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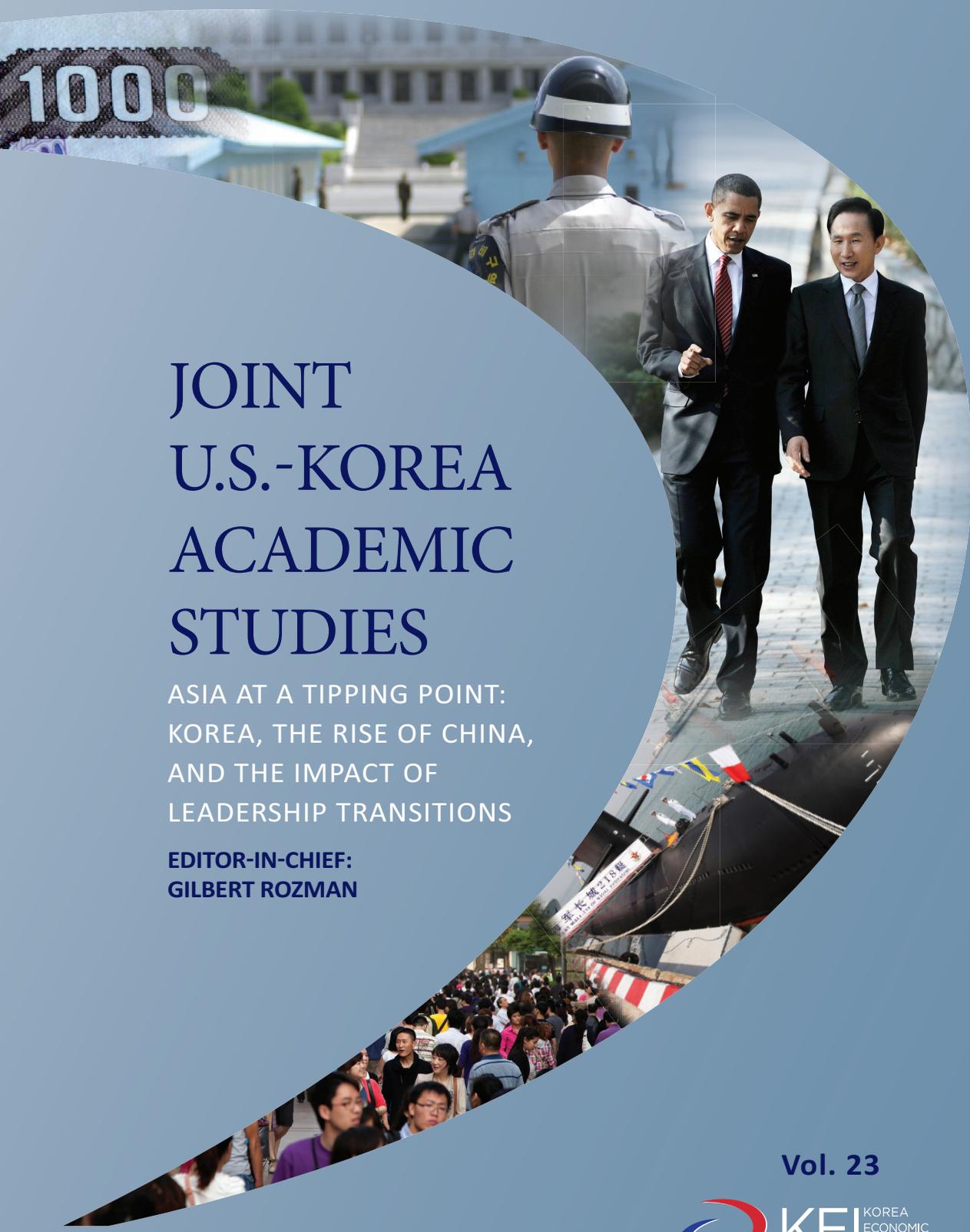
ASIA AT A TIPPING POINT:
KOREA, THE RISE OF CHINA,
AND THE IMPACT OF
LEADERSHIP TRANSITIONS

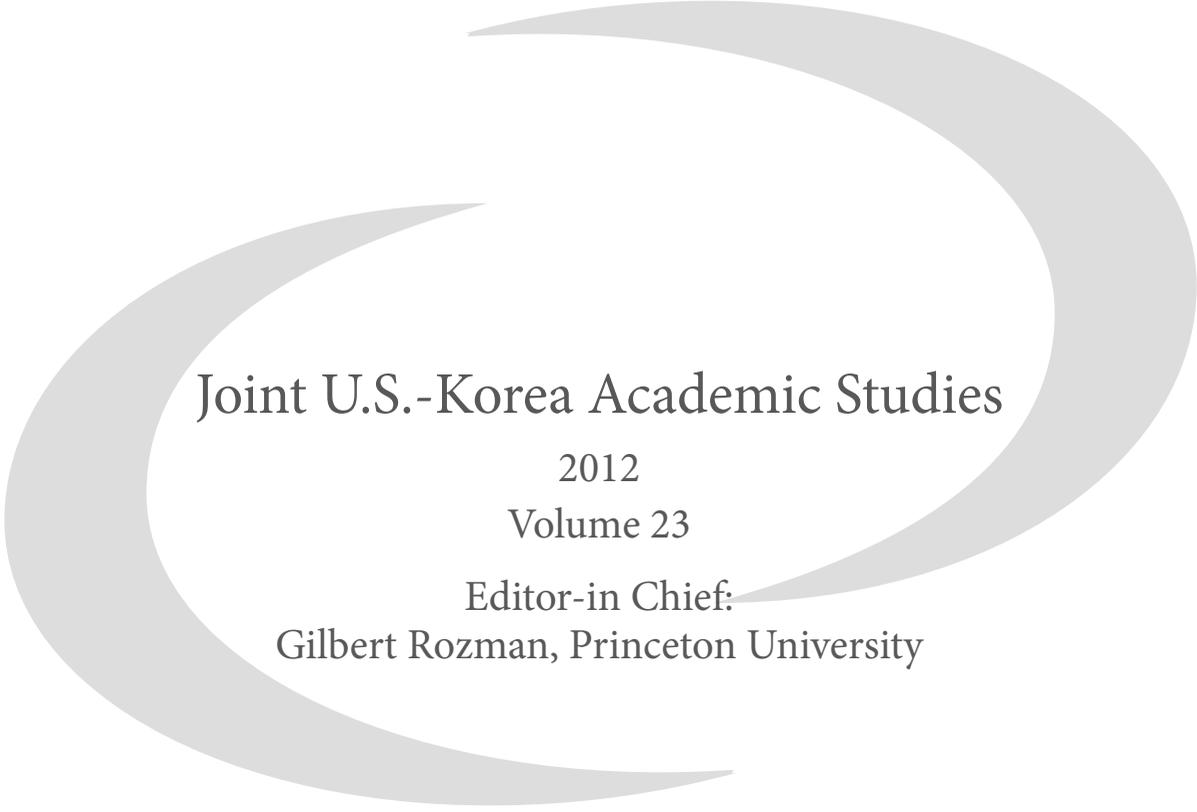
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Political Change in 2010-2012 and
Regional Cooperation Centered
on the Korean Peninsula

INTRODUCTION

The year 2012 may be determinative in transforming the leadership that will decide the fate of the hexagonal maneuvering over the North Korean nuclear threat and the prospects for reunification. Assuming his posts after his father Kim Jong-il's sudden death, an untested Kim Jong-un faces the difficult challenge of consolidating power while calibrating the pressure he and his powerful military constituency will apply in order to leave no doubt that North Korea cannot be ignored. A re-ascendant Vladimir Putin, who made renewal of personal ties to Kim Jong-il the stepping stone to Russia's reassertion of influence in Asia, must decide how firmly to support North Korea along with China in realizing his strategy of reasserting the power balancing logic of Soviet foreign policy. Similar to Putin, Xi Jinping can look forward to a high probability that he will retain power into the 2020s, continuing a relationship with North Korea which China has no intention of fraying no matter how belligerent the North becomes. At the sixtieth anniversary of the Korean War, the Chinese leader delivered a message that it was a glorious war that cemented relations with North Korea. These three choices of leaders provided clarity within the regional hexagon by early 2012, but another three uncertainties still to be resolved by year's end must be added to this picture.

In the case of Noda Yoshihiko the question is not a set date for elections to either the Lower or the Upper House of the Diet, but a resolute stance to overcome Japan's malaise by forcing tough votes that will decide his fate and, if he fails, make early elections likely. Japan's relations with the United States will be affected by its stance on the Trans-Pacific Partnership followed by three-way talks with China and South Korea aimed at a joint FTA, while the shadow of North Korea's growing threat is hovering in the background. The November U.S. elections will culminate a year of priority for the Iranian nuclear threat, to which Republican candidates promise to be even tougher than Barack Obama, but the overlap with the struggle against North Korea's nuclear threat is unmistakable as Obama's State of the Union assurance that he will prevent Iran from going nuclear reverberates in Northeast Asia. South Korea is the site of year-end elections that mark the final leadership choice of 2012. If the conservatives retain power, its posture toward North Korea is bound to be far more cautious, demanding reciprocity and coordinating with the United States, than if the progressives regain power with renewed hopes that one-sided generosity and more diplomatic balancing between China and the United States are the desired strategy.

In the span of one year there will be a remarkable leadership reshuffling and vetting in all countries involved in the Six-Party Talks with profound consequences for the future of the Korean peninsula. Assuming relative continuity in North Korea and China, where new leaders are selected by the old leadership and are still held accountable to the same vested interests, leadership change in the United States is of primary concern in predictions of what might be different after 2012. If Obama stays in office and succeeds in orchestrating multilateral pressure on Iran that causes it to back away from nuclear defiance, then efforts to find a multilateral solution for the North Korean threat will likely intensify. If he stays in office but deems sanctions to be failing or is provoked into a military confrontation in defiance of Russian as well as

Chinese policy, then cooperation on North Korea is less likely as U.S. allies are forced to take a stance. Even more confrontational would be the Republican policy, in light of campaign rhetoric, foreign policy advisors, and scorn for multilateralism.

No matter who wins, confrontational forces are likely to grow in light of the North's trajectory and China's increasing support of North Korea and Sinocentric strategy.

As Jack Pritchard and Gordon Flake explain, the sequence of 2012 transitions matters. Kim Jong-il's stroke in 2008 and death in December 2011 showed others a combination of at least three things. First, leadership would be weakened for a long time to come in North Korea, resulting in even more deference to the military and the principle of *songun*. Second, the prospects for serious reform and real pursuit of denuclearization, even along the lines followed in 2007-08, had grown dim. Third, through China's accommodation of North Korea's belligerence and embrace of this succession (prioritizing regime stability over everything else), the choices available to new leaders—including China's fifth-generation party leadership—are constricted.

If the North Korean succession had occurred even a few years earlier, China's response would likely have been different. Kim Jong-un would have been younger and even less groomed to take power. China's relative power would have been less, leaving more doubt about its readiness to challenge the United States and the other states that prioritize denuclearization. Chinese concern for boosting soft power and encouraging multilateralism would have remained salient. Instead, China damaged relations with the United States and South Korea, after reassessing on the basis of newly asserted Sinocentric aspirations the importance of regime stability in the sole country with which it has a treaty of alliance and legacy of communist comradeship.

South Koreans oscillate not only in the way leaders have dealt with China but also in choosing between blaming China for opposing reunification while reinforcing North Korea in pursuit of hegemony and blaming their own leaders for mishandling China policy in ways unfavorable for dealing with North Korea. Zero-sum thinking about South Korean relations with China and the United States has complicated the effort to strike the right balance, but North Korea's aggressive behavior has widened the Sino-U.S. divide and left in doubt progressive plans to draw closer to China while sustaining a strong alliance. Jae Ho Chung traces the balance between conservatives and progressives in the National Assembly and the annual changes in views of the United States, as he shows how new leadership has influenced policy toward China.

Japan's quest for a greater voice on Korean affairs has led to frustration, as discussed by Kazuhiko Togo. Yet, that does not mean leadership change is irrelevant to diplomacy toward both North and South Korea. He shows the recurrent interest in finding a path forward with the North and in solidifying relations with the South on the basis of increasingly overlapping values and security interests. Difficulties in coordinating with both South Korea and the United States in talks with North Korea are a major theme in his chapter, raising the question of how much a single leader can achieve without yielding to more urgent U.S. and South Korean diplomacy. Not able to put aside the territorial dispute with South Korea, Japan appears destined to further bouts of wishful thinking without serious follow through of strategic moves.

While leadership change in China potentially has the greatest bearing on the future of North Korea outside the North itself, we know less about the inner debates there than in the democracies. Gilbert Rozman has traced changing positions, as one generation of leaders has been replaced by another. He has also looked for clues about the input of different interest groups. Considering China's shift in thinking toward South Korea from 2008 and toward North Korea from 2009 as a decisive turning point, punctuated in October 2010 by Xi Jinping's commemorative statement on the sixtieth anniversary of the Korean War, Rozman concludes that their leadership will not see a return to its flexible, multilateral posture to 2008. Taken together with the conclusions drawn in the chapter on North Korea's transition, this argument suggests that new flexibility in South Korea or even in Japan is unlikely to alter the sharp divide now in place. In the aftermath of Bo Xilai's downfall in March 2012, reform elements gained traction, but a precarious balance prevailed without hardliners losing their decisive voice.

A chapter on Russia's leadership is not included, although Russia is treated separately for its approach to security. Suffice it to say, that even Dmitry Medvedev showcased Russian support for Kim Jong-il, meeting with him in Ulan-Ude in August 2011. With Putin's return to the presidency after campaigning on anti-Americanism, the importance of opposing U.S. foreign policy is not likely to diminish. Yet, Russia's dream of multilateralism contrasts to China's Sinocentrism, and Russia denounced North Korea's March 2012 announcement of an April satellite launch that scuttled the "Leap Day" agreement with the United States; so Putin's hold on power likely keeps alive the uncertainty over how Russia would respond to a crisis atmosphere.

Leadership has great bearing on the way the states active in Northeast Asia address sensitive questions related to the Korean peninsula. How should the shared goal of denuclearization be prioritized relative to goals such as stability and the regional balance of power? What weight should be given to human rights in the context of urgent security concerns? To what extent should the multilateral nature of diplomacy override the expression of national policy priorities? How closely is coordination with South Korea advisable, recognizing its legitimacy to represent the Korean people, given divergence in threat perceptions and strategic thinking about the future of the peninsula? In the United States and South Korea differences often emerge on some of these questions. In China and Japan differences across time have been noteworthy. Leaders represent changing outlooks over time if not contrasting orientations in the competition for votes. South Korea is the principal unknown in the aftermath of its leadership transition, as indicated by past experience and by the greater contrast in views of political elites on how to deal with the North.

Leadership Changes and South Korea's China Policy

JAE HO CHUNG

Changes in political leadership are often associated with readjustments or reversals of policy, the impact of which can be both wide-ranging in scope and long-lasting in duration. Foreign policy, which had long belonged to the realm of sovereign decisions by the kings and their trusted servants in traditional times, has of late fallen into the domain of intense bargaining and compromises between the state and the society in the era of informatized popular democracy.¹ Political leaders are, of course, still empowered to make authoritative decisions but their boundary of discretion is now significantly constrained by the obligations to reflect and accommodate the interests and, increasingly, sentiments of the people who vote for them.

This article tackles the following question: Are leadership changes associated with oscillations in South Korea's China policy? Three issues seem particularly important: (1) how South Korean elite perceptions of China have been evolving over the years; (2) given that South Korea is now a fully-operating democracy where political elites have to accommodate popular sentiments and demands to a certain extent, how South Korean people's views of China have changed over time; and (3) whether South Korea's China policy has actually oscillated in tandem with the fluctuations in South Korean perceptions and views of China. The article deals with each of these issues in that order and concludes with some observations on future challenges.

SOUTH KOREAN ELITE PERCEPTIONS OF CHINA

For much of the history of the Republic of Korea, Seoul's foreign policy and external strategy has revolved around Washington as the U.S. has been its patron and principal protector against communist threat and against North Korea in particular.² Until the 1970s, China and South Korea were antagonistic to each other at worst and indifferent at best. For China, North Korea was a close ally while, for South Korea, Taiwan was a principal partner. Naturally, during this earlier period, South Korean elite perceptions of China as North Korea's ally and protector were generally negative, if not entirely hostile.

Cold War Sentiments

During Syngman Rhee's rule in the 1950s, Cold War sentiments dominated foreign policy in South Korea. U.S.-China relations, Sino-South Korean relations and inter-Korean relations were all so antagonistic that virtually no room was available for Seoul's direct dealing with Beijing, not to mention a rapprochement between the two. The present danger of North Korean aggression at the height of the Cold War was such that South Korea's foreign policy focus revolved mainly around the task of maintaining and consolidating the military alliance with the U.S.

