Liu Zhihe: Workers' Party of Korea;

a Brief Introduction to the 70-years-Brutal Inner-party struggle

**May 2015**

**Author is a senior researcher of Korean Issue and Cold War**

**Translated by Kemal Okur**

Recently, it was reported that North Korean People's Armed Forces Minister Hyon Yong Chol was killed for being disloyal to the leader. If the news is true, Hyon Yong Chol has become another victim of the North Korean inner-party struggle. This news reflects a fact from the side, that is, the Workers' Party of Korea, which is full of personality cult, extremely strict organization, and with highly centralized leadership, is not monolithic. Considering that Kim Jong-un has been constantly purging military generals and political veterans since he came to power, it can be seen that the struggle within the Workers' Party is extremely fierce. Throughout the history of the Workers' Party of Korea, the struggle within the party has been consistent, and almost all of the struggles within the party have been regarded as life-and-death class struggles. The losers are often uprooted and have a miserable end. The Workers' Party launches a large-scale purge campaign almost every decade.

In the 1950s, it was mainly factional struggles, in the 1960s, it was mainly line struggles, in the 1970s and 1980s, it was mainly struggles among successors to power, and in the 1980s and 1990s, it was mainly economic policy struggles. With the successive changes of North Korean leaders this year, consolidating power and attacking political enemies have become the norm in North Korean politics.

**1. At the beginning of the founding days of the Party, the Party cleared away the factions.**

The Workers' Party of Korea was not created by Kim Il-sung alone.As early as 1925, under the direct guidance of the Communist International, Korean communists established the Communist Party of Korea, led by Kim Jae-bong and Park Heon-young.However, due to the harsh suppression of the Japanese colonial authorities and the split within the party, it had to be revoked by the Communist International in 1928.Most of the communists who lost their organizational ties were scattered in Korea, especially in the southern part of the peninsula, engaged in underground struggles.Other Korean revolutionary patriots went to China and the Soviet Union respectively, and each developed into an independent faction.Some other cadres stayed in the northern mountainous areas of Korea to persist in guerrilla warfare. Kim Il-sung was just one of them.Later, due to the encirclement and suppression of the Japanese army, the guerrillas could not gain a foothold in Korea and had to enter China.They were led by the Northeast Anti-Japanese Democratic United Army.As the situation deteriorated, the Korean guerrillas retreated to the Soviet Far East with the Anti-Japanese United Army.At this time, Kim Il-sung gradually grew into the leader of the guerrillas and was recognized by the Soviet Union.

In August 1945, the Korean guerrillas invaded North Korea together with the Soviet army.Since there were few communists in the north, the Soviet Union designated Kim Il-sung, a former mid-level officer of the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army, to reorganize the Communist Party of Korea.Because the guerrillas represented by Kim Il-sung had little influence and deep roots in North Korea, they had to rely on the prestige of Cho Man-sik, known as the "Gandhi" of North Korea.Cho Man-sik was selected as the nominal leader of the North Korean administrative authorities, and Kim Il-sung was only a deputy.After Kim Il-sung returned to his country, on the one hand, he expressed his acceptance of the leadership of the Central Committee of the Korean Communist Party in Seoul, Park Heon-young, and on the other hand, he established the North Korean Communist Party Bureau, but was criticized by the Seoul Central Committee.Party organizations in some parts of the north even once expressed their refusal to accept the leadership of the North Korean Bureau.

In October 1945, the Communist Party of North Korea, with guerrillas as the main body, was established, led by Kim Il-sung;in March 1946, the Korean Independence League, which was originally active in Yan'an and Taihang Mountains in China, was reorganized into the Korean New People's Party, led by Kim Il-bong.In August of the same year, the Communist Party of North Korea and the Korean New People's Party merged into the Workers' Party of North Korea.In November 1946, the South Korean Communist Party (founded in September 1945, led by Pak Heon-young, who had been fighting against Japan in Korea), the Korean People's Party (founded in November 1946), and the South Korean New People's Party (founded in July 1946) also merged into the South Korean Workers' Party.On October 10, 1949, the South and North Korean Workers' Parties merged and unified, with Kim Il-sung as their leader.At the beginning of the founding of the Labor Party, the struggle within the party was very fierce.Those who insisted on domestic struggle included the Southern Faction and the Northern Faction, and those who insisted on foreign struggle included the Soviet Faction (also known as the Moscow Faction), the Yan'an Faction (also known as the Chinese Faction), and the Guerrilla Faction (also known as the Anti-Japanese United Army Faction).

