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국제학석사학위논문

China's Policy on North Korean Nuclear Tests: Changed and Unchanged

북한 핵문제에 대한 중국의 정책:
변화와 지속

2016년 8월

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Abstract

China's Policy on North Korean Nuclear Tests: Changed and Unchanged

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North Korea enforced four times of nuclear test in 2006, 2009, 2013 and 2016. Continuous nuclear tests are influencing a historically special relationship of China and North Korea. After the third nuclear test, arguments on whether or not there is any shift in China's policy towards North Korea reached its peak. By analyzing China's responses on North Korea after each nuclear test, this paper analyzes the changed and unchanged position of China.

Main subjects of analysis are (1) China's official position (2) China's attitude in the international society such as in the United Nations (3) China's substantial participation in political and economic sanctions (4) high-level meetings and other political exchanges (5) acceptance of criticism on North Korea in China.

Although some vivid changes are observed in China's tactical responses, the strategic judgment on North Korea stays consistent. The reason for the unchanged strategic judgment is fundamentally based on the lack of mutual trust in the Sino-US relations, China's demand for leverage on the Korean Peninsula and possible domestic problems in China. China will continue to show duplicity on North Korea's nuclear tests since China, as a major power, is demanded with responsibility from the international society but at the same time, intends to maintain the stability of the North Korean regime. As a result, as long as North Korea's nuclear come within multilateral category not bilateral, as long as it does not directly impact China's core interests, and as long as the competitive Sino-US relations continue lacking trust, China's fundamental policy will stay consistent.

Keywords: China, North Korea, Sino-DPRK relations, nuclear, nuclear test, strategic judgment, tactical response

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Chapter I. Introduction

1. Research Question and Background

Historically, the relationship between China and North Korea had been complex. Sharing approximately 14,000km of the nation's border and socialist ideology, the two countries cooperated in the Chinese Civil War, the Korean War and formed the only military alliance with each other.¹ The strong blood alliance of the two countries sustained from the 1950s for more than twenty years and for a long time China had been the big brother of North Korea. However, the Chinese 'Reform and Opening up' policy followed by its rapid economic growth led China to a higher status in the international system and is now expected to show responsibility as a superpower. China tried to keep North Korea inside the border of international system via the Six-Party Talks while North Korea enforced dramatic provocations threatening the peace of Northeast Asia and received severe criticism from the international society.

North Korea enforced four times of nuclear test in 2006, 2009, 2013 and 2016. Continued nuclear tests are influencing a rather special relationship between China and North Korea. China has been showing duplicity on North Korea's nuclear issue, officially opposing the tests but at the same time

¹ 소치형, 『현대 중국 정치외교론』 (서울: 건국대학교출판부, 2013), p. 439.

cooperating with North Korea and persuading other relevant parties to solve the problem within the framework of peaceful negotiations and dialogues rather than drastic sanctions. Although some vivid changes are observed in China's tactical responses on its longtime ally, it is quite certain that the strategic judgment on North Korea stays consistent. The author would like to examine both policy and responses of China on North Korea and analyze the reasons for the consistency. The research will address the following questions: despite nuclear tests, what is the reason for China's consistent stance and policy on North Korea? How and why have the responses changed after each nuclear test? In pursuing answers to the above research question, the author has limited the scope of research to China's North Korean policy on the case of nuclear tests. Furthermore, by analyzing the main factors of the consistency, the paper will anticipate the stance of China on North Korea and on the Korean Peninsula and try to answer whether or not China will maintain the same stance on North Korea's nuclear issue and ultimately, on North Korea in the future.

2. Literature Review

As North Korea's nuclear test is one of the most controversial issues in the Northeast Asia geopolitics, an uncountable number of academics have studied China's role on North Korea's nuclear development. China shows consistency on the issue. It constantly supports peace and stability of the Korean Peninsula,

and the denuclearization of the area. After every nuclear test, the Chinese government officially opposed and criticized North Korea for violent provocations but did not impose any significant sanctions on the country. China's insistence on peaceful problem solving, in other words, means ambivalent stance on North Korea's nuclear tests that rationalize the friendly Sino-DPRK relationship. However, since the outbreak of the third nuclear test in 2013, some scholars argued that China's policy towards North Korea has changed. They claimed that the two countries are going through a cooling-off period politically and seeking utilitarianism economically. In Boao Forum for Asia held in April 2013, President Xi Jinping stated, "no one should be allowed to throw a region, or even the whole world, into chaos for selfish gains."² Although he did not name any specific country, as the announcement was made not long after the third nuclear test of North Korea, his statement can be presumed to be targeting North Korea. Premier Le Keqiang also warned Pyongyang to stop being provocative, and Foreign Minister Wang Yi made similar remarks, calling on all parties to refrain from increasing the tensions.³ Also, China agreed to the UNSC resolutions on North Korea and actively carried out the sanctions by cancelling all talks on Rason (Rajin-Sonbong) Special Economic Zone,⁴ stopping crude oil exports and releasing a list of

² Jamil Anderlini, "China warns against Asia troublemakers," <http://www.ft.com> (Access Date: 2016.4.26).

³ Raymond Li and Teddy Ng, "Premier Li Keqiang warns North Korea: Halt 'provocations,'" <http://www.scmp.com> (Access Date: 2016.6.20).

⁴ 최형규, "중, 나진·선봉 특구 회의 모두 취소," 《중앙일보》 2013년 2월 14일,

resources banned from exporting to North Korea.⁵ Tougher remarks from the top Chinese leaders on nuclear tests and their government imposing tighter sanctions on North Korea were reliable grounds for those who believed that China has changed its policy.

Although there were questions on China's stance and signs of changes, the mainstream that it stays consistent strongly maintains. Above all, China is still passive on sanctioning North Korea. The scope of China's sanction is very limited in the sense that it does not incur any fatal damage to the regime. Therefore, intensification of its political pressure on North Korea and acceptance of severe criticism from media and scholars on the issue of nuclear development progressed within its leverage, mainly focusing on managing the problem and preventing North Korea from deteriorating the current situation. Also, the strategic value of North Korea for the Xi government would not lessen. Rather, there is possibility that China will use North Korea as a 'strategic card' or 'strategic lever' when negotiating with the US or other western powers.⁶ It is hasty to expect China's fundamental change when it still insists on peaceful Sino-DPRK relations, supports Kim Jong-Un regime and, furthermore, tries to expand its diplomatic leverage to become a superpower.⁷

<http://news.joins.com> (검색일: 2016.5.20).

⁵ Megha Rajagopalan, "China releases list of goods banned from export to North Korea," <http://www.reuters.com> (Access Date: 2016.5.17).

⁶ 박병광, 「북한의 3차 핵실험과 중국의 대북정책 변화」, 『동향과 분석』 KDI 북한경제리뷰 (2013년 3월), pp. 16.

⁷ 총성의, 「2013년 북핵문제에 따른 중국의 대북정책 변화 가능성」, 『정치정보연구』 제 17권 제 1호 (2014년), pp. 99-121.

Through reviewing other research and literatures, the author will reorganize several basic factors of China's consistent stance. Those factors are first, the relationship between China and the United States, second, China's desire of keeping its leverage on the Korean Peninsula and third, high possibility of domestic problems that can be caused by North Korea. By analyzing these factors, the paper will systematize the author's main statement on China's consistent policy.

3. Analytical Framework and Research Methodology

By examining the mainstream of China's foreign policy, the paper will approach China's policy on North Korea through a case of its nuclear issue by the time period after first(2006), second(2009), third(2013) and fourth(2016). In addition, further analysis will be categorized by policy and responses of China after each nuclear test.

The data collected are mainly government announcements, official remarks by the president, premier, foreign minister or spokespersons, the United Nations Security Council resolutions, and other reliable press releases. Statistical data were retrieved from sources such as KOTRA, KITA, China Vitae, and General Administration of Customs People's Republic of China (GACC). Also, to consider multiple perspectives, the research used mix of literatures of both Western and non-Western scholars and journalists.

Chapter II. Historical Background of the Sino-North Korea Relations

Before examining China's policy on North Korea after the outbreak of the nuclear weapon issue, the author will briefly organize historically special relationship of the two countries, from 1949, the establishment of People's Republic of China (PRC) by Chinese Communist Party until the first nuclear crisis occur.

1. The Maoist Era: “Blood alliance” from 1949 to 1978

Foreign policy of the Maoist era is focused on alliance diplomacy and on the two superpowers: the United States and the Soviet Union. For regime survival, the policy direction of the superpowers was most influential in Chinese policy. In the 1950s, China kept close relationship with the Soviet Union and North Korea which were the members of the socialist camp. Mao Zedong described the relationship between China and North Korea as “teeth and lips” or “intimately interdependent relations (唇亡齿寒)”. Since the outbreak of the Korean War, China, led by the Chinese Communist Party carried forward vigorous interchanges and worked closely with North Korea. Including the wartime until 1960, China provided more than 330 million dollars of economic

aid to North Korea⁸ and strengthened the bilateral ties by signing the Sino-Korean Economic and Cultural Cooperation Agreement in 1953 and a long-term trade agreement on low-interest loans and expanded cooperation in various areas. During Kim Il-Sung's visit to Beijing in 1961, they agreed on "the Sino-North Korean Mutual Aid and Cooperation, Friendship Treaty," and China was obliged to intervene against unprovoked aggressions which stipulated comprehensive cooperation and mutual assistance in political, military, economic and cultural spheres. The treaty emphasized the nature of the military alliance. However, the ROK-Japanese normalization in 1965, China's Cultural Revolution and its defensive behavior towards Vietnamese War threatened their security and worsened the bilateral relations. Premier Zhou Enlai's visit to Pyongyang in April 1970 contemporary eased the tension between the two countries.

