

What Factors Determine China's North Korea Policy?: Uncertainty, Instability and Status Quo Risk Management*

Kihyun Lee**

Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Seoul, Republic of Korea

China's North Korea policy is a combination of China's strategic goal toward regional order including U.S.–China relations and tactical management over North Korea's crisis action. Since the post–Cold War era, China has preferred the status quo as its regional strategy, which leads them to operate tactical management over North Korea risk. North Korea risk consists of uncertainty, which means uncontrollability of North Korea, and instability, which means the possibility of collapse of the North Korean regime. These risks often play as a crisis of China's status quo strategy, so China is inclined to implement its North Korea Policy to control these crises. The basis of China's North Korea policy is engagement, considering that China has to protect North Korea's conventional and geopolitical values. However, the engagement comes in different forms according to the characteristics of the crisis. The one is coercive engagement, which appears when North Korea's uncertainty prevails over instability. The other one is inclusive engagement, which occurs when North Korea's instability is stronger than uncertainty. This hypothesis can be applied to past and current situations. With this point of view, it is possible to predict the future of China's North Korea policy.

Keywords: China's North Korea policy, uncertainty, instability, status quo risk management

Introduction

China has differentiated its North Korea policy with time. This fact brings up the endless questions of which factors affect the changes in China's policy toward North Korea. The previous explanations of these questions can consist of three theories. First is the

* This work was supported by Hankuk University of Foreign Studies Research Fund of 2019.

** E-mail: chinapol94@gmail.com

“Structural–Factor Theory.” Representatively, there is the “North Korea–China blood alliance” in which both countries emphasize their amicable relationship originating from the blood shared during the Korean War. Also, they are keeping the automatic engagement clause in the “China–North Korea Treaty of Amity and Cooperation,” which is entirely for military purposes.¹ This alliance is proof that China can resolve the North Korean policy only according to its balance strategy toward the United States. It is because the stronger the U.S.’s check against China or engagement on the Korean Peninsula, the more likely that China will choose a North Korea–friendly policy, as China has to focus on the alliance with North Korea and the value of it as a geopolitical buffer zone. In conclusion, conflict between the United States and China will be the main factor that affects the changes in China’s North Korea Policy.²

The second explanation is the “Actor-profit theory.” This theory suggests that China’s North Korea policy decisions depend on China’s profits as an actor. China tries to maximize its profits, and has developed its relationship with North Korea from this perspective.³ As representative examples, we can see the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and South Korea, the case where China amplified conflict with North Korea even when there was a possibility of U.S. engagement on the Korean Peninsula, cooperation with the United States’ high-handed policy against North Korea, and also the case where China unilaterally took coercive action against North Korea.⁴

The third theory emphasizes recognition. This theory suggests that China’s North Korea policy changes depending on its own recognition of itself and North Korea. After the Chinese economic reform, as China’s national identity changed, its cognition of status and responsibility in the world has enhanced, and its North Korea policy has reflected this change.⁵ Also, there are some suggestions that there is a necessity to focus on the shift in China’s cognition of North Korea, as there were debates in China about whether they should consider North Korea a strategic asset or burden.⁶ On the other hand, because China’s norm is different from that of Western countries, some researchers insisted that they should not try to understand China’s North Korea policy based on Western culture, but should understand it by figuring out Chinese features.⁷

The second and third explanations give us appropriate reasons for China’s policy changes on every single event. However, despite their clear statement of several phenomena, these theories fail to provide us with a diachronic and comprehensive explanation of changes in China’s North Korea policy. In other words, although these theories act as alternative opinions, they lack worth as general theories.

Also, the first explanation reveals its limitation even though it tries generalization. For example, the formation of U.S.–China cooperation generally brings about China’s assistance on harsh sanctions or policy changes against North Korea. However, even when there was a consistent or amplifying conflict between the United States and China, there are some cases where China gave positive assistance on sanctions and also took action that could cost its relationship with North Korea. On the other hand, in some cases, China actively protected North Korea despite a U.S.–China cooperation structure.

Above all, there has not been much structural change in the U.S.–China relationship since the end of the Cold War.⁸ China’s regional strategy keynote, which includes the

Korean Peninsula, is to keep the status quo until it becomes nourished while securing cooperation with the United States. Thus, the structure is invariable, and even if ups and downs in their relations can influence China's North Korea policy temporarily at the micro level, it is hard to consider them to be critical variables.

Therefore, the North Korea variable should be the leading cause of China's policy changes. North Korea, as an independent actor, interacts with regional dynamics between the United States and China, and China chooses strategies with the comprehensive understanding of structural change caused by North Korea's actions. Thus, an overall approach is required that can encompass both action and structure.

First of all, a diachronic theoretical framework is indispensable to analyzing changes of China's North Korea policy from the post-Cold War era to the current time when denuclearization negotiations between the United States and North Korea is proceeding, in which there has been a significant transformation in the regional structure. At the same time, not only should it include structural variables like U.S.–China relations but also interaction with North Korea's action variable.⁹ Therefore, this study aims to provide a framework that aggregates the regional structure of the post-Cold War era, China's attitude toward this structure, the North Korea variable that can influence this structure, and interactions between these variables. China's choice on the North Korean matter is a sum of its strategic goal in the regional structure, including U.S.–China relations and tactical management of the crisis brought by North Korea.

This article consists of the following content. In the introduction, this article proposes the necessity of a new analytic framework about changes in China's North Korea policy by examining previous studies. In the next chapters, this study provides the explanations, hypothesis on its analytic frame and concepts, and tries to verify these hypotheses with the representative examples related to China's North Korea policy in the post-Cold War era. In the fifth chapter, there will be an application of these historical examinations from previous ones to the current examples of change in China–North Korea relations to generalize the analytic frame. Lastly, there will be a summary of analytic results in the conclusion.

China's Status Quo Risk Management and North Korea

China, Preferring the Status Quo

China prefers the status quo in the regional order. It is still controversial whether China is a status quo state or not.¹⁰ However, experts generally agree that China's foreign policy aimed to secure the status quo until the Hu Jintao period and even though it is partly showing the intention of destroying it in the Xi Jinping period, it is premature to deem China as directly challenging the current order.¹¹ It is because even if China is rapidly emerging as a power, it still cannot challenge U.S. hegemony, and it is still maintaining its assistance to the global order led by the States.

