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**Master's Thesis of Graduate School of International Studies**

China's Foreign Policy toward  
North Korea over the past 40 years

- Focusing on Chinese Academic Discussions -

지난 40년간의 중국의 대북 외교정책 연구

- 중국 학계의 논의를 중심으로 -

**August 2022**

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China's Foreign Policy toward  
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- Focusing on Chinese Academic Discussions -

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# Abstract

China's North Korea policy has changed subtly over the past 40 years since the reform and opening up. In particular, regional security instability caused by North Korea's nuclear and missile development has led to numerous debates among intellectual elites in China regarding China's policy toward North Korea. The increase in these discussions peaked in the first term of Xi Jinping's leadership, a period that encompasses both the third nuclear test in 2013 and the sixth one in 2017.

In this regard, existing research has endeavored to classify and explain policy proposals made by Chinese academia related to North Korea policy. However, as the perceptions of national interest regarding North Korea are varied by each scholar and policy prescriptions could not be summarized by two or more classifications, the categories presented in the previous analysis had several limitations. Therefore, this study attempted to delve into the academic discussion in the form of answering four questions constantly raised concerning China's perception of North Korea.

This paper presents three points overall. First, it asks how China's North Korea policy has changed during the 40 years of reform. Second, it examines what arguments have newly emerged and to what extent they have expanded within Chinese academia. Finally, it evaluates the actual North Korean policy during Xi Jinping's reign as an extension of academia analysis. This study aims to look into the details amid the explosive increase in China's discussion of North Korea policy, mainly to avoid the risk of any one of the arguments being generalized to describe the whole of China's North Korea policy. In addition, it provides insight to distinguish and interpret the discussions of experts and the actual diplomatic behavior of the Chinese leadership toward North Korea. As a result, this will help the readers make an evaluation closest to reality no matter what kind of North Korea policy discussions they face in the future.

**Keywords:** China's North Korea policy, Chinese academia, Xi Jinping's leadership

**Student Number:** 2018-23339

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# Chapter I. Introduction

## 1. Study Background

During the 40 years of China's reform, North Korea-China relations seem to maintain traditional relations even after the end of the Cold War. Still, the words 'blood alliance' and 'lips and teeth' constantly illustrate both countries. However, after the 2008 global financial crisis, China's international status starkly changed, and Western doubts that China would engage in offensive diplomacy were amplified from this period. To cope with this phenomenon, there was an evaluation, within China, of China's status change, which has rapidly emerged as a rising power, and active debates on how to establish a new foreign policy that China should unfold.<sup>1</sup> Discussions of the government and academia that China's North Korea policy should be reorganized were conducted in line with those on China's overall foreign policy.

The North's second nuclear test, conducted in 2009, quickly amplified the Chinese public's opinion and academic debates over its policy. After North Korea's third nuclear test in 2013, discussions increased more remarkably under the new Xi Jinping leadership. Beijing, which had been lukewarm about sanctions until just before the third nuclear test, not only actively supported UN sanctions on nuclear tests but more openly opposed them than it had previously responded to similar provocations. The Global Times threatened North Korea that there would be a "heavy price" if nuclear tests were carried out, which was interpreted as indicating that the Chinese government would stop providing aid to North Korea.<sup>2</sup>

Despite China's stern warning, North Korea conducted a nuclear test, and China was greatly embarrassed, as many foreign media expected. Chinese students within 100 kilometers of the nuclear test mistook the event for an earthquake and evacuated. The residents in the border area, who feared radiation leaks from the nuclear test,

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<sup>1</sup> 조영남(2013). p.263

<sup>2</sup> 정재홍(2017). p.99

protested in front of the North Korean embassy. During the annual two sessions(全国两会) in March 2013, news has revealed that there was an unusual debate over the North Korean issue.<sup>3</sup> This showed a sign of changes in the perception of North Korea in China's mainstream society. The rationale for the more definite change is that the Chinese government has begun to allow the media to criticize Pyongyang to some extent. From the first nuclear test in 2006 to the third in February 2013, before the first North Korea-China summit in 2018, the Chinese government used political rhetoric, recognizing North Korea as a troublemaker. This suggested that China's North Korea policy was 'rethinkable,' which became the background for the rapid increase in related academic discussions.

Therefore, this paper tried to analyze the increasing discussions of the elites over China's North Korean policy. These attempts are not new to observers of North Korea-China relations. However, depending on when and in what context they studied, they have some limitations, such as putting different alternatives in one category and confusing some of the arguments presented by scholars with government perceptions. Therefore, this study aims to present a comprehensive and detailed summary of currently available works by adding the data up to the year 2021 to the previously studied literature.

## **2. Literature review**

China's North Korean policy debate has a standard and core question of 'which elements of national interest should be regarded most significantly when dealing with North Korea' and, accordingly, 'how to establish or reconstruct relations with North Korea.'

As the most representative pacemaker, a report published by the International Crisis Group (ICG) in 2009 set a standard for the research on this theme by presenting and summarizing Chinese scholars' opinions of that period.<sup>4</sup> This classified and

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<sup>3</sup> 정재홍(2017). p.166

<sup>4</sup> International Crisis Group(2009).

presented two critical arguments for the controversy over the perception of North Korea that began after the nuclear test in 2006. The first is the '*traditionalist*' group arguing to maintain the conventional relationship with North Korea. The second is the 'strategist' group that proposes renewing its strategy toward North Korea.

The *traditional* faction essentially argues for the continuation of political and economic protections for the traditional ally, North Korea. That is not unconditional support without a wish for profit. This claim is supported by deep suspicions that the United States undermines China's national interests. Scholars who belong to this classification have doubts about the United States, so they have a zero-sum perspective between the U.S. and China on the interests of the Korean Peninsula. They also hold the U.S. accountable for why the North's nuclear issue is not resolved and think it is primarily because the relations between the U.S. and North Korea are not normalized yet. Therefore, they believe that the U.S. should no longer act 'suspiciously' before it requires North Korea-China relations to turn into a normal state relationship,

The most representative group belonging to this school is the People's Liberation Army (PLA), which has the memory of participating in the Korean War as a supporter and fighting together. They insist on sticking to the "blood alliance" concept and focusing on North Korea's value as a strategic asset through peace and stability in North Korea and the Korean Peninsula and continuing support for North Korea as a brother country. Therefore, China stresses the need to prevent external pressure, such as U.N. sanctions, which could cause instability in the North Korean regime.

However, when North Korea virtually withdrew from the six-party talks and conducted its first and second nuclear tests in 2006 and 2009, scholars from the *strategist* group raised their voices with a new perspective. Even within the Chinese government, there was no consensus on how to respond to North Korea's unpredictable provocations. Among them, the argument of the *strategist* faction, which proposed to change its attitude toward North Korea completely, has gained momentum.

The *strategists* argue that while there may be benefits from maintaining friendly relations with North Korea, they should establish realistic and normal state-to-state



relations and weigh the actual losses the North Korean issue poses to China. They stress that through North Korea's nuclear test, China has become a direct victim and that if North Korea's provocations lead to the increase of South Korea or Japan's arms, China's security will be threatened. According to the ICG's classification, they argue that China should work closely with the U.S. to strengthen sanctions on North Korea. They emphasize "denuclearization" rather than "peace and stability" that both the government and scholars have traditionally advocated. This means that China cannot enjoy peace and stability as long as North Korea is a de facto nuclear power.

This paper provides the most comprehensive and brief classification when studying China's North Korean policy. Despite many changes in the subsequent discussion of North Korea policy in China, the above two categories of schools can still be applied to this day. It is most brief and helpful to categorize the discussion of Chinese academia. However, since 2009, when the report was published, it was necessary to continue the research since it failed to contain much more diversified and diversified discourse with the third nuclear test in 2013. In addition, the opinions named as *traditional* groups in this study are mixed with those who claim 'blood alliance' to preserve historical or ideological ties between North Korea and China and those who highly value North Korea's strategic worth in consideration of unstable Northeast Asian security structure. This is because both arguments, in conclusion, suggest maintaining continuous friendly relations between North Korea and China. This study will present the reasons and grounds that these two should be distinguished.

Li Xin, a professor at the Shanghai Normal University in China, studied what elements of national interest the Chinese intellectual elite used to evaluate North Korea after the second North Korean nuclear test in May 2009.<sup>5</sup> He explains that during the Cold War, certain research institutes such as the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, or the Military Academy monopolized the research on North Korea, so Chinese

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<sup>5</sup> 이희욱, Xu, Zhenqing, & 성균중국연구소. (2015).

intellectuals seemed to have one voice on North Korea, but now the situation has changed. As the Cold War ended and the North Korean nuclear issue began to become international, he observed a change in the attitude of the intellectual elite toward North Korea, and the current academic community is relatively free and diverse on the North Korean issue, which was previously considered taboo. After the North Korean nuclear crisis, Chinese society diversifies its views on defining China's national interests regarding North Korea.

Therefore, Li argues that there is a limit to simply classifying them into '*traditional*' and '*strategic*' as summarized in the ICG report and suggests seven school classifications according to the differences in the national interest perceptions by various factions. The first is the "morality" faction that values China's international status. Scholars belonging to this faction argue that since "North Korea is a projection of China," it is appropriate to provide security guarantees to North Korea, which is currently suffering from moral responsibility, and expand economic aid. Furthermore, scholars belonging to the school argue that North Korea's development of nuclear weapons is justified because it was a struggle to counter the threatening policy of the "imperialist U.S."

The second faction named 'the normative' is the group of scholars who perceive 'international norms' as the highest level of national interest. They argue that North Korea should impose sanctions for conducting nuclear tests and firing missiles from a normative point of view. However, if the U.S. forces North Korea even when it does not engage in provocative acts, it is argued that the U.S. should criticize the U.S. because it did not do the "right thing" normatively. They also believe that North Korea should be recognized according to the "five principles of peaceful coexistence," claiming that any country should not interfere in domestic affairs without violating the country's sovereignty.

The third is the 'buffer zone optimists.' They are a school that positively evaluates North Korea as a "buffer zone" that will prevent direct confrontation between the U.S. and China in a similar context to *traditional* scholars' perception of North Korea

as a strategic asset in the ICG report. Considering this value of North Korea, it is the opinion that China should continue to support North Korea, strengthen relations between North Korea and China, and ease U.S. coercion, as it is in China's national interest. Li Xin said that considering that a relatively large number of scholars from the early 2000s to 2012 have made arguments for this classification, it is still possible that this opinion is the mainstream opinion in China.

The fourth is 'buffer zone pessimists.' Like the third school, these schools view the security value as the most significant among China's national interests elements. However, unlike the "buffer zone optimists," they argue that once the Korean Peninsula is unified, the reason for the presence of U.S. troops in Korea will disappear, so its function as a buffer zone will disappear. Therefore, they argue that China should support the unification of the Korean Peninsula instead of exhaustingly worrying about it.

Next is the 'economic cooperation school' (or the geographical school), which emphasizes the economic aspect. They expect economic cooperation with North Korea to revitalize the underdeveloped Northeast region. They argue that if North Korea succeeds in its reform and opening up, the burden of Beijing's aid to Pyongyang will be reduced. Besides, if North Korea breaks away from international isolation through economic development, it will be easier to give up its nuclear weapons. This opinion is similar to what the ICG *traditional* faction argues for developing friendly relations between North Korea and China.

The last two schools are divided into 'optimists in the U.S. negotiations' and 'pessimists in the U.S. negotiations,' depending on whether or not North Korea can be used as an advantageous card in negotiations with the U.S. The optimist in the negotiations with the U.S. says the presence of the North Korean issue is an excellent tool to boost China's influence by favoring China's position in relations with the U.S. On the other hand, pessimists in negotiations with the U.S. argue that North Korea will not simply give itself up as a "China card," as China thinks. On the contrary, the pessimists believe North Korea will find itself used in the negotiations with the U.S.,

leading to an unfortunate end such as the deteriorated relationship between Pyongyang and Beijing. In the worst-case scenario, scholars warn that only China is used as the “China card” by North Korea, to avoid preemptive strikes from the U.S.

Li Xin's classification is commendable for showing the complex nature of Chinese academic discussions more clearly through a more specific classification than the previous ICG report. If anything is to be supplemented, the first classification, the "morality" faction, all of whose analyzed papers were published before the second nuclear test in 2009. It leaves the question of whether scholars making such claims still exist. Also, most of the scholars classified as 'normatives' are not Chinese. This is also regrettable. Except for Qu Xing's thesis, which is a member of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs' public diplomatic advisory panel, Korean scholars such as Lee Hee-ok and Moon Jeong-in were cited. It can be inferred that it is a very small number of non-mainstream opinions in China. Moreover, it is clear what kind of national interest perception each school's claims are based on, but even if they belong to the same classification and have the same national interest perception, the conclusion policy prescriptions are often different. This thesis intends to supplement this part because relatively short pages were devoted to Li's article to publish all these proposals.

Zhu Feng and Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga classified academic perceptions of North Korea-China relations according to the classification of international relations mainstream theories.<sup>6</sup> First, *nationalists* value historical ties during the Korean War and value North Korea's role as a buffer zone, describing North Korea as a "lips-and-teeth relationship." Second, *realists* argue that in relations with North Korea, they should protect the national interest with a more practical perspective, but that Pyongyang is still China's strategic asset and that China should not lose it to the United States. Third, *internationalists* pay attention to the negative impact of North Korea's actions on China's national interests. Among them, it is resentful that China has been criticized by the international community for its lukewarm attitude toward

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<sup>6</sup> Zhu, Feng & Beauchamp-Mustafaga, N. (2015).

North Korea's provocations and its national reputation has been harmed. Therefore, it requires a policy to correct this. On the premise that unification will be achieved under the leadership of South Korea, they demand that North Korea take appropriate sanctions against North Korea by utilizing China's leverage and restore China's image through this. The last is the argument of *liberalists*, and basically, similar to the liberalist idea of international relations theory, it proposes a policy of cooperation such as "humanitarian support." But their real purpose is to reject North Korea's value as a strategic asset and focus on the lives and human rights of North Koreans who are unhappy under Kim Jong-un. Therefore, they urge the Chinese government to immediately switch to a North Korea policy that focuses on improving the lives of North Koreans.

The first two categories are relatively friendly toward North Korea, and the third and last categories maintain a negative attitude toward North Korea. In light of the ICG classification, the former corresponds to the *traditionalist* opinion and the latter to the *strategist* opinion, but Zhu Feng's article explains more detailed motives. However, if the school is classified with existing theories like the authors', it is difficult to avoid various errors. Amid the growing tide of nationalism in China today, it may be a hasty conclusion to say that all nationalists value relations with North Korea. It is not clear whether the author refers to "nationalism" in the same sense as the current phenomenon(patriotism) in China, but there is room for confusion. In addition, it may be a premature judgment to assume that all those who maintain a realistic perspective value high on North Korea's strategic asset value. The authors' classifications help the observers to utilize the advantages of international relations theory. Still, my thesis chooses not to classify schools to avoid such errors considering the above problems.

As can be seen from the perspective of North Korean researchers presented above, neighboring countries' anticipations for changes in Xi Jinping's policy on the Korean Peninsula were very high before and after the second and third nuclear tests. In fact, the discourse on North Korea policy, which is discussed at the level of public

opinion, showed a significant change from the traditional approach after those two tests. It was a clear change that there was a sharp increase among North Korean diplomatic experts in China in the opinion that China should not only play a role of a mediator but also take the initiative and put efforts to make North Korea a normal country.

Although not covered in detail in the above classification, it is very interesting that the discussion on how to define "closeness" between North Korea and China there had added a view that "China's North Korea policy should be approached from the perspective of unification on the Korean Peninsula." Considering the past when the mention of North Korea's foreign policy itself was regarded taboo, it can be said that discussing "unification of the Korean Peninsula" relatively freely in the form of proposing policies to the government is a great development. Regarding the issue of unification, some scholars say that it would be advantageous for China to use the entire Korean Peninsula as a buffer zone if necessary, and for this, there is a growing perception that it is necessary to enhance relations with North Korea as well as South Korea and strengthen strategic communication with the U.S. Finally, the opinions that have emerged relatively recently are more unconventional. There are even unusual opinions that the current Kim Jong-un regime should be abandoned, by supporting absorbing unification into South Korea or encouraging pro-China forces in North Korea.

### **3. Analytical framework and Research Questions**

This paper will analyze China's foreign policy over the past 40 years after the reform and opening up, based on the analysis of the existing literature and the points to be supplemented. It focused on the discussion of academia, but as briefly mentioned earlier, the discussion of China's North Korea policy was not conducted separately from the discussion of China's entire foreign policy but was conducted in parallel. Therefore, in order to accurately understand academic discussions on North Korea-China relations, understanding the entire foreign policy of the previous Chinese

leadership must come first.

Therefore, this paper will first analyze China's overall foreign policy stance from Deng Xiaoping to Hu Jintao, and then examine the perceptions of North Korea that each leader had. In addition, we will analyze the discussions of the academic field's disputes that appeared rampantly from the end of Hu Jintao's reign to the entire period of Xi Jinping's reign, when academic discussions on North Korea policy intensively increased. Finally, we will observe the remarks of Chinese foreign ministry and senior leaders and China's actual foreign policy toward North Korea, and examine the Chinese government's response or reality to the above policy proposals. This aims to investigate how the various spectrum of policy prescriptions that have emerged have affected Xi Jinping's foreign policy and North Korea policy. In conclusion, I would like to analyze the causes why the increased experts' discussions failed to reach the point of causing fundamental changes in North Korea-China relations.

The research questions of this paper are summarized into three main categories as follows. First, how has China's North Korea policy changed during the 40 years of reform? Second, what interesting discussions and various arguments about North Korea policy have emerged within Chinese academia, and to what extent have they expanded? In addition, how is the discussion held in the Global Times, a state media, different from the discussion in general academia in terms of temperature, tone, and allowed range of discussion on North Korea? Lastly, what was the actual North Korean policy during Xi Jinping's leadership and how is it different from the scholars' contention? Why has the magnified idea of requesting the government to keep its distance from North Korea failed to bring about a fundamental change in North Korea policy?

## **Chapter II. Foreign Policy and DPRK Policy during 1978~2012**

In order to answer the first research question presented, this chapter will present the results of research on bilateral relations in terms of the Chinese government's foreign policy by leadership, perception of North Korea, and policy decisions.

### **1. Deng Xiaoping Leadership(1978~1989)**

#### **1-1. Diplomatic Strategies**

Deng Xiaoping's leadership declared a reform and opening policy at the 11th plenary session of the third Central Committee of the Party in 1978 (December 18-22, 1978). Since then, China has set economic development as its foremost national goal. Following these goals, the Chinese government began to look at the international situation by reflecting on and turning away from the existing policy of "war and peace," causing a major change in foreign policy. Deng Xiaoping's basic principles and diplomatic strategies for foreign policy decisions formed during his reign served as the basis for China's next generation of leaders to form their own foreign policy. Many have been handed down from this period to the third, fourth and even to the fifth generations of today. Therefore, with a thorough understanding of Chinese foreign policy in the Deng Xiaoping era, it is possible to make more accurate judgments when looking at Xi Jinping's foreign policy today.

The characteristics of foreign policy at Deng's time can be summarized into four main categories. First, it has set the purpose of creating a peaceful and stable international environment for economic development. Through reform and opening up, Deng turned the national goal of focusing on political elements in the previous Mao Zedong era to a pragmatic economic line. Since then, the catchphrase of 'creating a peaceful and stable international environment for sustainable growth' has become a representative banner of foreign policy during the reform period.



<sup>1</sup> It was to focus only on economic development without competing for arms with major powers such as the United States like the Soviet Union did. In the same vein, Deng reinterpreted the existing ideology, Marxism-Leninism-Maozedong Thought. Based on this, the practical aspect of Leninism was further emphasized among the various characteristics of Leninism, and later attempted to combine ideological liberation and ‘empirical tradition(實事求是)’ by promoting relations with capitalist countries and justifying overseas investment<sup>2</sup> This paved the way for the ideological background to support the capital and technology markets, as Beijing at that time had no choice but to rely on developed countries when they began to reform and open up. Through this, Deng Xiaoping was able to successfully create a peaceful international environment that did not confront the developed countries.

Second, it pursued an independent and non-aligned policy (結盟). Through the ‘Political Report’ of General Secretary Hu Yaobang at the 12th Communist Party Congress in September 1982, and the constitutional amendment at the 5th National People's Congress in December of the same year, "independent diplomacy" and "non-alignment principles" were decided as new diplomatic policies.<sup>3</sup> As a result, Deng Xiaoping's reform period pursued an independent diplomatic line. This was to maintain strict independence without forming an alliance with the United States or the Soviet Union under the Cold War structure and to implement a firmly independent foreign policy by prioritizing economic growth.

Third, the "five principles of peaceful coexistence" were emphasized: mutual respect for sovereignty and territory, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference in domestic affairs, equality and reciprocity, and mutual respect for peaceful coexistence. China declared compliance with the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence at the 12th Party Congress, stipulated in the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, and in fact established and developed friendly relations

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas W. Robinson.(1994). p.568

<sup>2</sup> Thomas W. Robinson.(1994), pp. 570-571

<sup>3</sup> 조영남. (2013). p.260

and cooperation with countries around the world.

Finally, if the principles of foreign policy in the Deng Xiaoping era are abbreviated in one word, it can be called '*taoguangyanghui*'. This includes the detailed spirit of calm observation(冷静观察), confidence in the situation (稳住阵角), responding with faith (沉着应付), keeping a low profile(善于守拙), not becoming the head(决不当头), and contributing when it has to”(有所作为).<sup>4</sup>

Deng Xiaoping's reform era foreign policy led China to rapid economic growth and paved the way for China's increased diplomatic power in relations with the United States and third world countries. China, which has been able to use its own cultural attractiveness and military power as diplomatic leverage along with its unprecedented economic growth record, is now looking at the international environment with one step further ahead.<sup>5</sup>

## **1-2. DPRK Policy**

### ***A Realist Diplomatic Line***

North Korea-China relations, which have maintained friendly relations based on ideological homogeneity and geographical proximity, went through a stage of adjustment in the 1980s due to reform and opening-up policies. This is because China's policy on the Korean Peninsula has also shifted to a practical and realistic diplomatic route from pursuing traditional national interests. In other words, China attempted to maintain the status quo and continue the stability of the Korean Peninsula in terms of "creating a peaceful and stable surrounding international environment" to achieve the goal of domestic economic development. Beijing tried to prevent North Korea from leaning toward the Soviet Union("To Lean to One Side") while maintaining friendly relations with it. China saw North Korea as threatening Beijing's security if it completely moves away from China's influence toward the Soviet Union or causes instability on the Korean Peninsula. To Beijing, it was an act

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<sup>4</sup> 리단. (2005). p.56

<sup>5</sup> 김재철. (2005).

that directly hinders China's domestic economic development, which was unacceptable.

In order to gain an upper hand in relations with the Soviet Union, China made the following efforts to maintain relations with North Korea during the Deng Xiaoping period. First, China supported North Korea politically and diplomatically with gestures such as recognizing the power succession system of Kim Il-sung and his father. Second, in order to minimize Soviet influence in every field, it strengthened the relationship with North Korea and military and economic support were not spared.<sup>6</sup>

In the 1980s, even before the new diplomatic line was settled down, the Chinese leadership was conscious of the relations with North Korea. Evidences are revealed through two examples. First, in May 1978, China's then president Hua Guofeng visited North Korea to inform North Korea in advance of the normalization of U.S.-China relations. At this time, He promised three things to North Korea as a benefit in return for China improving relations with the United States. First, he promised to provide loans worth \$100 million, secondly, to provide 30 factories during the second seven-year plan period (1978-84), and thirdly, to provide 1.5 million tons of additional oil on top of 1 million tons of oil supply to the North.<sup>7</sup>

As another example, in September 1978, a Chinese delegation led by Deng Xiaoping also visited Pyongyang, a few months before the Communist Party of China decided on a path to reform and opening up. Deng Xiaoping's message to Kim Il-sung can be summarized in the following three things. First, China's improvement of relations with the U.S. is to check Soviet hegemony. Second, China does not compromise with the U.S. to resolve the Taiwan issue. Third, the biggest national challenge facing China is 'modernization', which requires a stable surrounding environment.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> 김옥준.(2004). p.159

<sup>7</sup> Han Sang Jun. (2021). p.63

<sup>8</sup> 최명해.(2009). p.328

It is worth noting that all of this was done on the basis of the "ideological blood alliance" established during the Mao Zedong period, but the focus of the bilateral relations was shifted in terms of pragmatism. This is because it still lies at the center of controversy among scholars to this day. Deng Xiaoping's leadership was now proposing a new relationship to create a peaceful and stable surrounding environment to benefit China's growth by reflecting on and breaking away from the ideology which used to connect Beijing and Pyongyang. He proposed a new relationship slogan of 'stable neighbors developing together' to reject hegemony and pursue practicality and national interests.

### ***Korean Peninsula Unification Policy***

During his last unofficial visit in 1982, Deng Xiaoping expressed firm support for the struggle of the Workers' Party of Korea, the North Korean government and its people for the peaceful reunification of the motherland.<sup>9</sup> Prior to this, the unification policy announced in January 1980 through Foreign Minister Huang Hua's remarks is in line with China's overall foreign policy stance mentioned above. He proclaimed the principle of "autonomous unification" without external interference in domestic affairs through remarks that "the unification of *Chosun* should be pursued solely through peaceful means by both the two Koreas and without foreign interference." He also made clear the principle of "peaceful unification" by saying, "I support the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's claim to realize the unification of North and South Korea, but I do not approve or support the resolution of the unification of North and South Korea using military means other than peace talks." His announcement shows the willingness to resolve the Korean Peninsula issue that continues up until today. He also mentioned "China strengthens relations with North Korea to minimize Soviet influence," and "If North Korea has a Soviet card, it should not forget that China also has a Korea card." These indicated a sense of vigilance of

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<sup>9</sup> 孟红, "邓小平可圈可点的若干个“最后一次” (in Chinese), 邓小平 纪念王, 2013年02月22日08:52, <http://dangshi.people.com.cn/n/2013/0222/c85037-20565770-3.html>.)

China against the then hegemonic and border-bound Soviet Union. This is reminiscent of the tense competition between the U.S. and China over the North Korean card today.