2. The Reformist Era: “Personal ties” from 1978 to mid 1990s

Economically, China had already fallen behind among developing Asian countries and played a relatively small role in the region. Since the 1980s, Beijing showed efforts to overcome its passive regional policy and to eradicate unstable and violent factors surrounding China such as boundary problems.

⁸ From 1950 to 1960, China assisted North Korea with around 500 million dollars. 336 million free economic aids were included. 강인덕, 『북한전서』 (서울: 극동문제연구소, 1972), p. 585-592.

China started to promote extensive economic reform and open-door policy under Deng Xiaoping who said “it matters not whether the cat is black or white, as long as it catches mice.” This clearly reveals his pragmatism. Deng’s black cat white cat theory on economic reform under the communist system separated economy from politics, and China was reborn with its own Chinese-style socialism.

Deng, in 1984 announced “independent foreign policy of peace” as a result of domestic decision on developmental party line and international factors such as the collapse of Soviet Union and the termination of Cold War era. Hugely influenced by the complex international situation and facing danger of being isolated, Deng had to change the policy from the Maoist era, and the national goal evolved from regime survival to development. Mainstream of the foreign policy became post-ideological, and most of the policies were reformed from primacy of politics to primacy of economics. China started to normalize its relations with countries that could stimulate China’s development and expanded its diplomatic arena from superpower diplomacy to regional diplomacy. It embraced a large number of developing countries in Asia, established a new policy named “nonalignment diplomacy,” and emphasized independency.⁹ Furthermore, China became an active actor in the field of multilateral system for its economic growth.

⁹ Thomas W. Robinson, *Chinese Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 567-587.

Changes in China's foreign policy in the 1980s also influenced the peace of the Sino-DPRK relations. Pragmatic policy made China realize the importance of South Korea as its economic partner, and the nation expanded the normalization of the diplomatic relations with western countries including the United States. North Korea severely criticized China as "a turncoat who succumbed to imperialism"¹⁰ and showed strong antagonism against China's new policy. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the normalization of the Sino-ROK relations in 1992 made the 1990s the darkest period of the Sino-DPRK bilateral relations.

3. "Lukewarm Relations" since mid 1990s

Unfortunately, North Korea was isolated from the international society by the deterioration of the Sino-DPRK relations and historically extreme natural disasters caused domestic economic crisis. Drought and flood ruined the crops and led to the worst North Korean famine ever. Political leaders of North Korea had to bite the bullet and pursue reorganization of the Sino-DPRK relations due to its need of diplomatic resources and international aid in the 2000s. At the same time, China who was still concerned about its regime survival and vital interests such as national security, sovereignty power and territory needed to maintain relationship with North Korea.

¹⁰ 오진용, 『김일성 시대의 중소와 남북한』 (서울: 나남, 2004), p. 355, 385.

Kim Jong-Il's visit to Beijing in 2000 and Jiang Zemin's reciprocal visit to Pyongyang in 2001 recovered the bilateral relations, but the characteristic was somewhat different from the past blood alliance. China's Communist party and Worker's party of North Korea still maintained the strong party-to-party ties, but China's reaction to issues that are not part of its core interests seemed less cooperative and selectively supportive. This new relationship is renamed strategic cooperative relations. China supported North Korea on issues related to political stability and threatened endurance of peace in the Korean Peninsula but opposed North Korea's nuclear weapon and emphasized pragmatism on economy.¹¹ Wang Jiarui, the director of the Chinese Communist Party's International Department, described the Sino-DPRK ties as merely "normal relations between states", which is a far cry from the "lips and teeth" closeness the two countries once maintained.

Overall, the relationship of China and North Korea can be described as "fragile relationship" or "bed-fellow"¹² even during the Maoist era because their blood alliance was neither strong nor stable due to ideological and historical conflicts. It was rather calculative as what North Korea needed from Beijing was economic benefits while China needed political support from Pyongyang. In the Reform era, China's open-door policy and a clearly different economic policy line made their gap on diplomacy and security bigger. China

¹¹ 이종석, 『북한·중국관계 1945-2000』 (서울: 중심, 2000), p. 282-284.

¹² You Ji, "China and North Korea: A Fragile Relationship of Strategic Convenience," *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 10, No. 28 (August 2001), pp. 387-398.

tried to build up appropriate background to boost its economic growth and the pragmatism in diplomacy led to normalization with South Korea. Isolated and threatened North Korea who still maintains ideological diplomacy could no longer feel close bond with China and it rapidly started to arm itself with nuclear weapons. Their negative historical experiences and the big gap in economic and diplomatic power deepened the rift within the relations. However, this fragile relationship never severed and their agreement on “the Sino-North Korean Mutual Aid and Cooperation, Friendship Treaty” made in 1961 is still valid.

Chapter III. China's Policy and Responses after North Korea's Nuclear Tests

North Korea started its nuclear research from the 1950s, but it was only a potential problem during the Cold War era since the rivalry of national power between the United States and the Soviet Union were mainly focused on Europe. Also, North Korea joined the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in 1974, entered into the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) in 1985 and accepted international inspection and the surveillance of the IAEA; it was not a much debated issue. However, since the end of the Cold War, and as North Korea accelerated the development of nuclear weapon for its own security, it gradually became an international issue, and it is now a major concern for surrounding countries in the Northeast Asia such as China, Japan, Russia, South Korea and the US.

It is necessary to focus on China's policies and responses on North Korea's nuclear tests as it is one of the only closest allies. A unique characteristics of China's stance after two nuclear crises followed by four nuclear tests is its duplicity. In this chapter, the author will analyze how the duplicity appears in its policy and responses in each period according to international and domestic circumstances.

1. The First and Second Nuclear Crisis

When North Korea's first nuclear crisis broke out in 1994, China sat on its hands on the problem. The UN Security Council officially requested North Korea to respect the NPT through presidential statement and demanded that field agents of the IAEA conduct a stronger inspection of North Korean nuclear sites;¹³ however North Korea announced its intent to withdraw from the NPT. As a result, Jimmy Carter visited Pyongyang and through a long negotiation, the two countries signed the Nuclear Agreed Framework in October 1994. The Nuclear Agreed Framework included North Korea's agreement to freezing its illicit plutonium weapons program and to the installation of surveillance system in return for aid and construction support on dissolution of graphite moderated reactor by the US, Japan and Korea.¹⁴ Since ‘unity and stability’ of China at home was an important security consideration¹⁵ until the mid 1990s, China cautiously kept its low-profile strategy and non-involvement policy on the crisis. Also, it regarded the United States as the cause of such problem since the US insisted on keeping the Cold War policy which denied North Korea and strengthened the bilateral alliance with South Korea and Japan.

¹³ “Statement by the President of the Security Council,” <http://www.un.org> (Access Date: 2016.3.25).

¹⁴ “US-DPRK Agreed Framework,” <http://www.nti.org> (Access Date: 2016.4.3).

¹⁵ Avery Goldstein, “The Diplomatic Face of China’s Grand Strategy: A Rising Power’s Emerging Choice,” *China Quarterly* 168 (December 2001), pp. 837.

In the 1990s, China started to set a foot in regional diplomacy and multilateralism. China was contained by the US after the 1989 Tiananmen incident and the collapse of the Soviet Union. It insisted on “peace and development” policy rather than challenging the current system because it knew that turning the US into its enemy was unhelpful. At the same time, it signed “The Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation between the People’s Republic of China and the Russian Federation” with Russia to respond to the US alliance system. Also, in need of Asian policy to overcome the isolation, China decided to expand diplomatic arena and make peaceful international environment. China adopted defensive Asian policy in the early 1990s and sped up the normalization of diplomatic relations with surrounding countries. By 1996, China raised “New security concept” which influenced its foreign policy to seek more economic power and functional regionalism. At the fifteenth Chinese Communist Party Congress in 1997, Jiang Zemin announced that “China needs to actively participate in multilateral diplomacy and give full play to China’s role in the United Nations and other international organizations.”¹⁶ It turned its head to multilateral organizations, building up trust with ASEAN, forming the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and forging partnerships pursuing mutual interest under equal conditions. Along with China’s increase of national power and economic growth, China actively

¹⁶ On September 12, 1997, in the 15th Party Congress Report, Jiang Zemin asserted that China should take an active part in multilateral diplomatic activities and give full play to its role in the UN and other international organizations.

utilized regionalism and multilateralism, and it clearly appears after the second nuclear crisis of North Korea.

Complexity surrounding the Nuclear Agreed Framework in 1994 delayed its promised support and 9·11 terror in 2001 brought changes in the Northeast Asia as Bush announced the ‘axis of evil’ and North Korea was mentioned as one of the three.¹⁷ In 2002, North Korea made its resumption of nuclear development public to the US special envoy and the US cut the supply of heavy oil, criticizing North Korea for violating the agreement. However, North Korea accused of the US for not keeping the word referred in the agreement, lifted the closure of the nuclear system, eradicated surveillance system of the IAEA, deported the IAEA agents and officially withdrew from the NPT. This was the second nuclear crisis. Radical deterioration of the situation in North Korea brought changes to China’s policy. China, who had been a bystander for more than ten years, started to participate in the issue actively. It understood that accepting the principle of nuclear non-proliferation is vital to its own security and that the nuclear test of North Korea threatens China’s peaceful development. China tried to solve this problem establishing an environment for multilateral negotiation.

