

Abstract

The Significance and Features of North Korea's New Rural Doctrine

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North Korea's 'New Rural Doctrine' was adopted during the 4th Plenary Meeting of the 8th Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) which was held in late December 2021. The overriding view in South Korea is that the new doctrine signifies a 'North Korean-style Saemaul Movement.' The resemblance between South Korea's Saemaul Movement and North Korea's new rural development is displayed in the doctrine's propagation of enhancing agricultural production (to alleviate food shortages) and resolving the urban-rural gap (by improving the rural living environment). However, such an analogy is

only a partial assessment based on the fragmented reports disclosed by North Korea.

The new doctrine seems more of a revival of Kim Il Sung's 'Rural Theses,' which had been de facto discarded during the agricultural reform process since the early 2000s. Boosting farm production and closing the gap between rural and urban areas are not new but old agendas that were emphasized in the Rural Theses. It is also noteworthy that 'Thought Revolution' and 'New System of Agricultural Guidance,' the core contents of the Rural Theses, have been reemphasized and revived through 'Our-style Agricultural Guidance System' in the new doctrine. In addition, the Rural Theses was adopted amid a need to increase the government's food purchase ratio by introducing the mandatory procurement plan, which also seems to be the case for the new doctrine.

Kim Il Sung, at that time, faced an accumulation crisis that resulted from the dual policy of defense and economic development promoted while the Soviet

Union and China had suspended foreign assistance. The mandatory procurement plan of the Rural Theses aimed to overcome North Korea's accumulation crisis by exploiting the agricultural surplus of the cooperative farms. The Thought Revolution and New Agricultural Guidance System purported to facilitate exploitation by the de facto nationalization of the cooperative farms and by means of expediting the peasant-to-worker process. North Korea is confronted with another accumulation crisis due to international sanctions and the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, the new rural doctrine can be interpreted as an attempt to increase the government's agricultural plunder by abandoning its agricultural reform policy and enhancing the collectivistic feature of the cooperative farms.

From a broader perspective, the New Rural Doctrine appears to be part of North Korea's efforts to recentralize economic management and strengthen government control on the producer and consumer goods. Therefore, the adoption of the new doctrine, amid the recent resurgence of the concept of 'complete victory of socialism' seems to

signify that North Korea has completed the theoretical work for a return to economic conservatism.

Keywords

complete victory of socialism, rural doctrine,
agricultural guidance system, thought revolution