Considering this evaluation, it seems like China's perspective on regional order is

also the status quo, and it has put emphasis on a compromise with the United States. Even though there is the heritage of the Cold War, the division of the Korean Peninsula, it has been long since the balance of power between the southern triangle (South Korea, the United States, Japan) and the northern triangle (North Korea, China, Russia) has broken and the regional order has been under U.S. leverage. Though the China–Russia cooperation has expanded since China’s prompt rise and the U.S.–China conflict, it is not as much of a crisis as it was in the Cold War era, when these countries consisted of separate power groups. China has no choice but to admit U.S.’s leverage, considering that its capacity cannot surpass that of the States even if China has some discontent on a U.S.-leading regional order. On account of this, China has put its focus more on risk management than on crisis reinforcement. Notably, this is more obvious considering the most prominent issue after the end of the Cold War, the North Korea nuclear problem, which prompted China to work together with the United States. Even if it can cause resistance to U.S.-leading global norms and conflict against it on vital issues like the economy (trade conflict) or territory (Taiwan issue, etc.), at least China will desire to minimize the conflicts caused by other countries for a while.

Besides, because China domestically faces potential political, economic, and social conflicts, constant and stable economic growth is critical to suppress domestic revolts against the undemocratic and authoritarian communist party. To accomplish this, China desires that the current order should be as stable as possible or at least change should be as slow as it can be, which leads the country to pursue peace and stability among the neighbor states. In other words, China prefers the status quo for stable economic growth.

Regarding the Korean Peninsula policy, China has put importance on “sustaining peace and stability,” “realizing independent reunification through communication and negotiation,” and “realizing denuclearization.” This fact reveals that China seeks status quo by showing that it wants to minimize conflicts on the Korean Peninsula, and no foreign power should intervene. If the goals mentioned above contradict each other, China’s priority policy will be “peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula.” It is because the peace and stability of the surroundings is indispensable for China for its sustainable development after all.

Uncertainty, Instability of North Korea and Risk of Status Quo

For China, North Korea is an uncertain and unpredictable object. This means that there is a certain limitation in China’s control and influence over North Korea. Though their relationship has been a typical asymmetric alliance between a weak nation and a power, North Korea has enjoyed considerable autonomy.¹² Representatively, North Korea’s military provocation and nuclear experiment had been achieved out of China’s control. From China’s perspective, progress in North Korea’s nuclear technology brings risk to the status quo. The more North Korea tries to prove itself as a *de facto* nuclear nation and seeks to widen the trajectory range with missile launch experiments, the more likely the United States considers North Korea as a threat. Besides, North Korea’s constant military provocation will lead to the reinforcement of the United States’ MD system and

alliance strategy against China. In other words, China's failure to control North Korea not only drives itself to a nuclear threat but also an unfavorable northeast regional power order.

Next is North Korea's instability. North Korea is politically and economically unstable. If this instability increases and ends in the collapse of the North Korean regime, this will be the worst-case scenario for China.¹³ Instability in the North Korea system not only provokes the malfunctioning control system over WMD but also brings U.S. intervention. Also, it can bring about political, economic, social instability in northeast China. It is because there is a large amount of ethnic Koreans living in northeast China, and there is a possibility of enhanced social instability issues like minor ethnicity problems from a long-term perspective.¹⁴ Moreover, the economic and social cost that China has to handle because of North Korea's instability has a direct effect on China's economic development. An increase in North Korea's economic dependency against China also acts as a burden to it. The proportion of China in North Korea's foreign trade approaches up to ninety percent, and China is becoming an actual, sole sponsor of the North Korea economy. It is like China has gotten trapped in North Korea's "paradox of increase of dependency toward China."¹⁵ Most of all, because the collapse of the North Korean regime means the loss of a geopolitical cushion against the United States, a loss in the security balance strategy is unavoidable.

In summary, China has to manage North Korea's uncertainty and instability to keep the status quo. First of all, to lower uncertainty, it has to put the effort in restraining North Korea from committing military provocation. This way, China can minimize the pretext of U.S. intervention toward the Korean Peninsula. Securing the North Korean regime is the next step. China should offer assistance when it is needed, relieve sanctions, and help North Korea launch economic reform following China's economic development model. It is because economic deterioration or political instability in the neighbor country directly affects its security, and can even speed up U.S.-led Korean Peninsula reunification.

Status Quo Risk Management

As mentioned above, China has to keep the status quo in the regional order and strategically manage North Korea to avoid a crisis. If this is true, the keynote of China's North Korea policy is the protection of North Korea. The existence of North Korea is indispensable for keeping the status quo which acts as a buffer zone against the South Korea–the United States–Japan security cooperation system. Thus, China cannot give up on North Korea, and has to keep its leverage over it. Only so, can China control the regional order around the Korean Peninsula according to its pace.¹⁶ Thanks to this fact, China's North Korea policy appears as an engagement. Generally, engagement promotes interdependency between two nations, enhancing cooperation in diverse sectors and seeking a normalized relationship. Meanwhile, engagement, as its fundamental goal is to take effect on the political act of the target country, is also a policy that detains engaged nations, seeking to fulfill the strategic objectives by locking it inside the political, social,

cultural frames of the engaging nation.¹⁷

According to this definition, engaging occurs in two different ways. One is inclusive engagement. This engagement takes the form of compensation and incentives using economic assistance or grants and humanitarian support. The giver nation boosts interdependence to influence the receiver. The other way is coercive engagement. It includes occasional punishment using physical or economic power.¹⁸ In this method, the relationship between the giver and the receiver is positive, but the giver uses oppressive means when the receiver tries to secede from the former's frame or influence. In short, China determines North Korea policy according to its status quo risk management tactic, and this policy appears in coercive and inclusive engagements. Then, which engagement will China choose in which crisis?

Though both the uncertainty and instability of North Korea can give rise to status quo risk for China, reality occurs in a more complex scenario. The first case is when the uncertainty surpasses the instability. Open provocation of North Korea will disturb China's status quo strategy by letting U.S. influence expand. Accordingly, China will be likely to choose coercive engagement, which entails physical force and economic punishment, even if it tries to keep a friendly atmosphere with North Korea. Of course, coercion is only possible to the degree that it does not provoke its instability excessively.

In contrast, instability prevails in other cases. Political and economic instability in North Korea is an obstacle for China to keep the status quo. Hence, China will be likely to operate inclusive engagement, which includes cooperative means like economic assistance and exchange. This engagement is only possible to the degree that instability is lower than uncertainty. In other words, China implements the inclusive method in the "uncertainty < instability" case while it goes with the coercive approach in the "uncertainty > instability" case. Practical examples for verification follow in the next chapter.

