

## The 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party and North Korea's Congratulatory Message Diplomacy: Implications for North Korea-China Relations and the Development of North Korea

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### Online Series

2021. 07. 05. | CO 21-19

On the occasion of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), North Korea demonstrated through its congratulatory message diplomacy that the friendship in North Korea-China relations will focus more on its role promoting the construction of socialism rather than promoting regional peace in Northeast Asia. Though various interpretations of North Korea's congratulatory message diplomacy are possible, it is difficult to completely disregard the possibility that Kim Jong-un is preparing for negotiations with the U.S. and the Korean Peninsula Peace Process after elevating the relationship between North Korea and China to a new level through summit meetings. There is a need to observe whether the spring of peace in 2018 returns as the spring of peace in 2022. Meanwhile, the perceptions of China in countries involved in the Korean Peninsula Peace Process, including the U.S. and Japan, have become more negative before and after the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the CCP, while North Korea blatantly sides with China. This dynamic of confrontation between South Korea, the U.S., and Japan on the one hand and North Korea, China, and Russia on the other in which each side holds the other side in check will inhibit the two Koreas from taking the initiative on the Korean Peninsula Peace Process. Lastly, there is a need to persuade Kim Jong-un that North Korea can emulate the democratic and prosperous aspects of South Korea, rather than follow the Chinese model based on the institutionalization of politics and the comprehensive leadership of the CCP, to shatter the belief that North Korea can prosper only through nuclear weapons, the construction of socialism, and its blood alliance with China.

After beginning with only 58 members at its 1<sup>st</sup> National Congress, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) now has more than 90 million party members to become the largest political party in the world as it recently celebrated its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary on July 1, 2021. CCP Chairman Xi Jinping, who wore a Mao-style jacket, as well as former President Hu Jintao and other members of the CCP leadership attended the anniversary celebration held at Tiananmen square where approximately 70,000 Chinese people, all without wearing masks, chanted ‘cheers for the CCP’ and ‘cheers for the people of China’ in unison. Chairman Xi boldly proclaimed that “there will never return an era in which the Chinese nation is subjugated or bullied as the people of China have now stood up,” and that “anyone who would attempt to do so will find themselves on a collision course with a great wall of steel forged by over 1.4 billion Chinese people.” From this perspective, it is important to assess what implications the centenary of the CCP will have on bilateral relations between North Korea and China as well as the Korean Peninsula.

Meanwhile, North Korea congratulated the CCP on its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary while also sending a strong message to both China and the U.S. through Kim Jong-un’s ‘congratulatory message diplomacy.’ First of all, Kim Jong-un congratulated the CCP for achieving victory in the revolution and pioneering the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics, as well as its ability to build a strong nation and provide happiness for the people. Specifically, it highly praised the CCP’s accomplishments of comprehensively establishing a prosperous society, escaping poverty, overcoming the health crisis, and generally strengthening China’s power and international status since the 18<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the CCP.<sup>1)</sup> Overall, the substance of North Korea’s congratulatory message is very similar to propaganda by the Chinese government. But a wide gap exists between the accomplishments of the CCP propagated by the CCP and perceived by North Korea on the one hand, and actual views of the CCP’s

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1) “Kim Jong-un, General Secretary of the Workers’ Party of Korea (WPK) and Chairman of the State Affairs Commission of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), sends congratulatory message to comrade Xi Jinping, Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP),” *Rodong Sinmun*, July 1, 2021, page 1 (in Korean).

performance by the international community on the other.

Therefore, this study will first compare Kim Jong-un's messages congratulating the 100<sup>th</sup>, 95<sup>th</sup>, and 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the CCP, respectively, to trace changes in North Korea's views on the North Korea–China relationship. The study will then proceed to evaluate the impact that both the increasingly negative views on China held by countries involved in the Korean Peninsula Peace Process before and after the centenary of the formation of the CCP as well as North Korea's blatant support of China have on the Korean Peninsula Peace Process. Lastly, the study will explore the implications and significance of the Chinese development model of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the CCP on the development of North Korea and peace on the Korean Peninsula.

