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North Korea, The era of Kim Jong Un

**“Will North Korea run on a collective leadership system?
Jang Sung Taek will cover for Kim Jong Un.”**

On December 25th, Professor Kim Hyun Sik, met with a journalist at his home in Fairfax, Virginia, and said, "the sudden death of the National Defense Commission Chairman, Kim Jong Il, was God's mercy on him because it spared him from spending his last days in misery like Saddam Hussein or Muammar Gaddafi. By Choi Youngae, correspondent of Dong-A Daily in USA

Professor Kim Hyun Sik, who defected to South Korea while teaching at National Russian College of Education as an exchange professor in 1992 has refused to reveal his true identity because he was worried about his students who were in high office in North Korea. He came to the United States in 2003 and is lecturing at a university in the U.S.

Q: What kind of thoughts came to your mind when you heard the news of Kim Jong Il's death?

I vividly remember in early 1990s, Kim Il Sung told me, “Hey, being 60 years old is still considered young and you should be considered old only when you become 90 years old. I am still in my 80s, so I can work 10 more years.” If that is the case, Kim Jong Il should still be in his youth. I had no idea that he would die this early. In North Korea, there is a ‘Research Center for Longevity’ and the doctors from that center in charge of Kim Jong Il’s health stood by him 24 hours a day. The center must have done a lousy job. He was only 69 years old. He did not live as long as his father did. I wanted him to read my book and change his mind so that he would open up North Korea so that he might not end up like Gaddafi.

Q: What kind of student was Kim Jong Il when you were his tutor?

When Kim Jong Il was a senior in high school, Kim Il Sung summoned some of his experts and said, “My son forgot how to speak Russian even though less than a semester ago he studied it

earnestly in the resort during the summer vacation. He is supposed to learn to speak Russian in his class, but the situation is like this. Please monitor what is going on.”

I became a chairperson of the monitoring committee and I monitored his class and tested him at the principal’s office while the principal of his high school and teachers were all watching. He read in Russian with difficulties but he was pretty good at Russian grammar. However, he was horrible at speaking. Kim Il Sung assigned me to be his tutor to help him with Russian conversation. Hence, I tutored him at the principal’s office every day.

He studied hard and was very diligent. After the private lesson, he used to walk with me to the door and slip Russian chocolate into my pocket. Sometimes he gave me Chinese cigarettes. After I told him, “I don’t smoke,” he gave me Chinese candies instead. He did that every day.

When Prof. Kim was saying this, he shed tears. He could not continue speaking for a while recollecting the time when Kim Jong Il was young and he shed tears of emotion.

Q: Why do you think Kim Jong Il’s personality has become belligerent?

“It is a pity. He was brought up in an environment which made him develop a crooked mind. When he was little, his brother drowned in a pond while they were playing together. As a result, he was alone. Also when he was seven or eight, his mother (Kim, Jong Sook) died due to an ectopic pregnancy. In North Korea, there is a boarding school for children who have one or more step parents. If a child has more than one step parent, they are sent to this boarding school. Kim Il Sung started this system. You could imagine how twisted his son was because his father created such a system. Then, Kim Jong Il had other younger brothers, Pyong Il, Kyong Il, and Kyong Jin. They were all taller and more handsome than he was. Pyong Il would lead his classmates and they would play together but Kim Jong Il was short could not play well and felt inferior to him.

Q: Do you think the hereditary succession of power to Kim Jong Un will happen swimmingly?

North Korea adopted *The 10 Principles for Fulfilling Ueuil Ideology* (advanced version of Kim’s *Juche* ideology) consisting of 10 articles and 65 clauses. This is the North Korean Constitution where it was written, “the great achievement of the revolutionary will be completed through the hereditary succession of power.” In North Korea, the head of the State is designated by heaven. People should be completely loyal to the head of State so that the system refrain people from attempting to do anything against him. There is no doubt about Kim Jong Il’s son succeeding him and becoming the head of State. Some people may wonder if Oh Geuk Ryul or Jang Sung Taek would try to do something but that is out of question. Collective leadership system? That is not possible in North Korea. They will try to do everything through Kim Jong Un. Even if

they might discuss everything behind his back, they would run it through Kim Jong Un by saying, "It is good to get this done this way, right?" It is unthinkable to imagine the military trying to do anything against Kim Jong Un. Jang Sung Taek would cover for Kim Jong Un. I have worked with Jang Sung Taek since 1975. He is a very loyal and forward-looking person. Everything he has done will be credited to Kim Jong Un. Despite Kim Jong Il's death, there is no possibility that the North Korean regime would collapse. Anybody who says that doesn't know anything.

