

## **Beijing's Dilemma and Preference on the Korean Peninsula: Responses to the 2010 Korean Crises**

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The ROK is a major contributing partner to China's economic prosperity. The ROK is China's third largest trading partner and the fourth largest investor. The total amount of trade with China, including Hong Kong, is bigger than the sum of the next nine trading partners' all combined, including the United States and Japan, the second and third largest partners, respectively. However, despite the deep economic ties between the two countries, Seoul was frustrated with Beijing's support for Pyongyang during the 2010 Korean crises. China faces a dilemma in the 2010 Korean crises in its efforts to maintain equidistant between Seoul and Pyongyang. However, Beijing is likely to lean toward Pyongyang because doing so will contribute to China's inherent national goals: continue the CCP's political rule, preserve national integrity, and strengthen its global power status. In addition, due to the 1961 Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with Pyongyang, Beijing's support for Pyongyang is likely to persist. However, there is a limit; Pyongyang should not step beyond Beijing's level of tolerance. The degree of tolerance is the dilemma that Beijing faces, and at the moment, it prefers to maintain equidistant between Seoul and Pyongyang. However, if Pyongyang adopts a Chinese style of reform, the dilemma could disappear. Beijing should persuade Pyongyang to follow China's reform and open policy. Whether this will succeed or not depends on the self-confidence of Pyongyang's inner circle in both the domestic and international environments.

**Key Words:** The 2010 Korean crises, politico-economic linkage model, China's dilemma, China's preference, China's national goals

### **Introduction**

The Korean Peninsula has faced many crises in the international community since its liberation from the Japanese colonial rule. The

liberation from the distressful colonial rule was an undeniable bliss for Korea; however, for the people, it was also the beginning of unbearable pain that bore little comparison to the thirty five years of colonial rule. Since the liberation, Korea was divided into two states, the Republic of Korea (ROK) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), and suffered under the innate confrontation that resulted from the global Cold War structure. The legacy of the Cold War still remains on the Korean Peninsula.

Along with the U.S., China has been, and will continue to play a crucial role on the Korean Peninsula. From Seoul's perspective, Beijing's behaviors appear equivocal compared to Washington's stance. This is especially because China seems to be maintaining an equidistant policy toward the two Koreas; economically leaning toward Seoul, and politically toward Pyongyang. During the 2010 Korean crises, Seoul recognized that its close economic friend was actually politically distant.

Initially, the Cold War structure emerged from the then two superpowers, the U.S. and the former Soviet Union. The two urged the separation of Korea and in 1948 established their separated governments in Seoul and Pyongyang. China saved Pyongyang from their desperate situation during the Korean War (1950-53). After the disintegration of the former Soviet Union in 1991, China, along with the U.S., exercised a more decisive influence over the Korean Peninsula. Moreover, unlike Moscow, Beijing's role and influence over Seoul and Pyongyang has been much more instrumental since it has diplomatic relations with both countries. Beijing is crucial for Pyongyang's national and regime security while at the same time, is Seoul's biggest trading partner.

The cooperation between Beijing and Seoul in the economic realm is undeniable. Since the normalization of relations in 1992, economic and business exchanges between the two have dramatically increased. At present, China is the ROK's largest trading partner. For China, Seoul is its third largest trading partner and fourth largest investor.

Nevertheless, by supporting Pyongyang, Beijing's responses to the 2010 Korean crises had strained Seoul-Beijing relations. The question

remains, why had Beijing supported Pyongyang, ignoring the hopes of the international community and its friendly neighbor, the ROK?

Beijing wants to grow into a global power, but this requires support from the international community, its neighboring countries, and the U.S. The international community generally agreed on imposing sanctions on Pyongyang's brutal behavior; China, however, seemed unmindful of the consensus. China agreed with the UN Security Council's statement to tighten sanctions on Pyongyang after the regime's rocket launch on April 12, 2012.<sup>1</sup> However, the leadership in Beijing did not strictly condemn Pyongyang with direct words but rather requested all concerned parties to exercise prudence in order to maintain stability in the region and the Korean Peninsula.

In this paper, I neither handle the chronicle of the 2010 Korean crises and specific theories nor the relations of the concerned states and the third image<sup>2</sup> of international relations. Instead, I intend to examine the interrelations between domestic politics and China's responses to the 2010 Korean crises; specifically, the reasons behind Beijing's decision to politically support Pyongyang, receiving all the political criticisms from Seoul, Washington, and even from the rest of the international community during the 2010 Korean crises.<sup>3</sup> By achieving this research goal, one can understand the reason behind Beijing's

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1. Most states in the international community regard the launch as a long-range missile test and violation of UN Security Council resolution 1874, which was adopted on June 12, 2009. Just three days after the rocket launch, the UN Security Council including China concluded a Presidential statement on April 16, 2012. See the statement on the website, <http://daccess-dds.ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N12/295/91/PDF/N1229591.pdf?OpenElement> (accessed April 25, 2012). However, it is also true that Beijing changed its policy toward Pyongyang after the most recent rocket launch in December, 2012 and the third nuclear test in February, 2013 although the change is not substantial but superficial; Beijing and Pyongyang still share major strategic interests against the U.S. and its allies in Northeast Asia.
  2. Kenneth Waltz, *Man, the State and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1959).
  3. China's opposite position from the international community on the DPRK's provocation might infringe her national dignity pursuing a global leader.

favorable behaviors toward Pyongyang, as well as its limitations.

This paper will first provide a general theoretical explanation that is useful in understanding China's response to the 2010 Korean crises. Then it will go over the Beijing leadership's innate priority in domestic and external policies and its response to the Crises. Finally, Beijing's possible responses and preferences regarding Pyongyang's future behavior will be discussed.

### Politico-economic Linkage Model

The bottom line of the politico-economic linkage model is that each factor never functions independently. Therefore, emphasizing one factor and ignoring the others leads to a misunderstanding of the targets of analysis. Rather, all factors interact with one another despite their independent importance. The interlinked relationship between politics and economy fluctuates according to the urgency of the situation. In times of urgency, political logic takes precedence over the economic one in the decision-making process.

In his edited book, *Linkage Politics: Essays on the Convergence of National and International Systems*, James Rosenau<sup>4</sup> affirms the necessity of a linkage approach to analyze a country's foreign policy. Robert Putnam<sup>5</sup> also argues that the foreign policy-making process can be understood as a 'two-level game.' In other words, policy-makers play at the politics of both the domestic and the international arena. Sociologist James Coleman<sup>6</sup> argues that individuals behave in accordance with their own interests and also with the society in which they live and have been socialized. That is, each factor at the micro level (individual level) transfers to the social or collective behavior at the macro level

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4. James Rosenau, *Linkage Politics: Essays on the Convergence of National and International Systems* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1969).

