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Analysis on the 7th Congress of Korean Workers' Party (1): General Review

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North Korea held the Seventh Congress of the Workers' Party for 4 days starting on May 6 at 4.25 Cultural Hall in Pyongyang. Although the Seventh Congress of Korean Workers' Party (KWP) may aim to build the foundation of Kim Jong-un's reign for the long-term, a "spectacular plan" boasted by North Korea fell short of the expectation. And unlike the Sixth Congress of KWP, the Seventh Congress ended up becoming a feast enjoyed only by the few.

'Spectacular Plan' Failed to Present Vision for the Future

There seemed to be hardly anything new or hopeful in the "spectacular plan," which was described in an overall project report published by Party Central Committee. It's just a reaffirmation of Kim Il Sung-ism/Kim Jong Il-ism as a guiding ideology and Byungjin (parallel development) policy of pursuing the dual goal of economic development and nuclear weapons program as a national strategy.

North Korea's stance on international agenda and South Korea remains

unchanged: denuclearization of the world, signing a peace agreement, obtaining nuclear power as a means of self-defense, withdrawal of United States Forces Korea (USFK) from the Korean peninsula, Three Principles of National Reunification, and federation approach toward unification. Pyongyang announced its five-year plan for developing its economy, which simply turned out to be a reiteration of the claims that the North had already made without forward-looking and detailed measures to economic management and reform.

The 7th Congress has resolved the Byungjin policy's intractable and controversial issue of whether "nuclear should go first or the economy." Kim Jong-un announced that North Korea has become an invincible military powerhouse and a nation armed with the strongest Juche ideology (North Korea's dominant ideology of self-reliance) in the universe and that it will diligently fulfill the obligations of the international community as a "responsible nuclear state." He also set the tone that "making an all-out-effort to build an economic power is our primary goal," which makes the policy direction of "nuclear first and economic development next" official. Since the end of last year, Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) has emphasized the importance of "Changangryeok" (the power to survive through its own efforts). It can be interpreted as a counteraction to toughened international sanctions and China's pressure on the North. The Seventh Congress also gave weight to Changangryeok-first policy emphasizing that "Changangryeok has led and carved out North Korea's triumphant history." In addition to that, other arguments that were made at the Congress included achieving the economic independence and the economic self-reliance through a food self-sufficiency and the use of domestic facilities/resources and overcoming the limitation of a lean-to-one-side policy in foreign trade.

Politics led by Workers' Party and Stable Generational Shift

Pyongyang placed its focus on establishing the system of the monolithic leadership

through an idealization of Kim Jong-un in the process of and preparation for the Seventh Congress. In Kim Jong-un era, the process of power secession and the manipulation of symbols unfolded very rapidly within a shorter period of time compared to the Kim Jong-il era. Kim Jong-un, who is young and hadn't had enough time to prepare for power succession, has strived to rapidly strengthen his own authority as a "suryong (supreme leader)" by celebrating the 100th anniversary of Kim Il-sung's birth on April, 2012 and the 7th anniversary of the foundation of the Korean Workers' Party on October, 2015. And through this Seventh Congress, he set out to double such impacts.

Kim Jong-un also opened a new position of the Chairman of the Workers' Party of Korea for himself and attempted to solidify his authority and status as the supreme leader of the party. That was intended to supplement the lack of personal leadership with institutional leadership. The First Secretary of the Workers' Party of Korea was the party's supreme leader as stipulated in its protocol but in name only. This position was seen as being abnormal and one-legged in its form. Kim Jong-un assuming the title of the Chairman of KWP indicates that the party's top position has changed from work-oriented·executive style to organizing·giving instruction style. This change may suggest that "party (consultative entity) - centered politics" has begun along with the expansion of Political Bureau. However, Suryong System (Suryong Dominant Party-State System with the power concentration on Kim Jong-un) and the party consultative entity are bound to collide with each other, which hints that how the party consultative entity actually operates remains to be seen.

At the 7th Congress, the plan for pursuing the stabilization and renewal of the workforce in parallel through a gradual generational shift was presented while maintaining the mixed policy that embraces the youth, middle-aged, and elderly. In other words, this personnel strategy must have helped lay the foundation for consolidating Kim Jong Un's ruling for a long time by stabilizing the very top class, making the top class loyal to the regime, and organizing the generational shift of

the middle and upper class. It's noteworthy to point out that 70% of members at Party Central Committee (candidate members) were newly selected compared to the 3th Conference of Party Representatives in 2010.

Mysterious "Festival Reserved only for Them"

177 representatives of delegates from 118 countries participated in the 6th Workers' Congress in 1980. Some of the top-level representatives also make an appearance at the event, including Li Xiannian, Vice Premier in China, Viktor Vasilyevich Grishin, Full Member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Ahmed Sekou Toure, President of Guinea, and Robert Gabriel Mugabe, President of Zimbabwe. However, this time hardly any ministerial-level representatives appeared at the 7th Congress, let alone top-level dignitaries. In addition to that, how the date for the 7th Workers' Party was set remains to be unknown. The 6th Workers' Congress was held in 1980, a year that celebrated the 35th anniversary of the foundation of KWP. To this end, it seems to be more reasonable to hold the Seventh Congress in 2015, which was the 70th anniversary since the foundation of KWP. Furthermore, the timing for the 7th Congress didn't correspond with the will of Kim Jong-il that the Party's Congress should be held once the economic issues were settled. There are not many resources left in the economic sector since North Korean residents are feeling exhausted after having been mobilized to prepare for the 70th anniversary of the foundation of KWP last year. And toughened international sanctions against the North didn't help at all. Early May happens to be the time where all the residents are mobilized for rice planting in farming villages. Either it was Kim Jong-un's impromptu decision or advanced nuclear program that might have affected the schedule of the Party's Congress.

DPRK has attempted to use the Seventh Workers' Congress to turn the circumstances of internal affairs around after having faced with tougher sanctions against its provocation. Pyongyang suggested holding an inter-Korean dialogue such as a military



summit and set out to ease the U.S. pressure on North Korea by mentioning the possibility of fulfilling the NPT obligations. The North will try to undermine the impetus of the South Korea's policy toward North Korea by triggering a South-South conflict and nullify the international cooperation by leveraging China's two-track approach of sanctions and negotiation. ©KINU 2016

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