Among them, the domestic faction had the greatest influence due to its long-term persistence in domestic struggle and was the main force of the Worker’s Party.The Soviet Faction was mainly composed of Koreans who were born in the Soviet Union and obtained Soviet citizenship and was mainly concentrated in the propaganda system and technical arms of the army.The Yan'an Faction was large in number and had participated in China's revolutionary struggle and had rich combat experience and was the main force of the army.Although the guerrilla faction was the weakest, it had a political advantage because it was familiar with the Soviets and was the first to receive the support of the Soviet army.Soon, Kim Il-sung began to launch an internal struggle within the party, deliberately eliminating political dissident forces.

The first to be eliminated was Cho Man-sik, who had the highest prestige but the shallowest foundation.Kim Il-sung, with the help of the Soviet army, arrested Cho Man-sik, a representative of nationalists, in 1946.In 1950, as the Korean People's Army was defeated, Cho Man-sik, who had been under house arrest, was secretly killed by Kim Il-sung.

The second group to be attacked was the Northern faction, which had a shallower foundation.Before and after the establishment of the Worker’s Party, the representatives of the Northern faction, Wu Qixie and Zhu Ninghe, were repeatedly criticized by the Anti-Japanese United Army and the Soviet Union faction at party meetings.Subsequently, Wu Qixie was labelled an "anti-Soviet element" and was demoted.The other members of the Northern faction were dismissed from their posts.In April 1958, Wu Qixie was demoted to the deputy director of a local farm and then disappeared from the political arena.As the struggle within the party deepened, Kim Il-sung maneuvered, won over and beat his opponents, and gradually expanded his power.

In 1950, the Korean War broke out, providing Kim Il-sung with a rare opportunity to concentrate power and strike at his political enemies.Three days after the war began, the Military Commission, the highest authority during the war, was established.Kim Il-sung served as chairman and became the supreme commander of the People's Army.Through the wartime system, Kim Il-sung monopolized the power of the party, government and army, and began to purge other factions on a large scale.As the Korean People's Army was gradually defeated in the war, Kim Il-sung put the blame for the defeat on his political enemies.

The first to be attacked was the Soviet faction.In 1951, Xu Jiayi, a member of the Soviet faction, was dismissed from his post as the Central Secretary on the grounds of ineffective party expansion.In April 1953, when revealing Lee Seung-ye's "treason group", Kim Il-sung claimed that Xu Jiayi supported and participated in the domestic faction's attempted coup.Kim Il-sung presided over an emergency meeting of the Central Committee and criticized Xu Jiayi in an interrogation-style manner.Not long after the meeting, Xu Jiayi committed suicide, and other relevant personnel were purged one after another.The Soviet faction suffered a serious blow.When the North Korean army collapsed across the board, Kim Il-sung began to attack Wu Ting, the most powerful figure of the Yan'an faction.Wu Ting had joined the Communist Party of China in 1925, served as the commander-in-chief of the Shanghai workers' riot in 1929, participated in many Red Army battles, and was the only Korean who had walked the entire Long March.He was deeply trusted by Peng Dehuai, one of the earliest founders of the Chinese People's Liberation Army artillery, and the leader of the Koreans who participated in the Chinese revolution. In 1950, Kim Il-sung denounced Wu Ting for "warlordism", accused him of being responsible for the initial defeat of the war, and pushed the responsibility for the loss of Pyongyang to Wu Ting, revoked his position as a member of the Central Committee, and expelled him from the party forever.Wu Ting later went to Changchun, China for treatment due to illness.Peng Dehuai arranged for him to go to the best local hospital.In 1953, Wu Ting died alone in a military hospital in North Korea.Kim Il-sung and Chinese Marshal General Peng Dehuai developed a grudge because of this incident.After learning that Peng Dehuai was criticized at the Lushan Conference in 1959, Kim Il-sung took the opportunity to add insult to injury and called the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "indicating that Kim Il-sung strongly agreed with the treatment of Peng and asked to meet Mao Zedong in person, saying that he had a lot to say to him."

Kim Il-sung then purged Park Il-woo and Fang Hushan, two important leaders of the Yan'an faction.Park Il-woo and Fang Hushan were both experienced old revolutionaries.Park Il-woo was the deputy political commissar of the Sino-North Korean Joint Command at the time (the commander and political commissar was China's Peng Dehuai), equivalent to the general political commissar of the People's Army.He was considered Mao Zedong's personal representative in North Korea and served as the Minister of Internal Affairs at the time.Fang Hushan was the commander of the Fifth Corps, which had the most outstanding military exploits and had fought to the southernmost tip of the Korean Peninsula.He was the commander and political commissar of the 166th Division of the Northeast Field Army.At that time, the Yan'an faction generally doubted Kim Il-sung's military command ability because of the failure in the early stages of the Korean War. Park proclaimed himself as the representative of the Korean revolutionaries who returned from China, forming cliques and factions, and had a tendency to confront Kim Il-sung.After the end of the Korean War, Park was demoted and dismissed.At the 16th Plenary Session of the Second Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea held in April 1955, Park Il-woo and Fang Hushan were removed from their positions inside and outside the party as "anti-party sectarians" and expelled from the party.Their subsequent life and death were unknown.

