



China's Position on Korean Unification and ROK-PRC Relations

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I . Introduction

The established assumption is that the People's Republic of China (either PRC or China) has consistently supported North Korea's position on Korean unification since the Cold War-era. Officially, China has voiced support for peaceful Korean unification achieved through peaceful means and not by military means; and this principle also applies to North Korea. The general perception, however, is that China's policy in practice has adhered to a strategy of deferring or deterring South Korea-led unification. This perception originates from the dichotomous thinking that is the legacy of the Cold War-era, but also reflects accumulated experience with China and reflects the current strategic situation of China.

Despite their various sorts of rhetoric, both South and North Korea's perspectives on unification during the Cold War were based on the premise of unification by absorption; and both Koreas did not rule out the will to achieve this end by military means. South Korea envisioned achieving unification by advancing into North Korea with the support of the ROK-US alliance, while China sought to deter, overpower, or at least offset the ROK-US alliance to prevent South Korea from achieving this end. Even in today's post-Cold War context, these perceptions still strongly resonate in South Korean society and among ROK policy makers.

The question is whether these Cold War-era perceptions and policies on Korean unification will provide the most realistic and desirable options to address new external/internal developments that have emerged in the post-Cold War-era. That is, we need to take into account the following factors that have newly emerged in addressing the issue of Korean unification.

First, North Korea faces chronic economic difficulties that originate from its socialist system, while internal political instability is increasing with the recent series of political purges in an attempt to consolidate the power of the Kim Jong-un regime. North Korea has sought to overcome these challenges to its regime security and post-Cold War security challenges by arming itself with nuclear weapons. As long as North Korea maintains the perception that its nuclear weapons programs are a strategic asset, and thus insist on keeping its nuclear weapons, its isolation from the international community will intensify, and make it more difficult for it to adopt economic opening and reform measures that are necessary for its regime security. If North Korea continues to maintain these policies, it would also be difficult to rule out the scenario of a North Korean implosion, and the potential for a military conflict on the Korean

peninsula.

Second, PRC-DPRK relations are in the process of shifting from the Cold War-era traditional “special” alliance relationship to a normal “state to state” relationship. This signifies that bilateral relations are no longer being defined by ideological affinities, but are shifting towards a more complex relationship that is prescribed by strategic, diplomatic, security and economic interests. At the same time, we can observe the diversification of views on North Korea within the Chinese policy making circle, as well as the growing dilemma among Chinese academics and policy makers with regards to the strategic value of North Korea.

Third, US-PRC relations have evolved since the 1970s from a confrontational relationship to a more complex relationship that is characterized by competition and cooperation defined by strategic interests. For the time being, US-PRC relations are likely to be characterized by the coexistence of cooperation and conflict, but both countries appear to perceive that in the mid- to long-term the bilateral relationship will inevitably evolve towards a strategic consortium or “US-China Concert” system. In particular, the G-2 system has already become more or less established in the Northeast Asia region, and regardless of power transition trends, it has become difficult for one country to unilaterally coerce the other. Under the current situation, both the US and China appear to prefer a status-quo policy over a revisionist policy in light of their strategic interests on the Korean peninsula.

In light of the above factors, the post-Cold War situation cannot be necessarily seen as being more favorable for South Korea in achieving its goal of unification. South Korea remains the only country in the region that seeks unification or a revisionist policy on the Korean peninsula, which is contrary to the will of neighboring powers. Following the death of

North Korean leader Kim Jong-il, China continues to have suspicions that South Korea may attempt to change the status quo and has attempted to check such efforts. This means that it is highly unlikely that a North Korean contingency scenario will naturally lead to Korean unification. At the same time, South Korea faces the growing potential for conflict on the Korean peninsula.

In light of these situational developments, it is important to note China's position and role on Korean unification. China is in the process of undergoing meaningful change, including China's relations with North Korea, the United States and South Korea. China is considered as a constant, rather than a variable, in Korean unification, and this is likely to be the case in the future. This is due to the strategic importance of the Korean peninsula to China; and Beijing has the will and capacity to intervene in whatever way in Korean peninsula affairs. Therefore, it is imperative to understand the implications of these changes for Korean unification, and will be an integral part of solving the most difficult and key puzzle to Korean unification.

