

# On the Special Feature : North Korea Pursuing Rejuvenation and *shí shì qiú shì* (practical search for the truth) in Hardship

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In this issue, we are going to deal with the economy of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (hereinafter referred to as North Korea) as a special feature. The title, "North Korea pursuing rejuvenation and *shí shì qiú shì* (practical search for the truth) in hardship," means that North Korea has undergone a tremendous change in politics and public administration despite facing the state of affairs identified as "triple difficulty," which refers to the combination of international economic sanctions based on United Nations Security Council resolutions, global expansion of COVID-19, and the natural disasters that ravaged North Korea in summer/fall 2020. The planner of this special feature would like to convey the message that North Korea is in the middle of its largest period of socioeconomic change after socialization.

Moreover, the planner endeavors to outline personnel changes in North Korea, such as many younger executives being elected as well as Congress representatives being selected based on a party member's ability to play a core role in the enforcement process of the decisions of Congress, and a new style that eliminates formalism and looks a question in the face as *shí shì qiú shì* (a practical search for the truth). North Korea itself does not employ such an expression, and the slogan of the 8th Congress was "a congress for work, struggle and progress."

In this special issue, we have published three papers. The first is my paper, "The 8th Congress of the Workers' Party of Korea, Related Conferences, and the New Five-Year Plan for National Economic Development." It attempts to record and organize the discussions of the seven important meetings held from early January to early March 2021 and decipher a message that can be read from them. Moreover, it is a record of historic significance, and thus it is quite long, but if you manage to read through it, you will surely get the sense that the Kim Jong Un era has entered a stage of full-scale operation.

Next, we put forward Lyu Hak Su's paper titled "DPRK's Fundamental Economic Structure and Survival Strategy—Analysis on Its Self-Rehabilitation Policies from the Viewpoint of Industrial Placement." He teaches economics at the University of Kitakyushu. At this party convention, it was announced that North Korea would adhere to socialism based on social ownership as a means of production, and by more realistically formulating an economic plan, it would strengthen production cooperation among domestic state-owned enterprises and supply domestically. The decision was made to focus on reviving the chain. This treatise clarifies industrial policy since the founding of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, focusing mainly

on industrial layout. The second half of the treatise also touches on the current state of so-called "marketization" that has occurred in North Korea since the 1990s, when the Cold War ended, and the socialist international market disappeared.

Finally, LI Chengri and ZHONG Feiteng offer "The Belt and Road Initiative and China's New Northeast Asia Strategy." Dr. LI Chengri and Prof. ZHONG Feiteng are researchers at the National Institute of International Strategy, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. At first glance, it is difficult to see a direct link between "the Belt and Road Initiative" and the promotion of Northeast Asia, but in reality, Dandong City in Liaoning, China, which borders North Korea, is less than 500 kilometers from Seoul, the capital of the Republic of Korea. The purpose of "The Belt and Road Initiative" is to expand economic exchanges between China and neighboring countries through infrastructure and to promote the development of Chinese regions bordering neighboring countries. Given this, one will find almost instantly which project is technically and financially easier, a project to build a high-speed rail about 4,000 km from Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region in China to Moscow, Russia or a project to build 460 km of rail from Dandong to Haengshin Station, where the rail yard of the high-speed rail (KTX) is located north of Seoul. As instability in the political and military situation on the Korean Peninsula is still a factor, a potential railway link across the Korean Peninsula is considered more a political challenge than a technical one. Hence, China is looking ahead and forecasts improvement in the situation on the Korean Peninsula. It is said that the project will also contribute to the economic development of the Northeast Region of China, where economic development is predominantly slow these days. For the time being, China is encouraging infrastructure connections between China and Russia or between China and Mongolia. The Chinese dream of expanding "The Belt and the Road Initiative" into Northeast Asia has not been abandoned.

It is unclear as to what level the economic and administrative changes in North Korea will help to improve DPRK-US relations and Japan-DPRK relations. However, with North Korea beginning to undergo major changes, and the fact that China is sensitive to this change and is considering measures to expand cooperation, Japan, as a fellow neighbor of North Korea, should pay a little more attention from the perspective of strategic importance.

We hope that this special feature will help readers to improve their understanding of North Korea and its surrounding areas.