5. Robert D. Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games," *International Organization*, Vol 42, No. 3 (summer, 1988): 427-460.

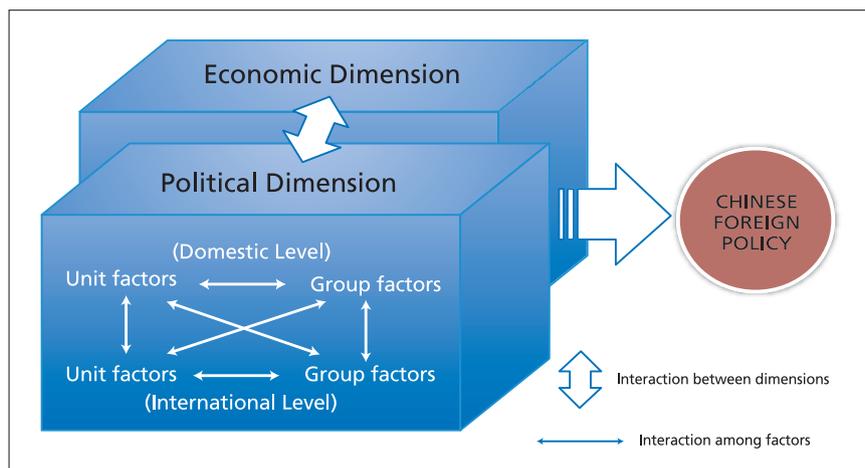
6. James Coleman, *Foundations of Social Theory* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1990).

(domestic and international system level), and the factors at the micro and the macro levels interact with each other. More recently, Quansheng Zhao<sup>7</sup> has analyzed Chinese foreign policy with a modified 'micro-macro linkage approach.' He analyzes Chinese foreign policy by assessing the interaction of diverse factors at the micro and macro levels.

Although these authors are primarily concerned with foreign policy issues, I believe that one is able to gain important implications from their analytical frameworks. In other words, the Chinese response to the 2010 Korean crises can be better explained with a politico-economic linkage model. Modifying the aforementioned scholars' linkage ideas, I devised a 'politico-economic linkage model' to explain and understand China's responses to the Crises.

The following figure summarizes the 'politico-economic linkage model.' I analyzed China's responses to the 2010 Korean crises in two different dimensions: political and economic. In addition, the factors affecting China's responses are divided into two levels: domestic and

Figure 1. Politico-economic Linkage Model



7. Quansheng Zhao, *Interpreting Chinese Foreign Policy: The Micro-Macro Linkage Approach* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

international.

The domestic level has two kinds of factors: unit factors and group factors. The 'unit' refers to individual decision-makers who are the subjects of behavior in the groups. Decision-makers do not behave independently. They interact with one another within the groups, such as the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), governmental branches, and the informal *guanxi*<sup>8</sup> system. Groups and individual decision-makers are also interdependent on one another.

The international level implies sovereign states as unit factors, and international organizations and structures as group factors. A sovereign state is the main unit of behavior in the international community. They behave independently and sometimes form groups, such as international organizations, through which they play in the international arena. These unit and group factors independently interact with counterparts of the domestic level in addition to interacting with each other. At the same time, as an international system they also influence domestic factors. This interacting mechanism should be taken into account with consideration to two different dimensions: the political and economic dimensions.

In a general situation, the political dimension is dependent on the economic dimension and the economic dimension has greater influence on the political dimension.

However, in moments of national urgency, the relations between the two dimensions are reversed. Most notably, the will and choices of decision-makers come to be crucial. Figures 2 and 3 contrast the interactive relationship between the political and economic dimensions in different situations.

Then, why does the priority between the economic and political affairs differ in situations of national urgency? This is because of their characteristic variance. Matters relating to the economy follow interests and efficiency, while politics tends to act as a force that manages them. If one accepts David Easton's definition of politics, which is the authoritative allocation of value, the economy pursues these values while

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8. In Chinese, *guanxi* literally means relationship.

Figure 2. Relationship between political and economic dimensions under long-term normal situation

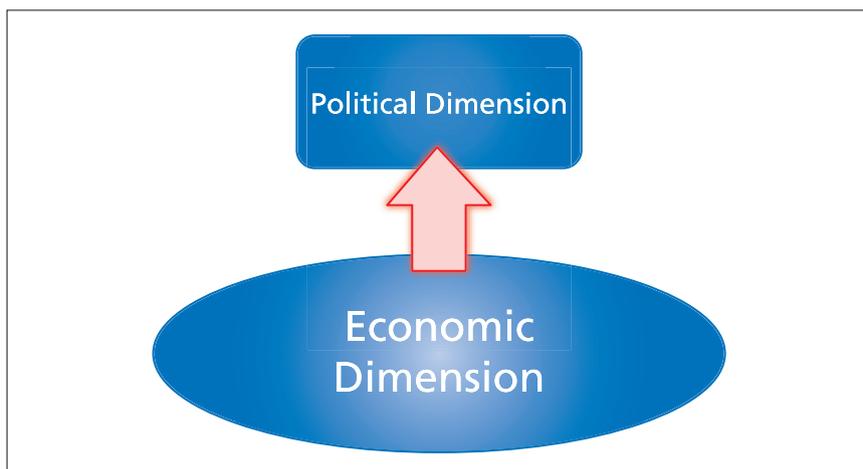
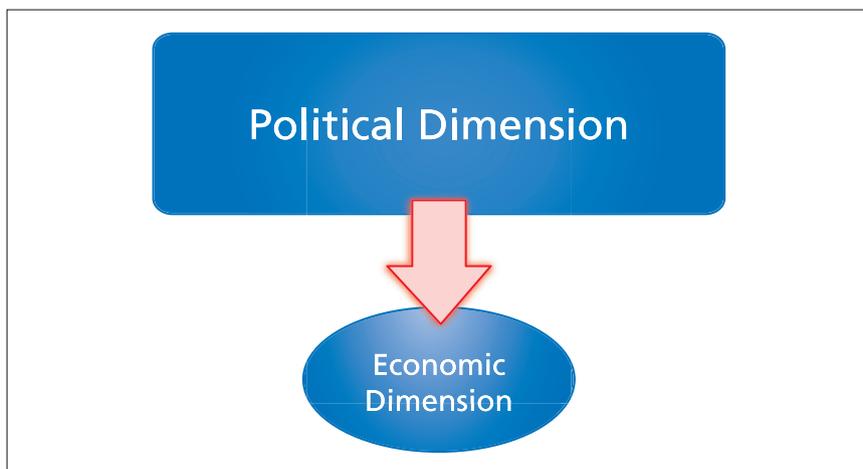


Figure 3. Relationship between political and economic dimensions under short-term critical situation



politics is concerned with how these values should be distributed in society. In most cases, the economy contributes to the expected allocation through the market, but it takes time; that is why in times of

urgency, politics is given more importance than the economy.