II . China's Geopolitical Interests on the Korean Peninsula

1. China's Position on Korean Unification: Historical Origins

Chinese leader Mao Zedong decided in 1950 to enter the Korean War based on the strategic judgment that the future of China would be directly linked to whether US–ROK joint forces succeed in winning the war. It is interesting to note, however, that the Chinese military opposed to Mao's decision to enter the war, which forced Mao to defer his decision in order to persuade the military. China's entry into the Korean War eventually resulted in the division of the Korean peninsula, and also forced China to

forgo its opportunity to unify with Taiwan. That is, China's intervention in the Korean War came at the price of failing to unify with Taiwan. This means that China's loss of Taiwan, as well as China's defeat in the Sino-Japanese war in the late 19th century, were both related to China's military intervention in the Korean peninsula.

The Chinese military's opposition to entering the Korean War was based on the historical lesson of not repeating the same mistake, while having to suffer immense losses by fighting the more technologically superior US forces. China's losses during the Korean War provided the historical basis for China's efforts to evade a direct military confrontation with the United States during the Vietnam War.

The tragic experience and lesson stemming from China's participation in the Korean War is reflected in the 1961 PRC-DPRK Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance. Article 2 of the treaty commits both parties to come to the aid of the other if attacked and is often cited as the grounds for the PRC-DPRK military alliance. Article 6 of this treaty, however, strongly reflects China's position on Korean unification. That is, the article stipulates that "the unification of Korea must be realized through peaceful and democratic foundations," and that "such a resolution must be recognized as corresponding to the national interests of the Korean people and the aim of preserving peace in the Far East."

China's emphasis on Korean peninsula peace in the article could have been a defensive response to situational developments on the Korean peninsula at the time, including US nuclear armament on the Korean peninsula and the anti-Communist policies of the new Park Chung-hee military government and Kennedy administration. At the same time, the article reflects Chinese concerns of being forced to get militarily involved in Korean peninsula affairs by North Korea; the article thus provided a

safety mechanism for China by stating that Korean unification must be realized through peaceful and democratic means.

Beijing's position on Korean unification is also reflected in the secret cable (dated March 28, 1973) drafted by the East German Embassy in Pyongyang, and states the following: "Though it appears that Chinese propaganda outlets support North Korea's position on Korean unification, the USSR judges that China is not interested in Korean unification. China will support Korean unification only when it is confident that a unified Korea will be pro-Chinese." The cable goes on to state that "China was also concerned that a unified Korea made up of over 50 million Koreans will become more politically important and independent, and that a leader with political ambitions extending beyond the Korean peninsula will appear."

This position is also reflected during Henry Kissinger's secret talks with the Chinese during the 1970s. At the time, instead of expressing support for North Korea's position on Korean unification, China expressed that the Korean peninsula issue should be resolved by the four parties or the US, China and the two Koreas. This position also reflects China's approach to maintain the status quo on the Korean peninsula by jointly managing Korean peninsula affairs with the United States. Even when US-PRC talks were suspended in the mid-1970s and it became inevitable for the US to pull out of Southeast Asia, China consistently expressed opposition to then-North Korean leader Kim Il-sung's intention to use military means to unify the two Koreas. Furthermore, China clearly conveyed to North Korea that it would not accept any attempts by Pyongyang to change the status quo on the Korean peninsula by military means, and drew the line that Beijing supports "North Korea's independent peaceful unification policy." Since then, China has consistently maintained the status quo and peaceful unification principle, which is based on its historical lesson from the

Korean War and pragmatic judgment.

2. Possibility of Change in China's Status Quo Policy

We do not need to presume that China will always adopt a negative position on Korean unification. First, we should note the high likelihood that the territory of North Korea is not included in what China defines as its “core interest.” At the inaugural Strategic and Economic Dialogue (S&ED) talks in 2009, Chinese State Councilor Dai Bingguo articulated China's three “core interests” as maintaining the governance capacity of the Chinese Communist Party, issues related to sovereignty and territory, and sustainable economic development and social stability. In light of this position, in contrast to the issue of Taiwan, China does not consider North Korea to be directly linked to its sovereignty or territory. At the same time, there is still the possibility that the North Korea issue could be linked to China's “core interests” if it has implications for China's governance capacity. For example, a situation where the United States unilaterally occupies the territory of North Korea without the consent of Beijing could have implications for the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party. Also, China would have concerns regarding the negative implications that a North Korea collapse scenario would have for China's social stability and economic development.