Q: Is there any possibility that the unification of Korea might be expedited?

The North Korean regime's most vulnerable aspect is food shortage. Lack of necessities of life is an issue and in order to solve this problem, Jang Sung Taek has to be flexible and future-oriented free handedly. He has studied abroad, unlike Kim Jong Il, and must have contemplated about how to deal with other countries. I believe Jang Sung Taek will lead Kim Jong Un to take the open door and reform policy. Kim Jong Il was going to take the open and reform policy but he was in a dilemma about how to maintain the regime and not abandon the nuclear development program at the same time. Kim Jong Un can never give up the Kaesung Industrial Complex because they are learning how to operate under a capitalistic economic system. They will eventually opt for a North Korean way to implement the open door and reform policy.

Q: Right before Kim Jong Il's death, the United States and North Korea were near a breakthrough for accepting food aid in exchange for denuclearization.

North Korea would not abandon the nuclear development because it is their last resort. North Korea is going to strategically change its positions from here to there but it would never give it up.

Reporter's Note

About Professor Kim Hyun Sik

Professor Kim Hyun Sik taught Kim Jong Il Russian and defected to South Korea in 1992. North Korea-defected scholar, Professor Kim Hyun Sik served as a personal tutor for children of Kim Il Sung's in-laws for 20 years since 1971. One of the famous episodes is that he put the 6-year-old son of Kim Il Sung's brother-in-law on his shoulders in order to active his attention because he would not focus. Professor Kim Hyun Sik won Kim Il Sung's confidence because of this incident.

Prof. Kim tutored Kim Jong Il when he was a senior in high school and became close to him. For 6 months, he never skipped day except Sundays and tutored him Russian.

Since 1954, he served as a Professor of Russian for 38 years at Pyongyang College of Education (Kim Hyung Jik College of Education). When he was serving as an exchange professor at the National Russian College of Education in 1992 where 20,000 North Korean people were dispatched, and where he taught the North Korean language and the spirit of the Korean people, he was able to reunite with his long-separated sister through the help of South Korean CIA and defected to South Korea. After this, he lived in Seoul as a North Korean defector for 10 years and served as a visiting professor at Kyungnam University, Graduate School of North Korean studies, and as a professor of the Russian language at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies. He was a member of the research committee at the Institute of Unification Policy (director, Hwang Jang Yup). In 2003, he came to the United States and served as a visiting professor at Yale University and lectured at more than forty universities including Harvard on the topic of North Korea. Since 2007, he has been serving as a research professor at George Mason University. In 2007, he published his autobiography titled, 'I am a Nomad of Ideologies in the 21st Century.'

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**“There is a hole in the door of the Pyongyang Fortress
and the dike has collapsed.”**

A Letter – Unable to Be Sent, to Kim Jong Il
From Kim Hyun Sik, Former Tutor

The 80 year old teacher of Kim Jong Il burst into tears recollecting the time when his student was young and naïve. From 1971 – 1991, Professor Kim Hyun Sik was a personal tutor for the children of Kim Il Sung’s in-laws and served as a professor of the Department of Russian Language at the Pyongyang College of Education. He defected from North Korea in 1992 and is now serving as a research professor at George Mason University located in the suburbs of Washington D.C. I met with him at his house, located in Fairfax, Virginia on the 25th of December, 2011. During the exclusive interview with Dong-A Daily that lasted for four hours, he was holding the letter that he wrote to Kim Jong Il. He expressed sincere grief. At 10 pm on the 18th of December when the death of Kim Jong Il was announced, he had just finished writing this letter to Kim Jong Il:

