

Kim Jong Il's China Visit and China's Strategic Diplomacy

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1. Defining the Issues

- Chairman Kim Jong Il's strategic, undisclosed visit to China from May 3-7, 2010 (5 days and 4 nights) the first such visit in about 4 years
 - Tours of port facilities, factories, and technical development zones at Dalian and Tianjin
 - Meetings with high-level Chinese officials including Premier Hu Jintao
- Because the conditions of this trip differ considerably from those of the past, international attention is drawn to questions of Kim Jong Il's objectives and China's intentions in inviting him
- North Korea is facing grave concerns including overcoming the extreme economic difficulties which followed its currency reform and preparing a smooth succession for 3rd son Kim Jong Un
- As the key organizer of the 6-Party Talks, China is pushing for North Korea to return to the talks
 - China seeks to separate the reopening of the 6-Party Talks from the *Cheonan* investigation
- Accordingly, after a review of Chairman Kim's previous China visits, this paper will analyze the circumstances and objectives behind Chairman Kim's visit, the circumstances and objectives behind China's invitation, and the results of this China visit, and consider in-depth the relevant issues of concern to South Korea's policy-makers.

2. Chairman Kim's Previous China Visits

A. Precedents

i. 2000 China Visit

- From May 29-31 (3 days 2 nights), Chairman Kim made his first China visit since officially taking office an unofficial friendly visit to Beijing.
 - Key delegation members: Cho Myong Rok, Kim Yong Chun, Kim Guk Tae, Kim Yong Soon, Kim Yang Gon
- At a summit meeting, Jiang Zemin and Chairman Kim reached agreement on the Inter-Korean Summit and discussed the situation on the peninsula, then toured the IT facility at Zhongguancun.
 - Accompanied by Hu Jintao, Li Peng, Zhu Rongji, Li Ruihuan
- As hoped for, the visit achieved a restoration of friendly ties between China and North Korea, China's promise of economic aid, and agreement on hosting the Inter-Korean Summit (2000.6.15)

ii. 2001 China Visit

- From January 15-20 (6 days 5 nights), Chairman Kim made an unofficial friendly visit to Shanghai and Beijing, and held a summit with Premier Jiang Zemin.
 - Key delegation members: Kim Young Chun, Yun Hyung Mook, Kim Guk Tae, Chung Ha Chul, Kang Sok Ju, Kim Yang Gon, Pak Song Bong, Hyun Chol Hae, Pak Jae Gyung
 - Meetings with Zhu Rongji, Hu Jintao, Wei Jianxing, and others
- North Korea's objectives were to make field visits to Chinese development sites and secure Chinese aid.
 - Chairman Kim praised Shanghai's development, calling it a "miracle."
- The results of the visit were seen in the 2002 7.1 economic adjustment measure and the September announcement about creating a Shinuiju special economic zone.

iii. 2004 China visit

- From April 19-21 (3 days 2 nights), amid the 2nd nuclear crisis, Chairman Kim made an unofficial friendly visit to Beijing and Tianjin.
 - Key delegation members: Kim Young Chun, Pak Bong Ju, Yun Hyung Mook, Kang Sok Ju
 - Met with all 9 members of the Party Political Bureau Standing Committee, the highest organ



of state power in China

- China and North Korea agreed to strengthen ties, and reached agreements on the nuclear issue, restarting the 6-Party Talks, and economic cooperation
 - Proposal of 16 policy points (traditional inheritance, future aims, good neighborly relations, stronger cooperation)
 - Resolving North Korea’s rational security concerns, denuclearization and peaceful resolution through dialogue, and re-starting the 6-Party Talks
- North Korea restored its friendly relations with the new Chinese leadership and Party-to-Party relations, and acquired Chinese aid and economic cooperation; China expanded its influence by persuading North Korea to attend the 6-Party Talks

iv. 2006 China visit

- In return for Hu Jin Tao’s visit to North Korea (2005.10), from January 10-18 (8 days 7 nights) Kim Jong Il made an unofficial friendly visit to Wuhan, Yichang, Guangzhou, Zhuhai, Shenzhen, and Beijing
 - Key delegation members: Pak Bong Ju, Kang Sok Ju, Pak Ki Nam, Ri Gwang Ho, Roh Doo Chul
 - Met with all members of the Political Bureau Standing Committee, including Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao
- Major objectives were responding to US pressure and acquiring Chinese diplomatic and economic aid
- At the summit, both sides agreed to “work together to overcome the impasse in the 6-Party Talks and expand the friendly, cooperative relationship.”
- At the summit, both sides discussed applying China’s development experiences to North Korea, and agreed to strengthen economic cooperation on the basis of “reciprocal cooperation and joint development.”
 - Hu Jintao stated that “We support North Korea in determining its own most suitable path for development.”
 - Kim Jong Il praised Chinese-style modernization and reform/opening.