In fact, Deng Xiaoping's pledge to U.S. Secretary of Defense C. Weinberger in 1983 about "in the event of war on the Korean Peninsula" was very different from what many people today associate with the word "blood alliance" when they think about the North Korea-China Treaty. Deng said, "If North Korea's obvious Invasion from North Korea, there will be no Chinese intervention, and if South Korea's obvious attack, we will consult with the U.S. if China needs to support North Korea."<sup>10</sup>

## **2. Jiang Zemin Leadership(1989~2003)**

### **2-1. Diplomatic Strategies**

It can be said that China's national strategy during the Jiang Zemin era is an extension of the Deng Xiaoping era. However, Jiang Zemin's remarks, which solidified his position as a leader at the Chinese Communist Party's 15th congress in 1997, showed his triumphant confidence due to the achievements of reform and opening up, as well as concerns about a mountain of problems.<sup>11</sup>

#### ***Tian'anmen Incident and Social Problems***

China, which began to ride the waves of economic growth after reform and opening up, encountered obstacles due to the Tian'anmen Incident in 1989. The incident triggered Western forces, led by the U.S., to strengthen their containment policy against China, and disrupted plans to establish active friendly relations with

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<sup>10</sup> 최명해.(2009). p.328

<sup>11</sup> "Now, we are facing serious challenges, more favorable conditions and better opportunities than ever before. We have to make it clear that international competition is intensifying, gaps between economies, science and technology, and advanced countries are putting a lot of pressure on us, and that we ourselves have a lot of difficulties."(in Chinese) 江泽民, 1997, "高举邓小平理论伟大旗帜, 把建设有中国特色社会主义事业全面推向二十一世纪——江泽民在中国共产党第十五次全国代表大会上的报告" 《人民日报》(1997.9.21) ([http://www.gov.cn/test/2007-08/29/content\\_730614.htm](http://www.gov.cn/test/2007-08/29/content_730614.htm))

neighboring countries during the Deng era. Besides, regional and hierarchical inequality, which began to emerge from the early days of reform and opening up, and social problems such as corruption, individualism began to become more prevalent. At the same time, after the advent of the Chen Shuibian regime, the risk factors of Taiwan's independence movement began to increase. Then, in 1991, the Cold War system ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the international system began to change rapidly.<sup>12</sup>

### ***Continuity of Deng Xiaoping's Foreign Policy***

Jiang Zemin basically maintained and continued the reform and opening policy of the Deng Xiaoping era, peace and development, and an independent foreign policy stance.<sup>13</sup> However, as the domestic and international environment changed, it was inevitable for Beijing to read the world system and the trend of globalization and multipolarization to adjust its diplomatic goals to appropriately respond to them. This was because the creation of a peaceful and stable international environment was still essential for China. Therefore, in an effort to prevent and offset factors that hinder peace and stability, China has launched diplomacy to increase its influence in the international community. In this process, three characteristics of the foreign policy of Jiang Zemin's leadership appeared.

The first was an effort to gain recognition of China's new identity of a 'responsible great power' from the international community. As part of these efforts, China restored its external relations, such as China -U.S. relations and China-Europe relations, and it actively participated in UN activities, and put efforts to join the World Trade Organization. This was a policy to enhance its national image by informing the world that it would accept the rules and norms of the international political and economic order as a 'good global citizen'.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> 리단(2002), p.173

<sup>13</sup> 조영남(2013). p.261

<sup>14</sup> 차창훈.(2007). p.167

Second, Jiang Zemin's leadership emphasized 'multilateral diplomacy' and 'good neighbor' diplomacy. In particular, since the Joint Declaration on New Security between the U.S. and Japan in 1996, Beijing has continuously mentioned "multipolar diplomacy." This began with the consideration of the Chinese leadership to clean up hegemonism and power politics, which were by-products of the Cold War, and to pursue world peace and stability. In particular, China, which had been unable to break away from its passive attitude since the Tian'anmen Incident in 1989, showed an aggressive attitude to enthusiastically engage in world affairs by breaking away from its submissive diplomatic stance through multipolar diplomacy.<sup>15</sup>

Meanwhile, after Deng Xiaoping's 'Southern Tour' in 1992, 'economic development' was once again prioritized as China's primary national goal. Among the specific contents, the task of good-neighborly friendship diplomacy, such as "strengthening cooperation with the third world and developing friendly and economic relations with Western advanced countries," was highlighted.

The third feature is the "New Security Concept" presented by President Jiang Zemin at the Geneva Conference on Disarmament in 1999. This is a new security view that corresponds to the new international order in place of the old security view based on military alliances in the past. The main contents of it are dialogue, trust, equality, and cooperation. Its main idea suggests that in order to maintain peace, each country must abide by the principles of mutual respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, non-aggression, mutual non-interference, reciprocal equality, and peaceful coexistence, and talks and negotiations based on equality are the right shortcuts to resolving disputes.<sup>16</sup>

## **2-2. DPRK policies**

The third-generation leadership's policy on the Korean Peninsula is likewise an extension of the second-generation leadership. Beijing has maintained its policy on

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<sup>15</sup> 류동원. (2001). pp.137-139

<sup>16</sup> 리단.(2002).p.179

the Korean Peninsula continuously against the backdrop of domestic factors aimed at continuous economic growth and international environmental factors such as concerns over U.S. expansion after the end of the Cold War.<sup>17</sup>

Therefore, the stance of the Korean Peninsula policy in the era of the third leadership was maintained as a practical foreign policy of "maintenance of peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula." It can be seen that the establishment of diplomatic relations between Korea and China in 1992 was also made for the purpose of pursuing such practicality. On September 3, 2001, Jiang Zemin visited North Korea for the first time in ten years after diplomatic relations between Korea and China. He emphasized the basic policy of North Korea-China relations in 16 words(in Chinese): tradition succession, future orientation, good neighborhood friendship, and strengthening cooperation.<sup>18</sup>

Here, the expression "tradition succession" reveals the specificity of North Korea-China relations, but it is also contradictory considering that their relations have suffered a 10-year slump since the normalization of South Korea and China in 1992. Back then, North Korea firmly opposed their diplomatic ties. Kim Il-sung so strongly objected that he threatened Deng Xiaoping that he would recognize Taiwan if it happens. Therefore, the expression "tradition succession" was used to soothe the alienated North Korea, which does not deviate from the stance of "good-neighbor friendship," one of the diplomatic principles of Jiang Zemin's leadership. However, the string of ideological ties with North Korea has already been loosely adjusted in the Chinese perception since Deng Xiaoping's era. Thus, Jiang's expression of "tradition" seems to have had faded in its meaning. Jiang Zemin's China tried to keep the relations on a special level, but it continued to move away from ideological bonds like the one in Mao's period.

### ***Response to North Korea's Nuclear Issue***

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<sup>17</sup> 리단. (2002), pp.181-183

<sup>18</sup> 문홍호, & Heung Ho Moon. (2009).



Jiang Zemin's leadership approached the first North Korean nuclear crisis in 1994 also from a practical point of view. Then Jiang's position in China was not yet solid, so he did not want to be caught up in sharp international issues. It was about this moment that the first North Korean nuclear crisis broke out. Therefore, Jiang began to emphasize the peaceful resolution of the issue and the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, with the focus on the peace and stability untouched. Jiang Zemin consistently maintained the position of Deng Xiaoping's *taoguangyanghui*. He stuck to the basic principles with a very passive and lukewarm attitude. His principled stance was threefold. It was to pursue the denuclearization, support peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula, and resolve the nuclear issue through dialogue rather than sanctions. His stance was revealed as he abstained from the sanctions resolution against North Korea at the board level of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in June 1994. Jiang had to choose the United States for economic practical purposes, and could not abandon North Korea for political interest. As a result, he opposed the international pressure on North Korea and responded passively to the international community's request for arbitration in a way that does not directly challenge the U.S. East Asia policy. Jiang Zemin applied the rule of non-interference in internal affairs, one of the five principles of peaceful coexistence, to North Korea.<sup>19</sup>

In the process of managing North Korea's nuclear weapons program, both China and the U.S. competed to take initiatives in the Peninsula. China tried to maximize its security interests in East Asia, and managed the Korean Peninsula by preventing the U.S. influence but avoiding direct conflict. In particular, principles such as 'mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-interference in domestic affairs, and peaceful coexistence' in the New Security Concept have become a basic foundation for challenging the U.S.'s tough approach in dealing with North Korea's nuclear crises since 1994. It was an attempt to drive out the U.S.

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<sup>19</sup> “[알쏭달쏭 북·중 이야기(6)] 김정일과 장쩌민, 2015.03.01, <https://www.joongang.co.kr/article/17251593>

control in Asia.

### ***Unification Policy of the Korean Peninsula***

Like the Deng Xiaoping era, Jiang's China has publicly stated that it would not oppose the unification of the Korean Peninsula if the two Koreas voluntarily pursue peaceful unification without direct external intervention. Article 5 of the 1992 Korea-China Joint Statement on diplomatic relations concluded in the early days of Jiang Zemin's reign. It states, "The People's Republic of China respects the desire of the Korean people to reunify the Korean Peninsula early and supports the peaceful reunification of the Korean people." Even after that, Jiang Zemin made remarks on the unification of the Korean Peninsula in public several times.<sup>20</sup> The content remains unchanged from the principle of Deng Xiaoping. The unification of the Peninsula that China can accept should be independent and peaceful unification through inter-Korean agreements.

Through the above comments and contents of the Chinese leader's stance, it can be seen that the issue of unification on the Peninsula is not 'core' significance to China. This is because it does not present any schedule or specific policy, and denies that Beijing is the main party. However, the fact that the Chinese leader mentions the unification of Korea continuously and periodically means that it is a matter that requires "regular management" through continuous attention. Furthermore, it means that China has a sense of responsibility for the reunification of the Peninsula as a matter of the security interest of its own country.

## **3. Hu Jintao Leadership(2003~2013)**

### **3-1. Diplomatic Strategies**

When Beijing entered Hu Jintao's leadership, international community expected

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<sup>20</sup> "Jiang Urges the Koreans to Negotiate Reunification," *International Herald Tribune*, 1997.1.30.; "Jiang Zemin: China adamantly supports the self-determined and peaceful reunification of the Korean Peninsula" (in Chinese), *Sina News*, 2001.7.10.)

more roles from China's with its economic development performances. Domestically, confidence had recovered to some extent. Scholars have now begun to raise their voices that China should go beyond its *taoguangyanghui* strategy and actively engage in great power diplomacy, and fulfill its responsibilities and obligations in the international stage. Reflecting this argument from academia, the Hu Jintao government came up with a foreign policy focusing on "peaceful development" and "harmonious society" necessary to come further as a responsible power.

### ***Peaceful Rise***

The banner of "responsible power" in the Jiang Zemin era declared that China had emerged as a regional great power in Asia based on rapid economic growth. The 'peaceful rise' motto goes further and expresses China's desire and willingness to now emerge as a world power.<sup>21</sup> The Hu Jintao government stressed that it will continue to actively support the U.N. in the long run following the steps of previous generation and actively participate in multilateral problem-solving mechanisms, regional security, and economic cooperation to solve global problems such as the environment, poverty, refugees, and terrorism.<sup>22</sup>

### ***Peaceful Development and Harmonious World***

Direct expressions regarding development orientation, such as the 'peaceful rise', which the Hu government has previously promoted, have led to unwanted consequences of strengthening neighboring countries' moves to check China. This appeared in the form of negative discourses on China's development, such as China threat theory, China economic bubble theory, China responsibility theory, and China collapse theory. To solve these problems, Hu Jintao sought a route to replace the existing banner. At the end of the debate, based on the perception that peace should be pursued according to China's identity, the slogan of the inclusive mechanism of

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<sup>21</sup> 조영남(2013). p. 23

<sup>22</sup> 차창훈.(2007).

"peaceful development" and "harmonious society" was put in full force.<sup>23</sup> Beijing's efforts have changed China's status in the international community in line with its successful maneuver in the 2008 global economic crisis. The Hu Jintao government once again tried to reassure the world, which is looking suspiciously at China's development, saying it would "not pose a threat to anyone."<sup>24</sup> It also tried to establish cooperative relations with major powers such as the United States, not a competitive structure. This was because the full confrontation with the U.S. did not benefit the national identity and did not want to consume the national energy through unnecessary competition.<sup>25</sup>

### **3-2. DPRK policies**

Overall, the Hu Jintao administration's North Korea policy can be summarized into three main points: first, stable management of the North Korean regime and division of the Peninsula, second, efforts to resolve the nuclear issue and denuclearize, last, North Korea's reform and opening up.<sup>26</sup> In the process, as in the previous leadership, North Korea-China relations were seen moving to a normal state-to-state relationship based on national interests, not ideology. For example, unlike in the past, China has begun to convey its position relatively clearly to North Korea by demanding that it strive for economic independence, pursue a Chinese-style open policy, and end its WMD program. In fact, the result was North Korea having attended the six-party talks.<sup>27</sup>

#### ***stance on North Korea's nuclear issue***

While North Korea was developing nuclear weapons in earnest and passing through the first and second nuclear tests, China was trying to take on its role as a responsible

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<sup>23</sup> 김재철. (2005).

<sup>24</sup> 국무원, [http://www.gov.cn/zwggk/2005-12/22/content\\_134060.htm](http://www.gov.cn/zwggk/2005-12/22/content_134060.htm)

<sup>25</sup> Yan, Xuotong.(2014).

<sup>26</sup> 문홍호, & Heung Ho Moon. (2009).

<sup>27</sup> 리단. (2005).

power by actively incorporating itself into the world order. Therefore, Hu Jintao's leadership dealt with North Korea-China relations in order to enhance the image of a responsible power. Hu said "China-North relations are no longer bilateral relations under the Cold War structure," to demonstrate Beijing's willingness to take responsibility for the nuclear issue as a member of the international. In particular, the second nuclear crisis in 2009 made Hu's government focus on nuclear issues.<sup>28</sup> In addition, during the second nuclear crisis, the level of the crisis was higher in terms of North Korea's progress in nuclear development and its aggressiveness and Washington's hard-line attitude. The situation became more serious than in the past, making it more likely to cause a dreadful crisis on the Korean Peninsula.

Therefore, Hu tried to ease tensions around the Korean Peninsula, emphasizing the maintenance of peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula as the most important principle of resolving the North Korean nuclear issue. Hu Jintao emphasized the denuclearization, not limited to North Korea, but of the entire Korean Peninsula as an extension of the "three principles of North Korea nuclear" of the Jiang Zemin. He also led the six-party talks and used the strategy of dialogue and negotiations as the main strategy to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue.

### ***Unification Policy of the Korean Peninsula***

Hu Jintao directly expressed China's support for the ultimate unification of the two Koreas in various situations. "China's policy on the peninsula is consistent," Hu said in a meeting with President Roh Moo Hyun during his visit to China in July 2003. Hu continued, "We support reconciliation and cooperation between the two sides of the peninsula, and we support the eventual achievement of independent peaceful reunification of the peninsula. The Chinese side will play a constructive role in doing so as before." Later, President Roh and Hu Jintao met at the APEC summit in Busan in November 2005, issued a joint statement at the summit. "China welcomed the progress of reconciliation and cooperation between the two Koreas, reiterated its

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<sup>28</sup> 문흥호, & Heung Ho Moon. (2009).

steadfast support for improved relations and eventual peaceful reunification, and supported South Korea's active role as a direct party to the Korean Peninsula," the statement said.<sup>29</sup> In a speech at the Korean National Assembly in November 2005, Hu once again mentioned his support for the unification of the Korean Peninsula.<sup>30</sup> Since then, Hu Jintao has continued to express his support for the unification of the Korean Peninsula directly at the United Nations General Assembly in 2007, and in the Korea-China joint statements in May and August 2008.<sup>31</sup> Prior to his visit to Washington in 2011, he gave a speech in the U.S. media supporting "self-determination and peaceful reunification of the two Koreas."<sup>32</sup>

There are three principles that can be confirmed from the standpoint of support for unification expressed through his seven remarks during Hu Jintao's reign. And all of these characteristics have not changed a bit from the standpoint of the Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin periods. Firstly, it emphasizes independent unification. This means the unification of the Korean Peninsula by agreement between the two Koreas without foreign intervention. According to the interpreter's point of view, it can be interpreted that Korea, which should border China after reunification, opposes the disorder of the unified Korea under the influence of other countries. It could also be translated that Beijing opposes U.S.-led unification considering the competitive characteristics of Sino-US relations. It is in the same context as 'non-interference in internal affairs' of Chinese diplomacy principles.

Second, Hu Jintao, therefore, emphasized reconciliation, dialogue, cooperation, and improved relations between the two Koreas every time he spoke in support of

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<sup>29</sup> China Daily, 2005, "President Hu: China supports eventual Korean unification," November 18, 2005. [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2005-11/18/content\\_495630.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2005-11/18/content_495630.htm)

<sup>30</sup> "We consistently believe that both sides of the Peninsula are direct parties to the problem and that it should finally be resolved by dialogue and negotiations between the two sides. As before, we will support the improvement of relations, trust building, and the final realization of independent peaceful unification through dialogue between the two sides. We, along with the Korean side, will play an active role and contribute to important issues related to peace and stability in Northeast Asia." (in Chinese) "胡锦涛在韩国国会的演讲 (全文) 2005-11-17, [http://pk.china-embassy.org/zgxw/200511/t20051117\\_1138102.htm](http://pk.china-embassy.org/zgxw/200511/t20051117_1138102.htm)

<sup>31</sup> 박창근(2015).

<sup>32</sup> "胡锦涛主席接受美国《华尔街日报》和《华盛顿邮报》联合书面采访", 人民日报, 2014年1月18日

unification. For China, worsening relations between the two Koreas means unstable surroundings. If the two Koreas reach reconciliation and cooperation before reunification, it is likely to lead to friendly relations even after unification, and vice versa. This is why China is opposed to the two Koreas becoming hostile.

Third, the unification of the Korean Peninsula must be peaceful. This means unification without war. If a war breaks out on China's border, it will not only suffer serious damage to security and national interests. Furthermore, China has a treaty relationship with North Korea and an outbreak of war is the last thing it wants to see. This is an opinion that opposes both absorption of South Korea and unification through preemptive aggression by North Korea, and in a broad sense, it can be interpreted as a voice that opposes the ROK-U.S. joint military drills and the U.S. deployment of THAAD in South Korea.

Looking at the Chinese government's remarks on unification with the above in mind, China supports the unification of the Korean Peninsula itself in principle. Rather, they are expressing China's position on what 'conditions' the two Koreas should be unified. In short, it continuously emphasizes the premise that the unification of the Korean Peninsula must meet China's interests. In other words, if these conditions are not satisfied, it means that China cannot support the unification of the Korean Peninsula. When Hu Jintao gave a speech at the Korean National Assembly in 2005, he said he supported the unification of the Korean Peninsula, a big round of applause. It is not clear to what extent the Korean National Assembly understood the Chinese government's intentions.

#### **4. Conclusion**

If you look at it so far, you can see the characteristics of China's overall foreign policy and North Korea policy. The first is the continuity of foreign policy due to the party-state system. Small tactical changes are noticeable in foreign policy toward North Korea during the reform period, but no major strategic changes have been made. This means that policies are discussed and determined within the continuity

of successive governments and in the connection with overall foreign policy rather than in the specificity that only North Korea policy has. Second, it pursues consistent goals such as preserving sovereignty and territorial integrity, and maintaining a socialist system. In this paper, we will examine whether the continuity found in the Chinese government's foreign policy stance and perception of North Korea will be will remain or disappear. Will significant changes occur based on academic discussions with unusual policy proposals, especially amid the rapidly changing environment since Xi Jinping took office? This study had analyzed how the voices of academia toward the government were varied and on what kind of background and motives they emerged, and how it was reflected in Xi Jinping's leadership's perception and policy toward North Korea.



## Chapter III. Discussion of North Korean policy in Chinese Academia

In this chapter, we will look at the Chinese intellectual experts' perception of North Korea-China relations during the reform period. As Li Xin pointed out, discussions on North Korea's previously considered taboo began to erupt after the third North Korean nuclear test. It coincided with the emergence of Xi Jinping's leadership in 2013. Therefore, in this chapter, academic journals and books were analyzed. The papers directly dealing with Chinese scholars' perceptions of North Korea-China relations published after 2013 were included. If interviews of the same authors are available, they are also added.<sup>1</sup>

This paper takes the form of raising four questions and answering them one by one, unlike the existing literature classified schools according to whether each scholar is an advocate of the friendly bilateral relationship or sees the relations as a heavy burden. As will be described later, the reason is that even if the solutions to North Korea-China relations are the same among scholars, specific motives differ significantly. In many cases, the background of scholars' origin and affiliation affects their perception of North Korea. Therefore, if necessary, their personal background was also introduced.

In addition, this part attempts to supplement the part that has not been sufficiently explained in relation to the opinion named *traditionalist* in the previous study. The concept of the existing *traditionalist* is a mixture of both opinions claiming blood alliance due to history and ideology, and those highly evaluating North Korea's strategic value due to the changed security structure in Northeast Asia. This is

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<sup>1</sup> From here, the names of major scholars and their opinions will be introduced. It should be noted that this paper did not classify the names of scholars. An expert's opinion at a particular point of time may not be consistent throughout his or her lifetime. Chinese scholars can present different strategies or change their positions on North Korea depending on the country's security environment changes, and the seriousness of the North Korean problem. The most representative example is the case of a scholar named Shen Dingli. He made several arguments on North Korea, first moderate, then tough and hard-line, and recently both to meet the Chinese national interest. In the academic world, this is natural and also it was why this paper avoided categorizations of scholars.

because both opinions insist on maintaining continuous friendly relations between North Korea and China. However, these two must be distinguished for the following two reasons. First, the two opinions are completely different from the basis and process of thinking. As it literally seems, history and ideologies matter the most for some scholars, whereas they are only regarded as useful tools for the national and strategic interest for other groups of observers.

Second, many scholars evaluate that the blood alliance based on the two nations' history and ideology has long disappeared. However, many scholars who make such arguments recognize the strategic value of North Korea. However, many Western media outlets reported that "Chinese scholars deny the blood alliance between North Korea and China," and that the friendly relations between North Korea and China will soon disappear, or that China will abandon North Korea, as if it is a *fait accompli*. This actually caused a lot of public misunderstanding. Therefore, only by distinguishing between the above two concepts can we avoid mistakes such as predicting the end of the alliance at the scene of Beijing criticizing Pyongyang imposing strong sanctions. This is also key to understanding the foreign policy of Xi Jinping's leadership today.

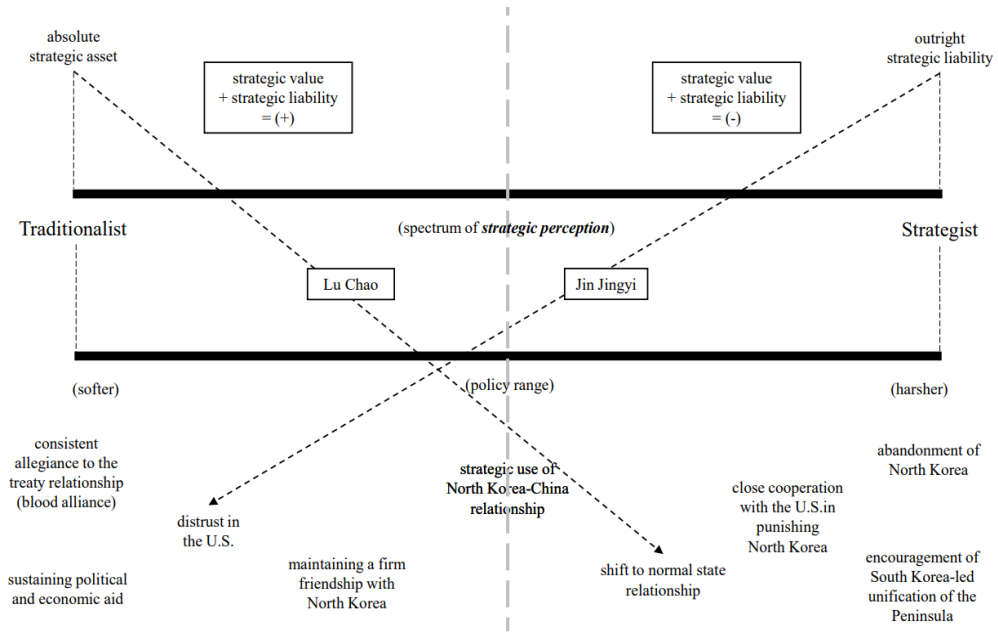
Another problem is the definition of a *strategist*. The conventional concept of the *strategist* faction was defined as those calling the six-party talks, a peaceful dialogue and negotiation, a complete failure and argues for an approach to punish Pyongyang for its bad behavior by making the bilateral relations a normal state-to-state relationship. Mostly they also call for the cooperation with the U.S. in doing so. However, this concept is also mixed with several arguments. For example, Lü Chao, a scholar who strongly opposes the break-up of Beijing-Pyongyang friendship, simultaneously raises the need for the relations to be converted to normal state-to-state relations. According to the existing definition of each faction, *traditionalists* were upset and critical of calling North Korea-China relations a normal relationship. So, Lü's opinion falls nowhere.



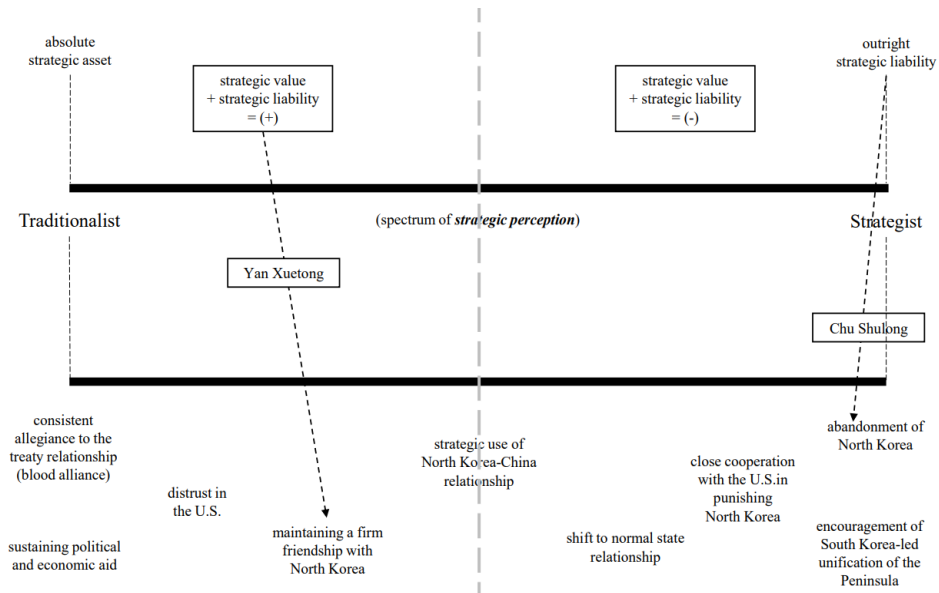
[Table 1] Spectrum classification from existing literature

To discuss this in more detail, if the two extremes of the spectrum of the existing discussion are set to the traditional wave and the strategic wave, it will look like [Table 1]. Here, this paper points out two weakpoints of the existing discussion. First, both parties share the scholars who recognize the strategic value of North Korea in their realm. They are not only in the *traditionalist* school but also in the *strategist* school. If you think that *strategist* scholars only take a one-sided hard-line position on North Korea and emphasize only cooperation with the U.S. and punishment on Pyongyang, you will miss a lot. For those with *strategist* view, North Korea is regarded as a strategic asset and a strategic burden at the same time. They are only classified as a ‘burdenist’ because North Korea is ‘more’ of a burden than of an asset when measured. The reason we should keep this in mind in evaluating the discussions of each scholar is that both the criteria for judging the value as an asset and the degree of burden are subjective. Moreover, policy prescriptions vary accordingly because the factors that each scholar pays attention to when evaluating North Korea-China relations are differed by the person.