The rise of Park Chung-hee in 1961 did not change the South Korean elite's perception of China as an antagonistic communist nation. Economic development became a top priority and, for that reason, sustaining solid security ties with the United States was deemed a prerequisite. The only official encounter between South Korea and

China took place at Panmunjom where armistice meetings were held intermittently. Throughout the 1960s, Cold War sentiments continued to dominate foreign policy in Seoul, thereby precluding possibilities for Sino-South Korean rapprochement.³

Drastic changes occurred in the international strategic environment during the early 1970s. China's accession to the United Nations in 1971, Nixon's blitzkrieg visit to China, and the subsequent rapprochement in 1972 between China, on the one hand, and the United States and Japan, on the other, came as a shock to South Korean elites. Mindful of China's potential influence over North Korea, Seoul came to think strategically about improving relations with Beijing. As early as 1971, South Korea's Foreign Minister, Kim Yong-Sik, commented that "[I]t is the policy of my government to approach the question of improving relations with the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China with flexibility and sincerity."⁴ According to a 1972 survey, as many as 38% of the National Assembly members were already in support of diplomatic normalization with Communist China.⁵

President Park's view of China shifted from antagonism and concern to interest and sense of utility. In 1972, Park instructed his Foreign Ministry to expand contact with Chinese diplomats overseas. For that purpose, five embassies and one consulate general (Washington, Tokyo, London, Paris, Ottawa and Hong Kong) were designated as the venues for such contact.⁶ Park's strategic thinking was encapsulated in his June 23, 1973 announcement, which abandoned the long-held Hallstein Principle and opened the door to socialist nations like China and the Soviet Union. South Korean media repeated the tune that Seoul should remain alert security-wise but keep its diplomatic options open as far as China was concerned.⁷ Of course, the detente atmosphere in inter-Korean relations was also a factor in favor of such shifting views of China in South Korea.

The fall of Saigon in 1975 and complex post-Mao succession politics in Beijing slowed down the momentum for rapprochement between South Korea and China. While details of Park's strategic thinking toward China still remain veiled, many of his overtures toward China were concentrated in the last phase of his rule (1977-79), concomitant to Seoul's increasingly bumpy relationship with Washington. The failed nuclear weapons program in the midst of the "Carter chill," by which all U.S. ground combat forces were to be withdrawn from South Korea in four to five years from 1977, must have pushed Park for an alternative window for security assurance—i.e., rapprochement with communist foes.⁸ It was not a coincidence that Kim Kyung-won, special assistant to the president on international security affairs, remarked in November 1978 that South Korea hoped to improve relations with China.⁹

China as a New Window of Opportunity

During his tenure as president, Chun Doo-hwan displayed strong interest in improving ties with China, as well as with the Soviet Union. During his state visit to Washington in 1981, Chun commented, "[I]f the People's Republic of China is a friend of the United States, I think I can extend the logic and say a friend of a friend is less of a threat to us."¹⁰ Recent documentation also demonstrates that the Chun administration skillfully utilized the 1983 hijacking incident and the 1985

Kunsan torpedo boat incident in improving ties with China.¹¹ In retrospect, however, Chun appears to have been more committed to consolidating Seoul's alliance relationship with Washington. Given that his rise to power was facilitated by the military coup d'état and bloody suppression of the Kwangju Uprising, America's formal endorsement must have been indispensable in securing the support and legitimacy for his regime.¹² Chun's view of China proved to be largely economic in pursuit of diversification of South Korea's export markets and investment destinations.

Roh Tae-woo was different from Chun, however. Roh was popularly elected and, therefore, not as much constrained by consideration of how his legitimacy was perceived by the United States. President Roh actively searched for alternative frameworks of South Korea's external relations. For one, he sought to utilize China in efforts to diversify South Korea's trading partners so as to reduce excessive dependence on the United States and Japan. For another, more importantly, Roh also wished to shed Seoul's role as Washington's loyal subordinate by actively seeking rapprochement with Moscow and Beijing.¹³

Unlike Chun, from the outset, Roh had a strategic agenda regarding South Korea's diplomacy toward the socialist bloc and China in particular. Roh described his vision as follows: "[A] new beginning [is here], an era of hope, which will see Korea, once a peripheral nation in East Asia, take a central position in the international community." He went even further by saying that "[W]e will broaden the channel of international cooperation with the continental countries with which we have thus far had no exchanges...Such a northward diplomacy should also lead us to reunification."¹⁴

Roh's northern diplomacy was, to a certain extent, seen as an independent effort to reduce excessive dependence on the United States. In December 1988, Park Dong-jin, Korea's ambassador to Washington, characterized American views of *nordpolitik* at the time as South Korea's "unilateral drive"—i.e., lacking sufficient consultation with its key ally.¹⁵ South Korea's response to the Tiananmen massacre in June 1989 was not synchronized with the tough measures adopted by the United States, Europe, and Japan. South Korea remained silent on the bloody military suppression and willing to resume business with China. Whereas the number of business delegations to China from the United States and Japan was reduced by more than 50%, those from South Korea marked a 70% increase over 1988.¹⁶

What then prompted South Korea to view China as a new window of opportunity? Strategically speaking, as noted earlier, the desire to reduce dependence, both economic and strategic, on the United States played a crucial role, while South Korea's growing national pride—an inclination to pursue a status on a par with her newly acquired capabilities—was also a factor. As an American analyst aptly put it: "Leaders in Seoul display a new appreciation that security means more than perpetuating the U.S. connection...[I]t still remains vital, but so are Seoul's new-found diplomatic levers."¹⁷

There was also the Japan factor. Regarding Japan, there existed a huge perceptual gap between the United States and South Korea. During the 1990s, South Korea viewed Japan as most threatening while America maintained much more favorable

perceptions of Japan.¹⁸ Though briefly and implicitly, there were some shared perceptions between China and South Korea of the latent threat that Japan might pose for the region. In fact, one reason for Beijing's decision to normalize relations with Seoul in 1992 was allegedly to lay the groundwork for an anti-Japan coalition.¹⁹

Much of Kim Young-sam's reasoning with regard to the role of China, or regarding South Korea's external strategy, remains unknown. Kim appears to have viewed China as a new window of opportunity, though largely unspecified. At a press briefing on his state visit to China on March 29, 1994, Hwang Byung-tae, South Korea's ambassador to China, remarked that "South Korea-China cooperation over the issue of North Korea's nuclear program should go beyond the level of simply notifying Beijing what has already been decided between Seoul and Washington.... South Korea's diplomacy should break out of its heavy reliance exclusively on the United States."²⁰ Although the remarks were drastic by the standards of the time, neither did President Kim endorse the remarks, nor was the ambassador sacked. (He remained in his post until 1996). Expectations for China as a strategic actor in the Korean game were indeed growing among South Korean elites.

In retrospect, it appears that up to Kim Young-sam's rule, South Korea's China policy had a linear upward trajectory from the points of antagonism and indifference to those of rapprochement and normalization filled with high expectations for economic and even some strategic cooperation. As the domestic political scenes became more complicated during the late 1990s, South Korea's China policy also took on an ideological—i.e., zero-sum—dimension.

The Rise of the Progressives, 1998-2007

The election of Kim Dae-jung as president in 1997 marked a new era in South Korean politics as it was the first progressive government to come to power. Kim pursued a dual-track strategy—the "Sunshine Policy" toward North Korea and an engagement policy toward China—and neither made the United States happy. The Sunshine Policy, engaging and assisting North Korea without requiring any *quid pro quo*, was closely connected with the engagement policy toward China in the sense that the Kim administration found it necessary to elicit support—or at least no objection—from China in order to accomplish reunification. Since South Korea was structurally tied to the United States through the alliance framework, it was thought, the spread of the "China threat" thesis would only constrain the range of Seoul's options.²¹

The rise of the progressive government coincided with the empowerment of public opinion in South Korean politics. During the period of concern, highly favorable and hopeful views of China emerged, marking a stark contrast with the plummeting popularity of America in South Korea.²² While the Kim administration possessed some threads of distinct strategic thinking, it did not have a China focus *per se*. Instead of viewing China as an alternative or counterweight to the U.S.-centered diplomacy, Kim's strategic thought revolved more closely around inter-Korean cooperation (*minjok gongjo*) and reunification, for which China was considered one of many variables.²³ Furthermore, South Korea at the time needed America's support for economic recovery from the

severe financial crisis and, therefore, Seoul's engagement toward China was yet neither so proactive nor pursued at the expense of South Korea-U.S. relations.

Toward the end of Kim Dae-jung's term, South Korea-U.S. relations plummeted to a record low in the wake of candle-lit anti-American demonstrations ignited by the tragic incident where two schoolgirls had been run over by a U.S. army vehicle. Among other things, the rise of fierce anti-American sentiments contributed significantly to the election of Roh Moo-hyun in December 2002. Worth noting is the fact that, up to that point, anti-Americanism was not directly connected to pro-China sentiments in South Korean politics. That is to say, zero-sum views linking Korea-China relations with Korea-American relations were not yet so popular.

The failed impeachment in 2003 led to a landslide victory for Roh's party in the National Assembly elections of April 2004. The subsequent massive inflow of younger politicians into the political arena introduced a drastic—both generational and orientational—change to the elite strata in South Korea as over two-thirds (68%) of the National Assembly members in the incumbent Uri Party and nearly half (43%) of those in the Grand National Party were younger first-timers. Many had different world outlooks. According to a *Dong-A Ilbo* survey of 138 newcomers to the National Assembly in 2004, 55% viewed China as a more important foreign policy target of South Korea than the United States.²⁴ More importantly, the spread of such opinion surveys gradually linked the elites' perceptions of the United States with those of China, unintentionally and unnecessarily popularizing dichotomous zero-sum views.

The Roh administration inherited its predecessor's Sunshine Policy toward North Korea. Vis-a-vis the United States and Japan, it insisted on "diplomacy with self-esteem," different interests were to be duly noted rather than concealed. In coping with the second nuclear crisis since 2002, while the Bush Administration took South Korea out of the driver's seat, Seoul was, nevertheless, singing peace and stability to the tune of Beijing in the backseat in efforts to prevent Washington from adopting non-peaceful measures against Pyongyang.²⁵ This naturally led to the situation where China emerged as an influential player and mediator in the North Korean conundrum. The heated debates among South Korean policy elites on the size, location, and timing of dispatching South Korean forces to Iraq in early 2004 were also indicative of the state of affairs in the Korea-U.S. alliance at the time.

It is often suggested that the Roh administration's catch phrase of "independence" or "self-reliance" meant a policy stance closer to China than to the United States. Despite painstaking compromises found in *Pyonghwa wa bonyong eul wihan dongbuka* (Peace and Prosperity for Northeast Asia) compiled and published in 2004 by the National Security Council (NSC), the Roh administration was generally seen as tilting toward China.²⁶ In an interview with this author, Lee Jong-seok, who directed the National Security Council for the first three years of the Roh administration, remarked:

President Roh took the task of keeping a balance between Washington and Beijing seriously, and this was often interpreted - wrongly - as taking a pro-China stance....As the administration stressed multilateral cooperation in the region, bilateral ties with the U.S. weakened to a certain extent, thereby further augmenting the image of the administration as tilting toward China.²⁷

In the summer of 2004, China dealt a heavy blow to the Roh administration. With much attention given to China's "Northeast Project" (*Dongbei gongcheng*)—efforts to incorporate much of Korea's ancient history into China's "local history"—many South Koreans became deeply concerned with the rise of an "assertive" China. Those who had had high hopes and expectations for China were disillusioned.²⁸ As Table 2 demonstrates, the impact of the history controversy was such that South Korean perceptions of China made an about-face in 2004.

The South Korean elite also changed its views of China. According to a 2005 survey conducted with 187 members of the National Assembly, 68% chose the United States as South Korea's most important foreign policy target.²⁹ Compared to the 2004 survey conducted with 138 assemblymen, which found 55% of the respondents chose China, the impact of the history controversy was readily discernible. Interestingly, one of the books that was then known to be Roh's favorites depicted the United States as a constant, not a variable, in South Korea's security equations and stressed the need to maintain Seoul's "independent" status vis-à-vis China.³⁰ The sudden surge of interest in a Free Trade Agreement with the United States (KORUS FTA) in 2005 is notable in the sense that Seoul was reawakened to America's strategic value.

The essence of the Roh administration's strategic thinking is found in Seoul's negotiations since 2003 with Washington on the issue of "strategic flexibility" (i.e., on what terms the U.S. forces can be deployed in and out of South Korea to cope with regional contingencies). While it initially appeared that South Korea was paying much attention to Chinese views and concerns, it, in fact, sought hard to avoid the intricate situation where it could be inadvertently sucked into an unwanted regional conflict—say, over the Taiwan Strait—thereby damaging its economic interests in China.³¹

Overall, in stark contrast with the earlier expectations, South Korea's strategic relationship with China of this period did not improve to the extent of compensating for the serious cracks in the Seoul-Washington alliance relationship. As a matter of fact, toward the end of Roh's term, South Korean perceptions of China continued to worsen (see Table 2) and, in tandem with South Korea's growing economic and diplomatic dependence on China, a sort of "China fear" began to emerge.³²

The Conservatives Strike Back

The election of Lee Myung-bak as president in December 2007 and the victory of the Grand National Party in the April 2008 National Assembly elections brought about drastic changes in South Korean politics. The principle of "ABR" (anything

but Roh Moo-hyun) was implemented virtually across the board.³³ To the extent the Roh administration was held accountable for the weakened ties with the U.S., the incoming administration vowed to restore and consolidate the alliance. Given the prevailing zero-sum views in South Korea, this inevitably meant weakened ties with China or, at least, a perception as such.

Table 1 illustrates the self-categorized ideological orientations of the National Assembly members in the last ten years. Among the members of the 18th Assembly (the bottom row), the share of conservatives was much higher (61%) than after the previous two elections. According to a 2008 survey conducted among 220 members newly elected to the 18th National Assembly, 137 members (59.6%) chose the United States as the most important country, while the comparable figure for China was 81 (35.2%).³⁴ Compared to the aforementioned 2004 survey which found that 55% of the Assembly members surveyed chose China, the orientational difference of the key elite was clearly identifiable.

	Conservative	Progressive	Others
2002 (16th)	19%	20%	69%
2004 (17th)	20%	45%	35%
2008 (18th)	61%	33%	6%

Sources: *Dong-A Ilbo*, April 14, 2008; and <http://ask.nate.com/qna/view.html?n=8148689> (accessed on January 5, 2012).

Assessing the Lee administration's China policy from 2008 through early 2012 is a rather complicated task since, at least on the surface and in rhetoric, it paid much attention to sustaining a good relationship. Generally speaking, however, its China policy has not really lived up to its rhetoric and announced policy goals. We may employ the following three criteria to substantiate this specific assessment.

First, while South Korea and China established a "strategic cooperative partnership" (*zhanlue hezuo huoban guanxi*) in May 2008 in efforts to expand the domain of Sino-South Korean cooperation from merely bilateral to regional and even to global issues, little evidence is thus far available to indicate that the two nations have indeed achieved genuine cooperation on urgent regional problems such as the North Korean nuclear issue, not to mention global ones. Particularly after the Cheonan sinking and the Yeonpyeong shelling in 2010, serious doubts have been cast with regard to the real meaning of "strategic cooperation" between the two nations.³⁵

Second, Chinese assessments of South Korea-China relations are such that they are "generally healthy but carry some 'dark currents' that can affect the relationship at any time" (*zongti lianghao de tongshi ye shibushi you anliu yongxian*).³⁶ Alternatively, South Korea's relations with China are also viewed as "hot in economics, warm in diplomacy, but cool in security terms." The ever-increasing trade statistics are starkly contrasted with China's stance on the sinking and shelling incidents in 2010. China's unequivocal defense of North Korea even

in the case of the first-ever attack by North Korea on South Korean land territory since 1953, which led to tragic civilian casualties, tells us a lot about the current state of affairs in South Korea-China relations.

Third, the Lee administration's "alliance first" policy (consolidating the strategic alliance with the U.S. and accommodating America's requests for military support in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere) was seen by the Chinese as de-prioritizing China and rejecting the "pro-China" policy of the progressive governments before it. One crucial point needs to be highlighted at this juncture. It refers to the unduly heightened expectations that China had of South Korea's China policy under Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun. Chinese analysts referred to U.S.-South Korean relations in the Roh administration as an "alignment" (*lianmeng*) instead of an "alliance" (*tongmeng*), thereby denoting a less military-related and looser organization. Yet, during Lee's rule, Chinese analysts reflected on their mistakes of over-interpreting and over-generalizing the policies of the two progressive governments.³⁷ At least from China's perspective, changes in political leadership mattered in terms of South Korea's policy toward China.

UPCOMING CHALLENGES: POLICY OSCILLATIONS AND DEMOCRATIC TRAPS

Theoretically speaking, democracy is said to be well functioning when government policy is able to reflect and accommodate the general public's views and needs. Although the nature of foreign policy is different from many other types of government policies, public opinion is generally understood to wield increasing levels of influence over South Korea's foreign-policy making. On the basis of thirty-four nationwide opinion surveys, Table 2 compares South Korean views of China with those of the United States for the period 1997-2012.

The public opinion data in Table 2 offer two interesting observations. First, with the year of 2004 as a watershed, South Korean views of China made an about face. For the period from 1997 to early 2004, nine (90%) out of the ten surveys found that South Koreans had more favorable views of China than of the United States. During 2004-2011, however, only four (16.7%) out of the twenty-four surveys found that South Koreans' perceptions of China were more favorable than those of the United States. The impact of the Koguryo controversy (from 2004) on views of China appears to be stronger and more durable than previously assumed. Apparently, South Korean perceptions have shifted to a zero-sum view in the sense that a decline (or increase) in negative views of China has been correlated with an increase (or decline) in positive views of the United States.