Meanwhile, China is a planned economy. In other words, the CCP leadership designs its specific strategies for economic development. At the same time, it has adopted traits of the capitalist market economy. Moreover, it wishes to modify it into a Chinese style. The result is a model that is relatively heavily intervened and managed by the state compared to other market oriented countries. This means that in China, a political logic likely goes prior to the economic one.

The 2010 Korean crises urged Beijing to choose its position between the two Koreas in a short period of time. It seemed that Beijing was at a loss by facing the pressure of Seoul and the international community. In fact, on December 15, 2010, Zhu Feng, a Korean Peninsula specialist at Peking University, defended Beijing's Pyongyang-tilted behavior in the Korean crises and the *Senkaku/Diayudao* incident at the Korea National Diplomatic Academy.<sup>9</sup> He claimed that the Chinese authorities were not yet well prepared for the rapidly changing situations in both the domestic and international arenas. Professor Zhu's comments imply that the Crises did not give Beijing enough time to decide its position. John Hamre, president of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), mentioned at a media interview that during the 2010 Korean crises, Pyongyang had urged China to choose sides between the two Koreas, a situation China was dreading.<sup>10</sup>

In any case, China finally chose to stand by Pyongyang despite international criticism, infringing China's national dignity as a responsible stakeholder of the international community.

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9. Professor Zhu's keynote speech at the opening ceremony of the Center for Chinese Studies, Korea National Diplomacy Academy (former Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security).

10. See, <http://sunday.joins.com/article/view.asp?aid=30277> (accessed May 26, 2013).

## **China's Innate National Goals**

In order to understand the reason behind China's specific behaviors including its responses to the 2010 Korean crises, one should pay attention to China's national goals. China has innate national goals behind its internal and external policies. They result from the authoritarian attributes of Chinese domestic politics. The Bo Xilai scandal<sup>11</sup> shows that the Beijing leadership severely limits diverse opinions, as well as different behavioral styles in domestic politics.

The inalienable goals of the CCP's inner circle can be analyzed on three levels.<sup>12</sup> First, at the individual level, the Chinese leadership's proximate goal is to continue the CCP's hold on power. This goal is superior to the others.

At the state level, the proximate goal is to preserve national integrity. The concerns in Beijing result in a democratic lethargy in China's domestic politics. The CCP leadership believes that the Western pluralistic democracy model does not fit with China's reality and could even erode its national integrity.

Finally, at the international level, the innate goal is to be a global power. To achieve these three national goals, Beijing's policy preference is focused on economic development. China's successful and continuously rapid economic growth has provided the CCP with the legitimacy of continuing its domestic rule for national integrity and the desire to be a global power. Therefore, rapid economic growth is an undeniable priority for the Beijing leadership; through economic success they can show its people the capability of the CCP regime.

However, it is not possible for countries such as China to continuously sustain high economic growth rates. China needs to prepare

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11. For the Bo Xilai scandal, see the website, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-17673505> (accessed August 21, 2012).

12. Regarding three major Chinese national goals, see the following article and Table-3. Taewan Kim, "China between the Two Koreas: Dilemma of the Korean Peninsula Policy," *Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 16, No.2, 2011, pp. 37-73.

for an era of impending low growth. According to Ruchir Sharma,<sup>13</sup> for instance, although an approximate six percent of national economic growth is enviable to most countries, for China, it might cause serious instability in domestic politics. Maintaining the CCP's political rule and national integrity requires a high economic growth rate. Therefore, domestic factors such as preparing for an era of low economic growth and maintaining stable politics have emerged as major challenges. These appear to be the primary concerns in the foreign policy decision-making of the newly launched Xi Jinping regime.

### China's Responses to the 2010 Korean Crises

China's responses to the sinking of the ROK Navy corvette *Cheonan* (PCC-772) and the bombing of Yeonpyeong Island are different in terms of its promptness and clear position. Beijing reluctantly presented its position on the *Cheonan* (PCC-772) sinking incident in public at the correspondent briefing room on April 20, 2010, twenty five days after the incident. Compared to the prompt condolences of the other neighboring countries and the international community, Beijing's late response was enough to irk Seoul.

However, eight months later, when the DPRK fired at *Yeonpyeong* Island, Beijing's response was different. Unlike the *Cheonan* (PCC-772) incident,<sup>14</sup> China responded quickly; the day after the incident, the Chinese Foreign Ministry expressed its concern and suggested immediate talks between the two Koreas. Chinese State Councilor, Dai Bingguo visited Seoul on November 27 to discuss the incident

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13. Ruchir Sharma, *Breakout Nations: In Pursuit of the Next Economic Miracles* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2012).

14. Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Jiang Yu mentioned on April 20 that the ROK Navy corvette *Cheonan* (PCC-772) sinking was a tragedy only twenty five days after the incident. China's condolence was late enough for Koreans to be disappointed compared to deep condolences from many other countries issued just after the incident.

only four days after the deadly artillery shelling incident, and flew to Pyongyang on December 8.

Although Beijing's swift response to the latter incident appeared to be a more responsible reaction, its contents deteriorated Seoul's views on China. Dai Bingguo suggested the resumption of the Six-Party Talks to resolve the Crises, which was already argued by Pyongyang. The bottom line for Seoul was that unless the talks discussed the issue of Pyongyang's responsibility for its actions, the resumption of the talks would be unacceptable.

Wu Dawei, Chinese Special Representative for Korean Peninsula Affairs, continuously requested for the Six-Party Talks to deal with the 2010 Korean crises. The Beijing leadership clearly intended to separate the Crises from Pyongyang's nuclear issue. However the Six-Party Talks were organized to essentially resolve the DPRK nuclear problem, not to handle the Crises. Therefore, China's request for the Six-Party Talks without holding Pyongyang's responsible was ignored by Seoul and Washington, because in their eyes, the request seemed to be exceptionally favorable to Pyongyang. Such turn of events would more likely entice Pyongyang to carry out further provocations. China is likely to have received criticism for spoiling the DPRK.<sup>15</sup>

In sum, the worst scenario that could happen from Beijing's perspective is the collapse of the newly launched Kim Jong-un regime<sup>16</sup> due to Beijing's unfavorable decisions. The contingency from such a collapse may stimulate instability in China's northeast region. It is no wonder China seemed to be at a loss for words after the sinking of the ROK Navy corvette *Cheonan* (PCC-772).