### **Changes to North Korea's Congratulatory Message Diplomacy and North Korea–China Relations: Will the Spring of Peace Return to the Korean Peninsula in 2022?**

The biggest difference between Kim Jong-un's congratulatory message commemorating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the CCP and his message celebrating the CCP's 95<sup>th</sup> anniversary sent on July 1, 2016, was the fact that the more recent message only mentioned “the promotion of the construction of socialism” as the role of friendly relations between North Korea and China, compared to how the previous message placed bilateral relations in the context of both the “promotion of the construction of socialism” and the “protection of regional peace and security in Northeast Asia.” Kim Jong-un also mentioned that friendly relations between North Korea and China could contribute to the “promotion of the construction of socialism” as well as ‘peace and stability in the region’ in his congratulatory message celebrating the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the CCP during the Hu Jintao era on June 30, 2011, but references to regional peace and stability in Northeast Asia were completely deleted from the congratulatory message commemorating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

There may be various interpretations of why especially the construction of

socialism remained as the sole role of friendly relations between North Korea and China while regional peace and stability were left out. The most plausible explanation might be that it is a sign that North Korea will only concentrate on Party-to-Party relations with a focus on strengthening the traditional socialist friendship with China. North Korea may have concluded that friendly relations between North Korea and China can not contribute to regional peace and stability given the strategic competition and confrontation between the U.S. and China as well as the current situation in which the Korean Peninsula Peace Process has stagnated. On the other hand, it can also be seen as an expression of North Korea's resolve to overcome the current difficulties it faces by focusing on cooperation with China within its strategy of self-reliance. But the possibility that North Korea is preparing for the resumption of bilateral negotiations with the U.S. as well as the Korean Peninsula Peace Process by elevating its relationship with China to a new strategic level can also not be completely disregarded.

Regarding another change in North Korea's congratulatory message diplomacy, five years ago, Kim Jong-un wished that the CCP would achieve great accomplishments in the areas of strengthening the CCP, maintaining social order, continuing economic growth, constructing a socialist society with Chinese characteristics, and rejuvenating the Chinese nation in his congratulatory message commemorating the 95<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the CCP. This reflected both Kim Jong-un's assessment that China had not yet achieved these goals but also his hopes and confidence that the CCP would successfully do so through struggles and perseverance in the not too distant future. In contrast, this year's congratulatory message highly praised the CCP's accomplishments by noting that the path to socialism with Chinese characteristics had been pioneered while the wealth and power of the state, as well as the happiness of the Chinese people, 'have already been achieved,' and further stressing 'all accomplishments achieved through the construction of Chinese socialism.'

Ri Su-yong, Vice Chairman of the 7<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK), was dispatched to Beijing as a special envoy for Kim Jong-un and

met with Chairman Xi on June 1, 2016, while North Korea's 'congratulatory message diplomacy' commemorating the 95<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the CCP on July 1 later that year was viewed as an opening for the restoration of bilateral relations between North Korea and China. Prior to these gestures, North Korea-China relations had become strained due to North Korea's third nuclear test in February 2013 about 20 days before the official inauguration of Chairman Xi's leadership, and bilateral relations further deteriorated due to the sudden cancellation of the Moranbong Band's concert in late 2015 as well as North Korean provocations in 2016 including its fourth nuclear test and long-range missiles test launches.

Under these circumstances, North Korea restored bilateral relations with China through its congratulatory message commemorating the 95<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the CCP in 2016 and the first North Korea-China summit meeting on March 25, 2018, and the spring of peace in 2018 soon followed. In other words, the rehabilitation of North Korea-China relations acted as a cue for the promotion of the Korean Peninsula Peace Process. Moreover, two summit meetings between North Korea and China were held on May 7 and June 19 of 2018, respectively, before and after the Singapore summit meeting between the U.S. and North Korea on June 12, 2018. The fifth North Korea-China summit was held on June 20, 2019, as Chairman Xi visited Pyongyang, right before the trilateral Panmunjom summit meeting between the U.S., South Korea, and North Korea on June 30.

Therefore, Kim Jong-un has so far actively participated in bilateral negotiations with the U.S. and the Korean Peninsula Peace Process after elevating North Korea-China relations to a new level through summit meetings. If North Korea is once again preparing for the resumption of North Korea-U.S. negotiations and the Korean Peninsula Peace Process by 'enhancing and elevating' North Korea's relationship with China 'to a strategic level' through its congratulatory message diplomacy commemorating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the CCP, Kim Jong-un might, considering the COVID-19 situation, first coordinate the schedule for future summit meetings with China through an exchange of high-level officials before and after either the anniversary of the Sino-North Korean Mutual Aid and Cooperation

Friendship Treaty on July 11 or North Korea's Victory Day, or the anniversary of the Korean Armistice Agreement, on July 27, and then actively pursue a state visit to China later this fall or by the winter at the latest. And if a summit meeting between Kim Jong-un and Chairman Xi does indeed occur, North Korea will actively try to utilize the staunch backing of China before bilateral negotiations between North Korea and the U.S. resume. President Moon Jae-in and Kim Jong-un have exchanged personal letters at least once before and after the South Korea-U.S. summit meeting held on May 21, and appear to have discussed potentially hosting online video conferences, though North Korea's reactions have not yet been confirmed. The spring of peace in 2018 may be returning as the possible spring of peace in 2022 may reveal a new path for the Korean Peninsula.