Second, it is easy for us to recognize that each scholar comes up with a consistent policy prescription depending on which category he or she belongs to, but in reality, there are different cases. In [Table 2-1] and [Table 2-2], policy proposals according to the school classification are connected and expressed as classified in one of the existing literature. Subsequently, four representative cases of scholars to be described later were marked as examples. In the case of [Table 2-1], Yan Xuetong, who has an opinion belonging to the *traditionalist* school, and Chu Shulong, who belongs to the *strategist* school, each presented an expected solution. The problem



[Table 2-2] Academia's policy prescription on North Korea (with unanticipated results)



[Table 2-1] Academia's policy prescription on North Korea (with expected solutions)

is that, as shown in [Table 2-1], the unanticipated suggestion is derived across the centerline. This is why this paper avoids the classification of schools and attempts a more thorough approach. In addition to the subjective evaluation of the strategic value of Pyongyang, the variables that contribute to scholars' different beliefs include historical and ideological ties, subjective confidence in the North, the progress of its

nuclear development by period, and the responsibility for undermining the security environment around China.

Therefore, this paper uses a different definition of *traditionalist* to eschew confusion in concepts. In fact, many scholars point out that North Korea and China have not been allies in the real sense since the Mao period to this day. Therefore, although the concept of "traditional blood alliance" has a misleading element in itself, this study redefines the meaning of "traditional," as 1) share historical memories of participating as a military ally in the Korean War and 2) emphasizing ideological homogeneity as the same communist and socialist country. Based on this definition, two questions will be asked one after another. One asks whether North Korea is still in a 'comrade on the shared blood' and the other asks whether North Korea is a strategic asset or a burden on China.

Furthermore, the third question is asked about the possibility and necessity of China's abandonment of North Korea. At the opposite extreme from those advocating a blood alliance, there lies standpoints arguing that China should sever the diplomatic relations and abandon North Korea for several reasons. This is the toughest and most radical opinion among the opinions of scholars classified as *strategists*. However, those who do not subdivide *strategist* opinions and have a dichotomous perception of two schools, mainly by the convenience of "*traditionalists* and *strategists*," would draw a false conclusion or expanded interpretation that "China will abandon North Korea this time." This misunderstanding was reproduced centering on the Western media and treated as if this was the official position of the Chinese government. In other words, the reason why this question was added to the previous two questions is that the above misunderstanding is also derived from the limitations of existing literature. Therefore, it is necessary to check the facts and distinguish the detailed arguments and logic of intellectuals who actually insist on giving up North Korea, how many experts and writings suggest such opinions, and how much influence it has on the government.

Finally, a fourth question asks about how China should view the unification of

the Korean Peninsula and the related scholars will answer it. Existing papers that synthesized and analyzed academic opinions mainly focus on whether the attitude toward North Korea is negative or positive, or what value the relationship with North Korea has for China. However, in the course of the past six nuclear tests, this study found that North Korean experts in China have not only increased their negative attitudes toward North Korea, but also marked a significant change in the unification of the Korean Peninsula. Some scholars are unreservedly opposed to the Chinese government's unification policy stance on the Korean Peninsula, which has not changed a bit over the past 40 years. Not only are they against it, but they are also making unconventional proposals that are contrary to the government's policy.

Considering the view that North Korea-China relations are considered a strategic burden and that even North Korea should be abandoned, and scholars who view the unification of the Korean Peninsula from a different perspective from the government, the discussion on unification is located at the far right. Even after the Cold War, the North Korean issue had been studied only in the state-owned research institutes for a while. Among them, the discussion on unification was an issue that was difficult for private researchers to deal with. The reason why academic discussions on the unification of the Korean Peninsula, which was considered a kind of taboo, have changed is that anxiety and distrust in North Korea have increased among the government, academia, and even the general public. Unification views that go against the government's discussion are a good clue to evaluate North Korea-China relations with a new approach away from the framework of the research dichotomy of North Korea perception.

### **1. Is DPRK-China still a blood alliance?**

As for the first question, we will consider the view that China and North Korea should restore the historical relationship, which is believed to have existed. This is an opinion that corresponds to the *traditionalist* school among the classifications organized by existing experts. Scholars who maintain this opinion emphasize that

North Korea still has value as a strategic buffer zone, but that it is essentially an inseparable relationship between North Korea and China as a blood alliance through a bond of history and ideology. This tends to be argued mainly by the commanders of the People's Volunteer Army who fought in the Korean War, and their families, researchers from military institutions, and ethnic Korean scholars studying North Korea in northeastern China. There are views that the Chinese leadership has maintained this viewpoint<sup>2</sup> but this judgment is a little hasty, and it is necessary to conclude after further investigation through more detailed research.

The conclusions are the same in terms of insisting on the maintenance and development of a friendly policy toward North Korea, but it can be seen that the motives are all slightly different. In terms of motivation, it is very important to look at their arguments, so we could avoid inaccurate judgments not only when predicting the current North Korea policy but also in the future direction.

### **(1) Motivation for a Military Alliance**

There are many military experts among scholars who insist on traditional relations between China and North Korea. They want to study the Korean War and apply the lessons of the "Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea" to this day.<sup>3</sup> Representative scholars belong to the Military Academy of the People's Liberation Army. The organization is a research institute under the Central Military Commission, which mainly studies military basic theory, defense construction, and military construction, and provides policy advice and recommendations to the Party Central Military Commission and the General Staff. Due to the nature of the institution that mainly studies military issues, the level of disclosure is low, and North Korea-China relations are also recorded mainly based on facts, but core policy proposals are rare.

However, analyzing some of the agency's papers at the CNKI Awards shows that

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<sup>2</sup> 신상진.(2013). p.292

<sup>3</sup> 王宜胜. 朝鲜战争中的危机管理问题研究[J]. 韩国研究论丛. 2009(01) ; 抗美援朝战争打出了中华民族的硬骨头[J]. 罗援. 炎黄春秋. 2019(06).

overall military experts support a solid North Korea-China alliance based on the North Korea-China Friendship Treaty. Among them, Wang Yisheng is an expert on the Korean Peninsula who combines theory with military status, has research capabilities and policy influence, and is in charge of Korean Peninsula issues.<sup>4</sup> In order to support the maintenance of the North Korea-China alliance, he denies the possibility of a sudden change in North Korea and shows a friendly attitude toward the North. He argues that maintaining the status quo on the Korean Peninsula is still the biggest agreement in China, as the maintenance of vested interests of all parties, including China, the United States, Russia and South Korea, depends on the situation on the Korean Peninsula. Moreover, his article emphasizes that the North Korean regime is not unstable as much as it is concerned from the outside and remains very stable internally.<sup>5</sup>

Luo Yuan of the same organization has studied this in depth until recently to address questions raised about the legitimacy of the Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea war.<sup>6</sup> "The first shooting at the dawn of June 25, 1950 was not the real cause of the Korean War, and the essence of this war was 'the North Korean defensive war' that began with the South Korea and the United States' preparation for war," he says. Furthermore, the Chinese People's Assistance Army said that it achieved a "great victory" by "blocking the U.S. ambition to invade North Korea and defending its country against the U.S.," which is the "great driving force for the revival of the Chinese people." Scholars who emphasize this spirit of "Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea" believe that even if North Korea poses any threat to China's security through nuclear or missile development, it should not nullify this dignified historical legacy and maintain the relationship on blood that was forged 70 years ago. This idea is rooted in the hostility toward the "imperialist" America that continues to this day

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<sup>4</sup> 조철, & 산업연구원. (2018).

<sup>5</sup> 王宜胜.(2012).朝鲜半岛的战略形势分析. *东北亚学刊*(01),45-47.

<sup>6</sup> 抗美援朝战争的正义性、正当性和正确性[J]. 罗援. *经济导刊*. 2020(11); 新中国奠基之战, 共和国从此无人敢小觑——纪念抗美援朝战争70周年[J]. 罗援. *炎黄春秋*. 2020(10); 抗美援朝战争打出了中华民族的硬骨头[J]. 罗援. *工会信息*. 2019(14)



and the "patriotism" of the Chinese people who want to fight against it militarily.

## **(2) Ideological Motivation**

Among scholars who insist on friendly relations from the perspective of blood alliance between North Korea and China, there are rare claims based on 'ideology'. Piao Jianyi, a Korean-Chinese from Yanbian, a researcher of Asia-Pacific Global Strategy at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and Ma Yunpeng, a PhD student, look at North Korea-China relations from the perspective of Marxism.<sup>7</sup> They said, "We believe that there is bound to be a conflict between the two Koreas for fundamental reasons that North Korea's proletariat and South Korea's big bourgeoisie (dazibenjia) are incompatible. In the authors' argument, North Korea is a rational actor acting on the basis of national interests, and South Korea's North Korea policy is interpreted as the politics of classes and interest groups, assuming that it is an "irrational" actor.

From this point of view, Piao emphasizes the fundamental justification for China to maintain relations with North Korea. In terms of method, he argues that China should cooperate with the Democratic Party, which is a little more friendly to North Korea than the conservative party in South Korea, and that the unification of the Korean Peninsula should also not be U.S.-centered. It also says China should treat North Korea as an "equal sovereign state with different core national interests" and actively intervene in the inter-Korean cooperation process to prevent the unification of the U.S.-affected Korean Peninsula. His article goes a little further and points out that in order to correct serious factors that hinder North Korea-China relations, the media bias problem must be solved. He is calling for correction with a sense of problem about the Chinese public misunderstanding of North Korea due to China'

He argues that there is a serious gap between the official understanding of Chinese officials and the Chinese public's views on North Korea, as the majority of ordinary Chinese are "slaves" of the South Korean media. According to his opinion,

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<sup>7</sup> Piao Jianyi & Ma Yunpeng.(2015).

the growing negative perception of North Korea among China's academic elite and the public today is due to a public misunderstanding of the North's reality, and the Chinese leadership's idea is not.

### **(3) Emotional Motivation**

On the other hand, among scholars who mainly study North Korea based in northeastern China, such as Yanbian, are those who call North Korea a brother country.<sup>8</sup> They are mainly Korean-Chinese scholars who focus on developing relations with North Korea with a lot of information and data on the Korean Peninsula based on their language and regional strengths, but their political base is usually weak due to the limitations of ethnic Koreans. In addition, as they often have language barriers to English, their papers or interviews did not receive much attention and attention from Western media. Therefore, the arguments of Chinese scholars who had a relatively American education and had a critical view of North Korea were more exposed to the Western media, which led to information asymmetry in judging China's North Korea policy.

It is noteworthy that most of the scholars in this classification belong to the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences(CASS). It can be predicted that this is a national federation directly under the State Council of the People's Republic of China, which has a relatively large influence on China's state-run position and will be relatively close to the Chinese government's position. As a representative scholar, Li Nan of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences explains that people's motivation for China to maintain a friendly relationship with North Korea is due to the emotional ties China has with its neighbor North Korea.<sup>9</sup> He argues that the two countries have 'the ability to bond with the history that the two countries share'. According to his

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<sup>8</sup> Freeman, Carla. (Ed.). (2015).

<sup>9</sup> Li Nan's Several papers focused on the function of emotion between Beijing and Pyongyang: "An Emotional and Strategic Partner: China's Humanitarian Aid to North Korea in the 21st Century."(The Brookings, 2013) ; "A Strategic and Emotional Partner: China and Its Food Aid to North Korea in the 20th Century," China and North Korea: Strategic and Policy Perspectives from a Changing China, Palgrave Macmillan Press 2015.

observation, this emotional bond served to prevent the Chinese government from actually being reflected in China's North Korea policy, no matter how many calls for a hard-line approach, such as stopping or reducing aid to North Korea.

Second, Lin Jinsu is one of the Korean-Chinese scholars based in Yanbian, supplementing the emotional ties to North Korea that Li claims. She proposes China's economic support policy for North Korea, which is a little different from the judgment made by most Chinese scholars based on China's national interests. She points out the limitations that North Korea's economy is incompatible with its nuclear security policy but argues that North Korea should appreciate its gradual development in line with international market economic standards. Therefore, China suggests that economic engagement with North Korea should help the North expand the scope of international trade with other countries and continue to implement economic cooperation. In her article, the element of emotional ties can be found in that there is a lack of explanation for the strategic reason why China should do so.

Likewise, Li Yongchun of the Political Research Institute of the Asia-Pacific Global Strategy Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences(CASS) is also a Korean-Chinese. He described the North's renewed emphasis on economic development as hopeful when Kim Jong-un took power. He suggests that the deeper the North's participation in the international community, the more it will help the North open its economy and a potential opportunity for security improvements in northeastern China, suggesting China's unconditional support for the North.

Finally, Jin Zhe, secretary of the Korean Peninsula Research Center at the Liaoning Academy of Social Sciences, is the last Korean-Chinese Yanbian scholar to be introduced in this chapter. Jin's article also shows deep brotherly love for North Korea. He argues that North Koreans' trust in Kim Jong-un's leadership was formed long before Kim Jong-un was designated as his successor and that their trust is eternal. In addition, North Korea claims to defend the legitimacy of the North Korean regime, expressing it as a regime with its own unique characteristics in the international community. At the time of his writing in 2014, North Korea was

becoming increasingly isolated from the international community and relations between two countries continued to deteriorate. At this point, Jin says the international society should acknowledge, persevere and help North Korea "who needs time to adapt to democratic politics."

#### **(4) Motivation for Win-win Cooperation**

As above, there is an unchanged logic for North Korea-China friendship relations, and referring to the recent paper by Piao Dongxun (2021), it can be seen that changed policy prescriptions are still emerging from those who firmly support North Korea-China friendship. This suggests that the U.S. and North Korea should maintain friendly cooperation with the U.S. and North Korea in order to realize the coexistence of competition and cooperation between the U.S. and China in the 21st century and the North's nuclear development stage.

Piao Dongxun is also a Korean-Chinese scholar, a professor at the Korea Research Center of Yanbian University, and studies politics and great relations on the Korean Peninsula, and his arguments are largely two-fold. First, since the "traditional" ideology and policy line of the Workers' Party of Korea still determines the perception of China, it is argued that deeper cooperation and consensus should be reached not only in terms of economics but also at the level of two Parties. Both China and North Korea are socialist countries, but they have different understandings of socialist ideas and the gap has gradually widened. Accordingly, there is insufficient room for discourse to objectively cope with China's reform and opening up in North Korean society. The author recommends deepening communication between the two sides in terms of governing the party and the state.

Second, Piao explains that interaction between China and the United States is inevitable to solve Northeast Asian problems such as North Korea's nuclear weapons program today. He is not proud to say that the United States is the only one responsible for resolving the North Korean nuclear issue, as claimed by scholars belonging to the existing *traditionalist* school, or to point out the U.S. failure as if

China was the only solution. According to him, strategic competition between the U.S. and China is intensifying today, but on the other hand, the two sides have reached a big agreement on a nuclear non-proliferation regime. Moreover, China should maintain an agreement with the U.S. and listen to North Korea's legitimate security demands and work toward win-win cooperation in establishing a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula, as geopolitical competition between the two powers creates conditions for consolidating North Korea's nuclear status.

While advocating the maintenance of traditional North Korea-China relations, Piao is not the only opinion to propose U.S.-China cooperation by approaching the North Korean issue from a new angle. This means that the situation and pattern of the times have changed considerably from the observation that 'traditional' scholars looked at the North Korean issue with unresolved doubts about the United States in previous studies. Looking at the relationship between the major powers today, there is a deepening strategic competition structure between the U.S. and China and a strategic cooperation structure at the same time. Therefore, even among scholars who insist on the traditional friendly relations between North Korea and China, there are voices calling for the North Korean issue to be viewed as an object of U.S.-China cooperation.

## **2. Is DPRK a strategic asset or burden for China?**

The next question to be addressed is whether North Korea remains a strategic asset to China or has become a strategic burden due to its changing security structure in Northeast Asia. This excluded claims focusing on historical memories of the joint participation in the Korean War, ideological and pedigree homogeneity, so that it does not overlap with the question, "Is North Korea still a relationship of blood alliance?" Here, articles dealing with North Korea's values at the 'strategic' level such as Chinese politics, economy, society, and security are analyzed and opinions that answer given questions are summarized. The answer to this question is largely divided into two arguments. One is that whatever North Korea does, it is still worth

strategic assets to China and its value is growing day by day, and the other is that the Chinese government should distance itself by changing its strategy to deal with North Korea.

## **(1) North Korea is still a Strategic Asset to China**

### **A. The Value of Strategic Buffer in the U.S.-China Competition**

#### ***A-1. The relations should be strengthened to prevent the U.S. containment***

Among the experts who have a traditional view of North Korea-China relations are scholars who argue that China should never give up its value as a strategic buffer zone. Among them, a representative scholar is Lü Chao. He is a Han Chinese researcher at the Liaoning Institute of Social Sciences and an influential Korean Peninsula expert in close cooperation with the Liaoning Catholic Church and the government. He participated in the Northeast Project and carried out major national-level projects related to the change in China and North Korea, studying the economy of the change of North Korea and the problem of illegal border crossing in North Korea.<sup>10</sup> Since 2016, articles on the analysis of Korean domestic politics and criticism of Korean foreign policy have been published in Chinese media such as the Global Times.

He wrote an article in 2013 titled "The argument to give up North Korea is too childish and extreme."<sup>11</sup> In his paper, he criticized the "North Korean abandonment" which countless Chinese expressed anger over the 2013 nuclear test from the perspective of North Korea's geopolitical importance is too extreme. Furthermore, China said that the U.S. never controlled North Korea as it controlled South Korea and Japan, which meant that North Korea was not a true ally. It denied the blood alliance or subordinate relationship between North Korea and China. Therefore, on this premise, it was argued that it was impossible for China to "give up" North Korea, and even if possible, this could not be a realistic diplomatic option for China to

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<sup>10</sup> 조철, & 산업연구원. (2018). p.193

<sup>11</sup> 정덕구 & Chu Shulong(2013).

respond to the U.S. rebalancing strategy to Asia in early 2013. Therefore, while China's North Korea policy needs some adjustment to change into a "normal state-to-state" relationship, it is clear that North Korea is never the target to give up.

Huang Fengzhi, a member of the Communist Party of China and a security researcher in Northeast Asia in Jilin Province, also agrees that North Korea has geopolitical value to prevent the U.S. containment.<sup>12</sup> He has been wary of the U.S. appreciating the yuan since 2009, causing problems in Taiwan and Tibet and threatening China's core interests. Of course, security in Northeast Asia has become more unstable since the second nuclear test, but considering that the U.S. is working with countries in the South China Sea, especially China, China should continue to cooperate.

## **A-2. The relations should be closer to strengthen the existing alliance**

Among the scholars who claim that North Korea still has strategic value, some approach China's overall foreign policy level. Professor Yan Xuetong is one of the "*Taoguangyanghui*-abolitionists" who argue that "China should now deviate from its policy of *Taoguangyanghui*, which has been maintained since 2002, given the fact that China is rapidly emerging."<sup>13</sup> He argues that there will be a scramble for "friendship" between the U.S. and China in the future, and that China should also form an alliance or quasi-aligned relationship with more countries than the U.S..<sup>14</sup> It can be seen that there is a difference in the motives from the 'traditional' perspective that claims the alliance formed by blood.

As part of this foreign policy in the larger frame, he insists on maintaining friendly relations with North Korea. He says there are two possible options today. One is to accept North Korea as a de facto nuclear power and continue to provide economic

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<sup>12</sup> 黃鳳志 (2012).

<sup>13</sup> 조영남. (2013).

<sup>14</sup> 閻學通.(2016). pp.18-19.

aid, and the other is to put it as an adversary through sanctions. The first policy will have the effect of attracting North Korea to China's side in the structural contradiction of the U.S.-China competition, and strengthening sanctions on North Korea through the second policy will threaten China with nuclear weapons, which seriously violates China's security interests.

He says China is now capable of preventing war on the Korean Peninsula but not removing North Korea's nuclear weapons. China now says it faces having to choose between the four options: (1) China-friendly but nuclear-armed North Korea, (2) China-friendly and nuclear-armed North Korea, (3) China-friendly and nuclear-armed North Korea, and (4) China-friendly but non-nuclear-armed North Korea. Yan argues that China should give up one of the interests of "peace on the Korean Peninsula" and "denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula" because options No. 3 and No. 4 are unlikely. The aim is to maintain friendly relations with North Korea. This is because it is almost the only way to protect China's security interests in relations with North Korea, where its possession of nuclear weapons has become a *fait accompli*. He stresses that China's foreign policy stance needs to be revised in the process of strengthening strategic competition with the U.S., and that China should support North Korea more actively so that it does not lose it to the U.S. through its strategy of "strengthening alliances."

## **B. The relations should be strengthened to prevent war on the Peninsula**

Li Chengri, a Korean-Chinese researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, argues that North Korea-China relations should be strengthened to prevent war on the Korean Peninsula. His argument is based on China's reform-era foreign policy stance of creating a peaceful and stable surrounding environment.<sup>15</sup> According to him, if war or armed conflict occurs on the Korean Peninsula, China could also be hit hard. Therefore, it is argued that preventing war or armed conflict on the Korean Peninsula is a principle that cannot be discarded in China's policy on the Korean

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<sup>15</sup> 李成日,《新时代的中朝关系:变化、动因及影响》,《现代国际关系》,2019年第12期



Peninsula. Rather than appreciating North Korea's strategic value, this view is a defensive position that is wary of the threat of the Korean Peninsula war based on distrust in North Korea.

Like the opinions discussed above, Li is also looking at relations with North Korea at the point of competition between the U.S. and China. He argues that South Korea and the U.S. are trying to separate friendly relations between North Korea and China and that the strategic need to restore friendly relations between North Korea and China is highlighted in this regard. He is wary that "some right-wing forces in South Korea are trying to break off friendly relations between China and North Korea, try to change their regime to North Korea, and absorb Unification Chosun." Based on this alertness, the three countries are warning the Chinese government as the most dangerous scenario that could result in a catastrophic war if they misjudge North Korea-China relations and strengthen strong military pressure and war threats against North Korea. Therefore, he is giving a policy prescription that restoring friendship between North Korea and China is inevitable.

### **C. China's Economic Development Tool**

In the same paper as above, Li Chengri (2019) explains that another reason for maintaining friendly relations with North Korea is that North Korea has a great potential for economic cooperation with China. He believes that economic cooperation with North Korea is emerging as a major concern for regional cooperation in Northeast Asia as North Korea is one of the few undeveloped countries in the world as well as Northeast Asia. Therefore, the links between East Sea railways, roads, and mainland China are all urgent tasks to be resolved in economic cooperation with North Korea and China desperately needs support, participation, and investment. According to him, North Korea is currently closely watching the progress of "Belt and Road Initiatives" and economic cooperation between North Korea and China and is willing to actively seek ways to develop its economy through multilateral exchanges and cooperation with China. Therefore, Li

argues that the Chinese government should not miss the opportunity for good economic development given to Northeast Asia. However, very few scholars insist on promoting relations with North Korea only for the purpose of economic cooperation. Overall, scholars who pay attention to economic cooperation with North Korea are reevaluating the value of North Korea in terms of competition with the U.S. and the economic structure of unified Korea in Northeast Asia.

### **(1) North Korea is a Strategic Burden to China**

As above, behind the argument that the value of North Korea is an asset to China, the viewpoint that Pyongyang is a strategic liability is accelerating. These opinions had been in progress since North Korea began developing nuclear weapons, but after two nuclear tests during the Hu Jintao period, Chinese academic opinions gradually began to converge toward the conclusion that North Korea is a strategic burden. As this trend became more solid through the third nuclear test during the Xi Jinping period, various methodologies on how to solve the burden of North Korea began to be discussed. In particular, some *strategist* scholars emphasized U.S.-China cooperation to resolve the North Korean issue, raising expectations that "China's worldview will now be different from the Cold War period, and China will now show a bold policy shift."<sup>16</sup> Experts with this view look pessimistically at the logic that North Korea is a strategic asset to China.

#### **A. North Korea's nuclear is infringing on China's national interests**

Scholars argue that the North Korean nuclear program has caused unprecedented serious threats or substantial damage to China's core interests and significant interests.<sup>17</sup> Among them, scholars criticize that North Korea is mainly responsible for destabilizing the region by "intentionally" raising tensions through missile and nuclear tests. It is said that North Korea has hurt China's diplomatic goal of

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<sup>16</sup> 이기현.(2013). p.166

<sup>17</sup> 时殷弘.(2018).

maintaining a peaceful and stable international environment.

A representative scholar making this perspective is Zhang Liangui, a professor at the Central Party School of the Communist Party of China.<sup>18</sup> His views are so critical of North Korea that he is a graduate of Kim Il Sung University. He is freely suggesting as a policy that he believes is the internal truth of North Korea. In this regard, he is an expert on the Korean Peninsula with opinions equivalent to a minority in China and has a view that is criticized by Chinese experts. However, his internal knowledge of North Korea and the policy influence of the Central Party School's institutional accessibility cannot be ignored until now, and he mainly focuses on media activities after retiring from the Central Party School in 2009.<sup>19</sup> After the third nuclear test, he expressed four dangers that North Korea poses to the international community. First, North Korea is challenging today's international legal system and the global nuclear order. Second, North Korea can pursue a nuclear policy and lead to nuclear proliferation. Third, North Korea's nuclear possession stimulates the arms race in East Asia. Fourth, the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia have lost peace and stability. Zhang sees the situation on the Korean Peninsula as a flashpoint and is concerned about North Korea's violent investigations such as an all-out war, nuclear war and a sea of fire.

In addition to the joint damage of the aforementioned parties, they argue that China, a close neighbor of North Korea, will suffer the most. According to him, today all the world's nuclear powers are conducting nuclear tests in unmanned deserts or on uninhabited islands, with only North Korea in densely populated areas. North Korea's nuclear test site is within 100 kilometers of the Chinese border, and a new long-range missile launch site is being built 50 kilometers from Dandong, China. If North Korea starts a nuclear accident or war, the impact on China's northeastern and eastern coastal areas will be fatal. From this point of view, China's security environment faces an unprecedented serious threat.

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<sup>18</sup> 张琯瑰.(2013).

<sup>19</sup> 조철, & 산업연구원. (2018).

Moreover, North Korea's nuclear possession makes relations between North Korea and China quite uncertain. North Korea's diplomatic tradition is to benefit from brinkmanship and confrontation. If North Korea's possession of nuclear weapons becomes a fait accompli, North Korea will have an important means to threaten other countries, leading to a difficult situation in North Korea-China relations.

Three years later, during the sixth nuclear test, Professor Zhang said in a media interview, "It will not be easy to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue through dialogue and negotiations that the Chinese government has put forward." Regarding North Korea's nuclear test on the opening day of the BRICs summit in China, he directly expressed his dissatisfaction, saying, "I think it's because I want to get the attention of the world."<sup>20</sup> This is why he is negative about establishing friendly relations with North Korea. It can be seen that his idea is clearly different from what previous North Korean-friendly scholars viewed as a target to help, defending North Korea's actions, calling them the victim's position.