As a result, the first Six-Party Talks took place in August 2003 with six countries: China, Japan, South and North Korea, Russia and the United States. Here, China took an active mediatory role which was to impress the

¹⁷ “State of the Union Address,” <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news> (Access Date: 2016.3.16).

international society that China was the only country that could exercise strong leverage over North Korea and showed off its diplomatic power. Taking an active role in Six-Party Talks and putting joint efforts with the United States to control nuclear proliferation in North Korea were China's efforts to become a regional superpower and furthermore, to leap up to become an international superpower.

China and other participants, aiming for denuclearization, peace and stability of the Korean Peninsula, held six times of Six-Party Talks from 2003 to 2007. The most fruitful outcome was the Agreement on a Joint Statement in September 19, 2005. North Korea agreed in principle to disassemble its nuclear program, return back to the NPT and accept monitoring and surveillance of the IAEA¹⁸ in return for aid and security guarantees from other participants in the talks. Giving up nuclear program in exchange for security guarantees was important for North Korea as it was most concerned about its national security and regime survival. Under the situation in which the US-ROK-Japan alliance stood against the Kim regime, the improved diplomatic relations of the Sino-ROK was a threatening situation for North Korea when historical Sino-DPRK relationship was in lack of mutual trust.

¹⁸ “Joint Statement of the Fourth Round of the Six-party Talks.” http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng (Access Date: 2016.2.25).

2. The First Nuclear Test

In July 2006, North Korea launched Taepodong-2 and on October 9, North Korea announced that it successfully carried out its first nuclear test and nullified the Agreement on a Joint Statement of September 19, 2005.

The Chinese government announced that “the DPRK ignored universal opposition of the international community and flagrantly (悍然)¹⁹ conducted the nuclear test on October 9. The Chinese government is resolutely opposed to it,” and as “maintaining peace and stability in the Northeast Asia region conforms to the common interests of all parties concerned, China will continue to make unremitting efforts to this end.”²⁰ China severely criticized North Korea for such provocation and baldly showed its discomfort by using the word ‘flagrantly(悍然)’, a radical remark for a diplomatic rhetoric. However, at the same time, the Chinese government stated that it “calls for calm response from all parties concerned and urges them to stick to peaceful resolution of the issue through consultations and dialogues.” This shows China’s twofold stance of complaints and criticism with emphasis of peaceful problem solving and the principle of nonintervention.²¹ Also, Hu Jintao through the telephone call with

¹⁹ 「外交部：朝鲜悍然实施核试验，中国政府坚决反对」, <http://news.xinhuanet.com> (Access Date: 2016.3.20).

²⁰ “China resolutely opposes DPRK’s nuclear test,” <http://news.xinhuanet.com/english> (Access Date: 2016.2.24).

²¹ 外交部. 「外交部就朝鲜核试验等问题答记者问」, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn> (Access Date: 2016.3.15).

George W. Bush called on the relevant parties to try not to deteriorate the current situation.²²

Instantly, the UN Security Council voted unanimously to impose sanctions on North Korea over its nuclear test in October. Resolution 1718 demanded Pyongyang to “not conduct any further nuclear test or launch of a ballistic missile,” “suspend all activities related to its ballistic missile programme,” and “abandon all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programmes in a complete, verifiable and irreversible manner.” The DPRK must also “return immediately to the Six-Party Talks without precondition.” A ban was placed on imports from and exports to North Korea, and UN member states were obligated to “freeze immediately the funds, other financial assets and economic resources.”²³ China, as one of the permanent members, did not use its veto power to defend its ally but agreed to the resolution with a suggestion that “the UN Security Council resolution should also create favorable conditions for peacefully solving the issue through dialogue and negotiations.”²⁴ China stressed the need of international cooperation and its willingness to make joint efforts with other parties and work for the resumption of the Six-Party Talks.

As a result, the fifth session of Six-Party Talks took place and came out with 10·3 agreement on non-proliferation of North Korea’s nuclear weapon.

²² 「胡锦涛主席同布什总统通电话」, <http://news.xinhuanet.com> (Access Date: 2016.5.20).

²³ The United Nations Security Council, “Resolution 1718,” <http://www.un.org> (Access Date: 2016.4.11).

²⁴ “Foreign Ministry Spokesman Liu Jianchao Makes Remarks on the UN Security Council Resolution Concerning the Nuclear Test by the DPRK,” http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng (Access Date: 2016.2.25).

Afterwards, in March, the same year, Kim Jong-Il visited the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Pyongyang to celebrate Lantern Festival (元宵節)²⁵ and Yang Jiechi, Foreign Minister of the People's Republic of China, and Liu Yunshan, the leader of the Propaganda and Ideology Leading Group visited North Korea in July and in October. These active people-to-people exchanges symbolize the normalization of the cooled-down relations. China's desire for stability of the Korean Peninsula and North Korean political system led to pursuing the status quo and persuading North Korea to give up the nuclear weapon rather than imposing stronger political sanctions.

Economic aspect was no different. Since foreign economy of North Korea depended heavily on trades with China, China's reduction of trade volume would have directly damaged North Korea's economic situation. However, China did not economically damage North Korea. The Sino-DPRK trade continued to grow after the first nuclear test and China's agreement on the UNSC resolution. As described in Table 1 below, the bilateral trade volume increased from about 1.58 billion US dollars in 2005 to about 1.70 billion US dollars in 2006 and increased even more in 2007 to about 1.97 billion US dollars showing an increase of 16.1% compared with the previous year.²⁶

²⁵ 「金正日与中国外交官共度元宵佳节」, <http://news.xinhuanet.com> (Access Date: 2016.5.22).

²⁶ 홍기화, 『2007년 북한의 대외무역동향』 (서울: KOTRA, 2008), p. 23.

Table 1. The Sino-DPRK Trade Performance

Classification	2005		2006		2007	
	US\$thousand	% growth	US\$thousand	% growth	US\$thousand	% growth
Export	499,157	-14.8	467,718	-6.3	581,521	24.3
Import	1,081,184	35.2	1,231,886	13.9	1,392,453	13.0
Total trade volume	1,580,341	14.1	1,699,604	7.5	1,973,974	16.1

Source: Customs General Administration PRC, recited from KOTRA (2007 Report on Foreign Trade Trend of North Korea)

After the first nuclear test, China took the strongest position against North Korea. The Chinese government and its leaders officially criticized North Korea by using the word ‘flagrantly(悍然)’, at the same time instantly accepted the UNSC resolution. However, these were no more than a diplomatic rhetoric since there were no actions or sanctions afterwards. China never enforced North Korea to comply with the resolution, and their temporary cooled-down bilateral relations recovered very soon.

3. The Second Nuclear Test

Despite strong opposition from the international society, North Korea enforced the second nuclear test on May 25, 2009. North Korea detonated an underground nuclear explosive device which is believed to be several times more powerful than the first one tested in 2006.

The official position of China was very similar to the one after the first nuclear test. Qin Gang, the spokesperson of Chinese Foreign Ministry, stated that China “is firmly opposed to this act by the DPRK,” and “reiterate that to bring about denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, oppose nuclear proliferation and safeguard peace and stability on the peninsula and in Northeast Asia is in the common interest of all parties.” He emphasized to “leave room for parties to solve the DPRK nuclear issue peacefully through dialogue.”²⁷ China expected progress in bilateral meeting between the US and North Korea and hoped that North Korea would return to the Six-Party Talks. However, this time, China was more neutral than after the first nuclear test. It did not use any extreme terminology and, despite opposition, still emphasized the importance of peace and dialogue. No changes were made in the contents of the official position.

²⁷ “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Qin Gang’s Statement on the Adoption of the UN Security Council Resolution 1874 on the DPRK Nuclear Test,” http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng (Access Date: 2016.2.25).

China agreed to the UN Security Council Resolution 1874 adopted on June 13, which included stronger sanctions on financial support, all arms and material, and inspection on all cargo to and from the DPRK.²⁸ Despite China's agreement, Qin Gang's statement on Resolution 1874 included its hidden intentions. He pointed out "that the sovereignty, territorial integrity and legitimate security concerns and development interests of the DPRK as a sovereign country and UN member should be respected," and that "the Security Council action is not all about sanctions, and political and diplomatic means is the only way to resolve the relevant issues on the Korean Peninsula."²⁹ China kept leaving room for peaceful dialogue instead of pushing ahead with the sanctions and added that North Korea's action for its security concerns should be respected. China tried to lead both North Korea and the US into Six-Party Talks and stop the situation from deteriorating but there was no further progress in Six-Party Talks after 2007 and reached stalemate since 2009.

Continued isolation of North Korea worsened its economy and political stability. China had to make a decision in line with its vital interests: whether to recover its relationship with North Korea or not. Instant suspension of high-level exchanges did not last long. In October, 2009, Premier Wen Jiabao³⁰ visited North Korea to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Sino-DPRK ties and

²⁸ The United Nations Security Council, "Resolution 1874," <http://www.un.org> (Access Date: 2016.5.3).

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ 장용훈, "北-中, 경제원조 교환문서 등 조인," 《연합뉴스》 2009년 10월 5일, <http://www.yonhapnews.co.kr> (검색일: 2016.4.13).

the ‘Year of Sino-DPRK Friendship’. Wen Jiabao and the DPRK’s counterpart Kim Jong-II signed “documents on bilateral cooperation in economic, technological and other fields.” It included cooperation “to enhance high-level exchanges as well as communications at all levels, deepen political mutual trust and promote practical cooperation on the basis of equality and mutual benefit.”³¹ Wen emphasized exchanges and consultations with North Korea for trade cooperation and cultural educational exchanges which would strengthen their social foundation of the friendly relations. This cooperation had more factors of alliance than pragmatism. The reason China chose the regime stability of North Korea over denuclearization is the increased pressure on China from the US with its allies Korea and Japan. To counter the US alliance system, China had to strengthen its alliance as well.

