

## **Why Did We Get China Wrong? Reconsidering the Popular Narrative: China will abandon North Korea\***

**Seong-Hyon Lee**

Despite high hopes from Seoul and Washington, China articulated that it was not ready to “abandon” North Korea in the wake of Kim Jong-un’s nuclear test in January 2016, and that there would be slim chance of this occurring in the future. Seoul and Washington’s (so far invalidated) hopes of such were premised on China’s unusually strong anger and reaction toward North Korea’s third nuclear test in 2013. Many observers have since commented that China’s patience with its Cold War ally was finally wearing thin. With that, the narrative “China will abandon North Korea” has been the mainstay of relevant discussions in the public sphere. Given the importance of the 2013 nuclear test, this paper reviews major events in 2013 that shaped the public perception of China’s growing anger and frustration with North Korea and the potential presence of alternative explanations or counter-perspectives while scrutinizing both narratives. Finally, it establishes the interpretation that, while a series of events may have shaped the popular narrative concerning China-North Korea relations in 2013 and given the public reason to believe in changes to China’s fundamental policies, however no such actual

---

\* The examination in this paper has been in the making for the last three years. In a sense, it is a product of collective intelligence, based on numerous presentations and discussions at various institutions in Asia and the United States, including one in which two Chinese foreign ministry officials were present (one of whom raised a question and the other of whom shared a meal with the author.) The author would like to thank Gi-Wook Shin, Tom Fingar, David Straub, Michael Armacost, Dan Sneider, Kathleen Stephens, Alice Miller, Yun Sun, Stephanie Kleine-Ahlbrandt, Avery Goldstein, Thomas Gold, Lee Hee-ok, Han Suk-hee, Kim Heung-kyu, David Wank, Ryo Sahashi, Lee Geun, Moon Chung-in, Hwang Jae-ho, Chung Sang-ki, Kim Shin-dong, Lee Jung-nam, Chun Sung-heung, Edward Vickers, for either hosting my talk or being supportive colleagues. The greatest help, of course, came from my Chinese colleagues who are too numerous to mention here. In this paper, the merits are theirs; the faults are mine.

change occurred, revealing a mismatch between China's words and actions. It concludes with some forward-looking thoughts.

**Keywords:** China-North Korea, Sino-North Korea, Kim Jong-un, Xi Jinping, North Korea

The widespread narrative that China has been more willing to use crippling measures in dealing with North Korea's nuclear ambitions has yet to be substantiated, despite numerous reports entertaining this notion. This holds true even in 2016 in the wake of yet another nuclear test by North Korea. Despite the fact that it was Pyongyang's fourth and most technologically-advanced (and therefore most dangerous) effort, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi made it clear that China's stance towards North Korea would "not be swayed by such a specific event or the temporary mood of the moment" (*buhui shou yishiyishi yingxiang*).<sup>1</sup> If outside observers mistakenly expected China to make a stern response to Pyongyang's test, then it would indicate our previous assessments on Chinese policy on North Korea are flawed. Because our current notions are based on previous assessments of China regarding the matter, we need to go back and critically reexamine our previous perspectives. This paper is meant to serve such a purpose.

This paper examines to what degree North Korea's 2013 nuclear test had an impact on China's policy toward Pyongyang, with a key focus on whether it reached a "tipping point," a watershed moment for a fundamental shift. The 2013 event merits review and more in-depth discussion because it was a time characterized by particularly feverish speculation over a fundamental shift in Chinese foreign policy on North Korea after Pyongyang's nuclear test, which the latter carried

---

1. *People's Daily*, January 27, 2016, <http://world.people.com.cn/n1/2016/0127/c1002-28090219.html>. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi was also manifestly clear in sounding out China's long-held policy that prioritizes stability on the Korean Peninsula when he said, "a new resolution should not provoke new tension in the situation or destabilize the Korean Peninsula" (新的决议不是为了刺激局势紧张, 更不是要把半岛搞乱).

out despite China's repeated and painstaking counsel against it. An open debate in China among public intellectuals and even ranking members of the Communist Party institutions and the military erupted to question North Korea's strategic value to China. There were even calls for "abandoning" its Cold War-era ally. Subsequent academic literature and policy analysis covering Sino-North Korea relations often mention the 2013 nuclear test as a turning point in the evolution of Sino-North Korea relations as China's indulgence on North Korea is reaching a breaking point. Unfortunately, there has been no comprehensive and nuanced review of the event. This paper wishes to fill that gap.

This paper specifically examines major events in 2013 that shaped public perception of China's growing anger and frustration with North Korea. It then looks for the presence of alternative explanations or counter-perspectives and moves on to scrutinize both narratives. Finally, it establishes the integrated conclusion that, while a series of events shaped the popular narrative about China-North Korea relations in 2013 and may have given the impression to believe in a fundamental Chinese policy change, this did not manifest in reality. It leaves with a presentation of some forward-looking implications.

### **The Popular Narrative: "China Will Abandon North Korea"**

Is China poised to abandon the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)? For the general public, this is a tantalizing question. For the academic community, this is a trite inquiry. For the government in South Korea, this is a serious policy issue. At any rate, as of today, China has not, with many details left to be resolved. This necessitates more detailed investigation.

Speculation over Chinese fundamental policy shifts on North Korea has been particularly fertile in the wake of the 2013 Korean nuclear test owing to the fact that there were newly installed leaders in both Beijing and Pyongyang and many reports suggested the two former Cold War allies did not get along well. The world has been

wondering whether China's patience with North Korea has been wearing thin, as the rift between the two has deepened. Against this backdrop, a flood of international policy comments and media reports supported the concept that China no longer sees North Korea as a strategic asset. The popular view, endorsed by Richard Haass, president of the Council on Foreign Relations, suggested that Beijing now sees the regime in Pyongyang as more of a strategic liability than asset.<sup>2</sup> South Korean scholar Lee Jung-min even argued that a major foreign policy question of Xi Jinping as China's top decision maker would be to decide whether North Korea is no longer a strategic asset but a strategic liability to China's own core interests.<sup>3</sup>

China has long been blamed by the international community for shielding North Korea from international criticism despite the latter's various belligerent acts, because Beijing sees Pyongyang as a useful "buffer zone" against the U.S. and its allies — a mentality that goes back to the Cold War period. Also, there is the potential that a unified Korea might align with Washington, leaving China with an American ally right on its border. However, some observers argue that is an outdated view that only made sense during the Cold War. Now the Cold War is over and the world is different. China's worldview is also different. Or, it should be, the common assumption goes. As a major global power, China now has a different global outlook and a vision for the region it is situated in. For example, Chinese scholar Cheng Xiaohe said, "China is a formidable country with a large economy and a modern military."<sup>4</sup> Therefore, China, an increasingly confident superpower, wouldn't tolerate the wanton behavior by its smaller neighbor, especially under the strong and charismatic leadership of Xi Jinping, who is reportedly more conscious of China's global image and is more focused on China's own national interests.