Uncertainty Expansion in North Korea and China's Coercive Engagement

The following examples are when uncertainty was higher than instability. The first case was the first nuclear test of North Korea in 2006. After the second North Korea nuclear crisis, China kept trying to solve this crisis through the Six-Party Talks. Nevertheless, North Korea pushed ahead with its first atomic experiment and launched a Taepodong missile, which meant uncertainty had risen. China had postured its leverage over North Korea acting as an arbitrator of the nuclear issue drawing the joint statement 9.19 out of the fourth Six-Party Talks in 2005. Also, there was a cooperative atmosphere between the United States and China, since the U.S. became considering China as a responsible stakeholder.¹⁹ The collective mood of two countries over the North Korea nuclear crisis softened the firm stance of the first-term Bush administration, and this led to the weakening of the instability of North Korea. Moreover, because of the economic cooperation between South Korea and North Korea with the improved atmosphere, the instability of North Korea reduced even more. However, after the joint statement

9.19, the Six-Party Talks reached a deadlock, and as the United States raised the BDA (Banco Delta Asia) issue and accelerated pressure on North Korea, it reenacted military adventure.

In July 2006, before the first nuclear test in October, Chinese prime minister Wen Jiabao expressed objection against the missile launch of North Korea and Vice Diplomacy minister Wu Dawei tried to dissuade it. North Korea's refusal of China's dissuasion means China's leverage on North Korea had been deteriorating, and control impossibility had gotten higher, which implied that uncertainty increased.

This caused instant resistance from the United States. It took the lead in adopting UN Security Council Resolution 1695, which showed concern on the missile launch and demanded restraint of extra activity of North Korea and expanded pressure on North Korea independently. In addition to that, the United States intensified PSI (Proliferation Security Initiative) and the Senate passed the 'North Korea Nonproliferation Act' which prohibited corporations and individuals from transferring supplies and technology related to WMD to North Korea. Regarding North Korea's first nuclear test, the United States also condemned it that they provoked the entire world and warned the nation that it would mean a critical threat to the United States if it gave the nuclear technology and nucleus material to other countries.

Though the United States clarified that it would keep the talks and negotiations, China could not help being concerned about North Korea's uncertainty causing a swing of the United States' firm stance and direct engagement, which could lead to a risk in its regional status quo strategy.²⁰ Besides, China at that time desired to secure the cooperative structure it struggled to make with the United States and improvement of U.S.–China relations coincided with its strategy of fostering a stable global environment and constant economic development.²¹

China's status quo risk management appeared as a coercive engagement against North Korea. It was because there was a need to weaken North Korea's uncertainty to minimize U.S. engagement. It was also because China did not need to pick up conflict against the United States with the North Korea problem when they were in a cooperative atmosphere. Mostly, North Korea's uncertainty was higher than instability. Thus, China's adequate coercion would not damage the survival or stability of the North Korean regime.

After the Taepodong missile launch in July 2006, China positively agreed upon the sanctions of the UN security council, permitted three North Korea refugees to fly to the U.S., and consented to the coordination with the United States to deal with North Korea's counterfeit money, money laundering, drugs, and terrorism.²² Besides this, an independent compulsory measurement got implemented. China temporarily closed the oil pipes against North Korea, and went public about the opinion of deleting the military alliance section in the "China–North Korea Treaty of Amity and Cooperation."²³

Next, regarding the first nuclear test in October, China tried to deter the rash act of North Korea condemning it with the word "outrageous" and immediately approved the UN Security Resolution 1718.²⁴ These actions contrasted with the previous one when it played a blank ballot in the first North Korea nuclear crisis, and they showed a strong

will to build up a close cooperative structure with the United States in the North Korea nuclear crisis. Besides, this means that the Chinese approach toward the atomic issue changed from “dialogue, against sanction” to “combination of dialogue and sanction.” However, this coercion should never arouse the instability of North Korea. China declared that it firmly opposes military action as a punishment toward North Korea’s nuclear test.²⁵

After the first atomic test of North Korea, China had maintained its firm stance against North Korea for a while. China’s role in arbitrating in the nuclear issue has disappeared. As is widely known, it is not China’s arbitration as before, but a direct contact between the United States and North Korea that has changed the nuclear deadlock into a conversation. The meeting location was Berlin; not Beijing. Even China denied remittance of the frozen BDA funds to North Korea via a Chinese bank under an agreement between North Korea and the United States. It also deliberately delayed the provision of heavy fuel oil promised to the North.

The second case is a period from the third nuclear test in 2013 to the phase of denuclearization negotiations unfolded in 2018. China may have hoped to increase its influence on the fledgling Kim Jong Un regime. However, North Korea has demonstrated its autonomy over China, conducting continued nuclear tests and military provocations despite pressure from China. In other words, China has failed to exercise its influence over the New North Korea regime, which means heightened uncertainty in the North. On the other hand, Kim Jong Un ensured the stability of the regime by combining fear politics and people’s livelihood policy. As a result, uncertainty in North Korea has become dominant over instability.

This situation has led to a crisis for China’s strategy to maintain the status quo in the region. At that time, there was an increasing tendency in the regional structure for the United States to check on China’s rise. Since the 2008 financial crisis, the United States has tried to overcome its relative weakness in national power through its rebalancing strategy in Asia. The Obama administration sought to check China’s rise and increasing influence by strengthening its existing alliance. This process caused the conflict between the two great powers to begin escalation. In this situation, North Korea’s continued nuclear test and the creation of tension on the Korean Peninsula have provided justification for U.S. engagement in regional order, and raised the possibility that the strengthening of the South Korea–U.S. alliance and U.S.–Japan alliance could even expand into a trilateral alliance between South Korea, the United States, and Japan in the region.

Since its third nuclear test, North Korea’s military provocations have increased rapidly. A total of three additional atomic tests have been carried out and even the latest missile threats, including ICBMs and SLBMs, aimed directly at the United States, have escalated to a war crisis on the Korean Peninsula. As a result, the United States has increased its strategic assets in the region and strengthened its alliance through various military exercises, and China’s security burden has also increased.²⁶

However, China did not have enough capability to use balance strategy against the United States to secure the status quo, and it admitted itself that there was a power gap

between them. Therefore, China, after it felt the necessity to manage U.S. engagement and check on China caused by North Korea's military provocation, eagerly showed their interest in controlling uncertainty in North Korea. China's coercive engagement showed as follows.

Above all is the strict implementation of sanctions against North Korea. After the third nuclear test, China agreed on the UN resolution and vowed for sincere fulfillment.²⁷ High ranking officials of China, including Xi Jinping, stressed several times that "China does not want chaos in the Korean Peninsula, and it will enact the UN resolution in full measure." Different than before, there were also specific sanction implementation measures adopted. Lots of actions were formalized such as the opening of the sanction lists from the Chinese Ministry of Commerce and demanding affiliated organizations for strict implementation, closing accounts in Chinese banks suspected of being having ties to North Korea, tightening examination on cargos,²⁸ and strengthening visa screening on the new labor force.²⁹

Chiefly, because the UN sanctions after the fourth nuclear test was directly related to North Korea's core trade item, China's cooperation was indispensable considering that it takes up to over 80 percent of North Korea's foreign trade. China actually lowered the significant amount of imports from North Korea according to the UN Resolution 2270, which prohibited imports of North Korean minerals (ironstone, coal), China's cooperative implementation had become visible.³⁰ Then a restraint on a trip to North Korea, an enhanced intermission of smuggling, and promoted military watch and control in the border area followed.