According to another of his writings,<sup>21</sup> North Korea uses a "strategy" to "familiarize" with dealing with the nuclear power through diplomatic offensives to solidify its de facto status as a nuclear powerhouse. Zhang strongly opposes the argument that China should provide more aid to the nuclear North to recognize its de facto possession of nuclear weapons and resume "Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea." In addition, it expresses great concern over the reality that the expression "North Korea nuclear issue" is disappearing. North Korea is persuading the U.S. that its nuclear weapons are not a threat to the U.S., but rather could help the U.S. strategic pursuit. As a scenario, Zhang fears that if the U.S. falls for this persuasion of North Korea, the exchange of interests between North Korea and the U.S. will take place, which will pose a threat to China's security.

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<sup>20</sup> ([북 6차핵실험] 중장렌구이 "北 대화의지 전혀 없어 보여"(종합),

<https://m.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20170903066400083>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.chinathinktanks.org.cn/content/detail/id/dtqwca63>

## **B. North Korea is not China's geopolitical interest**

In particular, Professor Jin Jingyi and Jin Changyi's arguments are very interesting.<sup>22</sup> Jin Jingyi is a Korean-Chinese professor at Peking University and is studying the Korean Peninsula against the backdrop of linguistic and cultural strengths. Professor Jin Qiangyi is his younger brother, and is also a professor at Yanbian University who studies the Korean Peninsula. They argue the opposite of scholars who emphasize North Korea's strategic value, saying, "The so-called geopolitical meaning of the Korean Peninsula is only a relative political phenomenon formed under certain conditions," and "From a historical point of view, the emphasis on geopolitical importance has a negative impact on China." They protest that the idea that the geopolitical importance of the Korean Peninsula had a positive influence on China has allowed the U.S. to build a solid U.S.-Japan strategic alliance system in Northeast Asia.

More importantly, the U.S. is benefiting a lot from the "unstable Korean Peninsula." The logic presented by the authors is as follows. First, the U.S. keeps its regional powers in check, including China, in the name of intervening in the Korean Peninsula and protecting its allies, especially Japan, out of the U.S. strategy if Northeast Asia is too calm. Therefore, for China, it is an opinion that highlighting the geopolitical value of the Korean Peninsula can only be good for the United States and rather self-supporting. He says that for these reasons, a "stable and peaceful reunification of the Korean Peninsula" is best suited to China's national interests. Then, the geopolitical meaning of the Korean Peninsula will disappear and only the "geographical" meaning will be highlighted, and North Korea-China relations can be created closest to the strategic goals set by China through economic development and cooperation in the Northeast.

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<sup>22</sup> 金景一·金强一,“朝鲜半岛的地缘政治及其对我国的影响研究,”『延边大学学报』,2008年 第4期.

### **C. North Korea's buffer zone does more harm than good**

Professor Zhu Feng, who makes a similar argument, and the head of the Institute for International Relations at Nanjing University in China, denies the buffer zone logic in the concept of cost-to-benefit.<sup>23</sup> He believes that the buffer zone logic prevalent in Chinese foreign policymakers is increasing China's costs and putting its national interests at risk. Therefore, they argue that China will strengthen its influence in the region and better take on international responsibilities, "dump the unexpected burden of a Kim-controlled North Korea."

After the second nuclear test in 2009, the Chinese government decided to continue to support North Korea. He believes that China is investing huge amounts of money in North Korea, even losing its international reputation for security and foreign aid, but North Korea does not provide practical benefits to China. In addition, North Korea's militancy has legalized the U.S. "rebalancing" policy, and the associated increase in U.S. troops in Asia has had a negative impact on China's security. As the "cost" North Korea imposes on China's security environment exceeds the "benefit" or value of holding North Korea as a buffer zone, the Chinese government recommends that such logic be dispelled as soon as possible.

Similar opinions continue to be echoed by Dr. Gong Keyu, Shanghai Institute for International Studies.<sup>24</sup> She says China has become a "direct victim" for North Korea, not a "coordinator" nuclear test in 2013. This is mainly a security concern, which, as the two scholars mentioned above, North Korea's increased deterrence inevitably strengthened the arms of other countries in the region and further stimulated the development of nuclear weapons, objectively exacerbating the security environment around China. Furthermore, North Korea's nuclear test and military threats provide a justification and excuse for the U.S. to exert its influence on the Asia-Pacific situation with military force, increasing China's security burden. North Korea, which expected the function of a buffer zone, is showing that it has more damage by giving

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<sup>23</sup> Feng, Z., & Beauchamp-Mustafaga, N. (2015.).

<sup>24</sup> 정재홍. (2017).(in Chinese)

the U.S. a justification for military intervention in Northeast Asia.

#### **D. North Korea has the initiative in North Korea-China relations**

On the other hand, there is also an opinion that it is difficult to use North Korea as a useful card in relations with powerful countries because North Korea has the initiative in North Korea-China relations. Professor Cheng Xiaohe of Renmin University received a master's and doctorate degree in the United States. In his 2009 paper, he says that if you look at the evolutionary history of North Korea-China relations, you can see the characteristics of small countries.<sup>25</sup> He explained that while realist theory generally states that power is the leader of the international system, the influence of small states in world power politics is limited and can be a victim of power politics, he found that the influence of small states cannot be ignored. According to Cheng's research, North Korea's leadership has been small, resourceless and weak since the emergence of Juche ideology in 1955, but North Korea dominated relations with China and the Soviet Union.

His ideas are confirmed once again in an article published in the South China Morning Post in 2018, indicating that he is applying this logic in relations with the United States, not the Soviet Union, today. He said China and the U.S. have wanted to have North Korean cards with each other for decades, arguing that history proves that China's influence and leverage are somewhat limited, even though it is still a diplomatic supporter and economic lifeline for North Korea.<sup>26</sup> Such an idea may be naive, according to his argument, as scholars who regard North Korea as an asset make arguments based on the premise that China can "use North Korea at will." China, which tried to use North Korea to deal with the U.S., could rather be used as a tool for North Korea to deal with the U.S. These claims are alarming for 'North Korean assetists.'

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<sup>25</sup> 成曉河,“主義與安全之爭: 60年代朝鮮與中,蘇關係的演變,”『外交評論』,2009年 第2期;

<sup>26</sup> “How China is using North Korea in its long game against America”, 2018-6-16, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2151128/how-china-using-north-korea-its-long-game-against> (searched date: 2022-01-20)

In fact, Piao Dongxun (2021), who studied North Korea's major media reports on China, pointed out North Korea's clever attitude to guarantee its relative status in asymmetric relations with China by taking advantage of its "geopolitical discourse" as an opportunity. Park said North Korea is well aware that the global economy and power center have shifted from Europe to the Asia-Pacific region. In particular, he argued that North Korea's excessive economic dependence on China rather leads to North Korea's doubts about China because it goes against the principle of "independent diplomacy" that North Korea's trade with China accounts for more than 90 percent of its total foreign trade. Some think the two Koreas are "shrimps caught between whales," but North Korea understands this differently.

As its nuclear capabilities increase, North Korea emphasizes its strategic position in the geopolitical landscape and claims to be a strategic country. North Korea believes the Korean Peninsula is at a strategic point where it may cause conflict between powerful nations, but it may also ease it. In other words, it can be a strategic asset or a burden for a big country, but the choice depends on North Korea itself, not the big country. North Korea's perception of its geopolitical status is affecting North Korea's policy toward China and relations between North Korea and China. Looking at the strategies of the U.S. and China on the Korean Peninsula today, this can be said to be an accurate judgment, and it has become a fact that the Chinese leadership should consider sharply when managing relations with North Korea.

Many scholars point out this asymmetrical relationship between North Korea and China. Gong Keyu argued that China's role in solving the North Korean problem is limited because North Korea does not communicate with China properly in relations with China. Contrary to what the international community thinks, China is not only not provided with enough information about North Korea, but also North Korea is not willing to listen to its recommendations. However, China is criticized by the international community along with North Korea.

In addition, there are moments when it is difficult to see North Korea as a common partnership if you listen to North Korea's official remarks. One aspect of



this North Korean attitude can be examined by quoting Professor Wang Yizhou.<sup>27</sup> He argues that if North Korea is not punished on the North Korean nuclear issue or China takes a finite position, North Korea should impose reasonable punishment because it will act without hesitation. As he recognizes, North Korea knows that China will make itself a strategic asset, a strategic go-dol. North Korea said of China, "Not only can you do nothing about me, but you owe me not only oil, food and technology, but also all the diplomatic help I gave you at the U.N. because of course. Therefore, it should be recognized that the effect of this idea on resolving the North Korean nuclear issue can be reversed."

Jin Jingyi, a professor at Beijing University, also pointed out, "North Korea now thinks of neighboring countries such as China as a go player on its own board, and thinks that neighboring countries will not be able to touch them due to their geopolitical position." That's why he pointed out, "China should make a decision to let North Korea abandon such an idea, and we don't know what the decision will be, but it must be at a crossroads of choice," hinting that China should change its attitude toward North Korea strongly.<sup>28</sup>

### **E. China is a big country that doesn't need a buffer zone**

Cheng Xiaohu, who complained earlier about North Korea's dominance in North Korea-China relations, did not elaborate in his paper, but told the BBC in 2013 that traditional consideration of North Korea as a buffer zone was decades ago and that China was "a formable country with a large economy and a modern military system." We can easily see here that his argument is paying attention to China's growing status and national power. Furthermore, his remarks could be interpreted that China may

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<sup>27</sup> Wang Yizhou, "Sino-North Korea Relations Need to Evolve from 'Alliance' to Normalization [ 中朝关系需要从"血盟"走向正常化]," Phoenix International Think Tank, February 25, 2016, [http://pit.ifeng.com/a/20160225/47576918\\_0.html](http://pit.ifeng.com/a/20160225/47576918_0.html).

<sup>28</sup> [북 6차핵실험] 중장렌구이 "北 대화의지 전혀 없어 보여"(종합), <https://m.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20170903066400083>

abandon North Korea, South Korea-led reunification of the Korean Peninsula does not do China much harm, and even if it faces U.S. troops at the border due to unification, the Chinese military can afford it. As such, objections are constantly being raised to the value of North Korea as a buffer zone, which has been advocated as an immutable keyword in China. In fact, Cheng's confident stance on the security environment is not a common opinion in China's diplomatic policy during the *taoguangyanghui*-style reform period. However, these voices are gradually increasing today.

#### **F. North Korea is economically damaging**

Earlier, among scholars who positively evaluated the value of North Korea, there was an opinion that China could benefit from economic development through cooperation with North Korea. However, most scholars today argue that the economic development of the North Korean border in northeastern China, which is in danger of North Korea's nuclear weapons program, is undermined, adding to the security burden and risk of China as a whole, resulting in greater economic damage.<sup>29</sup>

#### **3. Will China abandon North Korea?**

Scholars appearing in the previous chapter do not go far enough to express their argument that "China should give up on North Korea," although North Korea is becoming an increasingly serious strategic burden. However, they are constantly raising questions about what decisions should be made by China, a rational actor in a "normal state-to-state" relationship with the actual cost-benefit measurement. In particular, over the past 40 years, China's foreign policy has struggled to break through the U.S. containment. Nevertheless, there are warnings from scholars that the more favorable relations the Chinese government maintains with North Korea, the more the North's provocative actions occur, thereby expanding the U.S.-led containment line against China. If this is true, it is a dilemma for the Chinese

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<sup>29</sup> 정재홍. (2017).(in Chinese)

government.

As the North Korean nuclear crisis escalated, opinions that further dug into such weak parts of North Korea-China relations emerged. The debate has begun over whether it is time to give up North Korea. In fact, a senior Chinese official said at the 2013 CPPCC that he discussed "keeping" and "disposal" of North Korea and "fighting or talking" with North Korea as a powerhouse.<sup>30</sup> In this way, it is noteworthy that the possibility of "dumping" North Korea is also emerging from within the Chinese leadership, not just to revise China's North Korea policy a little. In particular, as of 2013, many Chinese scholars began to agree with the claim that friendship with North Korea itself seriously undermines China's international image. Scholars have come up with bolder criticism and suggestions than ever before, and some even suggested that China should implement a South Korea-friendly foreign policy instead of using the "two Korea" policy from now on.

### **(1) Beijing must give up on Pyongyang**

The best-known opinion came from Deng Yuwen (then a department editor of a journal published with CCP) at the time. He wrote in the Financial Times, titled "China should abandon North Korea," embarrassing many who were watching China's foreign policy.

In the article, he argued that China should now give up on North Korea, and that helping South Korea-led reunification of the Korean Peninsula is the best way to give up North Korea. He even stressed that China can achieve the effect of disintegrating the Korea-U.S. alliance, eliminating North Korean risks, reducing geopolitical pressure in Northeast Asia, and helping reunification with Taiwan. Finally, Deng made a very bold argument to foster a pro-China government in North Korea to ensure North Korea's security and to give up its nuclear weapons and develop it into a normal country. He made such a strong argument because of his personal perception that North Korea not only has forgotten the merits of the Korean

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<sup>30</sup> Feng, Z., & Beauchamp-Mustafaga, N. (2015). p.44

War for which China helped, but also can betray and threaten China with nuclear weapons.

China's Foreign Ministry reportedly fired Deng after calling the Financial Times to express its dissatisfaction with the article. Although Deng's argument at the time was very unconventional, it was evaluated that the Chinese government's response still reflected the Chinese government's dilemma over policy on the Korean Peninsula. Although officially proclaiming peaceful reunification of the Korean Peninsula, as Deng said at this point, it is unrealistic for the Chinese government to abandon North Korea and achieve South Korea-led unification. Since Deng belongs to the Central Party School, it was almost misunderstood that his opinion would be the official position of the Chinese government, but the government showed that the government's thoughts were different through its quick response. Nevertheless, Deng's argument, which appeared two weeks after the third nuclear test in 2013, caused a great stir among outside observers. In Western and some South Korean media, the views of the "strategic burdenists" discussed in the previous chapter were selectively collected and cited, and claims that China might abandon North Korea began to spread like a fact.

## **(2) North Korea may be a potential enemy of China**

Some not only absolutely deny North Korea's strategic value but also see it as a potential enemy. Representatively, a well-known figure for this is Professor Shen Zhihua, a lifelong professor of history at Hwadong Normal University in Shanghai, and Professor Shen Zhihua, director of the International Cold War History Center. He is an authority on research on small- and medium-sized relations and the Korean Peninsula during the Cold War, but his policy influence is unknown because he is non-mainstream with a different view from the Chinese government's position. He is known to have criticized China's retaliation against THAAD in the view that "the Korean War is a misjudgment of North Korea's Invasion from North Korea and Mao Zedong," and that "North Korea is a potential enemy, and South Korea is a potential

friend." Professor Shen's research on the Korean War and North Korea-China relations has been criticized in China for "no political consciousness" or "denying the legitimacy of Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea."<sup>31</sup>

In this respect, he points out that the bilateral relationship actually developed into a contemporary relationship that is not normal in the modern world, and that North Korea is not swayed by China's influence as it is thought from the outside.<sup>32</sup> Shen is not the only scholar who claims that the Korean War is an "invasion of North Korea" and that North Korea has never properly acknowledged the credit of the Chinese People's Support Forces, but very few scholars completely deny the North Korea-China alliance. He believes that the Deng Xiaoping period was a period of "dismantling the China-China alliance," and that the relationship between Mao Zedong and Kim Il-sung was dismantled from the 1980s to 1992, and that the China-Korea relationship had already ceased to exist.

He also calls for a change in the government's North Korea policy, claiming that China and North Korea are brothers and that the relationship is blood-related and that the "Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea spirit" is "historical myths." He argues that serious Chinese academic research based on historical facts is very rare, and that progress in relations with North Korea will be made only when it is overcome. He also pointed out that establishing friendly relations with North Korea and continuing to support it is a policy that puts China's security interests and international prestige at risk. He argues that China should now turn back and cooperate with the United States, withdraw material and political support for North Korea, and ultimately prepare for the collapse of the North. Shen does not use the direct expression that North Korea should be abandoned, but it is clear that China is now giving the impression that it is okay to abandon North Korea.

### **(3) Relations with Pyongyang seriously harms China's national interests**

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<sup>31</sup> 2020.11.20 조선일보, “북한과 혈맹 아니다” 주장한 중국 학자 강연 생중계 돌연 중단

<sup>32</sup> 沈志华.(2013). pp.26-29

Chu Shulong, a professor at Tsinghua University, is a scholar who boldly criticizes and raises opinions on China's North Korea policy in a tough tone that is hard to find among Chinese scholars.<sup>33</sup> He called for China's near-disruptive attitude toward North Korea in his paper in 2009. They argue that China's traditional friendship with North Korea and South Korea's excessive consciousness of inter-Korean relations have led North Korea to engage in dangerous provocations. Chu says China should use ways to further tighten sanctions, such as diplomatic isolation and a drastic reduction or suspension of aid to North Korea, as China's national interests are undermined when North Korea escalates tensions on the Korean Peninsula. In particular, given the North's frenzied behavior, China has expressed its view that it should not only prepare for military conflicts, but also prepare for military situations that North Korea may cause against China.

After the 2013 nuclear test, Chu expressed antipathy to North Korea's maintenance of its unique "independence" from China while relying on and receiving aid, support and protection from China.<sup>34</sup> "Now Chinese people, including the Chinese leadership and the government, are tired of this type of relationship between North Korea and China," he said. "This relationship between North Korea and China should change, and we should not let North Korea continue to play games like this and never."

At the same time, he expressed a provocative view, saying, "As long as the development is peaceful, China will accept the results, including peaceful reunification of the Korean Peninsula and the natural collapse of the North Korean regime." This is quite different from the traditional view or the government's position. This is because the Chinese government still wants to prevent the collapse of the North Korean regime to the end, regardless of its form. Chu interprets the government's position from a different perspective, saying, "What China wants is to focus on China's economic development by maintaining peace and stability on the

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<sup>33</sup> 楚树龙 & 荣予.(2009). pp.127-134

<sup>34</sup> 정덕구 & Chu, Shulong. (2013).

Korean Peninsula, not maintaining the North Korean regime." But Professor Chu is definitely answering the question of whether China will abandon North Korea, making it clear that China will not "abandon" the North unless it breaks ties with China. According to the review in this paper, there were no scholars who directly insisted on giving up North Korea other than Deng, a member of the Central Party School.

If there are any advocates of China's abandonment of North Korea, they are faced with the question, 'Would the security environment in Northeast Asia be better if China changed its policy toward North Korea and took a new path?' More specifically, the question is whether China can truly give up what traditionalists and strategic assetists call North Korea's value, and whether a sharp regime collapse will lead to a massive influx of refugees into China and create enormous social, political and economic difficulties in northeastern China. The most important issue is the issue of U.S. Forces Korea, which may have to face borders after giving up on North Korea. These questions remain so clear that even though the stance on North Korea has become stronger than before, the radical idea of abandoning the North has not been much encouraged.

#### **4. Should China Support the Unification of the Korean Peninsula?**

In September 2017, the Chinese foreign policy community paid attention to social media conversations between Jia Qingguo, dean of the International Studies Department at Beijing University, and Zhu Zhihua, vice president of the Zhejiang International Relations Association. Zhu Zhihua accused Jia Qingguo of conspiring with the United States for contingency planning in the event of war on the Korean Peninsula. The incident began when Jia Qingguo wrote in his paper, "We should more actively consult with related countries on plans for emergencies on the Korean Peninsula in case the Korean Peninsula war becomes a reality." In his social media

post, Zhu accused Jia of treason and that his PhD degree at Cornell University had brainwashed him.

The above story is a dispute between the two scholars over the scenario of cooperation of interested parties in the event of a contingency in the Peninsula that can be expected in the process of unification of the Korean Peninsula. Previously, comments supporting the unification of the Korean Peninsula itself were taboo in Chinese society. However, as discussed earlier, there has been a significant change in the perspective of Chinese analysts looking at North Korea, and in this context, Chinese scholars openly express the view that South Korea's unification could be one of the ultimate solutions to the Korean Peninsula problem. Therefore, more and more Chinese experts are writing about scenarios of similar situations on the Korean Peninsula. For Chinese scholars, the study of the unification of the Korean Peninsula is related to how China can play a larger and more active role after reunification and how to protect its national interests.<sup>35</sup> In other words, China opposes and agrees with the unification of the Korean Peninsula in terms of China's own national interest, not at the normative level. In this chapter, papers that relatively clearly and specifically revealed the author's perspective on unification of the Korean Peninsula were collected and analyzed from CNKI.

### **(1) Opposition to Unification**

From Deng Xiaoping to Xi Jinping, the Chinese government officially supports unification. It is contradictory that the scholars support the unification of the Korean Peninsula through academic papers was unconventional. To date, Chinese leadership and academia are more clearly aware that the unification of the Korean Peninsula brings risks and uncertainties to China rather than benefits. Nevertheless, it is hard to find scholars who insist that the unification of the Korean Peninsula should be

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<sup>35</sup> Jianyi, Piao., & Yunpeng, Ma. (2015). Identifying a New, More Effective Role for China vis-à-vis Korean peninsula Issues through an Integrated Class Analysis Approach with Chinese Characteristics. In China and North Korea (International Relations and Comparisons in Northeast Asia, pp. 65-80). New York: Palgrave Macmillan US. p.76



prevented unconditionally through papers or remarks.

Scholars who relatively clearly state their opposition to unification oppose unification for the following reasons. First, Chinese scholars are almost certain that it will be unified under the leadership of South Korea.<sup>36</sup> This means that there is a great possibility that the U.S. Forces Korea, which remains on the Korean Peninsula after reunification, will have to face a border, so China is very concerned about this. In the previous chapter, one of the reasons why China wanted to hold North Korea as a strategic asset was its function as a buffer zone. Likewise, Chinese analysts' main concern about the unification of the Korean Peninsula is the loss of North Korea, which used to be a buffer zone. In particular, if U.S. troops are still stationed in Korea, China's security environment will seriously deteriorate.

Second, among Chinese scholars, there are also opinions that are wary of the unification of Korea to inherit North Korea's nuclear weapons. In fact, since Hu Jintao, China has advocated "denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula," not "denuclearization of North Korea." Therefore, the emergence of a unified Korea means the emergence of a larger country with nuclear weapons for China, which is causing fear for China. The third reason why Chinese experts oppose the unification of the Korean Peninsula is that it could cause fatal damage to Chinese society in the process of the unification process. The North Korea-China border will become unstable and numerous refugees will occur, destroying the peaceful surroundings China seeks. This is something that China, which is already plagued by a lot of domestic problems, must avoid.

## **(2) Korea's Unification is Beneficial to China**

According to Chinese analysts, China is preparing for communication with the U.S. more positively than believed outside of China, and tends to have positive expectations for the potential benefits of unification on the Korean Peninsula.<sup>37</sup> The

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<sup>36</sup> Glaser, Bonnie & Yun Sun. (2015). p.77; Kim, H. (2014). p.234

<sup>37</sup> Cho, Sungmin. (2020). p.569

most striking advantage they think of is the loss of legitimacy for the U.S. presence in Korea. Jin Jingyi and Jin Changyi(2008) argued that because the two Koreas were divided, the U.S. Forces Korea was stationed there, so the reason for the existence of the U.S. Forces Korea would disappear if Korea is reunified. Therefore, it has been proposed to reduce the negative factors given to China in support of the unification of the Korean Peninsula. Other scholars studying the U.S. Forces Korea on the Korean Peninsula also reiterate their claim that the disappearance of North Korea would lead to the loss of legitimacy of the U.S. military presence in South Korea.<sup>38</sup> Even the opinions of experts suggesting a military alliance with the United States are noteworthy.<sup>39</sup>

### **(3) China should Prepare for the Reunification of the Peninsula**

On the other hand, there are often opinions that China should prepare for this, assuming that unification will be achieved under the leadership of South Korea. Shen Dingli, a professor at Fudan University, also pointed out that in the long run, North Korea with nuclear weapons should closely analyze how it will affect China and East Asia. Shen's most notable analysis is that North Korea's nuclear development is basically aimed at countering threats from the United States, but it could eventually be used as a threat to China or as a diplomatic card. When North Korea tries to use its nuclear weapons as a Trump card to threaten China, it will act as a very complicated factor in China's handling of North Korea. Therefore, it emphasizes the need for China to maintain friendly relations with North Korea.<sup>40</sup>

Li Jiaojiao of Yanbian University analyzed the impact of each on China, focusing on the different ideas of the two Koreas on the unification of the Korean Peninsula.<sup>41</sup> First, Korea aims to achieve unification, that is, unification of an essential system, that completes national integration by forming an economic

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<sup>38</sup> Zhou, Congyi. (2016).

<sup>39</sup> Yan, Xuetong. (2014).; Chen.(2014).

<sup>40</sup> Shen Dingli(2006), "North Korea's Strategic Significance to China," *China Security*, Autumn 2006, pp. 26-27

<sup>41</sup> 李姣姣. (2016). 朝鲜半岛和平统一的路径选择及对中国的影响(硕士学位论文,延边大学).

community and an ethnic community. On the other hand, North Korea regards the model as a subversion of the North Korean political system and sticks to the federal unification model of "one people, one country, two systems, two governments." Her thesis notes that the impact of these different unification paths on China is not the same.

According to her argument, if the Korean Peninsula is unified under the leadership of South Korea, China should prepare for the possibility of U.S. military pressure. To this end, China needs to strengthen cooperation in the field of security with Korea and ensure the healthy and stable development of Korea-China relations in order to reduce the negative impact of the U.S. when Korea-led unification occurs. On the other hand, if the Korean Peninsula is unified under the framework of North Korea's federal system, China should consider how to remove the remaining North Korean nuclear weapons. To solve this problem, China is insisting that the North should be reasonably sanctioned and the North should re-establish its denuclearization discussions by striking the North's ability to develop nuclear weapons.

#### **(4) Reunification Dilemmas**

In conclusion, it can be seen that some consensus has been reached in the academic world that there are enormous challenges that will be encountered in the process, whether opposed or supported the unification of the Korean Peninsula. And the fact that someday the unification will be led by Korea and the United States is mostly accepted by academia as a *fait accompli*, but from the perspective of China's national interest, it is an atmosphere that cannot be fully welcomed.

In summary, China faces the following three dilemmas and uncertainties in the process of unification of the Korean Peninsula. First, it is a dilemma of who to help. As can be inferred from the example of the Jia Qingguo and Zhu Zhihua dispute, if China cooperates with the U.S. and other countries that share interests in unification on the Korean Peninsula, China may unintentionally participate in the collapse of the

North Korean regime and may have to support unwanted military cooperation. This becomes a form of betrayal of North Korea. If military intervention is made for North Korea under the North Korea-China Mutual Cooperation Treaty, China will have to endure criticism and isolation from the international community. China's strategic intentions for the future of the Korean Peninsula are already under suspicion from neighboring countries. The U.S. Senate report in 2012 even predicts that China will send troops to North Korea in the name of preventing the large-scale influx of refugees, laying the groundwork for claims on the Korean Peninsula.<sup>42</sup>

The second is the dilemma of how to save China's face. For the past 40 years, the Chinese government has put forward the "principle of voluntary unification" that the unification of the Korean Peninsula should be resolved by the Korean people on their own. In general, Chinese researchers agree. However, as the Korean Peninsula became a hotspot for the U.S.-China competition after the 1950 Korean War, Chinese analysts tend to recognize that if South Korea-led reunification defeats North Korea, China will step back from its rival, the U.S. In other words, it is concerned that China's reputation as a great power will be undermined by China's failure to protect North Korea, its de facto only ally, while it has left the issue of unification on the Korean Peninsula<sup>43</sup>. In this regard, China is facing a dilemma that it cannot deeply intervene in the issue of unification on the Korean Peninsula, but it also cannot be left alone indefinitely.

