



**Crisis of Succession:  
Mapping the Paths Into and  
Out of the Personalist Dictatorship in North Korea**

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**November 2011**



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### I. Introduction

At the third Delegates' Conference of the North Korean Workers' Party (KWP), held on September 28, 2010, the third-generation hereditary succession of Kim Jong-Un,<sup>1</sup> Kim Jong-Il's third son, was officially declared. This news reignited the perennial debate between the collapsists (Noland 2004, 12-19; Litwak 2007) and the resilientists regarding whether the Kimist (Buzo 1999) autocracy will survive the presumably conflict-ridden process of leadership transition. Collapsists call attention to the structural vulnerabilities of the personalist regime.<sup>2</sup> One scholar argues that as power succession struggles intensify, the "regime tends to crack along the lines of personal loyalties and 'estate inheritance'" (Mansourov 2007, 51). On the other hand, refuting the predictions of serious disruption, resilientists emphasize the regime's durability, buttressed by persistent ruling and coercive institutions (Kihl 2007, 3-33). As Daniel Byman and Jennifer Lind (2010) note, the autocratic iron cage has been vigilantly guarded, with many effective "tools of authoritarian control." It is thus expected that "despite all of the obstacles Kim Jong-Un must overcome as he ascends the throne," the regime will nevertheless manage to maintain stability (Lind 2010). Another resilientist even believes that "the succession seems to be going smoothly" (Chinoy 2011).

The resilientists' arguments are apparently supported by the earlier experience of the Kimist regime's survival in the initial hereditary succession process after Kim Il-Sung's death in 1994. However, before assessing the potential effects of the impending third-generation succession on North Korea, we first need to solve the puzzle of why no modern republic-style autocracy has ever completed a leadership transfer to a third-generation



hereditary autocrat (Brownlee 2007b). As Jason Brownlee shows, of the hundreds of potential candidates, only a few autocracies have cleared the thorny hurdle of the first succession to second-generation offspring. Even those few that have proved their persistence by passing the initial test failed to survive long enough to complete the next succession to a third-generation dictatorship.

What makes hereditary succession so rare? What prevents second-generation autocrats from handing down their thrones to their offspring as their fathers did? The first suffocates the next. The succession from father to son makes infeasible the next hereditary succession of the grandson. The reason seems to be that the initial succession over-consolidates personalist regimes to such an extent that the continuation of hereditary succession is no longer feasible.

Hereditary succession is a counterstrategy employed preemptively to cope with a fatal crisis of leadership transition in newly founded autocracies. This succession is feasible only when two conditions are met concurrently. The first condition is that coherently organized ruling institutions should be present. Effective institutions enforce hereditary succession. Mobilizing mass support, a competent ruling party consolidates the elites and constituencies to promote the attainment of the collective action needed for the smooth transfer of power. This process also organizationally produces reassuring effects for the security of elites after the succession.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, cohesive military and state coercive agencies repress the opposition within and without (Foran 1993, 3-27; Slater 2003, 81-101; Bellin 2005, 21-41). The second condition is that power must be concentrated in the predecessor to such a degree that he monopolizes decision-making authority and mobilizes ruling organizations. Only a few extraordinarily powerful autocrats have been able to satisfy both conditions at the same time, wielding “the power to make decisions” and “to enforce” them simultaneously (Slater 2010, 138). Therefore hereditary autocracy is rare.

In implementing hereditary succession, a regime’s tendency toward personalization is exacerbated. The successor’s survival strategy accelerates the predecessor’s patrimonial drive to minimize institutional autonomy so that, while the retinues’ vulnerability to his discretion is maximized, the rise of rivals entrenched in ruling institutions is prevented. This process inevitably deinstitutionalizes the regime to such an extent that the latter can survive only with the presence of a dictator who personally acts out the functions of institutions. Absentee dictatorship becomes impossible. When a personalist program succeeds, institutions decay. When it fails, rivals prevail. Whether it succeeds or not, it is thus least likely that the given autocracy concurrently meets the aforementioned two feasibility conditions of hereditary succession, especially when the incumbent dictator is debilitated. In that case, no hereditary succession is feasible.



In order to test the explaining power of the proposed “Second-Time-Unlucky” hypothesis based upon an auto-destructive logic of autocratic hereditary succession, this paper mainly surveys nine cross-national cases of hereditary autocracies: the Trujillos of the Dominican Republic (r. 1930-61), the Duvaliers of Haiti (r. 1957-86), the Somozas of Nicaragua (r. 1936-79), the Chiangs of Taiwan (r. 1949-88, the Kims of North Korea (r. 1948-present), the Assads of Syria (r. 1971- ), the Lees of Singapore (r. 1965- ), the Aliyevs of Azerbaijan (r. 1993- ), and the Gnassingbés of Togo (r. 1967- ). In the last four cases, the incumbent second-generation hereditary rulers are currently in power. Of them, Kim Jong-Il alone has formally set in motion a third-generation succession plan. A review of the past trajectories of these regimes can also explore the explanatory validity of the hypothesis.

The cross-national selection and examination of the cases allow us to examine potential alternative explanations for the rise and demise of hereditary succession. The cases are selected naturally. Of “258 post-World War II autocrats who ruled for at least three years” (Brownlee 2007b, 597), only nine of them managed to hand down the throne to a hereditary successor. The selected nine hereditary autocracies had diverse cultural, religious, and historical (and colonial) legacies. They can be conspicuously differentiated by economic fragility, ideological orientation, and human development. Even if the lack of a strong civil society characterizes the nine cases, most nonhereditary postwar autocracies have weak civil societies, signifying that all the enumerated factors are not decisive in explaining the rise and fall of hereditary autocracies. Contrastingly, as proposed in the second-time-unlucky hypothesis, the nine hereditary autocracies started with a powerful dictator and an effective party with robust coercive institutions, concurrently meeting the aforementioned two feasible conditions of hereditary succession. Before their final dissolution, four of them had degenerated into “sultanistic regimes” (Chehabi and Linz 1998a, 3-25), with decayed institutions. The remnant five regimes currently ruled by the founders’ sons also display identifiable tendencies of institutional de-routinization or debilitated dictatorship, providing grounds for future testing. All suggest the relatively stronger explanatory, predictive, and falsifiable potentialities of the second-time-unlucky hypothesis.

The synoptic survey of the cases is then supported by a focused investigation of the case of the North Korean regime. Reinforced by an application of a structured contingency approach, which highlights reciprocal interactions between the institutional precedents and agential actors, we can map North Korea’s trajectories into and out of personal dictatorship, tracking the past transition from a Stalinist single-party system to “sultanistic dictatorship” (Huntington 1991, 112), which was triggered by the hereditary succession to Kim Jong-Il. Beyond the debate about regime collapse, it allows us to anticipate that, in the current context of “post-totalitarian” (McEachern 2010) decay, the impending third-generation succes-

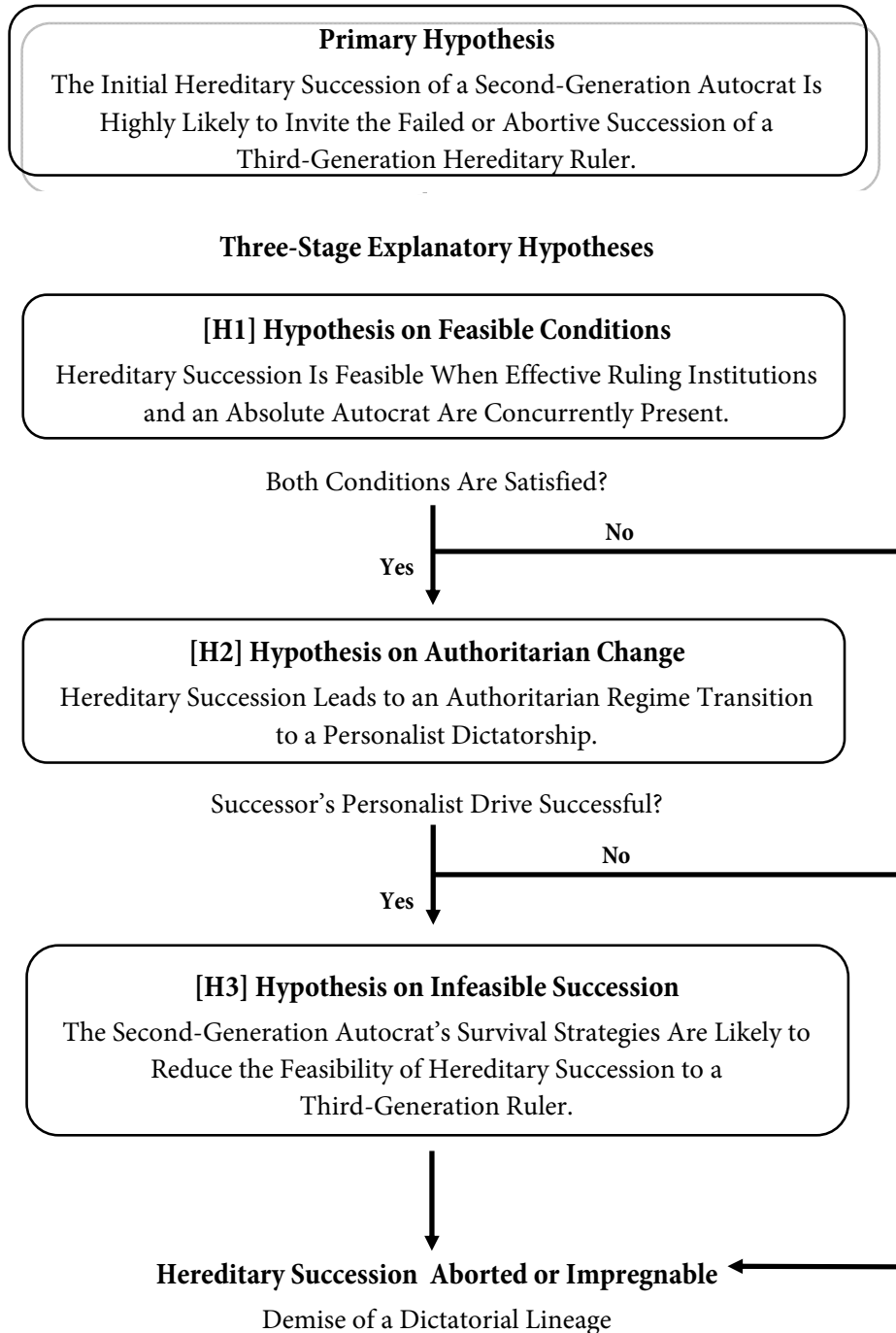


sion could precipitate another transition. Analyzing the Kim Jong-Un ascension plan with balanced titrations of such factors as the patrimonial legacies and the distribution of power among major actors and agencies, more plausible transition routes can be discerned. Whether by negotiation or by violence, the next transition is likely to invite either a single-party-based oligarchy or a military regime, neither of which is likely to produce stability due to the country's institutional lack of binding precedents and commitments.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows. First, based upon the existing theories of authoritarian regimes, the “second-time-unlucky” hypothesis on hereditary succession is advanced. Second, the hypothesis is applied to cross-national cases. It is then employed to explain the North Korean transition to the current personalist regime. Third, analyzing the Pyongyang's guardianship government and politics of succession, I illustrate potential transition paths. In the conclusion, policy implications are discussed.