In general, North Korea still has strategic importance to China, but it has a secondary impact to China's core national interests. From a geo-economic perspective, North Korea could rather be considered as having a negative impact on China's sustainable economic development. In particular, North Korea's nuclear weapons programs could pose a potential threat to China by increasing the possibility of a military conflict with the US and South Korea, having negative implications for the economic

development and social stability of China's northeast regions, strengthening North Korea's independent diplomatic/military policy line, and increasing the potential for nuclear technology and materials to fall in the hands of separatists in China. Ironically, North Korea is important to China not because it is a strategic asset, but because of the large strategic cost and burden that North Korea could incur on China. In fact, the current debate between traditionalists and strategists in China on North Korea's strategic value is related to these concerns.

Since the launch of the Xi Jinping leadership, China's policy towards the Korean peninsula and North Korea is in the process of evolving. It is still unclear what the ultimate result will be, and this process will be influenced by many factors. But it seems to be clear that the evolving policy will be clearly different from China's former policy towards North Korea, and in some respects be well pointed out by Peking University Professor Niu Jun's analysis that Chinese policy towards North Korea is moving along a critical juncture. China's traditional policy towards the Korean peninsula is based on the following four principles: (1) preventing war on the Korean peninsula, (2) preventing chaos in North Korea, (3) deterring South Korea-led unification, and (4) denuclearization. However, China has recently revised its official principles towards the Korean peninsula to denuclearization, maintaining peace and stability, and resolving the Korean peninsula issue through dialogue instead of the aforementioned four principles. It is noteworthy that the former principle on deterring South Korea-led unification has disappeared and there are signs that China is even inclined to accept South Korea-led peaceful unification (if it is independent) as the fourth principle. This position is generally in line with China's existing principle of peaceful Korean unification, but is more implementable in light of developments in inter-Korean relations and

ROK-China relations, and also has the implication of Beijing's pressure on North Korea.

III. ROK Unification Policy That's Compatible for Beijing

There are three general scenarios for realizing Korean unification: (1) unification through military conflict, (2) unification through inter-Korean political consensus or democratic procedures, and (3) unification by absorption triggered by a contingency situation in North Korea. Depending on the situation, a North Korea contingency scenario could provide the opportunity for Korean unification so it is essential for South Korea to prepare for various North Korea contingency situations. But, in realistic terms, it is highly likely that neighboring countries, especially China, will respond to a contingency scenario based on concerns of a ROK attempt to achieve unification by absorption. This demonstrates that the unification by absorption scenario triggered by a North Korea contingency situation will not be as easy in achieving unification as one might think.

In light of such factors, the most desirable unification scenario would be achieving unification through inter-Korean political consensus or democratic means. This implies that South Korea needs to adopt a more proactive approach when it comes to the North Korea issue, and take the initiative to be ready to burden related costs in inter-Korean relations. In particular, it is necessary for South Korea to convey to Beijing that South Korea's unification policy does not seek to change the status quo on the Korean peninsula by military means, while explaining that Seoul wants to maintain stability on the Korean peninsula through coexistence. These efforts will also provide the foundation for building trust with China, which is essential in achieving unification. At the same time, South Korea needs

to also underscore its “special” position on the Korean peninsula during its consultations with Beijing so that South Korea’s position is reflected and respected by China, and such efforts will contribute to laying the foundation for peaceful unification.

South Korea’s unification-related diplomacy needs to move beyond its traditional strategy of minimizing damages or preparing for the worst-case scenario by consolidating the ROK-US alliance; but to adopt a strategy that seeks to overcome such constraints. In order to overcome these constraints, South Korea needs to recognize and appropriately adapt to changes in the dynamics in US-PRC relations and the Northeast Asia security structure, while identifying the common denominator in US-PRC relations and make corresponding efforts to expand this common ground in line with ROK interests.

It is general knowledge to believe that China prefers a status quo policy towards the Korean peninsula (i.e., a divided Korean peninsula) regardless of one’s policy orientation (traditional vs. strategic). This claim is still convincing in light of the Chinese leadership’s consensus-based decision-making process, the conservative orientation of the Chinese leadership, as well as the fact that North Korea still continues to have actual strategic value to Beijing.

But, at the same time, it would be wrong to dismiss the Chinese leadership as blindly seeking to maintain the status quo on the Korean peninsula; and such a conclusion would result in reducing South Korea’s diplomatic and strategic space. It should be noted that China’s official position on Korean unification is that it supports the independent and peaceful unification of the two Koreas. This position is intricately related to China’s policy to achieve unification with Taiwan. Beijing’s opposition to Korean unification would be logically incompatible to China’s policy to

unify Taiwan. China is also well aware that South Korea will naturally be the main actor in Korean unification, if it happens.