From resolution 2371, which states the blockade of North Korean raw material importation and ban on exportation of the labor force, to resolution 2397, which expanded prohibited exportation items to food and agricultural products, China highly supported the sanction implementation. Because of the cut off on North Korea's main export items such as minerals, clothes, and seafood, China-North Korea trade weakened substantively. In the area of the main business gate, Dandong, China, there was even this saying that, "As a matter of fact, the sprout of the trade is getting trampled," which means China's participation in sanctions had enlarged to that degree.³¹ This positive participation of China on the embargo had so much impact on the North Korean economy that Kim Jong Un mentioned in a Labor party-branch conference that "We are in serious adversity because of sanctions."³²

Another proof of China's coercive engagement showed in the cool-off of the China-North Korea relationship. The high-level political exchange between the two nations actually ceased. The atmosphere of that time between these countries was the worst, as the summit between them failed until North Korea started denuclearization diplomacy. China even showed diplomatic actions that considered South Korea more important than North Korea. In July 2014, Xi Jinping visited South Korea before North Korea, which was unprecedented, and there was no friendship exchange in the celebration day of the China-North Korea treaty of amity and friendship and the celebration of the founding of the People's Liberation Army. Naturally, the conventional economic and human exchange had decreased as well.³³

Undoubtedly, China always tried to recover the relationship with North Korea from the perspective of the durability of engagement, and there was no significant outcome.³⁴ While it implemented the sanctions, China stressed that the sanctions should not damage the lives of the North Korean people and it also put efforts not to expand the instability of North Korea under the logic that the solution should be made not from military options but dialogue. Nevertheless, as this period was marked by the prevailing uncertainty in North Korea, China's engagement appeared coercive.

Instability Expansion of North Korea and China's Inclusive Engagement

The increase in North Korea's instability also caused risk in China's regional status quo strategy. Representative cases are as follows. First, the period of the first North Korea nuclear crisis and the death of Kim Il Sung. The first North Korea nuclear crisis originated from North Korea's alienation because of the change of foreign environments such as the end of the Cold War and South Korea–China's establishment of diplomatic relations. The flow of the post–Cold War starting with the collapse of eastern socialist nations meant the absence of support for North Korea. Even China, the only country that kept the socialism system, showed a definite interest in renewing relations with the United States and western societies and finally established diplomatic ties with South Korea. This kind of change in the socialist camps made North Korea fall into diplomatic isolation and security dilemma. This adversity brought North Korea to launch the development of nuclear power and the first atomic crisis took place as it dropped out of the NPT in March 1993. Right after that, North Korea created a war situation by mentioning the “sea of fire” to South Korea. The crisis reached its peak when it made fuel rods out of a nuclear reactor that contained plutonium enough to make five to six nuclear weapons in May 1994. Besides, this made the United States to review a preemptive strike against North Korea. As North Korea's uncertainty brought about U.S. engagement, China changed its voting from objection to withdrawal in the actual ballot.³⁵ In the China–South Korea ministerial meeting in June 1994, foreign minister Qian Qichen got on board with South Korea about the attitude toward the North Korea nuclear issue, and consent to the sanctions of the IAEA. Notably, China also delivered its positions to the North Korea ambassador that it could not assist North Korea's tough policy toward the United States forever.³⁶

However, China's coercive attitude started to change since the death of Kim Il Sung in July, which was fatal to North Korea's political system. In other words, instability in North Korea prevailed uncertainty. At that time, China needed to prevent the worsening of instability caused by the leader's death and to recover its damaged influence in North Korea. Thus, China's management strategy appeared as inclusive engagement. This engagement started with the wholesale condolence call for the leader's death. After Kim's death, China sent a joint condolence call of the core government ruling party, and some major political leaders such as Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin expressed their condolences. Also, it hung out half-staff flags at several major facilities—Tiananmen,

the Great Hall of the People, and the Foreign Office to mourn him.³⁷ These actions were exceptional compared to the cases of other allies. Following these was the promise of securing Kim Jung Il's succession of power and of security protection, development of friendly relations between parties and the military, economic support such as food and coal supply, and confirming their alliance.³⁸ In addition to that, China promoted the construction of railway, roads, and communication networks in the frontier. This measure was to show the world that China's North Korea policy would not change politically and ideologically. China even accepted North Korea's unilateral withdrawal of Chinese representatives in the Military Armistice Commission as resistance to China's Western-friendly diplomacy, including China–South Korea relations.³⁹ These measures were all part of inclusive engagement to reduce instability in the North Korean regime.

The second case is when there were the second nuclear test and a rumor that Kim Jung Il was sick. Even though North Korea committed the second nuclear test, instability was higher than uncertainty during this period. There had been a rumor of the leader's sickness since 2008, and this caused an internal solidarity problem derived from the successor issue. Also, since the Lee Myung-bak government period, the deterioration of relations between both Koreas had been expanding, and this would have struck North Korea's economy critically. South Korea enacted measurement 5.24 in 2010, and economic cooperation halted. The Obama administration did not show any active measure even after North Korea's second nuclear test, sticking to its strategic patience policy. Its indifference meant the United States was waiting for North Korea's collapse while ignoring all the situations. In short, that period was when North Korea's regime instability caused by internal problems was higher than North Korea's uncertainty which is likely to cause U.S. engagement.

China's approach was inclusive engagement, which was shown since its reaction toward North Korea's launch of its long-range missile right before the second nuclear test. China considered North Korea's action as a typical satellite launch and showed an implicit agreement on North Korea's right of peaceful space. This choice was different from the one that China showed in July 2006 when it supported the UN sanction against North Korea's missile launch. Even though China consented on UN Resolution 1874, it put out considerable conditions to prevent North Korea's instability expansion. China insisted that sanctions should be distinguished from free grants and regular economic trade. Notably, it stressed that the punishment should not hinder North Korea's development, buildups, trade, people's well-being, and normal relations North Korea had with other nations.⁴⁰

Above all, inclusive engagement through economic cooperation had increased remarkably. Despite the reaction of the world against North Korea's second nuclear test, China propelled the visit of Prime Minister Wen Jiabao to North Korea on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of both nations' friendship. Through this visit, China promised North Korea wholesale economic cooperation such as building a new bridge on the Yalu River, establishing a maritime memorandum, financial assistance, cooperation in economy and technology, software industry and education. The world expressed its concern over China's friendly approach to North Korea's second nuclear test situation,

and China argued that it was for economic growth and improvement of the public welfare of North Korea and did not violate the spirit of the UN sanctions.⁴¹

Besides, in the North Korea–China summit in Changchun, China in August 2010, President Hu Jintao showed off the improvement of the alliance suggesting an exchange of high-ranking officials, promoting cooperation of economic trade, and the reinforcement of strategic communication.⁴² In that summit, “government leading” was suggested as a new principle of mutual economic cooperation which had changed from “government guiding.” It implied that China’s economic cooperation with North Korea was not only for the economy but also for strategic management from a political consideration.