B. Characteristics

- Kim Jong Il's 4 China visits shared the following characteristics:
 - Because of issues of safety and secrecy, all visits were of an unofficial friendly nature
 - Emphasis on promoting traditional ties of friendship and cooperation
 - Field visits to Chinese reform/opening sites and provision of unconditional Chinese aid
- China - North Korea summits resulted in a strengthened alliance, economic aid and cooperation
 - Strategic benefits for China included stable management of North Korean issues and expanded influence; strategic benefits for North Korea included economic and diplomatic aid essential for regime maintenance
- However, because China - North Korea cooperation was built on a basis of what each side needed, rather than established mutual trust and shared benefits / goals, it faced limitations
 - As an example, after the 2006 visit, North Korea conducted missile and nuclear tests

〈Figure 1 – History of Kim Jong Il's Visits to China〉

	Dates	Character	Key Objectives	Significance	Results
1 st	2000.5.29–31	Unofficial friendly visit	Prior agreement on inter-Korean summit	First visit since Kim Jong Il came to power	Inter-Korean summit, economic aid and cooperation
2 nd	2001.1.15–20	Unofficial friendly visit	Field visits to sites of reform/opening	Kim Jong Il's acknowledgment of the success of Chinese reform & opening	7.1 economic measures, Shinuiju special zone, economic aid and cooperation
3 rd	2004.4.19–21	Unofficial friendly visit	Establishing cooperative relations with China's new leaders	Establishment of cooperation with new Chinese leaders, traditional Party-to-Party ties restored	economic aid and cooperation, restarting the 6-Party Talks
4 th	2006.1.10–18	Unofficial friendly visit	Acquiring economic and diplomatic assistance	Improved cooperative relations, modified principles of economic cooperation	Despite economic aid, North Korea conducts missile launches and 1 st nuclear test



3. Background and Objectives of Kim Jong Il's China Visit

- Establishing a stable succession system
- Acquiring Chinese aid for regime maintenance

1. Requesting Chinese economic aid for regime maintenance

- To relieve mounting inflation and restore the planned economy, on November 30, 2009 North Korea enacted a currency reform, but the restoration of the planned economy failed, and due to skyrocketing prices of food and other goods the middle and lower classes experienced significant hardships.
- The North Korean regime exposed its own limitations as it was unable to distribute consumer goods in place of the markets.
- Thus, Kim Jong Il's China visit was for the purpose of acquiring Chinese aid and investment to support the regime.
 - Kim Yang Gon spoke to Chinese corporations at Dalian about investing in the “Daepung Group
 - Kim Jong Il toured port facilities and factories at Dalian, as well as port facilities and the economic and technical development zone at Tianjin.
 - Kim Jong Il officially requested investment from Premier Hu Jintao.

2. Acquiring Chinese support for a stable succession system

- North Korea's most important political concern is establishing a succession system in preparation for the post-Kim Jong Il era.
- For this purpose, the North Korean authorities tried to restore central control via the currency reform and remove elements hostile to the succession system.
 - The hostile lower classes' accumulation of wealth and political/economic power through market activities have increased the threat to the regime
- As a result, the economic base of the lower class and the market traders, who constitute the economic middle class, has been extremely weakened.
- However, dissatisfaction with the authorities has grown among the people, particularly the market middle classes who have fallen into despair and hardship due to economic collapse



- People in the large cities and the border areas have begun dropping the honorific title “General” when speaking of Chairman Kim Jong Il
- The present-day North Korean people have changed since the time of the “Arduous March.”
- The system has destabilized due to economic troubles.
- The North Korean authorities strengthened control of the people’s ideology and information through such measures as “50-day struggle” (2010.1.2-2.20), border area controls, and redistributing identification cards, while making “improving the people’s consciousness” their first priority.
 - Leading up to the 65 anniversary of the founding of the party in October, there was a desperate need to show improvement in the peoples’ livelihoods
- In this situation, China’s understanding and support of the hereditary succession and economic aid are essential to secure the succession.
 - Securing implicit support from China, which had criticized hereditary rule in socialist countries

