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A Psychological Interpretation on NORTH KOREA's NUCLRAR Program Issue: Focusing on Kim Jong-Un's Personality Analysis

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Abstract

This study analyzes the individual psychology of Kim Jong-un, who exercises absolute power over nuclear development in North Korea, in order to understand the issue of North Korea's nuclear capabilities from a psychological point of view and to provide implications for solving the problem. 'Personality' is a concept used to explain a person's behaviors. Allport theorized that personalities develop during the process of adapting to environments, and personalities structured in this way demonstrate coherent patterns of feelings, thoughts and behaviors. Therefore, identifying a person's personality is important in that what he thinks, how he feels, and how he behaves can be predicted. Until now, there has been very little micro-approach, such as to the personalities of individuals, in the subject of North Korea. However, it is also meaningful to understand the psychological characteristics of this individual autocrat due to the nature of the North Korean regime, in which Kim's family members monopolize power following the lead of Kim Il-sung, Kim Jong-il, and Kim Jong-un. In particular, the issues of North Korea's nuclear development and launching projectiles are highly dependent on the will and determination of Kim Jong-un. Therefore, Kim Jong-un's personality is likely to have a direct impact on the North Korean nuclear issue. Based on various testimonies and data, there is no doubt that Kim Jong-un's personality is self-centered, ostentatious, and impulsive. However, as Kurt Campbell, the former US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia has stated, it is difficult to say that his personality is "unpredictable" or "violent". As a son of an autocrat, he was raised exercising absolute power. The environment where his desire can come true without deficiency might have led him to become self-centered and ostensible. These personality traits can affect his decisions regarding the nuclear issue. According to Fujimoto Kenji's testimony, Kim Jong-un said that he shoots missiles "impulsively" if he felt ignored or if his relationship with the United States could not be resolved. When considering his self-centered and ostensible characteristics, it is possible to predict the time and condition where he can be impulsive. The predictability of Kim's behaviors lies in the type of character he possesses. Kim Jong-un is thought to be someone with a self-centered, impulsive and ostentatious personality, and can be classified as having a narcissistic personality disorder. A person with narcissistic personality establishes relationships with others only to reveal his superiority, and experiences a sense of humiliation and frustration in situations where he cannot do so. However, in cases where the superiority is frustrated, narcissistic personality has a tendency to maintain his sense of superiority through self-rationalization rather than changing external conditions. Such nature of North Korea's society and Kim Jong-un's personality provides the following implications regarding the North Korean nuclear issue. First, it seems that there is virtually no reason for Kim Jong-un to give up the country's nuclear capabilities due to the practical and psychological benefits (superiority) they hold for North Korea and Kim Jong-un himself. Second, however, it is unlikely that North Korea will use its nuclear capabilities to launch a preemptive attack or war considering Kim's narcissistic personality. Third, the messages implied in North Korea's behaviors in relation to their nuclear capabilities still need to be considered carefully.

1. Introduction

Various analyses and different approaches have been made on North Korea's activities, including the North Korean nuclear issue, but most of them were conducted on the assumption that fundamentally, North Korea will act in a rational and reasonable manner. However, North Korea's actions such as the succession of power for three generations, the consolidation of systems even in the face of other communist countries' collapses, and the development of nuclear weapons with enormous funding during serious economic crisis, which cannot be found elsewhere in modern society, cannot be understood in a reasonable and rational manner. Therefore, new attempts are needed to explain North Korea's actions at this point, as understanding of the North Korean nuclear issue remains stagnant.

In this study, we try a psychological approach as an alternative explanation for the occurrence and progression of the North Korean nuclear issue. In particular, the leader of North Korea, Kim Jong-un's personality is analyzed on the premise that his personal characteristics may be closely related to the North Korean nuclear issue following the nature of the North Korean system that allows one person to exercise absolute power. First, based on the testimonies and observations of the people surrounding him, Kim Jong-un's personality is described. His behavioral patterns are then defined and his predicted personality type is considered based on the extracted personality traits. Later, the impact of his character on the issue of nuclear development is analyzed and implications are made accordingly.