Followed by Wen’s visit to Pyongyang, in May 2010, President Hu Jintao and Kim Jong-II held a bilateral meeting on nuclear program and economic cooperation. Likewise, China, rather than turning its back to its ally, showed intentions to engage North Korea in more strategic talks and communication. Again, in October, 2010, Zhou Yongkang, a member of Politburo Standing Committee, visited North Korea and stated that “relations between China and North Korea are again approaching a peak.”³² Also, Kim Jong-II visited Beijing three times in one-year period, in May and August of 2010 and in May

³¹ “Chinese premier meets DPRK counterpart on bilateral ties,” <http://news.xinhuanet.com/english> (Access Date: 2016.5.12).

³² “Relations between China and North Korea are again approaching a peak,” <http://news.xinhuanet.com/english> (Access Date: 2016.4.15).

2011. 2011 was the year of 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance and he reconfirmed the friendly relations during his visit.

Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Qin Gang claimed that China would develop the bilateral relationship with North Korea “on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence” and “decide policies and position according to the own merits of issues,” which leads to the conclusion that “the normal exchanges between China and the DPRK will not be affected.”

Table 2. The Sino-DPRK Trade Performance

Classification	2008		2009		2010	
	US\$thousand	% growth	US\$thousand	% growth	US\$thousand	% growth
Export	754,046	29.7	793,048	5.2	1,187,861	49.8
Import	2,033,233	46.0	1,887,666	-7.2	2,277,816	20.7
Total trade volume	2,787,279	41.2	2,680,734	-3.8	3,465,677	29.3

Source: Customs General Administration PRC, recited from KOTRA (2010 Report on Foreign Trade Trend of North Korea)

Hence, Table 2 clearly indicates that Wen’s visit to Pyongyang and Kim’s visits to Beijing accelerated the economic cooperation between the two countries. Although there was some decrease in import and total trade volume in 2009, considering the global financial crisis in 2008, the rate is comparatively small. Soon afterwards, in 2010, the Sino-DPRK total trade

volume exceeded 3 billion US dollars for the first time showing an increase of 29.3% compared with the previous year. In particular, exports increased by 49.8%. To-be-implemented UNSC resolution and sanctions were invalidated. Also, North Korea's dependence on China in trade reached over 80% in 2010. The main reason for such dependence is the international isolation caused by sanctions from other UN member states. For North Korea, China is one of the only friendly nations, and it seems that China is smart enough to know how to utilize this situation.

4. The Third Nuclear Test

The UN Security Council Resolution 2087 adopted in January of 2013 was to oppose harsh international economic sanctions and demand North Korea to follow Resolution 1718 and 1874.³³ However, this trial, created discontent to all parties. Soon, it became obvious that China's choice was inappropriate after North Korea conducted the third nuclear test at Punggye-ri site on February 12, 2013.

Similar to the previous nuclear tests, China emphasized the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and peace in the Northeast Asia solving the problem of North Korean nuclear development through dialogue.³⁴ It announced its stern position against North Korea's nuclear test by agreeing to the adaptation of the UN Security Council Resolution 2094³⁵ on March 7, 2013 with expanded and strengthened sanctions including asset freeze, banning trade of luxury goods and traveling of individuals and companies. China, who was originally not involved in substantial sanctions on North Korea, started to show some changed responses towards its ally. Hua Chunying, Foreign Ministry spokesperson referred the Sino-DPRK relations to “normal state-to-state relationship” at the

³³ The United Nations Security Council, “Resolution 2087,” <http://www.un.org> (Access Date: 2016.5.28).

³⁴ 「2013年2月18日外交部发言人洪磊主持例行记者会」, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn> (Access Date: 2016.4.25).

³⁵ “Security Council tightens sanctions on DPR Korea in wake of latest nuclear blast.” <http://www.un.org> (Access Date: 2016.5.28).

press conference on March 8, the day after China's agreement on the UNSC resolution. The wording “normal state-to-state relation (正常的国家关系)” had not been used since 2006.³⁶

The third nuclear test occurred not long after the establishment of Xi Jinping government which soon adopted a hard-line policy on North Korea. The new government gave orders to the Maritime Safety Administration, the Ministry of Transport and other authorities to enforce Resolution 2094 strictly. In addition, the Bank of China, the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China, the Agricultural Bank of China and some other Chinese banks had limited transactions to and from North Korea.³⁷ High-level talks in the traditional alliance had temporarily ceased, and, after the inauguration, Xi visited South Korea before North Korea and he yet visited the North.

Media also highlighted the changed relationship. Public's opinion against North Korea's nuclear tests did not make headlines when the first and the second nuclear tests were conducted. However, after the third nuclear test, even socially influential character like Deng Yuwen, an editor of the *Study Times*, started to criticize North Korea. In an article of the *Financial Times*, he stated that “China should abandon North Korea,” as “a relationship between states based on ideology is dangerous and China's strategic security basing on North Korea's value as a geopolitical ally is outdated.” He directly condemned North

³⁶ 「2013年3月8日外交部发言人华春莹主持例行记者会」, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn> (Access Date: 2016.4.25).

³⁷ 차대운, “중국, ‘법대로 하자’식 대북 압박,” 《연합뉴스》 2013년 3월 19일, <http://www.yonhapnews.co.kr> (검색일: 2016.4.23).

Korea and urged China to take the initiative to facilitate reunification of the Korean Peninsula through close cooperation with South Korea.³⁸ Considering that Deng is a scholar of the Central Party School of the Communist Party, his claim was very shocking.

Clearly, the way China dealt with North Korea's nuclear problem after the third nuclear test was quite different from that after the first and second test. Criticism from the Chinese public towards North Korea increased and strengthened economic sanctions influenced their brotherhood. Arguments over whether there was any shift in China's policy towards North Korea reached its peak when Xi Jinping met Choe Ryong-Hae, the vice marshal of the Korean People's Army in May, 2013. Choe visited Beijing to ease sanctions and request cooperation, but Xi emphasized that North Korea should abandon the nuclear program and rejected the demand on recognition of North Korea as a nuclear-armed country.³⁹ Also, during the summit with the US in June, 2013, both the US and China agreed on North Korea's denuclearization and promised that neither country will accept North Korea as a nuclear-armed state nor will it tolerate North Korea's nuclear weapon development.⁴⁰ China no longer maintained a passive attitude on North Korea's problem, but it did not completely turn its back on the longtime ally.

³⁸ Deng Yuwen, "China should abandon North Korea," <http://www.ft.com> (Access Date: 2016.4.1).

³⁹ 张岩, 「朝鲜观察: 谁是崔龙海? 来华为何事?」, <http://news.takungpao.com> (Access Date: 2016.5.3).

⁴⁰ Jackie Calmes and Steven Lee Myers, "U.S. and China Move Closer on North Korea, but Not on Cyberespionage," <http://www.nytimes.com> (Access Date: 2016.5.19).

Many indicators prove that China's fundamental keynote of its policy stay consistent. Deng, who publicly criticized North Korea, was dismissed from his position not long after the submission of the article. The sanction was temporary and the economic exchange continued to increase between the two countries. The Sino-DPRK's total trade volume increased by 4.8% compared to the previous year; hit 6.86 billion US dollars reaching the peak.

China, as the biggest trade partner of North Korea, took 90.2% of its total trade in 2014 and 89.8% of the total export volume of North Korea. It is a rare case for a country to depend most of its trade on one single nation. The main reason for such dependency on China seems to have come from the continuous UN sanctions since the first nuclear crisis in 1993.

Table 3. The Sino-DPRK Trade Performance

Classification	2012		2013		2014	
	US\$thousand	% growth	US\$thousand	% growth	US\$thousand	% growth
Export	2,880,104	3.3	3,218,382	11.7	3,164,650	-1.7
Import	3,931,173	10.2	4,126,404	5	4,446,231	7.8
Total trade volume	6,811,277	7.1	7,344,786	7.8	7,610,881	3.6

Source: Customs General Administration PRC, recited from KOTRA (2012, 2013, 2014 Report on Foreign Trade Trend of North Korea)

Along with hard-line policy, China started to manage North Korea. As the threat from Kim Jong-Un's missile launch and nuclear test continued, a senior Chinese Communist Party member Liu Yunshan visited Pyongyang to attend

the seventieth anniversary of North Korea's ruling party and to prevent the situation from getting worse in October 2015. Liu was the first senior member to visit North Korea after Xi Jinping's inauguration and as there were no exchange of high-level visit after the third nuclear test, Liu's visit can be interpreted as China's conciliatory message. He also carried Xi's warm note to Kim with congratulations on "positive progress in developing the economy, improving livelihoods, and so on."⁴¹

Around then, the economic cooperation between the two countries started to become solid through development of transportation. They operated a bulk cargo and container shipping route to support North Korea's coal import to and grocery export from China,⁴² and China established high-speed rail route between the Chinese border city of Dandong and Shenyang expecting to get more benefits in the bilateral economy. Economic exchanges with North Korea in Dandong area make up 40% of the city's total trade volume.⁴³

Although North Korea insisted on its nuclear policy and the bilateral relations seemed to have cooled-down, there was no change in China's fundamental position.

⁴¹ Jane Perlez, "Message From China's Leader, Xi Jinping, to North Korea May Signal Thaw," <http://www.nytimes.com> (Access Date: 2016.5.28).

⁴² "Bulk cargo and container shipping route links China, DPRK," <http://news.xinhuanet.com/english> (Access Date: 2016.5.30).