**Figure 1. Second-Time-Unlucky Hypothesis on Hereditary Succession**





## II. “Second-Time-Unlucky” Hypothesis on Hereditary Succession

The second-time-unlucky hypothesis posits that a hereditary succession to a second-generation autocrat is highly likely to invite a failed or abortive succession to a third-generation hereditary offspring. As Figure 1 illustrates, three explanatory hypotheses are developed to explicate the three-stage process leading to the demise of the lineage of the autocracy.

### 1. Feasible Conditions for Hereditary Succession

The first-stage explanatory hypothesis ( $H_1$ ) deals with the initial necessary conditions for the foundation of a lineage dictatorship. It posits that hereditary succession is predicated on the concurrent satisfaction of two conditions of effective provision of ruling institutions and absolute concentration of power in the leader. Before explaining the hypothesis, we first need to ask why the method of hereditary succession is adopted.

#### (1) Coping with the Problem of Succession

The “most dangerous point of transition” in any dictatorship must be “the death of the dictator and the succession” (Bialer 1980, 184-185). To the extent that power is concentrated in the ruler, the problem of succession becomes critical. Leadership succession is the hardest test an authoritarian regime must pass to reproduce itself. Failure is much likely lead to a premature downfall (Tullock 1987, 151-166). Hereditary succession is “a strategy of high uncertainty” (Silberman 1993, 39-66), which used to be employed mostly in post-revolutionary or post-colonial contexts where, while power and authority had asymmetrically converged around founding fathers, the precedent rules and fixed procedures of leadership succession had been de-legitimated or were unavailable. The adoption of hereditary succession aims to placate political uncertainty, moving structurally-given unpredictability into the more familiar box of sedentary custom of familial succession that produces an order by nature.

Combined with the structural deficiencies produced by the dense fog of uncertainty, the blood-stained careers of founders further impedes the institutionalization (and, by definition, impersonalization) of leadership selection and succession. Outgoing autocrats automatically face serious risks posed by former and hidden enemies. “For this reason, incumbents often seek a successor . . . they can trust to protect them” (Levitsky and Way 2010, 61-70). Provided that the autocrat can secure his followers’ consent, he tends to prefer hereditary succession to the designation of a non-familial successor, who is more likely





to develop a strong motivation to shorten the reign of the predecessor. Further, the sudden ascension of the one of the inner-circle strongmen upon the incumbent's death can pose a serious threat to the others. That path provides a strong incentive for them to agree with hereditary succession. Propelled by the agential motivations of authoritarians, dynastic succession is often chosen as a protective measure for the future security of the founding autocrat and his followers.

## (2) Why do Institutions Matter?

Even if hereditary succession is motivated, it is feasible only when the following two conditions are concurrently met: [1] the effective presence of coherently organized ruling institutions, and [2] the concentration of power in the dictator sufficient to dominate those institutions and bend them to his decisions.

Even the most powerful dictators cannot bequeath the throne to their sons without the effective provision of institutions. Institutions matter in two ways. First, they carry out and support succession. The party unites the elites. It promotes an elite consensus, resolving and mediating the disputes and conflicts over succession. It then coordinates, administers, and legitimates the succession processes in an organized manner. It binds supporters who make commitments to hereditary succession. As long as the party is expected to remain effective, even the disgruntled elites will hide their discontent and continue to remain loyal and cooperative “in the expectation of access to spoils” (Levitsky and Way 2010, 61-62). An effective ruling party thus reduces the threat of defection and redoubles the benefits of loyalty. At the same time, as long as they penetrate deeply into society, the parties and umbrella organizations such as AMOs (administered mass organizations) (Kasza 1999, 7) mobilize conscripted mass-supports, consolidating the backing of compliant constituencies. Parties and umbrella organizations preempt political space that could otherwise be filled up by the opposition, and thus deter defection by “ensuring that defectors will fail” (Levitsky and Way 2010, 61). Finally, the military and coercive institutions detect, threaten, and repress renegades that have managed to evade the matrices of civilian control.

Second, the effective presence of institutions works against the negative effects of the dictator's innate problem of making contract commitments. “The benefits of hereditary succession” spread beyond the predecessor and successor (Brownlee 2007b, 597), to protect the power and privileges of the founder's confederates and cronies as extra-familial elites. However, the contract between the incumbent autocrat and followers for the continuation of power through hereditary succession is not credible enough to persuade the latter. The incumbent will be unable to force the next dictator to honor the contract be-



cause “the dictator is the law” and “a new dictator means new law” (Gregory 2009, 35). Thus the dictator and his followers cannot enter into credible contracts. Only the effective provision of ruling institutions mitigates the credibility problem. As long as the institutions are highly expected to remain effective in the foreseeable future, those who make the contract with the outgoing dictator are more likely to be reassured and loyal because the institutions in which they are entrenched are more likely to tie the successor to the contract. Institutions are more credible than dictatorial commitments. Without the effective provision of institutions, it is less likely that the dictator will produce credible commitments to make retinues remain loyal.

The lack of rules and procedures to govern power transfers allows the adoption of hereditary succession. However, the latter can be feasible only when a powerful dictator is endowed with the institutions that can enforce succession and promote cooperation. Hereditary succession is highly likely to be aborted when effective institutions are lacking. The personal dictator tends to appropriate institutions, incurring diminished organizational rationality and effectiveness. In contrast, institutions tend to depersonalize the regime. Each is not so congenial or compatible with the other. Under the rarely occurring conditions of emergencies or contingencies, both tendencies can coexist in the hybrid authoritarian form for a period of time sufficient for a successfully implemented hereditary succession. This pattern means that cases of hereditary succession are rare in modern republics.

## 2. Autocratic Succession and Regime Transition

The second explanatory hypothesis (H<sub>2</sub>) posits that the initial hereditary succession is likely to trigger an authoritarian transition to a personalist regime. Different types of regimes involve different sets of incentive structures in which politicians, as professional careerists (Geddes 1994, 30-38), play the survival game. Actors embedded in different political institutions as the rules of the games behave differently because “political institutions determine which strategies for staying in office are likely to work” (Geddes 1994, 8). Thus we need to begin with the structural differences of regime types, which differentiate “the strategic contexts” in which authoritarians operate “in order to pinpoint precisely how much room, if any, exists for strategic maneuvering” (Snyder 1998, 51).

### (1) Authoritarian Regime Types

Authoritarian regimes can be grouped into three subtypes: military, single-party, and personalist regimes.<sup>4</sup> The former two types tend to develop either collegial or collective systems of



decision-making, with established sets of rules for leadership alteration. Single-party dictatorships<sup>5</sup> effectively monopolize power. Power is accessible only through the party organizations, leading to a fusion of the party and the state. The technocratic vision of “the party as a vast office or factory” is established (Stites 1989, 45). Even though this system is intended to extend the party’s control over the state and society, single-party regimes often entail “a relatively high level of political institutionalization” (Huntington 1991, 111). Rule by military junta is also used to promote rational-bureaucratic institutionalization.

The personalist type is genuinely autocratic in the sense that, in its purest form, the individual ruler as the sole source of authority is accountable only to himself, while his coteries are, in principle, unconditionally accountable to him. The neopatrimonial systems are more likely to take root in personalist regimes, in which access to power and decision making is determined by one’s distance from and personal relations with the ruler as the radial center of the informal clientelist-networks that permeate the official-formal institutions. Whether intentionally or not, the state and party institutions tend to be fragmented so that the system “owes most of what coherence it [has] to the unifying force of its leader.” (Gorlizki and Mommsen 2009, 43) The Bonapartist leader in a personalist regime “rather identifies the cause of order with his own person.” (Marx 2005, 61) Insofar as the dictator’s *persona* substitutes for the system on which the unity of political community is dependent, the nation is transformed into “the extended household” (Bratton and van de Walle 1998, 61) of the ruler. While “cadres decide all” in single-party dictatorships,<sup>6</sup> the leader decides all in personalist dictatorships.

## (2) Triggering Effects of Succession on Transition

Hereditary succession is feasible when the effective ruling institutions and an absolute autocrat are concurrently present. The authoritarian satisfaction of both conditions is possible in hybrid regimes such as in the personalist/military or personalist/single-party dictatorships in which autocrats are equipped with effective institutions. The adoption of hereditary succession urges the founding autocrat to strengthen the tendency toward personalization of the regime in order to complete the succession processes and to search for and destroy potential rivals to his son inside the regime. The given hybrid or institutional dictatorship begins to be transformed into a hardened personalist regime.