Second, more importantly, it appears that the respective government's China policy in the last ten years or so roughly corresponded with South Korean public opinion of China. During the period of two progressive governments, South Korean perceptions of China were far more favorable than those of the United States, and for the period of the conservative government under Lee, South Koreans viewed the United States more positively than China. One problem with this interpretation, however, concerns

Year	Chose China	Chose U.S.
1997 ^{1*}	56	31
1999 ^{2*}	33	22
2000 ^{3***}	45	43
2000 ^{4***}	53	8
2001 ^{5**}	29	30
2002 ^{6**}	41	30
2002 ^{7**}	50	36
2002 ^{8**}	55	37
2003 ^{9***}	48	33
2004 ^{10***}	48	38
2004 ^{11*}	24	53
2005 ^{12**}	39	54
2005 ^{13**}	38	37
2005 ^{14**}	65	51
2005 ^{15**}	15	38
2005 ^{16**}	11	46
2005 ^{17***}	29	55
2006 ^{18**}	12	50
2006 ^{19**}	56	51
2006 ^{20**}	24	47
2006 ^{21**}	57	58
2007 ^{22**}	32	35
2007 ^{32**}	10	53
2007 ^{23*}	20	79
2008 ^{24***}	52	30
2008 ^{25**}	40	49
2008 ^{26*}	18	52
2008 ^{32**}	8	61
2008 ^{27*}	23	50
2008 ^{28***}	15	45
2009 ^{29***}	32	51
2009 ^{32**}	6	68
2010 ^{30**}	6	71

2010 ^{31**}	4	71
2011 ^{32**}	5	69
2011 ^{33**}	33	78
2012 ^{34**}	12	35

Notes: *Question: With which country should South Korea maintain close relations? ** Question: Toward which country do you feel more favorable? ***Question: Which country should South Koreans regard as more important?

Sources:¹The Sejong Institute, 1997 *Seyon Report* (Seoul: Dongseo Research, October 1997), pp. 11-13; ²*Dong-A Ilbo*, January 1, 1999; ³*Hanguok Ilbo*, June 9, 2000; ⁴*Dong-A Ilbo*, December 5, 2000; ⁵*Dong-A Ilbo*, December 25, 2001; ⁶*Sisa Journal*, March 2002; ⁷*Wolgan Chosun*, July 2002; ⁸*Chosun Ilbo*, December 22, 2002; ⁹*Joong-Ang Ilbo*, February 12, 2003; ¹⁰*Dong-A Ilbo*, May 4, 2004; ¹¹*Global View 2004* (Chicago: Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, 2004), p. 19; ¹²*Chosun Ilbo*, January 1, 2005; ¹³*Hankyoreh sinmun*, March 17, 2005; ¹⁴*Hanguok Ilbo*, June 10, 2005; ¹⁵*Kookmin Ilbo*, December 9, 2005; ¹⁶*Joong-Ang Ilbo*, December 22, 2005; ¹⁷*Dong-A Ilbo*, November 7, 2005; ¹⁸*Joong-Ang Ilbo*, May 18, 2006; ¹⁹*Hanguok Ilbo*, August 7, 2006; ²⁰*Munwha Ilbo*, September 16, 2006; ²¹*Joong-Ang Ilbo*, December 23, 2006; ²²*EAI Opinion Briefing*, No. 9-2 (March 6, 2007); ²³*Christian Science Monitor*, August 13, 2007; ²⁴*Dong-A Ilbo*, April 1, 2008; ²⁵*EAI Opinion Briefing*, No. 25-1 (April 2, 2008); ²⁶*Kookmin Ilbo*, August 15, 2008; ²⁷*Dong-A Ilbo*, August 15, 2008; ²⁸*Kyunghyang sinmun*, August 15, 2008; ²⁹*SBS Sisa toron* (RealMeter: February 21, 2009); ³⁰*Chosun Ilbo*, August 12, 2010; ³¹*2010 tongil euisik josa balpyo* (Survey Report on the Consciousness of Unification) (Seoul: Institute for Peace and Unification Studies, Seoul National University, September 7, 2010), p. 90; ³²*2011 tongil euisik josa balpyo* (Survey Report on the Consciousness of Unification) (Seoul: Institute for Peace and Unification Studies, Seoul National University, September 21, 2011), p. 58; ³³*2011 gugkbang e daehan gukmin euisik josa* (Survey Report on the People's Consciousness Regarding National Defense) (Seoul: Korean Institute for national Defense, November 2011); ³⁴*Dong-A Ilbo*, January 6, 2012.

how to assess the Roh administration's China policy for the period of 2005-2007. If South Korea's agreement to the strategic flexibility of American forces in 2006 and the signing of the KORUS FTA in 2007 are interpreted as indicators of changes in Roh's China policy, the Roh government can also be said to have been more reflective of public opinions in its foreign-policy making.³⁸

If the findings noted above are a useful guide, which party should dominate the National Assembly elections in April and who should be elected as the new president in December this year are the most important issues of all. As for April, uncertainties loom large for at least two reasons. First, South Korean voters do not seem to have high levels of trust in incumbent politicians. According to a recent nationwide survey, respondents replied that as many as 61% of the incumbent members of the National Assembly need to be replaced by new faces. Ongoing nominations of candidates also seem to reflect such sentiments. Second, compared to four years ago when the popularity rating for the opposition party was a mere 9.6% as opposed to the governing Grand National Party's 54%, the current ratings as of March 2, 2012, were 31.8 versus 33.7%.³⁹ Predicting the outcome is difficult.

Predicting the outcome of the presidential election is equally, if not more, daunting. Unlike 2007, the upcoming presidential election is likely to be neck-and-neck given the growing discontent with the incumbent party. Notable at this point is the steady increase in the number of people who identify themselves as "progressives," which rose from 26.6% in 2006 to 28.9% in 2010 and 32.3% in 2011.⁴⁰ At the time of this writing, it is still not clear who will be the candidates from the governing and

opposition parties, or whether there will be a significant third-party candidate. Whoever the candidates may be, the most crucial issue at hand is whether they will be able to break the fixed image of their party's China policy. Will they be able to dispel the zero-sum cast between China policy and U.S. policy? Given that China policy is occupying an increasingly important place in South Korea's external strategy, how the candidates will address this issue—if the theme of foreign policy should become a key agenda at all for the presidential election—remains to be seen.

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North Korean Politics and China

JACK PRITCHARD and L. GORDON FLAKE

The death of North Korean leader Kim Jong-il on December 17, 2011 has prematurely set in motion the leadership changes that were anticipated in 2012. To be sure, a leadership change in North Korea in 2012 was not a given, but the transitional preparation that was begun in earnest in September 2010 with the naming of Kim's third son, Kim Jong-un, to a series of leadership positions as the designated successor was expected to continue in a serious vein. Kim Jong-un's arrival so early in 2012 restructures how the remainder of the anticipated leadership changes in Northeast Asia will be viewed. Instead of waiting to see how political transitions in China, South Korea, Russia and the United States might influence the succession process in North Korea, it is the sudden change in Pyongyang that could now have more of an impact in South Korea's National Assembly election in April and its presidential election in December. While events in North Korea are unlikely to have much of an impact on other leadership changes in the region, it will force U.S. presidential candidates to address a new dynamic when they (however briefly) talk about U.S. policy toward North Korea.

Since the stroke of DPRK leader Kim Jong-il in August 2008 and now his death in late 2011, almost all domestic and certainly all foreign interactions by Pyongyang have been focused on an accelerated and comprehensive effort to put in place a viable leadership successor. Inevitably, there are two schools of thought on the long-term prospects of success for a third generation hereditary succession in North Korea. The initial smoothness of the process has led many analysts to declare the transition a success, while others disagree pointing to the lack of depth of preparations, the inexperience of Kim Jong-un, and the youth of the new leader as significant points of comparison to the transition that took place in 1994 when Kim Jong-il succeeded his father as supreme leader. Also, somewhat counter intuitively, it is possible to view the rapidity with which Kim Jong-un has accumulated titles and support as a sign of weakness or at least a sign of a lack of confidence in the transition. By 1994 Kim Jong-il had already taken real control over the DPRK and yet assumed few titles and kept a low profile during a three-year "mourning period." As the dynamic with the current transition is different, with Kim attempting to give power to his son, Kim Jong-un does not appear to have the luxury of a long ambiguous transition.

DOMESTIC POLITICAL FACTORS

For the past three and a half years, a carefully orchestrated transition has been taking place. Kim Jong-il's sister Kim Kyong-hui and his brother-in-law Jang Song-thaek were given even more prominent places in government. The brother-in-law, Jang, was placed on the National Defense Commission—the highest governing body—in April 2009 and then in June 2010 was made one of its vice chairman. In September 2010 the selection of Kim's third and youngest son, Kim Jong-un, as the next leader was made official as he was made an instant four-star general and given the position of vice chairman of the Korean Workers Party's Central Military Commission. Kim Jong-il's sister was also made a four-star general. Favored generals were promoted and close confidants given key positions on the Politburo. In early November 2010 when co-author Jack Pritchard visited North

Korea for the eleventh time, he was told by senior officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that “all was well, that Kim Jong-il was healthy and in charge, and that they now have the pleasure of also serving the ‘young general’ – Kim Jong-un.” The message was a deliberate effort to dispel outside speculation that Kim was on death’s bed or that there was any opposition to Kim Jong-un as the next leader of North Korea. Thirteen months later, the situation drastically changed.

Why Kim Jong-un? There is some anecdotal evidence that Kim Jong-il had misgivings about a third generation Kim family successor to power. Unfortunately, he never acted to create an alternative opportunity and, conversely, was so concerned about a threat to his power that he actively eliminated potential contenders. Case in point was the demotion and banishment of his brother-in-law Jang Song-thaek for a period of time when it appeared that Jang was accumulating too much power in his own right. Whether or not Kim had a master plan in mind to cultivate a non-family related successor over time, the stroke he experienced in August 2008 had the effect of forcing his hand and limiting his choices. The stroke also had the effect of requiring an accelerated approach to introducing an acceptable successor. Thus, the choice of the third son, Kim Jong-un. While lacking credibility or experience of his own, Jong-un has the hereditary lineage and, fortunately for him, physical similarities to Kim Il-sung. In the immediate aftermath of Kim Jong-il’s stroke, no one knew how much longer Kim would survive, thus the imperative of acting quickly to put in place a candidate that would have a certain level of backing from those loyal to Kim.

By the end of 2010, Kim Jong-il appeared to have recuperated significantly enough and while the question of his longevity could not be predicted accurately at that time, the process of grooming Kim Jong-un took on a more deliberate pace. The accelerated campaign to provide Kim Jong-un with instant credentials and the deliberate placing of Kim loyalists in key positions of power has worked so far. At the beginning of the process following Kim’s stroke, conventional wisdom would not have bet that Kim Jong-un would be able to successfully succeed his father. There is no accepted practice of hereditary transfer of power in Socialist countries, particularly not to a third generation. The exception has been North Korea and success was by no means guaranteed. When Kim Jong-il came to power on July 8, 1994, he had been groomed as the officially designated heir for twenty years and by most accounts was already running the country day-to-day, yet he believed it both prudent and necessary to consolidate his power over a three-year period. As mentioned before, this relatively low-profile transition can also be viewed as evidence of confidence in a level of control and leadership which transcends titles. The prospect that a third generation Kim, without sufficient preparation, could take on the mantle of leadership without challenge defied common sense. While the efforts to assure a smooth transition have been extensive thus far, the fate of Kim Jong-un remains unsettled. In some respects, now that the funeral is over, loyalties have been declared, and titles conveyed, the real test is just beginning as Kim Jong-un will eventually have to make decisions and exercise the authority he has apparently been granted.

By examining the publicly announced outings by Kim Jong-il over a ten-month period beginning on September 1, 2010 (prior to the Party Congress), an interesting hierarchy has taken shape. In that period, Kim Jong-il made 103 appearances. Kim's brother-in-law, Jang Song-thaek, was listed seventy-seven times as accompanying Kim Jong-il. Of those, he was ranked ahead of Vice Marshal Ri Yong-ho on only one occasion (September 9, 2010). At that time, Jang Song-thaek held the position of Vice Chairman of the National Defense Commission. However, when Ri Yong-ho was promoted to vice marshal and NDC Vice Chairman on September 27, 2010, he began being listed ahead of Jang Song-thaek—indicating he was the more senior vice chairman. From September 29, 2010 until early February 2011, Ri Yong-ho was listed before Kim Jong-un. The *Chosun Ilbo* reported on February 16, 2011 that Kim Jong-un had been designated a vice chairman of the NDC—an appointment that needs ratification by the Supreme People's Assembly. While there has been no such notice by the Korea Central News Agency, Kim Jong-un consistently has been listed first (ahead of Ri Yong-ho and Premier Choe Yong-rim), an indication of Kim Jong-un's status regardless of his formal position within the NDC. Also, it may well have been a forewarning that Kim Jong-un's power would not emanate from the NDC, but ultimately through the Korean Workers Party. In the year since the *Chosun Ilbo* article, Kim Jong-un continued his preeminent position ahead of Ri Yong-ho at public outings without any additional public reference of a promotion or appointment to the NDC.

Analytically, the rejuvenation of the Worker's Party of Korea as a source of legitimacy and power was a necessary counterweight to the all-powerful military and the National Defense Commission.¹ At the Party Congress held in late September 2010, Kim Jong-il appointed his son as vice chairman of the Central Military Commission, and promoted his cousin, First Vice Minister Kang Sok-ju, to Deputy Premier and a member of the Politburo. Kim's sister, Kim Kyong-hui, along with Kim Jong-un was made a four-star general. Consequently, Kim Jong-un has formal ties and senior positions within both the WPK and the military and theoretically has corresponding protectors in each. This power base associated with the WPK and linkages to the military through Central Military Commission was reinforced when Jang Song-thaek was seen shortly after the death of Kim Jong-il in uniform for the first time with the rank of full general. Conceptually, Kim Jong-un has authority stemming from his bloodline to his grandfather, Kim Il-sung, and the Worker's Party of Korea even as he continues to build his credentials with the military. This is critical in the short-run. From a military hierarchical point of view, Kim Jong-un is a political appointee who has been imposed upon a seniority-conscious system that currently enjoys premier status within the country. While it is difficult to draw clear distinctions between the military and the party, there is considerable overlap in the leadership of both. One of the credible scenarios following the stroke of Kim Jong-il in August 2008, when an heir had not yet been announced, was that the military, perhaps using the structure of the NDC, would take control of the government following the demise of Kim Jong-il. That scenario will remain a plausible possibility until Kim Jong-un is fully accepted within the military as the legitimate leader of North Korea. And that probably will not fully be known until months if not years after he assumes the chairmanship of the

NDC. Here, however, it is useful to remember that the NDC itself was a vehicle largely constructed by Kim Jong-il and there is no guarantee that Kim Jong-un will use the same structure.

The provocative events of 2010 were seen by some as an effort to build the military legend of Kim Jong-un. Shortly after the Cheonan and Yeonpyeong-do attacks, rumors abounded within North Korea that Kim Jong-un had been given credit for planning and ordering the two incidents. Reports that Kim Jong-il and Kim Jong-un had visited the military district from whence the shelling of Yeonpyeong-do took place in the days before the attack would seem to give some weight to these rumors. Still, it is highly unlikely that Kim Jong-un, who has no military experience, was involved in any meaningful way, but the fact that he may have been assigned credit is consistent with an internal concern that Kim Jong-un might not be readily accepted by the military as its leader. At any rate, the events of 2010 were extreme and are hopefully not likely to be repeated anytime soon. As might be understood, however, much of the concern surrounding the transition in Pyongyang has focused on the presumption that as a new and untested leader, Kim Jong-un may be inclined toward provocative actions to shore up domestic support. While certainly possible, the far more likely scenario is that North Korea will conduct tests related to its missile or nuclear weapons programs which, although they may be driven by the internal timing and demands of those programs, the outside world is likely to perceive as provocative. Another short-term concern will be how the new leadership in Pyongyang reacts to long-planned and rather pro-forma U.S.-ROK joint military exercises, which the North has always viewed as provocative, but which to date they have only responded to with rhetoric. The question will be whether Kim Jong-un will have the capacity to calibrate a response.

Just as Kim Jong-il was apparently uncomfortable and uncertain about publicly exercising his own authority immediately after the death of Kim Il-sung, Kim Jong-un will hopefully be even more conscious of his own power base as he is given more and more titles in the process of assuming full leadership of the country. On December 31, KCNA reported that Kim Jong-un has assumed the “Supreme Commandership” of the Korean People’s Army at the behest of leader Kim Jong-il on October 8, 2011, attempting to create the allusion that Jong-un had been promoted by a living Kim Jong-il.² With renewed emphasis on the WPK, Kim Jong-un will have a level of theoretical power but it will be important to watch how the military reacts when future crises confront the new supreme leader.

Kim Jong-il was very careful to cultivate a loyal base of power by catering to the military. His *songun* (military first) policy inculcated in society the legitimate place of the military as the protector of the nation. The revision of the constitution and the establishment of the National Defense Commission as the preeminent organizational authority ensured the continued dominance of the military as the sole center of power. In the New Year’s Day Joint Editorial in January 2009, the first following Kim Jong-il’s stroke, “*songun*” was mentioned twenty-six times—about twice as much as it was mentioned in 2010, 2011 and most recently in 2012. In practical terms, the military has been relatively pampered. It enjoys

significant privilege among its senior members. In reporting by KCNA on Kim Jong-un's assumption of Supreme Commander, it noted, "His assumption of the supreme commandship provides sure guarantee for glorifying the great exploits performed by Kim Jong-il for the army building and carrying forward the cause of the *songun* (military-first) revolution generation after generation." This is an important reality to understand as we contemplate what change in North Korean leadership means now that Kim Jong-il is dead. Even if everything goes according to Kim Jong-il's desires, a young Kim Jong-un will need the actual and behind the scenes support of the military if he is to survive the inevitable challenges that leadership brings with it. The prospect that either Kim Jong-un or the military would voluntarily entertain serious reforms following the death of Kim Jong-il is slight. The Joint New Year's Editorial had a single sentence that was meant to emphatically convey that no change would be forthcoming: "The dear respected Kim Jong-un is precisely the great Kim Jong-il."³ The military elite thrive on their special status. Meaningful reform would threaten that existence. The near-term political health of Kim Jong-un will depend in large measure on how well Vice Marshall Ri Yong-ho and other leading military supporters of Kim Jong-un are able to deliver the long-term loyalty of the military. Before skeptics scoff at the prospects of a disloyal element within the military, it would be beneficial to remember the circumstances that led to the disbanding of the Army's Sixth Corps during the early years of Kim Jong-il's tenure. The prevailing analytical view just before the fall of Ferdinand Marcos was that there would not be a military coup because the Philippines did not have a history of military coups. Once the first one occurred, Philippine history was replete with them.

