

WHO ARE THE TRUE HEROES OF NORTH KOREA?

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This study aims to analyze the status and the background of the heroes born in North Korea. North Korean heroes are 'Republic heroes' and 'Republic effort heroes' selected by the government, whose background is the integrity of the system and mobilization of the general public for improving productivity. This study takes notice of the point that they did not remain in such roles but also contributed to the hereditary succession over three generations. As a weird phenomenon appeared, where the North Korean power elites were isolated in the North Korean system by selecting heroes focusing on the general public, the power elites have become unable to possess power to limit the exercise of power by the highest leaders of North Korea.

Keywords: North Korea; Republic heroes; Republic effort heroes; General public; Hereditary succession, Power elite.

I. INTRODUCTION

This study aims to analyze those figures selected as heroes in North Korea. In particular, this study reviews the conferment of the title of hero in relation to a regime change of the highest leader of North Korea.

We encounter heroes in history, movies, or novels. You can recall Hercules or Achilles, who appear in myth with strong power to confront even a god or think of war heroes such as Napoleon, the actual main character of *Eroica Symphony*. Though Superman is a character in a movie, you cannot forget him as a representative hero of the U.S. In the Republic of Korea (South Korea), heroes have appeared in crises such as a war as Admiral Yi Sun-shin, who is called a great hero, and Ahn Jung-geun who carried on an independence movement against Japanese colonial rule.

In the modern society, heroes in reality do not fight against a god or display supernatural powers to save the earth like figures in myths and movies. In addition, not so many heroes have been born, either. In *The Merriam Webster Dictionary*, a hero is defined as a "person who is admired for great or brave acts or fine qualities." Thus, heroes in reality are not someone with immense supernatural powers but someone who performs a different act from others' or who has different qualities.

As such, heroes are not common, but there have been a considerable number of heroes in North Korea. Sometimes even five hundred heroes have been born in a year in the country. Moreover, heroes of North Korea have been directly selected by the North Korean government. This study examines the background of so many heroes in North Korea in the aspect of regime change of the country.

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II. WHAT IS A HERO?

A. Hero Type

If someone is not a hero in a myth or a movie but a hero in reality, you can raise a question about his or her existence. You cannot help but being curious about his or her existence. Does he or she have special qualities or a product of his or her times? Or, was he or she made a hero by someone else?

Thomas Carlyle, a famous historian in the U.K. in the 19th century for his remark, "Indian Empire, or no Indian Empire, we cannot do without Shakespeare," has mentioned about special qualities of a hero in a study of his (1841). Carlyle has presented sincerity as a quality of a hero through 11 heroes in his book *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* 1841. He viewed sincerity as a fundamental characteristic of a hero, which is related to originality based on superior intelligence. He also stressed that worship for heroes is not blind obedience but voluntary respect. Carlyle recognized the ills of capitalism, which appeared in the progress of the Industrial Revolution in the U.K. as a chaos, and thought a rule by a heroic existence with power is more just than rule by the general public in such an era of chaos. The ignorance of the power of the general public and the worship for a powerful, heroic leader could not help leading to anti-democracy.

In some cases, heroes are revalued in accordance with the times, not the inborn qualities of theirs (Park Si-hyang 2005). Napoleon, a national hero of France, was held up to ridicule by the restored monarchy such as Louis XVIII and Charles X after being dethroned, but was restored by returning his remains to France after the reactionary government. However, he was devalued again because of the authoritative position of Napoleon III, his nephew, and the attempt to overthrow the monarchy of Louis-Philippe I. His value was recovered as the Third Republic admired Napoleon's achievements, and he revived as a hero of France while France underwent the First World War and the Second World War. Joan of Arc was called a witch at her times, but was revalued afterwards as 'the Maid of Orleans' and 'the daughter of the people' by French nationalists. In the modern times, she was revalued again as a figure who symbolizes a feminist and a political minority. Otto von Bismarck, the Iron Chancellor who unified Germany, was worshiped as a hero of the Germanic race, but was devalued afterwards since Hitler fancied himself as the successor of Bismarck.