2. Kim Jong-Un's Personality Type

Synthesizing the statements of the people around him and who were present since his birth and upbringing, and taking his actions after his reign power into consideration, there is a good possibility that Kim Jong-un

has a Narcissistic personality disorder. Narcissism refers to the effort and ability to maintain a positive self-image through various self-regulations, emotional manipulations and actions to control situations. These are driven by the motivation to pursue self-development and the desire to inflate self-esteem[1]. When these self-loving actions produce a backfiring result, it is called as a narcissistic personality disorder.

Narcissistic personality disorder is a type of personality disorder classified as a Type B personality disorder[2]. Type B shows very emotional, dramatic and whimsical behaviors. Antisocial/borderline/narcissistic/histrionic personality disorders are included in this type. In particular, narcissistic personality disorder is distinguished from other personality disorders among Type B because it shows ostentation, the need for recognition and self-aspect.

Normally, narcissism is divided into overt narcissism and covert narcissism[3][4]. Overt narcissism is where narcissistic attributes are evident to others and can be observed objectively. Covert narcissism does not show bragging or arrogant behavior on the outside, but possesses narcissistic attributes in oneself.

In reality, however, one can have overt narcissism while showing some aspects of covert narcissism; this goes for the opposite and categorizing these separately can cause confusion[5]. Therefore, narcissism can also be divided into narcissistic grandiosity and narcissistic vulnerability or hyper vigilant. Narcissistic grandiosity is when the 'typical' narcissistic attributes are exposed externally. The major characteristics of narcissistic vulnerability are that they do not show external behavior, but one becomes sensitive to minor failures or external evaluations and can easily get hurt and frustrated. Other than those, Millon subdivided this disorder through clinical observation into elitist narcissist/compensatory narcissist/unprincipled narcissist/amorous narcissist depending on which direction one's externally evident narcissistic aspects and dynamics are leaning to[6].

Analyzing Kim Jong-un's personality with the data aforementioned, he falls in the category of overt narcissism that shows external narcissistic behavior rather than internal behavior. He also reflects traits of narcissistic grandiosity rather than narcissistic vulnerability, in which people are easily frustrated due to high sensitivity to failure. He corresponds to Elitist narcissist among Millon's classifications. Elitist narcissism is a type where one is captivated by the thought that he/she is a superior compared to others. He or she will aggressively pursue 'first classism' and is obsessed with receiving society's recognition and praise.

Kim Jong-un reflects some compensatory aspects regarding his mother (Ko Yong-hee)'s class, but they are not very distinctive. In the media, he can be seen as an intemperate type, but with regards to what he needs, such as public self-image and nuclear related technology, it is difficult aspects to interpret them as exploitive.

Kim Jong-un's narcissistic behaviors seem to naturally reveal his experience of the privileges he has enjoyed since childhood, as the son of Kim Jong-il, the supreme authority of North Korea. This study will define Kim Jong-un's personality as narcissistic and deal with his personality traits and its origin along with its relationship to North Korea's nuclear problem.

2.1. Clinical characteristics of narcissistic personality disorder

Narcissistic personality disorder is distinguished from other disorders and normal people in terms of self-perception, interpersonal relationship, cognitive characteristics, and emotional expression. First, the self-perception of narcissistic personality disorder makes people think that they are superior, very special and possess extraordinary rights and privileges. They think that they are superior to laws, rules, morals, and customs. Therefore, anyone who challenges them will be despised and scorned.

Second, in interpersonal relationships, people with narcissistic personality disorders use others to satisfy their own desires. They

cannot empathize with others, and are not interested in or unable to understand their rights, feelings and demands. Since they perceive others to be the medium that helps enhance self-esteem through their approvals and compliments, it is difficult for them to truly appreciate others, sympathize others' situations and feelings from other people's perspective, and also it is hard to establish a mutually beneficial relationship[7].

Third, the cognitive characteristics of narcissistic personality disorder are that they are caught up in fantasies, thinking that they are superior. They also exaggerate their abilities, rationalize failures into successes, try to expand their values, justify how they feel, and even devalue those who do not accept their self-image. They think that all successes are entirely due to their contributions, and blame others for all failures and frustrations[8]. Therefore, narcissistic personality is fundamentally good at rationalizing. Through rationalization, they turn failures into successes, fearful and shameful behaviors into dignified efforts.