The problem then lies with China's perception that a unified Korea will have negative implications for China's strategic interests. That is, China's concerns about ROK-led unification are related to the potential that a unified Korea will be led by a government unfriendly to China, and that the government will assist the United States in checking China. In particular, such concerns are relevant to the concern that the Korean peninsula will be used as a military base in the event of a military conflict in Taiwan straits, and thus serve as a barrier to China's unification with Taiwan. North Korea has been well aware of such Chinese concerns and has utilized such concerns as the basis to its survival strategy.

Therefore, if South Korea intends to take the lead in achieving Korean unification, Seoul needs to present a blueprint and specific conditions for Korean unification that would be both acceptable to the US and China. This is because China has already become one of the most important stakeholders in the Northeast Asia region along with the US, and also in light of the fact that Beijing has the clear incentive and will to intervene in Korean peninsula affairs. In contrast, it would be difficult to realize Korean unification if it goes against the strategic interests of the US and China.

In light of international political developments, South Korea needs to recognize that ROK-PRC relations can no longer be considered as a variable in ROK diplomacy, but that it has become a constant in ROK diplomacy like ROK-US relations. South Korea also needs to make efforts so that China would be able to share the perception that Korean unification will not necessarily undermine Chinese strategic interests. It would be imperative to make a practical argument for unification by accurately identifying Chinese

strategic interests in real terms instead of making a normative argument on the need for Korean unification; South Korea also needs to make efforts to expand the areas of common strategic interests with the United States and China that are in line with ROK interests.

The United States and China would be able to agree on a unification scenario that would involve North Korea adopting an opening and reform policy, taking measures to denuclearize, and eventually agreeing to unify with South Korea through peaceful means. As long as North Korea insists on possessing its nuclear programs, North Korea will continue to adopt a survival strategy by utilizing the security crisis situation in the Northeast Asia region created by its nuclear activities. North Korea will continue to be a source of instability and uncertainty on the Korean peninsula, and thus threaten the security of the Korean peninsula, which China considers as a necessary condition to its economic development and national security. North Korea will go to the extent of forcing China to play the role of the “villain” in its relations with neighboring countries including the United States. Thus, North Korea will increasingly become a strategic burden, rather than an asset to China.

For this reason, China is in the process of transforming PRC–DPRK relations to a normal state–to–state relationship. The ulterior motive behind then–Chinese President Hu Jintao’s proposal in 2011 to North Korean leader Kim Jong–il during his visit to China to “strengthen PRC–DPRK strategic communications on internal and diplomatic issues” reflects China’s practical dilemma to check such behavior from Pyongyang. The protracted North Korean nuclear crisis will further deepen China’s dilemma regarding North Korea, and also impact China’s strategic thinking on Korean unification.

In this process, both South Korea and China need to overcome their 20th

century geopolitics-based security perspectives and establish a new 21st century geo-strategic frame work for thinking that includes geo-economic interests. That is, there needs to be a shared perspective that a stable, denuclearized and unified Korea that is led by a peace-oriented government, and which provides the space for broad economic activities and exchanges will provide more opportunities for prosperity for both countries.

IV. A Unified Korea and Chinese Political, Economic, and Socio-Cultural Interests

There are several benefits to Korean unification that China could consider. First, by eliminating the nuclear threat, Korean unification could play a role in stabilizing US-China relations since the protracted North Korean nuclear crisis and instability of the Korean peninsula is seen as having a negative influence on US-China relations.

Second, a unified Korea could be more beneficial for China in geo-economic terms. This is because the North Korea issue could have negative implications for China's sustainable economic development, which is important for China's political and social stability. Therefore, China needs to ensure that the security environment in Northeast Asia is stable and is in need of a broad-range economic belt. In light of the fact that the economic drivers from China's coastal development strategy are depleting, the development of China's northeast region is very important for China's sustainable economic development. But, as long as the North Korean nuclear issue and North Korea issue remain unresolved, such issues will serve as serious constraints to the stability and economic development of China's northeast region.