Against this backdrop, both leading up to and following North

---

2. Richard Haass, "Time to End the North Korean Threat," *Wall Street Journal*, December 23, 2014.

3. Lee Chung Min, "South Korea's Strategic Thinking on North Korea and Beyond," *The Asan Forum*, October 7, 2013.

4. "Is China ready to abandon North Korea?" *BBC*, April 12, 2013.

Korea's 2013 test, China spoke out much more openly than it had against similar actions in the past, and supported U.N. sanctions in response to the test, a stark departure from China's previous luke-warm attitude toward sanctions. A few days before North Korea's planned nuclear test in 2013, China's then-Vice Foreign Minister Cui Tiankai (崔天凯) publicly reaffirmed Beijing's disapproval about Pyongyang's third nuclear test when he said that China "resolutely opposes" it (jianjue fandui 坚决反对).<sup>5</sup> The Chinese government had been directly engaged in painstaking efforts to persuade North Korea to forgo the nuclear test. Diplomatic sources in Beijing told the South Korean newspaper the *Chosun Ilbo* that the Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi (杨洁篪) at that time summoned North Korean Ambassador Ji Jae-ryong twice<sup>6</sup> to urge Pyongyang to drop the test.<sup>7</sup> China's state-run *Global Times*, an international news arm of the official *People's Daily*, also warned Pyongyang that there would be a "heavy price" if the nuclear test went ahead.<sup>8</sup> China also threatened to cut off aid.<sup>9</sup> When, despite all these Chinese efforts North Korea went ahead with its nuclear test, China appeared to be greatly affronted and uncommonly agitated.

Moreover, the site for the DPRK's nuclear detonation (Punggye-ri in Kilju County, North Hamgyong Province) was only about 100 kilometers away from the Chinese border, prompting school evacuations

---

5. News video clip seen on ifeng.com, run by Phoenix TV in Hong Kong, February 5, 2013, [http://news.ifeng.com/world/special/chaoxiansanheshi/content-3/detail\\_2013\\_02/05/21968300\\_0.shtml](http://news.ifeng.com/world/special/chaoxiansanheshi/content-3/detail_2013_02/05/21968300_0.shtml).

6. "N. Korea-China Rift Deepens Over Nuclear Test," *Chosun Ilbo*, February 7, 2013.

7. On the day of North Korea's nuclear test Chinese then Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi, now a State Councilor, again summoned the North Korean ambassador to warn that China was 'firmly opposed' to the test. See "China firmly opposes DPRK's nuclear test; Yang summons ambassador," *Xinhua*, February 12, 2013.

8. "China should not fear NK disputes," *Global Times*, February 6, 2013. It says "If North Korea insists on a third nuclear test despite attempts to dissuade it, it must pay a heavy price. The assistance it will be able to receive from China should be reduced."

9. *Ibid.*

in fear of an earthquake. Concerned about nuclear radiation, enraged Chinese citizens staged protests in front of the North Korean embassy in China. The Chinese government even allowed its media outlets to criticize Pyongyang. Furthermore, Deng Yuwen (邓聿文), a senior publication editor with the Central Party School, penned an opinion piece in the *Financial Times* titled, “China should abandon North Korea,” which drew worldwide attention.<sup>10</sup> Taken together, many observers came to see North Korea’s 2013 nuclear test as the watershed moment in China’s fundamental policy shift on its North Korea policy. There are, however, conflicting signs that China’s much-touted policy shift on North Korea may have not turned past the critical threshold, the “tipping point.”

## Theoretical Perspectives

The term strategic “asset” or “liability” is often used by alliance theorists. Alliance theorists research why alliances form or dissolve. For example, John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt asserted that Washington’s close ties to Israel have become “a strategic liability” as the United States has become the focus of terrorists due to their alliance.<sup>11</sup> Bruce Gilley produced an article about whether Taiwan has become a “strategic liability” to the United States.<sup>12</sup> A normative form of alliance involves signing a mutual defense treaty. While each partner agrees, explicitly or implicitly, to defend the other, all parties retain substantial discretion in the implementation of the agreement.<sup>13</sup> In November 2010, for instance, the DPRK shelled South Korea’s

---

10. Deng Yuwen, “China should abandon North Korea,” *Financial Times*, February 27, 2013.

11. See John Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, “Israel: Strategic Liability or Asset?” *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Toronto: Penguin, 2007).

12. Bruce Gilley, “Not So Dire Straits: How the Finlandization of Taiwan Benefits U.S. Security,” *Foreign Affairs* 89, no. 1 (2010), pp. 44-60.

13. David Lake, “Anarchy, Hierarchy, and the Variety of International Relations,” *International Organization* 50, no. 1 (1996), pp. 1-33.

Yeonpyeong Island, raising the inter-Korean tension to the brink of war. According to former South Korean President Lee Myung-bak's description, Hu Jintao's emissary Dai Bingguo (戴秉国) flew to Pyongyang and sat down with Kim Jong-il face-to-face. Dai warned Kim: "If North Korea would first attack South Korea and as a result, there were full-scale arms clashes, China wouldn't aid North Korea."<sup>14</sup> Some observers interpreted this as Beijing considering a decoupling of their mutual defense treaty with North Korea they signed in 1961, effectively severing their alliance. China's defense treaty with the DPRK is China's only formal military alliance treaty signed with another country that has not been rescinded since the founding of the People's Republic. Former President Lee, at that time, took Dai's words as a significant sign. Lee observed: "China's attitude towards North Korea is beginning to change."<sup>15</sup> Since then, North Korea's periodic and often raucous provocative acts in the region have been increasingly described as a liability for China, not an asset. Scholars broadly agree that national interest is the key determining factor for a country to decide whether a particular nation is an asset or not. If judged as a liability, then, theoretically speaking, the nation may be "abandoned."

In the wide-ranging debate on China's policy change on North Korea, a main issue has been that experts surprisingly haven't agreed upon what constitutes "change." This has created confusion, as different scholars interpret it in different ways. Some scholars argue that China's policy on North Korea "changed" because China's attitude is "tougher" than before. Others argue that it didn't, because China still hasn't severed the alliance or abandoned Pyongyang. Here in this paper, China's policy shift means a fundamental change in China's willingness to sever its long-held fraternity ties with North Korea — to

---

14. This information was revealed by former South Korean President Lee Myung-bak in his controversial memoir, published in January 2015. South Korean media widely reported on it, for example see Jung Won-yop, "Wen Jiabao Eunmilhan Yeogiggaji ... onu jungshangyi soknae malhag gaekna" [Even revealing private conversations with Wen Jiabao ... Which leader would share a secret?], *JoongAng Ilbo*, January 30, 2015.