4. Background and Objectives behind China’s Invitation to Chairman Kim Jong Il

1 Basis of China’s North Korea Policy

- On the basis of China’s foreign policy, which is creating a peaceful environment for economic growth and gaining influence as a responsible power, China’s objectives regarding the Korean peninsula can be summarized as “maintaining peace and stability for China’s modernization” and “boosting China’s position as a great power through influence on the Korean peninsula.”
- China’s previous official statements regarding its Korea policy are summarized as follows.
 - Emphasis on traditional ties of friendship and cooperation
 - 16 policy points: (traditional ties, future direction, trust and friendship, strong cooperation)
 - Expanding economic cooperation under the principles of “reciprocal cooperation, joint development” and “government guidance, business participation, market management”
 - Support for North Korea’s rational security concerns
 - Support for North Korea’s “in our own style” socialist construction, normalized relations with the US and Japan, changing the armistice to a peace treaty, independent peaceful reunification,



denuclearization through dialogue, North Korea’s peaceful use of nuclear technology, global fairness and a rational world order.

- Opposition to North Korea possessing nuclear weapons, and to North Korea quitting the 6-Party Talks
- Considering the above-mentioned Chinese policy goals, peace and stability in North Korea and peaceful resolution of the nuclear issue are publicly stated goals, while maintaining and supporting the North Korean system (the Kim Jong Il regime) and increasing influence in North Korea can be considered as unofficial goals.
 - The highest priority among these is peace and stability in North Korea.

2 Objective of the Invitation

2.1 Stable management of North Korea

- China does not recognize North Korea as a nuclear power and objects to its nuclear programs, but it views peace and stability in its neighboring region as more important and so it opposes military intervention or strong sanctions as a means of pressuring North Korea to denuclearize.
 - China fears that sanctions and pressure will not only fail to achieve denuclearization, but will prompt North Korea to take extreme measures or bring about regime collapse, making the situation even more unstable and uncertain.
 - Further, considering North Korea’s strategic and geopolitical value as a barrier against the naval forces of potential rivals Japan and the US, China seeks to maintain the North Korean regime and gain greater influence over it.
- Particularly, China judges that a policy of “persuasion and appeasement” will work better than a policy of “coercion and pressure” summit meetings can maximize this.
 - Extended invitation to Chairman Kim Jong Il since last year
- In the goal of strengthening relations with North Korea by inviting Chairman Kim to visit, China shows its desire to preemptively avoid acts by North Korea that might heighten tensions
 - China needs a stable regional environment to support sustainable growth
 - In particular, it needs to successfully host the Shanghai Expo (April-October), the Asian Games in Guangzhou (November)

2.2 Enticing North Korea to return to the 6-Party Talks

- The 6-Party Talks are an important stepping stone to China’s greater role in Northeast Asia, so



even after North Korea's 2nd nuclear test China acted as an intermediary between North Korea and the US to restart the talks.

- Compromise plan: US → North Korea meeting → preliminary talks → actual talks
- Thus, China's main motive in inviting Kim Jong Il was to build up the state of North Korean relations in order to restart the 6-Party Talks.
 - North Korea's price for restarting the talks is aid, economic cooperation, and implicit acceptance of its succession plans.

2.3 Showing off China's role as North Korea's manager/tutor

- By demonstrating the two countries' close relationship through visits by Kim Jong Il, China shows off its influence over North Korea
 - In summit meetings China acts as a go-between, communicating to North Korea the wishes of the international community and vice versa
- China uses its influence over North Korea as a strategic asset for leverage in its US relations
 - Used strategically to cement China's hegemony in the Korean peninsula and throughout East Asia
 - China considers that the moral obligation to stabilize North Korea and bring it back into international dialogue lies not with China but with the US by the principle of "US responsibility (role)"

2.4 Pursuing strategic cooperation and encouraging reform/opening

- In addition to increasing its influence through support of the North Korean system in exchange for participation in the 6-Party Talks, another reason for China to strengthen its economic cooperation with North Korea is to entice it towards reform and opening.
- China is motivated to achieve sustainable development of its 3 northeastern provinces, and for this to happen economic cooperation with its neighbor, North Korea, is essential.
- In particular, as China has ratified the "Coastal Economic Corridor Development Plan" for Liaoning Province (July 2009) and its "Chang-Ji-Tu Development Zone Plan" for Jilin Province (August 2009), it needs concrete agreements with North Korea on the practical implementation of cooperative development to connect the areas of Dandong-Shinuiju and Tumen-Rasun.
 - Construction of a new Amnok River bridge, and rights to use the No. 1 wharf in Rasun.