Even if the father’s associates and retinues cooperate for the ascension of the successor, in the latter’s perspective, they are the most dangerous rivals and threats after his father’s departure. They themselves are lesser bosses followed by their own followers and clients, who used to be entrenched in the party and military institutions. This situation intensifies



the “Madison’s dilemma,” in which the dictator’s agents misappropriate their delegated authority and exploit their strategic positions in institutions against the dictator-principal (Kiewiet and McCubbins 1991, 26-27). Autonomous institutions and independent organizations can endanger the power position of the successor. As discussed in the next section, on the one hand, the successor’s survival strategy focuses on replacing the old guard with his trustworthy clients personally loyal to him, who usually consist of kin-group members and close cronies. On the other hand, he carries out a series of neopatrimonial programs to decrease the autonomy of institutions occupied by his deceased father’s loyalists while increasing the dependence of his own clients and cronies on himself, “weakening all independent centers of power beyond [his] control” (Bratton and van de Walle 1998, 84). The successful execution of patrimonial programs results in the reformation of the authoritarian regime in the personalist dictatorship in which only the “incessant exercise of dictatorial power” (Gerschenkron 1968, 315) sustains the regime as a whole. When the successor’s personalist drive for survival fails, hereditary succession is no longer feasible, because the authority of the successor cannot but help declining with the dispersed centers of power. Even the given autocracy could be challenged or overthrown from within.

### 3. PERSONALIST DEMISE

The third explanatory hypothesis [H<sub>3</sub>] deals with the final stage of hereditary autocracy. It posits that the second-generation autocrat’s personalist strategies are likely to reduce the feasibility of hereditary succession to third-generation offspring. After ascension, the hereditary successor’s own security depends upon the patrimonialization of the ruling institutions, which is bound to precipitate institutional decay. The paradox lies in the aftereffects; as much as the institutions are patrimonialized, they lose effectiveness and coherence. As an inevitable consequence, it is less likely that the hereditary succession of the third-generation offspring is feasible.

#### (1) Patrimonialization and Institutional Decay

The ultimate goal of the personalist successor’s survival strategies is to create a political order that can be empowered only by him. If the dictator succeeds in the construction of a personalist matrix, the fear of *mutually assured destruction* in the event of the demise of the incumbent dictator (as the sole linchpin penetrating and sustaining the whole system) may prevail, tightly binding together all the major agents and organizations.

It is not enough to merely permeate institutions with the ruler’s client network. “The



leader-retinue system” (Broszat 1981, 262-293), which colonizes the formal state and party institutions, tends not only to extend the dictator’s control over the state and the party, but also to promote the proliferation of splinter factions. Lesser bosses, who are initially dispatched to control specific institutions as the dictator’s loyal lieutenants, set about developing their own fiefdoms, prebendalizing formal offices and positions. “Hand in hand with institutional autonomy” comes “the formation of client networks” among inner-circle members, which can encroach on the primary role and authority of the dictator (Khlevniuk 2009, 260). As long as institutions remain sufficiently independent and strong, there is an opportunity for members of the ruler’s retinue who are deeply entrenched in them to become autonomous or even rebellious. This tendency for the retinue to gain autonomy can potentially enable members of the ruling clique to become dissociated from the fate of the dictator in a crisis.

In order to decrease the autonomy of institutions and factions, the succeeding dictator may deliberately build a “polycratic state with competing centers of power” (Bullock 1993, 317), compounded by “chaotic lines of authority” (Paxton 2004, 125). In such a system, parallel institutions, such as paramilitary units, are set up as countervailing forces to be infiltrated or to compete with the regular military, and their overlapping jurisdictions are used to promote intra-regime rivalries and factional struggles. By way of the organizational contradictions and perpetual dissension among his lieutenants, the personalist dictator as “the only man capable of [undo] the Gordian Knot” further secures his authority and followers’ loyalty (Nyomarkay 1967, 42).

The work of maintaining such extensive client-networks by means of selective distribution of privileges and punishments requires that ample resources be made available for exploitation by the dictator and his clique. This leads to the systemic appropriation of state resources and illicit predation of private economic systems to create monopoly and rent opportunities to “buy off” some significant constituents, especially both “those who may be too powerful to repress” and those whose power can be effectively mobilized to repress others, such as local strongmen (Wintrobe 1998, 335). Access to these rents and privileges is decided and channeled by the ruler. These actions further blur the institutional demarcation between public and private coffers, nourishing kleptocratic practices and licensed corruption. Despite their contributions to the immediate goal of dictatorial survival, these patrimonial economic arrangements dry out any developmental potential, with ever-diminishing capacity for self-rehabilitation. The state is turned into a “predatory” leviathan<sup>7</sup> only to look for rent-opportunities and even booty. The lack of “easily exploitable natural resources” and “massive doses of foreign aid” (Chehabi and Linz 1998b, 27) results in chronic economic disaster, heightening popular disaffection. The dictator’s fiscal



capacity to pay for loyalty is severely constrained. This situation unleashes a chain reaction that can ultimately crumble the patrimonial pyramid of patron-client networks. The “inability of superiors to supply their subordinates with the means to construct a strategy of survival” (Staniszki 1991, 164) makes “the official structure of the economic administration absolutely unsteerable” (Staniszki 1990, 131). The “poverty of the state, the prospects of wealth from predation, and the fears arising from the loss of office increased the likelihood that states would fail and political order break down” (Bates 2008, 40).

## (2) The Price of Leadership Inheritance

The personalist strategies for survival are purported to culminate in a situation where the state is virtually indistinguishable from the regime, and this in turn is inseparable from the personage of the ruler. This irresistibly precipitates institutional decay along with the breakdown of the rule of law. The law becomes “an order from the Führer” (Overly 2004, 296). The autocratic paradox lies in the self-contradiction that such “regimes seem to use state prerogatives in ways that erode the bases of their own power” (Boone 1992, 4). As Pierre Englebert and Denis M. Tull (2008, 121) point out, such personalist “strategies for political survival de facto accelerate the destruction of state institutions.” The dictatorial patrimonializing drive disintegrates the ruling institutions from within. The purported institutional fragmentations diminish their cohesiveness and consistency. This makes the everyday reproduction of political authority and satisfaction of economic desires so unpredictable that discontent with the regime is irreparably redoubled. Such discontent compels a desperate ruler to further strengthen his survival mechanisms.

A decayed regime structure provides less favorable conditions for the second hereditary succession to the third-generation successor. The same method may not produce the same results in the changed institutional context. It is unrealistic to expect the third-generation crown prince to fill the political vacuum left by his predecessor with coherently organized support from the party-state or military-coercive institutions that administered the initial hereditary succession effectively. To the retinues, overly sensitive and concerned with their uncertain future, the second-generation dictators’ commitments to the other hereditary succession contracts no longer appear credible as institutional backings weaken.

The collateral effects produced by effective institutions which made more credible the first-generation dictators’ commitment to the future security of their cronies and coteries have been diminished with institutional decay and bitter competition between organizations and factions. With a downsized economy and a diminishing of the rent-seeking opportunities necessary to maintain the loyalty of vassals and retinues, there seems little



prospect of the young successor being able to construct his own patron-client networks in a *timely* way and make them powerful and extensive enough to supersede the incumbent coalition of the old guard which could potentially threaten him. It is more reasonable to assume that such institutional degeneration can invite not the third-generation personalist dictators but another regime transition or even a radical collapse, a return to the primordial conditions of political uncertainty from which the dynastic autocracy emerged. The price of a second-generation succession may well be paid with the end of the dynasty.

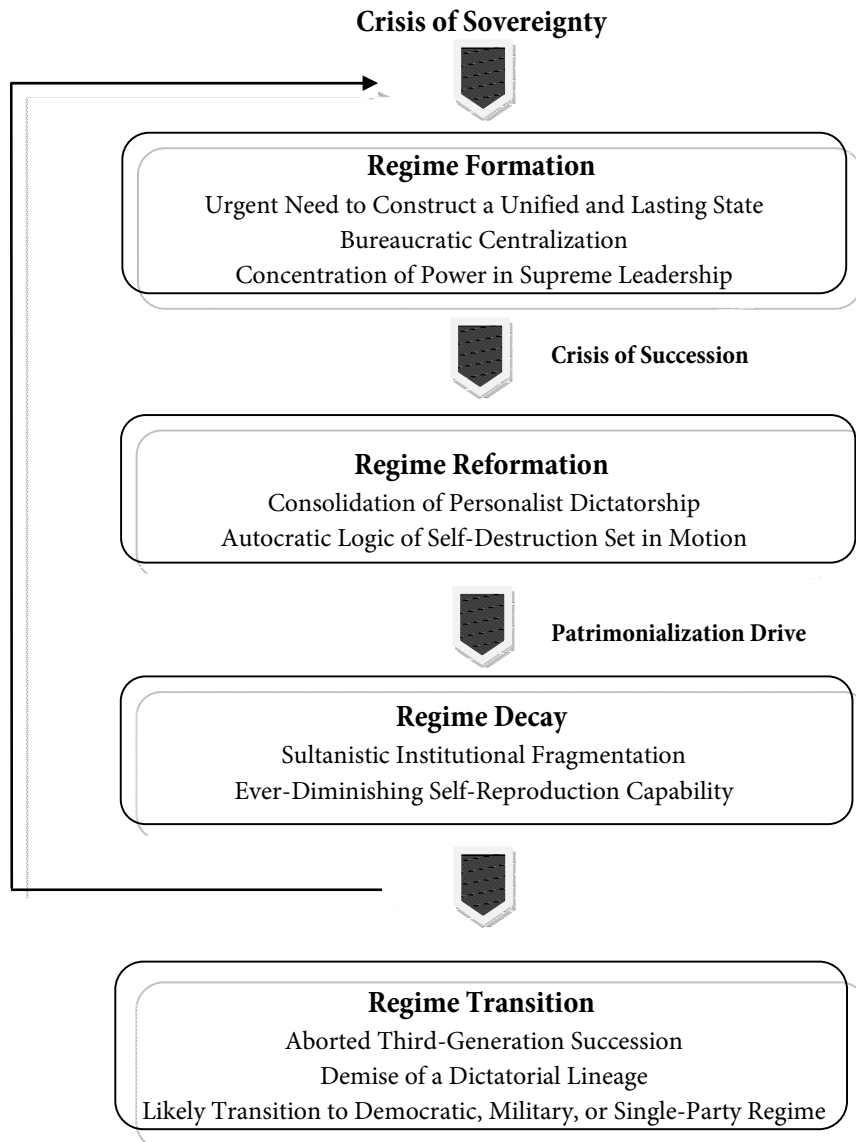
### III. The Cases

#### 1. Staged Courses

As shown in Table 1, we have nine cases of modern autocracies which were succeeded by second-generation autocrats. Of those nine, four autocracies were not able to survive for the next-generation hereditary succession. The remnants are the potential candidates which did try. As Figure 2 illustrates, the former four cases reveal the patterns of the three-stage processes of authoritarian transitions conditioned by the problems and methods of succession. The latter five cases share all the transition stages but the downfall of the dynasty. They still survive but show institutional decay and regime fragmentation.