Finally, there is also a dilemma due to uncertainty at a time when the unification country may grow to some extent into a powerhouse. If stability and growth are achieved on the Korean Peninsula after unification is completed, it should face an unwelcome variable that will bring about another "regional power" to deal with China. China must support Korea's unification if it is a unified Korea as a partner who can freely cooperate in a peaceful environment under the principle of unification that has been proclaimed at the government level. But China, which mainly looks at

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<sup>42</sup> US Senate Minority Staff Report, 2012

<sup>43</sup> Cho, Sungmin. (2020). p.569

international politics from a realist perspective, uses defensive diplomatic strategies that prepare for it with negative possibilities in mind rather than chasing positive ones. Uncertainty is usually not sought. Therefore, China cannot hastily support unification at a time when it has not been determined what kind of relationship a unified Korea will have with China. The rhetoric's focus on "supporting peaceful unification" at the government level should be seen as an emphasis on the conditional clause of 'peaceful.'

## Chapter IV. Analysis of Global Times Articles

Next, we will examine the Chinese people's perception of North Korea through the Global Times articles and op-eds. Global Times is a far-left newspaper that focuses on international issues from the perspective of the Chinese people.<sup>1</sup> It was selected for the second subject of analysis because it has distinct characteristics from the academic journals discussed in the previous chapter. First, when a newspaper article or an op-ed is written about an event between Beijing and Pyongyang, it is timelier than papers or journals. It is released almost simultaneously with the incident. Therefore, a more accurate chronological analysis is possible. Second, newspapers' primary audience differs from academic papers. Scholars who write about North Korea-China relations in their academic writings mainly contribute to the Chinese government in a form that offers policy proposals and valid grounds regarding North Korea-China relations. On the other hand, newspapers such as Global Times show the Chinese public and experts' perception of North Korea and what they demand from the international community. The Chinese government and various countries and their governments and people can be included as potential readers. Therefore, scholars studying more diverse fields can discuss North Korea-China relations in the newspaper. As it is not necessarily an academic article, it is easier to gauge the more popular public perception and discourse of contemporary Chinese people.

Global Times (hereinafter referred to as GT) has specific characteristics. First, this newspaper is independent of the Chinese Communist Party different from other state-run companies like People's Daily. Its market-orientedness and patriotic slant brought it immense popularity, one of the main reasons GT is chosen for this chapter. Today, nationalism is one of the surest ways to secure profits in China and GT is well-known for its nationalistic tone. Based on this characteristic of GT, the second chapter aims to analyze the discussions of the public widely accepted by the Chinese

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<sup>1</sup> 정재홍. (2017).(in Chinese) p.146

people today. Second, GT is used to test the public's response in advance before China makes an official announcement on Xinhua News. In this respect, we can see unrestrained perception and relatively close to the general public's thinking compared to other institutions.

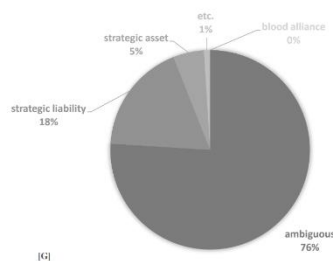
Taken together, GT's coverage of North Korea-China relations shows that, unlike in academic journals, scholars express their perception of North Korea in a timelier manner, freer from the formality of academia. In addition, it reflects the public's thoughts and orientation at the same time. This chapter focused on these advantages.

Moreover, according to the research of some Korean scholars, Chinese news articles on Korean Peninsula issues are mainly reported by GT. However, it also points out that "experts who have a very profound impact on the Party and government policy are rarely exposed to the media." Since these points need to be considered together, the next chapter will separately look at the statements of government figures and the policies actually implemented. Therefore, articles or comments directly dealing with the governmental statements were excluded from the analysis in Global Times analysis.

This chapter selected the period from January 1, 2013, to December 31, 2021, for Global Times report releases. This period was selected with the nature of the discussion on North Korea-China relations from 2013, when Xi Jinping began to have power and when North Korea's third nuclear test took place. As always, the discussions on North Korea-China relations have experienced numerous ups and downs. After the first and second nuclear tests in 2006 and 2009, there was a crisis between North Korea and China. Still, they reaffirmed their friendly relations with North Korea through the 60th anniversary of diplomatic ties between North Korea and China in 2009. Again, the international community saw their relations cool down after the third nuclear test in 2013. In particular, there was a lot of speculation about the breakdown of North Korea-China relations around 2013, and at the time of 2018 and 2019, seeing North Korea closer than in any other period after reform, some of

the false prospects have been corrected.

This chapter will also take the form of answering the same four questions raised earlier. Analyzing newspaper reports, which have different characteristics from academic papers, we will examine how newspapers react when a significant event occurs. In addition, it will be possible to compare the perception of the state-run newspaper on North Korea with the perception of the previous academic paper for a wider audience than the academic paper. This study focused on 675 op-eds from about 4,350 articles obtained by searching for 'North Korea' in the Global Times. Among the articles directly referring to North Korea, only articles with relatively straightforward perceptions of North Korea's strategic value were cited and analyzed. Most expert writings have ambiguous or overlapping expressions of attitudes toward North Korea's values. This is not limited to GT. Most Chinese experts did not recognize North Korea's strategic value in media reports on the North Korean nuclear issue. However, in some cases, the perception is relatively straightforward. In <Analysis of Chinese Organizations and People Related to Korea><sup>2</sup>, which studied Chinese scholars' perceptions, 5,000 remarks by experts on the Korean Peninsula exposed to 30 Chinese media were collected and investigated by setting a period from November 2012 to October 2017. Six critical issues related to the North Korean nuclear issue and the Korea-U.S. alliance were selected, and each expert's response was analyzed. Among the results of this study, we can refer to the graph that analyzed the 'Chinese expert's perception of North Korea's strategic value' that we want to focus on in this paper.



[Graph 1]

<sup>2</sup> 중국 한반도 전문가의 한반도 인식과 특징 연구, p.264



As shown in Graph 1, 18% of the experts surveyed recognized North Korea as a "strategic burden" among scholars who clearly expressed their opinions. Next, 5% of intellectuals recognized Pyongyang as a 'strategic asset.' A relatively large number of Chinese experts now regard North Korea as a burden rather than an asset to China. Nevertheless, it should be noted that an absolute majority of discussions correspond to 'ambiguous.' According to this previous study, we should be cautious when saying that a specific opinion is "a mainstream theory" in the Chinese academic field.

### **1. Is DPRK-China still a blood alliance?**

In Chinese society, claims that the "blood alliance" between North Korea and China ended due to the end of the Cold War and the continuation of the North Korean nuclear issue have spread like a trend. Nevertheless, GT's reports have a different tone from the traditional views discussed earlier, and are noticeably more likely to insist on friendly relations between North Korea and China with stronger tone and conviction. A total of four categories of reports suggest that North Korea and China should still be maintained in a blood alliance. First, it is a report that emphasizes the Treaty of Mutual Support for Friendship and Cooperation between North Korea and China when referring to North Korea-China relations. Second, it continuously mentions and emphasizes the Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea war. The third is a commentary that strongly refuted the claim that the blood alliance is over and that North Korea-China relations are cracked and contains arguments and grounds for protest. The last evaluation is to protect and support North Korea unconditionally.

#### **(1) Solid support of the Sino-Korean Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation**

Comments supporting the strong relationship between North Korea and China, with a strong tone, mainly support the China-North Korea Friendship Cooperation Mutual Assistance Treaty<sup>3</sup>, which has legal effect in the relationship between North Korea

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<sup>3</sup> The treaty was signed by President Kim Il-sung and Prime Minister Zhou En Lai on July 11, 1961,

and China, and its core content. On July 11, 2021, President Xi Jinping and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un exchanged congratulatory messages to mark the 60th anniversary of the treaty's signing, solidifying the treaty's extension.<sup>4</sup> However, China has not mentioned the existence of the treaty several times in public.

Strictly speaking of the nature of the treaty, North Korea and China have clearly formed an alliance militarily. However, none of the reports recognized the North Korea-China relationship as an actual alliance at the level of the 1961 treaty. It can be seen that Chinese experts' perception of the validity of the North Korea-China military alliance has changed considerably negatively.<sup>5</sup> In addition, Article 4 of the Treaty on Friendship and Cooperation between China and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea stipulates that "the two countries will consult each other on all major international issues of common interest." North Korea has not consulted with China in the course of its nuclear development and has often gone against China's opinion. On the basis of this clause, this means that the treaty has actually been violated. However, the recognition of the treaty, actual practices, and the contents of the recorded treaty remain separate and give deep symbolic meaning to both North Korea and China.

Among the GT's reports on this treaty, the comment dated 17 February 2016 is noteworthy.<sup>6</sup> The author warned that if military conflicts occur on the Korean Peninsula and Washington and Seoul take comprehensive military action beyond the 38th parallel, China should consider the possibility of military intervention. The comments came in an emotional state of resentment over China's heightened sense of crisis over North Korea's long-range missiles and South Korea's discussion of THAAD deployment. These proposals can also be seen as the purpose of protecting

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and entered into force on September 10, and was automatically extended twice in 1981 and 2001, and the current validity period is until 2021," the CCTV reported.(2011.7.13), Yonhap News Agency, Chinese media, "Automatic extension of the Treaty of Friendship in the past two times," <https://news.naver.com/main/read.naver?mode=LSD&mid=sec&sid1=100&oid=001&aid=0005161829>)

<sup>4</sup> 2021.7.11, “习近平同朝鲜最高领导人金正恩就《中朝友好合作互助条约》签订60周年互致贺电”, [https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/zyxw/202107/t20210711\\_9136938.shtml](https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/zyxw/202107/t20210711_9136938.shtml)

<sup>5</sup> 조철, & 산업연구원. (2018). pp.264-265

<sup>6</sup> 2016.2.17 [China must prepare for worst in the Korean Peninsula - Global Times](#)

mainland China, but the legal basis can be found in the North Korea-China Treaty. According to Article 2 of the treaty, China and North Korea promise automatic intervention to provide military aid to their opponents as soon as they are attacked and turned into a state of war.

## **(2) Emphasis on the Korean War**

The most prominent and emphasized feature of the GT report describing North Korea-China relations is the Korean War, and the emphasis on the "Resist U.S Aggression Aid Korea War." in Chinese terms. These articles describe how the U.S. carried out germ warfare in North Korea and northeastern China during the war, causing great damage to Chinese troops, North Korean troops, and civilians. Furthermore, it emphasizes that this war was a joint victory against the U.S. imperialism by China and North Korea, and heroizes the Chinese People's Volunteers (CPV) who participated as reinforcements.

These characteristics are more pronounced in the Xi Jinping era. Since 2013, around October, when the Chinese People's Volunteers crossed the Yalu River during the Korean War, more than a dozen knights have actively honored the Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea war. Among them, articles continuously producing and promoting musicals, movies, and TV dramas based on the Korean War were repeated seven times in two months. Indeed, this cannot be seen simply as a publicity stunt for the state media, as patriotism is gaining popularity among young people in China today. The public is also cheering for "China's Greatness" after seeing the narrative depicting this Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea war, and movies and dramas are actually recording box office hits. GT estimates that China's participation in the Korean War ended a century of national rule and declared its revival as a huge military power.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> 2021.7.16, "China's trajectory proof that it needs no lecturing, [China's trajectory proof that it needs no lecturing - Global Times](#)

### **(3) Reputing claims about cracks in North Korea and China**

The period from North Korea's third nuclear test in 2013 to October 2015 before Liu Yunshan, the fifth-largest party, visited North Korea was the time when suspicions about cracks in North Korea-China relations were the highest from outside. During this period, there was no clear close exchange between Beijing and Pyongyang, but rather only signs of deepening the cracks were being seen. Therefore, the deterioration of North Korea-China relations and the discussion of expanding and reproducing this atmosphere increased in academia, and GT began to pour out comments refuting these academic discussions. Li Dunqiu, a professor of Korean studies at Zhejiang University, posted a commentary in August 2015 under the title "Voices Questioning North Korea-China Relations are not worth refuting." He argued with two logic from a traditional point of view. First, it is not reasonable to raise criminal cases taking place on the border between North Korea and China to the height of relations between the two countries. At a time when the rift in North Korea-China relations was controversial, individual North Korean soldiers sometimes crossed the border and killed the Chinese. Public interest in this series of events was very high, and based on this, the deterioration of North Korea-China relations occurred. However, according to his argument, this is only an accidental criminal case and does not reflect the nature of North Korea-China relations. Second, he argued that those without background knowledge would think that the U.S. strategy of rebalancing the Asia-Pacific and Japan's military power strategy was due to North Korea, but in fact, it would have happened without North Korea's military provocations. Li pointed out that it is partly true that China's security interests have been violated by North Korea, but most of them are not true. He is likened to a 'wolf and sheep' which is often talked about by the Chinese. Here, the wolf symbolizes the United States with a sly image, and the sheep means an innocent China that has no choice but to be victimized by him. He emphasizes that some people without background knowledge may be deceived, but for China's national interest, it is necessary to understand the inside of the "cunning" U.S.

In the article published in September 2015,<sup>8</sup> a subtle crack is found in North Korea-China relations, but such issues were well managed by both countries. Since the foundation of friendly China-North Korea relations is very solid and the nuclear issue is not everything between the two countries, it is predicted that the "blood alliance" of North Korea-China will not break even in the face of the nuclear issue. Since North Korea formed a bond with blood, sweat, and tears, all claims to separate North Korea should be dismissed, making it clear that China will never give up on North Korea in blood-stained relations. In GT, comments against the prospect of worsening North Korea-China relations in a similar format continued to be repeated.

Article of March 19, 2018<sup>9</sup> actively propagated the Beijing-Pyongyang friendship at the beginning of the North Korea-China summit, which officially destroyed suspicions of years of North Korea-China cracks. First, the comment highly appreciates the fact that North Korea is a respectable country and very independent. Although North Korea's economy is not large, it boasts a familiarity with North Korea by praising the industrial system for being relatively perfect. Second, North Korea has the right to choose its own political system, and in particular, the Chinese public should understand it. It is unfair to condemn the North Korean political system because the political systems of each country around the world are very different. Third, this comment pointed out that the logic that "China does not manage North Korea well" was wrong. This is a common logic used by South Korea, the U.S., and Japan, and also by some people in China. The Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea emphasized that North Korea and China had a bloody relationship with each other, suggesting that China still manages North Korea well. Fourth, according to the commentary, almost the only difference in North Korea-China relations is differences over the nuclear issue. Fifth, maintaining friendly relations between China and North Korea is entirely in the interests of the two

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<sup>8</sup> 2015.9.8 "Sino-NK ties not at cost of others,"  
<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201509/941300.shtml>

<sup>9</sup> 2018.3.28 "Carrying forward China-North Korea friendship benefits both sides",  
<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201803/1095587.shtml>

countries. Overall, it strongly emphasizes that maintaining friendly relations between North Korea and China is advantageous to China.

#### **(4) Defending North Korea unconditionally, holding U.S. responsible**

As above, many GT articles and comments directly emphasize that the relationship between North Korea and China is still a blood alliance based on the friendly treaty shared by North Korea and the memories of the war. This is a stronger tone than academic papers. Furthermore, we can see China taking sides with North Korea from the U.S. and claiming to be a big brother.

In September 2014, Li Dunqiu, a leading pro-North Korean scholar, actively praised North Korea for its efforts to improve its national image after Kim Jong-un took power. He said the number of times Kim Jong-un visited and comforted North Korean workers, farmers, intellectuals, soldiers, students and athletes shows that he is a person who takes care of the people as well as other world leaders. Nevertheless, taking advantage of North Korea's lack of power to control international public opinion, the U.S. and Western media have demonized only the negative aspects of North Korea, which have hardened into false stereotypes outside the country, according to him. As he argued, it is true that it is difficult to find such a North Korea-friendly perspective in the Western media, including South Korea. Today, many Chinese experts still recognize North Korea's strategic value in consideration of its own national interests. However, scholars who use expressions that value North Korea's political, economic, and social systems themselves are not common even within GT.

In a commentary dated March 5, 2016, it explained that Beijing-Pyongyang relations had to go through a bad period over the past few years, and on behalf of Chinese society, "Chinese society fully respects North Korea's autonomy." The author of the comment said, "Many forces are cursing North Korea now, but China will never be one of them."<sup>10</sup> As such, from 2013 to the end of 2017, it was a time

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<sup>10</sup> 2016.5.6 [7th party congress may send key messages - Global Times](#)

when academic circles generally voiced that the relationship between North Korea and China became cold, but the relationship between North Korea and China, seen through the Global Times, was evaluated at a different temperature.

## **2. Is DPRK a Strategic Asset or Burden for China?**

### **(1) A strategic asset**

As covered above, GT comments provide positive indicators that North Korea is still a "blood alliance." In the process of answering the second question, "Is North Korea a strategic asset or a burden to China?," still different standpoints are encountered. Of course, some scholars who recognize North Korea as a strategic asset see North Korea as a "blood-sharing brother," but most recognize North Korea as an asset because of its geopolitical value.

First, among the reasons for considering North Korea as a strategic asset, the logic most frequently mentioned in GT is the expression that North Korea, or North Korea's buffer zone function as a 'strategic hub,' is high, similar to the academic papers.

#### **A. Value of a buffer zone in the U.S.-China competition**

In December 2014, Li Kaisheng, a researcher at the Institute for International Studies at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, compared the values of Cuba with those of North Korea in a GT commentary.<sup>11</sup> He noted that Cuba's geopolitical value for the United States declined in a world where the polar pattern of the Cold War disappeared, but North Korea was becoming an important geopolitical meaning of the United States in the Asia-Pacific region. He described North Korea as a troublemaker, which is an excuse for the United States to build and maintain military bases and missile defense systems in East Asia.

Understanding the same phenomenon 180 degrees differently can be interpreted as "North Korea is a burden to China." This is because security in East Asia is

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<sup>11</sup> 2014.12.31 [Geopolitical demands dictate turns in US-North Korean-Cuban policy - Global Times](#)

becoming unstable because of North Korea. Nevertheless, the reason why scholars contributing to GT regard North Korea as an asset is that if the place, where the U.S. attention is actually focused, is managed well to the advantage of the Chinese side, North Korea can be used as an asset on the Chinese side. Therefore, experts who insist on distancing themselves because they are burdensome, and those who insist on maintaining friendly relations because they are assets, often start with the same geopolitical characteristics that North Korea has. Among GT comments on North Korea's geopolitical elements with this ambivalence, opinions that recognize the strategic asset value will be introduced first.

### **B. Fears the U.S. strengthening its Asian alliance**

China is closely watching Japan's military buildup and the U.S. strengthening its alliance with Asia-Pacific countries. As a result, many GT comments are wary of the U.S. strengthening its ties with its allies through security cooperation systems such as AUKUS (Australia, United Kingdom, United States) and QUAD (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue). There are frequent opinions on the GT that accuse them of being "military containment of China" or "global anti-China alliance" for their sole purpose.<sup>12</sup>

In fact, in August 2020, U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun insisted that the U.S. wants to see Vietnam, South Korea and New Zealand participate in the expanded version of "QUAD." Further, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo visited China's neighbors in Northeast Asia except Russia and North Korea.<sup>13</sup> China is now in a situation where it has no choice but to pay keen attention. This trend did not change even after the advent of the Biden administration. In March 2021, U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin made a tour of Asia, and in the process, the U.S. and Japanese foreign and defense ministers warned of China's "pressure and unstable behavior." In response, China's Foreign

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<sup>12</sup> [Biden remains tough but cautious with China: Global Times editorial - Global Times](#)

<sup>13</sup> 2013.7.9 <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202010/1202661.shtml>



Ministry warned that the U.S.-Japan alliance should not target third parties.

In this way, discussions on the possibility of deploying THAAD in Korea began around 2013 at a time when the U.S. strategy to check China is being intensified. At this point, Dr. Wei Yingli, a researcher at the Asia-Pacific Research Center at the Shanghai Institute for International Studies, dismissed in a GT article of June 27, 2013, "North Korea, which is a geopolitical strategic buffer zone for China, has a very important meaning, and the difference between North and China is only superficial." In July 2013, Ren Weidong, an associate researcher at China's Institute of Modern International Relations, stressed that "North Korea is not only a security barrier for China, but also an important hub for strategic balance in the Asia-Pacific region."

To sum up the above discussions, many Chinese experts on the Korean Peninsula recognize that given the complex geopolitical situation in Northeast Asia today, relations with North Korea are still important to China and cannot be replaced by ever-growing Korea-China relations, as shown by the THAAD discussion. In addition, they are extremely wary of North Korea's complete inclination to the U.S. due to the collapse of North Korea-China relations. Through the strengthening of the U.S. alliance in Asia and the THAAD crisis, scholars learned a lesson that North Korea-China relations should be more valued.<sup>14</sup>

### **C. An economic hub**

Unlike most articles that view North Korea's geographical value in terms of geopolitical competition with the United States in the region, some comments appreciate its value as an economic hub. This point of view is to pay attention to the value that China can enjoy when China and North Korea are economically linked, unlike the value that North Korea has as a "buffer zone." In recent years, focusing on such utilization of North Korea, discussions on North Korea's participation in Belt

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<sup>14</sup> 2013.2.6, 社评：中国珍惜中朝友好，朝鲜也需珍惜，<https://opinion.huanqiu.com/article/9CaKrnJzcou>)

and Road Initiative and the value that China can gain have emerged.

As a representative example, on June 14, 2018, the Global Times raised the international community's interest in North Korea with its historic first U.S.-North Korea summit. Among them, he argued that North Korea's participation in China's Belt and Road Initiative is necessary for economic integration and social development in East Asia. The newspaper said, "If North Korea participates in the Chinese government's Belt and Road Initiative project, it will help rebuild the North Korean economy and promote regional economic integration." And shortly thereafter, in September, through the Liaoning government, China first announced a Belt and Road Initiative plan to expand down to the Korean Peninsula. By adding North Korea to the Belt and Road Initiative albeit belatedly, it can be seen that the Chinese government has recognized its value as an economic hub for North Korea.

#### **D. A counter card when the U.S. raises China's human rights issue**

There is a theme that is constantly being repeated on GT articles. This is about the 'human rights issue in China' which academic papers rarely deal with. Looking closely at GT's contributions, China can see a pattern in which North Korea and other countries targeted by the United States due to human rights issues join forces to add strength to their voices against the United States. These countries help China by praising how much progress China has made in solving human rights issues, or by explicitly proving its legitimacy in front of the international community. China, which has been criticized by the U.S. similar to North Korea over human rights issues, has naturally expressed opinions that are leaning toward protecting North Korea.

In a private review of the Global Times, it is argued that "North Korea-China friendly relations are a strategic diplomatic resource of China." This article emphasized the function of North Korea as diplomatic leverage, saying that China's friendly relations with North Korea are irreplaceable, although China is becoming

more and more powerful.<sup>15</sup> In GT, there are many cases in which China is using North Korea as diplomatic leverage, especially on human rights issues.

GT criticized or expressed concern about the U.S. "human rights oppression" phenomenon about 10 times in 2021 alone, and attracted North Korea to this phenomenon. The commentary dated July 3, 2021, expressed serious concerns about human rights violations in the United States and using the support of related countries, including North Korea, as a shield. According to this opinion "China and like-minded countries" expressed grave concern over the violations of human rights in the US immigration detention centers at a sideline online meeting of the 47th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC). Here, 'like-minded countries' are North Korea, Iran, and Syria. These countries demanded that the United States and the West abandon the double standards of hypocrisy and human rights and protect the human rights of immigrants. This is a kind of response strategy to the U.S. pressure on China that has been going on for a long time. Here, North Korea is being used as a small but useful card. These cards are mainly played on the U.N. At the end of 2021, China and North Korea jointly condemned the United States, Canada, and Australia for serious human rights violations at the UN Human Rights Council meeting, which is not uncommon.<sup>16</sup>

The move is interchangeable between North Korea and China. China also criticizes the U.S. for imposing economic pressure on North Korea at various levels, cutting ties between the international financial system, and interfering with North Korea's ideology in terms of human rights violations. GT comments say the unilateral sanctions are a violation of other countries' sovereignty and human rights, and are in favor of countries pointed out by Western countries as human rights issues.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to North Korea, countries that are used as diplomatic levers in China's

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<sup>15</sup> 2013.12.10 [社评：朝鲜稳定符合中国的利益 \(huanqiu.com\)](http://www.huanqiu.com)

<sup>16</sup> 2021.9.28 China and other countries jointly condemn US, Canada, Australia for serious human rights violations against indigenous people, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202109/1235321.shtml>

<sup>17</sup> 2021.12.13, US habitually violates human rights, sovereignty of other countries, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202112/1241400.shtml>

human rights issues include many developing countries, including Venezuela, Laos, and African countries, which are pointed out by the United States as human rights suppression. Even if these countries are on China's side, their actual diplomatic influence is minimal. In particular, we can ask what diplomatic power the remarks of a country like North Korea that does not gain trust in the international community have.

However, securing the support of a large number of countries at this time is a useful tactic that can be used on the Chinese side. The United States and Western countries, mostly European countries, have consistently raised and slandered issues China considers to be in key interests, including human rights repression in Uighur, Tibet and Hong Kong, through the UN Human Rights Commission. In this situation, the U.N. can gain strength from China's side if even one country, big or small, is on China's side. For example, in 2019, the UK represented 23 countries and read out a statement condemning China's violation of human rights in concentration camps. In 2020, Germany read a statement signed by 39 countries, and in 2021, four more countries signed it. In response, China responded with signatures from 45 countries in 2020, and at the third committee of the 76th United Nations General Assembly in 2021, a statement signed by 62 countries was issued through Cuba's representative. China's ambassador to the United Nations, Zhang Jun, countered that human rights issues raised by the United States and other countries were "groundless attacks and accusations" and "pure lies" and was able to defeat Western interference in Chinese human rights to some extent.<sup>18</sup>

### **(1) A Strategic Liability**

It is observed that GT devotes a significant portion of the ground to advocating friendly relations between North Korea and China. However, there are some opinions that maintaining friendly relations with North Korea is strategically

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<sup>18</sup> "The Majority of Countries Oppose the Interference in China's Internal Affairs in the Name of Human Rights" 2021/10/21, <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/ceun/eng/hyyfy/t1916044.htm>

burdensome only during the period of North Korea's provocations. The reason is that, as discussed earlier, North Korea's repeated provocations give legitimacy to the U.S. and its allies' military buildup and provide an excuse to accelerate the U.S. military blockade of China. In other words, for China, the existence of North Korea itself is a burden, and there is clearly a burden of thoroughly "managing" North Korea to cope with such movements in the West.