The following inclusive engagement appeared as an investment expansion to the Rasun economic trade area, development of the Najin port, and promoting the joint management and development cooperation of the exclusive economic zone in Hwanggeum-Pyeong and Wi-Hwa Island. These policy change of the central government of China stimulated investment and economic interactions of the local government toward North Korea, especially infrastructure in border areas such as railways and roads, finance on developing North Korean underground resources by the Chinese companies, and activation of China–North Korea tourism.⁴³

China also expanded the human exchange of high-ranking officials. From 2009 to 2011, senior Chinese officials visited North Korea 20 times, and North Korea senior officials visited China 27 times, whose number was higher than the whole of exchanges in the 2000s. In addition to politics, human exchanges in the economic, social and cultural sectors also upsurged naturally.⁴⁴ Moreover, similar to before, China expressed its condolences to Kim Jung Il’s death and displayed its guardianship supporting North Korea’s stability and the third hereditary succession.⁴⁵ This performance was a part of China’s inclusive engagement to manage North Korea’s instability.

North Korea’s Peace Approach and China’s Status Quo Risk Management

In 2018 Kim Jong Un implied in his new-year address that he would dispatch North Korean representatives to South Korea’s PyeongChang Olympics.⁴⁶ The thawing bilateral atmosphere that emerged since then, followed by North Korea’s will of denuclearization negotiations, inter–Korean summit, and the U.S.–North Korea negotiation, made the Korean Peninsula peace process look plausible. This change was dramatic considering that North Korea’s military provocation against the United States was at its peak just before and Donald Trump even mentioned “fire and fury,” and there was a concern about the war in the area.⁴⁷ Progress of the Korean Peninsula peace process meant a weakening of uncertainty of North Korea to China. Especially with this Korean peace solution, China could realize “dual suspension” in “dual suspension (halt of U.S.–South Korea joint military exercises, and respite from the North Korea nuclear test and missile launch) and dual-track approach” (process of denuclearization and peace agreement) goals. Also, denuclearization negotiations meant for China that there was less likelihood

of U.S. engagement at the regional level caused by North Korea's provocation. This weakened uncertainty let the situation change to a prevailing instability situation. Thus, from China's perspective, managing this instability became more critical.

Meanwhile, the harsh sanctions of the world did not change much. It was because, even though the denuclearization negotiations kept going, the United States did not show its will to relieve the sanctions in a situation where the difference in their stances did not seem to be getting narrower. China also, as a member of the world society, has fulfilled the sanctions, and it would be a diplomatic burden to violate the principles agreed upon between the members on its own accord.⁴⁸ Thus, sanctions should keep going, but they will worsen the economic situation of North Korea and would incite its instability.

Besides, Kim Jong Un is trying to expand its market renovation to break the economic crisis. Though it is welcome news, the expansion of the market can cause a weakening of the power of the conventional system. This is not only a dangerous gamble from a system maintenance perspective, but also entails instability. This danger induced China to manage the instability in North Korea to secure the status quo, and the policy became inclusive engagement. China's friendly approach to North Korea is a chance to redeem the estranged relations between two nations and empower China's influence. At the same time, it can prevent the sudden breakout situation of North Korea such as the rapid progress of U.S.–North Korea relations and a China passing situation.

China's inclusive engagement got realized in a thawing inter–Korea atmosphere. First of all, signs of a thawing China–North Korea relations appeared in the celebration report of Xi Jinping's second inauguration. An official organ of Chinese party, *People's Daily* placed North Korea on top of the list of the countries that sent congratulatory telegrams.⁴⁹ It seemed like China re-admitted North Korea as its traditional friendly country.

Because North Korea needs China's assistance on the denuclearization negotiation process, it welcomed China's inclusive engagement. In following the Korean Peninsula Peace Process including North Korea–U.S. negotiations, there were four visits of Kim Jong Un to China and summits with Xi Jinping. China, as it promised North Korea strategic communication and enhancement of cooperation, asked itself to be a sponsor country for North Korea to uplift its negotiating power against the United States. Primarily, in 2018, when there was the first North Korea–U.S. summit in Singapore, China provided North Korea with a Prime Minister's plane, and in the second summit in Vietnam in 2019, China provided various conveniences for Kim Jong Un's private train showing its dignity as a sponsor nation.

Secondly, China supported North Korea's position in the denuclearization negotiations. China emphasized a concordance of the perception in North Korea's negotiation strategy, “step by step, action to action,” and China's “dual suspension and dual-track approach.” Also, it stressed the importance of the yield of the United States. On a phone call with Donald Trump on the matter of success or failure of the North Korea–U.S. summit, Xi Jinping addressed that “the United States should consider North Korea's reasonable concerns about their security,” which implies a yield of the United States.⁵⁰ Even when the summit got canceled because of the differences in stance,

Vice President Wang Qishan defended North Korea. He clarified at the International Economic Forum held in St. Petersburg that the security of the Korean Peninsula is related to China's interest and China would never condone any warfare in the area.⁵¹ In the third summit after many twists and turns, Xi Jinping announced the support of North Korea mentioning that relations between China and North Korea would never change irrespective of the political situation.⁵²

Third, China attempted to mitigate the sanctions against North Korea. Right after the first North Korea–U.S. summit, China tried a press statement with Russia that said, “They are willing to ease up the sanctions considering North Korea abides by the UN Resolutions.” Even though it fell apart due to U.S. opposition, China consistently insisted that the world needed to see North Korea's negotiation attitude positively. Even in the UN General Assembly on September 2018, Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi openly suggested the mitigation of the sanctions mentioning that, “The United States should show a timely and positive reaction to make a real compromise with North Korea.” and that “China believes that the UN Security Council needs to operate mitigating action in an appropriate timing.”⁵³

Fourth, China made a quick recovery of traditionally-friendly relations between China and North Korea. In the process of the North Korea–China summit, they put the principal officials of the ruling party, government and military, in attendance for a full recovery of the chilled relationship and they resumed halted symbolic celebrations and occasions. Especially, in a ceremony marking the 70th anniversary of the founding of the North Korean regime, China sent Li Zhansu, China's number three in power to show off the traditionally friendly relations between the two nations. Other than that, in the wake of the visit of Song Tao, a director of the International Liaison Department, accompanied by an art troupe in April 2018, they enlarged the exchange of culture, art, and athletes to a full extent. In January 2019, a performance was held in Beijing in which Hyun Song-wol, the leader of the Samjiyon Band, led the show. All the high-ranking Chinese officials attended the concert, including Xi Jinping. Because of the experience of the North Korea Moranbong Band's failed visit to China in December 2015, people regarded this performance as a symbolic event for the restoration of the strained relations of North Korea and China.