Figure 2. Hereditary Succession and Authoritarian Transition







**Table 1. Crisis of Sovereignty and the Nine Republican-Style Hereditary Autocracies**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Internal/External Crises of Sovereignty</b>	<b>[1] First-Generation Founders [2] Second-Generation Successors</b>
Dominican Republic	Independence from Spain (1821); Haitian occupation (1822-1944); Spanish annexation (1861-65); U.S. occupation (1916-24)	[1] Rafael Trujillo (r. 1930-61) [2] Ramfis Trujillo (r. 1961)
Nicaragua	Foreign interventions during the Civil War period (1840s-1855); U.S. Occupation (1912-1933)	[1] Anastasio Somoza García (r. 1936-56) [2] Luis Somoza Debayle (r. 1956-67) Anastasio Somoza Debayle (r. 1967-79)
North Korea	Japanese colonial rule (1910-45); Soviet occupation (1945-48); Korean War (1950-53); De-Stalinization and the August Factional Struggle (1956); Sino-Soviet dispute (1960s)	[1] Kim Il-Sung (r. 1948-94) [2] Kim Jong-Il (r. 1994- )
Taiwan	Chinese Revolution (1911); Northern expedition against warlords (1925); Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-45); Civil War Defeat (1949); Loss of UN seat (1971)	[1] Chiang Kai-Shek (r. 1949-75) [2] Chiang Ching-Kuo (r. 1975-88)
Haiti	Civil wars and anarchy (1843-1915); U.S. occupation (1915-34); Failed experiments of democracy and a series of coups and revolutions (1934-57)	[1] François Duvalier (r. 1957-71) [2] Jean-Claude Duvalier (r. 1971-86)
Singapore	Japanese occupation (1941-45); Independence from the British (1963); Ideological conflicts and separation from the Federation of Malaysia (1956)	[1] Lee Kuan-Yew (r. 1965-2004) [2] Lee Hsein-Loong (r. 2004- )
Togo	German colonization (1884-1914) U.N Trust Territories (1945-59) Independence (1960) Assassination of the first president in the first coup led by Gnassingbé Eyadéma (1963)	[1] Gnassingbé Eyadéma (r. 1967-2005) [2] Faure Gnassingbé (r. 2005- )



Country	Internal/External Crises of Sovereignty	[1] First-Generation Founders [2] Second-Generation Successors
Syria	French mandate (1920-25); First independence from France (1936); Turkish invasion (1938); Second independence (1941); French occupation (1941-44); Arab-Israel War (1948-49) Intra-Party conflict within the Ba'ath Party and Black September (1970)	[1] Hafez al-Assad (r. 1971-2000) [2] Bashar al-Assad (r. 2000- )
Azerbaijan	Independence from Soviet rule and Soviet coup attempt (1991); Racial and territorial conflicts with Armenia (1988- )	[1] Heydar Aliyev (r. 1993-2003) [2] Iliham Heydar oglu Aliyev (r. 2003- )

#### (1) Stage 1: The Crisis of Sovereignty and Regime Formation

Concurrent satisfaction of the two conditions for feasible hereditary succession is hardly achievable. As the first explanatory hypothesis ( $H_1$ ) posits, the nine hereditary autocracies meet the two conditions. The coexistence of a powerful personalist autocrat and effective institutions is difficult. It is possible only in urgent historical contingencies.

As Table 2 shows, the births of the nine hereditary autocracies were preceded by serial crises of sovereignty, which necessitated the formation of an integrated nation-state. While the domestic crises like endemic rebellions and secessions obstructed the construction and maintenance of a modern state as a unified entity, such external shocks as imperial colonization and military occupations by powerful neighbors threatened national survival itself. For example, decisive defeats in the Chinese Civil War critically endangered the survival and sovereign status of the Republic of China.<sup>8</sup>

Bureaucratic centralization is the major solution to overcome those series of crises, the pursuit of which is the necessary precondition for the birth of hereditary autocracies. A centralized center is strongly believed to serve as “the only fixed point in a chaotic situation” (Lewin 2005, 79), on the basis of which it is possible to create a sovereign state. When a nation fails in building a centrally unified state, it is highly likely that it will not be able to develop a modern hereditary autocracy. Even if a powerful autocrat succeeds in building (or occupying) a unified state equipped with effective institutions, as long as the very institutions retain the powerful legacies of corporeal autonomy, his intention and ability to enact hereditary succession are bound to be restricted. Even if more than half of nine hereditary autocracies originated in military or party/military hybrid regimes, and



the establishment of the military as the most powerful institution in the latter types of regimes predates the ascendancy of the founding fathers, Jason Brownlee's thesis that sons can succeed fathers whose power predates the party's is powerful in that it provides a plausible alternative to answer the question as to what makes autocrats overwhelm the party in single-party regimes.

The serial crises of sovereignty necessitate bureaucratic centralization. In the case of successful pursuits, it becomes more likely that the two feasibility conditions of hereditary succession can be met concurrently. As many cases of post-colonial sub-Saharan countries show, it is highly likely that premature personalization results in tyranny without reliably effective ruling institutions. Those countries cannot satisfy feasibility conditions, so much so that hereditary autocracies cannot be developed in them.

**Table 2. Regime Transitions in Hereditary Autocracies**

Country/Families	Exit Paths	Regime Transition
<b>Dominican Republic</b> The Trujillos (r. 1930-61)	Election under Military Intervention/ Military Commander (Generalissimo)	From a Military Regime to <b>Personalist Dictatorship</b>
<b>Nicaragua</b> The Somozas (r. 1936-79)	Election under Military Intervention/ Military Commander (of the American- Trained National Guard)	From a Military Regime to <b>Personalist Dictatorship</b>
<b>North Korea</b> The Kims (r. 1948- )	Soviet Imposition/Communist Guerrilla Leader	From a Single-Party Re- gime to <b>Personalist Dicta- torship</b>
<b>Taiwan</b> The Chiangs (r. 1949-88)	Shanghai Military Coup (1927) amid Inner-Party Succession Struggles/ Mili- tary Commander and Party Leader	From a Military/Party Hybrid Regime to <b>Perso- nalist Dictatorship</b>
<b>Haiti</b> The Duvaliers (r. 1957-86)	Election/Physician (Papa Doc), Journal- ist, Populist (Black Nationalist) Politi- cian	From a Military Regime to <b>Personalist Dictatorship</b>
<b>Singapore</b> The Lees (r. 1965- )	Election/Party Leader, Co-Founder of the People's Action (1954)	From a Democrat- ic/Single-Party Hybrid Regime to <b>Personalist Regime</b>



Country/Families	Exit Paths	Regime Transition
<b>Togo</b> The Gnassingbés (r. 1967- )	Military Coups (1963, 1967)/ Military Officer, Founder of the Rally of the Togolese People (RTP, 1969)	From a Military/Party Hybrid Regime to <b>Personalist Dictatorship</b> Embedded in a Fake-Multi Party System
<b>Syria</b> The Assads (r. 1971- )	Ba'ath Military Coup (1964) to Form a Single-Party Regime and Intra Party Coup of the 1970 Corrective Revolution to Purge the Party Itself/ Military Officer (Air Force Commander) and Party Leader	From a Single- Party/Military Hybrid Regime to <b>Personalist Dictatorship</b>
<b>Azerbaijan</b> The Aliyevs (r. 1993- )	Election (in Wartime and Referendum Situations)/ Party Leader, Brezhnevite Candidate Member of the Soviet Politburo (1976-87), Former Leader of Soviet Azerbaijan	From a Single-Party Regime to <b>Personalist Dictatorship</b> in the Guise of a Multiparty-Election System
<i>*References</i>		
<b>Romania</b> The Ceausescus (r. 1965-89) (Aborted Hereditary Succession)	Party Nomination / Party Elite Cadre and Politician	From a Single-Party Regime to <b>Personalist Dictatorship</b> after 1983
<b>Iran</b> The Pahlavis (r. 1925-41, 1963-77)	Military Coup (1921) amid Anarchic Situations (Failed Constitutional Revolution and the Consequent State of Civil War)/Military Officer (Commander of Russia-Trained Cossack Brigade)	From a Military/Civilian Hybrid Regime to <b>Personalist Dictatorship</b> in a Monarchical Form
<b>Cuba</b> The Castros (r. 1959- ) (Fraternal Succession)	Revolution/ Revolutionary Party Leader	From a Single-Party Regime to <b>Personalist Dictatorship</b>

## (2) Stage II: Consolidation of Personalist Dictatorship

As hereditary succession is chosen as the remedy to the dictatorial problem of leadership succession, the tendency toward the patrimonialization of the regime is intensified. The fathers' patrimonial drive even tends to be accelerated during the reign of the second generation. As shown in Table 2, the personalist regimes were irreparably established in the autocracies that had successfully passed along the first hereditary succession to second-generation leaders.

For example, François Duvalier (Papa Doc, r. 1957-71) of Haiti<sup>9</sup> was elected as president.



His election and maintenance of the regime was possible only with a strong coalition with the military that was purged and managed directly by him. Buttressed by his private militia-army cum secret police, the Tontons Macoutes (Diederich and Burt 2005), which had the twice the number of the regular military, he established a quasi-military dictatorship with the help of the governmental executive. He then began to replace the “pyramidal structure of traditional dictatorship” bequeathed from the past dictatorial legacies with a “centrifugal structure in which those who held power enjoyed it only on the basis of a direct link to the chief of state,” that is, Papa Doc (Trouillot 2000, 171). When he determined hereditary succession as the method of leadership transfer to his son, Baby Doc, the personalizing tendency was decisively intensified. On June 14, 1964, when he was made the president for life and received the right to name his successor by a new constitutional referendum, he himself declared that “Dr. Duvalier is neither Dessalines, Soulouque, nor General Salmon<sup>10</sup> . . . He has the intention of governing as a master, an authentic autocrat. This means, I repeat, that he wishes to see no one in his way except himself” (Trouillot 2000, 171-172).