In addition, you can also think of a case where a hero is made as needed. When a hero is made like this, the hero may be selected on a positive level to provide proper compensation in order to maintain a system. There may be heroes who have made a significant contribution with excellent fighting power in a crisis such as a war, but ordinary soldiers, who have given their lives at the front line, are also selected as heroes (Choi Young-jin 2016). Sometimes heroes are selected not in a crisis of war but in an attempt to control the system. Since 1959, Indonesia has

selected national heroes from among soldiers, politicians, and intellectuals who have contributed to the establishment of the country (Song Seung-won 2013). In some cases, a selection of heroes are negatively used in order to mobilize the general public. Modern sovereign countries, which are differentiated from the traditional countries, are divided into capitalist nations and socialist nations in their development paths. Capitalist nations have markets, where private capitals pursue profits, and just have to perform economic functions on a level to increase the total social capital. Whereas, socialist nations put emphasis on the interest of the whole community and let production means be owned by the government or a group, so private pursuit of profits is limited. Therefore, in socialist nations, weak, unstable mechanism for reproduction appeared as a general phenomenon (Cha Mun-seok 2004). North Korea, which is the subject of analysis by this study, still maintains its socialist system, and in the country many heroes have been born by the government in order to mobilize labor force. Therefore, this study intensively analyzes the status of North Korean heroes and the political background for their selection.

B. Hero of North Korea

North Korean heroes can be considered as figures artificially fabricated by the government rather than as true heroes as mentioned above. North Korean heroes are classified into two types: One is 'Republic heroes' which were enacted in 1950 by the standing committee of the Supreme People's Assembly, which is the national assembly of North Korea. 'Republic hero,' which is the abbreviation for 'a hero of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea,' is defined as 'an honorific title awarded to someone, who possesses unlimited faithfulness to the Great Leader Kim Il-sung and the Dear Leader Kim Jung-il and displays persevering revolutionary spirit in the fight for the country's integrity and unification and performance of revolutionary tasks to accomplish a great achievement in front of the Party, the country, and the people, by the standing committee of the Supreme People's Assembly of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea or someone who has received the title (Joseon Language Dictionary 1 2004). The other one is 'Republic effort hero,' which was enacted also by the Supreme People's Assembly in 1951. 'Republic effort hero' is defined as 'the highest honorific title which is awarded to someone who is thoroughly armed with the Juche Idea of our Party and displays outstanding achievement in the fight for accomplish our Party's policies to greatly contribute to the revolution and the construction by the standing committee of the Supreme People's Assembly of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea or someone who has received the title (Joseon Language Dictionary 1 2004). Both 'Republic hero' and 'Republic effort hero' rank the highest in the medal list of North Korea. But, while 'Republic hero' is selected for maintenance of the system, 'Republic effort hero' is selected for contribution to economy, culture, construction, etc.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

This study targeted those who have received the title of hero put on 'Rodong Sinmun,' which is the party organ of the Workers' Party of Korea in North Korea as the subject of analysis. 'Rodong Sinmun' has a characteristic as a comprehensive newspaper which deals with politics, military issues, economy, society, culture, etc. 'Rodong Sinmun' is an important newspaper in that it has a function for propaganda and instigation about the politics of North Korea internally and externally, introduces the government's policies to North Koreans, and directly and indirectly states general issues of the North Korean society, presenting the directions (Koh Yoo-hwan 2006). This study analyzes those figures who have received the titles of 'Republic hero' and 'Republic effort hero' from the North Korean government.

IV. EFFECT OF MEDIA

In order to analyze the political background of the heroes on 'Rodong Sinmun,' this study uses a theoretical approach on communication where the general public recognize heroes. Mass communication refers to 'a system or technique by which a special group delivers symbolic content to a number of different, scattering receivers by using a technical method (Morris Janowitz 1968). Mass media, which is a means for mass communication, refers to an organizational method to communicate with a number of widely scattering receivers within a short period of time (Denis McQuail, translated by Yang Seung-chan 2002). According to McQuail, of the mass media, newspaper, which is a type of printed media, has characteristics such as commercial basis for regular issuance and sale, public personality, relative freedom, and a variety of purposes. A party-politics newspaper, which is one of the categories of newspapers according to characteristics, aims to deliver information to the general public, induce them to participate, constrain the readers to a party, and mobilize the general public for the purposes of the party.