The fifth is China's pursuit of more considerable aid and economic cooperation with North Korea. China's humanitarian assistance to North Korea has accelerated in the mood for the restoration of North Korea–China relations. In addition to the existing sustained food aid, China's large corporations have increased their support for emergency relief, medicine, and other products. The recovery of economic cooperation was rather slow due to continued sanctions against North Korea but the moves suggesting China's expansion of economic cooperation with North Korea were also continuously detected. The increase in the number of North Korea economic observers to China indicates that the government will seek to expand economic cooperation in agriculture, education and science and technology. A move to restore its tourism business by expanding North Korea's Koryo Air's routes to China is also being detected, and the opening of roads and bridges that had been delayed around the North Korea–China

border area, and the tourism project has accordingly begun.

Above all, Xi Jinping visited North Korea. It was his first visit since taking office, and the first visit by a Chinese president in 14 years. His visit to North Korea was the highest in a series of inclusive engagement measures China has continued since North Korea's peace moves. During his summit with Kim Jong Un, Xi Jinping formalized his support for North Korea's denuclearization and economic development strategies, pledging that China will play an active role in helping Pyongyang resolve the denuclearization issue and expand economic cooperation. In particular, he even said that China would help address North Korea's security concerns, showing his active attitude regarding the issue of guaranteeing the security of the North Korea regime. Despite the danger of expanding the space of conflict with the United States at a time when U.S.–China relations are deteriorating due to the trade conflict, Xi Jinping's bold decision to visit North Korea could be called an expression of China's firm will to act as an active supporter of North Korea and maintain its influence over it.⁵⁴

Conclusion

Various researchers have conducted studies on the causes of the changes in China's North Korea policy. The existence of multiple studies is a testament to much interest, but on the other hand, verification of the subject is not easy. This study began with the need for a comprehensive approach to structure and action factors related to China's change in North Korea policy. It did not aim at a specific event or timing, but at least since the post–Cold War until recently, this study seeks a routine and generalizable theoretical framework to analyze the factors of the changes in China's North Korea policy. To this end, an analysis was attempted to synthesize China's position on regional order, North Korea factors, and interactions among variables.

In short, since the Cold War, China has preferred to maintain the status quo as a regional strategy and has conducted tactical management to prevent North Korea variables from causing a crisis in maintaining it. The North Korea variables consisted of uncertainty and instability which often have created a crisis in China's efforts to maintain the status quo. For China, which considers maintaining the status quo in the region, the essential keynote of its North Korea policy was engagement, as it has no choice but to protect North Korea's traditional and geopolitical values. However, engagement also converts depending on the nature of the crisis. One was coercive engagement, which emerged when North Korea uncertainty prevailed over instability. The other was inclusive engagement, which worked in cases where North Korea's instability prevailed over uncertainty.

In the cases of North Korea's first and third-after nuclear tests, military provocations have adversely affected China's strategy of maintaining the status quo while raising the possibility of U.S. engagement on the Korean Peninsula. However, uncertainty prevailed over instability because the North Korea regime at that time was in a stable political and economic situation to some extent. China's choice for this situation turned out to

be coercive engagement. North Korea's first nuclear crisis and the second nuclear test are the military provocations carried out when the North Korea regime was precarious. Although there was a possibility of a status quo crisis that uncertainty, such as U.S. engagement and pressure following military provocations, the death of Kim Il Sung, and Kim Jong Il's health abnormalities, could cause the collapse of the North Korea regime, the two were cases where instability was more prevalent than uncertainty. China's choice for this situation was inclusive engagement.

As such, patterns in past cases are equally applicable to new situations. China's response to the shift in North Korea's denuclearization negotiations, or its peace moves, is increasingly prone to inclusive engagement. North Korea's peace orientation has weakened the possibility of U.S. military engagement on the Korean Peninsula, and it has affected the strategy of the strengthening of the U.S. alliance that China feared and slowed the trend of keeping China in check. In other words, the uncertainty in North Korea has dramatically deteriorated. Of course, North Korea's uncertainty cannot entirely vanish as U.S.–North Korea negotiations idled, not knowing when North Korea will make another mass provocation. For now, however, instability has become more dominant than uncertainty due to the relative weakness of North Korea uncertainties. Moreover, given that the vulnerability of the North Korean economy is worsening the stability of the regime in the absence of significant changes in the international community's trend of sanctions against it, China's choice can be assessed as helping enhance the stability of the North Korea regime by strengthening economic aid and cooperation.

However, since North Korea is an independent actor, the status quo risk from North Korea can occur at any time according to its will. Because the situation is beyond China's control, China has a limit to deal with passive crisis management in response to changing circumstances. In particular, China should manage the possibility of North Korea making a different choice, with denuclearization negotiations between the United States and North Korea idling without any specific results. The reason why China is involved in the North Korea issue is that its most important purpose is to maintain the status quo, regardless of whether the form is coercive or inclusive. Therefore, preventive efforts will also be made to reduce uncertainty and instability in North Korea as a whole. China's proposal for a solution to North Korea's nuclear weapons program, which is a "dual suspension and dual track approach," is also a primary precautionary measure aimed at reducing North Korea risk. Military provocations, such as North Korea's nuclear test and ballistic missile launches, eventually mean the resumption or expansion of South Korea–U.S. military exercises, which would lead to another cycle of military conflict. China's insistence on both denuclearization and peace treaty discussions, and to make North Korea's denuclearization and rewards step-by-step and simultaneous, contains China's hope to minimize the possibility of provocations by North Korea and instability in it while expecting U.S. concessions on it. In other words, China intends to manage the crisis originating from North Korea based on maintaining the status quo rather than actively changing the status quo.

We cannot rule out the possibility that China's national power will surpass that of the

United States in the future, and that based on such confidence, China's regional strategy will shift from securing the status quo to breaking it. If so, China's North Korea policy could be more aggressive and breakthrough-like, turning away from the current crisis management. However, since China's national power has not yet changed the U.S.-led regional order, it is highly likely that China's North Korea policy will develop at a level where it will selectively apply coercive and inclusive engagement to maintain the status quo.