As the second explanatory hypothesis (H<sub>2</sub>) posits, the nine hereditary autocracies went through authoritarian transitions to hardened personalist dictatorships. For example, the personalist dictatorships in Togo under the Gnassingbés (Houngnikpo 2002; Ebeku 2006; Seely 2006; and Heibunn 2007, 223-249), Syria under the Assads (Heydemann 1999; Lesch 2005; Leverett 2005; and Lesch 2007, 269-299), and Taiwan under the Chiangs<sup>11</sup> originated in party/military hybrid regimes. The personalist regimes in Azerbaijan under the Aliyevs (Swietochowski 1995; De Waal 2004; Cornell 2010; and De Waal 2010), and in North Korea under the Kims, share similar origins of the relatively purer type of single-party regime; on the other hand, the ones of the Dominican Republic under the Trujillos (Hartlyn 1998, 85-112; Roorda 1998; Turits 2004; and Derby 2009) and Nicaragua under the Somozas originated in military regimes. Despite the apparent system of multiparty competition and elections, even Singapore under Lee Kuan-Yew (Mauzy and Milne 2002; Lydgate 2003; Trocki 2005; Seou 2007; and Yap, Lim, and Kam 2010) showed a characteristic of a single-party regime, in a substantial sense. As shown in Table 2, we can also find similar patterns of transition in the relevant personalist-regime cases of Romania, Iran, and Cuba.

### (3) Stage III: Institutional Decay and Demise

As posited in the third explanatory hypothesis (H<sub>3</sub>), the cases show that the second-generation dictators’ survival strategy to minimize the autonomy of power institutions so as to maximize the vassals’ vulnerability deinstitutionalizes the regime, producing potentially segmented elites, a de-routinized state administration, prebendalized offices, and a



patrimonial military. It leads to the final stage of institutional decay. When the successor adopted the patrimonialization programs that would not effectively work, the ruling institutions would remain effective and autonomous with the declining power of a second-generation leader as a personal autocrat.

Whether the patrimonial programs work effectively or not, the third-generation succession was untried or aborted. As shown in Table 3, the four second-generation autocracies were transformed into another type of regime. For instance, the Somozas' regime of Nicaragua was toppled by massive popular mobilizations and guerrilla resistance led by anti-regime extremists to become a party/military hybrid regime. Such exit paths are discussed in the following section. It is also likely that the remnant of five hereditary dictatorships currently ruled by the incumbent second-generation autocrats will go through regime transitions. If they plan or try the next hereditary succession to third-generation leaders, this could further undermine their structural vulnerability.

**Table 3. Regime Transitions out of Hereditary Autocracies**

Country/Families	Causes and Processes	Outcome
<b>Dominican Republic</b> The Trujillos (r. 1930-61)	<b>Elite Fragmentation</b> Assassination of the First Duvalier by the Exiles (1961) Exile of the Successor by Opposition; Coalition and American Pressure (1962)	<b>Fragile Clientel- ist Democracy</b>
<b>Nicaragua</b> The Somozas (r. 1936-79)	<b>Social Revolution</b> (1979) Sandinista (SFLN) Guerrilla Movement; Spontaneous Mass Riots; Resistant Catholic Churches	<b>Military/Party Hybrid Regime</b>
<b>Taiwan</b> The Chiangs (r. 1949-88)	<b>Popular Protests and Elite Fragmentation</b> Opposition Party (Democratic Progressive Party, DPP, 1986); Influences of the Wave	<b>Electoral De- mocracy</b>
<b>Haiti</b> The Duvaliers (r. 1957-86)	<b>Elite Fragmentation and Military Coup</b> Spontaneous Popular Protests without Organized Oppositions; Severed Black Population	<b>Military Regime</b>
<i>*References</i>		
<b>Romania</b> The Ceausescus (r. 1965-89)	<b>Revolution and Elite Fragmentation</b> Spontaneous Popular Revolts; Staged Revolution; Military Coup Leading to a Civilian Rule by the Nation- al Salvation Front (FSN)	<b>Party/Military Hybrid</b>
<b>Iran</b> The Pahlavis (r. 1925-41, 1963-77)	<b>Social Revolution</b> Organized Oppositions (Radical Shi'a Fundamental- ism): Ineffective Coercive and Military Institutions;	<b>Revolutionary Theocracy</b>



#### (4) Exit Paths

In the personalist regime in which overconcentration of power of the ruler makes the problem of succession more serious, the death of the incumbent can transform the given strategic context of actors' maneuverability, which will decide the nature of the future regime. When a personalist dictator selects hereditary succession as the means for leadership transfer, the efficacy and autonomy of the ruling institutions decide the orderly transfer of authority to son. Four potential cases can be constructed.

First, when ruling institutions are effective but heteronomous, retinues without autonomous bases of power had better confirm and execute the decision, because it is predictable to them that regardless of individual actors' support, the succession plan proceeds well in accordance with the will of the father. Even after the father's departure, the successor can control those effective institutions to prevent deadly discord. All nine cases showed this trend when the initial succession to the second-generation leaders began.

Second, when institutions are effective and still autonomous, the retinues (small bosses) set out to devise a corporeal (oligarchy or junta) system of leadership to reduce the "fear of faction" rooted in the fear of one elite faction gaining "ascendancy over the other factions" (North, Wallis, and Weingast 2009, 197), as soon as the incumbent dictator departs. Taming the crown prince and cooperating to build an intra-elite consensus for constitutional rearrangement is the best strategy. The cases of the post-Stalinist Soviet regime or democratized Taiwanese regime after the Chiangs exemplify this process.

Third, when institutions are ineffective but still autonomous, proactive struggles and alliances between factions and institutions are likely. The crown prince is less likely to retain control over them as soon as his father departs. No cases of hereditary autocracies show this process. However, we can find an approximate example in the Romanian case of 1989. The party and military were so effective and strong enough to repress popular discontent. They maintained autonomy to the extent that, faced with a series of mass demonstrations, the former and incumbent notables in the party and military formed an alliance to overthrow the Ceausescus and install a new regime with new ideologies and titles.

Fourth, when institutions are ineffective and heteronomous, an authoritarian *cul-de-sac* is more likely to occur, in which neither the crown prince nor competing factions can fully control the situation after the father's death. Where the strong counter-elites and mobilizing centers survive the previous dictatorship, as in the Nicaraguan, Iranian, and Dominican cases, they can take advantage of those situations of political apathy for the purpose of demolishing the *status quo* regime and building a new one. In the latter two instances, the future paths could be mapped by means of the analysis of an intra-elite bal-



ance of power combined with the reassessment of institutional legacies and opposing agents outside the regime. Such an approach can be applied in charting the North Korean future after Kim Jong-Il.

## 2. The First Crisis Transformed the Kim Regime

The cross-national survey of the cases of rise and demise of hereditary autocracies shows the explanatory and predictive power of the second-time-unlucky hypothesis. This section applies the hypothesis to the North Korean case of authoritarian transition to a personalist regime triggered by hereditary succession.

### (1) De-Stalinization and the Birth of Lineage Dictatorship

After national liberation from the Japanese colonial rule in 1945, the Moscow center and Soviet forces occupying the north of the Korean Peninsula had successfully transplanted a Stalinist party-state system (Lankov 2002; Armstrong 2003), presided over by Kim Il-Sung,<sup>12</sup> one of the co-opted former anti-Japanese guerrilla captains. Far from being a monolithic personal dictatorship, the earlier North Korean leadership in the party, cabinet, and military can be characterized as loosely coalitional, teeming with competing factions including the Manchurian Guerrilla faction led by Kim, the pro-Chinese Yanan group,<sup>13</sup> the Domestic faction led by Park Hŏng-Yŏng, and the Soviet faction. .

Encouraged by the wave of De-Stalinization, during Kim Il-Sung's absence from June 1 to July 19, 1956, major Yanan and Soviet group<sup>14</sup> leaders secretly made an Anti-Kim alliance to demote Kim Il-Sung and take over the party leadership. Their challenges in the August Plenum were finally defeated by Kim's faction (Lankov 2005). By 1958, those revisionist challengers would be cleared out. Kim's "monocracy" (Scalapino and Chong-Sik Lee 1972, 752-756) was now firmly established as a tyranny. Their challenges were too late. The biggest Domestic faction was already demolished because the most important organizational and mobilizational centers had been located in South Korea and the National Division and the Korean War had liquidated them.

The lessons from De-Stalinization under the Soviets and in North Korea made resolute Kim Il-Sung's determination to preempt the persistent problem of leadership change endemic in the post-revolutionary communist states through inherited succession. This entailed the exhaustive privatization of totalitarian ruling institutions. "The one and only head-leader (*yuil suryong*)" leadership system was established. Surpassing institutional restraints, the head-leader began to rule the nation through the converging networks of





personalist patronage.

When the final resistance against the prearranged program of patrilineal succession during the 1970s by Kapsan factionalists was overcome, the dual power system of joint leadership ruled by the current supreme leader Kim Il-Sung and the heir-apparent Kim Jong-Il was created. When his father died in 1994, Kim Jong-Il was well established as the personalist dictator, surrounded with the Kimists (his father's loyal retainers committed to the succession to Kim Jong-Il, such as Generals Oh Kuk-Ryol and Cho Myong-Rok) as well as his new elite clients, mainly composed of younger generation Kim clan members and his cronies. The Stalinist legacies of overdeveloped coercive and extractive institutions coupled with a withered society provided incubating conditions for the birth of a robust personalist regime, by virtue of which collective actions of discontent from below were structurally impeded.