During the war, Kim Il-sung needed the Southern Faction to cooperate with the frontal military struggle in the rear, so he valued the Southern Faction.Lee Seung-yeop, a capable general of the Southern Faction, took control of the Central Liaison Department of the Workers' Party of Korea, which was responsible for handling matters related to guerrilla warfare in South Korea, and established the Kumgang Political Academy, which was not controlled by Kim Il-sung and was responsible for training political work teams and armed guerrilla force cadres to be sent to South Korea.However, as the front line gradually stabilized near the 38th parallel, Kim Il-sung saw that there was no hope of counterattacking the South and the strength of the Southern Faction in the South had greatly decreased.In early 1953, Kim Il-sung arrested Pak Heon-young and Lee Seung-yeop.Less than a week after signing the armistice agreement at Panmunjom, 10 people including Minister of Justice Lee Seung-yeop, Ambassador to China Jeon O-jik, Member of the First Supreme People's Assembly Kim O-sung, Leader of the 10th Detachment of the South Korean Liberation Guerrilla Maeng Jong-ho, Liaison Minister of the Workers' Party Park Seung-won, Liaison Minister of the Workers' Party Bae Cheol, Social Minister of the Workers' Party Kang Moon-seok, and Ministry of Internal Affairs cadre Baek Heung-bok were sentenced to death for the crime of "employed spies of the US imperialists", and two others were sentenced to 15 and 12 years in prison.At the same time, many leading members of the Southern Faction were dismissed from their posts as Central Committee members and expelled from the party.Two years later, the leader of the Southern Faction Park Heon-young was sentenced to death for "anti-party treason" and was immediately executed.Thus, the Southern Faction was completely annihilated.

Since 1956, Kim Il-sung has vigorously promoted "politics from one's own party", which has caused backlash from other factions.At that time, the anti-personality cult of the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union also blew to North Korea, giving the Yan'an faction and the Soviet faction an excellent opportunity to fight back.At the plenary meeting of the Party Central Committee on August 30 of that year, the Yan'an faction attacked Kim Il-sung, proposed to oppose the personality cult, strengthen democracy within the party, and demanded to change the policy of focusing on heavy industry to improve people's living standards.However, most of the participants were guerrillas, and the opposition went from criticizing to being criticized in less than a day, which was known as the "August Sectarian Incident".

Kim Il-sung then immediately retaliated against the challengers of the Yan'an faction and the Soviet faction. The representatives of the Yan'an faction, Kim Il-bong and Choi Chang-ik, were criticized, expelled from the party, and removed from their posts.Even though China and the Soviet Union tried to mediate, Kim Il-sung still purged all the Yan'an faction on trumped-up charges.Kim Il-sung then carried out ideological purges throughout North Korea.The declassified Soviet internal documents recorded Kim Il-sung's purge process as follows: within a month, more than 2,000 people were purged.By 1958, all the Yan'an faction members who remained in North Korea were purged, and the rest went into exile in China.After that, Sino-North Korean relations deteriorated sharply.Most of the party, government and military cadres who retained Soviet citizenship among the Soviet faction returned to the Soviet Union.Lee Sang-cho, the North Korean ambassador to the Soviet Union, had already sought political asylum in the Soviet Union.By 1961, the Soviet faction was also annihilated, and Soviet-North Korean relations turned cold.

After the purge of the domestic faction, the Soviet faction and the Yan'an faction, the leadership of the Workers' Party of Korea basically no longer came from all corners of the country, but was dominated by the guerrilla faction represented by Kim Il-sung.Kim Il-sung eventually defeated other forces within the party and controlled the entire party. Kim Il-sung's faction was the smallest, but he was able to finally seize power.Of course, there were factors such as timing and prestige, but it was mainly due to his political ability.He was able to obtain the support of major countries such as China and the Soviet Union, especially the Soviet Union, and used external forces to attack the opposition, and made China and the Soviet Union acquiesce to the fait accompli.At the same time, he used the power of the various factions of the Labor Party, which were constantly fighting, to make maneuvers, pull one faction against another, divide and rule, and eventually gradually eliminate the opposition.Most importantly, he grasped the fundamentals of North Korean society and gained the support of the largest class - farmers.At the same time, Kim Il-sung, who came from the guerrillas group, was deeply aware of the importance of the army and firmly controlled the army. In the struggle within the party, **Kim Il-sung held high the banner of independence and autonomy, excluded the influence of China and the Soviet Union**, and won the support of the North Korean people who had long lived under the shadow of foreign countries, especially the grassroots members of the Labor Party who were nationalistic.

