

The ROK's China Policy under Park Geun-hye: A New Model of ROK-PRC Relations*

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The once awkward relationship between South Korea and China has considerably subsided ever since Park Geun-hye won the presidential election on December 19, 2012. President Park's visit to China from June 27 to June 30 has reinforced the strategic cooperative partnership that was agreed upon back in 2008, in the name of "Enrichment of Strategic Cooperative Partnership." The factors contributing to better relations can not only be attributed to personal affairs and tendencies of each leader, but are also rooted in China and South Korea's respective strategic concerns. It is expected that the Park administration's China policy will be categorized into three different stages. The first is the attainment of China's support for the Trust-building Process on the Korean Peninsula (*Hanbandao Xinren Jincheng*), then the progress of the ROK-China Trust-building Process (*HanZhong Xinren Jincheng*) and then the establishment of a New Model of the Korea-China Relationship (*Xinxing HanZong Guanxi*). In order to capture China's heart, the ROK must push forward with a kind of policy of "Many drops make a flood" rather than attempting to "solve all problems at once."

Keywords: A new model of relations, Trust-building Process, Park Geun-hye administration, China, South Korea

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Introduction

From June 27 to June 30, 2013, South Korean President Park Geun-hye made an official state visit to China. It was a “trip of heart and trust” (*sim shin ji ryoe* in Korean or *xin xin zhi ru* in Chinese). South Korea and China publically announced that they will reinforce a bilateral strategic cooperative partnership. The anticipation of the development in the relations between the two countries by their leaders and people has increased. During the Lee Myung-bak administration, if ROK-U.S. relations were seen to be at its peak, ROK-China relations were at its lowest. Although mutual good feelings between President Park and Chinese President Xi Jinping played a significant role, at the time, ROK-China relations were at rock bottom and therefore, it was only bound to improve.¹

Since then, there are those that have voiced concern over the need to choose between the U.S. and China. On the other hand, there are also those who have expressed that rather than having several unstable and uncertain insurance plans, it is better to have one solid insurance plan; that is, the ROK-U.S. alliance.² Although the concurrent growth of ROK-China and ROK-U.S. relations is South Korea’s only answer at the moment, it is definitely not an easy task. How can Korea develop relations with both countries harmoniously? Amidst the changing security environment around the Korean Peninsula, on what level should ROK-China relations be handled in a way that would be appropriate for South Korea’s security?

This paper will be separated into four parts. The first part will consider the meaning of the recently established ‘Enrichment of the

1. ROK-U.S. relations are at a relatively higher level than the ROK-China relationship; however, in comparison to the ROK-China relationship, the ROK-U.S. relationship is only in decline.

2. Yoo Sang Chul, “U.S. and China: Who do we choose?,” (in Korean) *Joongang Daily*, November 6, 2013, http://china.joins.com/portal/article.do?method=detail&total_id=13058511&code=001003; Cho, Gap-Chae, Chun Young Woo, former chief of National Security, “There are many that confuse big brother between U.S and China,” (in Korean) <http://www.chogabje.com/client/search/search.asp>.

Strategic Cooperative Partnership,' which was agreed upon by both countries this year. Then the paper will evaluate the four sectors of politics, economy, society, culture, and the military following the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992. Unlike the intimate cooperation in the non-security sector, there is much imbalance in the security and military sectors, in which both countries have agreed to address. Next, the paper will analyze the considered factors that determined the agreement to the 'Enriched Strategic Cooperative Partnership.' It will explain that the factors are not influenced only by personal affairs and tendencies of each leader, but are also rooted in the respective strategic concerns of China and South Korea. Third, it will look into the content and direction of South Korea's China policy. With regards to the China policy, South Korea will first look to secure support from China regarding the Trust-building Process on the Korean Peninsula. Then, South Korea will pursue a Trust-building Process with China. Based on this foundation, South Korea will establish a new model of the Sino-Korean relationship. Fourth, the paper will make policy suggestions on three subjects, that is, South Korea's China policy, development of ROK-China relations, and the alliance with the United States.

Evaluation of the Current ROK-China Relations

1992-2012, Twenty years of ROK-China Relations: An Overview

The ROK and China established diplomatic relations on August 24, 1992. The two parties met in Beijing and established principles of reciprocal equality and peaceful coexistence embedded in the good neighbor policy, mutually supporting a "One China" and "peaceful unification of the Korean Peninsula." Both countries signed a joint statement establishing diplomatic ties, opening a new era in ROK-China relations. The meaning of diplomatic ties between China and the ROK can be broadly understood on three levels. Both countries have settled and reconciled a historically hostile relationship, overcome

differences in ideology and system composition, and led the North-east region towards the post-Cold War era. The establishment of diplomatic relations with China was significant for South Korea, as it allowed improvements in the security environment surrounding the Korean Peninsula. Moreover, South Korea gained an advantage against North Korea by responding actively to the changing international order. Furthermore, South Korea's technology and investment in the 1990s greatly contributed to China's economic development.

Within twenty years, the relationship between the ROK and China greatly developed in every sector. In 2012, China was South Korea's number one trade partner, and to China, South Korea was its third largest trade partner. The trade volume in 1992 was 6.3 billion dollars between China and South Korea, and increased 34 fold to 215 billion dollars in 2012. The extent of investments in 2012 totaled 37 billion dollars from over 22,000 venture corporations. Personal exchange between the two countries in 1992 marked over 13,000 people; in 2012, it increased 50 fold to 690,000 people. The number of Chinese exchange students in South Korea was 55,000 in 2012. Also, with approximately 62,000 Korean exchange students in China, Korean students are ranked number one in terms of foreign students. In addition, over 80,000 Koreans currently live in China and in South Korea, there are over 70,000 Chinese living in Korea, including approximately 45,000 ethnically Korean Chinese. There were 811 direct flights between both countries as of December 2013.³ Furthermore, the Korean Wave (*Hallyu*) is currently experiencing sensational popularity in China; in Korea, learning the Chinese language is runner up next to English.