The Global Times sometimes warns North Korea. But the tone is not strong. Even when the residents of all eight prefectures and cities in Yanbian, Jilin province in northeastern China, felt the earthquake during the third nuclear test, a warning was issued that "North Korea should consider the feelings of the Chinese people."<sup>19</sup> The author of this article is Ding Gang, a reporter for the People's Daily, and he is one of the representative experts who usually regard North Korea as a strategic burden to China. Nevertheless, most analysts who consider North Korea a strategic burden are concerned that "if the authority to solve the Korean Peninsula is fully under the control of the U.S., the security of Northeast Asia will also be affected by the U.S. strategy." These concerns prevent North Korea from being thrown out unconditionally. Furthermore, it is argued that dangerous references to 'moderate arguments' should be guarded.<sup>20</sup>

Even when North Korea fired its second intercontinental ballistic missile and conducted its sixth nuclear test, Chinese experts on the GT expressed regret over North Korea's actions, but emphasized a solution through dialogue and negotiations, without strong criticism. This can be seen as a contrast to North Korea's sometimes provocative expression of criticism against China. For example, in the event of North Korea's sixth nuclear test, China expressed its intention to impose strong sanctions on North Korea, including the suspension of crude oil supplies. At that time, North Korea's Korean Central News Agency warned China, saying, "If neighboring countries misjudge our will and cling to economic sanctions, they should be prepared

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<sup>19</sup> 2013.4.12., 丁刚: 朝鲜必须考虑中国百姓感受 (huanqiu.com)

<sup>20</sup> 2017.12.17 侠客岛: 为什么美国不想解决朝鲜这个“敌人”? <https://mil.huanqiu.com/article/9CaKrnK63L1>

for catastrophic consequences."

In addition, North Korea insists that it should never make an enemy of North Korea in its contribution that it should now switch to a normal state power and punish Pyongyang for its continued provocations. They stress that it is also necessary to remove blind protection and punish North Korea, which is to meet the expectations of the international community. This is because the international community expects China to do the right thing. At the same time, however, China's reduction of aid to North Korea should not be more prominent than the sanctions imposed by South Korea and the U.S. and Japan, but should only meet the minimum standards.<sup>21</sup> China should stick to its role as a mediator in the nuclear issue, and not join in and confront its opponents.<sup>22</sup> Although they feel burdened by North Korea, they consider the collapse of relations with North Korea even more unaffordable.

From the third nuclear test to the sixth nuclear test in 2017, it is true that North Korea's continued provocations have destroyed much of the strategic mutual trust between the two countries. However, on GT, while demanding a change in the nature of North Korea-China relations, most of them tend to be in parallel with the argument that they should maintain friendly relations with North Korea. Obviously, there is a strategic burden on North Korea to China, but the perception that the value of strategic assets is even greater remains unchanged.<sup>23</sup>

### **3. Will China Abandon North Korea?**

The third question, "Will China abandon North Korea?" has already been answered in the process of answering the previous two questions. The position of the Global Times is quite clear. Contributions that are clear enough to be recognized by just looking at the title are being presented. Such comments as "It is absolutely impossible for China to give up North Korea" and "China cannot give up a North

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<sup>21</sup> 2013.2.17 Global Times, "China needs to find right way to punish NK," <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/762090.shtml>

<sup>22</sup> 2013.2.7 中朝关系或更糟糕 中国应有所准备(<https://opinion.huanqiu.com/article/9CaKrnJzdQO>)

<sup>23</sup> 2017.4.28 社评：中朝关系或更糟糕 中国应有所准备(<https://mil.huanqiu.com/article/9CaKrnK2i2C>)

Korea on a while when it is good or bad" by Song Luzheng in 2013.<sup>24</sup>

One comment quelled the "North Korea abandonment theory," which was then hot among academics and the public, with the title "We cannot 'give up' North Korea's 65-year partner." This article said that China should not give up on North Korea for the following reasons. First, China and North Korea are two independent sovereign states, so it is a far-fetched idea to demand that their national interests cannot be exactly the same and that everything is in harmony. Second, it can be realized because maintaining friendly relations is not only China's hope, but a common demand from both North Korea and China. The current North Korea-China conflict is different from the one-way conflict dealing with issues such as territorial territorial waters, historical perceptions, and East Asian geopolitical patterns. Conflicts also exist in the relationship between China and North Korea. Third, the fundamental interests of both North Korea and China are consistent, and the fundamental interests of both North Korea and China will not change until at least a fundamental change occurs in the geopolitical topography of Northeast Asia.

Here, the author warns that if China really gives up on North Korea, there could be three consequences. The first is for North Korea to be held in the arms of a third country other than China. The second is that North Korea collapses amid political, economic and military siege and oppression. The third is a scenario in which North Korea is isolated and rekindles war on the Korean Peninsula. All three are unfavorable and fatal to China. He warns, "To bring maritime forces back to the Korean Peninsula and take control of them is to repeat the biggest mistake in China's history." He warned lastly that China should not "give the U.S. a big gift" due to China's strategic misjudgment, recalling the clear reason why China cannot give up on North Korea.

Amid the third nuclear test in 2013 and the suspension of visible exchanges between North Korea and China, the theory of abandonment of North Korea has

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<sup>24</sup> 2013.2.16 环球时报, “宋鲁郑：中国绝对不可能放弃朝鲜 专家：中国不能凭好恶图一时之快而放弃朝鲜”, <https://opinion.huanqiu.com/article/9CaKrnJzhNg>

been repeatedly raised and two years have passed. Then, in October 2015, this controversy ended to some extent through the visit of Liu Yunshan, the fifth-ranked party rank. In response, Da Zhigang, director of the Northeast Asian Institute of Social Sciences in Heilongjiang Province, China, pointed out how shortsighted the belief that "China will give up or abandon North Korea" has been. He claimed that Liu's visit to North Korea was to protect the peace between China and Northeast Asia and that he recalled that it was in China's national interest that the Pyongyang regime would not collapse.<sup>25</sup> As such, the Global Times is strongly opposed to the position of abandoning North Korea even if it does not necessarily recognize it as an asset.

#### **4. Should China Support Unification of the Korean Peninsula?**

As we have seen, the Chinese government officially states that it supports the unification of the Korean Peninsula. It is not clear how this will be done. However, various interpretations from the Chinese media and academia can read the general perception and more specific direction of Chinese experts on the Korean Peninsula. Most Western literature and the media tend to discuss the unification of the Korean Peninsula as part of a contingency scenario involving rapid change in North Korea. In the process, the psychological tendency to believe that China will have hostile intentions and that the United States and its allies will have good intentions in support of unification has been amplified. However, a somewhat balanced view of the Chinese people's overall view on the unification of the Korean Peninsula shows that they are not as extreme as Western literature suggests, but rather moderate on the issue of unification.<sup>26</sup>

GT does not often publish detailed opinions other than re-reporting remarks made by South Korean presidents, the Ministry of Unification, and lawmakers on the unification of the two Koreas. Based on the English website of the Global Times, there were a total of less than 20 search results for articles or comments referring to

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<sup>25</sup> 2015.10.14 [Steer wheel of China-North Korea ties from long-term perspective - Global Times](#)

<sup>26</sup> Cho, Sungmin. (2020). p.554



the unification of the Korean Peninsula after 2009. This is in contrast to scholars' frequent mention of "unification" since the 2000s in academic journals and papers, and high-level government officials' official position on the unification of the Korean Peninsula must be clarified. This phenomenon still disproves that expressing one's personal position on the unification of the Korean Peninsula in Chinese society is a sensitive topic. Moreover, Chinese experts still believe that the possibility of reunification in Korea is very low.<sup>27</sup>

Among them, there are two scholars who are relatively clear about their views on the unification of the Korean Peninsula. One is Zhang Liangui. "The current high-ranking North Koreans have no experience in war and lack rational judgment on North Korean military power because they grew up with education that North Korea is the world's best military power," he said, arguing that the North Korean nuclear issue is basically caused inside the North. In his article in the April 2013 *Global Times*, he points out that 'North Korea will try to unify the Korean Peninsula by force and this is the stated goal of North Korea.' This is because "unification of force" is being emphasized through North Korea's official statement. According to his argument, there is a 70 to 80 percent chance of war on the Korean Peninsula. North Korea has already made sufficient preparations for 'unification of armed forces', including the development of nuclear weapons. In addition, North Korea declared the armistice invalid on March 5, 2013. On March 30, a special statement announced that the two Koreas immediately entered a state of war, and that all issues between the two Koreas would be dealt with in a state of war.<sup>28</sup>

Chang is not directly speaking about whether or not the Chinese government should support the unification of the Korean Peninsula. But he uniformly emphasizes the irrational and dangerous military judgments of North Korea's high-ranking officials, hinting at how this will negatively affect China's interests in the process of reunifying the Korean Peninsula. First of all, for the Chinese government, which

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<sup>27</sup> 2014.1.22, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201401/838725.shtml>

<sup>28</sup> 2013.4.10 中央党校教授：朝鲜认定武力统一八成会打仗 (huanqiu.com)

absolutely does not want war in the neighboring countries, the word " the possibility of war " in the process of reunification is alone a sufficient ground to oppose it.

On the contrary, Professor Jin Jingyi of Beijing University supports unification from the perspective of a small number of North Korean experts in China. Professor Jin Jingyi, who appeared in the previous chapter dealing with academic journals, is a scholar who supports and supports unification. GT reported that Professor Jin said at the Seoul Forum hosted by the Korea Institute for Economic Policy (KIEP), "Korea's unification can bring astronomical economic benefits to northeastern China." Jin said peaceful reunification would increase the gross domestic product (GDP) of northeastern China, including Jilin, Liaoning a,nd Heilongjiang Province, to about 1 trillion yuan (\$162.6 billion). The three provinces are bordered by the Korean Peninsula. He pointed out that President Park Geun Hye's "unification grandiose theory" could also be applied to China, pointing out that the unified Korea could serve as a geographical hub between maritime power and land power.<sup>29</sup>

Professor Jin Jingyi supports unification not only for economic reasons. There is a more fundamental reason. According to his argument, North Korea is deepening its nuclear problem due to geopolitical conflicts with the United States. What is important is the division of the two Koreas that gives the United States room to take advantage of this situation. Therefore, in order to eliminate these factors that are favorable to the U.S. and unfavorable to China, the Korean Peninsula must be reunified as soon as possible. According to his argument, the United States wants to take advantage of this situation to maintain the status quo on the Korean Peninsula, that is, to maintain the division of the two Koreas. If the nuclear crisis is resolved peacefully, and the Korean Peninsula is unified, Washington will lose its strategic pivot in the region, and the U.S. influence that has been exerted in the region will be greatly diminished or greatly diminished.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> 2014.9.17 Unification of Koreas to benefit neighbors: experts  
(<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201409/881906.shtml>)

<sup>30</sup> 2014.10.21 Uncertainties remain in Korean Peninsula  
(<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201410/887464.shtml>)

To add a little more to his argument on Xinhua News, Jin recognizes that the U.S. has gained a lot, with the U.S.-South Korea alliance strengthening under the pretext of "problematic" North Korea and discussing the deployment of THAAD on the Korean Peninsula. Since the North Korean nuclear issue cannot be solved by China's efforts alone, it also demanded South Korea's role in stopping the South Korea-U.S. military training demanded by North Korea. In his argument, 'unification' refers to the weakening of U.S. influence on the Korean Peninsula, including the withdrawal of U.S. troops from South Korea, and the resulting significant improvement in China's security environment.<sup>31</sup>

According to the observation of a GT contributor, unification of the Korean Peninsula does not bring economic benefits only to northeastern China. A GT article in June 2014 delivered a report by Singapore's Yonhap News Agency that the unified Korean national brand value is now expected to jump from 16th to 7th in the world. South Korea's capital and technology are expected to become the world's seventh-largest economy with a population of 80 million from 2040 to 2050, combined with North Korea's resources and labor and overseas investment. In particular, it is reported that it will develop abundant natural resources in North Korea and drive economic development into domestic demand, breaking away from the existing economic model that relies on exports by self-sufficiency in more than 50 percent of domestic demand. If unification is not achieved, Korea's economic ranking, which ranks 15th in the world in GDP, could fall further due to aging, the report analyzed.

In this article, from the perspective of the Chinese, it does not present an evaluation of whether the nationality growth due to the unification of the Korean Peninsula conforms to China's national interests. If China sees a unified Korea as an object of cooperation to form an East Asian economic community, the world's largest economic bloc, it can expect a welcome sentiment. However, uncertainty over what kind of country it will be as a neighboring country bordering on reunification is still disturbing for China.

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<sup>31</sup> 2014.6.17 外媒称朝韩如“统一”将组成世界第七大经济体 (huanqiu.com)

### **In favor of the unification, but against absorption by South Korea**

If you look at the scenario of unification on the Korean Peninsula that experts expect, there are various scenarios. Among them, the unification of the way the Chinese are generally wary of is 'South Korea-led unification of armed absorption'. This may be one of the reasons why the Chinese government emphasizes independence and peace from an official standpoint.

In 2014, GT published the following editorial based on an interview with Yang Xiyu, a senior researcher at the Institute for International Affairs of China and a former director of the Korean Peninsula at the Chinese Foreign Ministry. At the time, there were voices of tension in China as a result of the unification discussion in South Korea due to President Park Geun Hye's "unification grandiose theory," and the editorial emphasized, "It is commendable that both Koreas have a strong desire for unification, but we should reform our policy to refrain from unification through absorption."<sup>32</sup> Not only Chinese scholars but also the Chinese government are basically opposed to "South Korea-led absorption unification of the Korean Peninsula." Currently, China has maintained a friendly relationship with North Korea for 70 years. Therefore, the above statement is the logic that there is no need to support the absorption unification of South Korea, which breaks the status quo when it is unclear what kind of relationship China will have with future unified Korea..

### **Conclusion**

As discussed above, regular subscribers of GT often encounter articles that Chinese experts highly value North Korea's strategic value. Readers who mainly read GT recognize that North Korea is a value and asset that China can never give up, and it is easy to conclude that this is the general idea of the Chinese people. The mainstream opinion, which is more evident through all other academic papers today, is

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<sup>32</sup> 2014.5.13 [Korean reunification must be based on reality, Global Times](https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201405/860080.shtml)  
(<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201405/860080.shtml>)

considered a strategic burden on North Korea. Although GT also expresses the view that North Korea is a burden in time for North Korea's nuclear provocations, the overwhelming majority say that the ultimate conclusion should never be given up on North Korea.

In conclusion, scholars and the public's perception of North Korean values do not stop at the level of theory and principle but comes out as a practical policy alternative in line with China's realistic needs. Therefore, it is very rare to conclude with the opinions of the two extremes that either support North Korea with their blood alliance or give up on the North altogether. Scholars who make relatively clear policy proposals tend not to appear frequently in the media or academic papers, and most of them are unclear in their opinions throughout the contribution. Therefore, the diversity of Chinese experts' perceptions of North Korea can be covered by the discussions in Chapters 2 and 3, but it is still hard to say that they have been examined thoroughly. This can be seen as a limitation of this study, and it is worth further researching later.

# Chapter V. Chinese Foreign Policy and DPRK Policy under Xi Jinping Leadership

## 1. Diplomatic Strategies and DPRK Policy under Xi Jinping Leadership (2013-present)

### 1-1. Diplomatic Strategies

#### *State Identity as a Great Power*

Today, Xi Jinping's leadership is adjusting its foreign policy according to its identity as a more substantial power. Moreover, he began to devise and implement policies beyond anticipation with his rapid reinforcement of personal authority. Since Xi Jinping's leadership was launched through the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China(CPC) in 2012, China has set 'the great revival of the Chinese people' and the realization of the 'Chinese Dream(中國夢),' as its top national policy.

Since then, the discussion of the '*great change not seen in a hundred years(百年未有之大变局)*,' which appeared in Xi Jinping's report at the 19th National Congress of the CPC in October 2017, showed Xi administration's perception of the international situation. President Xi reiterated at the Central Foreign Affairs Council in June 2018, "China is in the best stage of development in modern times, and the world is undergoing a great change in one hundred years."<sup>114</sup> Xi has repeatedly used the same concept in public even after this. This is his recognition of the international situation that the global economic, political, and cultural environment is moving in

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<sup>114</sup> 程勤主编. 经济关键词 读懂新时代中国经济. 北京: 东方出版社. 2019.04: 27-28.

favor of China for the first time in a hundred years, and also shows Beijing's confidence in the hegemony competition with Washington. This perception evolved in a way that emphasized the "two great phases" in combination with the strategic goal of the "great revival of the Chinese people."<sup>115</sup> This seems to mean that the time for strategic opportunities and concrete changes has come for the achievement of the *Chinese Dream* has come in a hundred years. Although the realization of this concept had slowed down for a while due to the influence of the COVID-19 incident, this confidence is melted throughout Xi Jinping's foreign policy.

China in the Xi Jinping era has a diplomatic vision to achieve the *Chinese Dream* in the great power identity. Moreover, according to the classification of China's traditional diplomatic domain, it is striving to realize this vision by dividing it into four fields: great power diplomacy, peripheral diplomacy, multilateral diplomacy, and developing country diplomacy. Below, focus is upon the great power diplomacy and peripheral diplomacy that Xi Jinping's leadership is most devoted.

### ***Great Power Diplomacy***

China's external strategy stance presented before and after the inauguration of Xi Jinping was, above all, the issue of readjustment of great power relations with the U.S. During the Xi Jinping period, China claimed to be a 'great power' itself, breaking away from the previous 'developing country' identity. It has proposed to establish an equal relationship with the United States. China also has publicly advocated an ambitious plan to overtake the United States by 2049 as the final stage

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<sup>115</sup> 이동률, "2021년 중국 외교의 지향과 도전," 『2021 중국정세보고』 (국립외교원, 2022). p.135

of two 100-year goals.<sup>116</sup> In addition, in an important speech on foreign policy in November 2014, President Xi Jinping stressed that China should have its own “Diplomacy of Chinese Characteristics.” He said that China's external works should have unique Chinese characteristics and Chinese style. This meant that China now is one of the great powers that must receive corresponding international respect.<sup>117</sup>

In the same month, Xi proposed to U.S. President Obama that the U.S.-China relationship be a "New Type of Great Power Relations." The move was aimed at achieving an "equal" relationship that "respects each other" by emphasizing that "both sides are beneficial if they cooperate" because "the interests of China and the U.S. are deeply fused." Of course, it is now clear that Obama did not accept Xi's proposal, as revealed by the actions of the Asia Rebalancing Strategy. At that time, China was not officially willing to give up its title as a developing country but was trying to deny its status as a great power. However, given that Xi acknowledged that Beijing could achieve an "equal" cooperation structure with Washington, China showed that it believes it can partner with the U.S. as another superpower.

The foreign policy report of the 19th Congress, which marks the start of Xi Jinping's second term, reevaluated the international situation up to the point of his first term in a different context than Hu Jintao's. The perception and evaluation of the balance of power revealed in the previous party congress meeting reports often defined the hegemonic and powerful politics of the U.S. as factors of instability. As an effective way to check this, the CPC appealed for the early implementation of a multipolar system.

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<sup>116</sup> 김홍규.(2021). 특집: 아시아의 미래와 전략 (4) 시진핑 시대 중국의 주변외교 전략. 아시아브리프 1권 26호 (2021년 9월 27일), 서울대학교 아시아연구소 <https://snuac.snu.ac.kr/?p=33517>

<sup>117</sup> 中央外事工作会议在京举行 习近平发表重要讲话 (来源：人民网－人民日报 发布时间：2014-11-30, <http://jhsjk.people.cn/article/26119225>



However, at the 19th Party Congress, the CPC evaluated today's international situation in a different way, starting with the view that it had achieved a balance of power. It concluded that today's power structure is being balanced by equal power distribution(国际力量对比更趋平衡). In other words, it acknowledges the results of China's rise and clearly reveals the increase in confidence. So, it no longer recognized the elements of hegemonic and power politics as the biggest destabilizing factor or the biggest threat to efforts in reforming the international order. It expressed the view that while promoting coordination and cooperation with the U.S., Beijing will focus on building an overall stable and balanced development relationship(推进大国协调和合作, 构建总体稳定、均衡发展).<sup>118</sup>

In fact, Xi's most important implication in seeking coordination and cooperation from Obama was that the U.S. should respect China's core interests: Taiwan, Tibet, Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, and the South China Sea.<sup>119</sup> Xi openly adheres to the principle of independent peaceful diplomacy that has persisted in previous generations and continues to use diplomatic rhetoric in support of "peaceful development" or "five principles of peaceful coexistence." At the same time, he vowed to firmly defend the core interests, saying, "We must move firmly based on our own power, not give up our legitimate rights and interests, and we must not sacrifice the core interests of the country."<sup>120</sup> China makes it clear that core interests such as sovereignty, security, and development profits should come first when it conflicts with other diplomatic goals of peaceful development.<sup>121</sup> On September 9,

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<sup>118</sup> 주재우(2017), pp.239-240

<sup>119</sup> 조영남(2013), p.275

<sup>120</sup> 中央外事工作會議在京舉行 習近平發表重要講話,” 人民日報, 2014年 11月 30日, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2014/1130/c64094-26119225.html>

<sup>121</sup> 习近平:和平发展绝不能牺牲核心利益, 2013/01/30, <https://www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/cefj/chn/gdxw/t>

2021, U.S. President Biden and Xi Jinping reportedly talked about pending issues between the two countries through a 90-minute phone call. Even at this time, Xi made it clear that the U.S. would not be able to expect any cooperation from China unless the U.S. respects China's core interests.<sup>122</sup>

### ***Peripheral and multilateral diplomacy***

Contrary to Xi's expectations in the early days of his administration, it was difficult to realize a new superpower relationship with the United States based on equality. Rather, the strategic competition intensified. As a result, the strategic importance of neighboring countries has become more prominent, and maintaining peace and stability with neighboring countries has become more significant than before to realize China's national and diplomatic goals. To build a 'modernized powerhouse' presented at the 19th Party Congress, it was also necessary to be supplied with continuous and stable resources. This is because it desires to rise as a world power comparable or even superior to the United States.

Based on this judgment, China is expanding the scope of peripheral and multilateral diplomacy with neighboring countries in more active and diverse forms. China took the initiative in participating in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, actively participating in the ASEAN Conference, and promoted a "coexisting division strategy" sharing its influence on Asia with the United States. Above all else, Belt and Road Initiative best depicts China's peripheral diplomatic ideology. The Belt and Road Initiative is being promoted under the pretext of China providing

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<sup>122</sup> 왕윤중, “2021년 중국경제: 소강사회를 넘어 공동부유 경제로 갈 것인가?,” 『2021 중국정세보고』 (국립외교원, 2022). pp.104-105

public goods to the world. This is a strategy to naturally expand its influence by providing investment, economic support, and opportunities for infrastructure construction that all countries need. The economic approach is mainly utilized instead of military and diplomatic one, which helps Beijing avoid direct friction and conflict with Washington.

Focusing on peripheral diplomacy, President Xi Jinping added the principle of being ‘friendly, sincere, beneficial, and tolerant’ to neighboring countries. This can be said to be a Chinese version of the soft power strategy to secure allies in the era of strategic competition between the U.S. and China. To China’s dismay, in the actual diplomatic situation, the strategic competition between the U.S. and China was augmented, and China was blamed as the origin of COVID-19. China’s diplomatic method was criticized as "Wolf Warrior diplomacy."<sup>123</sup> It was stigmatized with this unpleasant name because it aims to pursue aggressive diplomacies such as retaliation based on its growing economic and military capabilities. Representative examples encompass the South China Sea dispute and the direct enactment of the Hong Kong Security Law.

Despite these criticisms, China is pursuing a diplomatic strategy that seeks to crack down on the regime and unite internally while actively persuading and pressuring neighboring countries not to participate in U.S.-led pressure on China. The priority of China's diplomatic efforts is to enhance China's status and image in the international community and stop the U.S.-led gestures to check and contain China. Therefore, China uses both the carrot and whips selectively for the countries

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<sup>123</sup> 김홍규.(2021). 특집: 아시아의 미래와 전략 (4) 시진핑 시대 중국의 주변외교 전략. 아시아 브리프 1권 26호 (2021년 9월 27일), 서울대학교 아시아연구소 <https://snuac.snu.ac.kr/?p=33517>

it believes are actively participating in straining China following the U.S. The primary method used here is economic means. However, this Chinese strategy is not weakening the U.S.-led anti-China solidarity as hoped. China is already using economic means as a whip for pressure, so trust in promoting economic cooperation as a carrot has weakened.<sup>124</sup>

## **1-2. Xi Jinping's policy toward North Korea**

### **(1) Xi Jinping's North Korea Policy in the First Half of 2012-2017**

#### *neglect and passive management*

During the first term of Xi Jinping's reign, the U.S. and China were ostensibly cooperating in criticizing North Korean issues through UN sanctions. However, China was offering "dialogue and negotiations" as the only alternative, as it could never afford the collapse of the Pyongyang regime due to severe sanctions. China's negotiations were based on "double-freeze(雙中斷)" and "and "double wheels (雙軌並行)." Since the beginning of the Xi Jinping regime, the Chinese government has suggested this as a solution to the North Korean nuclear issue. *Double-freeze* means simultaneous suspension of North Korea's nuclear and missile development activities and large-scale South Korea-U.S. joint military exercises. *Double-wheels* strategy demands the denuclearization process of the Korean Peninsula, and negotiations on the North Korea-U.S. peace treaty system be carried out in parallel.

North Korea conducted as many as four nuclear tests and dozens of ballistic missile launches during Xi Jinping's first term alone. China faced a dilemma where it could not give up on North Korea while it also could not afford to have conflicts with the U.S. because of North Korea. Such a dilemma led to a policy of passive

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<sup>124</sup> 이동률, "2021년 중국 외교의 지향과 도전," 『2021 중국정세보고』 (국립외교원, 2022). p.179

attitude towards North Korea, which soon resulted in a massive discussion surrounding the cracks in the Pyongyang-Beijing relationship. Strategic distrust between the two countries, which has been heightened since the 2013 nuclear test, raised doubts among neighboring countries, and in fact, China used a North Korean strategy close to 'negligence.'<sup>125</sup>

Then, in October 2015, Liu Yunshan, the fifth-largest position in CPC, attended the 70th anniversary of the North Korean Workers' Party. The Chinese government broke its silence and showed signs of restoring bilateral relations for the first time. This was surprising because at that time, after President Xi Jinping visited South Korea in July 2014, Seoul-Beijing relations were being described as "honeymoon relations." Accordingly, Pyongyang-Beijing relations were at their worst. In September 2015, a month before Liu visited North Korea, President Park Geun-Hye said, "China's patience has reached its limit, and now China will support Seoul-led unification. Xi Jinping also proposed to start discussions as soon as possible, saying, "We will cooperate for peaceful unification of the Korean Peninsula." Xi had refused to hold any summit talks to protest Kim Jong-un's continued nuclear provocations. At least it seemed so to many observers in Korea and the West.