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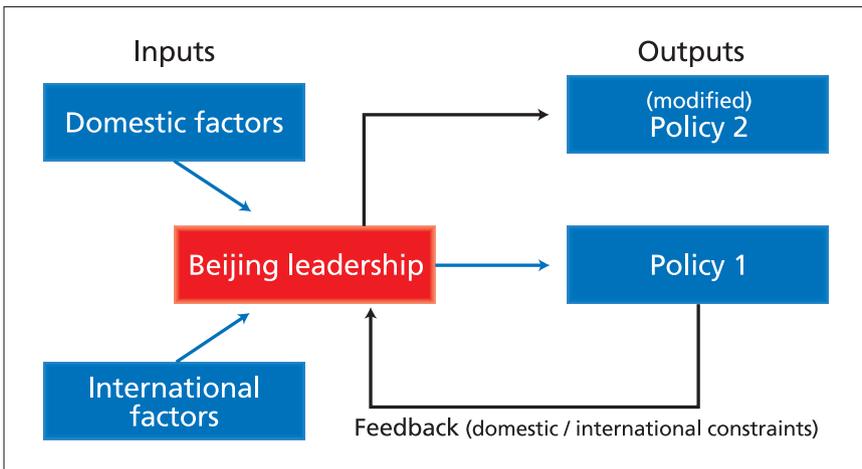
15. The rocket launch in December 2012 and the third nuclear test in February 2013 are the results of the tainted Pyongyang under the shelter of China.

16. *Yonhap*, December 15, 2010, <http://www.yonhapnews.co.kr/politics/2010/12/15/0503000000AKR20101215056351043.HTML> (accessed July 4, 2012).

## China's Preferences of the 2010 Korean Crises

As illustrated in Figure 1, Chinese external policies result from the interactions among diverse factors in both domestic and international levels under the political and economic dimensions. These interactions occurred inside the 'Beijing leadership' in the following Figure 4.

Figure 4. The structure of policy-making toward the Korean Peninsula<sup>17</sup>



China still preserves an authoritarian political system. The will of the CCP leadership is decisive in most foreign policies. The 2010 Korean crises puzzled Beijing in what to do because China had always pursued and wished for regional stability for its economic development. The Crises forced Beijing to decide in a limited time frame, whether it should support Pyongyang or join Seoul and the international community in condemning Pyongyang's inhumane provocations.<sup>18</sup>

17. Based on the Figure 1 from Taewan Kim, "An International Perspective on China's Northeast Project," *Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 13, No. 2, p. 10.

18. We do not know how much Pyongyang communicated with Beijing beforehand on the *Cheonan* (PCC-772) sinking and *Yeonpyeong* Island artillery bombardment. However, at least, it is hard to say that the both incidents were what Beijing wanted.

This was clearly an urgent situation for Beijing; therefore, the short-term critical situation displayed in Figure 3 accurately explains the situation facing Beijing. In other words, the Chinese leadership considered the political dimension more than the economic one. That is why Beijing supported Pyongyang despite its deep economic interdependence with Seoul. In addition, it is unlikely that China will change its position in the short term until Pyongyang's domestic stability becomes secured.

Then what factors did China consider? The aforementioned three national goals functioned as the 'inputs' shown in Figure 4. The Beijing leadership must have contemplated how to react to the Crises for twenty-five days until it officially commented on the *Cheonan* (PCC-772) sinking incident on April 20, 2010.

First of all, the Chinese leadership's top priority in policy preferences is to continue its economic development because doing so will guarantee the three major goals of the CCP: continue CCP reign, maintain national integrity, and become a global power. Sustainable economic development provides the Beijing leadership with the authority to govern mainland China, which is one of the above-mentioned national goals. During the Mao Zedong period (1949-1976), the communist ideology provided the legitimacy to rule over China. However, since Deng Xiaoping adopted the Open and Reform Policy, pragmatic economic development has gradually replaced the ideology's position as the state's top priority.<sup>19</sup>

To achieve economic development, the Beijing leadership adopted the capitalist market system. Although Beijing refers to it as the 'Chinese-style market economy,' it can be regarded merely as a political rhetoric. Entrepreneurs, who were once the CCP's targets to overthrow, have become welcome members of the CCP. In 2007, a new property law came into effect,<sup>20</sup> allowing the possession of private property.

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19. Quansheng Zhao, *Interpreting Chinese Foreign Policy*, Chapter 3.

20. Angela Wang, "Property Rights in China under the New Property Law," <http://www.worldlawdirect.com/article/3149/property-rights-china-new-property-law-2007.html> (accessed May 4, 2013).

Even the CCP is no longer based on the orthodox communist ideology. In a nutshell, sustained economic development is an apparent top priority of the Beijing regime.

In addition, China's sound economic growth also contributes to the national integrity by fueling *Zhonghua* nationalism.<sup>21</sup> China consists of fifty-six different ethnic groups. Although the *Han* majority (*Hanzu* in Chinese) occupied more than ninety percent of the total population in 2005, the minorities were distributed in more than sixty percent of China's territory within five autonomous districts. Among the regions, Tibet and Xinjiang are the areas which display the most active anti-Beijing sentiments and movements, and even attempt to establish their own independent government separate from the Beijing regime. To assimilate the minority into the *Han* majority, the Beijing leadership utilizes the *Zhonghua* national ideology. Such nationalism would gradually come to replace the outdated communist ideology.<sup>22</sup>

Besides the chronic ethnic minority issue, China also has serious obstacles in maintaining its domestic integrity. Inefficient state-owned companies, growing economic inequality, and corruption provide the Beijing regime with urgent puzzles to resolve in order to consolidate the unity of the country despite rapid economic development. All of these problems, coined with inadequate social safety and institutions, incubate potential instability in China's domestic politics and undermine national integrity; all are reasons why Beijing cannot give up its high economic growth. In fact, it is also true that the reform of the Chinese economic constitution is one of major problems that the new Xi leadership must resolve.

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21. *Zhonghua* nationalism was initially Han Chinese centered nationalism, which began during the late nineteenth century on the brink of the Qing dynasty's ruin. The so-called neo-*Zhonghua* nationalism contains all of fifty six peoples within Chinese territory. Current Beijing's political efforts to build a new nation, *Zhonghuaminzu*, are causing political and academic conflicts with China's peripheral countries, Korea, Vietnam, Mongolia, and so on.