⁴³ Julie Makinen and Carol J. Williams, "China unveils high-speed rail line to North Korean border," <http://www.latimes.com> (Access Date: 2016.5.27).

5. The Fourth Nuclear Test

Xi's gesture in the end of 2015, to send Liu Yunshan to North Korea to improve the bilateral relations, proved to have ended up as a failure since North Korea conducted a fourth nuclear test detonating a hydrogen bomb in 6 January 2016. Similar to the announcements after previous tests, the spokesperson of Chinese Foreign Ministry reported on that "the Chinese side will press firmly ahead with denuclearization on the peninsula and stay committed to resolving the Korean nuclear issue within the framework of the Six-Party Talks"⁴⁴ but she added "the Chinese side knew nothing about the nuclear test beforehand (一无所知)"⁴⁵ which also proves that China's trial to manage North Korea has failed. Not long after the nuclear test in 2 February, Wu Dawei, the special representative for the Korean Peninsula Affairs visited Pyongyang to restrain any additional provocations and resume Six-Party Talks when North Korea officially notified its plan to launch satellite. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson mentioned in the regular press conference on the next day that China hope "the DPRK would exercise restraint, act with discretion and refrain from any actions that might escalate the tension on the Korean Peninsula,"⁴⁶

⁴⁴ "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying's Regular Press Conference on January 6, 2016," http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng (Access Date: 2016.2.26).

⁴⁵ 「2016年1月6日外交部发言人华春莹主持例行记者会」, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn> (Access Date: 2016.5.22).

⁴⁶ "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Lu Kang's Regular Press Conference on February 3, 2016," http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng (Access Date: 2016. 3.20).

but only a few days afterwards in February 7, North Korea carried out launching “Kwangmyongsong” satellite using ballistic missile technology successfully. North Korea’s continuous provocations brought harsh criticism from the international society.

Condemning the nuclear test and satellite launch, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2270 in March. The resolution was expanded from the previous resolution, Resolution 2094 carrying contents with stronger sanctions on individuals and entities, stronger restrictions on finance and trade, banning states from supplying aviation fuel and other specified minerals to North Korea, and demanded all UN member states to inspect all cargo in transit to or from North Korea for illicit goods and arms. In line with strengthened economic sanctions, the Ministry of Commerce of the People’s Republic of China announced the list of more than twenty kinds of banned minerals according to the UNSC resolution.⁴⁷ However, it also put exceptions on both exports on main minerals and aviation fuel. First is that trade on minerals for the livelihoods of the public but not for the development of nuclear or missile is available. Minerals of the third country importing to North Korea through Rason port is not the target of sanctions. Second is that fuel for the livelihoods of the public or for civil aircraft is available.⁴⁸ For one reason or another, the announcement was somewhat unprecedented.

⁴⁷ 商务部, 「海关总署联合公告2016年第11号 (关于对朝鲜禁运部分矿产品清单的公告)」, <http://www.customs.gov.cn> (Access Date: 2016.7.2).

⁴⁸ “중국의 대북한 제재품목에 대한 수출입 통항 보고(4월),” <http://www.kita.net>

Although the Chinese government appears to be officially participating in the sanctions, such as announcing the list of banned minerals and actually reducing the quantity, the spokesperson of the Foreign Ministry mentioned, “China believes that sanction itself is not a panacea, and cannot root out the problem,” and “hopes all parties would also push for the genuine and complete settlement of the Korean nuclear issue in a constructive and responsible attitude, so that all parties would return to the right track of resolving the issue through dialogue and consultation at an early date.”⁴⁹ It still adheres to peaceful problem solving through Six-Party Talks and negotiations than stronger sanctions and pressures on Kim’s regime. Therefore, it is too hasty to conclude that China’s policy on North Korea has changed or is changing however it is obvious that there are changes on how China reacts and responses to North Korea and its provocations.

In the first quarter of 2016, the total trade volume of Sino-DPRK reached 7.79 billion Chinese Yuan, increasing by 12.7% compared to the volume in 2015 during the same period. Both China’s export and import to North Korea increased by 14.7% and 10.8% each. According to the statistics of the General Administration of Customs of the People’s Republic of China, in March, the first month of economic sanctions, China’s import and export rather increased by 13.1% and 12.5% compared to the previous year. The authorities announced that the statistics of the first quarter is not related to economic sanctions and

(Access Date: 2016.6.22)

⁴⁹ “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying’s Regular Press Conference on April 25, 2016,” http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng (Access Date: 2016.3.20).

implied that it will begin in earnest since April.⁵⁰ As presented in the table below, visible signs of sanctions actually started to appear as China's import and export to North Korea decreased by 22.3% and 1.5% each in April compared to 2015. Especially, the decrease in the total trade profit of the major import and export products included those which have been announced to be banned recently. In addition, China submitted an implementation report to the United Nations on economic sanctions according to Resolution 2270.⁵¹ Despite late submission, it has improved a lot compared to the report on Resolution 2094, when China handed it in after over seven months since the deadline. This comparatively different response shows China's willingness to participate in the resolution as a responsible country, but it is also one way of utilizing North Korea as a negotiation card to reach an agreement on other controversial issues with the US. The UN Security Council, especially the US has been strongly advising China for an active participation and China's supportive response functions to take over an advantageous position in the negotiation.

⁵⁰ 이준삼, “대북제재 첫달, 중국의 석탄수입액 30%↑…철광석•귀금속 급감,” 《연합뉴스》 2016년 4월 24일, <http://www.yonhapnews.co.kr> (검색일: 2016.5.30).

⁵¹ 이지선, “중국, 대북 제재 이행보고서 안보리 제출했다,” 《경향신문》 2016년 6월 28일, <http://news.khan.co.kr> (검색일: 2016.7.2).

Table 4. The Sino-DPRK Trade Performance in the first quarter of 2016

	January	February	March	April
Export	1.3% growth	6.9% growth	15.6% growth	-1.5% growth
Import	-4.0% growth	2.5% growth	13.1% growth	-22.3% growth

Source: KITA

Nevertheless, such changes could not influence the fundamental position of China. Even if the central government abides by the international rules, the local governments of border towns are expanding economic cooperations with North Korea, for example, test-operating Guomen(国门) trade area in Dandong and expecting to carry forward building an expressway connecting Dandong to Kaesong.⁵² The economic cooperation between two countries continues in any form.

Ambassador Liu Jieyi, the Permanent Representative of China to the UN, instead of criticizing the suggestion of North Korea on exchanging its nuclear renunciation to the suspension of the US-ROK military drill, stated that the parties should also consider this⁵³ as one way to solve the problem of the Korean Peninsula. From the beginning, China emphasized the need of dual track strategy, carrying forward in parallel the process of the UNSC resolutions and negotiations. Therefore, what the ambassador is stating is that if peace and

⁵² 홍창진, “中 래오닝성, 대북제재 국면서 북중경협 추진,” 《연합뉴스》 2016년 6월 28일, <http://www.yonhapnews.co.kr> (검색일: 2016.7.5).

⁵³ 박성제, “유엔주재 중국대사 ‘북한의 한미훈련중단-핵포기’ 제안 고려해야,” 《연합뉴스》 2016년 4월 30일, <http://www.yonhapnews.co.kr> (검색일: 2015.5.17).

denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula is the final goal of all parties, various suggestions should be cautiously studied if helpful.

Recently, the two countries are on a course for reconciliation, to put the bilateral relationship back on the rails. North Korea held the Seventh Party Congress in May 6. Wang Jiarui, the Vice Chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference was invited to an event held in the Embassy of North Korea in Beijing to congratulate the Party Congress⁵⁴ and Xi Jinping sent a message to congratulate Kim Jong-Un for his new position as a chairman of the Workers' Party.⁵⁵ Xi emphasized the historical friendship of the two countries as a common valuable treasure(宝贵财富) and that for the benefits of both countries and their people, they should try to promote continuous development of friendly cooperation to contribute to the regional peace, stability and development. Soon in the end of May, as a response to Xi's congratulatory message, the Vice Chairman of the Seventh Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea, Ri Su-Yong visited Beijing as the first high-level official to visit China after the fourth nuclear test. On this visit, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson mentioned the two countries "as important neighbors to each other," and that China, "hope to develop normal, friendly and cooperative relations with the DPRK."⁵⁶ Also, Renmin Ribao published Xi and

⁵⁴ 「王家瑞出席朝鲜驻华使馆举行的朝鲜劳动党七大庆祝活动」,
<http://paper.people.com.cn> (Access Date: 2016.6.22).

⁵⁵ 「习近平致电祝贺金正恩被推举为朝鲜劳动党委员长」, <http://news.xinhuanet.com> (Access Date: 2016.6.22).

⁵⁶ “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying's Regular Press Conference on May 31,

Ri's meeting on the first page⁵⁷ reporting China's position on the Korean Peninsula issue that it is consistent and clear-cut, hoping all relevant parties maintain calm (冷静) and restraint (克制), strengthen communication and dialogue for regional peace and stability. The purpose of emphasizing calm and restraint attitude is to recommend those parties to solve the problem through negotiation and find regional peace inside the multilateral frame than strengthening international sanctions or attempting more provocations. Although, the parties that should maintain calm and restraint include North Korea, publishing the bilateral meeting on the first page is to highlight the value of China as an important communication channel for North Korea and the international society and that the friendly relationship is an asset to resolve the danger caused by the nuclear weapon. China is participating in economic sanctions and at the same time proceeding high-level meetings with North Korea. This is to inform the international society that China is managing North Korea and to persuade North Korea not to enforce another nuclear test.