15. *Ibid.*

“abandon” North Korea, as Deng Yuwen himself proposes. Deng’s suggestion is chosen as the operative definition of “China’s policy shift on North Korea” in this paper because his article drew worldwide attention on China-North Korea relations and therefore serves as the most prominent “public barometer” for what should be the criteria for the “change.”

## “Wind of Change” in China’s Attitude on North Korea<sup>16</sup>

### *The Case of Deng Yuwen*

Deng was Deputy Editor of the Study Times (Xuexi Shibao 学习时报) under the Party School of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in Beijing, which is its official name, more simply known as the Central Party School (zhongyang dangxiao 中央党校).<sup>17</sup> The significance of the publication can be gleaned by the prominence of its oversized signboard near the entrance of the institution. As such, Deng’s case had a great bearing on the public’s perception of China-North Korea relations. Deng wrote an op-ed piece on the Financial Times titled “China should abandon North Korea.” Given his post with the Communist Party’s authoritative organization,<sup>18</sup> many outside purveyors believed that his view must have been a reflection of internal pronouncements on Communist Party leadership’s emerging new policy on North Korea. Otherwise, the logic went, Deng would not have dared to write such an unorthodox piece, with such a provocative title, in such a major Western newspaper. Doing so would have

---

16. This part draws from Seong-Hyon Lee, “Firm Warning, Light Consequences: China’s DPRK Policy,” *China Brief* 13, no. 23 (2013).

17. In China’s state-run think tanks and academic community, it’s comparable to associate professor status. Author’s interview, Beijing, March 2015. The institution’s full name is 中共中央党校.

18. The signboard of “学习时报” (Study Times) prominently displayed at the entrance of the Central Party School in Beijing, while the school itself on the contrary is not very conspicuous.



risked his career. Some further speculated that the Chinese foreign ministry was in “pre-consultation” with Deng. In other words, the Chinese government was using him as a “messenger” to signal to the world that China would decouple its problematic ideological ally from the Cold War era.

However, this author’s two-hour interview with Deng in Beijing<sup>19</sup> revealed that the episode was entirely of his own personal volition. He was not “on a mission.” The foreign ministry not only did not consult him, it actually also found out about his article the same time with everyone else, only after it was published. According to Deng, the ministry subsequently lodged an angry complaint with his employer.<sup>20</sup> Soon afterwards, he was fired.<sup>21</sup> While his column drew worldwide attention and made a huge impact in shaping public perception of a Chinese policy shift on North Korea, his dismissal and being fired from his post in the Communist Party organization received relatively little media coverage and most members of the public weren’t aware of this. This resulted in a significant “information asymmetry” in the way the outside world still understands the affair.

It begs the question as to why he bothered to write the piece, which costed him his career. Did he want to play the role of a harbinger for

---

19. Author’s interview with Deng Yuwen, Beijing, March 2013. Deng asked the author not to make public his dismissal, which the author honored. Deng, himself, however, soon revealed the news to various media outlets.

20. Ibid. According to two other Chinese sources, the Chinese foreign ministry became incensed because Deng “hijacked” the Chinese Communist Party’s authority by using his affiliation with the official Communist party institution.

21. Ibid. What many observers also weren’t aware of was that he had already received an internal warning the previous year when he wrote a critical piece about the legacy of Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao, predecessors of Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang, respectively. It was a very bold move in China. Asked why he did that, he said, “I noticed that in the United States, when a president nears the end of his term, people evaluate his legacy. I thought “Why not try the same with the Chinese leaders?” His penchant for daring behavior may be a clue as to why he wrote the problematic piece about North Korea. Obviously, such inclinations are not good traits for a person who works for such an official Communist Party organization.

China's coming policy shift on North Korea? Did he want to spark a larger and open debate about China's role on North Korea by directly engaging the Western audience?

Deng is somewhat unusual in that, even though he is part of the established Communist Party structure, which is comprised of individuals that refrain from writing personal columns and opinion pieces in commercial media platforms, a casual search on the Chinese internet shows that he in fact often writes media columns and opinion pieces on current affairs in Chinese news outlets and online platforms. Surprisingly, his motivation appeared to be more personal — part polemic and part opportunistic. And it may have more to do with his misjudgment of what constituted overstepping or toeing the line, in terms of what is acceptable and what is not acceptable in Chinese censorship. As a public intellectual working for the official state publication, Deng was usually savvy about this; in fact, his job involved reviewing the political correctness of material to be published for the Communist Party publication. Apparently, this time, he himself failed the test. The motivation can be best gleaned from his own words:

“In today's China, you have more freedom to voice your views and that's fine as long as it doesn't directly challenge the legitimacy of the Communist Party rule. I thought I knew where the boundary was.”<sup>22</sup>

Deng speculated that his article backfired because it was published at a particularly sensitive time, when China's ties with North Korea had become the focus of the world's attention, and he earned the ire of the Chinese government. Interestingly, it was also established during the interview with Deng that he had previously sent out the article to several Chinese media outlets first.<sup>23</sup> All of them rejected it — a clear indication that his article stood outside the boundaries of the Communist Party's censorship standards. Looking back on Deng's case, a Chinese scholar said he knew Deng's act would amount to political

---

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

suicide in China: “Deng argued that we should abandon North Korea. But it was him who was abandoned.”<sup>24</sup>

### ***Xi Jinping Rebukes North Korea?***

Deng was not the most senior figure in China to raise false hopes in the outside world about China’s alleged policy shift toward Pyongyang. When the Chinese President Xi Jinping, during his speech at the Boao Forum<sup>25</sup> in 2013, publicly proclaimed, “No one should be allowed to throw a region and even the whole world into chaos for ‘selfish gains’ (yiji zhi si),”<sup>26</sup> the remark made instant international headlines. Prominent media headlines such as “China rebukes North Korea, says no state should sow chaos,”<sup>27</sup> “China signals North Korea to stop throwing the world into chaos,”<sup>28</sup> and “China Hints at Limits to North Korea Actions” appeared.<sup>29</sup>

In his speech, in fact, Xi didn’t directly mention “North Korea” by name. Xi’s veiled language therefore became a hotly debated topic. In the context of a contentious time, when North Korea was ratcheting up tensions on the Korean Peninsula following its third nuclear test, it was easily interpreted that Xi was criticizing North Korea.<sup>30</sup>

---

24. Author’s interview with Chinese expert, Beijing, April 2013.

25. 博鳌论坛 in Chinese. An annual forum, which the Chinese promote as “China’s Davos.”

26. “更不能为一己之私把一个地区乃至世界搞乱,” in Chinese. The full Chinese text of Xi Jinping’s speech is available here, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2013-04/07/c\\_115296408.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2013-04/07/c_115296408.htm). For its English report, see “None of us Can Live without Peace: Chinese President,” *Xinhua*, April 4, 2013.

27. “China Rebukes North Korea, Says No State should Sow Chaos,” *Reuters*, April 7, 2013.

28. “China Signals North Korea to Stop throwing the World into Chaos,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 7, 2013.