Non-economic relations between the countries have strengthened as well. Mutual political trust has been enhanced through frequent high-level official dialogues. The leaders of China and the ROK have made active exchanges with one another through respective state visits and participation in international summits. Ever since President Roh Tae-woo made a state visit to China in September 1992, up until now,

3. ROK Embassy in China, <http://chn.mofa.go.kr/korean/as/chn/policy/relation/index.jsp>.

there have been a total of 33 instances of exchanges between state leaders. Meetings amongst prime ministers have totaled 31 instances. Meetings and exchanges between assemblies and political parties numbered 59 instances in Korea and 48 in China, totaling 107 instances. South Korea and China are cooperating in various international arenas, such as the UN, APEC, ASEM, ASEAN+3, ARF, Korea-China-Japan Trilateral Summit, and the East Asian Summit. Furthermore, they are working together to tackle the biggest security threat in Northeast Asia, the North Korean nuclear issue. In exchanges regarding the national defense sector, there were eight minister meetings, where six visits were to China and two were visits to South Korea. There were a total of 38 mutual visits among the upper commander level personnel in both respective countries.⁴

Assessment of the Strategic Cooperative Partnership

The importance of maintaining good relations between South Korea and China is not only because the two countries share a familiar culture, geographical accessibility and economic interdependence, but also because both countries share much interest in many international issues, particularly the situation on the Korean Peninsula and beyond. With the establishment of diplomatic ties during the Roh Tae-woo administration, the 'Friendship and Cooperative Relationship' was declared. Thereafter, the relationship between the ROK and China continued during the Kim Young-sam government, elevating to a 'Collaborative Partnership for the 21st Century' in 1998 under President Kim Dae-jung. Shortly, in 2003, under President Roh Moo-hyun, it transitioned into a 'Comprehensive Cooperative Partnership' and finally during President Lee Myung-bak's administration in 2008, it became a "Strategic Cooperative Partnership."⁵ This is evidence of

4. Ibid.

5. Heeok Lee, "China's Policy toward (South) Korea: Objectives of and Obstacles to the Strategic Partnership," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 22, no. 3 (2010): 283-301; Jae Ho Chung, *Korean Views of Korea-China Relations: Evolving Perceptions and Upcoming Challenges*, *Asian Perspective* 36, no. 2 (2012): 219-236;

how relations between the ROK and China elevated under different presidential leaderships every five years.

The scope of the Strategic Cooperative Partnership that was agreed upon between the ROK and China in 2008 expanded the level of cooperation from a regional to a global one. Furthermore, cooperation was strengthened through the economy, society, culture, politics and security. Han Xiandong defined this strategic partnership as the maintenance of a stable long-term cooperative relationship amongst related countries, which allows equal recognition and understanding of relevant issues. It would be easier if it were an alliance, but even if that is not the case, a relationship of such type can also be structured. Moreover, in order to be such partner, they must be able to maintain the relationship in times of conflict. Hence, the main point is that both countries need to be able to cooperate on political and security issues.⁶ In this regard, South Korea and China established a strategic partnership not only because of their economic interdependence, but because of their strategic importance.

However, a strategic cooperative partnership was not able to reach the desired level for the following two reasons. A true strategic partnership would prioritize the development of the national defense sector. However, in the case of the ROK and China, they were not able to meet the expectations held for the development of the military sector. For twenty years after the establishment of diplomatic ties between the ROK and China, the relationship was able to gain footing on economic, social, cultural and political fields. However, relations were overshadowed in the military sector. Annual defense strategic

Heeok Lee, Jaebok Cha and others, *Chinese-South Korean Relations, 1992-012: Achievements and Prospects* (Seoul: Northeast Asian History Foundation, 2012) (in Korean).

6. Xiandong Han, "Re-understanding the ROK-China Strategic Cooperative Partnership: Alliance Measures," at The 1st Korea Research Institute for Strategy (KRIS)- China Strategic Culture Promotion Association (CSCPA) International Conference on "Korea-China Strategic Cooperative Partners on the tour of Trust for a New Twenty Years," (Seoul: Hilton Hotel), October 22, 2013, pp. 114-116.

dialogues were held three times to kickstart future developments in military relations. For the first time in twenty years, bilateral defense interaction raised expectations for the institutionalization of military relations.⁷ Although there was an increase in mutual visits and various exchanges were carried out, it languished on the level of personal exchange. The establishment of mutual military facilities and training participation between the two countries were not properly carried out. Due to the unique relationships of the ROK-U.S. and DPRK-China relations, there are clear limitations to military exchanges.

Even in times of conflicts, the relationship has to be maintained; however, the solution to the problem of maintaining the relationship is not easy. The two countries had to face the cold reality despite their continued declaration of a strategic cooperative partnership in 2010. The first obstacle came on March 26, 2010, when the Korean Warship *Cheonan* sank. Before the national upheaval had a chance to settle down, the second incident took place, in which North Korea shelled the South Korean island of Yeonpyeong on November 23, 2010, causing four casualties which included two civilians. These were the first civilian casualty caused by an exchange of military fire after the Korean War; hence, it caused unrest in the international community. This strangled ROK-DPRK relations and imposed continuous pressure on the relations between the two Koreas even until today.