5. US and Japanese views of Kim Jong Il's China visit

1 The US view

- The US gave prior approval of the China - North Korea summit and particularly requested that China convey its wishes regarding the 6-Party Talks.
- After the *Cheonan* investigation results were announced, the US officially stated that it will need to consider whether or not to re-open the 6-Party Talks.
 - Expression of total support for the South Korean investigation
- The US position is that North Korea must return to the 6-Party Talks, and that before any meaningful discussion is possible North Korea must take positive steps towards denuclearization.
 - North Korean compliance with its denuclearization obligations and execution of its agreements are prerequisites to improved US-North Korean relations.

2 The Japanese view

- Kim Jong Il's choice of the port city of Dalian, a lively center of foreign investment, as his first stopover shows that he acknowledges that foreign investment is unavoidable in order to resolve North Korea's serious economic problems.
- In the analysis of Japanese observers, the key objectives of Kim Jong Il's China visit is establishing support for the succession and securing Chinese aid to maintain the regime.
 - Through this visit Kim Jong Il gained China's "implicit understanding" on the succession of Kim Jong Eun.
- Regarding the 6-Party Talks, Foreign Minister Okada said in a press conference (2010.5.7) that due to the suspicions of North Korea's involvement in the *Cheonan* incident, in the near term re-starting the talks would be problematic.
 - They suggest long-term suspension of the 6-Party Talks if North Korea's involvement becomes clear.



6. Results of Kim Jong Il's China visit

1. Major items

- North Korean National Defence Chairman Kim Jong Il and Chinese Premier Hu Jintao held a summit on May 5th; the results of Kim's visit including a report of the summit were announced in a release by the Chinese state-operated Xinhua News Service on May 7th and an editorial by North Korea's Rodong Shinmun on May 9th.
- During this visit, Chairman Kim Jong Il toured Shenyang in Liaoning Province, Dalian, and Tianjin, and also visited the Boao Biotech Co. Ltd in Beijing.
- The following is a summary of the statements by Premier Hu and Chairman Kim, mainly condensed from the Xinhua news release.

A. Statements by Premier Hu

i. Warm welcome to Kim Jong Il and emphasis on continued development of relations

- Kim Jong Il's visit is welcome; China is grateful for North Korea's expression of condolences after the earthquake in Yushu, Qinghai Province, and for its participation in the Shanghai Expo
- "The tradition of friendship between China and North Korea is a valuable asset to both our peoples; developing that relationship over the course of time and passing it down from one generation to the next is a historical responsibility shared by both our countries."

ii. Proposal of 5 areas for cooperation in order to advance relations to a new level

- First, maintaining close relations through continued high-level exchanges
 - Flexible and diverse methods, e.g. hosting visits by leaders of both countries, dispatching special envoys, and conveying personal messages
- Second, stronger strategic communication
 - Substantive communication, regularly or as needed, on items of mutual concern such as major issues concerning the domestic and foreign policies of both countries, governing experiences, etc.
- Third, more substantial trade cooperation
 - The relevant bureaus of both countries will conduct serious discussions on deepening economic cooperation



- Fourth, increased personnel exchanges
 - Efforts to pass on the friendly relationship to the next generation, through more exchanges in various areas, such as culture, education, sports, and particularly youth exchanges.
- Fifth, stronger cooperation on global and regional problems

B. Statements by Chairman Kim

i. Complete agreement on Premier Hu’s 5 proposals

ii. Emphasis on both countries’ continued friendly relations

- Continuing through the generations, “The traditional ties of friendship between our countries which were nurtured by our previous leaders have withstood the hardships and trials of the era, and we must ensure that they are not disrupted by the passage of time or the changing of generations.”
- “From the strategic, long-term view, the North Korean government and party must preserve the relationship between our two countries and continue to pass it on.”

iii. Expectation of investment in North Korea by Chinese businesses

- “Korea welcomes investment by Chinese businesses operating on joint-venture principles, and hopes to improve the standard of business cooperation between our countries.”

iv. Expression of basic position on the 6–Party Talks

- There is no change in North Korea’s position on the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, and it wishes to work with the countries involved to create favorable conditions for re-starting the talks.
- North Korea highly praises China’s direct efforts and contributions to progress in the 6-Party Talks

v. Invitation to Premier Hu to visit North Korea

- North Korea hopes that Premier Hu will visit North Korea again at a convenient time