29. Jane Perlez and Choe Sang-Hun, “China Hints at Limits to North Korea Actions,” *New York Times*, April 7, 2013.

30. But unlike the media’s prevailing pronouncement that Xi was referring to North Korea, there was not a unanimous view among the audience members at the Boao Forum as to which country Xi was referring to. A top international

A few days later, however, Chinese state media clarified Xi's remark. First, the Communist Party's official *People's Daily* recognized there was speculation regarding Xi's remark: "The Chinese and foreign media have speculated, who harbors 'selfish gain' (yiji zhi si)?"<sup>31</sup> The *People's Daily* then went on to catalogue turmoil in Libya, Egypt and Tunisia, noting that "Western countries" are responsible for them, referring to the United States and its allies. It also mentioned "an outside power" that is not in the East Asian region that "interferes" in the South China Sea dispute. China maintains that the South China Sea dispute should be resolved between China and regional states, without the interference of outside powers. The Communist Party's official English-language mouthpiece, *China Daily*,<sup>32</sup> was more blunt. In an editorial titled "Xi's Security Outlook,"<sup>33</sup> it again listed global hot spots, from the Syrian crisis to territorial disputes in the South China Sea. It then argued that many of these global security woes today can, in one way or another, be traced back to the pursuit of "selfish gains." If we consider a state with global outreach, which is subject to Xi's criticism and is involved in different global hotspots, ranging from the Middle East to the South China Sea, and which is responsible for "inciting chaos" (gaoluan 搞乱) in Afghanistan and Iraq, then the country China refers to is clearly the United States, not North Korea.<sup>34</sup> North Korea has nothing to do with the dispute in the

---

organization representative met with Xi later that day. He, like everyone else, was eager to hear Xi to elaborate on the much-circulated comment. "But Xi Jinping completely bypassed our expectation. He did not even mention the word 'North Korea' in that small confidential gathering," the representative told this author. Interview with the president of an international organization, Hainan island, China, April 2013.

31. "Shei you gaoluan shijie zhixin, yiji zhisi jiuzhi she" [Who harbors the intention to throw the world into turmoil? Who is seeking the selfish gains?], *People's Daily*, April 9, 2013.
32. Due to the official nature of China Daily in representing the Communist Party's view, the Chinese government feared that it may not appeal to the Western readers. As such, it encouraged the launching of the English edition of the more popular *Global Times* as a "counterweight" to the *China Daily*.
33. "Xi's Security Outlook," *China Daily*, April 10, 2013.

South China Sea, nor with conflict in the Middle East. This author was present as an invited guest when Xi delivered the speech. Even though Xi's ambiguous remark made global headlines, subsequent clarifications didn't receive equal exposure by foreign media outlets. Thus, an outside observer who has awareness of Xi's rebuke on North Korea usually doesn't know that it was subsequently clarified. The media reported on the former, not the latter. Again, as seen in Deng Yuwen's case, this shows how "information asymmetry" could influence the popular narrative.

### ***Obama: "China is 'Recalculating' North Korean Policy"***

The case involving U.S. President Barack Obama is another good case of how external perceptions of the issue can be influenced by the narrative espoused by a well-known and authoritative public figure. When Obama publicly proclaimed that China was "recalculating" its North Korean policy,<sup>35</sup> most people took it at face value. Given the position of authority a U.S. president carries, many believed that his remark was based on credible information and high-level intelligence.<sup>36</sup> For instance, at a conference, a well-known academic based his argument for China's policy shift on North Korea, quoting from Obama. This shows the public's tendency to attribute high credibility to information from authority figures when delivered via media platforms, such as television.

---

34. For an expanded discussion, devoted to this intrigue, see a more detailed analytic perspective at <http://www.moonofalabama.org/2013/04/misreading-xi-on-north-korea.html>.

35. "Transcript: President Obama's Exclusive Interview with George Stephanopoulos," *ABCNews*, March 13, 2013, <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2013/03/transcript-president-obamas-interview-with-george-stephanopoulos/>.

36. Conversations with the members of the diplomatic community in Beijing reveal the presence of a powerful alternative interpretation. "He [Obama] is definitely not using our intel," said a Beijing-based foreign diplomat. A China-based foreign intelligence official brushed aside Obama's observation this way: "He Probably didn't Read the Briefing on his Desk Carefully," Author's interviews, Beijing, March 2013.

However, the reactions from the community of Chinese experts were substantially different. Obama's remark was perceived by Chinese analysts as a politically calculated, clever public diplomacy ploy, designed to "publicly pressure" (gongkai shiya) China to fit into the American-scripted narrative.<sup>37</sup> The Chinese believed Washington's strategy was to use such public remarks to goad China into eventually abandoning North Korea, which in turn would strengthen Washington's geopolitical position in East Asia. From the Chinese perspective, such a public pronouncement from such an authoritative figure, who carries the natural credibility that comes with his position, was meant to drive a wedge between Beijing and Pyongyang. Amid growing strategic rivalry and mistrust between China and the U.S., Beijing suspects that the U.S. wishes to use it as a hired gun to topple the North Korean regime — to "kill with a borrowed sword" (jie dao sha ren 借刀杀人) — a clever "collateral damage" strategy of weakening China's political position in East Asia by removing the structural "buffer" North Korea provides for China. In this context, it's worthy to note that Cui Tiankai, the current Chinese ambassador to the U.S., publicly declared that China wouldn't play a role scripted by Washington, deeming it "mission impossible" when he addressed the audience at the U.S. Institute of Peace.<sup>38</sup>

## Scrutiny of China's Rhetoric

In the wake of North Korea's nuclear test in 2013, there were many reports that China implemented U.N. sanctions more strictly than before, characterizing it as China's pivotal policy shift on North Korea. After signing a punitive U.N. resolution against North Korea's nuclear test, Li Baodong (李保东), the Chinese ambassador to the United Nations, told reporters: "We want to see the resolution completely

---

37. Author's interviews, Beijing, March–April 2013.

38. Video clip on the website of the U.S. Institute of Peace, <http://www.usip.org/events/us-china-cooperation-in-peace-and-security-ambassador-cui-tiankai>.

enforced.”<sup>39</sup> It set the tone for China’s robust follow-up actions on North Korea — vastly different from Beijing’s previous reluctance to corner Pyongyang. There were also news reports that China stopped providing crude oil to North Korea in February — the same month North Korea conducted the nuclear test — an apparent indication of Chinese exasperation.<sup>40</sup> In April, China’s Ministry of Transport sent out a directive to relevant government agencies, including Customs Office to “strictly enforce” (yange zhixing 严格执行) the U.N. resolution on North Korea.<sup>41</sup> Then in May, China’s state-owned Bank of China (zhongguo yinhang 中国银行)<sup>42</sup> reportedly cut off its dealings with North Korea’s Foreign Trade Bank, the country’s main foreign exchange bank.<sup>43</sup> With all of this, the view that China’s North Korean policy had changed gained traction not just among the members of the public, but also among members of the academic community.