## (2) Institutional Deformation and Prebendalized Economy

Accelerating his father's drive, Kim Jong-Il's neopatrimonial engineering<sup>15</sup> to maximize his followers' personal dependence and to minimize the autonomy of party and state institutions brought de-routinized administration, prebendalized offices, and a patrimonial military. Through the Kim clan under Kim Jong-Il, the North Korean regime has been completely transformed into a sultanistic one. The leader is now formally identified with the state.

After the collapse of the Soviet Bloc in 1989 and the death of Kim Il-Sung, Kim Jong-Il declared a state of national crisis and established the exceptional ruling system controlled by the National Defense Commission (NDC). Since then, the Military-First paradigm has consolidated not only his personal power but also the state military-security apparatuses as his arms, further invalidating the legacies of the Leninist-Stalinist single-party structures. Under Kim Jong-Il, the Korean People's Army (KPA) has become the paramount power-institution placed at the forefront of all other party-state apparatuses. According to North Korea's official ideologues, "military-first politics is the prime framework of politics in our era to take the KPA as the core and main vanguard in defense of fatherland, revolution, and socialism" (Jon 2004, 26). The military, which, as a key buttress to Kim Jong-Il's "military-based rule," has been "converted into a political tool of the regime and has made a great contribution to the longevity of [his] regime" (Gause 2006, 47) at the expense of the party and state's diminished authority. In sharp contrast, the major party and state institutions have become more and more invisible. The KWP has held no Congresses or Conferences since the Sixth Party Congress in 1980. In 2010, the KWP Delegates' Conference was held only to formalize the Kim Jong-Un succession. The KWP



Central Committee and Politburo held no plenary meetings. Almost all the decision-making functions and authority of the party were formally transferred to the NDC, composed of Kim's retinues in the army and party. Infiltrated by the leader's clients, the party, army, and state agencies have competed with each other to secure Kim Jong-Il's favor.

However, the final decisions come from Kim's palace. Seemingly multitudinous and rivaling centers of power are only connected to and coordinated by the hub of Kim's personage. They are segmented from, hostile to, and competing with each other. These are the results of Kim Jong-Il's patrimonializing disintegration of the institutions adroitly learned from past dictatorial lessons. The progressive fragmentation of institutions is not an unintended consequence. By undermining the autonomy of state and party institutions, the "planned shapelessness" (Arendt 1966, 402) of such polycratic structures is prearranged to prevent "the members of the ruling clique themselves" from being "absolutely sure of their own position" (Arendt 1966, 400). It reminds them of "the reality that their authority derives directly from the leader" and that while their direct dependence is real, "the intervening hierarchy" is "an ostensible, spurious limitation of an authoritarian state" (Arendt 1966, 405). Combined with the ruler's maximum discretion and strategic whims in allocating prerogatives and privileges, such a planned inculcation of institutional unpredictability and structured uncertainty perpetuates the dependency and vulnerability of followers to the extent that "insecurity and the ever-present danger of a major personal calamity" become "a fact of life in the elites as much as (perhaps more than) lower social strata" (Fitzpatrick 2005, 201). In this political environment, inner-circle members are converted into "a transmission belt of autocracy," a privileged stratum of retinues and cronies who are "instrumentalities rather than real holders or sharers of power" (Tucker 1971, 179).

The economy is also managed patrimonially. It consists of four main sectors: the First State (People's) Economy; the Second Military Economy; the Third Party Economy; and the Fourth Private Economy. Both the Second and Third economic sectors are virtually dominated by the supreme leader himself (Kim Jong-Il) through outgrown and patrimonialized party organs of the Second Economic Committee (affiliated with the NDC) for the Second Economy and the Administrative Bureau of the Central Committee Organization Guidance Department, the Finance and Accounting Bureau of the Party, and the Central Party 38th and 39th Divisions to manage and control the Third Economy. They have been managed beyond the control of normal state planning and distribution mechanisms in classical socialist systems.

The major development of North Korean military industries was initiated when the strategy of simultaneous development of defense and the economy was officially adopted at the Fourth Plenum of the Party Central Committee in December 1962. In the early



1970s, the Second Economy Committee was established to manage the production and importation of military goods. When the Committee was affiliated with the National Defense Commission, Kim Jong-Il as the Chair of the Commission took the Second Economy under his direct control. The Second Economy started to be the main pillar to maintain the North Korean economy as a mega-military-industrial complex. The committee directly controls around 130 munitions factories that produce most competitive and marketable goods for exportation in North Korea and about 60 facilities for arms repairs and maintenance combined with about 100 civilian factories which produce strategically important goods. The major North Korean competitive civilian factories and trade organizations that can earn foreign exchange have been incorporated. For example, not only defense industries but also financial institutions<sup>16</sup> and lucrative enterprises are controlled by the Second Economic Committee to support the military economy.<sup>17</sup>

Both economic sectors prosper as independently and self-sufficiently managed economies at the expense of the People's Economy, almost monopolizing foreign trade and exchanges, and receiving 70 to 75 percent<sup>18</sup> of the governmental budget.<sup>19</sup> The privileged allocation of resources, foreign exchange, and skilled labor can be best understood as "rent" paid by the debilitated People's Economy, which makes it possible to legitimately describe the North Korean state as "predatory." The more ominous problem lies in the fact that, even inside each economic sector, the rent-seeking privileges become the major sources of private accumulation, which, as long as the holders of prebendal benefices remain loyal and useful to Kim Jong-Il, was permitted as the means to promote clients' loyalty as well as to stimulate the bitter rivalries among retinues.

Propelled by Kim Jong-Il's sultanistic survival strategies, the North Korean regime has been transformed from a Stalinist single-party to a personalist dictatorship, which was triggered by the initial hereditary succession of Kim Jong-Il. As the second-time-unlucky hypothesis and the lessons from the previous case study imply, given the fragmented and decayed ruling institutions coupled with a declining but patrimonialized economy, it is unlikely that the impending third generation will be successfully implemented. It is more likely that the next succession will invite another regime transition in North Korea.



## IV. Charting the North Korean Future

### 1. Guardianship Politics in Pyongyang

In order to chart the North Korean future, we must study the official succession plan and the major actors who compose the guardians' government to manage the succession processes. As the second-time-unlucky hypothesis predicts, it is highly likely that the next hereditary succession will trigger another authoritarian transition in North Korea, either via negotiation or violence, which is expected to transform it into either an oligarchy of Party-based guardians or a military regime.

#### (1) The Succession Plan: Young Successor, Guardians and Praetorians

The succession system unveiled at the aforementioned Party Delegates' Conference has the following characteristics. First, a power transition has just begun through the "third-generation succession" of Kim Jong-Un. Through Kim Jong-Un's promotion to the rank of 4-star general of the Korean People's Army (KPA), he has gained a foothold to take control over the military, while his sudden meteoric rise to the position of Vice Chairman of the KWP Central Military Committee (CMC) reveals Kim Jong-Il's intention to keep the military in check via the party.

Second, Kim Jong-Il's kinship members and a vassal-like entourage have been summoned to be guardians in charge of supervising and supporting the succession process. Members of the guardian cadre have been appointed to main positions in the KWP organizations such as the CMC, the Politburo, the KWP Central Committee (CC), the Central Party Secretariat, and so on. At the core of this emerging guardianship government, there are Kim Jong-Il's sister, Kim Kyong-Hui (4-star general, Politburo member, director of the KWP Light Industry Department), and her husband, Jang Song-Taek (Politburo candidate member, CMC member, NDC vice chairman, director of the KWP Administration Department). Other powerful confidants include Choe Ryong-Hae, close friend of Jang (Central Party Secretary, CMC member, former general secretary of the North Hwanghae Province Party Committee); Tae Jong-Soo (Central Party Secretary, former vice prime minister); Kim Pyong-Hae, the closest aide of Kim Jong-Il (Politburo candidate member, Central Party secretary); Park Jong-Soon (first vice director of the KWP Organization and Guidance Department); Moon Kyong-Duk (Central Party Secretary, Politburo candidate member, general secretary of the Pyongyang City Party Committee), who supposedly worked with Jang when Jang was the director (1989-1995) of the KWP



Youth and Three-Great-Revolution-Small-Team (TRT) Movement and Moon was a vice chairman of the Central Committee in the League of Socialist Working Youth (LSWY); and Kim Kyong-Ok (4-star general, CMC member, first vice director of the KWP Organization and Guidance Department). Most of them retain certain ties with the core guardians, Jang Sung-Taek and Kim Kyong-Hee.

On the other hand, it is difficult to avoid the impression that the Jang Sung-Taek line is being kept in check by Kim Jong-Il. The two men have a paradoxical relationship in that Jang can be the most powerful and trustworthy guardian for the young successor, but at the same time, he can be the greatest threat competing for the regime when Kim Jong-Il dies. Jang Sung-Taek, knowing his dear leader's suspicions, has no option but to be extremely cautious in his political path. Kim Jong-Il and Jang seemed to *tacitly* agree on the middle-ground terms which may temporarily satisfy both of them.