The effects of mass media are divided for the analysis into a first step of omniscient and omnipotent media, a second step of verification on strong effects of media, a third step of rediscovered, strong media, and a fourth step of adjustment of impacts of media (Denis McQuail, translated by Yang Seung-chan 2002). Of these, the adjustment of impacts of media of the fourth step provides a perspective that media composes meaning and generates the most important effects. In particular, cultivation effects or culture development effects of George Gerbner views that media influences the recognition of reality by the receivers and these effects are gradual, accumulative, and long-term. Gerbner especially argues that those who watch TV much shows a different reality recognition from the actual, already known society and has a tendency to recognize the society shown by the TV as the real world. Gerbner views that receivers, who have watched violence and crimes much on TV, recognize the world as meaner and nastier than those

TABLE I: CLASSIFICATION OF PERIOD BY NORTH KOREAN REGIME

	<i>Kim Il-sung Regime</i> (1946~1994)		<i>Kim Jung-il Regime</i> (1994~2011)		<i>Kim Jung-un Regime</i> (2011~Present)	
<i>Power Stability</i>	<i>Unstable Period</i> 1946-1968	<i>Stable Period</i>	<i>Unstable Period</i> 1994-2000	<i>Stable Period</i>	<i>Unstable Period</i> 2011-2013	<i>Stable Period</i>
Selection of Successor	Before successor nomination	Nomination in 1974 Official Announcement in 1980	Before successor nomination	Nomination in 2009 Official Announcement in 2010	Before successor nomination	

receivers, who watch TV less, and that the recognition is cultivated by accumulated experiences. Finally, he says mass media fill people with a uniform, distorted, and selective perspective on reality, and not the actual society but the society shown by mass media is cultivated in people. Therefore, this study applies a theoretical review of the concept and effects of mass media in analyzing the general public's recognition of the heroes appearing on the press of North Korea.

V. HEROES FOR MOBILIZING LABOR FORCE

Table 1 classifies the period of the three regimes of North Korea. The period of Kim Il-sung regime can be considered to have its stable period since the 1970s when a variety of factions were unified into the only leading system and power was strengthened. In the stable period of the Kim Il-sung regime, the successor for hereditary succession was designated and officially announced. In the period of Kim Jung-il regime, the unstable period is set to be from the point when Kim Il-sung died and Kim Jung-il succeeded to the power to the year 2000 until when crises due to floods in the mid-1990s and a variety of incidents have occurred. The stable period is considered from that time to the point when Kim Jung-il died. Also in the period of Kim Jung-il regime, the designation and official announcement of the successor was done in the stable period. The successor was nominated in 2009, and was officially announced only in 2010. The period of the Kim Jung-un regime is considered to have its unstable period as until the point when Kim Jung-un succeeded to the power and purged Jang Sung-taek. The period after that is set as the stable period.

Table 2 shows the status of selection of 'Republic heroes' and 'Republic effort heroes' of North Korea which was put in Rodong Sinmun from 1968, when the Kim Il-sung regime was stable to 2013, when Kim Jung-un seized power. What is noteworthy is that much more 'Republic effort heroes' were selected than 'Republic heroes.'