22. Taewan Kim, "China's Identity Transformation," *Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 2010, pp. 163-191.

In conclusion, considering these domestic factors, Beijing's CCP leaders must have seriously considered how to respond to the 2010 Korean crises. First of all, any turn of events that would destabilize the Korean Peninsula is exactly the opposite of what the Beijing leadership wants. Not only a full-scale war on the Korean Peninsula but also relatively mild and unexpected situations such as a mass influx of refugees from the DPRK border may harm China's economic development, which could eventually undermine the CCP's stable domestic rule and infringe on domestic integration. That is why Beijing authorities still do not officially acknowledge and accept any DPRK refugees. They fear that caring for the DPRK refugees would stimulate a mass exodus to the northeast region of China.<sup>23</sup> In short, China is concerned that banding with Seoul might induce Pyongyang's contingency, threatening China's national interests.<sup>24</sup>

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23. Of course, there are some exceptions. For instance, Hwang Jang-yup, who is a famous *Juche* ideologue and once ranked in the thirteenth highest position of the North Korean Labor Party, defected to Seoul via Beijing in 1997. Despite the strong objection of Pyongyang, Beijing allowed him to take refuge in Seoul. This was definitely a political decision intended to deepen economic relations with Seoul.

24. As for China's changed behavior after the 2012 rocket launch and the third nuclear test, one can explain that the domestic and international feedback worked within the inner circle of the Beijing leadership. China's public opinion on Pyongyang has deteriorated since late 2012 and early 2013. Pyongyang conducted its third nuclear test when the citizens were celebrating and enjoying the Chinese New Year holidays. Having caused a major crisis during such a time, the DPRK greatly disturbed the Chinese public. Regarding international feedback, China recognized the concerns of neighboring countries and the international community. The military alliance between Seoul and Washington became stronger. From China's perspective, Washington utilized Pyongyang's provocations to increase its military influence on the Korean Peninsula; Japan also used the unstable regional situation for building up its military capability. Moreover, the possibility of closer military ties among Seoul, Washington, and Tokyo increased. All of these domestic and international factors functioned as feedback shown in Figure 4.

## **Prospect of China's Future Behavior**

China's future position and behavior on issues regarding the Korean Peninsula will be determined by the combination of its relations with the U.S, the DPRK, and the ROK. The U.S.-China relationship is the most crucial. This is because China is becoming a global power. It harbors global interests in the global arena and is Washington's preferred national counterpart in the global economy and strategy. Although issues concerning the Korean Peninsula such as the 2010 Crises are of crucial importance to the two Koreas, for China, they are only a few out of many of its major interests.

### ***Beijing-Washington Relations***

The 2010 Korean crises were a series of attacks on the ROK by the DPRK. It is in essence, an inter-Korean issue that has lasted since the division of the Peninsula in 1948. Since then, Seoul and Pyongyang have competed for legitimate authority over the entire Peninsula.

The U.S. and China have shown that they perform important roles as the respective agents of Seoul and Pyongyang. They have even exchanged severe political rhetoric during the U.S.-ROK joint naval exercise in the Yellow Sea where the crises occurred. China is concerned that the U.S. may utilize the crises to recover and increase American influence in the East Asian region. In fact, many say Washington's military influence on the Korean Peninsula had increased during the Crises. However, it is also true that no one can tame Pyongyang without China's assistance. The Crises proved once again that China is the key in handling the DPRK.

Meanwhile, the international community including the ROK fears that Beijing's support might embolden Pyongyang to carry out further military provocations.<sup>25</sup> Consequently, the ROK is likely to

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25. This apprehension has been realized after the third nuclear test. Pyongyang continuously provokes military tension on the Korean Peninsula and does not seem likely to give up the nuclear capability. China shows intolerance of Pyongyang's nuclear provocation.

build up its military capacity and reluctantly lean toward the U.S, and even toward Japan. Seoul tried to sign the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) with Japan, although it was postponed due to severe domestic public opposition in June, 2012.<sup>26</sup>

In international relations, great powers share similar characteristics. They tend to avoid direct conflicts. Instead, when their client states clash against one another, they fully support their clients and try to utilize their clients' troubles to further their own national and global interests. China is expanding its influence around the globe. It is natural that the first targeted region is Northeast Asia, the area surrounding the Peninsula.

The U.S. seems to have lost its former dominance over the region. Washington has used its rivalry with China and Japan to effectively manage the region. However, China has been increasing power at a dazzling speed, and Japan does not have enough power to check it. The U.S. now directly competes against, and conflicts with China without having Japan as a mediator.

Fortunately, both states also have reasons to cooperate. Beijing requires Washington's support to achieve sustainable economic development,<sup>27</sup> which is instrumental in maintaining the CCP leadership's rule and national integrity in China. Similarly, Washington needs Beijing's assistance. The U.S. can stabilize its domestic prices by importing cheap Chinese products and China's economic development requires the U.S. market as well.

In a nutshell, Beijing is concerned more about Washington's will and response to the 2010 Korean crises than the Crises themselves, and vice versa. Both states need to maintain amicable relations. They

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26. Adam Westlake, "South Korea postpones signing Japan's military agreement." *The Japan Daily Press*, June 29, 2012, <http://japandailynews.com/south-korea-postpones-signing-japans-military-agreement-295618> (accessed July 15, 2012).

27. China's main tasks in foreign policy are not offensive but defensive; thus Beijing likely tends to cooperate with Washington. See Andrew J. Nathan and Andrew Scobell, "How China Sees America: the Sum of Beijing's Fears," *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2012, pp. 32-47.

also require a stable and calm Korean Peninsula; consequently, in most cases, they want to persuade Pyongyang and Seoul to be friendly toward each other. It is well known that President Obama made several phone calls to President Hu in urging him to check Pyongyang. Hu also admits the necessity of U.S.-China cooperation in order to resolve the 2010 Korean crises.<sup>28</sup>

From Seoul's perspective, President Hu's January 2011 visit to Washington can be compared to Nixon's February 1972 visit to Beijing in that both meetings discussed issues regarding the Korean Peninsula. After both of the visits, the two Koreas showed some conciliatory behaviors. This time, even before Hu's visit, the two Koreas agreed to hold their first high-level military talks after the Crises; although those talks did not produce any fruitful results. Likewise, four decades ago in 1972, the two Koreas concluded the July Fourth Joint Communiqué after Nixon's Beijing visit, but the sudden reconciliation was aborted.