Diplomatic cooperation viewed from the aftermath of these two incidents, clearly demonstrated to the international arena that the so-called 'friendship' that South Korea and China claimed they shared had been more of a rhetorical figure rather than a real, sincere attitude. South Korea expected Chinese support on the international stage, whereas China tilted more toward North Korea. ROK-U.S. joint military exercise in the Yellow Sea caused discomfort and complaints from China. The Chinese countered by exercising heightened tensions in the region. South Korea showed not only disappointment, but even anger toward the Chinese attitude and such anger spread out amongst

7. Strategic Defense Dialogue were held three times: Seoul in July 2011, Beijing in July 2012, and Seoul in November 2013.

the general public. This is where South Korea must look back to what has been going on between the two countries. What is China to South Korea, and what is South Korea to China? Has everything that has been declared in the 2008 Summit, including the elevation of relations to the Strategic Cooperative Partnership, all just rhetoric? Are both countries really strategic cooperative partners?

Generally, most meetings between officials of the two countries start with how much economic cooperation has deepened between South Korea and China. However, if the two nations were to be true strategic cooperative partners, they should be able to share much more than just economic affairs. South Korea and China were not yet ready to talk about sensitive issues. Perhaps it was easier and necessary for both nations to act as if they were close to each other, ignoring the underlying fact that they may not yet have established such a friendship. Perhaps they are just good trading partners rather than true friends. The relationship that the two nations have is more of an 'economic' cooperative partnership, and is not true to its full meaning.

Achievements and Background of the Enriched Partnership Agreement

The once awkward relationship between South Korea and China has considerably subsided ever since Park Geun-hye, the Saenuri Party candidate, won the presidential election on December 19, 2012. Even though Japan requested the extradition of Yasukuni Shrine arsonist Liu Qiang, on January 4 of this year, South Korea sent Liu back to China. China was the first to dispatch a congratulatory special envoy immediately after Park was elected on January 11. On January 22, China supported the UN Security Council sanctions against North Korea after the North's long-range missile launch in December 2012. At the meeting with the South Korean special envoy Kim Mu-song on January 23, Secretary General Xi Jinping clearly stated that the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and the nonproliferation of WMD are a consistent position for China. More importantly, President Park's

visit to China from June 27 to 30 has reinforced the strategic cooperative partnership that was agreed back in 2008, in the name of “Enrichment of Strategic Cooperative Partnership.”

Achievements of President Park's China Visit

Last June 27, both leaders of China and the ROK released a joint statement on the future vision of ROK-China relations, along with an announcement of a proposal to reinforce the strategic cooperative partnership.⁸ Both leaders evaluated that they had achieved great developments in politics and security, economy and trade, and society and culture, largely under the principles of mutual respect, mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence. Under this mutual understanding, they strengthened their vision for future-oriented mutual cooperation, respected the principle of equality and international standards, and finally contributed to the stability of regional and international peace as well as the improvement of human welfare.

In comparison to the previous joint ROK-China statements, the current statement may not be as flowery in its word choice. Although the current statement is more moderate, much consideration was invested into the methodology in order to transform mutual interests into mutual benefits. In addition to the acquisition of China's support to tackle the North Korean problem and their commitment to work toward an economic cooperation to conclude an FTA, two things are worthy of notice.

First, there is a need to strengthen strategic communication. Both Korea and China have acknowledged that they are important partners in the dialogue for politics and security. The institutionalization of dialogue between the Chief of National Security at the Blue House and the Chinese State Councilor displayed the will by both countries to place efforts to actively handle security problems. The regularization of mutual visits between foreign ministers, continuous opening of

8. ROK Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <http://www.mofa.go.kr>.

semi-annual vice foreign ministerial dialogues, and institutionalization between state-run policy think tanks were established.

Second, the two countries established a ‘ROK-China Joint Committee on Humanities Exchange’ in order to strengthen the bond of humanities.⁹ Economic cooperation has sufficiently been going well and Korea and China have remained satisfied under the premise that both have a different understanding on security and military issues. In this current state, in order to reinforce the strategic cooperative partnership, there is a need to cooperate on different sectors. That new platform would be the cooperation of humanities, where both countries can share each other’s Confucian culture and Asian values. Thus, both countries have agreed to a soft power cooperation to contribute to, and understand each other.

Background on the Agreement of the Enrichment of the Strategic Cooperative Partnership

Then, what is the background for the reasons behind the ‘Enrichment of the Strategic Cooperative Partnership?’ First, it is necessary to look at the personality of both leaders of China and Korea as well as their level of empathy for each other. President Xi and Park are both descendents of previous national leaders. When Xi Jinping’s father, Xi Zhongxun, a communist veteran and vice prime minister, received political persecution during the Cultural Revolution, Xi Jinping was also forced to work in the Yanchuan County in Shaanxi for eight years, reaching mental and physical limits. In his political rise, he

9. The “Joint ROK-China humanities committee” was officially established on November 19, 2013. Both countries completed its first vice minister level meeting and also adopted a declaration indicating the expansion and development of humanities exchange. This is seen as the measure of action of what was discussed last June at the ROK-China summit meeting. “Official Launching of the ROK-China Joint Humanities Exchange Committee,” (in Korean) *Financial News*, http://www.fnnews.com/view?ra=Sent0801m_View&corp=fnnews&arcid=201311190100210290010760&cDateYear=2013&cDateMonth=11&cDateDay=19.

prioritized *guanxi* and during his difficult times, he cherished personal connections. In February 2011, when vice president Xi Jinping visited the United States, he made it a point to visit a small town in Iowa. He made the visit, as he remembered the warm hospitality he received twenty-seven years ago in 1985, when he took a delegation from the town of Hebei. In addition, when Xi visited Seoul in 2005 as party chief in Zhejiang, Park Geun-hye, at the time the party chairman of the Hanara party, changed her schedule to welcome him.