**II. Line Struggle and Establishment of Authority**

However, the unity within the North Korean party did not last long.In the 1960s, as the situation changed, the leadership of the Workers' Party, which was mainly composed of guerrillas group, split into two factions.One faction was the "Gaksan Underground Work Faction" (abbreviated as "Party Affairs Faction" or "Gaksan Faction"), represented by Park Jinzhe, who was sent back to the country by the Anti-Japanese United Party Organization and the Fatherland Restoration Society during the Anti-Japanese War and engaged in underground revolutionary work in the northern part of the Korean Peninsula.The other faction was represented by General Kim Changbong, who had been following Kim Il-sung in the anti-Japanese armed guerrilla struggle in Northeast China and the Soviet Union.They were later called the "military opposition." At that time, Kim Il-sung's policy of emphasizing military and neglecting economy caused the opposition between the Gaksan Faction and the military faction.The contradiction between the Gaksan Faction and Kim Il-sung was mainly as the following: the Gaksan Faction proposed the priority of economic policy and opposed Kim Il-sung's policy of giving equal importance to national defense and economy.

Gaksan Faction opposed the unrealistic distortion of party history and military history, exaggerating Kim Il-sung's personal role, and building monuments and historical sites everywhere in the country.Gaksan Faction had opposed the internal designation of Kim Jong-il as Kim Il-sung's successor, and believed that hereditary succession was a major taboo in the socialist system.The military opposition faction, based on the tense confrontation between North and South Korea on the Korean Peninsula at the time, advocated further strengthening of national defense and achieving reunification of the North and the South by force.At the 15th Plenary Session of the 4th Central Committee of the Workers' Party in May 1967, Kim Il Sung criticized and purged the "Gaksan faction" in the name of opposing the bourgeoisie and revisionism and establishing Kim Il Sung's Juche ideology as the only ideology of the Workers' Party of Korea.The North Korean authorities claimed that this plenary session thoroughly exposed the crimes of Park Jinzhe and other anti-party revisionists and exposed the great harm they had caused to the party's organization, ideological work, national reunification and foreign affairs, and revoked their positions inside and outside the party and expelled them from the party.The purge of the "Gaksan faction" spread to all parts of the country.By 1968, about two-thirds of the local party and government cadres in North Korea were implicated.After the purge of the "Gaksan faction" " the "military opposition" faction dominated and threatened Kim Il-sung's position.

In order to establish his own prestige, Kim Il-sung took the initiative to provoke a series of radical military actions under the banner of national reunification.In January 1968, the North Korean navy captured the U.S. spy ship Pueblo, which was collecting intelligence off the coast of Wonsan Port on the east coast of North Korea, causing extremely tense relations between North Korea and the United States at the time, an event known in history as the "Pueblo Crisis." In April 1969, to celebrate Kim Il-sung's birthday, two fighter jets of the North Korean Air Force shot down an American EC-121 electronic reconnaissance aircraft that was collecting intelligence in the Sea of ​​Japan.For a time, the situation on the Korean Peninsula was extremely tense.On land, since 1967, the conflicts between North Korea and South Korea in the demilitarized zone along the military demarcation line have increased greatly.According to the declassified documents after the collapse of the Soviet Union, most of these conflicts were provoked by North Korea.In January 1968, North Korea sent a 31-member armed task force to secretly infiltrate South Korea, preparing to assassinate South Korean President Park Chung-hee.When approaching the Blue House presidential palace, they were discovered and the two sides exchanged fire, and most of the team members were killed.After the failure of the "Blue House incident", on November 4, North Korea sent an armed spy ship carrying about 120 people to invade the east coast of South Korea and land, but landing failed again.In addition, the North Korean army was ordered to dig a large number of military tunnels in the demilitarized zone along the military demarcation line between North Korea and South Korea, leading to the direction of South Korea, attempting to use the tunnels to raid South Korea, but the tunnels were also discovered by the South Korean side.To this end, Kim Il Sung held the military leadership responsible for these failures on the grounds of "left-wing blind activism", and accused them as advocating "warlordism" and attacked them for the failure to implement the party's military line.At the Fourth (Enlarged) Plenary Session of the Fourth Party Committee of the Korean People's Army in January 1969, Kim Il Sung "exposed and smashed the conspiracy of anti-party revisionists and warlord bureaucrats hidden in the party and the army.” Kim Il Sung used senior generals such as General Kim Chang-bong, member of the Party Central Political Committee and Minister of National Defense of the Cabinet, General Choi Kwang, alternate member of the Party Central Political Committee and Chief of the General Staff of the People's Army, and General Heo Bong-hak, alternate member of the Party Central Political Committee, Secretary of the Central Secretariat and former Director of the General Political Bureau of the People's Army as scapegoats, and comprehensively eliminated the "military opposition" faction by means of election failure, dismissal and exile.