Fourth, one of the characteristics of narcissistic personality in emotional expression is low empathy[9]. It is said that their parts of brains which are responsible for empathy are smaller[10]. Overall, they feel well-being based on indifference and calmness, but they easily feel angry and frustrated when they experience failures or when they feel that they are not receiving special treatment[11]. They often expect unrealistic achievements and performances that are in line with the elevated self-image. However, if the results are not as expected, they easily feel a sense of failure. If others do not respond as much as they want (mirror reaction), they feel that they are attacked, and get overwhelmed with extreme anger, hostility and vengeance.

The followings are diagnostic standards for the narcissistic personality disorder. If a person fulfills more than 5 fields, he or she can be said to have a narcissistic personality disorder[12].

1. Has an exaggerated view of oneself
2. Engages in fantasies of endless successes, outstanding beauty, or ideal love

3. Believes that he is special and unique. Believes that only special people or high-class people can understand him, and that he should only be with them
4. Requires excessive praises
5. Has a sense of privilege
6. Acts deceptively in interpersonal relationships
7. Lacks empathy
8. Often jealous of others or believe that others are jealous of himself
9. Arrogant and rude

Based on the testimonies of interested parties, Kim Jong-un's personality reflects the characteristics of the narcissistic personality disorder. According to the testimonies and observations of the surrounding people mentioned above, Kim fulfills at least 1,4,5 and 7. Researchers also point out the exploitative attitude toward others and the sense of privilege as the most maladaptive components of narcissistic personality disorder[13][14]. Therefore, it seems reasonable to assume that Kim Jong-un has a narcissistic personality disorder because of his sense of privilege, superiority that he has boasted ever since his childhood days, and expository and impulsive movements, and his exploitative interpersonal relationships after becoming coming into power.

2.2. Causes of narcissistic personality disorder

Then how did Kim Jong-un develop such a narcissistic personality? As the successor of so-called "Baekdoo bloodline", he must have been influenced by the environment, in which he took all the privileges for granted from a young age and also the social and cultural backgrounds in which North Koreans, including those who closely served the rulers, could not express their objections to the Kim's family. This study will analyze the reason why Jong-un Kim attained such narcissistic personality based on the psychodynamic theory, which gives the most in-depth explanations regarding narcissism.

Freud saw narcissistic personality disorder as where the primary narcissism of an infant becomes fixed. During the newborn period of an infant, they feel that they are very important as they are unconditionally supported and cared for by their parents (primary narcissism). However, as they clearly distinguish themselves from the outside world, they learn to love their parents and experience exchanges of affection, thereby feeling their worth and value (secondary narcissism). When one is expressing love to others and feeling self-worth by responding to the love and affection received from others, it is a mature form of narcissism[15].

Freud's explanation was redefined by Kohut, who advocated self-psychology. Kohut viewed that people with narcissistic personality disorder projected self-importance and immersed in narcissism and illusion of infinite success. These characteristics show that they hide their vulnerable self-esteem internally. Thus, they are developing their self-worth in order to receive constant respect from others. Furthermore, Kohut thought that parents' emotional indifference and emphasis toward achievements influenced their children's narcissistic personalities[16].

Kohut also found that if appropriate failures and discouragements are not experienced, it could develop to narcissistic personality disorder. This is where either experiences of discouragement of infant narcissism are absent or too extreme. If they don't get the chance to realistically correct their narcissistic grandiosity or manage their expectations of the image of their parents but rather strengthened, the idea of 'I'm a great and special person, and the world runs around me' will become fixated with greater conviction[17].

On the other hand, according to Kernberg, an object relation theorist, narcissistic personality is considered to be an exaggerated idea of 'narcissistic grandiosity'. He states that the narcissistic personality developed from the interactions made with mothers during childhood mixed with ideal self-image and mother figure[18].