President Park Geun-hye's father is the former President Park Chung-hee. Park Geun-hye had to overcome a period of difficulty as both her parents were assassinated. The still single President Park considered General Zhao Yun of the Three Kingdoms period in China as her first beloved and indulged herself in books by the Chinese philosopher Feng Youlan. She endured her difficult times through learning Chinese. President Park's understanding of China was easily revealed through her movements during her state visit last June. In comparison to the former presidents' usual visit to Shanghai, the location of the interim Korean government during the Japanese colonial rule, President Park visited Xi'an. Xi'an is China's pride of 3,000 years of history and symbolizes the Chinese Dream (*Zhongguomong*). President Xi Jinping's father is also buried in Xi'an. This was a decision that took into consideration both leaders' sense of fellowship.

Aside from this personal mutual respect and fellowship, why is China actively promoting bilateral relations? From last November until this year of March, China had an important domestic political event schedule. At the 18th CPC National Congress in November, Xi was appointed as the Secretary-General, and in March at the National People's Congress, Xi was elected as the new president. However, in November, North Korea launched another missile and in February, North Korea conducted its third nuclear test, ruining China's festivities. In comparison to China's refusal to agree to President Roh Moo-hyun's proposal on a strategic cooperative partnership considering North Korea, this time around, North Korea's continuous infringement of China's national interests greatly angered China. China disregarded North Korea and felt it unnecessary to take further consideration.

Broadly, China's considerable isolation after the return of the U.S. to Asia in 2010 along with America's rebalancing strategy allowed China to realize the strategic importance of the ROK. This was evident in the rapid increase in Japanese military spending and its expanding military role in East Asia. By actively responding to the U.S. to join the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and as an active peace contributor supporting the American military partnership, Japan is leading the blockade of China.¹⁰ The only country that does not have to join would be South Korea. As indicated by a director of a policy think tank in China, in a situation where China is becoming isolated (*gudu*), it is very important for China to actively engage South Korea.¹¹

Why is Korea actively reinforcing relations with China? The Korean government has acknowledged the reality that China ranks number two in its foreign affairs priority list. Comparing the previous Korean presidents' level of priority regarding the U.S., Japan, and China, after President Park took office, the act of sending her first envoy to China rather than to Japan was of great significance. It indicates that Japan has fallen to third place in Korea's foreign affairs priority list and that China has risen to be the next important nation after the United States. In reality, the importance of China in Korea's foreign affairs started a while back. It was even apparent when the U.S. and the Japan-friendly Lee Myung-bak government opened FTA negotiations with China first.

In reflecting on the past five years, South Korea's China policy seemed to be based on emotion. China displayed strong disapproval of the Lee Myung-bak government's strengthening of ROK-U.S. relations, and a hard-line approach toward North Korea. In response, the ROK was disappointed with China's ambiguous stance with regard to the *Cheonan* Naval Ship sinking and the Yeonpyeong Island attacks. With the death of a South Korean coast guard during the process of

10. Jaeho Hwang, "South Korea's Strategy in the G2 Era," *KNDU RINSA Forum*, Vol. 23 (2012), <https://www.kndu.ac.kr/rinsa/index.jsp?mid1=00000135>.

11. His statement was made in August 2013 at a Track 1.5 dialogue between Korea and China in Changchun, China.

the Chinese illegal fishing boat crackdown in December 2011, the presidential visit to China was almost canceled. In addition to the repatriation of North Korea defectors and the case of North Korea human rights activist Kim Young-hwan, feelings between both countries greatly deteriorated. No matter how much South Korea criticized, it was difficult for China's North Korea policy to gain the hoped whole-hearted support for South Korea. Therefore, South Korea realized that it must be watchful of China and approach it more rationally and systematically, rather than emotionally.

Direction of the ROK's China Policy

It is expected that the Park administration's China policy will be categorized into three different stages. The first is the attainment of China's support for the Trust-building Process on the Korean Peninsula, then the progress of the ROK-China Trust Building Process and finally, the establishment of a New Model of the Korea-China Relationship.

Securing Support for the Trust-building Process on the Korean Peninsula ('Hanbando Shinloe Process' in Korean or 'Caoxianbandao Xinren Jincheng' in Chinese)

The conceptual meaning of "trust" is the foundation of making mutual cooperation and peace settlement possible by accumulation through the process of conversation, reciprocating exchange and cooperation. "Process" is carried out continuously and gradually in phases. Due to its nature, the speed and scope is flexible depending on the situation.

During her visit to the United States, President Park gave a speech in front of the U.S. Congress on May 8, 2013:

We are determined to embark on another shared journey toward peace on the Korean Peninsula ... the Republic of Korea will never accept a nuclear-armed North Korea. Pyongyang's provocations will be met decisively ... at the same time, I will not link humanitarian aid provid-

ed to the North Korean people, such as infants and young children, to the political situation. And with the trust that gradually builds up, through exchange, through cooperation, we will cement the grounds for durable peace and — eventually — peaceful reunification....¹²

The trust process, as the name suggests, implies “building trust.” Trust is not developed overnight; rather, trust is when one continuously overcomes difficulties via amicable feelings toward the other. In instances where one is disappointed with the other and criticizes them, it can be concluded that trust is lost in that relationship. Trust becomes more important in times of crises rather than when times are favorable. It is important to be considerate of others so their feelings are not hurt.