By purging the "Gaksan faction" and the "military opposition" faction, Kim Il-sung finally achieved his goal of establishing his Juche ideology as the only ideological system of the Workers' Party of Korea.He was elected to the post of President of the country, which was specially created for him.Together with his tenure as General Secretary of the Party and Commander of the People's Army, he finally achieved the comprehensive Kim Il-sungization of the Party, government and army, and removed the obstacles to determining his son Kim Jong-il as his successor.

**3. Fighting for the throne and fighting among the people**

As Kim Il-sung gradually aged, the issue of succession was put on the agenda. In the early days, Kim Jong-il had a shallow foundation and strong opposition within the party, so Kim Il-sung chose his younger brother, Kim Yong-ju. In 1970, on Kim Il-sung's 60th birthday, North Korea suddenly amended the constitution to establish Kim Yong-ju's absolute authority and ensure that Kim Yong-ju, the No. 2 figure in the party, could take over smoothly. However, at the party congress four years later, Kim Yong-ju was criticized for "lacking ambition and not assisting Kim Il-sung well." After this announcement, Kim Jong-il was determined to be the successor, and Kim Yong-ju was eventually demoted to deputy prime minister and then exiled. Kim Yong-ju did not return to capital city Pyongyang until 1993.

Kim Il-sung had three sons, among whom the eldest son Kim Jong-il and the second son Kim Pyong-il were the candidates for succession, and the competition was the most intense. Kim Jong-il was opposed by Kim Dong-kyu, then secretary of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party and vice president of the country, and General Nam Il, then vice premier. In 1976, General Nam Il was in a car accident while inspecting in other places and died unexpectedly. In 1977, Kim Dong-kyu and his supporters were accused of "poisoning the party's only ideological system of the Ten Programs", expelled from the party and imprisoned in a political prisoner camp, and their life and death were unknown. So far, Kim Jong-il has completely determined his position as successor.

On May 31, 1986, Kim Il-sung clearly announced: **"The successor issue has been successfully resolved."** In 1990, Kim Jong-il was elected as the first vice chairman of the National Defense Commission (equivalent to the Central Military Commission), served as the Supreme Commander of the Korean People's Army in 1991, and was elected as the chairman of the National Defense Commission in 1993.Kim Il-sung died of illness in 1994, and Kim Jong-il took over, and North Korea officially entered the Kim Jong-il era.

**4. Ten Crisis events, Consolidation of Power**

Although Kim Il-sung had purged opposition factions within the party many times, Kim Jong-il still faced many challenges from dissident forces within the party after he came to power.During Kim Jong-il's period, the struggle within the party intensified and took on new characteristics.When Kim Jong Il came to power, he was faced with the dramatic changes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.The Soviet socialist economic system represented by the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance collapsed (COMECON), and North Korea lost its largest external aid.The relationship between North Korea and the United States remained tense, and Western countries increased sanctions on North Korea. In 1992, China and South Korea established diplomatic relations, and North Korea was extremely isolated in the international community.Domestically, due to the rigid and highly centralized system, North Korea's economy was getting worse and worse.After Kim Il Sung died of illness, North Korea suffered from natural disasters for many years, the so-called "Misery March" period, and distrust and suspicion was pervasive in North Korean society.Under these extremely difficult conditions, Kim Jong Il made consolidating the regime and purging opposition forces his top priority.Since Kim Jong Il did not have Kim Il Sung's war experience and lofty prestige, he did not rely on legal struggles within the party to attack political enemies during his time, but relied on intelligence personnel to spy, inform, and directly purge political enemies through secret means.The appointment and removal of cadres was not based on merit and seniority like in the Kim Il Sung period, but was based on their loyalty to leadership.The elite class was often won over with rewards in the hope of working together, while the middle and lower-level cadres and the common people were maintained with the use of purges to maintain a reign of terror and eliminate dissident forces in society.

In October 1992, Kim Jong Il discovered that the Soviet returnees were criticizing the North Korean system. In order to prevent foreign ideas from influencing North Korea and to prevent the dramatic changes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe from happening in North Korea, Kim Jong Il eliminated more than 20 people and dismissed more than 300 returnees. Since then, all officers and generals who had studied in the Soviet military education institutions since 1986, as well as military attachés and deputy military attachés in the embassy in Moscow, were arrested. All officers who returned from the Soviet Union have been reported and investigated. In 1994 alone, more than 600 generals and senior officers were forcibly demobilized. The number of those executed, still remains a mystery.