Notes

1. In 1996, though China proposed an intriguing concept, "New Security Sense," promoting non-allied policy, it still keeps this military treaty with North Korea alone. However, to shame the word "blood alliance," not only was there no military cooperation between these two countries but also China lacks the discussion of North Korea's military provocation or nuclear experiment beforehand.
2. Yongho Kim, "Alliance Reliability and Post-Alliance Dilemma in Asymmetric Alliance," *The Korean Journal of Unification Affairs* 13, no. 2 (Winter 2001): 5–37 [in Korean]; and Hongseo Park, "Wooing the Foe's Partner?: U.S. and China's Alliance Strategies towards Two Koreas in Their Power Transition," *Korean Journal of Politics* 42, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 299–317. [in Korean]
3. You Ji, "China and North Korea: A Fragile Relationship of Strategic Convenience," *Journal of Contemporary China* 10, no. 28 (Summer 2001): 387–98; and Jaeho Chung and Myung-hae Choi, "Uncertain Allies or Uncomfortable Neighbors? Making Sense of China–North Korea Relations, 1949–2010," *The Pacific Review* 26, no. 3 (Spring 2013): 243–64.
4. Gregory J. Moore, "How North Korea Threatens China's Interests: Understanding Chinese 'Duplicity' on the North Korea Nuclear Issue," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 8, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 1–29.
5. Hochul Lee, "China in the North Korea Nuclear Crisis: 'Interest' and 'Identity' in Foreign Behavior," *Journal of Contemporary China* 22, no. 80 (Winter 2013): 312–31.
6. Heung-kyu Kim, "From a Buffer Zone to a Strategic Burden: Evolving Sino–North Korea Relations during the Hu Jintao Era," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 22, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 57–74; and Sang-jin Shin, "China's Changing Perceptions on North Korea," *Unification Policy Studies* 17, no. 1 (Summer 2008): 265–91. [in Korean]
7. Leif-Eric Easley and In-young Park, "China's Norms in Its Near Abroad: Understanding Beijing's North Korean Policy," *Journal of Contemporary China* 25, no. 101 (Spring 2016): 651–68.
8. Even though people often said that the rise of China brought about the challenge against the conventional order led by the United States, there are not enough clues to conclude that there is a fundamental change in the structure. For more details, refer to the discussion in Chapter 2.
9. The following research tried to provide a comprehensive analytic frame about China's choice in North Korea policies. Young-hak Lee, "North Korea's Three Nuclear Tests and Analysis of China's Policy Shift toward North Korea," *Korean Journal of International Relations* 53, no. 4 (Winter 2013): 191–223 [in Korean]; and W. Song and S. Lee, "China's Engagement Patterns towards North Korea," *Pacific Focus* 31, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 5–30.
10. John G. Ikenberry, "The Rise of China and the Future of the West: Can the Liberal System Survive?," *Foreign Affairs* 87, no. 23 (2008): 23–37; and Alastair Johnston, "Is China a Status Quo Power?," *International Security* 27, no. 4 (Spring 2003): 5–56.
11. Refer to Suisheng Zhao, "A Revisionist Stakeholder: China and the Post-World War II World Order," *Journal of Contemporary China* 27, no. 113 (Spring 2018): 643–58.

12. Samuel Kim and Tai-hwan Lee, "Chinese–North Korea Relations: Managing Asymmetrical Interdependence," in *North Korea and Northeast Asia*, eds., Samuel Kim and Tai-hwan Lee (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002); Sukhee Han, "Alliance Fatigue amid Asymmetrical Interdependence: Sino–North Korea Relations in Flux," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 16, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 155–79; and Myung-hae Choi, *Sino–North Korea Alliance: History of Uncomfortable Neighborhood* (Seoul: O-reum, 2009). [in Korean]
13. David Shambaugh, "China and the Korean Peninsula: Playing for the Long Term," *The Washington Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (Winter 2003): 45–46.
14. Bonnie Glaser, ed., "Keeping an Eye on an Unruly Neighbor," *USIP and CSIS Joint Working Paper* (Winter 2008), 14–15; and Susan L. Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007).
15. Myung-hae Choi, "North Korea's Second Nuclear Test and Sino–North Korea Relations," *The Quarterly Journal of Defense Policy Studies* 25, no. 3 (Fall 2009): 133. [in Korean]
16. Scott Snyder, *China's Rise and the Two Koreas: Politics, Economics, Security* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2009), 149–57.
17. Chae-sung Chun, "Theoretical Basis of 'Engagement Policy' and ROK's Reconciliation and Cooperation Policy toward the North," *Korean Journal of International Relations* 43, no. 3 (2003): 232. [in Korean]
18. Kihyun Lee, Ae-kyung Kim, and Young-hak Lee, "China's Neighborhood Diplomacy and Policies on North Korea: Cases and Application," *General Research of Korean Institute for National Unification* (2005), 16. [in Korean]
19. As U.S.'s international status and power deteriorated with the burden of two warfare and financial crises in the 2000s, it started to deem China from being a strategic competitor to an actor in interest or a cooperative partner. Robert B. Zoellick, "Whither China: From Membership to Responsibility?," (Deputy Secretary of State, Remarks to National Committee on U.S.–China Relations, New York City, 2005), <http://www.state.gov/s/d/former/zoellick/rem/53682.htm> (accessed June 17, 2019).
20. John R. Bolton, the U.S. ambassador in UN stated right after President Bush's North Korea Statement that, "Because North Korea needs to know our military options, we shall put them on the table." See *CNN*, Transcript, 2006, <http://www.kida.re.kr/frt/contents/frtContents.do?sidx=709&depth=3&lang=en> (accessed July 20, 2019).
21. For more about the progress of the U.S.–China relationship after 9.11, refer to Jonathan D. Pollack, "Chinese Security in the Post–11 September World: Implication for Asia and the Pacific," *Asia–Pacific Review* 9, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 19–20.
22. Hyung-gyu Choi, "U.S.–China, Joint Countermeasures for Counterfeit, Drug and Terrorism," *Korea Joongang Daily*, August 1, 2006.
23. Other than these, imposing a penalty on a North Korea coal carrier and changing the border guard to the regular army, there was a rumor among the media and scholars that China is giving up on North Korea.
24. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "The Statement of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China," 2006, <http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/fyrth/t275508.htm> (accessed July 20, 2019).
25. Refer to Kristin Huang, "How China Responded to Previous North Korea Nuclear Tests," *South China Morning Post*, September 4, 2017.
26. For example, the ROK determined to operate the THAAD in the U.S. Army in Korea as an empowerment of the alliance against North Korea's fourth nuclear experiment, which caused China's revolt.
27. China agreed upon and promised to abide by all of the UN Resolutions on North Korea sanctions 2094, 2270, 2321, 2356, 2371, and 2397.
28. "China Bank Shuts Down North Korea's Bank Account," *Chinese Economy*, May 8, 2013, <http://big5.ftchinese.com/story/00105031> (accessed August 14, 2019) [in Chinese]; and Ministry of Commerce, People's Republic of China, "Announcement of List of Products Banned for Export to North Korea," September 23, 2013. [in Chinese]