The trust process is a “process,” and not something that is achieved at once. It must not be rushed or acted upon justification; further, it should act on things that the ROK can do and moreover, such things should not be taken lightly. It is not about changing the other; thus, actions should not be easily carried out because of economic interest. In conclusion, trust is about having a conversation. Only with trust will the conflict be solved at its root. As a mutual concept, it must be carried out as a promise between the two Koreas, gradually accruing trust. Through politico-military trust and socio-economic exchanges, the South-North Korea relationship will normalize and as a result, peace will be stabilized on the Korean Peninsula. South Korea should work effortlessly to show and persuade China the meaning, content and vision of the trust process so that gradually, China will support it.

12. “Full text of Park’s speech at U.S. Congress,” *Yonhap News Agency*, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/national/2013/05/08/4/0301000000AEN20130508010800315F.HTML>.

Progress of the ROK-China Trust-Building Process ('Hanjung Shinloe Process' in Korean or 'Hanzong Xinren Jincheng' in Chinese)

During President Park's visit as a state guest to China in June, key issues such as the North Korea nuclear issue, Trust-building Process on the Korean Peninsula and the Northeast Asia Peace Initiative, were discussed. Support for Park's key point in her China policy was sought after and she listened to China's opinion on the issues. Both countries discussed ways to change the state of tensions on the Korean Peninsula through cooperation and peace. Having much anticipation on the newly elected Korean government's North Korea policy, China looked forward to the ROK's constructive approach to North Korea. Also, in circumstances where the "Asian Paradox" is heightened, the Northeast Peace Initiative was accepted as a very useful suggestion.

The motivational forces that allowed the strengthening of cooperation for both countries on the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia can be concluded to be the personal sense of fellowship amongst the two leaders arising from President Park's "tour of heart and trust." The most important goal for the recent summit was to solidify trust between the two leaders. Therefore, it can be concluded that the start of the relationship between the two leaders is a success. There is a famous Chinese phrase "Friendship of *Guan* and *Bao*," which refers to the close friendship between Prime Minister Guan Zhong, who helped the Duke Huan of the Qi State in the Spring and Autumn Period (*Chunqiu Zhanguo Shidai*), and his friend Bao Shuya, who is famous for his royal friendship with Guan and was the one that persuaded Duke Huan to put aside personal animosity and promote Guan Zhong to Prime Minister.

Guan Zhong and Bao Shuya did not fight over material interests. They did not blame each other when affairs did not go as they pleased. At times when situations did not go the way they projected, they trusted each other. Guan Zhong was quoted saying that it was not his parents, but Bao Shuya who believed in him. Simply put, their friendship was built on trust. The two friends lead through life values of trust for President Park and "No Trust No Survival" (*wuxin buli*)

for President Xi Jinping. It can be easily seen that both leaders' life philosophy have common grounds.

During the former state councilor Tang Jiaxuan's visit to Seoul last June 16 of this year, he stated that "among the neighboring relationships, that of ROK-China has the most benefits. It has the most potential for development, is the most willing for development, already has beyond a bilateral level, and has the most optimistic future."¹³ In order to further develop the relationship, it is necessary to simultaneously build the ROK-China Trust-building Process for the future and peace of the Korean Peninsula as well as the Trust-building process on the Korean Peninsula for the two Koreas.

Establishment of a New Model of the Korea-China Relationship (Xinxing Hanzhong Guanxi)

At the U.S-China Summit which took place last June 7, China attempted to persuade the United States to create a "New Model of Major Power Relationship (Xinxing Daguo Guanxi),"¹⁴ China displayed its intentions to have close cooperative relations with the United States. It is obvious that China also plans to develop these new major power relationships with other great powers. In the future, China will build

13. "Foreign Minister Yoon Meets Former State Councilor Tang Jiaxuan," Press Release No. 13-315, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, June 16, 2013, http://www.mofa.go.kr/webmodule/htsboard/template/read/korboardread.jsp?boardid=235&typeID=6&tableName=TYPE_DATABOARD&seqno=346489.

14. The concept of the new model of major power relations was officially suggested by President Xi Jinping to President Obama this year in June at Sunnylands. Thereafter, this concept has been researched significantly; however, it still has not settled as a concrete concept. The following article explains thoroughly the limitations of this concept. See Richard C. Bush III, "Obama and Xi at Sunnylands: A New Pattern of Relations?," *The Brookings Institution Blog*, June 4, 2013, <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/up-front/posts/2013/06/04-obama-xi-new-pattern-relations-bush>; This concept in the American perspective: David M. Lampton, "A New Type of major-Power Relationship: Seeking a Durable Foundation for US-China Ties," *Asia Policy*, No. 16 (July 2013), pp. 51-68.