Yet, careful scrutiny shows that China’s North Korean sanctions were focused more on rhetoric than substance. The international audience failed to give attentive follow-up to Chinese actions. For example, observers openly characterized China’s support for punitive measure at the U.N. against North Korea’s nuclear tests as “unusual.” But it was, in fact, usual. Prior to 2016, North Korea conducted three nuclear tests. China agreed to punitive resolutions after all three of them. While China prefers lesser measures in response to North Korea’s conventional missile tests, tests of nuclear weapons serve as China’s standard for accepting U.N. resolutions against North Korea.

---

39. Park Hyun, “China Vows to Carry out UN Sanctions on North Korea,” *Hankyoreh*, March 9, 2013.

40. “China did not Export any Crude in Feb to N. Korea-data,” *Reuters*, March 21, 2013.

41. Ministry of Transport of the People’s Republic of China, “Guanyu zhixing lianheguo anlihui di2094hao jueyi de tongzhi” [Notice regarding the UNSC resolution 2094], April 25, 2013, [http://www.moc.gov.cn/zizhan/siju/guojisi/duobianhezuo/guojihuyue/duobiantiaoyue/201304/t20130425\\_1402013.html](http://www.moc.gov.cn/zizhan/siju/guojisi/duobianhezuo/guojihuyue/duobiantiaoyue/201304/t20130425_1402013.html).

42. This shouldn’t be confused with China’s central bank, which is the People’s Bank of China (Zhongguo Renmin Yinhang, 中国人民银行)

43. 조선무역은행 in Korean. See “China Banks Rein in Support for North Korea,” *Financial Times*, May 13, 2013.

"A nuclear test is a standard threshold for China to agree to a U.N. resolution," said a well-placed Chinese expert in an interview with the author.<sup>44</sup>

Second, China's heavy-sounded punitive rhetoric was followed by a perfunctory implementation. For example, according to diplomatic sources, China worked hard to limit the scope of the U.N. sanctions to only cover nuclear and missile-related items and succeeded in that effort.<sup>45</sup> China also said that it was clamping down on North Korea's "illegal" trade activities. The same logic meant that "legal" trade behaviors would be intact, including the annual Chinese aid of 500,000 tons of crude oil to North Korea. According to this author's field interviews in the Chinese border cities near North Korea in May 2013, the Sino-North Korean border trade there largely remained intact, as stated by local business people. Local customs inspections on items to be transported to North Korea were not as rigorous as some foreign media described.<sup>46</sup> Many local bank employees were even unaware of the U.N. sanctions on North Korea.<sup>47</sup>

A telling indicator that the sanctions were not hurting North Korea was that 2013 marked a record high in total bilateral trade between China and North Korea, the very year North Korea conducted the nuclear test.<sup>48</sup> It was therefore not clear how effective China's

---

44. Author's Interview, February 2013.

45. See Park, "China vows to carry out UN sanctions on North Korea."

46. A local resident, who was familiar with the situation, said it would be, in fact, nearly impossible to thoroughly go through the items, without severely interrupting the workflow. According to him, the packing process for one single truck usually takes three hours. "They put all sorts of things. You name it. Then, they tightly pack them together, to put as much as possible, to the maximum load. You cannot tell each truck to unload or unpack all the items to see whether there are any illegal items. That's simply impossible." Besides, the Chinese city Dandong's economy heavily depends on the border trade with North Korea. Given that, it's very difficult to motivate the local officials to sustain the kind of very rigorous inspections, which would essentially be "shooting themselves in the foot." Author's interview, Dandong, May 2013.

47. Author's interviews with Bank of China employees, Dandong and Shenyang, May 2013.



clamping down on the trade between the Bank of China and the DPRK's Korea Trade Bank was, considering that transactions between them were very small from the very beginning. Furthermore, after the 2007 Banco Delta Asia incident, in which the United States froze many of North Korea's international bank accounts, North Koreans who regularly conducted businesses in China switched to cash dealings or borrowed Chinese-name accounts, thus effectively flying under the sanctions' radar.

On the matter of China's much-touted stoppage of oil to North Korea, China's most authoritative answer came from Qiu Guohong (邱国洪), China's top diplomat to South Korea, when, during a press conference, he was directly asked about the matter. "I have never heard about such information," he said.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, he said: "China is dealing with North Korea with an expectation that Kim Jong-un will be around for a long time."<sup>50</sup> His remark came amid news reports that the U.S. and South Korea might engineer a regime change in North Korea. China opposes instability in North Korea, which it regards as its "backyard" (houyuan 后院).

In addition, North Korea's industry appears to be operating as normal and the military was little affected by a shortage of fuel. For instance, the South Korean intelligence apparatus openly raised the possibility that China may be secretly providing North Korea with crude oil, with shipments across the border intentionally omitted from their export statistics.<sup>51</sup> "Without China's provision of crude oil, the operation of many of North Korea's industrial facilities and vehicles would be suspended. But there has been no such indication yet," a South Korean intelligence official noted.<sup>52</sup>

---

48. See Koo Jun Hoe, "No Sign of Slowdown for Sino-NK Trade," *DailyNK*, February 3, 2014.

49. Ha Jong-dae, "Zhung, Kim Jong-un jangkijipkwon yesanghago bukhan sang-daehae" [China deals with North Korea expecting Kim Jong-un's regime will be sustained for a long time], *Donga Ilbo*, April 29, 2014.

50. *Ibid.*

51. "China May Be Secretly Sending Oil To North Korea," *Business Insider*, November 14, 2014.

China also didn't conduct high seas boarding and inspection on suspected North Korean cargo ships for fear of the situation escalating into an armed standoff.<sup>53</sup> The U.N. sanctions, which China signed on to in 2006, requires member states to conduct inspections on North Korean cargo ships. This is similar to what befell the subsequent Chinese list of over 200 goods banned from export to North Korea. The move was initially welcomed and was taken as a sign of China's willingness to better cooperate and coordinate with the U.S. by acting tough on North Korea. However, interestingly, China has since refused to provide details to the U.S. on how it has implemented the new rules, despite Washington's repeated requests for relevant data.<sup>54</sup> Hong Lei (洪磊), a spokesman for China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, parried a question on the matter during a press briefing when the issue was raised. He said, "punishment [on North Korea] is not the goal."<sup>55</sup>

## Misplaced Hope on China

The above examination raises more questions than answers on the nature of China's attitude towards U.N. sanctions and overall Sino-North Korea relations as the international audience commonly understands it. The same inquiries, raised earlier, largely remain unanswered and demand scrutiny. If China implemented the strongest-ever economic sanctions against North Korea in the wake of the DPRK's nuclear test in 2013,<sup>56</sup> why then did economic trade between China and North

---

52. "China's Crude Exports to N. Korea Seem to Continue: Officials," *Korea Times*, November 14, 2014.