In April 2009, when the DPRK constitution was revised, the principle of military first was raised to the same level of importance as *juche*. The other significant change affecting the military was an addition to its mission statement. Article 59 now begins: "The mission of the armed forces of the DPRK is to carry out the military-first revolutionary line in order to protect the nerve center of the revolution..." In other words, the role of the military is to protect leader (then, Kim Jong-il) and sustain itself. Safeguarding the interests of the working people was relegated to a lesser importance. The 2009 Constitution also contains a new section regarding the Chairman of the National Defense Commission. The chairman of the NDC is constitutionally designated the "supreme leader (*ch'oego ryo'ngdoja*) of the DPRK." Ken Gause, an expert on DPRK leadership, in a blog for the Korea Economic Institute on January 3, 2012, raised an interesting issue to follow:

The role of Supreme Commander (*Choson inmin'gun ch'oego*) raises an important question. Will Kim Chong-un be made chairman of the National Defense Commission, a post that is responsible for commanding the armed forces (i.e., the Supreme Commander)? Although the North Korean media called for Kim Chong-un to assume the role of Supreme Commander, it has been mute on the post of NDC chairman. The regime may choose to leave the NDC post vacant. Much as Kim Il-sung became the eternal president,

Kim Chong-il might become the eternal head of the NDC, an organization that embodied his leadership era. This scenario might have been tipped by the fact that at least one, if not more, of the funeral events have been handled by Chon Hui-chong, the protocol director for the NDC. This suggests the possibility that the NDC apparatus is already acting in the service of the Party's CMC.⁴

Kim Jong-il's 2008 stroke had profound effects. The lack of a designated heir led to an accelerated effort to protect the legacy and future of the Kim family. This was done by placing key family members and loyalists in critical positions. Jang Song-thaek and his wife, Kim Jong-il's sister, have been promoted and placed in top echelons of government. Jang and his wife were almost always at Kim Jong-il's side when he forayed out in public. The institution of the military and the military-first policy has been codified as the single most important element in society. Select generals, loyal to Kim, are in controlling positions within the WPK and the Politburo. Up until now the National Defense Commission and its chairman were the center of power in North Korea, but with the death of its chairman and no particular effort to publicly reaffirm its practical power, its status is questionable. In the absence of a chairman, the role of the four vice chairmen should become more important. Two of the vice chairmen are in their eighties, another is seventy-six. The fourth is Jang Song-thaek who turns sixty-six in 2012. A case can be made that actual power will emanate from the military component of the WPK—the Central Military Commission. This scenario has Jang Song-thaek, NDC vice chairman, acquiescing to the shift in power and Vice Marshal Ri Yong-ho supporting it from his position as CMC vice chairman.

THE CHINA FACTOR

In late May 2011, Kim Jong-il made an extensive visit to China, his third in the span of one year. Kim's visit took him to Mudanjiang, Changchun, Yangzhou, Nanjing and Beijing. It appears that Kim had two reasons for making the trip, both related to succession. By firmly establishing his interest in China's remarkable economic achievement, he signaled to his posterity a usable rationale for pursuing economic development and reform after his death much in the same way Kim Jong-il was able to say that denuclearization was his father's dying wish. It was difficult for the military to challenge the wishes of the founding father and it also served as a ready response to outsiders who challenge Pyongyang's sincerity with regard to denuclearization. Secondly, it reinforces with China's leadership that there is still hope that North Korea will follow China's economic development model. This latter is particularly important in that it provides Pyongyang with continued Chinese support in the short-term and works in favor of Beijing's longer-term support of Kim Jong-un—especially if Beijing believes Kim Jong-un is likely to carry out his father's goals of economic revitalization. At the same time, the Chinese leadership has made it abundantly clear, that as much as they might wish for North Korea to follow the Chinese path of economic reform and opening, their first priority is the stability of North Korea.

REGIME SURVIVAL AT RISK

North Korea has survived on a strict concept of one-man authoritarian rule. Kim Il-sung eliminated rivals and tolerated no dissent. Kim painstakingly ensured his son learned the art of iron-fisted leadership over a twenty-year period. Even then, when Kim Il-sung died in July 1994, there were concerns that Kim Jong-il might not survive. But at age fifty-two and twenty years of practical experience under his belt, he took three years to fully consolidate his power base and then autocratically ruled for the next eleven years until his stroke in August 2008. Facing his own mortality, Kim Jong-il began a hasty and accelerated plan for succession. He settled on his then twenty-five-year-old son as his successor. Finding the prospect of success low, Kim expanded the National Defense Commission (the ruling body) and named his brother-in-law first as a member and then later as a vice chairman. Kim appointed his sister and son a four-star general and began the process of revitalizing the Korean Workers Party as a counterweight to the military. Analysts predicted that the process would succeed only if Kim Jong-il lived long enough to cement the paper thin credentials he had bestowed upon his son, Kim Jong-un. For much of the three years since Kim Jong-il's stroke, the basic equation has remained unchanged; the longer Kim Jong-il lived, the greater the prospects for a smooth and successful transition; the more abrupt and sudden his demise, the less likely that a succession would hold. In the end, Kim Jong-il was unable to escape the frighteningly accurate math of actuarial tables, which predicted that a man of his age, health and habits was highly unlikely to live another five years after a stroke. We are left then with a scenario in which Kim Jong-il lived long enough to ensure that the succession would take place. What remains to be seen is whether he lived long enough to ensure that it would last.

The consequences for Kim Jong-un because of his father's abrupt death may be dire. He has virtually no practical experience, no individual power base and a system newly designed to weakly function after Kim Jong-il as check and balance between the military, the party and a regent (Jang Song-thaek). The problem is that Kim Jong-il elevated the military through his Military First Policy to the point where it is THE power in North Korea, and efforts to share power can only come through the diminution of the military—something it will not accept in the mid-to long-term. With Kim Jong-un having been given apparent authority so quickly, an early test will be what happens when he begins to exercise that authority, particularly if it is a direction opposed by members of the military.

As we are seeing it play out, there will be a natural and short-lived period of public unity in the aftermath of Kim's death. However, the consolidation of power and the maneuvering that is going on behind the scenes will come to the surface—probably shortly after the April 15 celebrations of Kim Il-sung's 100th birthday. At some point the military will challenge the right of Kim Jong-un to rule, wondering what added value he brings. Objectively, Kim Jong-un is in power because of his royal bloodline. If the military finds Kim Jong-un no longer useful as the public face of continuity of the Kim dynasty, it is possible that he too will vanish from public view.

The most likely scenario, then, over the near-term is for a weak, unprepared, and unacceptable Kim Jong-un to continue the formal transition to select positions of power. Because of his absolute dependence upon the military, he will not have the ability to attempt any reforms that the military finds risky or threatening to their supreme position within society. That means he will not be able to seriously engage the West in denuclearization negotiations, which will result in a continuation of regional and international economic and diplomatic isolation. Kim Jong-un's practical choice will be to govern in a status quo manner. He will, in effect, command a sinking ship. As the situation inevitably deteriorates, the military will be tempted to take things in their own hands, relegating Kim Jong-un to a powerless figurehead.

IMPLICATIONS

The leadership change that is taking place in the DPRK is likely to be turbulent at some point and may be the precursor of the end of the Kim regime that has ruled the DPRK for over sixty years. This has serious implications for China, South Korea and the United States. The year 2012 would have been critical even without the death of North Korean Leader Kim Jong-il as leadership change in a number of countries is scheduled to take place. Relationships were bound to be modified; new leaders tested and new policies enacted; initial year posturing by countries for which campaign promises are the metric for early evaluation. The sudden imposition of Kim Jong-un as the leader of an immature nuclear state with a history of military provocations and critical economic shortcomings is bound to have a compounding effect on the nature of regional leadership changes.

Implications for the United States: For the United States, Kim Jong-il's death came just as a small opening was appearing after several years of diplomatic stagnation. For a number of years Donald Zagoria of the National Committee on American Foreign Policy (NCAFP) has hosted a senior level Track 1.5 roundtable discussion involving either North Korean Vice Minister Kim Gye-gwan or Ambassador Li Gun and a number of prominent former American officials. The North Koreans have found these sessions to be useful because of the seniority of American participants and seek to attend when invited. The Department of State was able to parlay a request for visas to attend an early August 2011 session into actual leverage that required the North Koreans to first engage with their South Korean counterparts in Bali on the margins of the ASEAN Conference in July. That meeting led the State Department to issue visas for Kim Gye-gwan to attend the NCAFP meeting and the first face-to-face meeting between North Korean and U.S. government officials in the United States during the Obama administration.

In turn, a second North-South meeting was held in Beijing in late September followed by the second North Korea-U.S. meeting held in Geneva in mid-October. To be sure these meetings were likely more tactical for both Pyongyang and Washington. North Korea was under serious pressure from both Russia and China to return to the Six-Party Talks and, for its part, Washington needed to demonstrate clearly to China and Russia that the United States was not the

obstacle in the process and that it was willing to engage with North Korea as long as Pyongyang demonstrated some “seriousness of purpose.” Still, this series of exchanges had the promise of moving the process back towards a restart of the Six-Party Talks, which had been suspended since late 2008. U.S. Special Envoy for Human Rights Bob King met with North Korean Director General for American Affairs Li Gun in Beijing on the two days prior to Kim Jong-il’s death. Press speculated that a deal had been reached that would have provided North Korea with 20,000 tons of “nutritional assistance” each month for a year in exchange for Pyongyang’s suspension of its uranium enrichment program and reentry of International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors. Additionally, U.S. Representative for North Korea Policy Glyn Davies was reportedly preparing to meet with First Vice Minister Kim Gye-gwan the following week.⁵

Kim’s death on December 17 put this possible breakthrough on hold. The North Korean New Year’s Day Joint Editorial used language that was meant to signal to the outside world that its new leader should be seen as natural continuity from Kim Il-sung to Kim Jong-il to Kim Jong-un. That suggests that, at some appropriate point, just as it happened after the death of Kim Il-sung in 1994, North Korea will emerge from its period of mourning and reengage the United States. What we do not know is how the powers behind Kim Jong-un will react. Does continuity really mean continuity or will new challenges mean the opportunity for fissures to emerge?

We got a glimpse of what the answers may be when Pyongyang contacted the United States with a request to continue the discussions cut short by Kim Jong-il’s death. That reengagement led to what is being called the “Leap Day” agreement in which North Korea “upon request by the U.S. and with a view to maintaining positive atmosphere for the DPRK-U.S. high-level talks, agreed to a moratorium on nuclear tests, long-range missile launches, and uranium enrichment activity at Nyongbyon and allow the IAEA to monitor the moratorium on uranium enrichment while productive dialogues continue.”⁶ Unfortunately, Pyongyang publicly announced its intention to launch a satellite during the celebrations for Kim Il-sung’s 100th birthday on April 15. Initially, some analysts concluded that the announcement, which would violate UN Security Council resolutions and the Leap Day agreement, was an early indication of a power struggle behind the scenes in Pyongyang. However, information is coming to light that indicates that North Korean negotiators reminded the United States of its interpretation of the difference between an intercontinental ballistic missile (weapon) and a space launch vehicle, which it has the sovereign right to launch. If the latter proves true, it will mean that there is no visible infighting over this issue at this time.

Given that 2012 is an election year in the United States, a launch of a satellite will be met by an angry reaction by the United States and its allies. During the course of a joint press conference with President Lee Myung-bak at the Blue House in Seoul in November 2010, President Obama was asked about the prospects for the Six-Party Talks. He responded that “...there will be an appropriate time and place to reenter into six-party talks. But we have to see a seriousness of purpose by the North Koreans in order to spend the extraordinary time and energy

that's involved in these talks.”⁷ During an election year the “extraordinary time and energy” to which President Obama referred will also include attempting to overcome strong congressional criticism of North Korea and the possibility that the issue could become politicized in the course of the campaign. There may also be new hurdles to overcome such as the January 5th Statement by the Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of Korea carried in KCNA: “As recognized by the world, the DPRK is a full-fledged nuclear weapons state and its nuclear deterrent is the revolutionary heritage which can never be bartered for anything.” While this was issued as a response to President Lee Myung-bak's New Year's address, running such statements in KCNA does not seem to indicate a “seriousness of purpose” or a short-term return to the Six-Party Talks.

Implications for South Korea: For South Korea, however awkwardly their initial interaction with the new regime started, the death of Kim Jong-il means both the potential for political intrigue in their April 2012 National Assembly elections and the December 2012 presidential election and also, hopefully, the relief from North Korean military provocations, at least in the short run. A satellite launch will only reaffirm the worst suspicions about North Korea's intentions.

When compared with the reaction of the ROK President Kim Young-sam to the death of Kim Il-sung, the Lee Myung-bak administration's response to Kim Jong-il's death was the picture of reserve and moderation, but the constant stream of invective and vitriolic directed at President Lee and his “gang” in the last few weeks gives little hope for meaningful progress in inter-Korean relations during the remaining months of the administration. What remains to be seen, however, is what effect the North Korean stance will have on public opinion in South Korea and thus on the upcoming South Korean elections.

Already Grand National Party leader and possible presidential candidate Park Geun-hye has sought to distinguish herself from President Lee with a more nuanced approach to North Korea and that is to say nothing of the more progressive side of the spectrum, which has bemoaned the deterioration in inter-Korean relations over the past four years. Still, the lessons of 2010 and the strong public reactions to the sinking of the Cheonan, and particularly to the shelling of Yeonpyeong-do will not fade quickly. As long as there are no further clashes, it is likely that South Korea's approach toward the North will continue to moderate and that a change in policy toward North Korea will be part of the political debate during the election. However, should there be another incident, it will almost certainly further harden South Korean public opinion, that is if a strong South Korean response and further escalation can be avoided.

Implications for China: While it is difficult to make the case that the transition in North Korea, or any external factor for that matter, will make a difference in the political transition in China in 2012, China has already arguably been the country most affected by the succession process in North Korea. For the better part of a decade, cooperation on North Korea was a primary public justification in Washington for the importance of U.S.-China relations. However, beginning with Kim Jong-il's stroke and growing Chinese concerns about the potential for

instability in North Korea, China has reverted to a much more traditional stance in support of the Kim regime in Pyongyang and in so doing undermined and strained its relations with both Seoul and Washington.

Of course China has never abandoned its erstwhile ally. Yet during much of the 2000s China played an important role in the Six-Party Talks in an effort to curb North Korea's nuclear program. The Chinese leadership arguably maintained a "three no's" policy toward North Korea—no nukes, no collapse, and no war—and they tried to maintain a balance between the three priorities. As Kim Jong-il's health deteriorated, however, China began to place ever greater priority on avoiding instability in North Korea at all costs...even if it meant supporting a third generation hereditary succession which was anathema to communist ideology and China's own policy. This decision to be more proactive in backing Kim Jong-il appeared to move into full force in the early fall of 2009 when China backed away from implementing sanctions it had agreed to after North Korea's second nuclear test a few months before. Even after the sinking of the Cheonan, China opted to double down on its bet on Kim Jong-il and resist attempts to censure or punish North Korea for this act...something that some in the U.S. considered "enabling behavior" which might have contributed to the North's shelling of Yeonpyeong-do in November of 2010.

While China again blocked any meaningful international response to the Yeonpyeong-do shelling, when President Obama and President Hu Jintao met in Washington in January of 2011 it did appear that China may have been willing to recalibrate its support for North Korea. While it may seem arcane, there was some cause for optimism in how the issue was framed in the joint statement issued at the conclusion of their January summit. While there was but a single paragraph's reference to Korea in that statement, it contained both a clear reference to the uranium enrichment facility and the broader strategic context:

The United States and China agreed on the critical importance of maintaining peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula as underscored by the Joint Statement of September 19, 2005 and relevant UN Security Council Resolutions. Both sides expressed concern over heightened tensions on the Peninsula triggered by recent developments. The two sides noted their continuing efforts to cooperate closely on matters concerning the Peninsula. The United States and China emphasized the importance of an improvement in North-South relations and agreed that sincere and constructive inter-Korean dialogue is an essential step. Agreeing on the crucial importance of denuclearization of the Peninsula in order to preserve peace and stability in Northeast Asia, the United States and China reiterated the need for concrete and effective steps to achieve the goal of denuclearization and for full implementation of the other commitments made in the September 19, 2005 Joint Statement of the Six-Party Talks. In this context, the United States and China expressed concern regarding the DPRK's claimed uranium

enrichment program. Both sides oppose all activities inconsistent with the 2005 Joint Statement and relevant international obligations and commitments. The two sides called for the necessary steps that would allow for early resumption of the Six-Party Talks process to address this and other relevant issues.