new relationships with neighboring countries (*Xinxing Zhoubian Guanxi*) as well. According to the Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, at a conference on the diplomatic work with neighboring countries, which was held in Beijing from October 24 to 25, 2013, President Xi Jinping expressed the four key characters for China's neighboring country foreign policy: friendship (*qin*), sincerity (*cheng*), benefit (*hui*) and inclusiveness (*rong*). The four key characters, respectively, mean to become more close with neighboring countries, respect the neighboring countries to the fullest, share China's benefits of development, and more so embracing the neighboring countries.¹⁵ As a result, this can be seen as the core concepts for China to build a new model of neighborhood relations, which will become useful approaches to capture the hearts of neighbors in order to Rise as a Great Power (*Daguo jueqi*). If the initial neighbor policy (*Sanlin* or three neighbor) was to maintain amicable diplomatic relations (*Mulin*), a peaceful security relationship (*Anlin*), and a win-win economic relationship (*Fulin*), now the new neighborhood relationship (*Silin* or four neighbor) would be the addition of the maintenance of a cultural relationship (*Wenlin*) with its neighbors.¹⁶

The representative case for China's New Neighbor Policy can be the ROK-China relationship. A New Model of Korea-China Relations (*xingxing hanzhong guanxi*) could be the basic frame for the future relationship between the ROK and China, based on mutual respect, mutual benefits, and peaceful coexistence, which were agreed upon by the leaders of Korea and China during President Park's visit to China. Both countries will work toward peace and prosperity. Taking the trust of both countries in the strategic cooperative partnership as the basis, there are four areas of "strategic cooperation" that can be

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15. "Xi Jinping: Let the Sense of Community of Common Destiny Take Deep Root in Neighbouring Countries," Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PRC, October 25, 2013, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx/t1093870.shtml>.
 16. "Jaeho Hwang tells China Review Agency: The value of Seoul Defense Dialogue is high," (in Chinese) *Zhongguo Pinglunshu* (China Review News Agency), November 13, 2013, http://hk.crntt.com/doc/1028/6/0/7/102860781_4.html?coluid=7&kindid=0&docid=102860781&mdate=1113003003.

considered.¹⁷ By grafting the respective nation's philosophy, role and competitiveness, a larger synergy can be created.

First, both countries can establish a cooperative relationship for a safer environment (*Mulin*). For the peace and stability of Northeast Asia, collaboration can be achieved for a safer Korean Peninsula. Second, both countries can establish a cooperative relationship (*Fulin*) that will create a more developed economic environment. Currently, it is predicted that over the next several years, 300 billion dollars of trade will occur between the two countries. Through the trade investment cooperation and an FTA, a win-win situation can be anticipated. Third, both countries can establish a cooperative relationship (*Anlin*) to further create a more improved human security environment. Both countries can lead human security against the non-state and non-military factors, which are disease, illegal immigration, natural disaster and environmental pollution. Fourth, both countries can establish a more improved cultural environment (*Wenlin*). Through the strengthening of ties in humanities, a valuable common denominator can be expanded, which will ignite the progress in political and economic security.

Policy Suggestions

The development of ROK-China relations is not solely determined bilaterally. The ROK-U.S. alliance, China-DPRK relations, U.S.-China relations and the ROK-DPRK relations must be taken into consideration. Taking these considerations as a foundation, three types of policy suggestions will be made; first, concerning the ROK's China policy, second, on mutual efforts between ROK and China governments, and third, the United States.

17. The author has benefited with regard to the ideas of the first three strategic cooperation from an interview with Yang Xiyu of China Institute of International Studies (CIIS) in Beijing in May 2012.

Suggestions for the ROK's China Policy

First, an understanding of China must be deepened. Although the ROK and China have initiated the strengthening of humanities exchange and it appears that both countries have a good idea of each other, in reality, both countries still do not have a full understanding of each other. For example, the Korean government interpreted the slogan “journey of ‘heart and trust’” (*shin-sim* in Korean or *xin-xin* in Chinese); however, it should have been “trust and heart” (*sim-shin* in Korean and *xin-xin* in Chinese with different intonation). When looking at the meaning of the Chinese characters, without a proper explanation, it is not easy to understand and pronounce the phrase correctly. For ROK and China, it could have been explained as a simple Chinese character cultural right and it would have been better understood if it was explained in this way. In Korean, *Shin-sim* means trust, which is the same in Chinese. China merely accepted the translation as it was something South Korea designated. Thus, it is understood that what is good is good. Although it was an effort to win over China’s heart, it was a very Korean logic and way of approach.

Second, Korea must be very careful with its China policy regarding North Korea. South Korea must not eliminate the possibility that ROK-China relations with regard to North Korea can become uncomfortable. Even in that case, Korea must not ‘demand’ but ‘request’ China’s assistance. When South Korea makes such demands, there is a possibility that relations with China will retreat to levels experienced during the Lee Myung-bak administration. The Park government’s policy toward China, particularly in relation to North Korea, for the next four years should be a Korean version of *Taoguang Yanghui* (not to show off one’s capability but to keep a low profile). There must be no attempts to intentionally absorb North Korea. The ROK must accept the special relationship that China and North Korea possess, and continuously send the message to China that the ROK will not get in the way of its national interests. In order to gain the heart of China, the ROK must push forward with a kind of policy of “Many drops make a flood.”

Also, rather than at tempting to “solve all problems at once,” the ROK must go in the direction of maintaining the current situation and strengthening cooperation. China does not want to be dragged into an uncertain and confusing situation, such as the collapse of North Korea, due to a change in its North Korea policy. Within the scope of not instigating the collapse of North Korea and through the modification of aid, it appears that China will assert a subtle influence on North Korea. Therefore, as long as China seldom takes the role of pressuring North Korea, it is necessary for the ROK to settle with its policy toward China. South Korea’s realistic China policy should be one that insists China to assert influence by giving moderate pressure to North Korea in which the situation is not aggravated further.