In April 1995, the "Sixth Army Corps Purge" incident occurred in North Korea. It was rumored that the Sixth Army Corps (stationed in North Hamgyong Province, close to China) was planning a coup and rebellion. Kim Jong Il sent General Kim Yong-chun to the suspicious Sixth Army Corps and cruelly executed the suspects. It is said that hundreds of soldiers were executed. However, it is generally believed that the economic situation was deteriorating at that time, the people were hungry, and even the soldiers who were given priority had a very difficult life. But general analysis of the real event suggests that: At that time, when the economic situation deteriorated, and the common people had no food to eat. Even the prioritized military personnel had a difficult life. More than 20 people, including the political commissar of the Sixth Army Corps, the secretary of the Xianjingbei Party organization, and the general manager of the trading company, these local leaders were only using their power to engage in foreign trade business, embezzled foreign exchange income, in fact they hadn’t engaged any military rebellion.

In 1997, the infamous "Deepening Group Incident" occurred in North Korea. Kim Jong Il felt the dissatisfaction of the North Korean people after experiencing the "Difficult March" and urgently needed a scapegoat for the dissatisfaction of people. So Kim Jong Il used Seo Kwan-hee, the agricultural secretary of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea, who was detained in the 7th Re-education Center of the Ministry of Social Security for suspected embezzlement of 30 tons of fertilizer for his relatives. Kim Jong Il ordered "to treat Seo Kwan-hee as a South Korean spy." Jang Sung-taek, who was then the administrative minister of the Organization Department of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea, pushed forward the matter together with Ri Chol, the instructor of the Organization Department of the Central Committee in charge of the Social Security Department, and Choe Mun-deok, the director of the Political Bureau of the Social Security Department. As a result, Seo Kwan-hee was accused of "systematically persecuting our agriculture as a spy of the United States and South Korea in order to starve our people to death". Seo Kuan-hee was then publicly executed together with Hwang Jin-sook in front of the citizens of Pyongyang. After the "Seo Kuan-hee Incident", Kim Jong-il organized the "Deepening Group" within the Ministry of Social Security and used it to carry out a large-scale purge. After its establishment, the “Deepening Group” manipulated and created the so-called "Ryongsong Incident". The "Ryongsong Incident" was held under the pretext of "investigating spies who had infiltrated our internal affairs during the Korean War".

From 1996 to 2000, countless North Korean cadres and their families were arrested. More than 3,000 people were beaten to death and more than 10,000 family members were detained in the first phase of interrogation alone. In the second phase of arrests, even Wen Chengshu, the responsible secretary of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea, and Xu Runxi, the former responsible secretary of Pyongyang City, were among the arrested. More than 2,000 people, including 4 cabinet ministers, were executed. Among them, Wen Chengshu could not bear the torture and committed suicide by hitting the wall in prison. It is said that the incident involved more than 25,000 North Korean cadres, thousands of whom were shot, and the rest were dismissed or detained in shelters.

**5. Economic reforms have created a slight ripple in stagnant seas**

Since 1970s, North Korea's economic system has become increasingly rigid, and it is at a disadvantage position compared to South Korea's economy. After the 1990s, North Korea's fatigue was fully revealed, and its economy declined and even on the verge of collapse. It was difficult to even feed its own people, and it had to use nuclear blackmail in exchange for economic assistance. At this time, the economies of neighboring China, South Korea, Japan and even Russia were thriving. Under this sharp contrast, some knowledgeable people in the North Korean system began to gradually explore the path of economic reform. Although North Korean society from top to bottom wanted to improve the economic situation, those who advocated economic reform were a minority after all, and they did not form any social or political group, let alone a clique, but this fact did not prevent Kim Jong Il from using intra-party struggles to attack reformers. North Korea's economic system is still a highly centralized Soviet planned economic system just like the Stalin period. China has already domestically discussed the drawbacks of this model in detail in the 1980s, so I won't repeat them here. In addition, North Korea's Juche ideology emphasizes military-first politics and has always emphasized national defense construction, with economic construction taking second place. In the economic structure of North Korea', heavy industry development is given priority, while light industry and agriculture are neglected. Kim Il-sung once said: “**People can survive without candy, but people cannot survive without bullets”.**