Of note, in this short statement, the September 19, 2005, joint statement of the Six-Party Talks was mentioned three times. Such a reference to an obscure unimplemented agreement of talks that increasingly appeared defunct may seem a bit odd. However, one of the fundamental challenges of dealing with North Korea has been its frequent and continued assertion that it is a nuclear power and must be dealt with as such. When North Korea makes vague references to its support of denuclearization, its definition of denuclearization should be clarified and challenged. The apparent North Korean interpretation is that, as a nuclear power and an equal with the United States and the other nuclear powers in the world, it is willing to discuss the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, including the removal of the U.S. nuclear umbrella, the end of the U.S.-ROK alliance, and overall global disarmament of other nuclear powers' positions. This interpretation understandably does not accord with that of the United States, China, any other member of the Six-Party Talks, or ostensibly any other signatory of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) from which North Korea is the only country in history to withdraw. As such, a clear reference to the September 19, 2005, joint statement in which North Korea committed to "abandoning all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs and returning, at an early date, to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and to IAEA safeguards" helps set a clear definition of what the United States and China now jointly mean when they referred to "denuclearization" including the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. Related to this is the question of the parameters of the Six-Party Talks. With the September 19 joint statement, the Six-Party Talks are now more than format, but also have function and content. Given that in the joint statement "the Six Parties unanimously reaffirmed that the goal of the Six-Party Talks is the verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula in a peaceful manner," by focusing upon this joint statement the United States and China once again jointly defined the parameters of—and indirectly a core requirement for—the resumption of the Six-Party Talks. Also of note, the January 19, 2011, Obama-Hu joint statement placed U.S. and Chinese "concern regarding the DPRK's claimed uranium enrichment program" clearly in the context of the September 19, 2005 joint statement.

Despite this agreement, Chinese support for the Kim regime intensified over the course of 2011. Some would argue that such support stems from the fact that China's relationship with North Korea is handled on a party-to-party basis rather than by the Foreign Ministry in Beijing. Another possible interpretation is that the dramatic changes in the Middle East manifest in the Arab Spring unnerved the Chinese leadership and made them even less inclined to consider the possibility of instability in their long-standing ally in North Korea. Whatever the cause,

China has reassumed its long-standing role as North Korea's primary patron and protector and if the events of the last month are any indication, that is not an approach that is likely to change any time soon.

CONCLUSIONS/LONG TERM IMPLICATIONS

Despite the short-term uncertainties and the increased risk of instability associated with the passing of Kim Jong-il, in the long run his demise must be seen as a positive development for the Korean peninsula as a whole. Whatever expectations may have existed when he assumed power from his father in 1994, in the last few years it became increasingly apparent that as long as Kim Jong-il was alive it was almost impossible to imagine North Korea pursuing fundamental economic opening and reform, abandoning its nuclear ambitions, or reconciling with South Korea. There is of course no guarantee that any of the above will be possible under Kim Jong-un either. In some respects, the passing of Kim Jong-il is the classic "necessary" but not "sufficient" condition. While real change may yet be unlikely as long as the Kim family and the current regime are in control in North Korea, with the ongoing transition in Pyongyang we are at least one step closer to change of one form or another.

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Japanese Politics, the Korean Peninsula, and China

KAZUHIKO TOGO

The year 2011 closed with several symbolic events in predicting Japan's relations with the Korean peninsula. When President Lee Myung-bak held summit talks with Prime Minister Noda Yoshihiko on December 17-18, contrary to some media anticipation in Japan, the meeting was dominated by the comfort women issue. Lee urged Noda "to have real courage in order to resolve the comfort women issue with high priority."¹ All of the December 19th morning newspapers were filled with the comfort women issue, but then at noon, North Korean television broadcast announced the death of Kim Jong-il and the succession of Kim Jong-un. All television and newspaper coverage from the evening of December 19th became dominated by this news, brushing aside the tense meeting between Noda and Lee. As if to symbolize the critical role which China might play on this issue, at the December 5, 2011 Japan-China summit in Beijing, other than issues centered on bilateral relations, the North Korean issue alone appears to have dominated the foreign policy agenda. The power succession in North Korea and its implications for the security situation in Northeast Asia have deep repercussions for Japanese politics toward the peninsula.

This paper analyzes first the fundamentals of Japan's politics under Noda, then his basic foreign policy, particularly in regard to the major issue in the region, the rise of China. In the next sections it scrutinizes Noda's policies toward South and North Korea respectively, considering China's role in each relationship. A brief conclusion explores future leadership change and possible repercussions on foreign policy.

FUNDAMENTALS OF THE POLITICAL SITUATION UNDER PRIME MINISTER NODA

Noda's position has to be judged against the backdrop of the overall post World War II Japanese political situation. Japan's economic and political development was ensured under the reign of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which was formed in 1955. The "System of 55," as it was defined from this foundational year, put Japan's development in the hands of three cooperating forces: 1) the LDP, whose factional politics kept its leadership (except for a three-year interregnum from 1993 to 1996) stable; 2) an able bureaucracy, which functioned also as a set of think tanks; and 3) forward-looking and creative business leaders, who strengthened their production on a global scale. This allowed Japan to achieve its economic miracle in the 1960s, to overcome two oil crises in the 1970s, to astonish the world with its economic bubble of soaring land prices in the 1980s, and to establish Japan as an unmistakable economic giant, second only to the United States, at the end of the Cold War in 1989.

Japan's success story began to wane from the early 1990s, by the bursting of the economic bubble, the failure of political reform in the mid-nineties, and the weakening of the bureaucracy's authority through successive monetary scandals and indecisive foreign policy, which could not resolve any of the outstanding major issues from the legacy of the war. By the end of the 2000s the resulting incapacities resulted in three major social problems which were eroding the fundamental structure of Japanese society: 1) drastic change into the most aged

society in the world and failing social and economic policies to meet this change; 2) increased national debt due to continuous overspending in proportion to tax revenue; and 3) failed economic reform which satisfies neither the need for sound competitiveness nor the need for a stable social safety network. Japan was left adrift, having lost clarity about its national objectives.

In 2009, finally the System of 55 collapsed and the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) replaced the LDP. It first gave the impression that it aims for a very different society, domestically, with its slogan of “from concrete to human beings” backed by a policy of “encouraging births with special children’s allowances” and in foreign policy, with plans for “creating more equal relations with the United States.” Japan’s development had been driven for decades by Tanaka Kakuei’s policy of “Rebuilding the Japanese Archipelago,” as declared in 1972. The gist of that policy was to expand the industrial success of the 1960s centered on the Tokyo-Nagoya-Osaka megalopolis to the rest of Japan, transforming Japan into a one-day economic and transportation zone, where Tokyo would play the central role. Discrepancies between cities and countryside, between the Pacific side and the Japan Sea side would vanish. This would be ensured by massive public investments to construct infrastructure all over Japan, including roads, railways and bullet trains, super highways, ports, dams, and massive apartments. Local cities rapidly began to change into mini-Tokyos.

“From concrete to human beings” implies a rejection of economic development led by massive public investment. Less public investment can decrease the national debt, more human-friendly policies can ensure the social safety network, more ecologically-friendly priorities can not only satisfy material welfare needs but also lead to spiritual happiness and contribute to a vision of society which values children and old people. These were the directions envisioned in the new government’s development policy in December 2009.² But then Prime Minister Hatoyama Yukio lost his footing in relations with the United States over relocating the Futenma base to Henoko in Okinawa, leading to his departure. Disregard of the bureaucracy is considered to have been a critical factor in the failures of the DPJ.

Prime Minister Kan Naoto inherited Hatoyama’s policies with certain readjustments of election campaign slogans, for instance to ensure children’s allowances of five trillion yen, which is an extraordinarily high sum in an overall budget of ninety-two trillion yen for the 2011 fiscal year budget. But then 3/11 happened, and Kan’s cabinet grappled with the calamity caused by the tsunami and the Fukushima nuclear disaster. Kan had to leave office primarily because of leadership failure, i.e. the inability to establish drastic policies based on consensus in this crisis atmosphere.

Noda replaced Kan, increasingly making his policy objectives clear. First, Noda obviously had to overcome the aftermath of 3/11, tackling this issue with typical bureaucratic consensus building. This requires time, a phenomenon suitable in normal circumstances but not so adequate in an extraordinary situation. Established only on February 10, 2012, the Reconstruction Agency was immediately criticized as weak and incapable of transferring power from the existing ministries.³ A year after the catastrophe the fact that only 5% of the rubble had been cleared is

indicative of the substantial obstacles still in the way of reconstruction.⁴ Second, Noda, who moved from the position of Minister of Finance, increasingly made clear that his major policy objective was to resolve two of Japan's most serious social and economic problems, i.e. the accumulating national debt, tantamount soon to 1,000 trillion *yen*,⁵ and the collapsing social security network in an era of drastically aging society through implementation of unified reform of the consumption tax and social security system. On February 17, 2012, Noda's cabinet adopted the Basic Plan of Unified Reform, elevating the current consumption tax of 5% to 8% in April 2014 and 10% in October 2015 and assigning the increased tax revenue to social security.⁶ The appointment of Katsuya Okada to the post of vice-prime minister on January 13, 2012 is understood to have reinforced the cabinet to implement this unified reform of tax and social security.

Third, to achieve these major objectives, Noda seemed to have renewed reliance on the bureaucracy, substantially pulling back from the slogan of "from concrete to human beings." The 2012 budget resumed the construction of large-scale public works such as suspended dams or bullet trains, a policy which could well be at odds with the goal of prioritizing the reduction in expenditures.⁷ In December 2011, Noda issued a strategic policy document, "The Basic Strategy of Japan's Reemergence: Overcoming the Crisis and Challenge to Frontiers."⁸ It outlines four major tasks: (1) reemerging from the nuclear disaster; (2) achieving both economic growth and reduced budgetary deficits; (3) strengthening Japan's capacity to reach economic and social frontiers; and (4) meeting the challenge of new global and regional frontiers as a long-term objective. Although some ideas developed by the DPJ are grouped under the third and fourth tasks, nowhere can we find clarity on what are meant to be the to be the main policy objectives.

THE RISE OF CHINA

If one chooses one issue of critical importance in today's East Asia, it is probably axiomatic to say that it is the issue of the "rise of China," combined with the countering policy advanced by the United States. Japan is trying to define its position between these two gigantic torrents. The phenomenon of China's rise began in 1978 under Deng Xiaoping's policy of "reform and opening." It took the very clear direction of opening the economy but preventing the dilution of the Communist Party's power, as shown in Tiananmen Square in 1989. After Deng's acceleration of the economic opening with his southern tour in 1992, the true impact of China's economic, political, and military rise began to be acutely felt from the second half of the 1990s. During the 1990s, Japan's China policy looked reasonably successful in establishing cooperative relations, symbolized by the relative "understanding" it showed in comparison to how the United States handled what had happened in Tiananmen. The Emperor's visit in 1992, the Murayama statement in 1995, the launching of ASEAN+3 (APT) in 1997, and the Japan-China-Korea trilateral dialogue in 1999 were all considered steps beneficial to bilateral relations. But Prime Minister Koizumi's yearly visit to the Yasukuni Shrine undermined the fundamental trust and leadership dialogue between the two countries in the first half of the 2000s. This was particularly regrettable in light of the "new thinking" regarding China's policies

toward Japan expressed by Chinese academics in the initial period after Hu Jintao assumed the post of General Secretary in November 2002. Upon the succession by Abe as prime minister in 2006, relations began to normalize through policy changes on both sides, and this basic trend continued during the tenures of the following three, short-lived LDP prime ministers.

From 2009, just at the time the DPJ assumed power and when both sides were still expressing support for tension-averting policy, tensions arose anyway as a result of China's growing naval power. While Northeast Asia was no exception, the South China Sea was in the forefront. At the July 2010 ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), for the first time there was open contention between China, on the one hand, and the major maritime ASEAN countries supported by the United States and Japan, on the other.⁹ At the following ARF meeting a year later the tension continued.¹⁰ In this environment the DPJ first strove to maintain a China-friendly policy. Hatoyama emphasized the notion of an East Asia Community, although it mirrored the theme of pan-Europeanism, the key concept that his grandfather Hatoyama Ichiro had advocated in the wake of World War II, and proved to be devoid of content.

After Kan took office, Japan's policy toward China was shattered by the collision of a Chinese fishing boat with a Japanese coast guard vessel on September 7, 2010. To those who saw an alarmist trend in China's access denial policy in the South China Sea, the incident had to be instigated by a militant group, possibly within the PLA, which succeeded in derailing an agreement on joint excavation of oil fields in the East China Sea, which had been scheduled for signing in a few days in Beijing.¹¹ Whether this interpretation is correct or not, initial statements by the Kan cabinet to "handle this issue in accordance with Japanese domestic law" gave the impression, or possibly supplied the pretext, on the Chinese side to conclude that his cabinet relinquished the wisdom shared from the time of Deng Xiaoping to "let the future generation resolve the issue." China's reaction became vehement, and Kan's cabinet had to release the captain, leaving an impression that the Japanese government backed away due to Chinese pressure.

Whatever the interpretation of that incident, Kan took one of the most important decisions of his tenure by adopting the new National Defense Program Guideline on December 17, 2010, which defined China's threat as follows:

China is steadily increasing its defense expenditures. China is widely and rapidly modernizing its military force, mainly its nuclear and missile force as well as navy and air force, and is strengthening its capability for extended-range power projection. In addition, China has been expanding and intensifying its maritime activities in the surrounding waters. These trends, together with insufficient transparency over China's military forces and its security policy, are of concern for the regional and global community.

This guideline introduced the notion of a dynamic defense force, strengthened the Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) and redeployed more of the Ground Self-Defense Force (GSDF) on the southern islands chain.¹²

Noda inherited this situation. The worst of the tension was over, the new defense policy had been established, and his primary mission became “not to rock the boat and to add as much positive momentum as possible.” He had once expressed in 2005 his view that “Class A war criminals were not war criminals,” but he immediately stopped expressing such views.¹³ In his visit to Beijing on December 25, 2011, Noda emphasized large-scale cooperation between the two countries and highlighted six initiatives as a comprehensive list of positive cooperation, which the two sides would eventually be able to advance.¹⁴ Although those initiatives clearly look positive, at closer examination there does not seem to be any substantive agreement.

In order to understand the gist of the JDP policy toward China, a brief analysis is needed on its policy toward the United States and the current status of Japan-U.S. relations. The LDP’s most successful foreign policy implemented after the Cold War was probably the one with the United States. Koizumi’s unambiguous support of the U.S. position after 9/11 and his personal relationship with George Bush marked the high water mark of this policy, and the policy continued under his three successors. Hatoyama’s drastic statements on relocating the Futenma base outside Japan or, at least outside Okinawa, shattered that foundation. Not only did Futenma become an impossible issue for all who cared about the relationship, but in conjuncture with his Asia friendly proclamation, it raised misgivings that Japan was shifting its cornerstone relationship from the United States toward China.

Kan, in a way, was fortunate to face the United States under the impact of 3/11, producing an atmosphere of extreme goodwill and massive U.S. assistance through Operation Tomodachi, which was truly appreciated across all layers of Japanese society. Noda inherited this positive atmosphere. Serious misgivings that Japan was turning from the United States to China had faded, partly due to the fishing boat collision of 2010. It was still necessary to do something about Futenma, and a first step may have been the announcement in February 2012 of the relocation of 4,700 marines first and the decoupling of the Futenma issue for the time being.¹⁵ Another decision affecting the fundamentals of Japan-U.S. relations was taken on November 11, 2011 with the decision to enter into negotiations for joining the TPP. Although Noda’s selection of two complete laymen, Ichikawa Yasuo and Tanaka Naoki, to serve as Minister of Defense surprised many, Noda has managed to keep U.S. relations on a rather even keel.

SOUTH KOREA

Japan-Korea Relations in Broad Perspective

There are strategic reasons why closer cooperation between Japan and Korea would be mutually beneficial. First, historically, Korea’s rapid rise in its economic and political power and Japan’s drift over the last twenty years resulted in leveling differences between the two countries, in particular in the economic arena. Professor Soeya Yoshihide’s groundbreaking proposal of a middle-power configuration for Japan and Korea increasingly has resonance in Japan. Second, socially and culturally, the two countries began to share the same social problems such as aging, immigration, and gender equality. The two countries increasingly

also share a common cultural understanding and even admiration, as seen in the Korean wave in Japan. Third, geopolitically, the most important factor is that the two countries are juxtaposed with China. Though one of them faces it across a land frontier (separated by North Korea) as well as across the sea, and the other only across the sea, both are directly affected by “China’s rise,” and thus have a common agenda, which is reinforced by the fact that both have been spokes in the U.S. “hub and spoke” system since the the Cold War.

Positive and creative ideas for cooperation are actually numerous:

(1) Overcoming poverty and insecurity for all individuals. Cooperation on ODA and human security could be a realistic objective. Overcoming global problems to achieve sustainable economic development, dealing with such matters as energy, the environment, global warming, and population issues is another area for cooperation.

(2) Creating a regional economic structure. Both Korea and Japan could obtain common benefits, and address common problems, on the one hand, from the creation of an East Asian cooperative structure through ASEAN+3 or +6, or on the other hand, by joining in wider Asia Pacific cooperation through the TPP and APEC. Korea has put into effect the KORUS FTA, whereas Japan has started on the path of joining the TPP. Both are faced with the challenge of overcoming a maze of networking and creating the most effective regional economic structure. As interest has intensified in the CJK FTA, the importance of coordination is further demonstrated. Since both are energy poor but high energy consuming countries, why can they not cooperate in creating a more effective regional energy network? Both have vital interest to preserve and strengthen agriculture not only for the sake of maintaining some indigenous food supply but also for the sake of maintaining landscape and scenery. Why cannot they cooperate in this area?

(3) Establishing a regional security architecture. Both are located in the shadow of a rising China, and both countries’ security is dependent on the United States. The fundamental resemblance of their security conditions is startling. The Japan-Korea-U.S. triangular cooperation is one concrete step forward, but is that all?