Third, China could also judge that it would be easier to expand economic cooperation and become closer with South Korea than the United States due to the geographic proximity, and ethnic and cultural similarities. Accordingly, it is possible for China to make the strategic judgment that a unified Korea could be an ultimate method to reduce US influence in the region. The potential for China to make such a judgment suggests that if the appropriate conditions are in place and when China is faced with the situation to make a decision, it is possible that China could adopt a more favorable position on Korean unification.

Fourth, as long as China seeks unification with Taiwan, it would be difficult for China to adopt a negative position on Korean unification as it would not be logically compatible with its position on unification with Taiwan. Korean unification could also contribute to creating the atmosphere for Chinese unification, while at the same time play a role in reducing the psychological resistance in China and international community regarding Chinese unification. In particular, South Korea–led unification could also provide the motivation for optimistic thinking on the positive impact, while minimizing the negative impact of unification with Taiwan.

V. Positions of Chinese Opinion Leaders on Korean Unification

In light of recent developments in PRC–DPRK relations, it would be more accurate to understand the bilateral relationship as a cohabitation relationship that is based on both countries' strategic interests than to see the relationship in static terms as an alliance relationship. PRC–DPRK relations are deeply influenced by changes in China's internal development strategy, developments in US–PRC relations, China's integration and

greater dependence on the international economy, ROK-PRC relations and new structural developments. When Hu Jintao came into office in 2002 and carried out a complete review of China's foreign policy, China made it clear that it would address PRC-DPRK relations as a normal state-to-state relationship. It appears that the Xi Jinping leadership will firmly maintain and even arduously promote this position. A normal state relationship in the nation-state system means that state relations will be based on national interest. This concept is clearly different in concept and nuance from the existing perception of viewing the PRC-DPRK relationship as a "blood-shared alliance." Developments in bilateral relations will be based on this trend to shift bilateral relations towards a normal relationship, and has negative implications for bilateral relations rather than serve to strengthen bilateral ties.

North Korea has traditionally been perceived as a strategic buffer state of China. Based on this logic, it is not difficult to understand why China had decided to enter the Korean War. North Korea and China not only fought against the United States, but shared an ideological link during the Cold War and went on to establish the PRC-DPRK Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in 1961, which included an article justifying Chinese military intervention on the Korean peninsula. Because this article is still valid, many South Korean and foreign scholars have characterized the PRC-DPRK relationship as a semi-alliance. This perception provides the basis for the argument that China will continue to support and protect North Korea regardless of additional provocations like after its nuclear test and Cheonan battleship-sinking incident; according to this argument, China is also highly likely to intervene militarily in the event of a North Korea contingency. Proponents to this argument claim that PRC-DPRK relations cannot be free of the structural constraints from the Cold War, thus we

cannot underestimate the special nature of PRC-DPRK relations.

Recent research on PRC-DPRK relations during the Cold War, however, demonstrates that relations were more relatively characterized by distrust as seen in North Korea's policy to use its own independent means to promote its own security rather than follow a policy in line with the socialist ideology and respect on China's interests.

In light of the current situation, there are growing and deeper differences rather than similarities when looking at bilateral relations. This represents significant differences in both countries' strategic interests. In the mid- to long-run, greater strategic cooperation between the US and China would mean decreasing interests and great costs for China in maintaining its relations with North Korea. Progress in ROK-PRC relations will likewise mean greater costs for China in maintaining its relations with Pyongyang. If we observe the pattern of recent DPRK provocations, the possibility of DPRK provocations appears to increase when US-PRC relations are improving or well-managed than when Washington-Beijing relations are deteriorating.

At the same time, existing US-China and ROK-PRC distrust still maintain the validity of claims that China and North Korea still share common interests. Even if North Korea will not have the equal strategic value to China as Taiwan, the utility of the North Korea card still remains in relation to the Taiwan issue. In addition, the North Korean nuclear issue and the instability factor of North Korea, which thus increases costs for China, has ironically had the effect of increasing the importance of the North Korea issue for China.

In light of this situation, China's Korean peninsula policy will likely maintain the Korean peninsula status quo position and continue to support the peaceful unification method. Accordingly, China will be opposed to

German-style unification or unification by absorption. In the past, China tried to evade a direct military conflict situation on a Chinese soil with the US by getting involved in Korean peninsula affairs as supporting North Korea's unification strategy by military means. At present, China appears to have judged that unification if it happens is likely to be led by South Korea in consideration of North Korea's military inferiority compared to South Korea and the growing factors of instability inside North Korea related to regime instability. It is likely that China will oppose ROK-led unification due to concerns that ROK-led unification will strengthen the US strategic posture on the Korean peninsula and concerns that a unified Korea will try to check China, and thus lead to greater US influence.