Due to conflicts in South China Sea and the US policy of strengthening its military alliances in Asia to rebalance China, China is currently facing bigger security danger from the international situation than from the nuclear development of North Korea. The majority of the Chinese general public and mass media are firmly criticizing North Korea after the fourth nuclear test,

2016,” http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng (Access Date: 2016.6.13).

⁵⁷ 李伟红，「习近平会见朝鲜劳动党代表团」，<http://paper.people.com.cn> (Access Date: 2016.6.22).

stating that the problem of nuclear weapon has now become a direct threat to Chinese security and its surrounding environment. However, under such situation, the Chinese government has no other choice but to strategically accept North Korea. Therefore, the reason of China's consistent policy is that for China, how many times North Korea enforces nuclear tests and experiments atomic bomb or hydrogen bomb, how many times it launches intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) or submarine launched ballistic missile (SLBM), the level of fundamental threat stays the same.

Chapter IV. Changed and Unchanged Position of China on North Korea

In the previous chapter, the author presented China's responses on North Korea after each nuclear test. It is obvious that due to the military alliance between the two countries, despite unexpected happenings, the bilateral relations never severed but stayed under an entanglement of accords and conflicts. In this chapter, the author will categorize the changed and unchanged position of China.

1. Changed position

Compared to the first and second nuclear test, China's tactical responses appear to be very considerate or rather cautious after the third and fourth nuclear test. China's tactical responses include the intensity of participation on the UNSC resolutions and involvement in sanctions on North Korea. It changed according to situational factors. China showed the strongest responses on North Korea after the first nuclear test, and the intensity of criticism differed after China learnt a lesson that too much pressure will lead to less leverage on North Korea.

One of the most outstanding changes after the third nuclear test was the mounting criticism of North Korea inside China. Before then, neither media

largely publicized North Korea's nuclear test nor did they criticize the issue so severely. The level of criticism accepted by the Chinese government increased. As mentioned in Chapter III, a public figure like Deng Yuwen, an editor of the Study Times stated "China should abandon North Korea". This was a rare case even if he was dismissed soon after his submission of that article. Also, China has allowed the data retrieval on 'Fat Guy Number 3 Kim Jong-Un (金三胖)'. In October 2015, by the time when Liu Yunshan visited Pyongyang, one of the largest internet website 'Baidu' had blocked searching 'Fat Guy Number 3 Kim Jong-Un' notifying that the word does not comply with China's law and policy. There had been some observations that this response was in an extension of restoring the bilateral relations.⁵⁸ Therefore, China's unblocking is one way of expressing dissatisfaction to North Korea's nuclear test and missile launch.

Table 5. Top Chinese Leaders' Visits to North Korea

Year	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
No. of times	3	2	2	4	5
Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
No. of times	5	2	1	0	1

Source: Complied information based on records of top leaders visits to Pyongyang from China Vitae

After the first nuclear test, exchanges of high-level officials decreased in 2007 and 2008 but it was not influenced after the second nuclear test as the

⁵⁸ 윤동영·전인경, “中, '김정은 뚱보3세' 검색차단 해제...대북 제재 일환?” 《연합뉴스》 2016년 3월 9일, <http://www.yonhapnews.co.kr> (검색일: 2016.5.3).

number of visits rather increased from 2009 to 2011. Not only the number but also the contents discussed during the exchanges had been upgraded. Top leaders like Dai Bingguo, Zhou Yongkang and Wen Jiabao visited North Korea to further discuss the bilateral ties. Liang Guanglie, the then Minister of National defense strengthened their military alliance. Li Keqiang, the former Vice-Premier met Choe Yong-Rim, the former Premier of North Korea to confirm on consolidating the traditional friendship and further develop exchanges in trade and practical cooperation in various areas.⁵⁹ Until then, the bilateral relations seemed to become even solid. However, after the third nuclear test in 2013, which was enforced following the generation shift in politics to Kim Jong-Un and to Xi Jinping, exchanges in high-level officials have noticeably decreased. In 2014, no Chinese top leader visited North Korea. The new Chinese government for the first time sent one of its top leaders Liu Yunshan to recover the bilateral relations in 2015 but not long after the visit, the fourth nuclear test broke out. Wu Dawei, the special representative for the Korean Peninsula Affairs visited Pyongyang in February when North Korea announced to launch a long-range missile and up until now, no top leader visit has been arranged.

Another change to notice is how China is utilizing North Korea. Especially, after the fourth nuclear test, China rather than solving the problem of North Korea, is trying to make a good use of this issue as a negotiation card. China's

⁵⁹ "Chinese vice premier meets DPRK premier on ties," <http://news.xinhuanet.com> (Access Date: 2016.5.22).

position runs counter to that of the US which insists denuclearization of North Korea before peace agreement. John Kerry claimed that North Korea should respond to negotiation table for denuclearization first, and then the parties will be able to enter into the discussion of peace agreement.⁶⁰ However, Wang Yi, while making a speech on China's basic position, emphasized that the dual track approach, to simultaneously discuss the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and the replacement of the Korean armistice with a peace agreement, is reasonable in order to solve the problem and ease concerns of all relevant parties. He also stated that China's firm goal is to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula in both south and north, either developed indigenously or introduced from the outside. This indirectly aims China's concern on deploying THAAD in South Korea since the X-band radar associated with the THAAD system has a radius that goes far beyond the Korean Peninsula reaching the interior of China. He pointed out that their exaggerated security defense can all the worse become a huge security threat to China and China's legitimate national interests must be taken into consideration.⁶¹

China knows that the more cooperation comes the more leverage over North Korea. So, China will continuously by supporting the North, use it as a

⁶⁰ 국기연, “케리·왕이 G2 외무회담... 북핵 해법 등 싸고 이견,” 《세계일보》 2016년 2월 24일. <http://www.segye.com> (검색일: 2016.4.17).

⁶¹ “A Changing China and Its Diplomacy ——Speech by Foreign Minister Wang Yi At Center for Strategic and International Studies,” http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng (Access Date: 2016.3.20).

negotiation card not only on the THAAD issue but also on other problems within Asia against the US.

Table 6. Tactical Responses of China after each Nuclear Test

	First Nuclear Test	Second Nuclear Test	Third Nuclear Test	Fourth Nuclear Test
Official Position	Opposition	Opposition	Opposition	Opposition
International Action				
UNSC Resolution	Resolution 1718	Resolution 1874	Resolution 2094	Resolution 2270
The Sino-DPRK Relations				
High-Level Exchanges	2006-2008 7 times	2009-2012 16 times	2013-2015 2 times	2016
Economic Cooperation	Active	Strengthened	Temporary sanction, but recovered soon	Stronger sanction (yet), with cooperation
Domestic Situation				
Critical Public Opinion	Official position	Some criticism	Criticism	Deterioration
Sanctions in Action	No	No	Partly Yes	Partly Yes

2. Unchanged position

Continuous nuclear tests of North Korea were not influential enough to change the big frame of the bilateral relationship.

The Chinese government criticized North Korea most severely after the first nuclear test. North Korea leaders rationalized in Rodong Sinmun that “to defend our sovereignty and the right to live against nuclear threat, sanctions and pressure by the US, we are compelled to prove our possession nuclear weapon,”⁶² and insisted on its possession. Internationally isolated and turning the US into its enemy, developing nuclear program was one way of survival for threatened North Korea and the maintenance of the Sino-DPRK relationship was very important. However China’s adaptation of the hard-line policy and the diplomatic pressure on North Korea led it to find another way to overcome the isolation. In other words, China’s such diplomatic pressure escalated conflicts between the two countries, on the other hand, the US-DPRK relations ironically improved. In early 2007, North Korea and the US through bilateral meeting in Berlin, came up with ‘2·13 Agreement’ and afterwards agreed on ‘10·3 Agreement’ and removed the designation of DPRK as a state-sponsor of terrorism in 2008. In the progress between the US and North Korea, China

⁶² 《노동신문》, 2006.10.12

passing became practical which gave China a strong motivation to re-arrange its policy.⁶³

China learnt a lesson after the first nuclear test that in order to maintain leverage over North Korea, it has to keep the intimate relationship stable. Even though the Sino-ROK relationship was upgraded to ‘Strategic Cooperative Partnership Relations’ in 2008, it lacked cooperation on security related issues. China’s reactions after the second nuclear test, the Cheonan sinking and the bombardment of Yeonpyeong clearly proved the reality.

Before and after the second nuclear test, North Korea had two big tasks, first is the deteriorated economic crisis by international sanctions and second is the drastic process of succession from Kim Jong-Il to Kim Jong-Un due to Kim Jong-Il’s life and death sickness. North Korea’s political situation was not stable. It desperately needed China’s economic and political support. China originally adopted twofold policy on North Korea, the stability of the regime and the denuclearization of North Korea. However, keeping the North Korean regime in a stable matter and developing the bilateral relations was more important than the denuclearization at that time period. Especially, strong criticism from the international society on North Korea after the Cheonan sinking and bombardment of Yeonpyeong made China feel that supporting North Korea was necessary for its regime survival. Not only did China give political support, but also continued to increase its economic cooperation with North Korea which

⁶³ 이희옥·박용국, 「중국의 대북한 동맹안보딜레마 관리: 대미인식과 북한지정학의 재구성을 중심으로」, 『중소연구』 제 37권 제 3호 (2013), pp. 60.

gave China greater leverage to control the North in future events. It is believed that China made an internal decision in the summer of 2009 to separate the denuclearization issue from its overall approaches to North Korea. In other words, although China did not explicitly express it this way, but its goal to denuclearize North Korea could have down-graded to stable management of North Korean nuclear program⁶⁴ and putting aside the problem to a different level.