Japan-Korea Relations in Historical Perspective

Despite complex issues related to history, which keep tormenting bilateral relations, the LDP managed to gradually remove some of the heat from these issues. Some credit should be given to the continuous efforts from both sides to overcome the rift, but at the same time, Korea’s development into a rich, democratic, and culturally confident country was a large factor for closing the gap between the two countries. Particularly after it transformed into a country with a democratically elected civilian president (as of 1993) and reached the status of an advanced market economy (as was shown by its joining the OECD in 1996), this positive trend was enhanced. President Kim Dae-Jung’s groundbreaking visit in 1998, the joint holding of the World Cup in 2002, the unprecedented attraction of Korean culture in Japan from 2003-04 were all positive phenomena, bringing the two countries closer.

The DPJ government inherited this positive trend and carried it forward. Kan's August 10, 2011 statement on the occasion of 100 years of Japan's annexation of Korea was generally perceived as hitting the right tone. The key passage reads as follows:¹⁶

As demonstrated by strong resistance such as the Samil independence movement, the Korean people of that time were deprived of their country and culture, and their ethnic pride was deeply scarred by the colonial rule which was imposed against their will under the political and military circumstances....To the tremendous damage and sufferings that this colonial rule caused, I express here once again my feelings of deep remorse and my heartfelt apology.

The Takeshima/Dokdo Territorial Problem Haunting the Relationship

And yet, past history still haunts the two countries. In recent years the territorial issue around Takeshima/Dokdo, sometimes combined with the textbook issue in Japan, has become most critical. Particularly from March 2005, when the prefecture of Shimane announced its decision to make February 22 Takeshima Day and President Roh Moo-hyun declared "diplomatic war" against Japan, this issue has cast a shadow on relations, even during the period under President Lee Myung-bak from 2008.

For Koreans, this issue is more than a dispute over the ownership of islands, but a pivotal symbol of historical memory, pride, and identity. Takeshima became officially a part of Shimane Prefecture in 1905, five years before Japan formally annexed Korea. Koreans regard it as a precursor to the annexation; therefore, any defense by Japanese of Japan's ownership sounds as if justifying the Korean annexation itself and leads to an emotional outburst. In Japan the root cause of Korean emotionalism is little understood.

When any action in Japan on Takeshima results in an emotional explosion, the Japanese government finds it difficult to take meaningful action. Scholars and opinion leaders in the private sector might have a useful role to play by expressing divergent views, undertaking positivist surveys of historical records and engaging in genuine dialogue with Korean scholars to achieve mutual understanding.

The Japanese government's view on Takeshima has been explained on the MOFA home page, notably formulated in a pamphlet "Ten Issues of Takeshima" published in 2008.¹⁷ The scholar who most actively supports this official position recently is Shimojo Masao.¹⁸ Aside from his popular writing, he has concentrated his recent activities at the Shimane Prefecture Research Institute. The first round of research of this prefectural institute was made from June 2005 to March 2007, and the second round of activity produced its interim report in February 2011.¹⁹

There has been a sizable number of scholars who have argued strongly against the official government view in Japan. Among them, Naito Seichu has recently been most active in criticizing Japan's official views, including bombarding "Ten Issues of Takeshima" with refutations.²⁰ But recently there has emerged in this debate scholars who may be identified as in between, trying to take "an objective stand"

based solely on positivist scholarship. Ikeuchi Satoshi of Nagoya University is one such scholar, and his publication opens a new perspective of historical recognition, resulting in an impression that neither Japan nor Korea was extending its actual control over the island at the time of its annexation in 1905. Following his writings in 2010 and 2011,²¹ a promising development in September 2011 was an open debate at a scholarly meeting in Korea without leading to an emotional outburst.²²

Another avenue for a peaceful settlement of this issue is to resort to confidence building measures, as discussed at the Takeshima/Dokdo conference in June 2009 held by SAIS in Washington D.C. and sponsored by the Northeast Asia History Foundation. Japan and Korea may learn from the rich experience that was accumulated in Japan-Russia negotiations to “consolidate the environment” of negotiations on sovereignty, such as no-visa exchanges or a fishery agreement.²³

The Comfort Women Issue Resurfacing

Also coming to the surface after several years of relative lull is the issue of comfort women. In August 2011, the Korean Constitutional Court judged that its government is not fulfilling its duty to protect the rights of former comfort women. After three months of quiet diplomacy, Lee Myung-bak went on a full-scale diplomatic offense during his Kyoto trip on December 17-18. Noda reportedly replied that while all issues of compensation were resolved by the 1965 bilateral agreement, there may be a way out from an humanitarian point of view.²⁴

Editorials in the major newspapers on the morning of December 19 were split in two: Yomiuri and Sankei covered the issue with strong criticism against the Korean approach, warning that Japan should not give in to Korean pressure. Asahi and Chunichi, followed by Mainichi, acknowledged that the issue is not resolved and that some kind of solution based on a humanitarian approach needs to be pursued. All wrote that the Korean side should not ignore what Japan had actually done: apologized for the pain Japan caused (Cabinet General Secretary Kono’s statement in 1993), and apologized with compensation, which Japan showed a readiness to extend through the Asian Women’s Fund, which worked from 1995 until 2007.²⁵

The debate on comfort women was swept away by news of the North Korean succession, but the comfort women issue is not gone. South Korea did not accept this scheme in 1995, arguing that Japan refused to take state responsibility. Indeed, the Japanese government took a legally cautious approach, insisting that because the 1965 agreement solved all legal compensation issues, actual compensatory money would be paid by the private sector. But after the Japanese Supreme Court ruled in April 2007 that, based on post-war treaty obligations, all claims made by individuals cannot be sustained, the Japanese government may not fear any more criminal indictments in Japanese courts. Moral resolution of this issue by establishing a new scheme for what the Asian Women’s Fund had wanted to achieve in South Korea, using government expenditures, could become the ultimate solution to this difficult issue. This is the author’s view, expressed in two recent articles,²⁶ to which there has not been a response. Judging from

press reports, Noda's position on this issue is mute, if not negative. In his March 1 statement, Lee Myung-bak urged Japan to resolve the comfort women issue, but the Japanese government spokesman just responded with a vague statement about "squeezing one's brain to find out what to do."²⁷

NORTH KOREA

Continuous Efforts Toward Normalization After the End of the Cold War

To the end of the Cold War, relations between Japan and North Korea were simple. Until 1965, Japan's sole diplomatic objective on the peninsula was to establish relations with South Korea. When it succeeded, the Japanese government wanted to maintain practical relations with the North.²⁸ During the 1970s and 1980s moderate steps were taken in the economic and cultural spheres.²⁹ It was only after the end of the Cold War that serious efforts were made to establish political relations. Three occasions can be noted. The first opportunity was the period immediately following the end of the Cold War. Precisely when fundamental change began in the Soviet Union, Prime Minister Takeshita Noboru made Japan's first initiative-taking statement at the Diet on March 30, 1989. He expressed "deep remorse and regret to all people in this area" with the clear implication of addressing both South and North Korea and expressed his willingness to "improve relations" with the North.³⁰ In September 1990, just one week before Gorbachev recognized South Korea, Kanemaru Shin, who was known as the Godfather of the LDP (more precisely of its Takeshita faction), led a LDP-Japan Socialist Party (JSP) delegation to North Korea and met with Kim Il-sung. Based on their agreement negotiations for normalization took place over eight rounds from January 1991 to February 1992, without achieving any success.

The second opportunity arrived after the death of Kim Il-sung and after the Agreed Framework and the establishment of the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO). In March 1995, a delegation led by Watanabe Michio, an influential LDP leader, visited North Korea and agreed that "there were not any preconditions to resuming the negotiations for normalization of the relationship." Some warming in the relationship was seen through Japan's food aid and the return home of Japanese-born spouses. After the positive international mood developed by North-South dialogue under Kim Dae-jung's Sunshine Policy, three rounds of normalization negotiations took place from April to October 2000, but again to no avail.

The third opportunity produced a totally different result. Koizumi Junichiro visited North Korea and on September 17, 2002 issued the Pyongyang Declaration with Kim Jong-il. As a prerequisite of the agreement, Kim acknowledged the fact of abductions, apologized, and promised they would never happen, while conveying a list of thirteen abductees, of whom eight were allegedly dead. In the Declaration, an agreement was reached about the modality of establishing diplomatic relations, based on the South-Korean format of 1965 and Murayama's apology of 1995. A security working group was established to discuss all security related issues, including, "nuclear and missile issues" as prescribed in the Declaration.

Koizumi's success was due to several factors: North Korea's diplomatic initiatives to enhance dialogue with the outside, culminating in the North-South summit of June 2000 and the opening of diplomatic relations with Europe in 2001; U.S. rejection of North Korea through Bush labeling it one of the three "axis of evil" countries during his January 2002 State of the Union address; and Koizumi's shrewd diplomacy to cut into this vacuum and enter into completely confidential negotiations through his MOFA assistant Tanaka Hitoshi.

Fixation on Abductions and Complete Stalemate in Negotiations

Koizumi's Pyongyang visit was first hailed as an unforeseen diplomatic success, but soon relations became paralyzed. The first blow came from the U.S. announcement that North Korea had been enriching uranium even after the Agreed Framework of 1994. Continuation of normalization talks became much more difficult. But it was Japan's outrage at North Korean abductions that virtually ended Koizumi's overture, which had opened a very short-lived strategic opportunity for Japan to enter into the peninsula's power game. The news that eight abductees were allegedly dead aroused emotional indignation. The government decided on October 24 not to let five abductees, who had returned to Japan two weeks earlier, go back to North Korea. In turn, at the normalization talks at the end of October, North Korea suspended all of the commitments it had made in September. Public opinion rallied behind the families of abductees, eventually taking the form of the National Association for the Rescue of Japanese Kidnapped by North Korea (NARKN).³¹ Since then, Japan's policy toward North Korea has been dominated by its requests to resolve the abduction issue first.

The relationship became completely frozen. Koizumi succeeded in gaining back the children of the five returned abductees in 2004, and that became the only practical result from the fall of 2002. When the Six-Party Talks were established in August 2003, Japan managed to join, but it refused to contribute unless there was progress on the abductions issue. In February 2007 in response to the Joint Agreement Japan refused to join in supplying 50,000 tons of heavy oil in response to North Korea's shut down of the Yongbyon nuclear facility.

After the DPJ assumed power, as far as we can trace through media reports, responses continued to be monopolized by this abductions-first-approach. In the initial months after Hatoyama became prime minister, two channels were apparently opened with North Korea. One was a person close to Ozawa Ichiro, who once a month visited the North Korean embassy in Beijing. Another person close to the prime minister's office visited Beijing in mid-October 2009 and had a talk with a high-ranking North Korean official. In all these meetings in response to questions about the abductees, there was no clear response. Some information implied that "some are in not good health."³² Hatoyama stated on January 4, 2010, "If opportunity matures and there emerges real necessity I would visit the North, but unfortunately that timing has not arrived yet."³³

A similar situation prevailed under Kan. The abduction issue attracted wide attention when the government invited Kim Hyeon-hui, the North Korean agent who blew up a South Korean airline in Iraq in 1987, with media fanfare from July 20-23, 2010. She had talks with families of abductees, stayed overnight in Hatoyama's summer house, had a helicopter tour over Tokyo and Mount Fuji and then went back to South Korea without tangible results. In the last months under Kan, reports suddenly appeared that Nakai Hiroshi, the minister in charge of abduction in the Hatoyama cabinet, had four meetings with Son Il-ho, North Korea's ambassador in charge of Japanese relations at the Six-Party Talks, somewhere in a third country during the spring of 2011. The last meeting reportedly took place on July 21 and 22 in Changchun. An official of the cabinet office in charge of abductions accompanied him. Nakai requested concrete steps forward on the abductions, but no progress was observed. The Kan government took the position that it does not acknowledge Nakai's visit.³⁴ If the purpose of these contacts was just to ensure progress on the abductions issue from a domestic point of view, lacking any strategic thinking toward the Korean peninsula, then real progress in Japan-North Korea relations, including regarding the issue of abduction, can hardly be expected.

Noda Facing Kim Jong-un

The North Korean situation was put in a different light by the death of Kim Jong-il and the succession of Kim Jong-un. What policy will the Japanese government take toward the new regime, and how will this affect Japan-South Korea relations are important questions about which several cautious comments are in order.

First, the government's initial response was reactive. The Cabinet Security Council immediately met on the announcement of Kim Jong-il's death, and it decided to strengthen the system of information gathering, sharing information with the United States, South Korea, China and others, and set the state system on alert so that Japan would be ready to respond to any eventuality.³⁵ On December 21, Cabinet General Secretary Fujimura Osamu announced that the government is not going to extend condolences.³⁶ Koizumi only offered a wreath at the central office of Chosen-Soren (the National Federation of Pro-Pyongyang Korean Residents in Japan). North Korean television reported it, and Japanese television replayed the scene in the North Korean television broadcast.

Second, contrary to this seemingly detached reaction, a chorus from the abductees' families argued that under the new leader there might be a long-awaited opportunity for a breakthrough, and, therefore, the Noda government should do everything possible to achieve concrete results. Yokota Sakie (mother of the symbol of the abductees, Yokota Megumi) desperately appealed to the government that "the situation in North Korea might change substantially by the dictator's death. Ten years have passed since Koizumi's visit. We consider that this may be the last opportunity to see our daughter."³⁷ *Gekkan Nihon* carried an article expressing the collective voice of families, practically everyone urging Noda to do everything possible, and Iizuka, the representative of the family association, stated at a national meeting "the Japanese government should do everything before the new system takes concrete shape. Whether through underground negotiations or official negotiations, with stern will it should be possible to move North Korea."³⁸

Third, as if to respond to this drumbeat of appeals, on January 9-10, 2012, Nakai held another meeting with Son Il-ho in Northeast China, but this was followed by Fujimura, Cabinet General Secretary, dismissing the meeting as “a diplomatic activity of an individual parliamentarian.”³⁹ On January 12 at the meeting between the heads of delegations of Japan and South Korea, the Japanese side described Nakai’s meeting as “informal contacts outside the level of government to government contacts.”⁴⁰ Since relations between South and North Korea are tense, media reports in Japan began indicating South Korea’s irritation: “in South Korea, such views are emerging that Nakai is taking singularly isolated contacts with the North in a situation where the situation around the North has become very fluid. It is also reported that Prime Minister Noda knew about this contact, so the Korean side must have requested an explanation from the Japanese side.”⁴¹

Fourth, and possibly most important, Noda’s public message to North Korea began to acquire nuances not recently seen. Conspicuously, this shift was visible in his meeting with Wen Jiabao on December 25, 2011 in Beijing. According to the MOFA home page, the North Korean issue dominated their foreign policy discussions. In the six initiatives published in Japanese, North Korea appears prominently twice: in the first one on “enhancing mutual trust in the political arena,” and in the sixth one on, “strengthening dialogue and cooperation on regional and global issues.” However, the content was not particularly new, emphasizing the importance of Japan-China cooperation, the success of the Six-Party Talks, and the need to resolve the abduction issue.⁴² Yet, the English version of the same home page adds a statement. Apparently, Noda said, “Japan’s basic policy is the Japan-DPRK Pyongyang Declaration and its comprehensive approach.”⁴³ This can be interpreted as Noda’s desire to get beyond the fixation over abductions. After the surprising news of a breakthrough in U.S.-North Korean negotiations, a Japanese newspaper reported “some government officials are whispering about decoupling the Six-Party Talks and the abduction issue.”⁴⁴ One can assume that in top-level diplomatic exchanges such a nuanced policy shift has already been transmitted to the U.S. and South Korean governments. Interestingly, the first public indication of that message was apparently in Noda’s statement to Wen Jiabao.⁴⁵

CONCLUSION

Korean unification and the policy adopted toward North Korea are matters of utmost strategic importance for Japan. For South Korea, these are fundamental issues of when and how to regain its national identity and to put an end to its tragic history starting from Japan’s annexation, leading to a divided country, and following with the devastating Korean War with all its human losses. For Japan, how to reestablish relations with North Korea is one of the outstanding issues originating from World War II, but the issue of unification is primarily to be determined by the will of Korean people. Realists might argue that for countries surrounding the peninsula, the present-day split of Korea may best serve their strategic interest, but at the same time, no country would dare to appear as an obstacle, should the will of the North and the South converge toward unification.

What kind of policy should Japan take toward North Korea, bearing in mind its ultimate objective as described above, but at the same time, coordinating its policy with essential regional powers—especially with the United States, South Korea, and possibly with China? The Japanese government has to consider whether it is in Japan’s long-term interest to normalize relations with North Korea before or after unification. All realists’ power-based arguments probably favor normalization prior to unification, simply because Japan might have a better bargaining position against the weak North than a powerful united Korea. But that realism becomes totally illusionary if the Japanese government does not take into account the positions taken by South Korea and the United States, and, in some possible scenarios, China. If Japan is really prepared to take a flexible approach, as was hinted by Noda’s December 25th statement, coordination becomes critically important.

This embryonic policy change hinges on Noda’s leadership position in domestic politics. His domestic reform agenda, tackling the fundamental issues of the tax system and social security, faces a string of potential crises: on the adoption of a budget, on the possibility of an opposition attack, and in June on the possibility of the dissolution of parliament.⁴⁶ If the LDP fails to muster enough power, a new political movement led by the Ishinnokai (Committee of Restoration) may be able to gather unexpected momentum. Hashimoto Toru, elected in February 2008 as governor of Osaka, at first challenged the duplication between the prefecture and city of Osaka, vanquishing the opposition in the city by being elected its mayor in December 2011. After this stunning success, he is reportedly planning new moves directed at central government politics. So far, the foreign policy objectives of Ishinnokai are too vague to gauge, apart from its support of relations with the United States and Australia.⁴⁷ With leadership in Japan too fluid to be confident of any predictions, especially with foreign policy implications, decisions on the Korean peninsula are not likely to be rushed in 2012.