Third, under the pressure between China and the U.S., Korea must not lose focus in this critical timing as there is a possibility of losing the hearts of China and the United States. But, by responding actively, Korea could gain the hearts of both China and the U.S. Korea should have given the U.S. what it wanted quickly. Rather than being pushed into the TPP, Korea should have volunteered into it at the time when the U.S. would have been appreciative of it. China joined the APEC through the active support of Korea in 1994, even for the TPP, Korea can join first and help China join thereafter. Likewise, Korea should have actively supported the admittance of the U.S. into Asian gatherings.

Suggestions for Mutual Efforts between the ROK and China

The first aspect that must be acknowledged is that there is a need for a change in mutual recognition. For example, China should recognize South Korea as a true strategic partner. While South Korea positively considers the elevation of relations with China, Seoul is deeply concerned with it as well. How will China try to move on with this new Strategic Cooperative Partnership? Does China understand the realistic questions of a country with a powerful neighbor? Does China understand Korea’s strategic dilemma between the U.S. and China? Does China understand how South Korea feels directly threatened by the

threats from North Korea? In other words, South Korea is concerned with the sincerity of the Chinese government and hence, there is a need for China to provide such assurance and dissipate any doubts South Korea may have.

On the other hand, South Korea should understand the relationship between China and North Korea. It is not that China 'loves' North Korea; they simply both understand what they want from each other and why. Their relationship is more of a strategic relationship that is beneficial for both parties' national interests. This also means that once that usage is over, they can easily turn their backs. Behind the smiles and the so-called 'blood relationship,' North Korea fears that China will abandon their support, and China fears that North Korea is using China to be closer to the United States. Thus, it would be irrational to conclude that Sino-North Korea relations is an unchangeable, blood-bound relationship. One thing that South Korea should consider is the fact that similar to the ROK-U.S. relationship which has a historic background that bounds the two nations together, Sino-North Korea relations also have a history of an alliance that has tied them together for more than 60 years.

Second, when President Xi makes a state visit to Korea this year, a new level of cooperative partnership must be declared in order to establish an increased new model of Korea-China relationship based on the Trust-building Process on the Korean Peninsula and ROK-China Trust Building Process. Both countries do not invest sufficient importance to the Korea-China relations in their diplomatic priority.¹⁸ When considering the regional security environment, a Strategic Cooperative Partnership is already highly prioritized. Therefore, a further elevation of relations may not be a rational decision. There are three reasons to support this statement.

18. Honghua Men, "Evaluation and Prospects for the ROK-China Strategic Cooperative Partnership," *Reinforcement of the ROK-China Strategic Cooperative Partnership*, Proceedings of the 2nd ROK-China Strategic Dialogue hosted by the Central Party School of the Communist Party of China and the Center for China Studies of ROK National Diplomatic Academy, at Qianjin International Hotel (Changchun, China), August 2013, p. 22.

First, such terms do not indicate that the ROK-China relations have elevated to that level, but rather that both agreed to step forward in that direction. Strategically, China is implicating that in the long term, it would like to cooperate with Korea. Although the strategic cooperative partnership itself can be analyzed in various ways, it is a clear indication that both countries are in need of each other. Second, it must be understood as to why China suggested the strategic cooperative partnership during the Lee Myungbak government, when Korea was more focused on the ROK-U.S. alliance, and not during the Roh Moo-hyun government, when the ROK-China relationship was already prioritized. Currently there is no request to elevate ROK-China relations since both the ROK-China and ROK-U.S. relations have been stabilized. Upgrading the relationship with China at a time when the DPRK-China relationship is stagnant and when the surrounding environment is more favorable to South Korea is very important. Another method is to give in to China when they need Korea the most. South Korea is in a greater need for a partner, not China. Finally, although this was not expressed, there is a need to define the relationship between Korea's new government and that of China's. This can be seen as a title for the relationship between the ROK-China every five years. Therefore, there is indeed a need to approach the relationship actively rather than passively.

However, this does not mean that ROK-China relations must be considered above all else and declare it to bring it to the highest level. China cannot be Korea's everything when it comes to foreign policy. Currently, what Korea can further consider regarding the strategic cooperative partnership is that it was agreed upon by both leaders, that they become "a strategic cooperative partnership on a trip of trust." Some other names could be considered as "a strategic cooperative partnership on peace and cooperation," "a comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership" or "a strategic cooperative partnership based trust and cooperation."

Third, based on such relationships, both countries at least can achieve three results in the next four years. First, both countries must work toward redefining a channel between the Chief of National

Security at the Blue House and the Chinese State Councilor in order to discuss security and foreign policies into a joint crisis prevention and management mechanism. Generally, crisis management consists of a threat assessment that focuses on threat detection and prevention, threat control that focuses on evaluating and negotiating existing threats, and threat resolution that resolves the threat and takes preventive measures.¹⁹

Second, both countries should work towards establishing a comprehensive mechanism at a more high-level official dialogue. Currently the vice minister level dialogues for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Defense are being held separately, but this needs to elevate to ministerial level. Further, there is a need to develop this into a 2+2 ministerial level meeting.²⁰ There is no ministerial level economic dialogue, which is necessary for the above establishment. Thereafter, it is recommended that when the timing is right, a merge of the three dialogues into a Korean version of vice premier level Strategic and Economic Dialogue is recommended. It is necessary to be flexible with the names and formats of the meetings in order to proceed with the elevating process smoothly.