53. See Stephanie Kleine-Ahlbrandt, "Testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission: Hearing on China's Relations with North Korea," U.S. Institute of Peace, June 5, 2014.

54. *Ibid.*

55. "China Says Banned Exports to North Korea not Meant as Punishment," *Reuters*, September 24, 2013.

56. See Kleine-Ahlbrandt, "Testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission."

Korea reach record highs that very year when tallied up at year-end?<sup>57</sup> If China really discontinued providing crude oil to North Korea, as widely reported in the media, why then are there now substantially more cars on the streets of Pyongyang and North Korea's industrial facilities operating as usual, as witnessed by numerous recent foreign visitors there? Furthermore, if China was about to "abandon" North Korea, as purported by the popular narrative, why then did the leadership of Xi Jinping emphasized "friendship" with North Korea in December 2014?<sup>58</sup> In early January 2015, Xi even sent a congratulatory message to Kim Jong-un for his birthday.<sup>59</sup> These are just some of the questions that need to be rectified if the popular belief in a Chinese fundamental policy shift on North Korea is to be sustained.

On October 4, 2015, China's state media reported Liu Yunshan (刘云山), the ex-head of the Chinese Communist Party's Central Propaganda Department (中宣部, 2002-2012) would visit North Korea to attend the 70th anniversary of the founding of the Workers' Party. At that time, Liu became a member of China's most powerful body, the Communist Party's Politburo Standing Committee (政治局常委会) and fifth in the Communist Party's hierarchy. The choice of Liu, a member of China's top decision-making body, seemed odd. The visit would take place amidst the widespread view that the two Cold War allies' relationship was becoming sour as China was supposedly implementing stern punitive measures on North Korea for the latter's nuclear test. It would be also seen as undermining South Korean President Park Geun-hye's remark, made a month before Liu's visit, which insinuated Beijing would support Seoul-led unification of the

---

57. See Koo. In it, the Korea International Trade Association was quoted to state that the trade between North Korea and China grew 10.4% in 2013 to total \$6.5 billion, nearly doubling the growth rate of 2012.

58. "Liuyunshan qianwang chaoxian zhuhua shiguan chuxi jingzhengri shishi sanzhounian jinian huodong" [Liu Yunshan attends the third anniversary of the death of Kim Jong-il at North Korean embassy]," *Xinhua*, December 17, 2014.

59. "Waijiabu: zhongfang yi jiu jinzhengen shengri xiang chaoxian biaoshi zhuhe" [Foreign Ministry: China sends congratulatory message on Kim Jong-un's birthday], *Xinhua*, January 9, 2015.

two Koreas at a time when Beijing's patience with Pyongyang was wearing thin. During a talk with reporters on board the presidential aircraft on the way back to Seoul from a trip to China, South Korean President Park Geun-hye said she and Chinese President Xi Jinping had agreed to "cooperate on the peaceful reunification of the Korean Peninsula." Park went on to say, "various discussions could begin as soon as possible."<sup>60</sup> Many South Korean media portrayed it as a critical sign that the Chinese leadership finally decided to side with South Korea over the North Korean issue. Under this circumstance, the seniority of the Chinese envoy to North Korea would be interpreted as a barometer for "how truly upset" China was with North Korea, as well as the importance China would attach to the North Korea's new leader Kim Jong-un, who was about 30 years old.

Five years before, in 2010, for the same occasion of commemorating the 65th anniversary of the founding of the Workers' Party, China dispatched Zhou Yongkang (周永康), ninth in the Communist Party's hierarchy. Five years had since passed. North Korea conducted a third nuclear test in the interim. China became angrier. China's patience with its Cold War ideological ally was petering out. There was even a view, as we examined, that stated China would "abandon" North Korea. But, this time, China was sending an envoy to Pyongyang more senior than five years prior. Apparently, this is China's fence-mending move with North Korea, after a two-year estranged relationship, which is contrary to the mainstream view that China remains indignant with North Korea. This begs rectification.

## Connecting the Missing Dots

The available body of facts and information on China's foreign policy shift on North Korea finds little ground to support the popular view. The view was based on the notion that North Korea has become more

---

60. "Park: S. Korea to Begin Discussions with China on Koreas' Unification," *Yonhap News*, September 4, 2015.

of a liability than an asset to Chinese national interests and therefore, China is poised to abandon North Korea. However, as we have examined, the reality on the ground doesn't corroborate this theory. Furthermore, this theory also failed to explain the many inconsistencies between the punitive rhetoric China publicly displayed and its actual actions. China has not joined with the international community to place the Kim regime under long-term pressure. For policymakers in Seoul, this may come as a setback. But for academics, this offers more room for discussion.

In the aforementioned case of Deng Yuwen at the Central Party School who argued "China should abandon North Korea," what was particularly notable was that Deng himself didn't believe China would actually abandon North Korea, even though he argued as such. He told this researcher that the Chinese government would not change its policy on North Korea even though a growing number of Chinese citizens were publicly expressing their anger towards North Korea and their frustrations towards the Chinese government's policy, including using the increasingly vocal social media platforms. "The [Communist Party] leadership believes the public is not thinking clearly from the national interest's perspective,"<sup>61</sup> Deng explained, indicating that the Chinese leadership still regards North Korea as a geopolitically valuable asset. In a country where leaders are not directly elected by public votes, the government can still sustain its old policy, despite some public discontent — at least so far. Deng's remark thus explains why there is the gap between Chinese public's negative perception of the DPRK and the Chinese government's actual policy.<sup>62</sup> Even though some liberal Chinese intellectuals and scholars have voiced their personal views on the DPRK, traditional thinking and conservative mindsets in the Chinese leadership in support of

---

61. Author's interview with Deng Yuwen, *Ibid.*

62. William Overholt argues that the "disconnect" between popular sentiment and national policy is a pronounced feature of East Asian politics," and is much greater than it is in Western democracies, and that is particularly true of foreign policy. See William Overholt, "Asia, America and the Transformation of Geopolitics" (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 75.

China-North Korea ties still dominate China's policy on North Korea.<sup>63</sup>

In addition, if "punishment is not the goal," as described by the spokesman for the Chinese foreign ministry, then what is China's real goal? To start off, contrary to the popular narrative, a good number of Chinese analysts don't think North Korea's nuclear armament itself automatically constitutes a threat to China. One analyst puts it this way: "Do you know how many countries surrounding China have nuclear weapons? India has them. Pakistan has them. Russia has them too. Adding one more country isn't a problem per se, as long as you can maintain friendly ties with the country."<sup>64</sup> This attitude, albeit not openly discussed, hints that China is motivated to tolerate North Korea's nuclear armament, as long as China regards the U.S. as the bigger existential threat than North Korea. In addition, historically and psychologically speaking, China has long held a dominant position on the Korean Peninsula and perceived it as belonging to the Chinese sphere of influence. As the extension of this mindset, it regards Korea as a "domestic affair." It reveals the deep underlying mentality of the regional hegemon in looking at its former vassal state. From this perspective, China is inclined to see North Korea more as an issue to manage rather than a problem to "abandon."