When the third nuclear test broke out, China was not in the same status in the international society as in after the first and second test. Its national power grew with the rapid economic growth and had to show responsibility on such an important issue. The new Chinese government seemed to react differently compared to the previous one, resulting in cooling-off period of the long-time friendship, but it did not last long. The bilateral relationship started to improve after Liu Yunshan's visit to Pyongyang in October 2015.

Although China temporarily appeared to exert the heaviest pressure and firm economic sanctions on North Korea after the fourth nuclear test, it soon expressed its consistent three principles on the Korean Peninsula: achieving denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, safeguarding peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula, and resolving the issue through dialogue. During the US-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue in June 2016, the two countries showed delicately different opinions on North Korean nuclear program. Both

⁶⁴ 이종석, 『2차 핵 실험 이후 북한-중국 관계의 변화와 함의』 (성남: 세종연구소, 2012), p. 13-14.

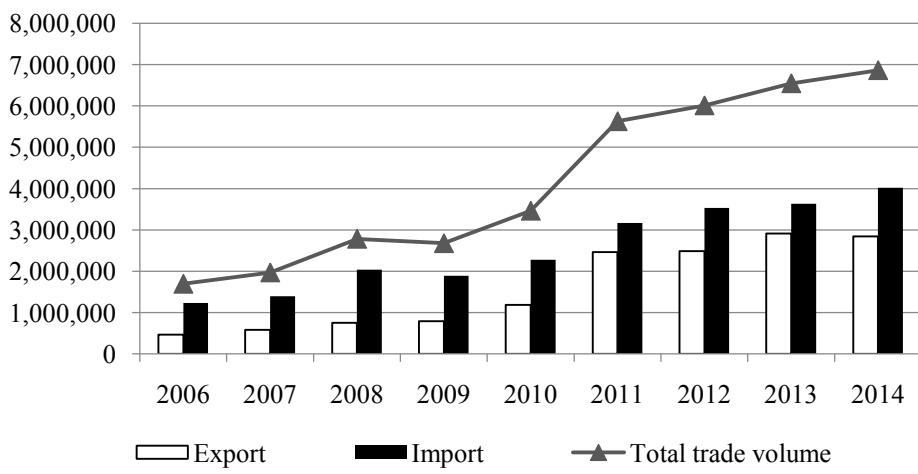
sides agreed on the denuclearization of North Korea and full performance of participating in the UNSC resolutions in principle,⁶⁵ but Yang Jiechi put more emphasis on the importance of “seeking a peaceful settlement through dialogue and consultation” and the resumption of the Six-Party Talks.⁶⁶ This is quite a different method from the US that insists to press North Korea with stronger sanctions to change and open up.

As organized in Table 6 and in Chart 1, political exchanges and economic cooperation maintained even when they were estimated to be going through a cooling-off period. Outstandingly, their economic diplomacy was steady and active despite the exclusion of ideology since the post ideological reformist era. China has been aiding with or exporting living necessities, food and other industrial products and North Korea has been exporting cheap natural resources. As obvious in the below chart, the total trade volume continuously increased not reflecting any political situations between the two countries, and even drastically growing from 2009 to 2011 after the second nuclear test.

⁶⁵ U.S. Department of State, “U.S.-China Strategic & Economic Dialogue Outcomes of the Strategic Track,” <http://www.state.gov> (Access Date: 2016.6.13).

⁶⁶ “Remarks by State Councilor Yang Jiechi At the Closing Session and Joint Press Availability of the Eighth Round of China-US Strategic and Economic Dialogue,” http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng (Access Date: 2016.6.13).

Chart 1. The Volume of the Sino-DPRK Trade



Source: Global Trade Atlas (GTA)

Throughout the history, in short, China's policy on North Korea can be described with two terms: durability and flexibility. China maintained the bilateral relations within the keynote of its foreign policy. Their relationship had not always been in a favorable mode but China continued to cooperate or aid North Korea even when ideological gap was formed or the relationship was influenced by various situational factors. For China, nuclear development of North Korea, so far, is only a multilateral dispute that does not directly threaten Chinese security. Therefore, China and North Korea will not turn away from each other over the problem of nuclear weapon. Also, Xi Jinping, due to his political policy line of developing normal relations with neighboring countries, has intentions to develop normal relationship with North Korea. The two parties could be displeased with each other, but with the willingness to negotiate and

resolve differences, they would not damage their mutual interests. Under the leadership of Xi, China's basic policy towards North Korea is to navigate the balance between intimacy and antipathy. Xi's apparently different approach from his predecessors goes no further than strategic adjustments towards one of the two poles, without actually breaking the balance. A move towards outright enmity is an unlikely scenario within the foreseeable future.⁶⁷

The basis of such durability can be found in China's unchanging strategic judgment on North Korea. Fundamental goals of China's foreign policy were to preserve independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity and to create a favorable international environment for its continuous development. The policy on North Korea had been under what it pursued. China still has concern over the strategy of US on East Asia and the US-ROK-Japan military alliance. Therefore, as long as North Korea is strategically valuable as a buffer zone against the US, China's strategic judgment on North Korea will stay consistent. Also, it can receive economical gains from their bilateral relations. In addition, not only the strategic judgment but also its strategic priority stays consistent, prioritizing the stable maintenance of the current regime in North Korea before denuclearization.

⁶⁷ Mu, Chunshan, "Why China-North Korea Relations Can't Be Broken," <http://thediplomat.com> (Access Date: 2016.4.25).

Chapter V. Three Main Factors of China's Policy on North Korea

As explained in the previous chapter, despite North Korea's successive nuclear tests, the foreign policy of China on North Korea has hardly shifted and only some changes of tactical responses are caught in sight. This research finds the reason for China's consistency from its unchanged strategic judgment influenced by the following three factors: the lack of strategic trust in the Sino-US relations, China's demand for leverage on the Korean Peninsula, and possible domestic problems in China.

1. The Sino-US relations

China prioritizes the United States in foreign relations and Chinese foreign policy on North Korea is largely influenced by the Sino-US relations and the policy of the US on North Korea.

As China remained low-profile strategy and non-involvement policy during that time period, it sat on its hands after the first nuclear crisis. Also, it regarded the United States as the cause of such problem since the US insisted on keeping the Cold War policy denying North Korea and strengthened the bilateral alliance with South Korea and Japan. China no longer could sit on its hands on the issue of North Korea's nuclear development after 9·11 terror boosted Bush

administration to enforce hard-line policy on North Korea announcing it as one of the ‘axis of evil’. China’s increase of national power and economic growth led it to active utilization of regionalism and multilateralism which clearly appears after the second nuclear crisis of North Korea.

China, as an active actor, criticized North Korea most severely after the first nuclear test and participated in the UNSC resolutions. Increased role of China in Asia tightened the cooperative Sino-US relations since the Global Financial Crisis in 2008. The two big countries shared their burden on international issues. However, the rise of China and relatively weakened economic power of the US resulted in reforming international order especially in Asia. Obama administration, to expand leverage over Asia and to contain China, has been insisting on ‘Pivot to Asia’ and rebalancing by strengthening the US-ROK-Japan military alliance. If China had solid security cooperation with the countries within its region, it would not have felt so threatened by the new US policy, but the East Asian countries, China, Japan and South Korea, are confronting territorial disputes, problems of distortion on history and controversies on increasing the expense of self-defense. Various difficulties exist hindering the trilateral cooperation. This phenomenon and the US rivalry on China had led it to recognize again the strategic value of North Korea. Surrounded by the US and its allies lacking trust in security cooperation with neighboring South Korea or Japan, China had no choice but to strengthen the friendly relationship with North Korea for its own security despite nuclear tests.

Table 7. Sino-US Relations and Sino-DPRK Relations in Different Periods

Period	Sino-US relations	Main affairs	Sino-DPRK relations and policy
First nuclear test (2006)	Regional stakeholder relationship, Cooperative	Strategic dialogue between China and US	Coercive diplomacy, but soon engagement policy
Second nuclear test (2009)	Global stakeholder relationship, Expansion of geostrategic intersections, Competitive	Global financial crisis and the rise of China, Pivot to Asia, Rebalancing by strengthening the US-ROK and the US-Japan alliance	Strategic alliance, strengthening the friendly bilateral relationship, more engagement and assistance
Third nuclear test (2013)	US containment policy on China, Competitive	Inauguration of Xi Jinping government, Enhancement of China's state power	Conflicts, Hard-line policy
Fourth nuclear test (2016)	Rising conflicts in Asia, Competitive	Establishment of AIIB, Dispute over South China Sea, Discussions on THAAD	More duplicity, Managing North Korea

Source: Edited 김홍규, 「시진핑 시기 미중 새로운 강대국 관계 형성」, 『국방연구』 제 56권 제 3호 (2013), p. 34.

The enhancement of China's state power and strengthening of the US containment on China are boosting their competitive relations. Especially, the US and China are obviously forming a conflict composition in Asia. First, the US started to strengthen the US-ROK-Japan cooperation system followed the Japanese Parliament passing security laws on collective self-defense and rearmament. THAAD deployment in South Korea is actively discussed between the two countries and this US-led missile defense system brought about serious security threats to China. Not only the THAAD issue, recently the US and China are confronting in various fields as China is increasing its military expenses and the controversies surrounding the South China Sea is more heated.