China views the period up to 2020 as the period of strategic opportunity for it to achieve great power status. Therefore, its interests would likely focus on actively preventing instability on the Korean peninsula or in the region. Korean peninsula instability could pose significant challenges to China's economic development due to its internal vulnerabilities, and accordingly have negative implications for the Communist Party's power.

Accordingly, China's rational policy choice would be to manage the Korean peninsula situation, while strengthening cooperation and dialogue with both South and North Korea. It is likely that China will expand its contact and cooperation with the Kim Jong-un regime as a way to manage the North Korea situation, while urging North Korea to incrementally adopt Chinese-style economic reform. At the same time, China will maintain economic and diplomatic support towards North Korea to prevent regime collapse.

VI. ROK-PRC Relations and Maintaining Peace on the Korean Peninsula

ROK-PRC relations will still be influenced by the following factors: China's foreign policy direction, US-PRC relations, the North Korean nuclear issue, and inter-Korean relations. It is necessary for South Korea to make efforts to establish ROK-PRC relations that would be more independent from these factors, but in practice this would be a difficult task. The current Park Geun-hye administration has adopted an approach towards building inter-Korean trust. But this would also be a difficult task due to structural challenges in the region. The concept of "trust" could be appropriate in epistemological terms and for the political branding of President Park's policy, but it would be difficult to use the concept as a practical criterion for policy. That is, all key criteria in ROK foreign policy would have to be based on national interest. China has also stated its position that its position on the Korean peninsula issue will be based on national interest.

If we list the above factors in the order of how much the factor is subject to South Korea influence, the list is as follows: inter-Korean relations, North Korean nuclear issue, US-PRC relations, and China's foreign policy direction. Seoul must take an initiative according to the order of influence. The North Korean nuclear issue will remain the greatest factor that could influence ROK-PRC relations in the immediate term since it remains one of South Korea's vital security interests. Many Chinese experts have claimed that the nuclear issue could be resolved by addressing North Korea's security threat perceptions since the nuclear issue originates from these threat perceptions. This position is similar to North Korea's position and claims. In contrast, South Korea perceives that North Korean nuclear

ambitions first originated from the US nuclear umbrella, but gradually DPRK nuclear development efforts became more related to North Korea's security and survival strategy against the backdrop of North Korea's greater inferiority to South Korea. South Korea perceives that currently North Korea's possession of nuclear weapons are seen as part of Pyongyang's survival strategy linked to internal issues, as well as an effort to expand Pyongyang's strategic space for unification. Therefore, based on these perceptions, there is the strong view that North Korea will not give up its nuclear weapons even if its regime security issue is resolved. North Korea identified itself as a nuclear state in its 2012 constitution and it appears that North Korea will continue to make efforts to get recognized as a nuclear weapons state. If the current situation continues, it appears that North Korea will complete its development of inter-continental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) within the next years and expand the number of warheads. By the end of President Park Geun-hye's term, we can expect North Korea to reach the nuclear capacity of producing about 30 nuclear warheads.

South Korea's policy options to North Korea's nuclear threats could be summarized as the following: (1) counter-response, (2) submission or (3) adaptation. Considering the disposition of South Korean people and South Korea's national power, it is highly unlikely that South Korea will submit to North Korea's nuclear threat. Therefore, South Korea's policy options to the nuclear threat would be either counter-response or adaptation, but it is still unclear which position the Park Geun-hye administration will adopt.

A counter-response strategy would mean either South Korea's nuclear armament or strengthening the ROK-US alliance by extending the US nuclear umbrella over the Korean peninsula. Another option in the counter-response strategy would be to establish a multilateral security framework that could offset inter-Korean mutual concerns on its respective

security. But since this last option can be applied in the long-term framework and due to the level of uncertainty, the ROK government is likely to put the most priority on strengthening its alliance with the US and the next possible option, if the above option doesn't work, would be to adopt a policy on South Korean nuclear armament. The key components of an adaptation strategy would be to maintain a clear opposition to North Korean nuclear weapons and continuing efforts to achieve denuclearization on the Korean peninsula. Since this position implies recognizing North Korea as a normal state, the process will involve both Koreas establishing appropriate rules. The methods in the adaptation strategy could be divided into a proactive and passive adaptation strategy. A proactive strategy would involve taking an aggressive position focusing on North Korean regime collapse or unification, while a passive strategy would focus on situation management.