After the founding of North Korea, people have been tightening their belts for a long time, and their living standards have not improved significantly. After Kim Il-sung died of illness, the economic situation further deteriorated, and it was even difficult to maintain the status quo in the economic development. Kim Dal-hyun, Vice Premier of the State Council and Chairman of the State Planning Commission of North Korea, is an elite coming from Kim Il-sung's family. Kim Dal-hyun was known as an economic expert and was particularly trusted by Kim Il-sung. After visiting South Korea, he realized that reform and opening up was the only way for North Korea to survive, and began to work hard to develop the North Korean economy. Kim Dal-hyun advocated restarting the Xingnan Fertilizer Plant built during the Japanese occupation to solve the people's livelihood problems. Kim Dal-hyun advocated moving the $870 million for the construction of the Kumsusan Memorial Palace, Kim Il-sung's mausoleum, to the Xingnan Fertilizer Plant, which was not tolerated by Kim Il-sung, who was vigorously promoting the cult of personality. In 1993, Kim Dal-hyun was criticized and demoted to the head of a nearly bankrupt chemical plant. In 2000, he committed suicide on the eve of his arrest by the Ministry of Security. Since then, no one dared to mention the promotion of agricultural equipment renewal, and the Xingnan Fertilizer Plant has now become a pile of scrap metal. Since the mid-1990s, North Korea's agricultural production has declined year after year, the food gap has reached more than half, and a large number of North Korean civilians have starved to death. In February 1997, Hwang Chang-yop, then a member of the Central Committee and Secretary of the Workers' Party of Korea, fled to South Korea via the South Korean Embassy in China.

Hwang Chang-yop had joined the Workers' Party of Korea in 1945. He was Kim Il-sung's secretary and Kim Jong-il's teacher. Hwang Chang-yop served as the president of Kim Il-sung University, the highest institution of learning in North Korea, and the chairman of the Supreme People's Assembly.

**Hwang Chang-yop was in charge of ideology and theoretical propaganda for a long time.**

Hwang Chang-yop was a thinker who theorized the guiding ideology of the Workers' Party, the Juche idea. The direct reason for his escape was that he did not collect enough food for North Korea during his visit to Japan, and Hwang Chang-yop was afraid of being severely punished after returning back to North Korea. The fundamental reason was that Hwang Chang-yop was gradually marginalized in the Party after Kim Jong-il came to power and was unwilling to sit and wait for death. Hwang Chang-yop was the highest-ranking official to flee from North Korea. After Hwang Chang-yop’s escape, his subordinates, family members and close colleagues were all purged. At that time, Kim Jong-il sent a large number of assassins to Beijing with the intention of assassinating Hwang Chang-yop at the South Korean Embassy in China. The incident almost led to a diplomatic conflict. After mediation by the Chinese Premier, Hwang Chang-yop went to South Korea via a third country. After that, Sino-North Korean relations fell to a freezing point. Kim Jong Il did not even go to the Chinese Embassy in North Korea to pay tribute to Deng Xiaoping, who had just passed away. After Hwang Chang-yop fled, North Korea increased its domestic blockade and strictly prohibited anyone, especially senior officials, from leaving the country without permission. Kim Jong Il called Hwang Chang-yop a "traitor who is worse than pigs and dogs" and listed him as his biggest enemy. The hunt for him continued until his death from illness.

In 2003, Pak Pong Ju became the Prime Minister of the Cabinet and implemented the "Temmuz 1 Economic Management Improvement Measures". The core content of these measures were to gradually reduce the rationing of food and daily necessities, implement an independent accounting system for enterprises and aimed at motivating workers. These measures advocated the implementation of hourly wage system, daily wage system and weekly wage system for enterprises. However, Pak Pong Ju’s reform measures were criticized as introducing capitalism. In 2007, Pak Pong Ju was dismissed and transferred to a local factory as a factory director. However, Pak Pong Ju was only transferred there overthrown his technological development understanding was not consistent with the top leadership of the Party, but luckily Pak Pong Ju was not purged. In 2013, Kim Jong-un recalled him and re-appointed him as the Prime Minister of the government. As the North Korean economy deteriorated further, the state could no longer provide enough goods s to the North Korean people as planned, and the underground economy of private trade among the people had developed. The North Korean authorities were worried that the increasingly severe inflation and the growing underground market economy would be out of control, thus threatening the stability of the regime.

In 2009, Park Nam-ki, then Minister of Planning and Finance of the Workers' Party, began the currency reform with the approval of Kim Jong-il, exchanging the old North Korean Won currency for the new North Korean Won currency at an exchange rate of 100:1, And then Park Nam-ki took subsequent measures of currency reform such as closing the market and prohibiting the use of US dollars, which caused state institutions and enterprises to close one after another, and the economy was in a paralyzed state of having prices but there was no market in the economy. When the government was forced to open the markets, this move triggered hyperinflation. This reform, which was led by the leader's will and violated economic laws, ultimately failed, and the people had strong dissatisfaction. In order to shirk responsibility, the North Korean authorities used Park Nam-ki, who had followed Kim Jong-il for more than 40 years, as a scapegoat. In 2010, Park was shot on the charge of "as the son of a large landlord, which had sneaked into the revolutionary ranks and who deliberately put the national economy to death", and then North Korean government launched a large-scale purge. North Korea has attempted to carry out some economic reforms without fundamentally breaking the current economic system. North Korea insistently resisted the globalization trend in the world economy, repeatedly provoked military conflicts on the peninsula, thus caused a bad external economic environment and sanctions. North Korea has used a large amount of national wealth for military expenditures and nuclear arms. Its left-leaning conservative ideology has suppressed pragmatic economic reforms. As a result, the North Korean economy has not fundamentally improved and has always been in a state of shrinkage. In fact, the North Korean cabinet, which is in charge of the economy, has always been relatively weak.