As stated by Freud's explanation, Kim Jong-un, who has been privileged as a son of the absolute ruler, and as a person who grew up as self-centered and indifferent to other's interests, is presumed to remain at the stage of primary narcissism rather than the mature secondary narcissism. Kim Jong-un, who has been doing everything he pleased since his childhood, is unlikely to experience discouragements. According to people around him, the time when he studied abroad in Switzerland may have been some sort of a frustrating experience, but there was still nothing he couldn't do if he wanted to during that time.

Moreover, Kim Jong-un's father, Kim Il-sung, and his mother, Ko Yong-hee, were indeed 'almighty parents', not only in his imagination, but also in reality. In the North Korean society where Kim's dictatorship, which is passed from Il-sung Kim and Kim Jong-il, and where no one can challenge their authorities, Kim Jong-un's primary narcissism didn't have opportunities to be corrected but only strengthened in an improper way. This ended up developing a narcissistic personality that has stayed in the primary stage.

Narcissistic personality has a high chance of coming from a mother who has a lack of affection, cannot sympathize with her kids and coldly emphasizes success. However, in Ko Yong-hee's case, to compensate for her inferiority of her national origin, she made efforts to make her son Kim Jong-un to be the successor. In this process, her interactions with her son can be seen as strict and achievement oriented. According to the testimony of Kim Jong-un's aunt Ko Yong-Sook, when he would get scorned by his mother, he would rebel by fasting and not talking. This story can demonstrate Kim Jong-un's stubbornness, but before that, it also suggests that his conflict with his mother was beyond the norm.

3. Understanding North Korean Nuclear Issue with Kim Jong-Un's Personality

People with narcissistic personality disorder have unique beliefs and thinking pro-

cesses such as superiority and a sense of entitlement. Their belief system is formed by feedback from parents, siblings, and others during their growth process. Once this belief system is constructed, then a person's positive self-image can be strengthened by selectively paying attention only to information that conforms to their beliefs, and information which opposes their beliefs will be distorted. Through this process, narcissistic beliefs are strengthened and develop into the form of a personality disorder.

When the process of Kim Jong-un's personality development is traced, there are many conditions that may have strengthened his narcissistic beliefs and many narcissistic behavior patterns have actually been observed. Moreover, North Korea's leadership class, in which the atmosphere of self-protectionism is prevalent due to isolated environment of North Korea which is dominated by one-man dictatorship and repeated purges, is not capable of checking and restraining Kim Jong-un's behavior. Therefore, all of North Korea's strategies, including nuclear development, are almost wholly dependent on Kim Jong-un, and it is reasonable to consider that such decision-making processes are closely related to his personality.

Firstly, people with narcissistic personality disorder endeavor constantly to maintain their belief that they are special. Secondly, they use interpersonal interactions to enhance their self-esteem[7]. In other words, those with narcissistic personality disorder establish interpersonal relationship to feel their superiority. Therefore, the North Korean nuclear issues decided by Kim Jong-un must have been closely related to Kim Jong-un's need to satisfy a sense of superiority.

First of all, the nuclear tests and projectile development, which have been noticed during Kim Jong-un's reign, are interpreted as a way to show his presence and superiority in international society. The enhancement of nuclear capabilities and improvement of projectile performance are also evidence which reveal the superiority of North Korea and its leader, Kim Jong-un, and he enjoys the feeling of superiority when South Korea and Japan

are under a state of emergency due to the nuclear tests and launching of missiles, and the strain it also puts on the United States and China.

This clearly shows a difference when compared to the nuclear development carried out by his father, Kim Jong-il. While Kim Jong-il recognized nuclear capabilities as the only card capable of attracting the attention of international society considering the reality of North Korea's internationally isolated situation, and actually used it diplomatically, Kim Jong-un has blocked the possibility of using nuclear development as a means of negotiation, and made the nuclear holding a fact. According to report by Lee Sang-geun, Kim Jong-il would not have stopped the possibility of negotiating with the United States[19]. Of course, his personality is different to that of Kim Jong-il, but nuclear development is very important to Kim Jong-un and it is hard to expect he might give up North Korea's nuclear capabilities in the future.