### **North Korea's Blatant Support of China and the Korean Peninsula Peace Process**

According to a survey by the Pew Research Center of 19,000 people from 17 countries in North America, Europe, and Asia conducted between February and May 2021, respondents from South Korea, Japan, and the U.S., all countries directly involved in the Korean Peninsula Peace Process, responded that they held negative views of China. For example, 88% of respondents from Japan, 77% from South Korea, and 76% of respondents from the U.S. held non-friendly views of China. Reasons for their responses included human rights issues in China, lack of trust in Chairman Xi, and China's irresponsibility regarding foreign affairs. Such an increase in negative views of China, coupled with strengthening relations between Russia, North Korea, and China, make agreements on the North Korean nuclear problem and the issue of sanctions difficult as it only intensifies the conflict and competition between the two camps involved in the Korean Peninsula Peace Process, with North Korea, China, and Russia on one side and South Korea, the U.S., and Japan on the other.

David Shambaugh, a professor at the George Washington University, argued during an interview with the Seoul Economic Daily on May 20 that negotiations on the North Korean nuclear problem are unlikely to return to the Six-Party Talks format in which

China played an influential role and instead will continue to proceed through bilateral negotiations between North Korea and the U.S. Shambaugh cautioned against over-estimating China's role in negotiations on North Korea's nuclear weapons. This assessment from an expert on China has a point. But while there is a need to refrain from over-estimating China's role, it is difficult to underestimate it. This is because Kim Jong-un has always tried to receive staunch support from China before entering into negotiations with the U.S. through summit meetings with Chairman Xi. Therefore, the South Korean government needs to objectively evaluate the influence of China and its limitations regarding peace on the Korean Peninsula and the North Korean nuclear problem through close cooperation and coordination with both the U.S. and China.<sup>2)</sup> Through this process, the U.S. and South Korea must discover facilitating roles that China can and is willing to play on the North Korean nuclear problem and persuade it to actively perform such roles.

In his recent congratulatory message, Kim Jong-un stated that "vicious slander and all-round pressure upon the CCP by forces hostile towards the CCP are no more than a desperate last-ditch desperate," thereby unabashedly siding with China on various issues such as China's disputes and confrontations with Western countries including the U.S. on matters related to China's core interests and sanctions on China. In particular, the congratulatory message stressed that "the WPK and the people of North Korea steadfastly support the accomplishments of the CCP in promoting the construction of socialism to protect the sovereignty of the state, complete territorial integrity, and world peace," thereby conveying its intent to ardently support China's efforts to protect its sovereignty and territorial integrity on issues

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2) During the session on the "Future of North Korea" at the Asian Leadership Conference on June 30, former U.S. Special Representative for North Korea policy Joseph Yun stressed the need for quadrilateral negotiations including South Korean and China in addition to the mainstream approach of bilateral negotiations between North Korea and the U.S., while Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs noted that while China is not the entire answer, it may be part of the solution to the North Korean nuclear problem. "The Strength of the Biden Administration is its Openness, North Korea must not waste this Opportunity," *Chosun Ilbo*, July 1, 2021 (in Korean). During an interview with the *Financial Times* on May 4, Secretary of State Tony Blinken mentioned that the U.S. would discuss the North Korean nuclear problem with China.

including Hong Kong, the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, and Taiwan, all areas where China is not willing to concede.

North Korea's position on these matters coincides with its approach of 'responding to power with power and goodwill with goodwill' vis-a-vis the U.S. which it announced during the 8<sup>th</sup> Party Congress of the WPK in early 2021. In other words, North Korea is competing against the U.S. by siding with China by projecting North Korea-U.S. relations onto U.S.-China relations. Like China, North Korea is currently sanctioned by the U.S., and while the extent of sanctions against China and North Korea are different, both countries similarly face a situation in which they are compelled to pursue self-reliant policies.

North Korea's projection of its situation onto China is not only observed in its congratulatory message but also in an editorial published by the *Rodong Sinmun* on July 1. The editorial claimed that "though hostile forces are increasing its degree of criticism and pressure to destroy the stability of the Chinese society and inhibit its growth, this will not stand in the way of the Chinese people that trust the CCP and are following the path that they have chosen."<sup>3)</sup> In other words, the North Korean regime is urging the people of North Korea to trust the WPK by emphasizing that the faith of the Chinese people in the CCP is the method through which the obstruction and pressure by hostile forces can be overcome.