During a series of meetings held in June, the Asia Security Summit, so called Shangri-La Dialogue and US-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue, both countries reconfirmed their big differences of position on those controversial issues. Unfortunate for the tensions in the Korean Peninsula, competition for supremacy in the Asia-Pacific area could degrade North Korea's nuclear issue to a tool for the Sino-US hegemonic race making them to neglect it behind. After the fourth nuclear test, China, as a responsible actor, participated in sanctions of North Korea according to the UNSC Resolution 2087, 2094 and 2270, which was one way of accepting the demand of the US and South Korea to take practical actions to solve the problem of North Korea's nuclear weapon. China had been trying to negotiate this issue with other conflicts in Asia. Although China followed the international order by accepting such demands and exposed its security concerns on THAAD deployment, South Korean

government recently announced its decision to actually deploy the THAAD system and China expressed dissatisfaction on the judgment of maritime disputes in the South China Sea. Therefore, it can be expected that China, who has no room for compromise in territorial related issues such as the South China Sea problem, will try to hold stronger position in the conflict with the US by recovering the Sino-DPRK friendship. The US had been pushing China's full involvement in sanctions and pressed China with North Korea card. Same for China, it can also defend itself against the US on other issues with the North Korea card. The lack of strategic trusts in between the US and China is the biggest obstacle for their relations. As long as this strategic competition stays in the same shape, China's position will also be similar to what it used to be after the third and fourth nuclear test, strategically engaging North Korea for the balance of power.

2. Leverage on the Korean Peninsula

For China, to keep leverage on the whole Korean Peninsula is necessary for its stable surrounding environment. In case, any unexpected incident happens, China's sufficient leverage over both North and South Korea will help China to manage the situation more favorable to its national interests.

China is nearly the only country that supplies diplomatic support and aid to North Korea, which means that China's support is critical for its regime

survival and keeping the bilateral relations stable is essential.⁶⁸ China is fully aware of this reality and not only does North Korea benefits from the relationship but also vice versa. So, it is inevitable for China to hold political and economic leverage over North Korea considering what result of damaging the stability of the North Korean regime can bring to China. Moreover, it recognized that leverage on North Korea is not effective when being exercised but more valuable when possessed. China will stop taking actions that can weaken the strong position on the bilateral relationship, such as enforcing economic sanctions or taking firm diplomatic oppositions. The collapse of North Korea will directly lead to loss of leverage over the Korean Peninsula in China's position, since there are possibilities that the US troops stationed in South Korea might enter North Korea without China's agreement on urgent security situations. The stable maintenance of the North Korean regime is important and that is the main reason for China's immediate reaction to consolidate the bilateral relations even after nuclear tests.

Since the Sino-ROK normalization in 1992, for more than twenty years, the two countries accomplished an impressive cooperation. However, the imbalance of the Sino-ROK relations has grown significantly. Cooperation in socio-economic field is increasing on the other hand; there are no discussions on military and security fields. There has been expansion on various fields and agents rapidly increasing human exchanges, but despite the upgrade of the

⁶⁸ 통일부 통일교육연구원, 『북한이해』 (서울: 통일부 통일교육원 연구개발팀, 2006), p. 84-85.

relationship into a mutual strategic cooperative partner, the gap between the official and actual relations in reality, is leading to intensifying more imbalances. Also, due to China's development and stronger economic power, the asymmetric relation is becoming serious and the larger gap in economy results in South Korea's rising dependency on Chinese market. South Korea is concerned about this stronger economic bonds and imbalanced asymmetric Sino-ROK relations. At the same time, it is threatened by the development of nuclear weapon in North Korea. South Korea has been showing a very considerate performance on security issues, reinforcing the US-ROK military alliance and the recent decisions on deploying the THAAD system. Lack of trust in the trilateral relations on security, Japan and South Korea are each realigning the relations with the US. The competitive relationship of the US and China is strengthening the US-ROK alliance and the Sino-DPRK alliance, and these are the key obstacle for China and South Korea to discuss cooperation on regional security.

China has to keep the friendly relationship with North Korea in any form to maintain diplomatic influence on North Korea and furthermore expand it on to the Korean Peninsula since concerned South Korea is relying more on the US about security issues and the Sino-US competition within the East Asian region cannot find a breakthrough.

3. Domestic problems in China

As mentioned previously, China confronts limitations on sanctioning North Korea, because the political instability of the North Korean regime amplifies the risk of regime collapse. If North Korea collapses, influx of North Korean refugees will cause negative impact on economic development and social stability of China's Northeast area. The Council Special Report expected that minimum one million refugees to maximum three million refugees might flee the North in case of the regime collapse with more than half of the number entering China.⁶⁹ All the neighboring countries and China, the one that is expected to receive the biggest number of refugees are exposed to the potential danger of criminal activities by some refugees during the chaotic period.

Zhao Qizheng, the former director of Information Office of the State Council, in the first three-way forum on public diplomacy, expressed China's concern on the influx of North Korean refugees in case of the regime collapse. Millions of refugees might enter China in the border line area, and Chinese border guards cannot fire machine gun blindly to those illegal migrants. China should house the refugees on humanitarian grounds,⁷⁰ however under unprepared situation,

⁶⁹ Council Special Report No. 42, January 2009 by Paul B. Stares and Joel S. Wit, "Preparing for Sudden Change in North Korea (Council on Foreign Relations, New York)

⁷⁰ 周骥滢, 「赵启正: 中国担心朝鲜难民大批涌入边境地区」, <http://world.huanqiu.com> (Access Date: 2016.5.3).

the expense and risk when accepting refugees is not inconsiderable and China cannot afford to do so.

Chapter VI. Conclusion: China's Perspective on the Korean Peninsula

This study has examined China's policy on North Korea after four times of nuclear tests and analyzed what has changed and unchanged. With the rise of China, as a major power, is demanded with responsibility from the international society but at the same time, such demand conflicts with the maintenance of its strategic judgment on North Korea. That is the main reason for duplicity of China's position on the Korean Peninsula. China emphasizes the resumption of Six-Party Talks and pursues peaceful problem solving through dialogues. Any turbulences or worse, military confrontation against the US or any other country in the region will damages its core interests, therefore the stability and maintenance of the North Korean regime is of its key importance.

Be derived from the previous chapters, China's policy on North Korea can be described as durability and flexibility. The unchangeable strategic judgment on North Korea as the buffer zone, China's prioritization on the maintenance of the North Korean regime before denuclearization, results in durability of the policy. Despite nuclear tests and other provocations including missile launches, the two countries cooperated politically and economically. While keeping friendly relationship with North Korea in terms of national security strategy, China has also tried to build solid relationship with South Korea for more leverage over the Korean Peninsula. China, under three principles on the Korean Peninsula: achieving denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, safeguarding peace and

stability on the Korean Peninsula, and resolving the issue through dialogue has consistently maintained the fundamental position.

China's tactical responses appear flexible after each nuclear test according to its consideration on the situational factors. China has been adjusting the level of criticism and sanctions on North Korea mostly influenced by the Sino-US relations and the stability of the North Korean regime. However, after the fourth nuclear test, China has been trying to utilize the tensions from the North Korea as a negotiation card instead of solving the problem by insisting a dual track approach, to simultaneously discuss the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and the replacement of the Korean armistice with a peace agreement. On the question whether China would abandon North Korea or manage the North for a negotiation card, the latter is most likely to happen as those changed tactical responses are all limited while the bilateral relations remain unchanged. Drastic changes in North Korea or the change of power structure in East Asia such as the success of trilateral cooperation among China, Japan and South Korea or the US and China build sufficient enough trust and discuss over the controversial issues in Asia, might be able to change the status quo. However, as long as North Korea's nuclear come within multilateral category not bilateral, as long as it does not directly impact China's core interests, and as long as the competitive Sino-US relations continue lacking mutual trust, China's fundamental policy will stay consistent.

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국 문 초 록

국제사회의 비난과 반발에도 불구하고 북한은 핵실험을 강행하였고 이에 따른 중국과 북한의 전통적 혈맹관계 변화 여부에 대한 논의가 계속되었다. 본 연구는 네 차례 핵실험 이후 북한에 대한 중국의 반응을 각각 분석하여 어떠한 대응적 변화가 있었고 중국이 어떠한 원인에 의해 관계의 단절이 아닌 대북 정책의 지속성을 유지하고 있는지 그 근거를 찾아보고자 한다.

주요 분석 대상은 북한에 대한 중국 정부의 공식 입장 및 고위급 지도자들의 발언, 국제사회 특히 유엔 안전보장이사회에서 중국이 보인 입장 및 대북제재 결의 과정, 중국이 직접적으로 참여한 북한에 대한 정치 및 경제적 제재의 내용, 북·중 간 고위급 회담 및 정치적 교류와 중국 내 대북 인식의 악화 및 비난의 허용 정도이다.

다양한 차원에서의 분석을 통해 북한에 대한 중국의 전략적 판단은 변화하지 않았고 전술적 대응만 변화하고 있음을 알 수 있다. 이 같은 중국의 대북 정책은 냉각된 양자 관계에도 불구하고 지속적으로 유지되고 있으며 미·중 관계의 상호 신뢰 부족, 한반도에 대한 중국의 영향력 확보 및 북한 붕괴로 인해 발생할 중국 국내 문제에 대한 우려와 같은 상황적 요소에 따라 유연하게 나타나고 있다. 위의 요소들로 인해 중국의 북한에 대한 전략적 판단은 쉽게 변화하지 않을 것으로 보이고 그러므로 향후 북한 핵문제에 대한 중국의 정책 또한 크게 변화할 수 없을 것으로 판단된다.

주요어: 중국, 북한, 북·중관계, 핵, 핵실험, 전략적 판단, 전술적 대응

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