Forty years ago, both Washington and Beijing ceaselessly persuaded and threatened Seoul and Pyongyang to reconcile their hostile relations since the Sino-American rapprochement. The bottom line was to make a stable environment on the Korean Peninsula through the two Koreas' détente so that Washington and Beijing could cooperate against the former Soviet Union.

From China's perspective, the Six-Party Talks are the only feasible option to ease the nuclear tension on the Korean Peninsula. Through the talks, all the concerned parties would have no choice but to be tolerant and cooperative in order to pursue a plausible and peaceful resolution to the security cooperation problem involving Pyongyang's nuclear weapons in Northeast Asia. Therefore, Beijing will show a more tolerant attitude in response to Pyongyang's provocation than

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28. The new Xi Jinping leadership of China and the second term of the Obama administration will become closer in resolving the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula, *The New York Times*, December 6, 2010; *The LA Times*, December 6, 2010, <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/washington/2010/12/obama-china-hu-jintao.html> (accessed March 20, 2013); <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2010/12/06/world/main7121957.shtml> (accessed March 20, 2013)

any other participants of the Six-Party Talks unless Pyongyang completely breaks down the Talks.

### ***Beijing-Pyongyang Relations***

First, China and the DPRK are bound together by the 1961 Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation. Article 3 of the treaty declares that both states shall not conclude any alliance against each other, and shall not participate in any actions and measures against each side. In other words, both states cannot officially blame or act against each other. This is one clear legal reason why Beijing did not blame Pyongyang and support Seoul and the international community in condemning the Crises.

Secondly, China fears that the worst scenario might materialize. That is, the Kim regime may collapse and the DPRK may go out of control, creating a great influx of refugees into China's northeast region. If Pyongyang collapses, Seoul will likely intervene in the DPRK to achieve unification of the Peninsula. Likewise, other great powers such as the U.S., Russia, and Japan will involve themselves with the country to fulfill their own interests. That situation would force China to involve itself in the maze-like Korean Peninsula and would likely lead to a reluctant competition with the other big powers.

Beijing was extremely sensitive to Pyongyang-related information, especially those of the late leader, Kim Jong-il. In 2008, information about Kim Jong-il's health problems were exposed. The person responsible for the leak, a well-known Chinese scholar at the Chinese Academy of Social Science, Jin Xi-de, was arrested and jailed.<sup>29</sup> This shows how sensitive the Beijing leadership is regarding information about Pyongyang, especially about Pyongyang's leadership. It is likely that Beijing has been seriously contemplating any possible contingencies in the DPRK since then.

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29. <http://baike.baidu.com/view/1229752.htm> (accessed February 4, 2012).  
<http://www.epochtimes.com/b5/11/2/26/n3182007.htm> (accessed February 4, 2012).

In October 2009, Premier Wen Jiabao visited Pyongyang. Even when Pyongyang still had been under suspicion in May 2010, China, in return, invited Kim Jong-il. This was before the official investigation was released on the sinking of the ROK Navy corvette *Cheonan* (PCC-772). Moreover, Kim visited China again only three months later in October 2010. Beijing's efforts to prevent such contingencies are evident when observing the exchanges between the two states.

Since the 1992 normalization between Beijing and Seoul, the friendly relations between Beijing and Pyongyang had been estranged; however, the relations between the two countries improved following in the aftermath of two events: Kim Jong-il's health problem in late 2008 and the failed currency reform in late 2009. China changed its policy toward the DPRK to support the Kim Jong-il regime; Beijing was seriously concerned about Pyongyang's contingency, which was regarded as the worst possible scenario.

If the worst scenario happens, this will be because of Pyongyang's domestic economic failure.<sup>30</sup> In the modern international system based on national sovereignty, no state can collapse or disappear unless it domestically collapses on its own, just like the former Soviet Union. That is to say Pyongyang shall not be forced by any external body to give up its national sovereignty.

China will continue to support the DPRK economically unless any unexpected situations arise. The two countries' economic cooperation will contribute to the Chinese economic enhancement policy in the northeast region of China. Thus, economic sanctions on the DPRK are unlikely to be successful unless China sincerely cooperates. China's economic support for Pyongyang, while all other states are applying

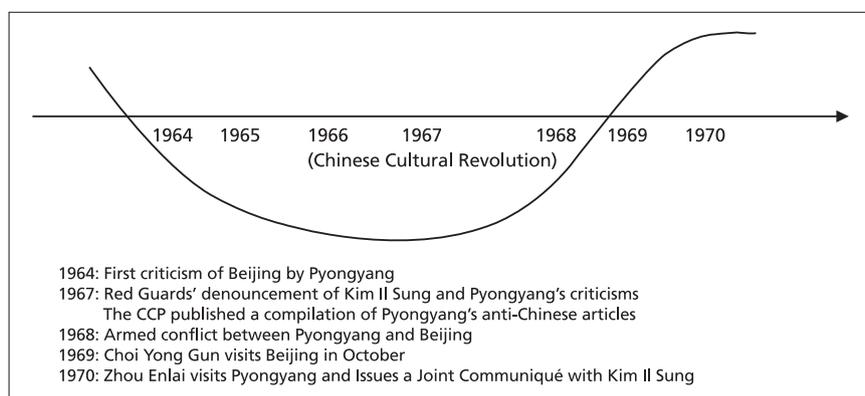
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30. Successful economic achievement is crucial for most authoritarian regimes such as the DPRK to maintain their rein. As already mentioned, rapid and continuous economic growth is currently contributing to maintaining the rein of the CCP. Zhao Jing, an influential Chinese blogger, comments that the CCP authoritarian regime will likely collapse, if at all, only because of an economic failure and not because of the democratic demand from the people. See, [http://article.joinmsn.com/news/article/article.asp?total\\_id=11554470&ctg=1300&cloc=joongang|home|newslst1](http://article.joinmsn.com/news/article/article.asp?total_id=11554470&ctg=1300&cloc=joongang|home|newslst1) (accessed May 20, 2013).

sanctions, will solidify the fact that China exercises strong political and strategic control over the DPRK.

In 2010, relations between Beijing and Pyongyang were still favorable. In general, however, relations among nations are never always amicable or quarrelsome. Likewise, the friendship between Beijing and Pyongyang has a pendulum cycle, ranging from friendly relations to frosty ones. As shown in Figure 5,<sup>31</sup> the relations have not always been steady and friendly.

Figure 5. The China-DPRK Friendship Trend



During China's Cultural Revolution, their relations deteriorated to the extent that guns were pointed at each other at the border area in 1968.<sup>32</sup> Later in 1969, their relations improved through the visit of high-ranking officials: Choi Yong-gun of Pyongyang and Zhou Enlai

31. Taewan Kim, "The Korean Paradox of the 1972 Sino-American Rapprochement: An East Asian Perspective," (Ph.D. Diss., University of Colorado at Boulder, 2005), p.121.

