, the media provided by outside groups, in terms of songs, TV shows, movies, and news about both North Korea and the outside world has a function beyond the simple information they impact. North Korean women's participation in markets leads them to create (perhaps inadvertently) a public sphere that is at least somewhat separate from the state-controlled public sphere of discourse. In order to survive in the markets, women need to share information and build trust. In the course of sharing information and building trust, they may pass on information that goes beyond, for example, the price, availability, and quality of the goods being traded. The information provided through media from the outside gives market participants something to talk about – the mundane items may be even more useful for building a public sphere, in fact, inasmuch as they are not overtly political, and so do not run the same risk of a backlash from the state.

Setting an outright revolt against Kim Jong-un's rule, or (voluntary) fundamental reform of the North Korean system is probably setting too high a bar for how women's participation in markets might lead to change. Perhaps more realistically, women's participation in markets is likely to lead to changes not only in the status of women as economic participants, but also in terms of expectations of the North Korean state by the population. Even if Kim Jong-un does not want to engage in fundamental reform (and all signs point to him at least attempting to tighten state control over the North Korean economy, and North Korean society in general), he must respond to the population's desire for economic (and therefore material) survival. North Korea can talk about a new Arduous March, but conditions are not the same as in the 1990s: there is now a fairly institutionalized and relatively efficient market system that, combined with relatively open cross-border trade, can provide a way to ameliorate the pain, and in the long term, Kim Jong-un needs this system to work properly.

### *The pandemic, the economy, and women's rights*

However, there is likely to be a significant amount of pain for women and men in the short term. The perhaps unsurprising news that North Korea not only has many cases of Covid-19, but that the government is essentially dealing with it by locking away anyone with symptoms, sealing the border, and tightening control of information has implications for how we think about the future of markets and women's rights.

The North Korean state's crackdown on border crossing (including smugglers) is no doubt to keep out the virus, but obviously it has a hugely negative effect on cross-border trade, and the availability of goods in both formal and informal markets. If women's improving status is in part dependent on their role as breadwinners in informal markets and business ventures, then a crushing of the markets, whether directly, or indirectly through pandemic-related controls, could endanger the social gains that women have made, in addition to the direct effects of a loss of income and food supply.

This has two ramifications, neither of them beneficial for North Korea's future. First, North Korea's formal economy continues to suffer from both the dysfunction typical of command economies, and from sanctions (which almost by definition are more likely to hit trade sectors that are dominated by state companies or state officials), meaning that men in households continue to be unable to be breadwinners even in the absence of women's loss of income.

Second, the pandemic is likely to entrench more politically connected elites in positions of market influence, inasmuch as they are the ones who are able to get trade permits even as the crackdown on smuggling continues. An unusual feature of North Korea's marketization is not only the rise of the informal markets (*jangmadang*), but the pervasive entrepreneurialism of essentially all real economic activity in North Korea, and between North Korea and the rest of the world. While politically connected elites are parasitic, inasmuch as they use their official positions to collect rents and muscle out competition, they are also entrepreneurial. Given that many of these state-connected enterprises are likely to run by men, one can imagine a future North Korea, post-pandemic, where marketization is further institutionalized, but many aspects of cross-border trade come to be dominated by state companies, thus edging out the informal markets and the women who participate in them.