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Chinese Politics and the Korean Peninsula

GILBERT ROZMAN

Leadership has great bearing on the way the states active in Northeast Asia address sensitive questions related to the Korean peninsula. How should the shared goal of denuclearization of North Korea be prioritized relative to such goals as stability and the regional balance of power? What weight should be given to human rights in the context of urgent security concerns? To what extent should the multilateral nature of diplomacy override the expression of national policy priorities? How closely is coordination with South Korea advisable, recognizing its legitimacy to represent the Korean people, given divergence in threat perceptions and strategic thinking about the future of the peninsula? These questions asked about the other states in the Six-Party process apply also to Chinese politics. Despite the fact that Chinese decision-making remains opaque with censorship tightening of late, some clues are available to offer insight into how the transition to fifth generation leadership bears on strategic thinking regarding the Korean peninsula, toward both North Korea celebrating in 2012 its success as a “strong and prosperous power” and South Korea voting in 2012 for a conservative or a progressive.

The death of Kim Jong-il has raised the stakes in China’s handling of North Korea. By approving the transfer of power to his son, Kim Jong-un, and praising the “socialist” leadership of the state, China is making the case for regime continuity. Whereas earlier it gave the impression that despite objecting to “regime change” it strongly supported reform and relaxation of tensions, its tone was shifting in 2009-10 and has now moved much further in the direction of a special relationship between the two allies in the building of socialism, the Korean War, and the Cold War struggle against anti-communism.

China’s approach to the Korean peninsula has changed in a deliberate manner over the forty years since the 1972 breakthrough in Sino-U.S. relations, and new Chinese leadership can be expected to give priority to further adjustments. After the Pueblo incident of 1969 and other acts of aggression by North Korea, leaders in the United States and South Korea hoped that the improvement in U.S. ties with China would lead China to lean on the North to exercise restraint. While Sino-Soviet competition for influence in Pyongyang did not serve this purpose, North Korea at times in the 1970s behaved less belligerently without putting a strain on the fragile Sino-U.S. reconciliation. In the 1980s reform and opening under Deng Xiaoping produced an environment for gradual expansion of trade with South Korea, while widening the ideological gap with North Korea. Yet, the North’s brazen 1983 terrorist bombing of the South’s leadership tested China’s patience, as the South’s patient engagement of China began to be rewarded with expanded interactions. In this atmosphere China advised the North to turn to reforms and to broaden economic and diplomatic ties, but it was reluctant to pressure the North or to assist in steps that might lead to “regime change.”¹ It resisted all appeals from the United States.

China’s normalization with South Korea was a third blow to North Korea, setting back relations through the 1990s without prompting China to take an active role alongside the United States in the first nuclear crisis or to agree to political cooperation with the South that would suggest a preference. Only in the context of

the second nuclear crisis and the Six-Party Talks did China play a more active role in steering diplomacy at the same time as it revived ties with North Korea, reassuring the North of cooperation in resisting U.S. efforts at “regime change.” Even shifts in great power relations have serious implications for Sino-North Korean ties, but the Sino-North Korean-South Korean triangle is the most important framework for assessing China’s leaders’ shifting calculus toward the peninsula.

The third generation leadership under Jiang Zemin emerged under the towering legacy of Deng Xiaoping. While the economic direction for China’s future had been set by Deng, particularly in his last assertive move in 1992, the political and cultural directions were uncertain after the rollback in 1989. In 1995-97 as “Jiang Thought” began to be articulated, treatment of “Western culture” and traditional Chinese culture was confusing, as further clarity about socialism remained in jeopardy.² On the whole, Jiang did not alter Deng’s legacy of “avoid the limelight, never take the lead,”³ but he shifted the terms of debate toward emphasis on national identity, raising the stakes for leaders to draw on this rhetoric.

The transition to the fourth generation of leadership drew considerable scrutiny from outside analysts. In 2002-03 China was in transition following its accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO), uncertainties in dealing with the United States from its position as the second global power, and a growing leadership role in the region through a combination of ASEAN+3 and ASEAN+1 as well as through the new Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and intensifying negotiations over North Korea that became institutionalized as the Six-Party Talks. This generation of leaders led by Hu Jintao faced prospects of regionalism and multilateralism different from its predecessors. Given U.S. alarm about North Korea from October 2002, this issue overshadowed others as a test of intentions. In this transition observers studied the rising group of leaders and their patron-client ties and bases of power, but also the changing role of various institutions that drive policy and of think tanks and academic experts that shape the policy debate.⁴ Already there was informed commentary regarding the rise of the fifth generation of leaders, who attended college from the mid-seventies to eighties and joined the party in the midst of market reforms and growing awareness of divisions between factions linked to senior leaders. From the 1990s appeals to national identity in foreign policy intensified, and these rising leaders faced the challenge of accommodating them in addressing significant foreign partners.⁵

China’s policymaking toward North Korea has been a kind of black box for analysis of what determines policy decisions or shifts in rhetoric. U.S. officials intent on increasing coordination with China keep seeking greater clarity without adequate responses. Over the years of the Six-Party Talks such consultations intensified, but continued tight censorship on what could be published about the North left observers grasping for clues about how much confidence should be placed in the narrowly reassuring responses in support of denuclearization.⁶ It is easier to discern when critical decisions were taken by the Chinese leadership, than whose views they express or what reasons were foremost. Yet, there is enough published information to fill in some gaps and to indicate the importance of particular leadership changes for decision making on the peninsula.

The period of 2009-11 revealed the main elements of Chinese reasoning about the peninsula. Observers know few details about the internal leadership discussions that led to a softer line after the North Korean nuclear test in April 2009, decisions not to blame or pressure North Korea following its two attacks on South Korea in 2010, and the apparent Chinese effort to restrain North Korea at the end of 2010 in response to U.S. warnings about the dangerous environment that was emerging and Hu's preference to proceed with a January 2011 state visit to Washington in a positive atmosphere. It appears that a left-right split in the leadership was intensifying in advance of the 18th Party Congress in 2012. While leaders jockeying for the top posts may have found it beneficial to cater to hard-line elements in the party and military, there were longstanding concerns that favored more open defiance of the preferences of the United States and South Korea and tolerance, if not real approval, of the North's conduct, in line with the place of the Korean peninsula in strategic thinking.

In the midst of leadership changes in most or all of the countries engaged in the Six-Party Talks, China's leadership transition in 2012-13 deserves special attention. It is assessed against the background of Chinese strategic thinking, and is proceeding in a context of shifting national identity. This chapter looks at China's leadership prospects through the perspective of generational change and through interest groups. While direct evidence on the preferences of candidates for top posts regarding Korea is unavailable, the themes covered prepare us to appreciate the various dimensions of the leadership transition that pertain to policy determination regarding the peninsula.

CHINESE STRATEGIC INTERESTS, NATIONAL IDENTITY AND THE KOREAN PENINSULA

North Korea and, by extension, South Korea are special cases in Chinese foreign policy. This is a reflection of the peninsula's strategic location, the significance of the Korean War in PRC history, the legacy of three decades of Sino-Soviet competition over the North with no definitive resolution, and the peninsula's special relevance to both geopolitical calculations and Sinocentric assumptions linked to East Asian reorganization, including economic, cultural, and political regionalism. Decisions about Korean affairs draw a distinct set of actors—old-guard Chinese Communist Party (CCP) adherents, the People's Liberation Army (PLA), and regional leaders in Northeast China—all known for traditional, socialist outlooks. At critical moments since Deng Xiaoping launched China's "reform and open door" policy, decisions had to be made about Korean affairs in the midst of deliberations over Chinese politics.

The powerful coalition of forces insistent on prioritizing North Korea over South Korea kept its dominance until 1992, relinquishing some ground prior to normalization of relations with Seoul even as it repositioned itself to exert renewed influence once the Sunshine Policy took effect and China's power grew in the new millennium. North Korea had rising strategic significance as China refocused on regional realignment, symbolized by the Six-Party Talks, the Shanghai

Cooperation Organization, and ASEAN+3. Its salience rose as China took aim at the U.S. military presence near China's borders and more directly challenged U.S. alliances, including the ones with Japan and South Korea. Strategic thinking had not made an abrupt turn, but it was evolving in accord with a changing balance of power to put North Korean ties in a more favorable light. In 2003 China's willingness to play a positive role in bringing North Korea to multilateral talks reflected hopes that this would result in U.S. realization that unilateral military pressure was unrealistic while others would agree on pressuring it to shift to a regional strategy amenable to the North's revival and China's rise. In late 2006 Sino-U.S. coordination increased in response to the North's nuclear test, but many missed the point that Chinese confidence also grew and the United States would have to negotiate from increased vulnerability. After the 2009 nuclear test, China took a tougher posture against U.S. interests and in support of those of the North.

In 2010 not only was China more forthright about the balance of its strategic interests, it also expressed national identity in a more blatant manner. There was much discussion of "core interests" in which sovereignty was at stake. Differences were framed as conflicts between civilizations, making regionalism a matter of denying cultural imperialism from the West while insuring the advance of Eastern civilization led by China. As Bo Xilai led aspiring leaders in Mao-era nostalgia, the pull of national identity concerns intensified. Li Changchun, who heads the Ideology and Propaganda Leading Small Group and directs the Central Guidance Committee on Ethical and Cultural Construction, and Zhou Yonggang, the director of the Public Security Commission and secretary of the Politics and Law Commission of the Central Committee, have led in orchestrating recent assertive identity claims. Their legacy is being transmitted to the fifth generation leaders groomed to replace them.

GENERATIONAL CHANGE AND ATTITUDES TOWARD THE KOREAN PENINSULA

Americans, Japanese, and South Koreans placed high hopes on generational change as the force that would transform Chinese attitudes toward North Korea. Memories of the sacrifices Chinese made in the Korean War would steadily subside. The need to distort the truth about the nature of the war and of the regime in North Korea would diminish. Adhering to its slogan of "peace and stability" and benefiting ever more from economic integration with South Korea as well as with the United States and Japan, China would pressure North Korean leaders to choose reform and regional cooperation or at least get out of the way as others pressured it when it reverted to aggressive behavior. This outlook prevailed through 2008 even as generational change did not appear to follow the predicted script.

The first generation of Chinese leaders under Mao Zedong authorized the Korean War and had revolutionary bonds to Kim Il-sung and other North Korean leaders. When Mao agreed to cooperation with the United States against the Soviet Union, he did not sacrifice the North. After all, U.S. hesitation to sacrifice Taiwan meant that consideration of how to deal with these thorny allegiances would

have to be postponed to another time. Brief signs of North-South reconciliation at the time held out hope that spillover was possible, but new tensions followed with no sign that China would act to defuse them.

The second leadership generation under Deng Xiaoping decided to praise the first decade of Mao's achievements even as it acknowledged mistakes during the following two decades as leader of the Chinese Communist Party and PRC. They had been part of China's leadership at the time of the war and would have been tarnished by association with criticisms of it as well as by the impact on the legitimacy of communism. In the background was the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act that angered them and made the case for concessions on the other Asian state divided between socialists and capitalists unappealing. If Deng gradually allowed economic ties with South Korea, this appeared to be the most that could be accomplished as the Soviet Union was strengthening its ties to North Korea and China was both competing with it and seeking to normalize ties as the means to equidistance in the strategic triangle. Participation of Chinese athletes in the Seoul Olympics still fed optimism of change ahead.

In 1982 the 12th Party Congress solidified a new direction in foreign as well as economic policy, raising questions about relations with the two Koreas. On the one hand, Deng's reforms had prompted interest in the South Korean development model. On the other, China's dropping of "revisionist" as the label for the Soviet Union, growing desire for equidistance between the two superpowers, and worry about North Korean anger over its policies opening to the West and abandoning Mao's domestic system put a premium on reassuring the North. While Chun Doo-hwan singled to Beijing his eagerness for ties and Ronald Reagan and Yasuhiro Nakasone were strengthening ties to him and eager for Beijing to make some positive moves, the Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang team did not have the political clout to take anything more than some small steps, mostly economic in nature. Berated for going too far with Japan as he fell from power at the start of 1987, Hu was no doubt aware that his options were limited on Korea. Pressing his economics mandate, Zhao made some headway in 1984-87, the period Jae Ho Chung calls the "expansion phase" in Seoul-Beijing relations.⁷ Yet, hardliners limited such efforts.

Preparations for the 13th Party Congress in 1987 came amidst rising interest in South Korea due to the Seoul Olympics, democratization, and international fascination with its economic miracle. The political significance of the peninsula was growing as the contexts for viewing it drew political attention. One context was comparative socialism, which in 1956 had been the starting point of the Sino-Soviet split and remained after the 1981 70:30 verdict on Mao, a battleground in China. With the early 1987 purge of theorists, such as Su Shaozhi and Li Honglin, who were striving to establish this field of research and the growing alarm about Mikhail Gorbachev for both *glasnost* and new thinking, the prospect of criticizing North Korea was considered dangerous to both bilateral relations and the legitimacy of the CCP. A repeat of Mao vs. Khrushchev through Kim Il-sung vs. Gorbachev loomed in the background, as the humanistic theme, which

had been harshly repudiated in a 1984 campaign, was deemed to have fearsome consequences.⁸ The second context was democratization in Taiwan as well as South Korea, which could further put the PRC on the defensive. Rather than discarding the intransigent North as an albatross, the political imperative was to shield it from Chinese criticism. A third context was East Asian regionalism in which China was left at a disadvantage. Japan was rising, South Korea was becoming a more appealing model, Confucianism was invoked in reference to the “four little tigers” not China, and the U.S.-Soviet rapprochement coupled with new thinking favored an openness far from the liking of China’s leaders, which could lead to spillover as in South Koreans with their greater wealth and modern imagery gaining influence in the Korean Chinese area of Yanbian. In 1988, China’s political wariness of the South remained strong, refusing to allow it to open trade offices.

The usual image of 1988 to 1992 is of ever-improved Sino-South Korean relations, leading to normalization. Beijing responded, as did Moscow, to Roh Tae-woo’s *nordpolitik*. Northeast China had fallen behind the opening of Southeast provinces and was eager to expand ties with South Korea. After sanctions were imposed on China in the summer of 1989, South Korea became one of its saviors, even as North Korea lost favor and was pressured to accept joint admission into the United Nations. Yet, in Chung’s assessment of the politics of normalization, one learns of divisions within the leadership, even as the Small Group on South Korea served as a supra-agency to expedite ties.⁹ Rejecting the scenario after Moscow normalized ties with Seoul, China’s leaders continued economic assistance, albeit not at an increased level, and kept the door open to reinvigorated ties. In the background of the 14th Party Congress there was a duality to Chinese policies: follow Deng’s leadership in opening China’s market economy wide; and sustain the vigilance since June 4, 1989 in reinforcing communist legitimacy. The collapse of the Soviet Union and Russia’s tilt to the West led to vigorous efforts to change this course as well as to prevent spillover, such as in the Russian Far East where South Korea was feared to be seizing the crisis atmosphere to weaken North Korea’s presence and to flex its own economic muscle.

In the aftermath of the Tiananmen trauma, China’s third leadership generation under Jiang Zemin emerged from the shadows under Deng Xiaoping’s watchful eyes. Relations with neighboring states countered international sanctions, and South Korea’s *nordpolitik* was the most tantalizing offer. Given Gorbachev’s enthusiasm for a similar offer and the eagerness of Shandong and the Northeast provinces to capitalize on growing economic ties with the South, normalization beckoned. Yet, the collapse of international communism and then the Soviet Union raised the importance of keeping ties with North Korea, even if its leaders were angry at China’s relations with the South. As seen in the first nuclear crisis of 1993-94, China neither would pressure the North nor give it strong backing. In the eyes of the world, it was seen as cautious but inclined to let the North collapse if it did not choose to reform, as China advised. Jiang and his colleagues appeared passive without a strategy, as they paid most attention to rapidly advancing economic ties with South Korea and asserting leverage over it.

The Chinese political context in 1992-93 warrants further attention in light of what proved to be erroneous assumptions by many less careful than Chung about acknowledging many unknowns regarding domestic politics. It can be assumed from later actions that the leadership was resolved to forestall a hard landing for North Korea, which would be further proof of the failure of communism. As U.S. criticism of China intensified again in the 1992 elections and the early period of Bill Clinton's presidency, China was loath to encourage a sanctions mentality critical of human rights abuses. Not agreeing to more than a bystander role in the nuclear crisis of 1993-94, it welcomed new signs of U.S. reliance on it as the crisis unfolded and after the Agreed Framework was signed. Alert to gaps opening between Seoul and Washington, Seoul and Tokyo, and Tokyo and Washington, Beijing found room to maneuver. Yet, it found itself waiting, as Pyongyang remained cool to it and caught in the succession of Kim Jong-il as well as a severe famine. Joining in Four-Party Talks, Beijing proved itself sympathetic to Pyongyang even as it saw reforms along the lines followed in China as the eventual way forward.