29. Chang-jin Hong, "China, Tightening North Korea Sanctions: No New Visa for North Korea Workers and Restaurant Employee," *Yonhap News*, May 9, 2016. [in Korean]
30. Young-jin Ye, "Effect of North Korea Sanction, North Korea's Coal Exports to China Decreased by 40 Percent," *Joongang Ilbo*, May 15, 2016. [in Korean]
31. Refer to the interview of the people in Dan-dong, China, June 18, 2017.
32. "Kim Jong Un Discloses North Korea's Real Situation in His Recent Speech," *Duowei*, December 22, 2017. [in Chinese] <http://news.dwnews.com/global/news/2017-12-22/60031208.html> (accessed August 8, 2019).
33. For more details, refer to Kang-taek Lim et al., "An Analysis of the Status of Major Fields in North Korea–China Relations," *Korea Institute for National Unification*, 2017. [in Korean]
34. In 2015, there was a qualified dispatch of high ranking officials of the Chinese Communist Party such as Vice President Li Yuanchao and standing committee member Liu Yunshan to contain North Korea provocation.
35. China changed its stance on economic sanctions from opposition to non-preference. See Statement by the President of the Security Council, S/PRST/1994/13, May 30, 1994.
36. Jim Mann, "China Assisted U.S. Efforts on North Korea," *Los Angeles Times*, June 28, 1994.
37. "DPRK Leader Kim Il Sung Died," *Xinhuashe*, Beijing, July 9, 1994. [in Chinese]
38. China's inclusive engagement contributed to redeeming the cooled-off relations between China and North Korea in 1999. See Sang-jin Shin, "China's North Korea Risk Management Policy," *Journal of Korean Political and Diplomatic History* 35, no. 1 (Summer 2013): 76. [in Korean]; Hee-ok Lee, "China's North Korea Policy," *Study on Unification Issue* 6, no. 2 (Winter 1994): 56. [in Korean]; and Jinzhi Liu et al., *Relationship between People's Republic of China and the Korean Peninsula* (Beijing: Global Knowledge Press, 2006): 12. [in Chinese]
39. After the death of Kim Il Sung, North Korea dispatched a special envoy and demanded China to withdraw its representatives in the Military Armistice Commission. China reluctantly took their demands, and withdrew its representatives and did not get involved in the process of a series of U.S.–North Korea negotiations including Geneva Agreed Framework. See Baek-ju Kim, "Has the Sino–North Korea Alliance Changed?," *National Strategy* 4, no. 3 (2018): 48. [in Korean]
40. United Nations Security Council, *Implementation Reports*, August 3, 2009, https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/AC.49/2009/23 (accessed July 20, 2019).
41. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "Wen Jiabao Answers North Korean Nuclear Issue at Triangular Summit," October 10, 2009. [in Chinese]
42. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "Hu Jintao Holds Summit Meeting with Kim Jong Il at Changchun," August 27, 2010. [in Chinese]
43. For more details about his process, refer to James Reilly, "China's Economic Engagement in North Korea," *The China Quarterly* 220 (Winter 2014): 919.
44. Kyo-duk Lee et al., "Human Exchange and Network Studies between North Korea and China," *General Report of Korea Institute for National Unification*, no. 14-1 (Winter 2014) [in Korean]; Andy Lim and Victor Cha, "Dataset: China–DPRK High Level Visits Since 1953," *Beyond Parallel*, March 17, 2017, <https://beyondparallel.csis.org/china-dprk-high-level-visits-since-1953/> (accessed July 21, 2019).
45. At that time, China sent joint condolence calls of the supreme authority such as the China Communist Party Central Committee, National People's Congress Standing Committee, State Council, Central Military Commission. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "China Sends Condolence to Death of Kim Jong Il," December 1, 2011. [in Chinese]
46. See New Year's address of North Korea, January 1, 2018. [in Korean]
47. Todd Beamon, "Trump: North Korea Threats Will Be 'Met with Fire and Fury,'" *Newsmax*, August 8, 2017.
48. As a matter of fact, China officially declared the implementation of the UN Sanction 2375 despite the China–North Korea summit in March 2018. This deed can symbolize China's effort to dispel concerns of its relief of sanctions. For more details about China's support for the sanctions, refer to Kihyun Lee and Jangho Kim, "Cooperation and Limitations of China's Sanctions on North Korea: Perception, Interest, and Institutional Environment," *North Korea*

- Review* 13, no. 1 (Spring 2017): 28–44.
49. “Leaders around the World Congratulate Xi’s Election,” *People’s Daily*, March 18, 2018. [in Chinese]
 50. “Xi Jinping Calls Trump as Promised,” *People’s Daily*, May 9, 2018. [in Chinese]
 51. Seung-sub Ahn, “Wang Qishan: “Korean Peninsula Issues Are China’s Interest... War Is Unacceptable,” Yonhap News, May 27, 2018. [in Korean]
 52. “Xi Jinping Stressed Importance of China–North Korea’s Friendly Relationship,” *People’s Daily*, June 20, 2018. [in Chinese]
 53. Ki-won Lee et al., “Wang Yi: U.S. Should Show a Positive Reaction to for a Compromise with North Korea,” Yonhap News, September 29, 2018. [in Korean]
 54. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, “Xi Jinping Holds Talks with Chairman of the Workers’ Party of Korea (WPK) and Chairman of the State Affairs Commission Kim Jong Un of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea),” June 20, 2019. [in Chinese]

Notes on Contributor

Kihyun Lee is an Assistant Professor at the Division of Language & Diplomacy (LD) at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies. Dr. Lee received his Ph.D. in Political Science from Peking University in China. He was a Director of the International Strategic Research Division and Research Fellow at the Korea Institute for National Unification (KINU). He was also a Research Professor at the Academy of East Asian Studies at Sungkyunkwan University. His main research interests are China’s State–Society Relations, China’s Foreign Policy and its relationship with the Korean Peninsula. His recent publications include “China’s Awareness and Response to the THAAD: Strategic Discomfort and Wishful Thinking (2018),” “The Offensive Realists are Not Wrong: China’s Growth and Aggression, 1976–2001 (2017),” “Cooperation and Limitations of China’s Sanctions on North Korea: Perception, Interest, and Institutional Environment (2017),” “Brief Reflections on the Possibility of Change in China’s North Korea Policy (2016),” “Analysis of Factors for Change in China’s Strategy on Diaoyudao (2016),” and “China’s Neighborhood Diplomacy and Policies on North Korea: Cases and Application (2015).”