In an article published by the *Rodong Sinmun* on June 21, the Chinese Ambassador to North Korea Li Jinjun explained how "the people of North Korea have consistently achieved new great accomplishments by solidly uniting behind the WPK," thereby highlighting the legitimacy of accomplishments by noting that the leadership of the CCP and the WPK, as well as their trust in their respective people, have resulted in the achievement of various goals.<sup>4)</sup>

3) "Fervently Commemorating the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)," *Rodong Sinmun*, July 1, 2021, page 1 (in Korean).

4) "Let's Jointly Explore the Beautiful Future of the North Korea-China Relationship with Unwavering Original Intent and Firm Aspirations," *Rodong Sinmun*, June 21, 2021, page 3 (in Korean)

Soon after the issues of strengthening of the South Korea–U.S. alliance and the Taiwan Straits, which China is sensitive to, was discussed during the South Korea–U.S. summit meeting on May 21, the Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with Ri Ryong-nam, North Korea’s Ambassador to China, at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse rather unusually to discuss preparations for celebrations of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Sino–North Korean Mutual Aid and Cooperation Friendship Treaty while stressing “the friendship between North Korea and China forged through blood.” As strategic competition between the U.S. and China intensifies, the dynamic in which both the South Korea–U.S. alliance and the North Korea–China alliance equally strengthens and mutually hold the other side in check has the potential to inhibit the two Koreas from taking a lead in inter–Korean relations.

### **Implications for the Development of North Korea: Can China be North Korea’s Model of Development?**

Many observers are paying close attention to whether the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the CCP will be an important milestone in Chairman Xi’s path to long-term rule. But the pivotal aspect for long-term rule by Chairman Xi is that the concentration of power and the institutionalization of politics can be complementary rather than conflicting. During the Xi Jinping era in China, there has been the trend of power consolidation around Chairman Xi within its collective leadership system. At the same time, the institutionalization of China’s Party, government, and state systems are also underway. Typically, we generally anticipate institutional reform to be weakened as one-man rule is strengthened. But the crucial feature of the Chinese model under Chairman Xi is that a system of one-man rule and enhanced institutionalization is concurrently in progress. This is because although institutionalization may place restraints on power, it can also strengthen it through legitimation.

The collective leadership system under Chairman Xi is also perceived as a ruling system of collective leadership. Whether Chairman Xi decides to resurrect the position of Party Chair of the CCP to further strengthen one-man rule or whether

the right to make the final decision on important matters will be granted to the General Secretary of the CCP will both serve as clear indicators that will determine Chairman Xi's long-term rule. It is difficult to know whether Chairman Xi's consolidation of power is the result of either a consensus among the elite or politics of fear, but what is clear is that the ongoing process reflects Chairman Xi's own desire for power to a certain extent, as witnessed in the revision of the Chinese constitution and inclusion of Xi Jinping's thought in the amended constitution of the CCP.

Therefore, the consolidation of power during the Xi Jinping era can not be understood separate from the institutionalization of China. In other words, institutional reform has not regressed or stopped but has rather changed in the direction of strengthening the rules of the CCP, institutionalizing the CCP, and institutionalizing the rule of the CCP. And in the process of pursuing not only institutionalization of the relationship between the CCP and the Chinese government but also comprehensively strengthening the leadership of the CCP, Chairman Xi has utilized the anti-corruption policy as the main tool.<sup>5)</sup>

The other serious problem that China is currently facing is increasing inequality that has worsened ever since Deng Xiaoping proposed the theory of 'get rich first' in the process of implementing the 'open door policy.' According to statistics published by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) in 2019, inequality in China had worsened so much so that its Gini coefficient was recorded at 0.465, close to that of the U.S. at 0.480. Therefore, the Chinese government is trying to reform Deng Xiaoping's theory of 'get rich first' through its experiment of 'realizing common prosperity' currently underway in the Zhejiang province. There is a need to pay attention to whether this experiment succeeds and the Zhejiang province model is applied nationwide.

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5) Regarding the one-man rule system and greater institutionalization during the Xi Jinping era, see, Young-nam Cho, "100 Years of the Chinese Communist Party and Evaluating China during the Xi Jinping Era," Special Spring Conference Marking the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the CCP by the *Korean Academic Association of Contemporary Chinese Studies*, "100 Years of the CCP, What has China Achieved and Where is it Going?" June 29, 2021, presentation materials and discussion (in Korean).