In the North Korean political system, the actual status of the prime minister is lower than that of the chairman of the Supreme People's Assembly, and sometimes prime minister is not even a member of the Party’s Political Bureau Standing Committee. Prime minister’s power is subject to various restrictions. Therefore, it is difficult for the economic reforms promoted by the cabinet to have a good end and the impact of such reforms will be limited.

**6. New leader** Kim Jong-un **took office and removed old officials**

In December 2011, Kim Jong-il died of illness, and Kim Jong-un came to power, and the political situation in North Korea began a new round of reshuffle.Unlike Kim Jong-il, Kim Jong-un is not the eldest son, and his study and education foundation is too shallow and his prestige is not high.Although Kim Jong-un immediately launched a campaign to glorify his personality cult after he came to power, he knew very well that such propaganda could only deceive the grassroots people.Senior officials knew him well and probably senior officials did not think highly of him. In order to consolidate his power, Kim Jong-un launched intra-party struggles again and again.The characteristics of the intra-party struggles after Kim Jong-un came to power were mainly aimed at senior military officials and political veterans. In short, Kim Jong-un purged his political enemies to gain prestige and consolidate his ruling power.The first to be targeted was the military. In North Korea, which advocates the ideology of military supremacy (Songhun policy), the military is the most powerful political force in the country. In order to fight for power, Kim Jong-un first became the supreme commander of the military within a month after Kim Jong-il's death, then became the first secretary of the Workers' Party, and then the first chairman of the National Defense Commission, thus seizing the power of the party, government and military in his own hands.Subsequently, with the support of other factions, he suppressed senior military officials who were too successful or not loyal enough

**Suppression of senior military officials**

Li Yonghao, then member of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea, vice chairman of the Central Military Commission, chief of the General Staff of the Korean People's Army, and deputy marshal of the Korean People's Army, was relieved of all his posts in 2012 and was reportedly identified as an anti-party and counter-revolutionary element. Kim Yong Chun, Vice Marshal of the Korean People's Army, was removed from his post as Minister of the Ministry of People's Armed Forces (Ministry of National Defense) in April 2012 and his family whereabouts since then have been unknown. Kim Jong-kyeok, Vice Marshal of the Korean People's Army, was appointed Minister of the People's Armed Forces in April 2012. Seven months later Kim Jong-kyeok was dismissed and his family whereabouts are unknown since then. Yu Dongce, then Minister of State Security, was dismissed in April 2012 and his family whereabouts have been unknown since then. These four people were among the eight pallbearers at Kim Jong Il's funeral. They were core power figures. Their almost simultaneous dismissal shows that Kim Jong-un has already taken initial control of the military. Kim Jong-un then turned to Jang Song-thaek, the No. 2 figure in the Party with the highest prestige and who he saw as the greatest threat. In December 2013, North Korea government sentenced Jang Song-thaek to death for engaging in subversive activities against the Party and state executed him immediately. Among the many charges, one was "long-term gathering of impure forces to form a faction in an attempt to usurp the supreme power of the party and the state." Subsequently, many of Jang Song-thaek’s close associates were purged one after another. After Kim Jong-un was confirmed as the successor in 2010, loyalty to Kim Jong-un became the top priority for the North Korean government and the North Korean people. Any senior officials and people who did not actively surrender to Kim Jong-un and pledge loyalty to him would be purged and cleansed at any time.

In 2010, North Korea had as many as 60 public executions, three times the number in 2009. In the past two years, many senior officials in North Korea have disappeared, and most of them are believed to have been purged, mostly on charges of forming cliques for personal gain and subverting the regime. Although the data and facts are still debatable, it is certain that a new leader has found new loyal ministers. In order to firmly grasp power and ensure his own safety, former leader Kim Jong-un had chosen to use bloody means to purge the senior officials who are dissatisfied with him and disloyal to him, but Kim Jong-il used soft tactics to win over the senior officials. There have been struggles within the party in the past, there are struggles now, and there will be struggles in the future. Looking back at the 70 years of intra-party struggles in the Workers' Party of Korea, although the changes are dazzling, the core of the intra-party struggle is the struggle for power, which takes the form of continuous and expanding political purges, and the criterion is whether one is consistent with the leader. As Kim Jong-un once declared at the unveiling ceremony of the bronze statues of Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il at Kim Il-sung Military University: "People who are not loyal to the party and the leader are useless to us, no matter how outstanding their military talents are."