32. Jae-jin Lee, *China and Korea: Dynamic Relations* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Press, 1996), p. 101; Bernd Schaefer, "Weathering the Sino-Soviet Conflict: The GDR and North Korea, 1949-1989," *Could War International History Project Bulletin*, Issue 14/15, pp. 25-38; "North Korean 'adventurism' and China's Long Shadow, 1966-1972," *Could War International History Project*, Working Paper #44, <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/topics/pubs/swp44.pdf> (accessed November 19, 2004).

of Beijing.

Similarly, in 2009, Beijing and Pyongyang began to have frosty relations since the 1992 Beijing-Seoul normalization. The former Foreign Minister Chen Qichen reflected that he was the most poorly treated Chinese official visitor ever by Pyongyang when he visited Pyongyang to excuse the normalization of Beijing and Seoul.<sup>33</sup>

That mood changed when Wen Jiabao visited Pyongyang to celebrate the 2009 China-DPRK Friendship Year and discussed how to improve their economic cooperation. After Wen's visit to Pyongyang, the Chinese media praised the DPRK in an unprecedented manner. In 2010, Kim Jong-il visited China twice, amidst the sensitive political environment following the *Cheonan* (PCC-772) sinking incident.

In sum, Beijing and Pyongyang's friendly relations will likely continue for the time being;<sup>34</sup> consequently, at the very least, Beijing will continue to provide economic support to Pyongyang. However, this is because of the Chinese leaders' fear of the DPRK collapsing, and not particularly because they support Kim Jong-il (now Kim Jong-un) or his system. Rather, they have serious discussions in their closed inner circle about whether they should abandon the Kim Jong-il regime that has been a burden to Beijing's image as a responsible stakeholder. Therefore, if Pyongyang's contingency occurs and the Kim regime fails to bring down any potential rebels, Beijing is likely to support the potential rebels unless the rebels turn against Beijing. Great powers in international relations show similar behaviors; Washington abandoned its longtime friend Mubarak in Egypt when the anti-Mubarak rebels seemed to be successful. Likewise, China would, in theory, cooperate with any political entity in the DPRK as long as it is friendly to Beijing; it is not necessarily the Kim regime that Beijing

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33. Chen Qichen, *Wai Jiao Shi Ji* (Beijing: shijiezhishichubanshe, 2003), pp. 154-161.

34. After the death of Kim Jong-il and his son Kim Jong-un's succession, the DPRK is still struggling to consolidate the new leader's rule and domestic stability. It is a very sensitive transit period in Pyongyang's position. The series of provocations including the third nuclear test in February 2013 challenges the tolerance of China. However, the existence itself of the DPRK provides China substantial strategic advantage in Northeast Asia.

supports.

In other words, Beijing most likely acknowledged and accepted the three generation patrimonial succession in Pyongyang because it was concerned about the aftermath of its collapse. Beijing was probably persuaded by Pyongyang's insistence that the dynastic succession of power was indispensable to DPRK's unique domestic reality.

Meanwhile, Kim Jong-un will likely adopt the Chinese style economic reform if Beijing successfully persuades him and his inner circle on the condition of economic cooperation and support toward Pyongyang. In fact, Pyongyang does not seem to dislike the Chinese style economic reform; it only fears the side effects of the reform such as domestic instability or people's demand for political reform. Unlike Beijing, which has well managed the domestic political demand, Pyongyang has not been strongly convinced of its grasp of its domestic politics. Kim Jong-un and his inner circle fear the people's political demands, which would result from the Chinese-style economic reform. Therefore, if they perceive there is no other option to break through the recent stalemate, they may decide to follow the Chinese direction.

Pyongyang has many other puzzles to solve, such as accomplishing a successful patrimonial succession of power, economic enhancement, and so on. Although all the puzzles cannot be solved at once, it is also true that maintaining only nuclear weapons and long-range ballistic missiles can never be useful in solving these problems, especially without the cooperation of neighboring countries and the international community.

### ***Beijing- Seoul Relations***

China will try to separate any potential inter-Korean conflicts from regional security issues. Unless the neighboring major powers involve themselves in any potential conflicts between the two Koreas, Beijing will step aside and manage the two countries while making sure that no harm is done to China's national goal of continuing economic development and maintaining the stability of China's northeast region.

The ROK is clearly a major contributing partner to China's recent

economic prosperity. Since the normalization of Beijing-Seoul relations, the amount of trade has continuously increased, and in 2002, it had already bypassed the total amount of trade conducted with the U.S., the previous top trading partner of the ROK. Various economic data show that both countries' economic ties have become closer at a tremendous speed following the normalization of relations. Even during the 2010 Korean crises, Beijing and Seoul broke the record of the largest trade volume, despite their political estrangement. According to data from the Korea International Trade Association,<sup>35</sup> the two countries' total amount of trade in 2010 was larger than Korea's second (the U.S.), the third (Japan), and the fourth (Hong Kong) trading partners combined. When Hong Kong is included as part of China, the amount of trade is much bigger than the sum of the trades with the second to ninth (Vietnam) countries combined.<sup>36</sup>

As for China, Korea is its third largest trading partner and the fourth largest investor. It is undeniable that Beijing and Seoul are already a common economic community.<sup>37</sup> Sino-Korean relations are very friendly, and the top leaders of Beijing and Seoul have held summit talks more frequently than any previous leader. Moreover, the two countries' degree of cooperation has expanded, encompassing the military and defense arena. In August 2008, the top leaders of the two countries concluded a so-called 'strategic cooperation partnership relation.' In addition to their economic ties, their similarities in culture and historical experience allow them to easily cooperate against Japan in social and political levels. They tend to cooperate against Japan, criticizing many historical issues involving Japan including the issues of Japanese history textbooks, the Nanjing massacre, comfort women,

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35. [http://stat.kita.net/top/state/n\\_submain\\_stat\\_kita.jsp?menuId=01&subUr1=n\\_default-test\\_kita.jsp?lang\\_gbn=kor^statid=kts&top\\_menu\\_id=db11&lang\\_gbn=kor](http://stat.kita.net/top/state/n_submain_stat_kita.jsp?menuId=01&subUr1=n_default-test_kita.jsp?lang_gbn=kor^statid=kts&top_menu_id=db11&lang_gbn=kor) (accessed July 3, 2011).

36. Singapore was the fifth largest, Taiwan was the sixth largest, India was the seventh largest, and Indonesia was the eighth largest trading partner of Korea in 2010.