In the stable period of the Kim Il-sung regime, around three to four people were selected as 'Republic heroes' each year, but around 58 'Republic effort heroes' were selected in the same period, which shows a great difference. This phenomenon appeared as the North Korean government selected many people with good work efficiency or performance as 'Republic effort heroes' to set an example in the process of mobilizing labor force through production increase movements such as 'the fine horse movement' and 'the red flag winning movement' for industrialization after North Korea was established. The career of those who were selected as heroes in the Kim Il-sung regime covered all areas where the general public worked such as agriculture, livestock industry, fishing industry, construction, mining industry, railroad transportation, chemical, metal, and machinery factories, and sports. In the period of the Kim Il-sung regime, Kim Il-sung, the highest leader, and his son Kim Jung-il were selected as 'Republic heroes.' In addition, anti-Japan fighters,

soldiers during the Korean War, soldiers for the North Korean People's Army, administrative officers, captains, and workers as 'Republic heroes,' and even selected power generators as heroes.

TABLE II: STATUS OF 'REPUBLIC HEROES' AND 'REPUBLIC EFFORT HEROES OF NORTH KOREA

<i>Year</i>	<i>Republic Heroes</i>	<i>Republic Effort Heroes</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Republic Heroes</i>	<i>Republic Effort Heroes</i>
1968	25	7	1991	0	10
1969	2	9	1992	24	107
1970	2	3	1993	1	18
1971	10	69	1994	0	14
1972	1	94	1995	6	18
1973	2	28	1996	1	66
1974	0	23	1997	1	2
1975	1	545	1998	0	3
1976	1	7	1999	1	5
1977	2	19	2000	2	0
1978	1	53	2001	2	1
1979	1	25	2002	2	0
1980	0	13	2003	1	1
1981	2	11	2004	0	4
1982	2	15	2005	0	0
1983	0	15	2006	0	19
1984	10	29	2007	0	0
1985	1	44	2008	0	0
1986	0	130	2009	2	2
1987	1	47	2010	0	16
1988	0	162	2011	1	5
1989	1	79	2012	105	131
1990	1	15	2013	1	44

Into the Kim Jung-il regime, the number of heroes selected rapidly decreased. As in Table 2, the government selected only one 'Republic hero' and just around eight 'Republic effort heroes' each year, which shows a great difference from the previous regime. In 1995, the first year after Kim Jung-il succeeded to the power, the government selected 17 Party officials and soldiers in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the Korean Workers' Party as 'Republic effort heroes.' However, from the next year, the general public including workers for construction, mining and manufacturing industries, and farms, housewives, and female soccer players were selected as 'Republic effort heroes.'

In the period of the Kim Jung-il regime, soldiers for the North Korean People's Army accounted for a great part of 'Republic heroes' excluding a few of the heroes including unconverted long-term political prisoners of South Korea, track-and-field athletes, director of opera company, and workers for farmers.

In the period of the regime of Kim Jung-un (since 2011), who is the third highest leader of North Korea, an increased number of heroes were selected unlike in the period of the Kim Jung-il regime. The first 'Republic hero' selected by the Kim Jung-un regime was Kim Jung-un's father, Kim Jung-il. In addition, workers for mines, secret police, scientific technicians related to Kwangmyongsong-3, which is an artificial satellite, troops in islands on the border with South Korea, female traffic policemen, etc. were selected as 'Republic heroes' of North Korea. Those selected as 'Republic effort heroes' include designers and other workers related to construction (power plants, Kumsusan Palace of the Sun, Memorial Hall for Victory in the Great Fatherland Liberation War, amusement facilities), workers in the areas of arts (video), textile machines and factories, athletes and directors for the 30th London Olympics, makers of bronze statues of Kim Il-sung and Kim Jung-il, and policemen for saving human lives.

Heroes of North Korea are made by the government. 'Republic heroes' were selected from among anti-Japan fighters, war heroes, soldiers for the North Korean People's Army, and lifesavers. 'Republic effort heroes' were mainly selected from among workers for a variety of industries in North Korea. 'Republic Effort heroes' can be considered as figures selected as the mechanism for mobilizing workers to improve productivity of North Korea. In the period of the regime of Kim Jung-il, who is the second leader of North Korea, the number of heroes decreased. The number of heroes can be considered to have decreased since North Korea was in a serious economic crisis in the period of the Kim Jung-il regime. The time can be inferred as a crisis of the regime, which is worse than a situation where labor force could be mobilized by selecting heroes. However, the North Korean economy had been poor constantly from the late 1970s as shown in Figure 1. Rather, the economic situation in the late period of the Kim Il-sung regime was even worse, but in that period, heroes were continuously selected. A more detailed analysis may need to be conducted on the hero selection in the period of the Kim Jung-il regime, but the hero selection can be considered to have been somewhat neglected because of a combination with political instability at that time. In summary, hero selection in the periods of the three regimes of North Korea is identified to have been conducted for 'Republic heroes' for the integrity of the system and for 'Republic effort heroes' for mobilizing the general public despite the differences in the number of such heroes.