### ***Rhetoric that predicted rupture in the North Korea-China relations***

Regarding North Korea's third nuclear test on Feb. 12, 2013, China's Foreign Ministry said, "We are resolutely opposed to North Korea conducting another nuclear test despite the universal opposition of the international community." Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi also invited the North Korean Ambassador to China, Ji Jae-Ryong in the afternoon of the same day to express strong dissatisfaction. According to China's state-run Xinhua news agency, this is the first time that a Chinese foreign minister has called the North Korean ambassador to China regarding a nuclear test.

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<sup>125</sup> 박홍서. (2020). p.226

Later on March 8, the UN Security Council passed a 2094 resolution that sanctions and condemns North Korea. China agreed to the resolution and took strict measures, unlike before, emphasizing the full implementation and suspending financial transactions with North Korea. As a result, the "hopeful thinking" sprouted from the West that China's previous lukewarm and traditional attitude finally began to shift. In addition, during this period, China continued to pursue "dialogue and negotiations" as a principle of resolving the North Korean issue but did not lead the Pyongyang-Beijing summit or high-level talks. Finally, in November 2017, Kim Jong-un did not meet with President Xi Jinping's special envoy Song Tao, who visited Pyongyang, and their frosty relations lasted further.

Another trigger was President Xi Jinping's remarks at the opening speech of the Boao Asia Forum in April 2013. "Without peace, we can't discuss development," he said. "No one should let a region and even the whole world be in turmoil for selfish gain." The U.S. and South Korean media reported that China blamed North Korea for conducting a nuclear test in February of that year.<sup>126</sup> However, government media such as the People's Daily and the Global Times later corrected and reported it. What was belatedly known was that this remark pointed out the United States.<sup>127</sup>

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's remarks in April 2017 can be interpreted in a similar context. Wang said, "Recently, the U.S.-South Korea and North Korea have been confronting each other..., and anyone who wants to wage war on the Korean Peninsula must take historical responsibility and pay a commensurate price," he said.<sup>128</sup> These remarks could also be seen as a warning to North Korea, which conducted two nuclear tests in 2016 and prepared for another one. However, it is more likely that the remarks were made to urge Washington, which decided to deploy THAAD to Seoul in July 2016, not to provoke Pyongyang further.

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<sup>126</sup> 동아일보, 시진핑, 北 겨냥 “세계를 혼란에 빠뜨리지 말라”  
<https://www.donga.com/news/article/all/20130408/54269128/1>

<sup>127</sup> 정재홍. (2017). pp.106-107

<sup>128</sup> 2017.4.15 “朝鮮半島, 到了最危險的時候?”

Nevertheless, in August of the same year, he said, "If sanctions against North Korea are newly launched, China, which has close economic ties with North Korea, will pay the most. But expectations continued that China's attitude had changed when it showed firm determination to implement resolutions at all cost." Resolution 2270, implemented after North Korea's fourth nuclear test, was a more robust measure than any earlier resolutions. Unlike previous ones imposed only on North Korea's WMD, the 2270 resolution also affected trade volume with China, including the ban on North Korea's coal exports. Almost everything was mandatory, and thus China sacrificed a lot, as Wang had mentioned.

### **(1) 2018-2021 Xi Jinping's North Korea Policy**

#### ***2018-2019 North Korea-China Summit***

On October 18, 2017, Xi Jinping's second presidential term commenced through the 19th party congress. Since then, the atmosphere between North Korea and China has begun to change. In particular, numerous suspicions and speculations have been corrected through Kim Jong-un's four visits to China from March 2018 to January 2019 and Chinese leader Xi Jinping's visit to North Korea for the first time in 14 years since Hu Jintao. Through the five summits, Xi Jinping used expressions that emphasized the goodwill of North Korea, reminiscent of the blood alliance of the Cold War era.

At the first meeting, Xi Jinping said, "The traditional friendship between China and North Korea is unique as it was forged through blood," and "this friendship is a valuable property of both sides." In the second meeting in May 2018, he also stressed that "North Korea-China's traditional friendship is a valuable common asset between the two sides" and "North Korea is the same socialist country as China." In addition, the expression 'lips-and-teeth' was used to express traditional ideology. In June of that year, a month later, at the third round of talks, Xi Jinping promised 'China's support for socialist North Korea will never change.' At the fourth round of talks

held in January 2019, Xi Jinping again emphasized the "China-North is a lips-and-teeth relationship," as though reviving the traditional North Korea-China relations. Finally, when Xi Jinping visited North Korea at their fifth Summit Meeting in June 2019, he said, "The essence of China-North Korea relations is maintaining a socialist country led by the Communist Party."<sup>129</sup>

### ***The celebration of the 70th anniversary of the war victory***

The display of goodwill between Pyongyang and Beijing did not end at the five summit meetings. The Chinese government held an event to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Chinese People's Volunteers' War to the Korean War(1950-1953). Xi described the victory of the *Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea War* as a victory for justice, peace, and people. He defined the nature of the war as "forced" on the peace-loving Chinese people by the United States, an "imperialist aggressor." Xi Jinping argued, "The great victory of the *Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea War* is a declaration that the Chinese people have risen and stood firm in the world's east. This is an important milestone for the Chinese nation's great revival and has significance for China and the world." He emphasized that it was a "just war" because it was a war against imperialism. "No matter how strong a country or its army is, if it invades against the flow of the world's development, its head will be broken."<sup>130</sup> Through this speech, we can learn three characteristics of Xi Jinping's North Korea policy.

First, China is on North Korea's side in the confrontation structure with the U.S. In his speech, Xi Jinping mentioned "North Korea" only five times, and there is no clear expression of comradeship or camaraderie toward North Korea. He devoted most of his time to heroizing China, which fought against imperialist invaders to

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<sup>129</sup> 이성현.(2020). [세종정책브리프 2020-05] p.9

<sup>130</sup> “习近平：在纪念中国人民志愿军抗美援朝出国作战70周年大会上的讲话” [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2020-10/23/c\\_1126649916.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2020-10/23/c_1126649916.htm); “纪念中国人民志愿军抗美援朝出国作战70周年大会举行 习近平发表重要讲话”, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VbOmvG04jvc>



East Asia. It was a statement that provoked the patriotism of many Chinese people and antagonized the United States. However, as seen from the word "*Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea*," the enemies and comrades here are clearly divided, and there is no doubt.

Second, we can see the determination of Xi Jinping's leadership to use North Korea and its historical experience with it as a valuable tool in the U.S.-China confrontation. What is noteworthy about this ceremony is that Xi Jinping made his first speech at a '*Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea War*' ceremony since Jiang Zemin had done in 2000. Before this speech, his attitude was relatively moderate, primarily mentioning peace and stability and emphasizing dialogues for any issue resolution. However, it was only ten or more days before the U.S. presidential election when Xi made a strong statement against the U.S. in his speech. Through this, the future confrontation between the U.S. and China became more evident, and the value of North Korea was evaluated higher.

Third, it can be predicted that the role of the People's Liberation Army(PLA) in China's foreign policy decision-making process will continue to increase. Zhu Feng pointed out that due to the growing influence of the PLA in foreign policymaking, "China's security calculus is unlikely to change soon."<sup>131</sup> The military has a conservative and traditional attitude towards North Korea and is already exerting considerable influence on its foreign policy decisions. Xi government's emphasis on *Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea War* is likely to have further solidified their power base. Through this, it can be expected that the Chinese government's foreign policy toward North Korea will also flow in a way that strongly supports the North Korea-China friendship.

### ***60th Anniversary of the Treaty of Friendship between North Korea and China***

July 11 2021 was the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Friendship between North

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<sup>131</sup> Feng, Zhu., & Beauchamp-Mustafaga, N. (2015).

Korea and China. Attending the ceremony, Xi said the treaty serves as an essential political and legal foundation for strengthening friendly relations between the two countries and promoting friendly cooperation. He also said that it was a farsighted decision by the older generation leaders of both countries to have signed the treaty to strengthen their "friendship established on blood."<sup>132</sup>

### *A readjustment in rhetoric*

Amid this trend, the attitude and rhetoric of the entire Chinese leadership toward North Korea have certainly changed with some characteristics. First, it started to emphasize homogeneity as socialist states. Foreign Minister Wang Yi stressed that the treaty between North Korea and China "gave strong support to the socialist construction in both countries and contributed to peace and stability in the region and the world." This, coupled with the Xi Jinping leadership's emphasis on "socialist" ideology, is giving synergy to the development of North Korea-China relations.<sup>133</sup> Zheng Jiyong, director of the Center for Korean Studies at Fudan University, insisted that their relations would not be severed and only strengthened. Thus, according to his argument, a rift between the two countries hoped by the Western elites and observers will not be realized.<sup>134</sup>

Second, there has been an increase in remarks explicitly defending North Korea from the U.S. In the first half of Xi Jinping's reign, China oscillated between the identity of a "responsible power" that was asked to abide by international norms regarding Pyongyang and the one as a "comrade-in-arms" with North Korea as socialist forces.<sup>135</sup> But Xi's government, in his second term in power, has become so bold that he is less caring about the international community holding Beijing accountable for siding with Pyongyang. And it was no more afraid to actively support

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<sup>132</sup> 习近平同朝鲜最高领导人金正恩就《中朝友好合作互助条约》签订60周年互致贺电, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2021-07/11/c\\_1127643511.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2021-07/11/c_1127643511.htm)

<sup>133</sup> 2021.9.9 Global Times

<sup>134</sup> <https://warsawinstitute.org/anniversary-china-north-korea-treaty/>

<sup>135</sup> Noesselt, N. (2014).

and defend it as a socialist country. For example, in September 2021, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Hua Chunying said at a regular press briefing, "The key to breaking the deadlock on the Korean Peninsula and resuming dialogue is to take North Korea's justifiable concerns seriously and resolve them." This can be seen as a significant change because, in the past, China insisted that North Korea's nuclear development could not be justified under any circumstances.

Third, direct exchanges and friendly expressions between North Korean and Chinese leaders increased noticeably. On September 9, 2021, Chinese President Xi Jinping sent a congratulatory message to North Korean leader Kim Jong-un to mark the 73rd foundation anniversary of North Korea. Describing their relations as a "precious treasure," he said, "I attach great importance to the China-North Korea relations, and am willing to make efforts to bring the relationship to a stable, sustainable and a higher level."

## **2. Characteristics of North Korea Policy in the Xi Jinping Era**

### **(1) the importance of ideology**

The common feature of the North Korea-China summit and the 70th anniversary of the war victory is that the terms of the Cold War era have been revived. In particular, there is a lot of emphasis on socialist ideology, and there are two conflicting opinions.

First, there is a view that ideology is no longer critical in North Korea-China relations. It is a perspective that says the ideological relationship has disappeared as China has decided to carry out the reform and open-up policies and established diplomatic ties with the U.S.<sup>136</sup> Furthermore, another holds the view that the issue of socialist ideology has now lost its ability to bring the two camps together or divide them.<sup>137</sup> From a contrasting standpoint, other groups see that socialist ideology is still essential in North Korea-China relations. They posit that the shared ideology of

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<sup>136</sup> 김동길(2020). pp.309-310

<sup>137</sup> Hoshino, M., & Hiraiwa, S. (2020).

the leaders of both countries offers the foundation of trust in each other.<sup>138</sup>

My evaluation is that both sides' arguments are not entirely wrong in describing the current Xi Jinping leadership's North Korea policy. The socio-political heterogeneity between the Chinese and North Korean governments continues to grow due to fundamental differences in North Korea's refusal to reform and open up and adherence to the hereditary political system. Moreover, for Beijing, which has adopted a pragmatic line, maintaining relations with Pyongyang regarding national security and economic ties has greater importance than whether it shares a socialist ideology.

However, the latter argument is more convincing in today's phenomenon. Although the two countries have different points of view on the changed international political structure, they both believe in the socialist political ideology and adhere to the one-party system. It means that they have continuous homogeneity internally and externally. This has been confirmed from the rhetoric of government figures to this day, and as the heterogeneity with Western countries increases, the homogeneity between Pyongyang and Beijing becomes clearer relatively. The socialist discourse is spreading again in North Korean society, with the government re-specifying the communist phrase that had been erased for a while in revising the party code in 2021 and actively using it for internal propaganda.<sup>139</sup> On top of that, China's strategic goal of attracting "the socialist North Korea" to China's side has become more urgent in advancing to long-term U.S.-China hegemony competition.

## **(2) unification policy**

As introduced earlier, Chinese experts such as Jin Jingyi and Deng Yuwen suggested a unification solution supporting the South Korea-led unification of the Peninsula.

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<sup>138</sup> 홍석훈(2014) p.133

<sup>139</sup> 동태관, 정론, “인민의 심부름꾼당”, 『노동신문』, 2021.5.14. p. 1. “오늘 우리의 생활과 투쟁에는 공산주의 이상에 대한 열렬한 사랑과 함께 공산주의 사회로 가자는 구호가 전인민적 지향으로 힘차게 울리고 있다”, “공산주의는 우리 인민의 이상이며 공산주의 사회를 반드시 건설하는 것은 우리당의 확고한 의지이며 투쟁목표이다.”

Their advice is less likely to be accepted during Xi Jinping's reign. Previously, many experts pointed out that "peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula," China values the most in its policy on the Korean Peninsula, is more like a negative peace than a so-called "positive peace." The passive pursuit of peace would refer to Beijing's indirect efforts to ensure that Seoul and Pyongyang remain divided as they are now. Still, their hostility toward each other is eased, and the threat of war is reduced. From Deng Xiaoping to Xi Jinping today, the Chinese government has pursued passive peace in this regard.

In Beijing in late June 2013, President Xi Jinping said at a joint press conference after his summit with South Korean President Park Geun Hye, "China supports the two Koreas to improve relations and realize reconciliation and cooperation, ultimately achieving independent, peaceful reunification." Xi's remarks came in this 'polar' context. It was the first time in March 2014 that President Xi directly mentioned the unification of the two Koreas in four summits or meetings with President Park since taking office. At the Korea-China summit with President Park in The Hague, the Netherlands, he delivered a message saying, "We hope to realize independent and peaceful reunification between the two Koreas." Xi's related remarks by China's Foreign Ministry are that "the two Koreas hope to eventually realize independent and peaceful unification by continuously pushing for a reconciliation and cooperation process with patience."

Since then, Xi has not mentioned the unification of the Korean Peninsula in his official appearance. What can be seen from this is that China will not actively strive for peaceful reunification between the two Koreas. However, China will try to block the possibility of war on the Korean Peninsula by any means, prevent the North Korean regime from collapsing due to inter-Korean conflicts, and voice opposition when the security situation on the Korean Peninsula is in danger and affects China. However, under the current circumstances, North Korea relies on China, which does not require regime change. Inter-Korean relations have also entered a stable phase, maintaining the status quo that China wants. Therefore, it can be evaluated that China

currently realizes a desirable unification policy on the Korean Peninsula.

### **(3) Breaking away from *taoguangyanghui***

Xi Jinping's leadership seems to be shifting China's foreign policy more actively and gradually deviating from Deng Xiaoping's recommendation of " *Taoguangyanghui* (Hide your ability and step back)." Since all the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth nuclear tests took place during Xi Jinping's reign, North Korea could not take a "backward" step. Above all else, North Korea's nuclear weapons are a strategic burden on China, showing a firm attitude toward them. This aspect shows that relations with North Korea are changing from the existing blood alliance to pragmatism. However, adherence to pragmatism also means that Beijing can change its attitude toward North Korea as much as possible if necessary.

### **(4) The North Korean issue is not in China's core interest**

Xi Jinping's China explained that it is implementing a foreign policy centered on core interests. These include the South China Sea and the East China Sea, which do not include areas on the Korean Peninsula. Professor Yan Xuetong once interpreted that the East Asian hotspots recognized by China are no longer the North Korean nuclear issue but are moving toward Taiwan and the South China Sea. Not only is it not a core profit, but its relative importance is not very high.

Looking at Xi Jinping's comments, it is clear that Beijing sees itself as one of the "crucial stakeholders" in the Korean Peninsula issue. However, it does not "waste" the North Korean issue, which is not included in the category of core interests. Instead, it uses a strategy to pressure Seoul, which has this as a critical benefit. China is interested in stabilizing the Northeast Asian region and achieving a peaceful environment for sustainable development.

## **3. Continuation and Change of Xi Jinping's North Korea Policy**

### **3-1. Continuation: The pursuit of peace and stability in the Korean Peninsula**

Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian held a regular press conference on June 16, 2020, saying, "China hopes to maintain peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula consistently."<sup>140</sup> Asked about North Korea's announcement of a military presence in a non-military zone (DMZ) negotiated with South Korea, Zhao reaffirmed the Chinese government's priority value on the Korean Peninsula over the past 40 years, saying, "Joseon and South Korea are one nation and China consistently hope to maintain peace and stability."

Asked about his opinion before April 27, 2018, North Korea-China summit, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said in reference to the Korean Peninsula, "We hope that the momentum of dialogue will continue and the peaceful situation will be maintained. We urge all parties to jointly support the improvement of relations between North Korea and South Korea, advance the process of peace talks, denuclearization, and political resolution of the Korean Peninsula, and make concrete efforts to achieve peace, stability, development, and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula and the region."

As above, what Xi Jinping's leadership does not omit when discussing China's position on the Korean Peninsula is a reference to "peace and stability." This has changed little from Deng Xiaoping to today's Xi Jinping era, and its importance has grown since the nuclear crisis. The critical point here is why China wants peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula, which will not be misunderstood from the perspective of China's national interest, not from the position of the Korean Peninsula. China is pursuing stability on the Korean Peninsula for its continued economic development. It does not want to damage Chinese security due to the Korean Peninsula amid the U.S.-China competition.

### **3-2. Change: More aggressive efforts to take initiative on the Korean Peninsula**

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<sup>140</sup> <http://kr.people.com.cn/n3/2020/0617/c414496-9701330.html>[인민망 한국어판 6월 17일]

As discussed earlier, diplomacy in the Xi Jinping era is more active and leading than in the previous generation. As a result, the Korean Peninsula is also trying to intervene without looking on the sidelines in the competition for leadership with the U.S. This is especially prominent in the second term of Xi Jinping's reign. China dramatically increased its efforts to manage North Korea-China relations by offering solutions of *double-freeze* and *double-wheels* and conducting five North Korea-China summits. Behind this are a change in the Xi Jinping administration's diplomatic stance and a shift in North Korea's nuclear technology development stage.

Today, the world recognizes that North Korea's nuclear technology and nuclear development capabilities are nearing completion. Therefore, as the international community's efforts to deter North Korea's nuclear development increased, interest in North Korea increased worldwide. Against this backdrop, China has increased its need to keep pace with the international community's efforts to thwart North Korea's nuclear development. This is in line with China's foreign policy of pursuing a responsible power mentioned above. It was necessary even as a showcase to the international community, which views the North Korea-China alliance suspiciously. At the same time, it is raising its voice to control the level of U.N. sanctions to prevent the possible collapse of the North Korean regime due to increased sanctions.

China is no longer contemplating whether it should join the international community's move toward Pyongyang or continue its traditional North Korean policy. Today, China in the Xi Jinping era is implementing a North Korea policy that has its own characteristics. In particular, two important factors are leading Xi Jinping's policy on the Korean Peninsula. First, the element of vigilance against "China Passing" that influenced Beijing through the U.S.-North Korea summit. Another is the great power national identity with the desire to exercise leadership on the Korean Peninsula or beyond it in Asia.

#### **4. Academic Perception and Xi Jinping's Leadership**



### **(1) Response to North Korea's nuclear program**

North Korea's four nuclear tests and dozens of armed provocations conducted during the Xi Jinping era caused a change in China's perception of North Korea. Therefore, it is no exaggeration to say that the spark of all these discussions was Pyongyang's nuclear development and that there was no article on North Korea-China relations except for the nuclear issue. Not only civilian intellectuals but also the general public and even the military, known as a minority but conservative, have begun to express their inclination to punish North Korea's nuclear weapons, which exacerbates China's security environment, year after year. They say that North Korea should be punished by strengthening sanctions against the North through the United Nations or by stopping political and economic aid that symbolizes special relations.

On the other hand, there are voices calling for the official recognition of North Korea's de facto possession of nuclear weapons, not making Pyongyang an enemy. Scholars such as Yan Xuetong are representative. He argues that North Korea could be lost to the U.S. if Beijing punishes Pyongyang for its nuclear weapons program. He even furthers his opinion insisting that denuclearization is unrealistic because there is little possibility of Pyongyang giving up its nuclear weapons. Thus China should pursue peace and stability for the Korean Peninsula "with nuclear weapons." He proposes to promise North Korea a nuclear umbrella if it must be denuclearized. Dai Xu makes a similar argument, saying that China does not have to damage North Korea-China relations because of the U.S. and that the U.S. and Japan, the biggest victims of North Korea's nuclear weapons program, should resolve the issue on their own.

Xi Jinping did not accept the proposal for tolerance of North Korea's nuclear weapons program, which some scholars have claimed. And he repeatedly declared the goal of denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula. Not long after the sixth nuclear test in 2017, he met with South Korean President Moon Jae In and declared the "Four Principles on the Korean Peninsula" (▲War on the Korean Peninsula is absolutely

unacceptable ▲Firmly adhere to the principle of denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula ▲ All issues, including North Korea's denuclearization, will be resolved peacefully through dialogue and negotiations ▲The improvement of relations between the two Koreas will ultimately help solve the Korean Peninsula problem.)<sup>141</sup>. Many observers say that Xi Jinping's decision was to seek a long-term approach by separating the North Korean nuclear issue from the overall North Korean issue. As discussed earlier, China during the Xi Jinping era took a firm and hard-line stance on North Korea because the nuclear issue is almost the only one.

### **(1) Responsibility for North Korea's nuclear program**

Although not covered in detail in this paper, the dispute over who is responsible for the long-standing resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue has been going on in academia for quite a while. The main opinion is that the U.S. has a large responsibility (Fan Jishe, Yang Xiyu, Li Kaisheng) Typically, Fan Jishe's opinion points out that denuclearization and stability on the Korean Peninsula differ between the U.S. and China. For example, China uses political means and diplomatic negotiations mainly because stability is absolutely important. On the other hand, it is pointed out that it is difficult to cooperate with the U.S., which has a willingness to use force without considering China's national interests, for the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

Scholars who cite another reason argue that the U.S. standards from its strong and pressing military attitude are so high that North Korea has solidified its nuclear weapons strategy amid extreme anxiety instead of reaching an agreement. According to the authors, the U.S. position was to prevent North Korea's nuclear development and military provocations from becoming a threat to its regional allies. Through this, he enjoyed the special ability to strengthen pressure on North Korea and strengthen

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<sup>141</sup> 2017.12.14 연합뉴스, 한중, 사드 수위 낮추며 관계복원에 방점... 한반도 4대원칙 합의  
“ <https://www.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20171214207000001?input=1195m>”

cooperation with Asian allies. But, crucially, it failed to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue. In particular, Obama's strategic patience policy and others tried to combine pressure and dialogue in anticipation of North Korea's own policy change over a long period of time, but neglected North Korea's nuclear development. The reason why the U.S. responded "slowly" is that the threat from North Korea's nuclear weapons program is small due to confidence in the U.S. missile defense system.

Third, there are scholars who claim responsibility only for North Korea (Wang Xiaobo, Song Jinquan, Wang Sheng, and Ling Shengli 2016). Finally, some scholars argue that the North Korean nuclear issue is not being resolved due to China's ambiguous nuclear response policy, although it is very rare (Liang Yunxiang, 2016). He argues that China has voiced opposition to the international community's use of force against North Korea and is confusing North Korea in that it does not support North Korea's nuclear weapons and agrees to sanctions against it.

Xi Jinping's China seems to be considering all of the above views evenly on the nuclear issue. It is true that GT editorials and official remarks have strong nuances that weigh the responsibility of the U.S. for this. However, China has consistently recognized North Korea's nuclear issue as an issue that China and the U.S. must resolve through cooperation. As a result, the North Korean nuclear issue remains almost the only U.S.-China cooperation issue even when the U.S.-China strategic competition intensifies. Although the detailed flow of perception by the leadership is not known through the resulting phenomenon, several reasons for this choice can be inferred. First, China did not want to be an excuse to conflict with the United States over the North Korean nuclear issue. Second, at the same time, it is a space where U.S.-China cooperation is possible, and it is left as a card to improve U. Finally, China, seeking to emerge as a world-class power, would not have wanted to give the impression of solidarity with North Korea, which has been branded a failure on the international stage.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> 김홍규, 2019 중국정세보고 p.166

## **(1) The perception of strategic value of the bilateral relationship**

### ***1) Blood alliance***

The main issue of this paper was the part about the strategic value of North Korea recognized by China. Among them, scholars who insist on maintaining the "blood alliance" between North Korea and China for various reasons argue in their academic papers as follows. They argue that the North should strengthen its quasi-aligned alliance with China, give bold economic support and military cooperation, and even help the North negotiate with the U.S. to break through U.N. sanctions. This is often based on history, ideology, and emotional motivation, and tends to be recognized separately from judgment on strategic values. On the GT, this trend is more pronounced, and the main argument is that the North Korea-China alliance and Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea spirit should be raised to the level of blood alliance.

At first glance, Xi Jinping's leadership seems to have accepted the classification's opinion. However, this is not necessarily the case. Xi Jinping's leadership indeed uses a lot of political and diplomatic rhetoric reminiscent of the blood alliance listed above. Given that individual political leaders' tendencies are significant in policymaking, we also need to pay attention to President Xi Jinping's background, which is from the "Prince Party" and educated in a thorough socialist tradition. Under today's Chinese-style collective leadership system, it will be difficult for Xi Jinping to arbitrarily pursue a different foreign policy toward North Korea than in the past. Still, Xi also calls for a "Chinese-style socialist system" every day. Under these circumstances, it is not only difficult to give up North Korea, a political and military ally, but also the "congratulatory" rhetoric that has been going back and forth between North Korea and China since 2018 was not completely artificial.

Strangely, however, after the 2019 North Korea-China summit, North Korea has been emphasizing self-reliance. This can be attributed to the fact that after going through all the colorful repertoire and events that modify North Korea-China

relations, it has become clear that China cannot be a strategic partner in breaking through North Korea's U.N. sanctions. North Korea wanted absolute protection, support, and a solid alliance, but China's main interest was to "manage" North Korea. In line with China's understanding, it only warned North Korea should no longer provoke and gave some financial help to control instability on the Korean Peninsula caused by the North's collapse. In addition, the purpose was to convey the vision of future economic cooperation between North Korea and China when North Korea complies with denuclearization.<sup>143</sup>

In addition to these, there are many more reasons why North Korea and China cannot essentially become blood allies in the Xi Jinping era. There is an alliance dilemma at work between North Korea and China that will not be implicated and abandoned.<sup>144</sup> That's how loose the connection is. Most importantly, the evaluation of external threats, a critical factor in maintaining the alliance, was always different between North Korea and China. The perception of threats against the Soviet Union in the Cold War, against the U.S. after the U.S.-China detente in the 1970s, and against Korea after the establishment of diplomatic relations between Korea and China in 1992. There has been little military cooperation against the same enemy since the Korean War.<sup>145</sup> The same is true of Xi Jinping's time. North Korea is hostile to South Korea and the United States, but China cannot assume the two countries militarily. Once again, this is the most decisive reason why China and North Korea cannot become blood allies, even with the use of numerous friendly expressions.