The reason why North Korea's Ambassador to Ri Ryong-nam visited Zhejiang province on June 8 as his first local region in China to visit was not only because it is the breeding ground for private companies such as Alibaba and the political birthplace of Xi Jinping but also because it was chosen as the laboratory for China's first socialist common prosperity experiment. An official document of the CCP declared that common prosperity is "not only an economic issue but an important political one on which the ruling foundation of the CCP hinges." North Korea's Ambassador to China probably learned the reform policies currently underway and explored whether they can be applied to North Korea by inspecting the region at the forefront of China's socio-economic experiment.

Centered around its policy of mixed ownership and modernization of corporations, the Chinese government is currently pursuing reform of state-owned companies but also stronger regulation of private companies such as Alibaba. Comprehensively strengthening the leadership of the CCP is a pivotal part of these reforms. Through its Party press release published in 2020, the Central Organization Department of the CCP announced that the rate of Party organization among the approximately 15.61 million private companies in China was high at 73% as of late 2019. This shows that the penetration of the CCP into private companies has rapidly increased since its opening policy.

From the perspective of the international relations aspects of the Chinese model, if the expansion of influence and consolidation of power by the CCP becomes a diplomatic issue while the conflict and competition with the U.S. persist and while China continues to pursue its dual circulation strategy, it may help enhance the justification of its rule domestically but is likely to create considerable problems diplomatically. Moreover, if the CCP gains the authority to make foreign policy decisions, it may precipitate tensions with liberal democratic countries on countless fronts in international relations. For example, if the CCP decides to directly intervene to actively try solving the problems on issues like Hong Kong and Taiwan, the collective outcry and resistance from the U.S. and other Western countries that share the values and ideals of democracy and human rights will inevitably become greater.<sup>6)</sup>

China has consistently proposed Chinese-style democracy as an alternative to the multi-party democratic election systems in Western countries. "China's Political Party System" White Paper published by China's State Council Information Office on June 25 describes China's consultative democracy as "a system in which, different from Western two-party, multi-party, or single-party systems, the CCP leads while coexisting with various political parties in the long-run through cooperation and consultation." But one can only seriously question whether the term democracy can be used to describe a political system of single-party dictatorship that is without democratic elections, fair competition among parties, or meaningful transitions of power.

The North Korean regime recently established an Export Processing Zone (EPZ) in Musan-gun in North Hamgyong province located near the North Korea-China border. It appears that this EPZ will mostly manage the production of goods based on raw materials from China and their re-exportation to China.<sup>7)</sup> In the post-COVID-19 era, it is likely that the North Korean regime will use such consigned processing methods to circumvent sanctions on North Korea. On May 13, North Korea's diplomatic delegation to China also visited the exhibit hall for the Xiongan New Area development project, designed to relocate the non-capital functions of Beijing, in which the Chinese government has invested 400 trillion won to its construction to learn about the construction of infrastructure and policies for green ecology development, and also explore the possibility of applying them to North Korea.

In conclusion, incentives must be provided to North Korea so that it reduces its excessive economic dependence on China and considers inter-Korean economic

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6) Young-nam Cho, "100 Years of the Chinese Communist Party and Evaluating China during the Xi Jinping Era," Special Spring Conference Marking the 100th Anniversary of the CCP by the *Korean Academic Association of Contemporary Chinese Studies*, "100 Years of the CCP, What has China Achieved and Where is it Going?" June 29, 2021, discussion (in Korean).

7) Hye-yeon Yang, "North Korea Resumes Trade with China and Establishes an Export Processing Zone (EPZ) near the Border with China," Trade Mission in Hanoi, Vietnam, KOTRA, May 27, 2021 (in Korean).

cooperation as an opportunity to overcome a crisis. In particular, there is a need to, through close coordination between South Korea and the U.S., receive an exemption to sanctions to resume operation of the Kaesong industrial complex in order to revitalize consigned processing between the two Koreas, rather than that with China. And though the movement of goods or the provision of aid is currently impossible, inter-Korean exchanges can be increased through knowledge-sharing projects related to city development in the areas of city maintenance and city planning in which North Korea is interested. And more fundamentally, there is a need to persuade Kim Jong-un that North Korea can learn from the democratic and prosperous aspects of South Korea, rather than follow the Chinese model based on the institutionalization of politics and the comprehensive leadership of the CCP, to shatter the belief that North Korea can prosper only through nuclear weapons, the construction of socialism, and its blood alliance with China. It must be constantly explained to Kim Jong-un to persuade him that sustainable economic growth will only be eventually possible through the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, normalized relations between North Korea and the U.S., the subsequent complete withdrawal of sanctions on North Korea, and the gradual implementation of an open-door policy implemented through economic development zones. ©KINU 2021

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