VI. HEROES FOR HEREDITARY SUCCESSION

Considering the North Korean system, which has maintained socialism and has not actively promoted reform and opening as China did, the hero selection as models may be a natural phenomenon for mobilizing the general public for improved productivity and maintaining the system. But, the heroes of North Korea have been selected too much from among workers, that is, the general public. This study

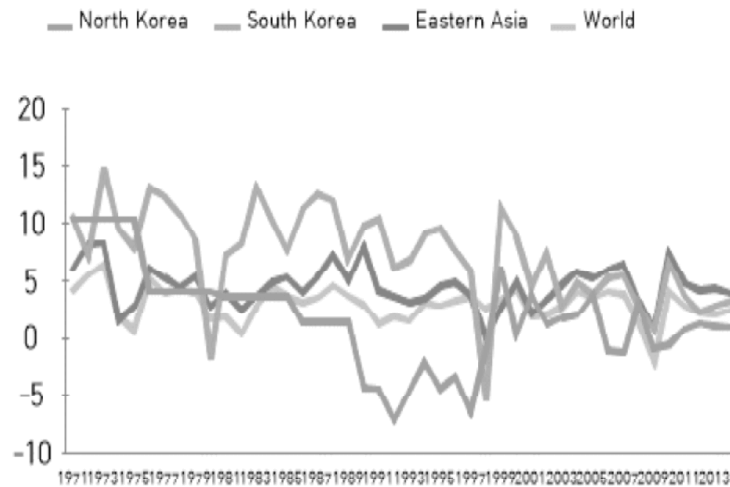


Figure 1: GDP Growth of North Korea

analyzes that the hero selection of North Korea focusing on the general public has a greater meaning than maintaining the system and mobilizing labor force to improve productivity. This study views that the hero selection focusing on the general public has made the hereditary succession of North Korea over three generations easier. Table b! shows the status of hero selection in the period of the 6th party convention in 1980, when Kim Jung-il, the successor of the first hereditary succession, officially appeared in the North Korean political scene. Most of the heroes selected in this period were workers for industries, except for Kim Il-sung and Kim Jung-il. Joo

TABLE III: STATUS OF HEROES WHEN KIM JUNG-IL APPEARED(1979-1983)

Year	Heroes	
	Republic Heroes	Republic Effort Heroes
1979	General of North Korean People's Army 1(Anti-Japan armed fight)	Fishing Industry 2 Mining Industry 9 Construction 11 Agriculture 1Teacher/Researcher 2
1980	None.	Fishing Industry 2 Mining Industry 1 Construction 5 Industries 1Railway Traffic 4
1981	Fishing Industry 1 Teacher 1	Fishing Industry 2 Construction 1 Mining Industry 4 Factory 1 Livestock Industry 1 Art 2
1982	Kim Il-sung, Kim Jung-il	Construction 7 Fishing Industry 1Railway 1 Mining Industry 1Art 4 Scientific Technique 1
1983	None.	Construction7 Industries 3Broadcasting 1 Livestock Industry 1 Soldier 1 Commerce 1

Do-il, who was selected as a 'Republic hero' in 1979, had been as a guard and dispatch rider for Kim Il-sung in the period of anti-Japan revolution and had supported the hereditary succession of Kim Jung-il. As such, at the point of time when Kim Jung-il was officially designated as the successor in the first hereditary succession, the general public accounted for the majority of the heroes of North Korea.