Dear Leader Kim,

Right now the world is turned inside out. Do you not think the Pyongyang Fortress that you are protecting is going to be drawn to this whirlpool? No one can stop the flow of history. There is no power that can put to sleep these scary heavy seas in this world. In the midst of this era of turbulence, you left Pyongyang Fortress to your son who is only in his twenties. More than 20,000 people including government officers working on international affairs as well as your own government leaders, and regular citizens, have betrayed you and defected to other countries of the world just seeking a chance to live. How and when do you think you can stop this wave of defection from North Korea? The door of the Pyongyang Fortress already has a hole in it and the dike has collapsed. Dear Leader, please take your teacher's heartfelt advice and make a prompt decision. As a teacher of yours, I do not want you to become another Hussein or Gadhafi. Why don't you follow the steps your neighbor China took by endorsing a Reform and Open Door policy?

In the early 1970s, when I was crossing China via the Pyongyang-Moscow international train, I saw groups of poor and hungry Chinese people who came to beg for food from us whenever our train stopped. I feel like that just happened the day before yesterday, but now China has rapidly developed and is competing economically with the U.S. and Japan. I believe this rapid development was caused by institutional reforms and becoming more open to other countries. I believe that if North Korea reforms its economic system and opens a door to the international community, it will catch up with China and be able to, even get ahead of China. How diligent and wise North Korean people are! Your grandparents, Mr. Kim Hyung Jik and Ms. Kang Ban Suk were ardent patriots and sincere Christians. Don't you have to fulfill their dearest wish as their grandson?

Your father's foreign language skills were incredible. He could communicate in Chinese, Japanese, and Russian without any difficulties. He was especially interested in foreign language education. Throughout his 50 year reign, Kim Il Sung observed a class only once and that was a Russian class that I taught as a professor at the College of Education. He also left a doctrine that conversation should be the basis of foreign language education.

I have been lecturing about the North Korean education system in many universities in U.S. I started 'Peninsula Language Institute' in Virginia 5 years ago. There is much work to be done but not many people to work with. I earnestly miss my talented colleague professors and competent students. How great it would be if they could freely travel back and forth so that I could work with them? I hope that the door to Pyongyang Fortress could be widely opened so that North Korean people and foreigners could freely travel in and out of North Korean and develop scientific technologies and educational cultures in collaboration with one another.

Dear Leader, I still remember vividly the time when you were a senior in high school. It was 50 years ago. Your father assigned me to be your Russian conversation tutor. For half a year, we studied Russian conversation together every day in the afternoon in the Principal's room of the Namsan High School where you attended.

One evening when we had a severe snowstorm in February 1960, you read Pushkin's poem, "Winter Path" in Russian fabulously at the art performance for the national council for teachers of Russian language. The poem perfectly fit in with the weather on that evening. As soon as the poetry reading was over, all the participants stood up and cheered your name, "Kim Yura (Kim Jong Il's Russian name)". When that happened, you ran to me and cried in my arms just like a child because I taught you how to do a poetry reading. I cried with you because you were so trustworthy and I was deeply moved.

Please go back to that trustworthy and naïve- child-like student. Right now, people all over the world are criticizing you as a war criminal, dictator, and as a person who should be put to death right away but I still remember you as a bright, naïve, and trustworthy student, Kim Yura even though I am now 80 years old. Dear Leader, please go back to your old self. Please revert to the time when you were my cute and lovely student and return to your teacher.

From my office at George Mason University, Virginia, U.S.A. thousands of miles away from Pyonyang

Your teacher from old days,

Kim Hyun Sik

December 18, 2011 10 pm (noon on December 19, 2011 in Korea)

PS. When I was about to finish writing the letter, I received a phone call from Seoul telling me that you died of a heart attack. I couldn't believe my ears. You were only sixty nine years old and this can't be true. What on earth did all the experts in the Research Center for Longevity do until you reached that point? I was writing a letter to you so that you could turn back from where you are and you could achieve things that you haven't yet been able to do for our country and our people. Dear Leader, rest in peace. I sincerely hope that all the wrongs you committed will not be repeated by your son.