China's Foreign Ministry has intermittently expressed its official view that "North Korea-China relations are not allies, but traditional friendship and cooperation."<sup>146</sup> Indeed, the blood alliance and ideological homogeneity that some

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<sup>143</sup> 김홍규, 2019 중국정세보고 p.167

<sup>144</sup> 황지환(2013), p.208

<sup>145</sup> 최명해(2013). p.136

<sup>146</sup> 2021, 중국정세보고 p.368

scholars still claim to exist have already faded, but the North Korea-China alliance treaty continues to play its role by replacing the vacancy with "strategic needs" and "interests."

perception of North Korea	policy prescriptions			
	background	academic theses	Global Times	Xi Jinping Leadership
1) Blood alliance		Let's strengthen the alliance		
		bold economic support	Let's strengthen the North Korea-China alliance	Ostensibly accepted but not wholly
	historical, ideological, and emotional motives	Helping breakthrough U.N. Sanctions	should not break the "blood alliance" even in the face of the nuclear issue.	
		military cooperation, economic engagement		
		Assistance in check and persuasion with the United States.		

## 2) *strategic asset*

Scholars who claim that North Korea is a strategic asset to China are aware of the strategic competition between the U.S. and China, noting that the expansion of security cooperation between the U.S. and its allies is due to North Korea. In addition, China has been more cautious about North Korea's values as the issue of cross-strait unification remains. They recommend that North Korea be used as a military and political buffer zone in terms of checks on the U.S. and all-around diplomacy. And in a situation where trust between South Korea and China is not high, the key to preventing a war on the Korean Peninsula is to have the power to control North Korea, so friendly relations between North Korea and China are essential. For China, which is engaged in all-around diplomacy, North Korea can also be used as a valuable tool for economic development or a diplomatic card for the U.N.

Although it slowed down in the first term of Xi Jinping's reign, it was seen that the second term of North Korea's policy was fully accepted by intellectuals who wanted to recognize the value of North Korea's assets and make a kind of

"investment" accordingly. First, military exchanges have increased since the visit of the top leaders of the two countries from 2018 to 2019. It can be seen that high-level exchanges and strategic communication in the military sector, as well as the North-China party and the government, have been significantly affected.

For example, Miao Hua, head of the Political Work Department of the Central Military Commission of the Chinese Communist Party, who visited Pyongyang in June 2019 as an entourage of President Xi Jinping, held three meetings with high-level military officials in North Korea in 2019 alone. Secondly, economic support has increased. Despite strong U.N. sanctions against North Korea, China provided free rice and fertilizer to North Korea with Kim Jong Un's visit to China. This is because food aid to North Korea does not violate UNSC sanctions. Nevertheless, the Chinese government has not disclosed details of the support. North Korea's exports declined sharply in 2018. UN sanctions are the effect of greater restrictions on exports than imports. Nevertheless, the share of China's trade in North Korea remained almost on the rise throughout Xi Jinping's reign. This is because China is officially participating in unprecedented sanctions against North Korea, but its strategic interests with North Korea are reflected, increasing trade with North Korea, focusing on non-sanctioned items and essential goods.<sup>147</sup>

In addition, it is noteworthy that Xi Jinping's policy on the Korean Peninsula goes beyond the basic "North Korea buffer zone theory" claimed by scholars. It should be seen that Xi Jinping's China is aiming to expand its influence on the entire Korean Peninsula by looking at its strategic value on the entire Korean Peninsula. Therefore, China hopes to maintain friendly and balanced relations with both Koreas. During the Park Geun Hye administration, President Xi Jinping took exceptional measures to officially visit South Korea for the first time among China's previous leaders of North Korea. China is trying to strengthen its image as a country that leads stability and peace not only on the Korean Peninsula but also in Northeast Asia at a time when

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<sup>147</sup> 2019, 박병광. pp.351-352

the U.S. influence is declining. With this intention, China is expected to strengthen its willingness to intervene more actively in the nuclear issue of the Korean Peninsula in the future.<sup>148</sup>

perception of North Korea	policy prescriptions			Xi Jinping Leadership
	background	academic theses	Global Times	
2) strategic asset	strategic competition of U.S.-China	use North Korea as a military buffer zone to check U.S.	deal with the U.S. concerns in East Asia with North Korea card	accepted
	low level of trust toward Korea,	increase military and economic support	use North Korea as a tool for China's economic development	
	concerns over U.S. alliance	strengthen friendly relations with North to maintain stability on the Korean Peninsula.		
	cross-strait unification issue	use North Korea as a tool for China's economic development.	use North Korea as a strategic diplomatic resource for China's human rights issues.	

### 3) strategic liability

As is well known, the security instability caused by North Korea itself was something that China wanted to avoid, but the aftermath was even more serious. North Korean diplomatic and security experts have preached that the troubled North tends to strengthen the military alliance of its U.S. allies, further igniting the intensified U.S.-China competition. In addition, he pointed out that supporting North Korea behind the scenes while participating in U.S.-led sanctions against North Korea severely damages China's image. Therefore, he urged the government to shift to a "normal state-to-state relationship" or a "very tough attitude" that can flexibly deal with North Korea at the time based on national interests. GT contributors called for a minimal change in relations that satisfy international standards, while maintaining friendly relations between North Korea and China from a more modern standpoint.

<sup>148</sup> 김홍규, 2019 중국정세보고 p.166



This position has been partially accepted. In the first term of Xi Jinping's administration, China's position as if it was stepping back, focusing on the burdensome aspect of the North Korea-China alliance, was boldly expressed. That means the accumulated fatigue and dissatisfaction with the Kim Jong-un regime was as great. Since the advent of the Kim Jong-un regime, North Korea has suspended high-level exchanges with China for a considerable period of time, refusing to communicate strategically, and has damaged China's face by unilateral nuclear tests and launching intercontinental ballistic missiles.<sup>149</sup> North Korea was actually a burden to China. However, since 2018, the second term of Xi Jinping's reign, the two countries have strengthened their friendship and strategic alliances through mutual visits between the leaders of the two countries. As a result, China's voice, which once regarded North Korea as a strategic burden, has disappeared, and the perception of North Korea as a strategic asset is now implicitly dominating the atmosphere in Beijing.<sup>150</sup>

It can be evaluated that under Xi Jinping leadership, Beijing takes full advantage of North Korea's strategic values while strictly dealing with the nuclear issue as it lays a burden on China. For example, China has not only escaped the danger of involvement but also suffered damage to its international image through small attempts to adjust some of its North Korean policies, such as sympathizing with U.N. resolutions and gradually raising sanctions whenever there is a nuclear provocation. Trade between North Korea and China decreased by 60% in 2018 amid unshakable U.S. sanctions against North Korea. This means that despite Kim Jong-un's three visits to China in 2018, it did not lead to a substantial easing of sanctions on North Korea.

Besides, there were several signs that North Korea and China would switch to normal state relations, and this evidence appeared only in the first term of Xi Jinping. Previously, North Korea and China began communicating only at the party level

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<sup>149</sup> 2021 정세보고 p.371, 박병광

<sup>150</sup> 2019 정세보고 p.327, 박병광

using officially institutionalized diplomatic channels. In addition, it seemed to be looking for an actual balance between Seoul and Washington, away from the previous role of a "balancer" devoted to North Korea between Washington and Beijing. Cooperation between North Korea and China was slackening. Finally, in the Hu Jintao era, it broke away from the practice of avoiding intervention as much as possible and strongly pressured North Korea during Xi Jinping. Therefore, if North Korea shows concessions, it has strengthened exchanges and communication with North Korea, and if North Korea is stubborn, it has shown its willingness to make China pay the price.<sup>151</sup> Given that it has begun to treat North Korea on 'conditions,' it can be evaluated that North Korea and China have escaped from complete special relations.

perception of North Korea	policy prescriptions			
	background	academic theses	Global Times	Xi Jinping policy
<b>3) strategic liability</b>		break up friendship		
	North Korea's nuclear development	dismiss buffer zone logic	maintain friendly relations even when sanctioning	
	U.S. containment strategy	stop unconditional aid to North Korea	only meet the minimum standards required by the international community	partially accepted
	international image & status	switch from special relations to normal state relations		
		change attitude toward North Korea strongly		

#### ***4) abandonment of North Korea***

Some scholars claim that North Korea should be dealt with as more than a strategic burden. These opinions lead to options for abandoning North Korea, mainly to avoid the entrapment thrown by the North, to protect Beijing's international status, or because it is hard to know when it will turn into Beijing's enemy. Of course, GT provided logic to refute this rather than suggesting giving up on North Korea.

<sup>151</sup> 정덕구 p.343

North Korea also has strategic thinking in relation to North Korea-China relations, but China also has strategic thinking that benefits most at the lowest cost inertially.<sup>152</sup> In other words, if China has made fundamental adjustments to North Korea-China relations in abandoning North Korea according to the extreme opinion among the strategic burden theories, China will pay a hefty cost. But there is little benefit. Therefore, China responded by adjusting to the North Korean nuclear issue, which it thought was doing the most damage to it, to return it to a "denuclearization trajectory." In addition, the government spread the logic of dispelling North Korea's abandonment through government discourse and government vacationers. It paid the minimum cost of coordination, focusing only on returning North Korea to its denuclearization trajectory. For example, Kim Jong-un expressed his willingness to denuclearize through the U.S.-North Korea summit in 2018 and 2019. Because these conditions were met, China was able to embrace North Korea.<sup>153</sup>

perception of North Korea	policy prescriptions			
	background	academic theses	Global Times	Xi Jinping policy
<b>4) abandonment of North Korea</b>	North Korea's nuclear development, U.S. strategy to block China, international image, history of North Korea, etc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Let's break the North Korea-China alliance because we should not fall into the trap of involvement thrown by North Korea.</li> <li>* Dismiss the relationship with North Korea, a country that will soon be ruined.</li> <li>* Withdraw material and political aid to potential North Korea.</li> <li>* Warn China that China may abandon North Korea as there is a possibility of military provocations against China.</li> </ul>	* It is absolutely impossible to give up North Korea.	not accepted

### 5) Perception on the Peninsula Unification

Chinese scholars' policy proposals for unification of the Korean Peninsula in this study process are as follows. First, it is an opinion that while supporting the principle

<sup>152</sup> 최명해(2013). p.145

<sup>153</sup> 2019 정세보고, p.329, 박병광

of independent peace and unification on the Korean Peninsula, which has been at the forefront of the reform period for 40 years, psychologically, it should be opposed to maintaining the status quo. It is desirable that the unification of the Korean Peninsula takes place after the unification between the two sides, which requires considerable time. Second, while watching the unstable situation on the Korean Peninsula, there is a growing tendency among Chinese scholars to feel a sense of crisis that unification of the Korean Peninsula is imminent. They oppose South Korean-led reunification, which can involve U.S. influence if reunification must be done. It is a support for the federal unification system of one country and two systems implicitly advocated by North Korea. The new one is the third opinion. They believe that even if the Korean Peninsula is unified under the leadership of South Korea before the reunification of the two sides, it would be advantageous for China if the method is peaceful and the nuclear provocations of U.S. Forces Korea and North Korea disappear.

The existing government opinion was to choose the first view that wanted the status quo, and the second view when there was a sense of crisis that it would be unification. This is not a radical unification plan(German-style absorption unification), but rather a gradual unification, which is aimed at preventing the North Korean regime from collapsing or overthrowing its regime. This is because North Korea's plan to unify the federal system is the most consistent with China's maintenance of East Asian order and foreign policy stance."

Today, Beijing has internally begun to consider China more actively than before on the issue of unification on the Korean Peninsula. However, it seems that the Xi Jinping administration needs a little more time to positively review its third opinion. The policy direction of the Korean Peninsula, which had been agreed upon in China's internal discussions after a series of incidents on the Korean Peninsula in 2010, was the order of preventing war, preventing chaos/preventing the North Korean regime from collapsing. It can be seen that China still has far more incentives to oppose the unification of the Korean Peninsula. China's perception of unification will not

change until it is premised that unification on the Korean Peninsula will serve to promote peaceful and cross-strait unification rather than the leadership's tendency and is advantageous for China's economic development.

### **5. Reasons for the Absence of Fundamental Changes**

Among the explicitly expressed opinions, calls for China to be cooler and tougher against North Korea increased sharply during Xi Jinping's reign. They suggested that the Communist Party of China should switch from North Korea-China relations to a normal state-to-state relationship that acts more on the "national interest" than now. Nevertheless, Xi Jinping's leadership divided the North Korean nuclear issue and North Korea-China relations into two strategies, and seemed to recognize the North's strategic value except for the nuclear issue. This was not only a phenomenon in which there was no fundamental change in the Chinese leadership's perception of North Korea and its policy toward North Korea, but rather a return to the past.

There are three backgrounds for this phenomenon. First, North Korea has become a fairly important strategic asset for China due to the prolonged U.S.-China competition. Xi Jinping's leadership still appreciates the fact that the North Korean regime can not only check the allocation of U.S. strategic resources to China, but also create a strategic barrier. Of course, North Korea's role as a strategic barrier has fallen significantly in the era of high-tech war, but its symbolism and psychological significance cannot be underestimated. Although the Sino-Korean military alliance is nominal, the Sino-Korean Friendship and Mutual Aid Treaty still exists, so China has legal effect to intervene on the Korean Peninsula independently. It has legal power to take military action in case of an emergency on the Korean Peninsula. In particular, as the U.S. strengthens its efforts to block China, the geopolitical value of North Korea is increasing based on this perception and legal device. In addition, China became the biggest beneficiary of the breakdown of the North Korea-U.S. talks in Hanoi. This is because it has been concluded that it will not be solved unless China intervenes. China's position in North Korea has changed.

The most important reason for intensifying the U.S.-China competition is that the prolonged U.S.-China competition has led China to consider the North Korean issue as a substructure for U.S.-China relations. Countries threatened by North Korea's nuclear weapons program, such as the United States, South Korea, and Japan, tried to use China's influence to help solve the North Korean problem. There was also a dispute over China's responsibility for the North Korean issue. However, the prolonged U.S.-China competition has defied these countries' expectations. Because China wants to 'strategically' use North Korea as a card against the U.S.<sup>154</sup> For China, distrust of the United States is far greater than fear of North Korea's nuclear weapons. China cannot help but think about the possibility of conflict with the U.S. over Taiwan. In this situation, the leverage of North Korea is a very useful card.

Second, it is because of the passive tendency of Chinese policymakers to change foreign policy. According to the opinion of Jin Canrong of the People's University, it is true that there has been a fierce debate among experts and government officials over North Korea, but China's policy has not moved because the two sides are almost evenly matched. The Chinese government is considered to be stuck in a passive policy toward North Korea because it cannot determine the gravity of the opinions of the two sides.<sup>155</sup> Regarding the same phenomenon, Lee Sung-hyun argues that the reason why China's policy toward North Korea did not change is that there was no agreement on "change in North Korea" in the leadership, and that the meaning of change was not agreed. This is not necessarily a conflict of opinion with the reason why Professor Chen Chan-lung calls it "China's passive foreign policy." It means that you do not take action until something is definitely. Furthermore, Chinese policymakers are primarily hedging.<sup>156</sup> Policymakers do not want to change much from existing policies because they have to wait until it becomes really clear or they have to take great responsibility later on. This can be said to be the cause of a lot of

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<sup>154</sup> 이성현, '북한 문제에 있어 중국 변수는 과연 상수인가?'

<sup>155</sup> Jin Canrong (2013), p.114

<sup>156</sup> ICG(2009).

effort and time difference in reflecting the opinions of numerous academia and the public in this paper in policy.

Third, Professor Zhu Feng is similar, but presents a detailed explanation in terms of China's foreign policy-making structure. He explains that there is no real foreign policy change due to the substantial bureaucratic inertia created by the increasingly subdivided policy management system developed under former President Hu Jintao. According to him, due to the centralized decision-making process and the decentralized policy implementation system, junior officials are often unable or reluctant to make routine decisions about relations between China and North Korea. China's top leaders had to intervene directly in simple policy issues, such as having to revise the foreign ministry's statement in response to North Korea's first nuclear test in 2006.<sup>157</sup> Amid this bureaucratic inertia, traditional and conservative policymakers of the Chinese leadership who support North Korea-China relations still dominate China's policy toward the North, even though some liberal Chinese intellectuals and scholars express their negative views on the North. In the process of determining foreign policy toward North Korea, there are many actors and institutional obstacles to determining North Korea policy. Accordingly, there are many difficulties in determining the opinions of academia, which have newly emerged as the mainstream, as a policy.

The more important reason Professor Zhu Feng suggests is that North Korea's security value is being expanded and interpreted in North Korea's foreign policy due to the influence of the PLA Army in foreign policy. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) is generally considered the second most influential actor after the International Liaison Department (ILD). The PLA has direct access to the highest-level government to express its position on North Korea's role, and has a stronger voice than the Foreign Ministry (MOFA).<sup>158</sup> The role of PLA in the Chinese government's foreign policymaking process is becoming increasingly important, and

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<sup>157</sup> Zhu Feng(2015). p.39

<sup>158</sup> Zhu Feng(2015). p.38

it has privileged access to the North Korean military. In this respect, PLA has become a major actor responsible for interpreting North Korea's geopolitical importance and behavior in terms of China's national security interests. Zhu Feng also made sensitive claims that the PLA, especially the Army, supports friendly North Korea policies to increase the budget allocated to them.

Still, the Chinese government's response over the past few years has proved that the government is not at a level that cannot overcome bureaucratic inertia. Although the Chinese government is still setting limits for academic debate on North Korea policy through state media control, the limit of acceptable discourse is expanding every time North Korea's provocations are repeated.

The possibility of additional consideration is the possibility that emotional factors are still at play, albeit insignificant, in the middle of North Korea as previously discussed. It is not clear how much policy influence military officials, descendants of the Korean War, and ethnic Koreans who perceive North Korea as real brothers actually have, but their voices still remain in China. Another possibility is that China recognizes the Korean Peninsula as its sphere of influence historically and psychologically. Lee Seong-hyeon said that the reason why China gave anti-Japanese aid during the Imjin War and Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea during the Korean War suggests that China has historically never given up, abandoned, or conceded North Korea within its geopolitical sphere.<sup>159</sup> In this respect, China thinks that it is always under its own sphere of influence, regardless of whether it is actively involved in North Korea or neglected. If this possibility is true, the possibility of China changing its relationship with North Korea is far from possible.

Finally, three factors can be considered in which consideration of Chinese domestic politics prevents changes in perceptions of North Korea and policy decisions. In China, problems such as the gap between the rich and the poor and internal confusion always coexist amid rapid economic development. This is even

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<sup>159</sup> 정재홍. (2017).



more pronounced in the northeastern region, the frontier between North Korea and China. Therefore, stability should still be prioritized in this area. China has no choice but to take a cautious approach because the change in North Korea policy could mean chaos on the Chinese border. The second domestic political consideration is the issue of the Communist Party of China's communist ideology legitimacy. North Korea's survival as a communist state can be seen as partially justifying the existence of another communist country, China, despite the title of an international sabotage. The third domestic reason to think about is the lack of pluralism and democracy in the Chinese system to influence the change in academic debate in determining China's foreign policy.<sup>160</sup>

<b>desired status</b>	<b>policy prescriptions</b>	
	academic theses	Xi Jinping policy
<b>status quo</b>	* Support for the principle of independent peaceful reunification (psychological opposition to unification) * Opposition to the emergence of a regional power after reunification	status quo
<b>confederal formula</b>	* Eliminating U.S. Influence in Unification * opposition to South Korea-led unification (psychological support for North Korea-led unification)	+ confederal formula
<b>peaceful unification</b>	* Support for South Korea-led unification * Unstable Northeast Asia Security	

<sup>160</sup> 정덕구, Chu, & Chu, Shulong. (2013). p.168

## Chapter VI. Conclusion

So far, we have looked at China's foreign policy changes over the past 40 years and the resulting North Korea policy since its reform and opening. As with all foreign policy decision-making processes, China's North Korea policy was a product of being determined by changes in the internal and external environment. Among them, security instability in Northeast Asia, mainly due to North Korea's nuclear and missile development, has prompted numerous intellectual elites to discuss North Korea's policy. These discussions peaked in the first term of Xi Jinping's reign, a period that encompasses both the third nuclear test in 2013 and the sixth nuclear test in 2017. This phenomenon has become more active due to high expectations from neighboring countries that Xi Jinping's leadership policy on the Korean Peninsula will change.

This paper comprehensively researched the discussion of the white family dispute in China and recorded the study results by finding complementary points of the existing literature that Chinese academia tried to classify and explain policy advice related to Chinese foreign policy. Existing literature had weaknesses, such as mixing different opinions within the same classification or the same North Korean policy prescriptions scattered within the divided school. A simple classification like that in existing literature is helpful for an academic approach. However, considering the diversity and complexity of discussions on North Korea in China, I judged that classifying scholars' arguments lead to an error in continuous hasty generalization and does not contain enough existing opinions. Therefore, this study tried to include as many discussions as possible in one place by answering four questions constantly raised about China's perception of North Korea, rather than classifying various arguments to confirm the extent of each argument.

This paper makes three arguments according to the three research questions presented. First, China's North Korea policy during the reform period has changed

with the characteristics of 'continuity' and 'connectivity.' From the second generation of Chinese leadership to the fifth generation, China's foreign policy follows the policy keywords of the previous generation. In addition, his foreign policy was established by changing or adding a little from the previous one according to the situation and needs of each leadership. The same was true of North Korea policy. China's North Korea policy is consistent with the context of China's overall foreign policy. Although there is a timely urgency from the nuclear crisis, there was no peculiarity that only appeared in North Korea policy.

Second, nevertheless, opinions on North Korea policy by Chinese experts during the reform period have changed dramatically. Among them, opinions that perceive North Korea as a strategic burden have significantly been amplified. China's North Korea policy has briefly passed a period of confusion and silence amid claims by various intellectuals who view North Korea as a blood alliance or strategic asset, a burden, or even a target to abandon in extreme cases. Looking purely at the academic position, opinions greatly differing from the leadership position appeared in many areas. On the other hand, the Global Times, which has the nature of a state-run media, recognized the clear strategic asset value of North Korea and focused on the fact that it was not an object to be discarded. Looking at the overall positions of academia and the Global Times, it has been confirmed that China's abandonment of North Korea, which once confused some observers, is being argued by very few experts.

Third, this study found that the Xi Jinping administration recognized North Korea's nuclear problem, North Korea's strategic values, and unification issues as separate issues and responded in a way that was most in China's national interest according to the needs of the time. It is unlikely, but in fact, the Xi government did not focus on opinions belonging to one faction. Therefore, existing studies that combine the nuclear issue, North Korea's perception of historical, ideological, emotional, and strategic values, and unification as a solution have significant limitations in applying to reality.

After that, this paper presented one additional question. Why did the foreign

policy of seeing North Korea as a strategic asset gain more strength despite the growing number of intellectual elites calling for normal state relations with North Korea? During Xi Jinping's second term, North Korea and China are evaluated as returning to the traditional relationship of the blood alliance. In fact, despite the widespread nationalist view of China's national interest and the remarkable increase in calls to distance itself from North Korea, why did it fail to bring about fundamental changes in its policy toward North Korea?

This study concluded that three major internal and external factors played a role in the background of DPRK policy determination during Xi Jinping era. First, strategic competition between the U.S. and China is prolonged, and as a result, the strategic value of North Korea recognized by China is increasing day by day. Second, foreign policy cannot be easily changed due to the passive and hedging characteristics of policy actors who decide foreign policy in China. Finally, bureaucratic inertia, such as the foreign policy intervention of the People's Support Forces, which values security in the Northeast region, still delays China's change of policy toward North Korea. It not only prevents change, but rather produces a return to a historical perspective.

The study was conducted to provide insight into how Chinese academia perceived North Korea differently according to its different motives and backgrounds for the change in China's North Korea policy, what their North Korea policy proposals are, and to evaluate the actual diplomatic behavior of China's leadership. The results of China's partial discussions on North Korea could lead to mistakes such as touching elephant legs blindfolded and thinking that they know the whole elephant. As suggested in this paper, the current perception of North Korea in China is the result of very complex factors interaction, and scholars have different perceptions of national interests and policy prescriptions. This study was conducted with the aim of examining the overall context of these discussions on North Korea policy and consequently helping to make the most realistic evaluation of any future discussions on North Korea policy. However, scholars who play a decisive role in North Korea

policy do not often disclose their public positions. Therefore, there is a possibility that among scholars who maintain an unclear position, or who are not publicly revealed, will directly influence government policy. In this respect, this study has limitations, which is also the need for continuous research in this field.

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## 국문초록

개혁개방 이후 40년을 지나며 중국의 대북정책은 미묘하게 변화해왔다. 특히 북한의 핵과 미사일 개발로 인한 역내 안보 불안정은 중국의 대북정책과 관련하여 중국내 수많은 지식 엘리트들의 논의를 불러 일으켰다. 이러한 논의의 증가는 2013년 3차 핵실험에서 2017년 6차 핵실험을 모두 아우르는 시기인 시진핑 집권 1기에 최고조에 이르렀다.

이와 관련하여 기존 연구들은 중국 학계가 중국 외교정책과 관련하여 내놓은 정책 제안들을 분류하여 설명하고자 노력하였다. 그러나 한두 가지 분류로는 정리할 수 없는 다양한 국익 인식과 정책 처방들이 존재하다보니 기존 연구들이 제시한 분류들은 몇 가지 한계점들을 지니고 있었다. 따라서 본 연구는 여러 주장들을 구분하기보다 중국의 대북인식에 대해 끊임없이 제기된 네 가지 질문에 답을 하는 형식으로 학계 논의의 범주를 확인하고자 하였다.

본 논문은 전체적으로는 세 가지 논점을 제시한다. 첫째, 개혁기 40년간 중국의 대북정책은 어떻게 변화해왔는지 질문한다. 둘째, 중국 학계 내에서 대북정책에 대한 어떠한 주장들이 등장했고 어느 정도의 범위까지 확장되었는지 살펴본다. 마지막으로, 실제 시진핑 집권기의 북한 정책은 어떠하였는지 학계 논의의 연장선에서 평가한다. 이 연구의 목적은 중국의 대북정책 논의의 폭발적 증가 속에서 세부적인 내용들을 두루 살펴보아 어느 한 편의 주장을 일반화하지 않게 하려 함이다. 아울러, 전문가들의 논의와 중국 지도부의 실제 대북 외교 행태를 구분하고 풀이할 수 있는 통찰력을 주는 것이다. 결과적으로 이를 통해 추후에 어떤 대북정책 논의를 마주하더라도 가장 현실에 가까운 평가를 내릴 수 있게 돕는 것이다.

**Keyword:** China's North Korea policy, Chinese academia, Xi Jinping leadership

**Student Number:** 2018-23339