A similar phenomenon is identified also in the status of heroes of North Korea in 1994, when the first hereditary succession was conducted. Table e! shows that heroes were selected also from among the general public in 1994, when Kim Il-sung died, and the previous year. Choi Ryong-hae, who was selected as a hero in 1993, is a son of Choi Hyun, who performed anti-Japan movement together with Kim Il-sung, and was very close to Kim Jung-il. Only after Kim Jung-il seized the power, he selected elites including his little brother as heroes. Nevertheless, these elites were not power elites of key authorities.

TABLE IV: STATUS OF HEROES IN PERIOD OF FIRST SUCCESSION(1993-1996)

Year	Heroes	
	Republic Heroes	Republic Effort Heroes
1993	Administrative Officer 1	Construction 2 Mining Industry 3 Fishing Industry 2 Agriculture 1 Teacher 1 Soldier 3 Low-class Executives of the Party 1 Art/Broadcasting 3 Women 1 Athlete 1
1994	None.	Mining Industry 9 Industries 1 Low-class Executives of the Party 3 Soldier 1
1995	General of North Korean People's Army 6	High-class Executives of the Party 3 Low-class Executives of the Party 1 Commerce 1 Fishing Industry 1 Railway Traffic 1 Industries 2 Art/Broadcasting 3 Researcher 1 Soldier 5
1996	General of North Korean People's Army 1	Teacher 1 Soldier 5 5 Construction 2 Commerce 2 Women 3 Industries 1 Administrative Officer 2

In view of the hero selection in 2011, when the second hereditary succession was conducted from Kim Jung-il to his third son, Kim Jung-un, it is also identified that heroes were selected focusing on the general public. Table d! shows that when the previous highest leader, Kim Jung-il, died, he was selected as a hero, but power elites in the key authorities in North Korea were not selected as heroes.

This study takes notice of the point that even if the hero selection focusing on the general public makes the general public recognize themselves as heroes even if it is different from the fact.

Workers and low-class officials, who are the general public in North Korea, were made heroes, but the power elites in the key group were relatively isolated

TABLE V: STATUS OF HEROES IN PERIOD OF SECOND SUCCESSION(2009-2013)

Year	Heroes	
	Republic Heroes	Republic Effort Heroes
2009	Dead Administrative Officer 1 High-class Executives of the Party 1	High-class Executives of the Party 1 Industries 1
2010	None.	Construction 16
2011	Kim Jung-il	High-class Executives of the Party 5
2012	Mining Industry 1 Agriculture 1 Secret Police 1 Troops 2 Scientific Technique 101	Construction 99 Athlete 5 Factory 1 Art/ Broadcasting 16 Women 10
2013	Police 1	Low-class Executives of the Party 7 Police 2 Construction 35

from the hero selection of the country. While the general public in a variety of areas in North Korean industries were frequently introduced as heroes of the country, the power elites have appeared as heroes only in special cases such as the foundation day of the Workers' Party of Korea and the birthdays of the highest leaders.

To this hero selection focusing on the general public, the culture development 'Effects of Gerbner' can be applied, which was introduced in the part of effects of media as the notion that people come to recognize the appearances in mass media, which is not like the realities, by distorting them as realities. According to the theory, the general public come to recognize the appearances of heroes shown by Rodong Sinmun as the heroes of North Korea. Rodong Sinmun showed a greater number of the general public were selected as 'Republic heroes' or 'Republic effort heroes' more frequently than the power elites, depicting the general public, who provide labor in a variety of areas in the country, as heroes more than the power elites. Therefore, the general public of North Korea come to recognize themselves and the highest leader, who govern themselves, as the heroes of the country. Accordingly, from the viewpoint of the general public, the power elites may be considered just the same level as themselves, who are governed by the highest leader of North Korea and are loyal to the highest leader. Therefore, it is difficult for the power elites to oppose the hereditary succession of the highest leader with their own leadership by being supported by the general public and connecting to the civil society in the North Korean political system.