For China today, the North Korean problem is not so much about North Korea per se, but about its bigger regional strategy in dealing with the U.S.<sup>65</sup> In geopolitical terms, China's North Korean policy stance is less dictated by North Korea's behavior itself, but more by

---

63. Author's interview with multiple Chinese interlocutors in 2013 and 2014.

64. Interview with a government-run think tank strategist, Beijing, February 2013. It's notable how this perspective is very different from public statements by Chinese officials.

65. Over the years, this sentiment was expressed to the author by many Chinese experts. One of them was Xu Baokang, a former *People's Daily* journalist who worked in North Korea for 15 years as a correspondent. In an interview with the author at the *People's Daily* cafeteria in Beijing in February 2011, he said: "The primary reason that Beijing pays attention to the Korea peninsula is less about Korea per se, but has more to do with its strategy to check the U.S. influence in the region." He noted the Korean Peninsula is where the differing interests of the two powerful countries collide.

China's perceived geopolitical and international politics vis-à-vis the U.S. in their complex intertwined relationship of both cooperation and competition in the region. That means China can sometimes show willingness to cooperate with the U.S. while also competing with the U.S., jockeying for regional hegemony and the security of its interests. As of today, China and the U.S. are seen heading toward a relationship more characterized by competition than cooperation.<sup>66</sup> Under such circumstances, China's cooperation on the North Korean issue would be further moderated.

Chinese analysts think strategic rivalry, competition for leadership in East Asia, and mutual mistrust between the U.S. and China are likely to deepen for the foreseeable future, amid Washington's "pivot to Asia," Tokyo's militarization, and the ongoing consultations between Washington and Seoul about the U.S.-led advanced missile defense system, THAAD, in South Korea, which all indicate that the U.S. is trying to strengthen its military alliances with Japan and South Korea. In fact, China suspects that the U.S. envisions a formal trilateral Washington-Seoul-Tokyo alliance. In this situation, North Korea's strategic value to China is bound to increase.<sup>67</sup> China believes the U.S. is exploiting friction between China and its troublesome neighbor, North Korea, to drive a wedge between them, and to strengthen Washington's own regional positioning.

Against this backdrop, China remains suspicious that the U.S. and their South Korean allies are scheming to force China to give up North Korea, so as to weaken China in the region.<sup>68</sup> Even though North Korea has recently been a discomfort for China, China is not ready to totally ignore its strategic value, let alone "give up" on North Korea.<sup>69</sup> The case of Russia is an illuminating lesson. After the disman-

---

66. See, for instance, Robert Sutter, "Obama's Recent China Policy – More Resolve, Rising Tension," *Pacific Forum CSIS*, March 21, 2016.

67. Author's multiple interviews with both Chinese and American scholars in 2015 and 2016. The interesting aspect is that there are quite a number of American scholars who agree on this view, which was suggested by the Chinese.

68. Interview, Beijing, July 2013.

69. *Ibid.*

tlement of the Soviet Union, Russia turned its back against its Cold War ally North Korea. Russia severed its alliance pact with North Korea and aggressively wooed an affluent South Korea. Moscow has never since recovered its political influence over Pyongyang. China's traditional strategists, who sees the state's interest in sustaining friendly relations with the DPRK, used this "case study" to internally argue that China should "learn a lesson" from Russia's failure.<sup>70</sup>

### **Playing the "China Card" on North Korea**

This paper doesn't argue that the elements discussed here are the only relevant factors. Instead, it attempts to identify prevailing events that have shaped the widespread sentiment that "China will abandon North Korea." This paper scrutinized the popular speculation that China's indulgence on North Korea has now been stretched to the breaking point. In this paper, China's responses to North Korea's 2013 nuclear test were examined one-by-one because such a comprehensive scrutiny was, surprisingly, not conducted before. This paper also added some more details about a hazy topic, hitherto not provided in academic publications. The 2013 event put China in the spotlight more than ever because China is seen, then and now, as the almost exclusive provider of economic assistance to North Korea, and China's potential role in and leverage over North Korea as a result of this has been a mainstay of relevant discussions in both media reports and scholarly community.

The China-North Korean intrigue is still unfolding, with constantly unfolding new developments. In China's dealing with the DPRK, this author concludes that China made a shrewd and effective tactical change, but not a fundamental shift in strategy. China retains its preference for a stable status quo with North Korea, while at the same time also trying to compensate for this by showing a certain degree of willingness to cooperate with Washington so that it wouldn't lose

---

70. Interview, Beijing, June 2013.



credibility as a self-styled “responsible power” (fu zeren de daguo 负责任大国) in the international community. China also wouldn’t want to arouse the ire of Washington, which is still more powerful than Beijing, especially in terms of the military power. China showed a “good-will gesture” in joining the U.S and the international community to punish North Korea, but it made sure this wouldn’t fundamentally harm China’s interests with North Korea, which remains strategically important.<sup>71</sup> With its much-touted economic influence, China could cripple the North Korean economy so as to contain North Korea’s belligerence. But it didn’t, because it feared that pressuring North Korea too hard would make Pyongyang turn around and become directly hostile toward Beijing. Besides, hurting North Korean economy would also hurt China’s own economy in its northeastern provinces that border North Korea. The Chinese government has made efforts in recent years to revitalize the region, which is seen as China’s economic “backwater.” Taken together, the Chinese dual approach of moderately punishing North Korea and moderately cooperating with the U.S. is well captured in what Chinese characterize as “huan tang bu huan yao” (换汤不换药), which means a change in form but not in substance, or a tactical window dressing that keeps the fundamentals intact.<sup>72</sup> It was partly China’s coping strategy to fend off the mounting Washington’s and international pressure.

Washington promotes a view that China, more than ever, has to realize that, if Kim Jong-un’s North Korea proceeds with a more robust nuclear weapons program (now armed with hydrogen bombs) and Beijing does not exert real pressure on Pyongyang, there will be increasingly negative repercussions for China’s own interests. Unfortunately, this doesn’t square with the own perceptions of the Chinese. After North Korea’s third nuclear test and widespread Western media speculation that China would soon “abandon” North Korea, one

---

71. In the similar vein, in the wake of North Korea’s 4th nuclear test, the Chinese government warned that the U.N. sanctions on North Korea should not harm China’s legitimate interests. See the Ministry of Foreign Affairs PRC, March 9, 2016.

72. Interview, Beijing, May 2013.

Chinese interlocutor observed: “We have a lot of patience with North Korea. The West doesn’t seem to understand it.”<sup>73</sup> Even though China sees North Korea’s provocations as destabilizing, it regards a collapse of North Korea as an even greater liability.<sup>74</sup> Further, the Chinese think the U.S. and its allies pose a more grave danger to China’s strategic interests than the DPRK.