The 15th Party Congress came on the heels of the Asian financial crisis weakening South Korea, Jiang Zemin's renormalization visit to the United States, and the formation of a close strategic partnership between Beijing and Moscow. Followed soon by Kim Dae-jung's election, it saw no clear shift in regional policy, even as optimism was growing about China's role in peninsular matters. By 1999 anger at the United States had intensified, coupled with more assertiveness in cooperating with Russia and capitalizing on Kim's Sunshine Policy to boost ties with North Korea. The Perry Process gave China an opening of renewed diplomacy. As Seoul eagerly pursued Pyongyang, with Moscow not far behind, and Tokyo strove for more leadership in the region with early improvements with Seoul and potential for Pyongyang ties, Beijing launched its own overtures to Kim Jong-il. Even before the Six-Party Talks, Beijing was the object of everyone's attention in dealing with Pyongyang. If some of the parties were under the illusion that they could gain leverage independent of Beijing and found encouragement for this view in Pyongyang, Chinese leaders knew better. They found the North Korean nuclear issue convenient to manage U.S. ties, to take advantage of Putin's new strategic aims in Asia, and, above all, to invigorate ties with the North. In this way, 1999 put Korea back as a central interest in Chinese politics. As in the years to 1992, China was certain of South Korea's need for it.

As the Crawford summit with George W. Bush proceeded in the shadow of the 16th Party Congress, Jiang Zemin saw flux on the Korean peninsula as an opportunity as well as a danger. More cooperation with Bush had seemed advisable after 9/11 and again as the Iraq War became a reality, but this could be accompanied by bilateralism and multilateralism in Asia at the expense of its rival distracted elsewhere. The pieces of China's strategic rise were soon in place as Hu Jintao took over the reins of power. Roh Moo-hyun's election meant tense times ahead for U.S.-South Korean relations. The self-defeating Asian strategy of Koizumi Ichiro enabled China to shift from its trial balloon of "new thinking" to actively using the "history card." Putin's growing anger with the United States and failed mediation in North Korea strengthened the strategic partnership. Even as tensions continued over the way North Korea dealt with reform and failed to coordinate,

the Six-Party Talks proved to be a venue where Bush had to yield, however slowly and grudgingly, to China's approach. In the fall of 2003 Wu Bangguo's visit to Pyongyang, followed by talks with Washington that proved unsuccessful, left Beijing convinced it was in the driver's seat and able to place the blame for no progress on Washington. This reinforced security thinking about the importance of Sino-North Korean relations. When a critical article on the North in *Strategy and Management* defied this thinking while arousing the North, the journal was closed. Given this sense of empowerment, China could more boldly challenge the South on the obscure placement of the ancient Koguryo dynasty, revealing a future-oriented Sinocentrism. Roh Moo-hyun's shift toward China's viewpoint was seen as far from sufficient, just as in 2009 Hatoyama's parallel shift away from the United States toward a regional community failed to impress the Chinese.

If special circumstances explain hesitancy in the previous generations to abandon North Korea, the fourth generation under Hu Yaobang was under no such constraints. Coming to power amidst the rise of East Asian regionalism and the eruption of the second nuclear crisis with North Korea, events appeared favorable for a tougher stance toward an unruly partner bent on destabilizing the region, as China was, doubtless, benefiting the most from stability. The period 2002-08 tested the Hu regime. On the one hand, diplomacy with the Bush administration gave some reassurance that it prioritized the denuclearization of North Korea and would calibrate its responses to provocative acts constructively. On the other, China kept giving North Korea the benefit of the doubt, insisting on an optimistic outlook on the North's inclination to reach agreement to denuclearize, while in the bulk of its publications airing criticisms of the United States for not making a deal within reach. Apart from momentary critiques of North Korea's nuclear test in 2006, Chinese sources conveyed a one-sided narrative that should have drawn suspicion for its lack of candor and obviously deceptive coverage of China's motives. Indeed, the exchange of visits between Hu and Kim Jong-il in October 2005 and January 2006, when U.S. ties with North Korea had deteriorated, may have produced some discord over economics but it saw more agreement on how to manage the crisis and indicated China's growing interest in playing a key role.

If the fourth generation seemed unsettled in its thinking about the region to 2006, diplomacy in 2007 was more reassuring. After attributing troubles in Sino-Japanese relations to Yasukuni Shrine visits by Koizumi Ichiro, the thaw begun in Abe Shinzo's visit to Beijing in late 2006 led to warming relations. The Bush administration reported increasing satisfaction about the course of bilateral talks. After a brief outburst in South Korea over China's claims to the Koguryo state, Chinese leaders strove to quiet concerns, as ties with Roh Moo-hyun continued to progress favorably. Above all, the Joint Agreement in February 2007 was attributed to an understanding that Beijing applies pressure when Pyongyang gets out of line and Washington accepts stage-by-stage progress when it cooperates. The most prominent academic voices were reassuring about China's interest in improving relations with each of the great powers, multilateralism, soft power, and peaceful development amidst its neighbors. There was talk that China was proving to be a "responsible stakeholder" with North Korea above all.

One of the important changes in the transition of the fourth to the fifth generation is the rising power of the People's Liberation Army. Three examples have drawn particular attention. First, earlier restraint has been dropped, as high-ranking military officers have, since 2008, independently pressed for a more assertive foreign policy. For example, in May 2011 General Liu Yuan, political commissar of the PLA General Logistic Department, charged that top leaders in the "past and recently" have been "selling out to foreign interests and ideology."¹⁰ Second, since 2008 the PLA has taken charge of added functions: psychological warfare, media operations, and legal warfare, leaving unclear how this may be diminishing the power of the Propaganda Department and various agencies within the media. One further change at the end of 2011 was the establishment of the Strategic Planning Department inside the PLA, which in the absence of a National Security Council may weigh military input more heavily in China's security deliberations. Given the special relationship of the PLA to North Korea, its voice likely counts for even more in the segmented leadership decision making affecting the Korean peninsula.

At times over the decade of the 2000s, Chinese academic experts wrote or spoke critically of North Korea in meetings with Western counterparts. There was even talk of Chinese "new thinking" about the North. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs conducted a promising dialogue with the State Department and other diplomatic bodies, repeatedly explaining China's support for denuclearization of the North. These views were transmitted widely as if they accurately reflected Chinese strategic thinking. Yet, Scott Snyder and some others who transmitted them also noted contradictory views, such as the idea that North Korea represents a strategic resource useful to China in countering the United States.¹¹ In 2009 it became clear that the reasoning of the moderates did not prevail in the leadership. A political watershed after the North Korean nuclear test in May revealed the leadership's reasoning not only in regard to North Korean provocative behavior, which would intensify, but also concerning the U.S. role in the region and South Korea as a U.S. ally. There has been no looking back three years later.

The fifth generation leadership was already emerging in 2010 under the shadow of factional struggles over who would be included. Without real evidence about the horse-trading under way, one cannot find direct links between policy making toward the Korean peninsula and leaders' preferences. Only circumstantial evidence suggests that the clout of the PLA and security apparatus was rising, the CCP ideologues and old guard found it easier to make their case, and Northeast China's officials intent on improving ties with North Korea had more room to maneuver. Somehow, in the linkages between the fourth generation leaders eager to perpetuate their power, or designate heirs from their faction, and the prospective fifth generation leaders agreement was reached on foreign policy, including how to deal with North Korea. Comparing different outlooks on issues related to the Korean peninsula sheds light on the national identity choices of China's leaders even if their personal preferences remain murky. The identity implications of support for North Korea proved decisive.

Analysis of the competition for slots on the Standing Committee centers on a small number of individuals born in 1945 or later and grouped largely into an elitist and a populist faction. Their main policy differences are over domestic matters with scant indication of divergent priorities in dealing with the United States, East Asian regional issues, and the Korean peninsula.¹² Already with the tough new measures on cultural policy in late 2011 and early 2012, it became clear that ideological pressure was mounting on those with reform ideas. Xi Jinping took the lead in ordering universities to step up ideological control over students and young lecturers.¹³ If South Korea is a target of criticism for its cultural effrontery, North Korea is treated as if it poses no cultural challenge to China whatsoever.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS DEBATES AND THE BALANCE OF NORTH AND SOUTH KOREA

While some in South Korea and Japan blame their own leaders for mismanaging China policy and causing China to take a harder line, the evidence from Chinese sources is that the hard line was taken with little provocation and new overtures to China are unlikely to revive the cooperative mood of 2007-08. The forces driving China closer to North Korea—shifting national identity, a changing balance of power, and internal dynamics of Communist Party leadership—are not reverting to the conditions that preceded the fundamental shift in 2009, which was fully confirmed by actions in 2010.

The Korean peninsula lies at the intersection of ongoing debates over Chinese foreign policy and national identity. They focus on great power relations, the international community, regionalism, and civilizations. In 2007 these debates appeared to be leaning in one direction, but by 2010 they had decisively veered in the opposite direction. Concerns related to Korea were at the center of this shift. The leadership groups leaning to North Korea and critical of South Korea under conservative control have strengthened, and there is no sign that they will be eclipsed in the coming transition at the top.

Seemingly, the strongest group in setting China's international relations has been the major powers school. In the period to 2009 it was associated with a priority on improving relations with the United States apart from brief interludes as in 1999 and 2001, Russia, and Japan. The best known academics are mostly in this school with no sign of dissent on Russia after mid-1992, some division on the United States at times of tension, and most discord over Japan, as was apparent in the backlash to "new thinking" in 2003. Dissension cast doubt on the logic for favoring cooperation over competition, such as that China is too weak or too dependent on the United States and its allies, it requires peace and stability for its continued modernization, and this approach provides the best cover for its rise in Asia by capitalizing on differences between the United States and other countries. This school revived to a degree in 2011, but its overall marginalization within the leadership seems to be little in doubt.

Championing North Korea and challenging South Korea threatened the major powers ideal. In 1993-94, 1998-99, and 2002-11, U.S. leaders kept stressing that China's stance toward North Korea is a litmus test for relations. Loss of U.S. urgency was not the cause of a sharp shift in 2009-10. Instead, it appears to have been a reassessment of China's relative strength and dependency, confidence in the economy to the point peace and stability no longer took priority, and an assessment that both hard power and economic power were sufficient to allow China to press harder for leadership in Asia. The transition in thinking was under way early in 2009 when Chinese anger at Lee Myung-bak—after a year of disappointment combined with a decision to take a tough line against Barack Obama's Asian policy—encountered the immediate challenge of North Korea's April missile test and May nuclear test. Japan counted for little as a great power and relations with Russia were considered separate; so it only took a decision to put the main blame on the United States for the nuclear crisis to mark a turning point. At first China's leaders were uncertain about using the flagrant provocations by the North as the event to shift direction. In April China voted for sanctions at the United Nations Security Council, and articles appeared very critical of the North. Yet, in May-June the tide turned against the United States and the school of officials and experts that prioritized cooperation. That appeared to change in 2011 and in early 2012 as Xi Jinping's visit raised some hopes, but the gap in national identities kept widening.

Which interest groups pressed for this hardened approach? With breakthroughs in military modernization, the PLA was apparently ready to question U.S. supremacy on the seas adjacent to China and be more vocal about the negative effects of U.S. alliances. The fact that the U.S.-South Korean alliance was tightening in response to Lee Myung-bak's strategic thinking and North Korea's more belligerent posture seems to have aroused the PLA, after a period when Chinese sources had seen a consistent widening of the gap between the two allies. The CCP old guard also was emboldened, as seen in a more assertive tone to claims about socialism and ideology. They may have decided that as a socialist state North Korea must be defended. Provincial interests in Northeast China had been given reason to expect that the long anticipated corridor to Rason would be developed, giving more than seventy million Chinese easier access to the sea. Frustrated, they pressed Beijing for stronger support in order to convince North Korea. Rising expectations had fueled impatience over Taiwan and domestic issues, which could be channeled toward support for more assertiveness regarding the Korean peninsula.

Another important group was the school in support of Asian regionalism, with multilateralism with China at the center. It had gained strength from the late 1990s and existed in uneasy coexistence with the major powers school. South Korea, as Japan had, became a partner in ASEAN+3 and by 2008 was in a new trilateral organization. While it had been an enthusiastic supporter of an East Asian community when the idea was broached by Kim Dae-jung at the start of the decade and under Roh Moo-hyun, it did not press for an expanded East Asian Summit to the degree Japan did and the prospect of cooperation faded under Lee Myung-bak. Even as Obama was blamed for interfering with the natural course

of region building by “returning to Asia,” Lee was deemed culpable as well and Hatoyama’s early interest in a community was not taken seriously since Japan focused on the East Asian Summit as its foundation.

While the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and internationally conversant academics draw attention from the global community, the power balance in China is tilted toward a combination of party-guided security and ideological forces less visible to the world and Chinese. Power transitions in these circles will be harder to follow. On North Korean policy, the People’s Liberation Army carries not only links to its principal partner since the final stages of China’s revolution and the Korean War, but claims that the greatest glory achieved since 1949 was in this war. Its voice is heard directly through the highest circle of party leadership. The International Liaison Department is directly under the party and keeps close ties to North Korea as well. Even the intelligence community, both the analysts associated with CICIR and the operatives separately organized, has its own channels to the leadership. While Dai Bingguo, who had headed the Liaison Department, may have seemed for a time, as Hu Jintao’s special councilor, to have brought his old unit together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, his role was eclipsed before December 2011 when his call for moderation was again heard. Whoever succeeds Dai, especially if it is an internationally respected figure from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs such as Wang Yi, would seem to have less likelihood of representing the full range of voices on foreign policy.

Another factor is cultural. With widespread popular resentment of what was perceived as the affrontery of South Koreans in challenging assumptions about Chinese cultural centrality, leaders had broad support to teach the South a lesson. One assumption that grew with Sino-South Korean ties after normalization was that South Korea would be deferential, shift away from its pro-U.S. outlook, and welcome regionalism led by China. Yet, the Koguryo dispute, which erupted in 2004, and other signs of what was seen as cultural arrogance became popular Internet grievances, which writings on South Korea exacerbated in 2009-10. It is unclear how these cultural attitudes operated in discussions within the leadership. The Propaganda Department is one likely conduit for them. Less cosmopolitan and more nativist voices could have shared the urge to take a tougher line toward the South. A shift to the North Korean side represented, in part, rejection of the South Korean side and demonization of it.

Liu Yunshan, secretary of the Propaganda Department and member of the Politburo, who, as a member of the fifth generation, is favored to secure the Political Standing Committee slot held by Li Changchun. While he has been criticized by intellectuals as a conservative commissar, he has won support in leadership circles for reasserting an orthodox approach to national identity. The fact that the Party devoted an entire Central Committee plenary session in October 2011 to culture and ideology reflects Liu’s ability to draw attention to the urgency of safeguarding China’s “cultural security.”¹⁴ Along with Liu’s success in what is seen as rejuvenation of Chinese propaganda, Minister of Public Security Meng Jianzhu appears to be another rising leader, capable of replacing

Zhou Yonggang on the Standing Committee, with a proven record of managing public opinion through innovations such as public-security microblogging.¹⁵ The 6th Plenum was followed by release of “CCP Central Committee on Deepening Reform of the Cultural System: Resolution to Address a Number of Challenges to Promote the Development and Prosperity of Socialist Culture.” As reported, “proper public opinion guidance is a blessing for the [CCP] and the people; mistaken public opinion guidance is a disaster for the [CCP] and the people.”¹⁶ Assertive leadership on cultural matters favors the North over the South, given the image of a deepening cultural divide in Sino-South Korean relations.¹⁷

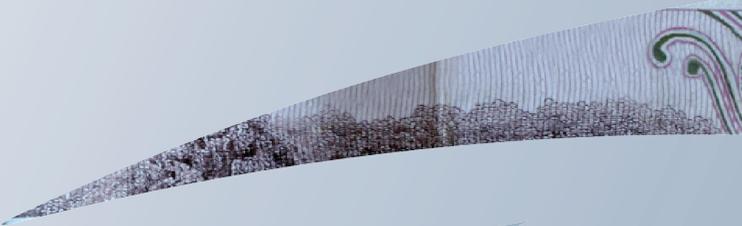
China has justified its claims to intervene in North Korea through historical arguments that the Koguryo state was part of China and that the Korean War, which is not over, was glorious cooperation that drew China into helping to save the beleaguered North. It explains China’s unique position today as a reflection of diplomatic success in establishing relations with both North and South Korea, giving it unique leverage on both sides. While supporting the North more than any other state does, China makes clear that it sets the terms for assistance. In support of Kim Jong-un, assistance is already rising further, but on terms that China’s leaders calibrate to steer diplomacy in the most favorable direction.

Precautionary measures have been taken by China’s leaders to prevent conciliatory voices from gaining real leverage over foreign policy. Returning students from abroad in international relations and related fields rarely become heads of academic organizations or party secretaries. Talented experts may be lured back to China, but in sensitive fields their mobility is narrowed. The example of the Soviet “*mezhdunarodniki*” influencing change under Gorbachev is well recalled. There is tolerance for a more informed discussion of international relations, but caution to inculcate a clear message at odds with what many experts argue and to prevent infiltration of advocates into top posts.

Hardliners have intermittently gained dominance over policy making, as in 1989-92, but there is debate over whether the long-run trend is in their favor or not. A moderating trend in 2011 reflects calculations that the balance of power remains less positive for China than many had believed. Yet, this relative caution does not suggest serious reconsideration of the reasoning that has driven China’s Asia policy, especially its Korean peninsula policy, since assertiveness grew bolder. For reasons of both long-term patterns in strategic thinking and multi-dimensional coherence in national identity, China’s leadership has clarified its outlook on the peninsula in a manner that is unlikely to change markedly after the fifth generation takes power. Xi Jinping’s fall 2011 statement on the Korean War is a telling indicator, as is a worsening human rights record and tighter controls over culture.

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ASIA AT A TIPPING POINT: KOREA, THE RISE OF CHINA, AND THE IMPACT OF LEADERSHIP TRANSITIONS

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