Fig. 2 shows Table a! in a graph. In view of Fig. 2 and Table a!, the number of selected heroes decreased in the periods when the hereditary succession was conducted, though it is not precisely shown. It is found since 1980, when Kim Jung-il, the first successor, officially appeared, the number of 'Republic heroes' and 'Republic effort heroes' decreased. The number increased in the late 1980s, and decreased again in 1994 when the Kim Jung-il succeeded to the power after Kim Il-sung. In the period of the second succession, the number of selected heroes itself is too small, so it cannot be clearly described, but it is found the number

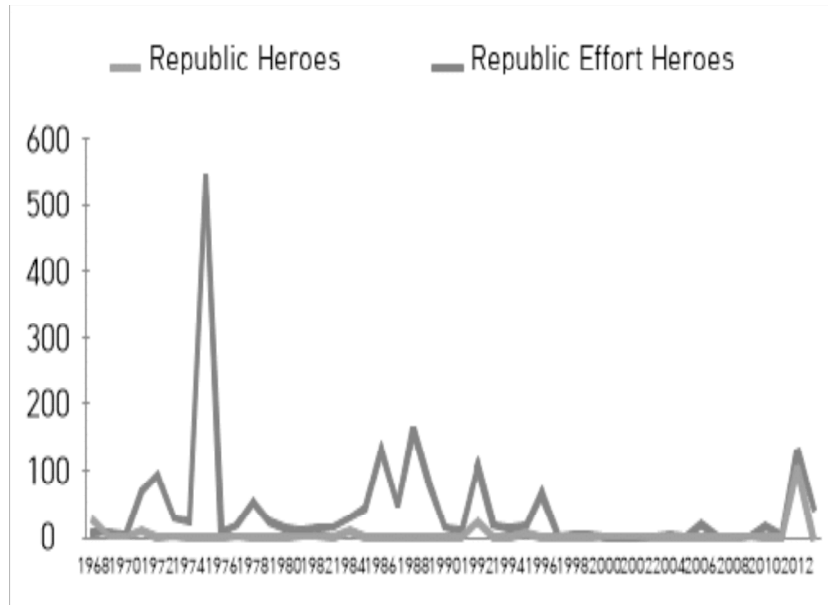


Figure 2: Status of 'Republic Heroes' and 'Republic Effort Heroes' of North Korea

increased after Kim Jung-un, the second successor, seized the power. The government may do its best to minimize the resistance to succession and exaggerate the ability of the successor in the period of hereditary succession. Therefore, it may be viewed as a strategy to minimize the hero selection from among the general public and make it smooth for the successor to seize the power.

VII. CONCLUSION: WHO ARE THE TRUE HEROES OF NORTH KOREA?

This study has failed to obtain the answer for the question, 'who are the true heroes of North Korea?' which is the title of this paper. Too many heroes have been born in North Korea. There have been heroes, who mobilize the general public in order to overcome low productivity, which is a typical trait of socialist countries, other heroes, who standardized the North Korean people to maintain the regime, and still other heroes, who have shown sacrifice to maintain the system.

North Korean heroes have not played the role of maintaining the system and mobilizing the general public but also have contributed to the hereditary succession over three generations. The general public, who view those selected as heroes from among the general public and the press, come to recognize the highest leader and themselves as the heroes of North Korea. In North Korea, anyone from among the general public can become a hero, but the power elites were excluded from the

hero selection. In this process, the power elites, who have power to oppose the exercise of power and hereditary succession of the highest leaders, were naturally isolated from the general public and remained in the position of simple administrative officers. Since North Korea has almost no civil society and needs more heroic roles of the power elites, but they are actually isolated. Finally, the North Korean power elites, who are not supported by the general public and has almost no connection to the general public, could not help naturally accepting the hereditary succession over three generations, without opposing it properly.

The many heroes from the general public in North Korea were figures who have shown brave acts or superior qualities to meet the standards of the North Korean regime. There have been those heroes who have participated in a war and saved human lives, but those heroes, who will improve the basic rights of the general public and draw more participation, have not been born yet in the North Korean system.

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