Chinese mistrust of the U.S. remains the primary obstacle to cooperation with the United States on North Korea. Looking forward, if North Korea’s various provocations, even including the hydrogen bomb test in 2016, don’t directly trigger the shift in China’s policy toward Pyongyang, then it may be also reasonable to speculate that China is willing to accommodate North Korea’s belligerence in the future as long as its perceived security environment in the East Asian region persists. This, then, inevitably indicates that the current approach by Seoul and Washington to play “the China card” to deal with the North Korean nuclear issue is unattainable.

■ Article Received: 2/4 ■ Reviewed: 3/9 ■ Revised: 3/24 ■ Accepted: 3/27

## Bibliography

- ABCNews. “Transcript: President Obama’s Exclusive Interview With George Stephanopoulos.” March 13, 2013. <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2013/03/transcript-president-obamas-interview-with-george-stephanopoulos/>.
- Barbara Demick. “China Signals North Korea to Stop throwing the World into Chaos.” *Los Angeles Times*, April 7, 2013.
- BBC. “Is China ready to abandon North Korea?” April 12, 2013.
- Bruce Gilley. “Not So Dire Straits: How the Finlandization of Taiwan Benefits U.S. Security.” *Foreign Affairs* 89, no. 1 (2010): 44-60.
- Business Insider. “China May Be Secretly Sending Oil To North Korea.” November 14, 2014.

---

73. Phone Interview, January 2015.

74. See Kleine-Ahlbrandt, “Testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission.”

- Cary Huang. "China Rejects U.S. Call for Tougher Sanctions against North Korea Over Nuclear Bomb Test." *South China Morning Post*, January 27, 2016.
- China Daily*. "Xi's Security Outlook." April 10, 2013.
- Chosun Ilbo*. "N. Korea-China Rift Deepens Over Nuclear Test." February 7, 2013.
- David Lake. "Anarchy, Hierarchy, and the Variety of International Relations." *International Organization* 50, no. 1 (1996): 1-33.
- Deng Yuwen. "China should Abandon North Korea." *Financial Times*, February 27, 2013.
- Financial Times*. "China Banks Rein in Support for North Korea." May 13, 2013.
- Global Times*. "China should Not Fear NK Disputes." February 6, 2013.
- Ha Jong-dae. "Zhung, Kim Jong-un jangkijipkwon yesanghago bukhan sangdaehae" [China deals with North Korea expecting Kim Jong-un's regime will be sustained for a long time]. *Donga Ilbo*, April 29, 2014.
- Jane Perlez and Choe Sang-Hun. "China Hints at Limits to North Korea Actions." *New York Times*, April 7, 2013.
- John Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt. "Israel: Strategic Liability or Asset?" *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*. Toronto: Penguin, 2007.
- Jung Won-yop. "Wen Jiabao Eunmilhan Yeogiggaji ... onu jungshangyi soknae malhag gaekna" [Even revealing private conversations with Wen Jiabao ... Which leader would share a secret?]. *JoongAng Ilbo*, January 30, 2015.
- Koo Jun Hoe. "No Sign of Slowdown for Sino-NK Trade." *DailyNK*, February 3, 2014.
- Korea Times*. "China's Crude Exports to N. Korea Seem to Continue: Officials." November 14, 2014
- Lee Chung Min. "South Korea's Strategic Thinking on North Korea and Beyond." *The Asan Forum*, October 7, 2013.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. March 9, 2016.
- Ministry of Transport of the People's Republic of China, "Guanyu zhixing lianheguo anlihui di2094hao jueyi de tongzhi" [Notice regarding the UNSC resolution 2094]. April 25, 2013. [http://www.moc.gov.cn/zizhan/siju/guojisi/duobianhezuo/guojihueye/duobiantiaoyue/201304/t20130425\\_1402013.html](http://www.moc.gov.cn/zizhan/siju/guojisi/duobianhezuo/guojihueye/duobiantiaoyue/201304/t20130425_1402013.html).
- Moonofalabama.org*. "Misreading Xi On North Korea." April 9, 2013. <http://www.moonofalabama.org/2013/04/misreading-xi-on-north-korea.html>.

Park Hyun. "China Vows to Carry out UN Sanctions on North Korea." *Hankyoreh*, March 9, 2013.

*Phoenix TV*. News video clip seen on ifeng.com, run by the Phoenix TV in Hong Kong. February 5, 2013. [http://news.ifeng.com/world/special/chaoxian\\_sanheshi/content-3/detail\\_2013\\_02/05/21968300\\_0.shtml](http://news.ifeng.com/world/special/chaoxian_sanheshi/content-3/detail_2013_02/05/21968300_0.shtml).

*Renmin Ribao* [*People's Daily*]. "Shei you gaoluan shijie zhixin, yiji zhisi jiuzhi she" [Who harbors the intention to throw the world into turmoil? Who is seeking the selfish gains?]. April 9, 2013.

*Reuters*. "China Did Not Export Any Crude in Feb to N.Korea-data." March 21, 2013.

\_\_\_\_\_. "China Rebukes North Korea, Says no State should Sow Chaos." April 7, 2013.

\_\_\_\_\_. "China Says Banned Exports to North Korea Not Meant as Punishment." September 24, 2013.

Richard Haass. "Time to End the North Korean Threat." *Wall Street Journal*, December 23, 2014.

Robert Sutter. "Obama's Recent China Policy — More Resolve, Rising Tension." Pacific Forum CSIS. March 21, 2016.

Seong-Hyon Lee. "Firm Warning, Light Consequences: China's DPRK Policy." *China Brief* 13, no. 23 (2013).

Stephanie Kleine-Ahlbrandt. "Testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission: Hearing on China's Relations with North Korea." U.S. Institute of Peace. June 5, 2014.

U.S. Institute of Peace. "U.S.-China Cooperation in Peace and Security with Ambassador Cui Tiankai." April 10, 2014. <http://www.usip.org/events/us-china-cooperation-in-peace-and-security-ambassador-cui-tiankai>.

William Overholt. "Asia, America and the Transformation of Geopolitics." Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

*Xinhua*. "None of us Can Live without Peace: Chinese President." April 4, 2013.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Liuyunshan qianwang chaoxian zhuhua shiguan chuxi jingzhengri shishi sanzhounian jinian huodong" [Liu Yunshan attends the third anniversary of the death of Kim Jong-il at North Korean embassy]." December 17, 2014.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Waijiabu: zhongfang yi jiu jinzhengen shengri xiang chaoxian biaoshi zhuhu" [Foreign Ministry: China sends congratulatory message on Kim Jong-un's birthday]. January 9, 2015.

*Yonhap News*. "Park: S. Korea to Begin Discussions with China on Korea's Unification." September 4, 2015.