2. Characteristics

- This China tour marks the 5th such visit by Chairman Kim in the new millennium amidst the worsening aftereffects of the November 30th currency reform and the continuously stalled 6-Party Talks, this visit has been anticipated since the beginning of this year.
 - In particular this visit occurs amid speculation about North Korean involvement in the sinking of the *Cheonan* on March 26th.
- During this trip Kim Jong Il visited major sites of development such as Dalian and Tianjin, and also toured a biotechnology park with Premier Hu Jintao.
- China received Chairman Kim with the highest degree of ceremony, displaying the traditional friendly relationship between the two countries.
 - All 9 Members of the Political Bureau Standing Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, including Premier Hu Jintao and Prime Minister Wen Jiabao, met with Kim Jong Il.
- Also, both leaders showed off the continuously developing relationship between their countries.
- As North Korea is preparing its succession structure, Kim Jong Il particularly emphasized that the China-North Korea relationship must not change in the future
 - The editorial in North Korea's Rodong Shinmun on May 5th directed attention to the task of cultivating the young generation, saying "The Chinese Party's unchanging desire for Korea-China friendship to shine on through the generations"
- Premier Hu Jintao pressed for consultation with North Korea on "major domestic and foreign issues" alongside development of the bilateral relationship through his 5 proposals.
- While Kim Jong Il emphasized Chinese investment in North Korea, Premier Wen Jiabao expressed the desire to "pass on China's experiences in reform and opening" thus both emphasize economic cooperation, yet subtle differences between the two sides are apparent.
 - North Korea's Rodong Sinmun failed to mention Kim Jong Il's statement that he "welcomes investment by Chinese businesses"
- On the nuclear issue, attention was focused on whether or not North Korea would announce its intention to restart the 6-Party Talks, but at this summit there was no progress aside from a reiteration of their basic position, which appears to show a slight difference with the Chinese position.
 - The Xinhua News Agency reported "There is no change in North Korea's position on the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, and it wishes to work with the countries involved to



create favorable conditions for re-starting the talks.

- The Rodong Shinmun reported “According to the 9.19 Joint Declaration, both sides agreed to work together to achieve the goal of a nuclear-free Korean peninsula.”

7. South Korea’s strategic concerns

1. Limitations of Chairman Kim Jong Il’s China visit

A. North Korea’s severe economic problems and the limits of Chinese aid

- During his China visit, Chairman Kim formally requested Chinese economic aid, giving an indication of the severity of North Korea’s economic troubles.
- The current North Korean food situation resembles that of the “Arduous March” period.
 - Food shortages in the inland area around Dancheon are extremely serious.
- However, Chairman Kim failed to secure promises of economic aid and investment from the Chinese leadership to the degree hoped for.
 - China’s leadership did not express high enthusiasm for economic aid and investment in North Korea.
 - Chairman Kim returned home one day early

B. Limits to achieving a turnaround in restarting the 6-Party Talks

- North Korea reaffirmed China’s support regarding the 6-Party Talks and tried to achieve a turnaround in the stalemate, but when the situation did not develop as anticipated, their statement on restarting the talks was vague.
- North Korea said only that it hoped “to create favorable conditions for restarting the 6-Party Talks,” and did not make a clear statement on returning to the Talks.
 - A strategic statement in consideration of a possible peace treaty

2. China’s efforts in increase its influence, and the limits of China-DPRK relations

- Through Chairman Kim’s visit China showed off its influence on North Korea, but analysis reveals limits in the China-DPRK relationship.



- We can deduce that China applied a combination of aid and pressure to persuade North Korea to return to the 6-Party Talks, yet this did not even elicit a statement on a preliminary meeting to discuss the Talks.
 - At the meeting of foreign ministers of South Korea, China, and Japan in Kyeongju (5.15), China reiterated its previous proposal of “US-DPRK talks → preliminary meeting for the 6-Party Talks → actual 6-Party Talks”
- Following the China-DPRK summit, there were proclamations on advancements in China-DPRK relations or large-scale economic aid.
- Further, after Kim Jong Il returned from China, North Korea made an announcement about its own success in creating a nuclear fusion reaction (5.12).
 - In response, China made rare negative comments via the China Daily and Huanqiu Shibao newspapers.
 - Exposure of limits in China’s influence on the North Korean nuclear issue

3. Systematic strengthening of South Korea’s strategic dialogue with China

- While proposing improved “strategic communication” with North Korea on internal and external affairs, China emphasized that the China-DPRK relationship must develop over time, and endeavored to increase its influence over North Korea.
- This indicates that China intends to speak for North Korea’s interests in its role as “North Korea’s mentor” and to establish its strategic role as an arbitrator.
- Thus, South Korea must work separately to develop its strategic dialogue with China.
 - Strengthening of South Korea’s strategic bonds and understanding with China