The current position of the ROK government could be seen as taking a middle position between a counter-response and adaptation strategy. In concept, President Park's trustpolitik policy could be seen as a variant of an adaptation strategy, but the current situation warrants serious consideration of a counter-response strategy. In light of developments in the situation, South Korea will feel the need to agonize over its strategic position between the two options of a proactive and passive adaptation strategy. When considering the two variants of the adaptation strategy, the ROK government is likely to lean more towards a proactive adaptation strategy, while the Chinese government will likely have more preference for a passive adaptation strategy. It is thus necessary for South Korea and China to have strategic communications in order to reduce this gap.

In addressing the Kaesong Industrial Complex (KIC) shutdown issue in 2013, the Park Geun-hye administration suggested that it was adopting an

adaptation strategy, which can be credited as bringing on the relatively successful resolution of the issue. Despite the successful resolution of the KIC issue, it is still difficult to make an optimistic assessment of future developments. We have to understand that the China factor played a large part in the successful resolution of the KIC issue, and therefore South Korea needs to actively utilize the China factor in consolidating positive results from its adaptation strategy. Under the situation, where North Korea is unlikely to give up its nuclear ambitions, South Korea and China lack the appropriate means to sufficiently respond to North Korea, which darkens prospects for the future security of the Korean peninsula.

Serious developments in the North Korean nuclear issue are likely to increasingly have negative implications for ROK-PRC relations. Therefore, efforts are necessary to promote ROK-PRC mutual interests in the Korean peninsula, regional and global levels by utilizing common interests found in the respective ROK trustpolitik policy and PRC “a new type of major power relations” position. South Korea and China, along with the United States need to carry out consultations and joint efforts on denuclearization, inducing North Korea towards the direction of economic opening and reform, as well as jointly responding to DPRK's continued nuclear development activities, threats and military provocations. South Korea and China both need to share the will to seek a way for coexistence among South Korea, North Korea and China, while working together to lead North Korea in a positive direction.

The direction of China's policy on North Korea will be affected by multiple factors. South Korea needs to be aware that there are also many gaps on North Korea in the two countries' respective interests, and such gaps and different expectations have the potential to lead to unnecessary conflict between the two countries. An example of the expectation gap

could be related to South Korea hoping that China will adopt a more firm position towards North Korea, while China will want South Korea to play a more proactive role in reducing tensions and provide the occasion for a breakthrough in the face of inter-Korean, PRC-Japan and US-PRC tensions. South Korea needs to break away from its prejudice that the PRC-DPRK relationship is an alliance and “special relationship,” while China needs to also free itself from the prejudice that the ROK-US alliance is a static factor. In particular, both countries need to work on improving mutual perceptions among its people through public diplomacy efforts. If President Park’s June 2013 state visit to China had the goal of “creating the diplomatic space and opportunity” with China, the Park government in 2014 needs to focus on analyzing the achievements and also making efforts to realize concrete results from the visit. Follow-up measures to President Park’s state visit to China still remain pending, and it could be of concern that the Park administration has not yet come out with a vision to expand bilateral cooperation to the strategic level.

Both South Korea and China need to overcome their respective geopolitical-based security orientations characteristic of the 20th century and need to establish a new geo-strategic frame work that includes geo-economic interests appropriate for the 21st century. A stable, denuclearized and unified Korea that is led by a peace-oriented government, and expanded economic activities and exchanges would expand the prosperity and opportunities for both countries. In order to achieve this end, South Korea and China need to come together to discuss the future of the Korean peninsula based on a consensus to look towards the future, develop new areas of cooperation, and establish mutual respect and mutual prosperity.

It is highly likely that the direction of President Park Geun-hye’s foreign

policies and North Korea policy, and South Korea's relations with North Korea and neighboring countries in the Park administration will play a decisive role in South Korea's future. South Korea needs to move away from its former bandwagoning behavior, and play a more proactive role in understanding and addressing its challenges that is more appropriate to its middle-power status. South Korea hopes for a prudent leader comparable to France's Richelieu, Austria's Metternich, Germany (Prussia's) Bismarck, Stresemann, Adenauer, Kohl, and Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh. South Korea is at the cross roads in security waiting for a "philosopherking."