Third, generally, in a military relationship, relations begin with a 'military exchange,' developing to a 'military cooperation' reaching to a 'military alliance' and there is a need to bring up 'military exchange' to the 'military cooperation' level within the scope that the ROK-U.S. alliance is not placed into conflict.²¹ Both countries should make efforts to build mutual trust between the two militaries. First, the defense ministries of the two countries must actively support the

19. Byungok Gil and Taehoi Heo, "Research on establishing a national threat management system and program development," (in Korean) *Korea Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (2003), pp. 340-341.

20. The first 2+2 director level meeting between Korea and China was held on December 23, in Beijing, "The first ever 2+2 meeting after the execution of Jang Sung-taek," (in Korean) *The Korea Economic Daily*, December 23, 2013, <http://www.hankyung.com/news/app/newsview.php?aid=2013122380658>.

21. Jaeho Hwang, "Security and Defense Relations between Korea and China," *Chinese-South Korean Relations, 1992-2012: Achievements and Prospects* (in Korean) (Seoul: Northeast Asian History Foundation, 2012), pp. 55-63.

Defense Strategic Dialogue that was already established in order to achieve substantial results. Second, at the time of military exercises of both countries, there must be a mutually advanced notice. Third, military bases can be selectively opened to visit in the limited scope of mutual visits for both countries. Fourth, both countries must cooperate toward humanitarian efforts, such as the humanitarian relief operations and UN Peace Keeping Operations. Fifth, on the level of the defense minister, an actual hotline should be managed. If it is possible to achieve all these steps, it will be of tremendous help in developing a military mutual trust for both countries in the future.

Suggestions Relating to the United States

First, when it comes to Korea's China policy, the U.S. needs to understand that Korea takes into full consideration the position and benefits of the United States. Even though the special envoy visited China first, the U.S. still came before China in sequence of ROK diplomatic priority. As it was seen when President Park sent a policy consultation team to the U.S., the ROK-U.S. alliance and policy is has modified. In addition, during President Park's China visit, South Korea only accepted to create "ties in humanities (*renwen niudai*)," instead of agreeing to create "a humanities community (*renwen gongtongti*)" that could be seen as a kind of de facto value alliance between the two countries, that their Chinese counterpart wanted.

Second, when it comes to the North Korean problem, the U.S. and South Korea must actively recognize China's role and utilize it. Every five years, when the new government takes office in the ROK, North Korea commits a rash act testing the new Seoul government. However, this time, the North was not able to commit a rash act not only because of the solid ROK-U.S. relationship, but mostly because of China's hard-line position toward North Korea. China's current DPRK policy is very useful in that DPRK is not able to act foolishly and emotionally. The U.S. and Korea must appreciate China for not giving carrots to the DPRK and encourage China to continuously place pressure.

Third, in the case of ROK-Japan relations, there is an expectation for the role of United States. At the APEC summit last October 7, President Park's warm gesture to President Xi and cold gestures to Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was a hot issue. The U.S. must take a constructive go-in-between role, rather than an expectant one, as seen from ROK-U.S.-Japan trilateral summit at the Nuclear Security Summit in The Hague on 24 and 25 March, 2014. An expectant role can be seen as America prioritizing U.S.-Japan relations, which can lead to South Korea's great disappointment.

Concluding remarks

Currently, South Korea's foreign policy is confronted with many challenges. It is faced with the decline of the United States and China's rapid rise along with Japan's normalization under the sponsorship of the U.S., and a continuously unstable relationship with North Korea. Furthermore, the ROK-U.S. alliance is gradually transitioning from a security alliance to include the economic. In contrast, China-ROK relations are expanding from an economy-focused one, to include security. South Korea is cornered in a situation where it must strategically balance the U.S. and China. Korea must maintain the ROK-U.S. alliance and also manage well its Korea-China partnership.

President Xi Jinping stated that President Park is an old friend (*laopengyou*) of his and the people of China. In reality, he only has met President Park once in 2005, although they met three times this year. It is possible to discuss world affairs and become good friends after only meeting once. However, there are still many pending issues that both countries are faced with. Recently, the Ieodo situation escalating tensions over the KADIZ and CADIZ and the missile defense system along with various other issues are leading Korea to a situation where it must choose. Improvement in relations with China after President Park's state visit to China and the declaration of 'enrichment' is stated to be at a risk of 'falsehood.' After June, China expected Korea would respond more flexibly to the Kaesong Industrial Complex situation.

However, with no follow-up stating that North Korea's patience is reaching its limit, there is evidence of movements of folding all expectations of the Trust-building Process on the Korean Peninsula. We can only verify China's basic principles in regard to the Northeast Asia Peace Initiative.

Last October 7, President Park met President Xi at the APEC summit and quoted poet Wang Zihuan of the Tang dynasty stating that "In order to view the scenery farther, we must go a floor up (*yu qiong qian li mu, geng shang yi cheng lou*)," indicating that both countries have upgraded a level. The poem that President Park quoted was a poem written on a scroll given as a present to her by President Xi last June when she visited Beijing. She memorized the poem and presented it back to President Xi.²² However, there is a possibility that the relations between both countries will not be able to upgrade at all and just degrade. For example, in the instance that the heart and trust is not properly delivered to each other between the ROK and China, hearts will break and the trust will become mistrust. This will bring the worst results to both countries, making the next four years painful. There are high expectations on President Xi's visit to Seoul this year to be another tour of heart and trust that will turn an ill-fated history of the Korean Peninsula to a happy history.

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