**Table 4. Guardians and Praetorians**

<b>Civilian Guardians</b>	<b>Kim Kyong-Hee</b> (4-star general, Politburo member, director of the KWP Light Industry Bureau), <b>Jang Sung-Taek</b> (Kim Kyong-Hee's husband, Politburo candidate member, CMC member, NDC vice chair), <b>Choi Ryong-Hae</b> (crony of Jang, Central Party Secretary, CMC member), <b>Kim Pyong-Hae</b> (close friend of Kim senior, Politburo candidate member, Central Party Secretary), <b>Mun Kyong-Duk</b> (Central Party Secretary, former LSWY vice chair), <b>Kim Kyong-Ok</b> ( first vice director of the KWP Organization and Guidance Department, 4-star general), <b>Park Jong-Soon</b> (first vice director of the KWP Organization and Guidance Department), and so on
<b>The New Military</b>	<b>Ri Young-Ho</b> (Jang's classmate at the Mankyungdae Academy, KPA General Chief of Staff, Politburo Standing Committee member, CMC vice chair, KPA <i>chasu</i> ), <b>Kim Jong-Gak</b> (first vice director of the KPA General Political Bureau, 4-star general), <b>Choi Boo-Il</b> (KPA Vice Chief of General Staff, 4-star general), <b>Kim Myong-Guk</b> (Chief of the General Staff Operations Bureau, CMC member), <b>Kim Young-Chul</b> (Director of the KWP Reconnaissance Bureau), <b>Jung Myong-Do</b> (Navy General Commander, 4-star admiral), <b>Oh Il-Jong</b> (newly promoted to the director of the KWP Military Department, CC member, former KPA general chief of staff), <b>Hyun Young-Chul</b> (Eighth Army Commander), <b>Kim Kyok-Sik</b> (4-star general, Fourth Army commander, former KPA General Chief of Staff), and so on

In terms of political experience and latent influence, as well as personal reliability—which is the most important quality in a supporter—Kim Jong-Il can be hard-pressed to find a guardian group that can surpass the power couple Jang Sung-Taek and Kim Kyong-Hee. It is widely believed that the couple is already making policy-decisions behind the scenes while Kim Jong-Il's health is failing, and it is also likely that Jang will be a principal manager of the crisis expected immediately after Kim Jong-Il's retirement. In this regard,



we need to note the rise of Jang's close aides, including Choe Ryong-Hae, Ri Young-Ho (Jang's classmate at the *Mankyungdae* Red-Flag Academy, KPA General Chief of Staff, Politburo Standing Committee member, CMC vice chair, KPA *chasu*), Woo Dong-Cheuk (first vice chairman of the State Security Department), Ji Jae-Ryong (director of the KWP International Department, ambassador to China), Park Jong-Soon (first deputy director of the KWP Organization and Guidance Department), Rhee Young-Su (allegedly director of the KWP Labor Department, former chairman of the LSWY Central Committee).

Third, there has been a partial generational shift in the military. The rise of members of the so-called new military leadership has been accompanied by the relative decline of the old military group dominated by Oh Kuk-Ryol and Kim Il-Chol. This move has a strong character of a preventative measure against any possible resistance by members of the old guard.

## (2) Exit out of Personalist Dictatorship: Conditions and Paths

Authoritarian regime transitions are usually propelled either from within or from below. In the North Korean case, transition by popular mobilization or revolutionary movement is not likely. Transitions from above are more likely. Investigating the composition of Pyongyang's guardianship government, three major agents can be identified. As my model of hereditary succession suggests, Kim Jong-Un's ascendancy as the sole and only dictator is not likely to happen. Conditions and potential paths and their feasibility conditions are summarized in Table 5.

As Table 5 shows, for Kim Jong-Un to succeed the throne as a personalist dictator requires too many things to be done. It is almost infeasible. However, his role as a balance between competing factions and institutions is significant in the future reconfiguration of the regime. He would need to solicit military intervention to overthrow the would-be civilian oligarchy to restore his authority as the personal dictator. This would lead not to the restoration of a personalist dictatorship but to the establishment of a military dictatorship or anarchy.

One of the most feasible paths is the construction of an oligarchy composed of civilian guardians (i.e., party leaders and technocrats). Although the authority and autonomy of the party has been severely impaired by Kim Jong-Il's personalist survival strategies, Kim Jong-Il shows an intention to restore party authorities and organizations to balance off the overly empowered military. This may bolster the power of core guardians led by Jang Sung-Taek as well as the security of his designated successor. The restored party could be the institutional base of the would-be oligarchy to assemble the elites and to build a consensus or pact among competing factions and actors about the future alloca-



tion of power. The regime would be recreated by negotiation. In case this scenario is realized, the current personalist regime would be changed into either a single-party regime or an elite oligarchy entrenched in the state. This possibility is the topic of the next section.

**Table 5. Post-Kim-Jong-Il Paths**

<b>Succession Methods</b>	<b>Main Actors</b>	<b>Regime Types (Feasibility)</b>	<b>Conditions</b>
<b>Hereditary Succession</b>	Kim Jong-Il to Kim Jong-Un	<b>Personalist Dictatorship</b> (Low)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Longevity of Kim Jong-Il as effective dictator</li> <li>(2) Rapid and reliable construction of Kim Jong-Un's own ruling clique and client network</li> <li>(3) Earlier assumption of real power to balance and even remove guardians without losing control over the whole regime</li> <li>(4) Secure fiscal ability to construct and maintain the extensive retinue system</li> </ul>
<b>Pacts</b>	Civilian Guardians	<b>Oligarchy</b> or <b>Collective Leadership</b> (Relatively Higher)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Earlier reactivation of party apparatuses</li> <li>(2) Strong alliances with party cadres and technocrats</li> <li>(3) Neutralization of the military and cooptation</li> <li>(4) Strong fiscal ability</li> <li>(5) Increase of successor's dependence on guardians</li> </ul>
<b>Coup</b>	The Military	<b>Military Junta</b> (Feasible)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Alliance with Kim Jong-Un</li> <li>(2) Exclusion of the old guards inside the barracks</li> <li>(3) Cooptation of a portion of party leaders</li> </ul>

Over a half-century of totalitarian rule and the “complete absence of institutions capable of channeling mass discontents into effective political action” (Noland 2007, 102) have suffocated social autonomy so as to make the political mobilization of mass discontent virtually impossible. “In a consolidated mono-organizational dictatorship, a repressive equilibrium can be instituted such that political voice (insurgent and reformist) will be too costly for most citizens no matter how dissatisfied” (Pfaff 2006, 25). As a result, even when the dictatorship was put into a critical juncture after Kim Il-Sung's death, many people chose not the way of resistance but of refugee. “With exit and voice blocked, dissatisfied actors” instead resorted to “inactivity and neglect” (Pfaff 2006, 26).

Under current conditions the direct coordination and political mobilization of the subjugated classes appears a remote fantasy, but with the addition of fractures among the elites, this latent explosive force may become a reality. However, the collapse of the public distribution system and the emergence of a self-sufficient means of survival through spontaneously emerging markets from below have accelerated the tendency toward social



secularization and economic rationalization, and the likelihood of automatic obedience to the idealized totalitarian mobilization system also appears to have proportionally declined.

While organized mobilization is impossible, sporadic and spontaneous revolts and protests become more possible than in the past. Even though such unorganized resistance is not likely to collapse or transform the regime, it might have significant effects on the configuration of power among competing actors. Even in this case, the spread of instability would not support peaceful change led by civilian leaders but would prompt violent intervention by the already politicized military.

## 2. Transition by Negotiation? Pact to Oligarchy

### (1) Guardian's Dilemma

The core guardians such as Jang Sung-Taek have fully enjoyed status and privileges in the current personalist regime. What would make them serve as the vanguard for potential regime change?

The core supporters such as Jang Sung-Taek have inevitably encountered the following three problems which foreshadow future instability, and the charter revision can be viewed as a byproduct of an unseen effort to overcome these issues.

First, the reason why absolute ruler Kim Jong-Il is lending power to supporters like Jang Sung-Taek is to ensure a successful succession. As long as they prove that their existence is valuable, Kim Jong-Il will continue to back them. Thus, the future of these supporting forces depends on the will of Kim Jong-Il. This will continue to be the case at least for as long as Kim Jong-Il remains in power.

Even after Kim Jong-Il is gone, guardian supporters have to maintain their links with Kim Jong-Un, the designated dynastic successor, without whom they may face formidable challenges from inside/outside the Party. Therefore, in order to maintain their vested power and keep potential rivals in check, the guardians of the succession system must continuously work to guarantee support through efforts to stabilize the succession system as a sort of “compensation” for their concentration of power. Even after Kim Jong-Il is gone, as indicated above, it would be dangerous to completely deconstruct the succession structure. Thus they must “protect” this structure, even if in name only.

Second, in view of Kim Jong-Il's severe health problems, Kim Jong-Un's youth and lack of experience, and the limitations North Korea faces as a failed state, there is no guarantee that Kim Jong-Il's intentions regarding the succession will be absolutely carried out. The succession could fail. Thus, it doesn't make sense for the supporting forces to invest





everything in Kim Jong-Un's solitary acquisition of power. Without arousing Kim Jong-Il's anger or suspicion, they must also invest in some kind of "insurance" allowing for retreat in the event of a crisis.

Third, as dangerous as the possible failure of the succession would be, equally threatening is Kim Jong-Un's "extraordinarily rapid" establishment as the supreme ruler. The young dictator's first target for attack will likely be the supporting group themselves. They need a "guarantee" of their future safety. Kim Jong-Un must not be allowed to grow strong enough to completely break away from their control. Thus, Kim Jong-Un's continued dependence on the supporting group must be guaranteed.

The best way to solve the dilemma is the institutionalization of the "collective bodies of power function[ing] regularly, which partly limit[s] the actions of the leader and provide[s] for a degree of political predictability" (Khlevniuk 2009, 247). Such a collective leadership system can turn the temporal authority of guardians as the caretaker of the succession process into the permanent institutional corporeality of actual power, to represent the collective will of the authoritarian selectorate. It can constrain the purview of the successor's strategic choice. On the other hand, such a collective system makes the successor one of them, who shares decision-making power. Thus the guardians are able to protect him, which, in turn, protects guardians from such unpredictable interventions as threats from the ambitious military.

## (2) Factional Alliance and Coalition Strategy: Revitalization of the Party?

In terms of the structure of supreme leadership there are only two periods in Soviet history: "oligarchy and dictatorship. The latter existed only under Stalin" (Khlevniuk 2009, 246). Under the oligarchic system, by restricting the functions through which Stalin achieved his dictatorship, the "collective bodies of power functioned regularly, which partly limited the actions of the leader and provided for a degree of political predictability" (Khlevniuk 2009, 247).

Revitalization and utilization of party organs such as the politburo and central committee can be one of the best strategies for civilian guardians to attain aforementioned institutionalized security. However, accumulated patrimonial legacies are bound to constrain the revival of party primacy. Most political actors are accustomed to patrimonial practices of struggle over privileges and spoils. Ideologically oriented loyalty is a scarce political resource in this context.

Under those unfavorable conditions for building a political consensus around the elites, earlier reactivation of party apparatuses is dependent upon the core guardians' per-



sonal managerial expertise as well as fiscal ability to grab sufficient economic inducements and opportunities to be distributed to factional allies. It is quite ironic to mobilize the patrimonial means to revitalize the party. First of all, it is necessary to construct a strong alliance with the party cadres and bureaucratic staff in the government and state enterprises, many of whom probably share common interests in reconstruction of the party and state organizations.