37. Ji Pei-ding, "Development of China and Sino-Korea Relations," *Foreign Relations*, Vol. 98. (Seoul: Korean Council on Foreign Relations, July 2011), pp. 49-59.

visits to the *Yasukuni Shrine*, and so on.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, Beijing's support for Pyongyang after the 2010 Korean crises has made Seoul uncomfortable and even frustrated.

Although Seoul failed to earn Beijing's support after the 2010 Korean crises, it did not publically blame Beijing. Seoul seemed to have understood Beijing's position, and its fear of Pyongyang's collapse. Moreover, Seoul also does not want the so-called 'hard landing,' or contingency, or any other unexpected situations to arise. Although the 'Sunshine Policy' of the late president Kim Dae-jung did not succeed, Seoul would like to support and contribute to Pyongyang's economic improvement. The Lee Myung-bak administration continuously expressed that Seoul is ready to fully support Pyongyang if the regime abandons its nuclear ambitions; Pyongyang's nuclear capability will never be tolerable to Seoul as well as Beijing. As a result, Beijing and Seoul have the same intention to restore North Korea's economy and invite it as a responsible actor in the international community; the two countries could cooperate and find means that both would agree on.

In fact, the newly-launched leaderships in China and the ROK appear to be warming up to each other. Beijing welcomes and expects Park to understand China much better than any other Korean leaders did, and the Park administration also respects Xi's posture in the recent deadlock caused by Pyongyang's third nuclear test and its continuing provocations. The two countries are likely to cooperate in breaking through the 2013 stalemate. Moreover, the recent incorrect historical consciousness shown by the new Japanese leaders<sup>39</sup> ironically provide Xi and Park even more reasons to work together to address regional issues.

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38. Recently many chauvinistic behaviors and rhetoric of political leaders in the newly launched Abe administration brought about strong criticism of China and Korea as well as the international community.

39. Japan's new Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's expressions of the lack of Japan's war responsibility, including many ultra-nationalistic mentions of domestic leader, result in strong criticism not only from China and Korea, but also in the U.S. and the international community.

## Conclusion

Pyongyang has been a troublemaker in Northeast Asia's regional security. Unlike China, its rigid political and domestic economic system results in desperate economic failure and the suffering of its people. To resolve such problems, Pyongyang tends to provoke its neighbors rather than cooperate with them.

Since China pursues to become a great power as a responsible stakeholder, it has been facing a dilemma ever since the 2010 Korean crises, which resulted from Pyongyang's military attacks. Nevertheless, Beijing is likely to ultimately stand by Pyongyang despite international criticism. This is because it fears Pyongyang's collapse and its aftermath. In addition, both are bonded to the 1961 Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation. Article 3 declares that both shall not conclude any alliance against each other, and shall not participate in any action and measures against each other. Beijing does not support Pyongyang because it supports the Kim dynasty, but because it fears the possibility of Pyongyang's collapse. Therefore, if the DPRK collapses and the Kim regime fails to quell potential rebels, Beijing will likely support the rebels, unless the rebels turn against Beijing. Similarly, because of its national interests, Beijing will at present attempt to urge the two Koreas to reconcile.

Seoul should understand China's decision to maintain an equidistant position between the two Koreas. Beijing's top national priority is to continue its economic development, and that requires having a stable periphery, including the Korean Peninsula. Of course, that stability does not necessarily refer to a status quo on the Peninsula. It could just as easily be the unification of the two Koreas, or a permanent division. Either way is acceptable for China unless it harms China's top national priority.

The status quo of the divided Korean Peninsula has clearly provided a good circumstance for Beijing's domestic national goals so far. On the other hand, it has not been verified whether reunification of the Peninsula will contribute to or damage China's national priorities. If the Beijing leadership is rational, there is no doubt that it would

prefer the maintenance of the status quo of the two Koreas. This has always been proved to be China's national interest. It does not matter who initiates the reunification because, from China's perspective, once the two Koreas become one, it will become more independent from China's influence. Beijing's leaders remember that North Vietnam, which was heavily aided by China, even engaged in war against China after the unification of the two Vietnams.

Therefore, Seoul should actively convince Beijing that Seoul's initiation of unification shall not harm, but rather will contribute to China's national interests. This is possible through continuous feedback from the ROK and the international community. For instance, that the division of the Korean Peninsula would cost more than the costs of unification. Emerging as a rational united Korea, or at least creating an open and reformed North Korea will contribute more to the economic cooperation and regional security in Northeast Asia.

China expressed its relatively ambiguous position on the two Koreas, but clearly criticized the U.S.-Korea military exercises in the Yellow Sea. Although Seoul and Washington clarified that the joint military drill is carried out against Pyongyang and not against Beijing, Beijing's leadership did not trust Washington's rhetoric. This shows that China is more concerned about the U.S. responses to the 2010 Korean crises than the Crises themselves.

In fact, Beijing de-emphasized the seriousness of the 2010 Korea crises. Rather, it was seriously concerned about the U.S.-ROK joint naval military exercises and irrationally supported Pyongyang's position. However, the more Beijing supports Pyongyang's reckless behaviors, the more Seoul will tilt militarily toward Washington, including its own military buildup. Korea has even sought military intelligence cooperation with Japan after the *Yeonpyeong* Island artillery bombardment, although Korea's public opinion did not support it.<sup>40</sup>

Sustained feedback from the U.S. and the international community

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40. Seoul and Tokyo tried to sign the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) to deepen military cooperation, but it was aborted due to the severe opposition of the ROK domestic public opinion in June, 2012.

is also a factor that is crucially taken into account by China. This is because Beijing's leadership knows well that American support is instrumental in continuing its economic development, and the international community's acknowledgement as a responsible stakeholder is important for China to grow as a global power.

In conclusion, Beijing's support for Pyongyang is not necessarily a threat against Seoul, just as Seoul's close ties with Washington is not a threat against Beijing. However, China's continued support for Pyongyang is not desirable in the realm of regional security. In cooperating with other neighboring countries, Beijing should continuously encourage Pyongyang to stop its military adventurism and adopt a Chinese-style reform. It should also be emphasized that no country is planning to invade or plotting to destroy Pyongyang unless it collapses on its own and by its leaders' wrong decisions.

Pyongyang matters. If one cannot expel an outrageous fellow from one's own town; there is no other way to appease or punish the outlawry. What one must do is to cooperate with the other villagers to find out which means are the best for the town's peace and security. As most people know, the town's peace and security requires a strong sheriff who executes consistent principles to the outlaws, whether they be carrots or sticks.

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