Therefore, North Korea's nuclear development and missile launches are expected to continue. This is because continuing to send a message to the international community that they have nuclear weapons and that they can actually use them are a real advantage to maintaining their governing system, and to Kim Jong-un's since they provide psychological advantage of his self-satisfaction. Moreover, it is also the best means for North Korea to choose when considering economic sanction. Thus, it is unlikely that any negotiations requiring North Korea's abandonment of nuclear weapons will be effective.

If so, will Kim Jong-un, who is obtaining more explosive nuclear warheads, projectiles that can strike the United States, submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBM) that can disable theater of high altitude area defense missiles (THAAD), initiate nuclear war? This study suggests that the possibility is low. To those with narcissistic personality disorder, their first priority is to make conditions in which they can become the best and maintain their superiority. However, an outbreak of nuclear war or a full-scale war with South Korea could result in the destruction of such conditions for Kim Jong-un. Although nuclear

capabilities can be expanded, and can they could strike the United States, North Korea has a limited number of nuclear warheads and projectiles. They also lack the economic and military capabilities to engage in all-out or long-range wars. Despite the grandiose image of himself, it is unlikely that Kim Jong-un, who is well-aware of the actual situation of North Korea, will make extreme choices to eliminate the stage where he feels superior.

However, we cannot be relieved that there will be no extreme choices, such as initiating nuclear war or an all-out war. Since the military and weapons possessed by North Korea could become a serious threat at any time, it is essential to identify and predict North Korea's trends. The current situation with regard to the North Korean nuclear issue continues to be tense. North Korea does not want to give up their nuclear weapons, and the United States and South Korea have no intention of making negotiations until North Korea abandons the nuclear weapons. However, while North Korea is diplomatically and economically pressed, it is true that it is hard to find predictable factors for the future given the North Korea-China relationship, which has strengthened after the decision of South Korea's THAAD disposition.

4. Conclusion

Kim Jong-un's individual personality characters have been examined. Through various observations and testimonies, we can assume that Kim Jong-un's personality is very self-centered, ostentatious and impulsive, and these kind of personality traits can be classified as having a narcissistic personality disorder. This study described Kim Jong-un's narcissistic personality, assumed the causes, and predicted how his personality has already affected and how it will affect North Korea's nuclear issue in the future.

To sum up, North Korea's one man dictatorial regime and social atmosphere, the upbringing with Kim Jong-un taking many privileges for granted from childhood, and the grandeur self-image formed by his father who was a supreme ruler, and by his mother

whom his father favored the most, and interacted the most resulted in Kim Jong-un's current personality. As observed until now, Kim Jong-un's political activities are very introspective and impulsive, and this tendency is reflected in the nuclear issue. In other words, North Korea's nuclear development and the projectile development can be interpreted as tools used to reveal Kim Jong-un's superiority and a strategy to gain an advantageous position in the international community.

However, due to the nature of the narcissistic personality disorder, where one wants to satisfy one's superiority based on self-recognition that they are superior to others, it is unlikely that Kim Jong-un will make a fatal choice of using nuclear weapons. This is because he probably will not want the stage to disappear where he can reveal his superiority. However, when the situation develops into a stage where he will no longer be able to satisfy his desire for superiority, it is possible that he may make a different choice to recover superiority. Therefore, North Korea and Kim Jong-un should be looked closely with regards to such current affairs.

This study has implications in that we have diagnosed and predicted the cause and the process of the North Korean nuclear issue based on the analysis of Kim Jong-un's personal character at a time when the overall situation related to the North Korean nuclear issue is fixated. The North Korean nuclear issue is a strategic choice by North Korea that it has decided on as a nation among different variables such as the economy, domestic politics and diplomacy. Consequently, there may be concerns that trying to understand the nuclear issue from a psychological standpoint based on the analysis of individuals is looking at the issue from an overly narrow perspective. However, North Korea is isolated from the international community and maintains its own unique culture and social dynamism. North Korea has a systematic character with all the powers of the state concentrated on one individual, Kim Jong-un, who is an unprecedented dictator in the world. For this reason, it is for sure meaningful to understand the character of Kim Jong-un, who has the psychological background and collective

dynamics of North Korean citizens and the whole power of North Korea.

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