It is not so promising to, in a short period of time, rebuild the party's authority and organizations sufficiently enough to institutionally constrain the politicized military. Prior to the full restoration of the party's control of army, it is necessary to co-opt a substantial portion of the officer corps. Personal ties and connections need to be utilized for that purpose. The bloated institution of the NDC can be used for making a peace agreement with the generals, many of whom might be concerned about the loss of privileges and material benefits previously obtained. Selective reassurance is required to make an alliance with the military.

## V. CONCLUSION

The “second-time-unlucky” model suggests that institutional decay under the reign of the second-generation autocrat Kim Jong-Il has so weakened the autocracy that it is less likely that the third-generation succession will be completed without regime transmission. Whether it is civilian or military, the future regime is likely to be more vulnerable to domestic instability and international pressure, because it will lack a robust linchpin to consolidate the fragmented institutions and competing factions into a unified system.

However, such a prediction can neither mean that Kim Jong-Il will give up the planned third-generation succession nor that certain ambitious military men (or hawkish politicians) will restrain themselves. The succession processes would be better if full of vociferous clamors. North Korean leaders of guerrilla origins with a siege mentality are used to “approach[ing] domestic affairs and statecraft as perpetual warfare to be overcome through military style campaigns” (Scobell 2005, 20). Such a tendency strengthened under the Kim Jong-Il's *songun* politics can be stronger and self-reinforcing. Support from these military and internal security agencies that monopolize the means of violence and coercion is essential for regime survival, especially when a country becomes a failed state and the public is alienated from the regime. Kim Jong-Il's hard-line foreign policies as the



means to “retain support from core domestic constituencies” (Solingen 2007, 138) can be repeated in a more aggressive manner.

To embellish the new leadership in such a short period of time, there seems no other feasible option but to become a de facto nuclear state or to show off its strong military power. The guardianship government may go further down the road of military adventurism. In this case the new military will willingly pursue such policies as military provocations and nuclear weapons development to establish its power positions. The sinking of the *Cheonan* naval ship and the artillery attack on *Yeonpyeong* Island last November were good demonstrations of North Korea’s aggressive tendencies, which, “as the nuclear card has been played to its full extent” (Rydqvist 2009), are now more inclined to conventional provocations in sensitive areas. It seems to be planned to lay a foundation for Kim Jong-Un’s succession as empowering relatively young hardliners of Kim Jong-Un’s guardian cadres such as the new military men, including Kim Yong-Chul. Those aggressive external policies will surely provoke foreign hostilities, which, in turn, can satisfy the North Korean hawkish and powerful domestic audience. They can certainly impose additional costs. “But North Korean leaders are by far not the risk avoiding type. In fact, they thrive on risk taking” (Han 2010). Weakening father and young son cannot but be more sensitive to the demands of military-first guardians during the transition period. Thus, it is highly likely that the young Kim will take a more aggressive risk-taking stance to cement his credentials once he feels insecure about his supporting system being mainly dependent upon the power of armed praetorians, who are likely to regard external tensions as “windows of opportunity through which parochial interests can jump” (Sagan 2004, 56).

The more fragile the transitional process is, the more aggressive the regime’s external policies will be. As a warning about the final stage of the North Korea’s autocracy made in 1999 by Richard L. Armitage, former Deputy Secretary of State, predicted, “North Korea is a failed state on the verge of collapse and that ‘hard landing’ collapse [will] perhaps [be] accompanied by aggression” (Armitage 1999, 2). However, as the “second-time-unlucky” model suggests, the warning can be more persuasive and helpful not at that time after the initial hereditary succession but at this time of the third-generation succession processes.

Not a sudden collapse but a regime transition from within is more likely. The party-based oligarchy composed of civilian politicians and technocrats is likely to be established in the long run. However, the more aggressive new military accredited by the young successor can exploit the unpredictable and fluctuating situations immediately followed by the withdrawal of Kim Jong-Il for their own supremacy. In the latter case, a military junta or dictatorship can be installed. The civilian oligarchy seems to pursue a moderate domestic reform program to relieve the ever-growing popular discontent and to legitimate their



rule. For the latter purpose, it can install the young successor or another son of Kim Jong-Il as the icon of reform. Externally, it could pursue a kind of good-neighbor policy to attract needed foreign economic and political support. A peaceful coexistence can be favored to restrict the interventions of the military or hard-liners.

Whether it is civilian or not, the future regime is likely to be more vulnerable to domestic instabilities and international pressures without the robust linchpin to cement fragmented institutions and competing factions into a system. Exorcizing the pathologies of personalist *Führership* or iron-fist militarism, strategically tailored policy alternatives such as “selective engagement” with reform-oriented civilians and “invisible ostracization” of militarists by the targeted un-engagement and appropriate punishment need to be prearranged to promote the formation of an internationally cooperative and socialized civilian government. The first test has already begun with a series of provocations in 2010 that seemed to be planned and executed by the new military with the endorsement of Kim Jong-Un. ■

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## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Information on the major North Korean actors mainly depends upon sources from ROK Ministry of Unification (2010 and 2011), cross-referenced with the website of *Yonhap News Agency*, <http://www.yonhapnews.co.kr>.

<sup>2</sup> On the tripartite classification of authoritarian regimes into the subtypes of military, single-party, and personalist regime, see Huntington (1991, 110-121) and Geddes (2003, 50-69).

<sup>3</sup> On the role of the strong authoritarian ruling party, see Brownlee (2007a, 37-40)

<sup>4</sup> As a matter of fact, there are transitory mixed-forms such as the party/military hybrid regime in Poland under General Jaruzelski.

<sup>5</sup> The typical cases include the former Leninist-Stalinist party-states in Eastern Europe and the North Korean Workers' Party regime during the earlier reign of Kim Il-Sung.

<sup>6</sup> This once-famous motto of Stalin's is re-excerpted in Nureev (2008, 169).

<sup>7</sup> In the predatory state, the private rent-seeking interests prosper at the expense of public goods provision. The state extractive and intervention institutions are mobilized to loot the nation. See Onis (1991).

<sup>8</sup> On the Taiwanese case, see Roy (2003) and Taylor (2011).

<sup>9</sup> On the regime of the Duvaliers, see Abbott (1988); Ferguson (1988); Nicholls (1996); and Nicholls (1998, 153-181).

<sup>10</sup> These individuals are past Haitian dictators.

<sup>11</sup> On the Chiangs and Taiwanese democratization, see Tsai, Chen, and Yu (1987, 71-86); Taylor (2000); and Hsieh (2008, 11-24).

<sup>12</sup> For the political career of Kim Il-Sung, see Suh (1988).



<sup>13</sup> Most Yanan Group figures had been members of the Maoist New Democratic Party (Chairman: Kim Tu Bong) high-cadres before its merger into the KWP. After the fall of the Domestic Faction, they became the sole potential rivals to the Partisan Loyalists. Yanan conspirators included Ch'oe Ch'ang Ik (Vice Premier and concurrently Minister of Finance), Sŏ Hui (Chairman of the Federation of Trade), Yun Kong Hŭm (Minister of Commerce), Ko Pong Ki (South Hwanghae Provincial Party Chairman), Yi Sang Jo (DPRK Ambassador in Moscow), Yi Pil Kyu (Director of the Bureau of Construction Materials Industry in the Ministry of Industry), Chang P'yŏng Sang (Commander of the NKPA Fourth Army Group), Ch'oe Chong Hak (Chief of the General Political Bureau of NKPA), and other army officers.

<sup>14</sup> Despite close relations with and support from the Soviets, especially Soviet Ambassador Ivanov, the cohesiveness of the Soviet faction was low, this because their formation itself had been administered by the Soviets to support North Korean state building. While Pak Ch'ang Ok (Chairman, State Planning Commission, Politburo member—after former leader Hŏ Kai's suspicious suicide in 1955, he led the group), Kim Sŭng Hwa (Minister of Commerce) and Pak Ŭi Wan (Vice Minister and concurrently Chairman of the State Construction Commission) were active; Nam Il (former Vice Premier) and Pang Hak Se (Secret Police head) were very loyal to Kim Il-Sung.

<sup>15</sup> The basic notions of neo-patrimonialism are well expressed in an address made by Kim Jong-Il as follows. "It is a true feature of our society that all its members form a large harmonious family... In our country, everyone regards and supports the leader as they would their own father. They trust and follow the Party, regarding its embrace as that of their own mother." Kim Jong-Il, "On Carrying Forward the Juch'e Idea," Excerpted from United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (2005, 78).

<sup>16</sup> They include Tanchon Commercial Bank (designated as "the DPRK's main financial agent for the sale of conventional arms and ballistic missiles" in "U.N. panel freezes assets of N. Korean firms" CNN.Com/Asia, April 24, 2009. (<http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/asiapcf/04/24/un.nkorea>); Ch'angkwang Trust Bank (the biggest North Korean bank, which also manages the foreign accounts related to the transactions of arms trade, one of the major North Korean objects of American surveillance and sanction); East Asia Bank; Yongaksan Bank; and so on.



<sup>17</sup> The enterprises include Yongaksan General Trade Company (import and export of chemical products, machinery, electronic and metallurgical products), Yonhap Trading Company (munitions importation and exportation, and the procurement of foreign exchanges), First Brigade (specializing in the construction of secret facilities and special mansions for Kim Jong-Il, and also exporting gold and silver bullion); O-eun Trade Company (munitions supplies), Bugang Trading Company, Chilsung Trade Company (import of special vehicles, paper products, printing machinery), Eunsan Trade Company, Maebong General Trade Company, Yongsung Trade Company, and so on.

<sup>18</sup> Joo Hyun Kim estimates that while 50 percent of the budget is allotted to the Second Economy and 20 percent to the Third economy, only 25 percent is allocated to the First People's economy run by the state (cabinet). See Kim (2001).

<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, 40 percent of the whole North Korean population works for state factories, farms, and mining fields in the First People's economic sectors. See Hwang (2005, 167-211).



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